

LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTORS' BELIEFS ABOUT ADULT LEARNING: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by
Sarah Ellen Scherling
Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The population of adult learners in higher education continues to increase. In many cases, the majority of faculty teaching adult learners are adjunct instructors. These instructors bring a rich background of experience and expertise to the classroom, but may lack experience in designing and implementing effective instructional practices for adult learners. Instructional practices of adjunct instructors are influenced by their beliefs about teaching and learning. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices. The study used written reflection, interview, and classroom observation data to examine the beliefs of learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult students. Three themes emerged from the narrative data. These themes reflect learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about the role of life experience, learning in community, and engagement in the learning process in developing a rich educational experience for adult learners.

Descriptors: beliefs, learner-centered, adjunct instructors, adult learners, adult learning, hermeneutic phenomenological study

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my family whose love and support encouraged me with words and deeds to complete this degree. Doug, you have been a tremendous support to me throughout this entire endeavor. You have endured all the “No, I can’t” comments, proof-reading papers, letting me talk through my ideas with you, and always offering great feedback and encouragement. Thank you for all you did to help me complete the “project.” You continue to show me what it is to love someone unconditionally. Nate and Abigail, you are the light of my life. I love you both beyond words. Nate, you continue to show me what it is to follow God’s calling on your life. Abigail, you are my biggest cheerleader. I treasure your words, “Mom, you’ve got this.” You continue to show me what it is to have a gracious and generous heart. Mom, you have cooked, cleaned, shopped, and in general kept the household from coming to a halt while I completed this degree. You are the blessing in our lives that constantly goes above and beyond in all you do. You continue to show me what it is to have a servant’s heart. And to my brothers, sister, and in-laws who have prayed for me and offered words of encouragement. You all continue to show me the blessings of a close family.

I also dedicate this paper to the 10 gifted instructors who participated in this study with me. Your passion for adult learners and dedication to assisting them in meeting their educational goals was an inspiration to me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities across America are experiencing a change in student demographics as the adult learner population continues to grow (Sandman, 2010). Students 25 years and older are the fastest growing population in higher education (Wyatt, 2011). Numerous higher education institutions have responded to this growth by offering adult educational programs designed to meet the educational needs and expectations of adult learners (Council of Graduate Schools, 2007; Ritt, 2008).

These educational needs and expectations of adult learners are relevant to those teaching in higher education, particularly adjunct instructors (Stenerson, Blanchard, Fassiotto, Hernandez, & Muth, 2010) since the majority of instructors teaching in adult higher education are adjuncts (Drury, 2007; Stenerson et al., 2010). While adjunct (Berschback, 2010; West, 2010), they may lack experience in designing and implementing effective instructional practices for adult learners (Day, Lovato, Tull, & Ross-Gordon, 2011). Like many who teach in higher education, adjuncts draw on their own personal educational experiences in determining educational practices (Pajares, 1992). Most often, these experiences reflect teacher-centered instructional practices since most instructors who lack training use the same pedagogical instructional practices they experienced in the classroom (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Nilson, 2010). Teacher-centered instructional practices, including (but not limited to), lecture, memorization, and testing, continue to dominate higher education classrooms (Landrum, 2010; Omelicheva & Olga, 2008). Teacher-centered educational practices are characterized as content-based in which instructors transmit information and answers to

students (Dalsgaard & Godsk, 2007). Advocates of adult learners challenge the effectiveness of transmitting knowledge from the instructor to learner (Askham, 2008; Brookfield, 1986; Gom, 2009). They argue that, for adult learners, the goal is to create engaging learning experiences that promote critical thinking, problem solving, communication, technology, and lifelong learning skills (Hyland, Pinto-Zipp, Olson, & Lichtman, 2010; Ritt, 2008). From this perspective, adult learners are expected to use multiple resources including prior knowledge and experiences to participate in making learning meaningful to them. The shift is from how teachers teach (teacher-centered) to how learners learn (learner-centered) (McWilliams, 2008; Weimer, 2013). Teacher-centered instructors focus on transmitting information to students while learner-centered instructors focus on transmitting the learning process to the student (Weimer, 2013).

In order to identify teacher-centered instructors and learner-centered instructors, Conti (1983) developed the Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) to measure the tendency towards teacher-centered or learner-centered practices of instructors. Various researchers have used the scale in multiple settings with higher education instructors, full-time and adjunct, to determine their propensity towards teacher-centered or learner-centered practices (Conti, 1983, 1985; Seevers, 1995; Spoon & Schell, 1998; Werth, 2009).

Regardless of an instructor's development of instructional practices, teacher-centered or learner-centered, their instructional practices are influenced by their experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning (Markley, Miller, Kneeshaw, & Herbert, 2009; Northcote, 2009). The literature reports numerous studies on teacher beliefs and their influence on instructional practices. Studies have examined K-12

teachers (Cross, 2009; Peabody, 2011; Powers, Zippay, & Bulter, 2006) and higher education instructors (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009; Norton, Richardson, Hartley, Newstead, & Mayes, 2005; Speer, 2008). A few studies specifically examined learner-centered instructor beliefs or beliefs about learner-centered practices (Bai & Ertmer, 2008; Shih-Hsiung, 2010; Yilmaz, 2008).

Nevertheless, while there are numerous studies on instructor beliefs and the influence of beliefs on instructional practices, there is a gap in the literature regarding learner-centered adjunct instructor beliefs about how adults learn. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining the beliefs about adult learning of learner-centered adjunct instructors who teach adult learners in higher education. Understanding these beliefs may lead to practices that actively engage adult learners in the learning process. Understanding these beliefs may also improve professional development opportunities designed to inform adjunct instructors' teaching practices with adult learners (Pajares, 1992).

Background

Adult learners are a significant population in higher education today (Simms & Knowlton, 2008). These learners have accumulated life experiences and knowledge that in turn provides a context for new experiences and knowledge (Abdullah, 2008; Bankert & Kozel, 2005). This perspective effectively shifts the focus from instructors transmitting knowledge to learners processing new knowledge in the context of prior knowledge and life experiences (Barrett, Bower, & Donovan, 2007). Knowles (1980) considered this learning experience necessary in developing life-long self-directed learners. Knowles (1980) further argued the mission of educators was not to develop

learners who relied solely on the transmission of knowledge by an instructor but rather to develop learners who relied on self-directed skills of inquiry.

Knowles (1990) who coined the term andragogy, the study of adult learners, further advocated for andragogical methods focused on the learner's need to know, self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation. “[Knowles] believed the process was important; trusted in the human organism's propensity toward growth; held a willing, experimental and innovative attitude toward helping learners learn from their mistakes; and provided learners with opportunities to practice self-direction” (Henschke, 2008, p. 45). Since adults engage in learning from the context of life (Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007), adult educators advocate the use of learner-centered instructional strategies in developing engaging, relevant educational learning environments (Martin & Woodside, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007; Muduli & Kaura, 2010).

Although a focus on the educational needs and expectations of adult learners is evident over the past several decades (Merriam et al., 2007; Knowles, 1980, 1990; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000), teacher-centered instructional practices, mainly lecture, memorization, and testing, continue to play a prominent role in the classroom (Rieg & Wilson, 2009; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Critics argue that teacher-centered instructional strategies limit the development of critical thinking and problem based skills (Kahl & Venette, 2010).

Despite the criticism of the dominance of teacher-centered instructional practices in higher education, moving from teacher-centered practices to learner-centered practices may challenge adjunct instructors' deeply rooted beliefs about teaching and instructional

practices in the classroom (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). A change in belief requires critical self-reflection leading to transformational change (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Since instructor beliefs are influential in determining instructional practices instructors implement (Markley et al., 2009), understanding the beliefs of learner-centered adjunct instructors may provide a framework for promoting learner-centered instructional strategies.

Situation to Self

As an adjunct instructor for over 15 years, I have developed assumptions about adult learners and how they learn. As a result of these assumptions, I have developed instructional practices which I believe are more effective in teaching adult learners. More specifically, I consider Knowles' (1990) assumptions about adult learners when planning instructional practices for adult learners. These include:

- The adult learner needs to know the importance of learning something new and the consequences of not learning something new.
- The adult learner needs to transfer the self-directed skill active in informal settings to the formal educational setting.
- The adult learner brings a depth and breadth of experience to the classroom that provides a rich resource for learning.
- The adult learner is ready to learn information and skills that are readily applicable to real-life situations.
- The adult learner is motivated to learn when information and skills are applicable to tasks and problems faced in real-life situations.

- The adult learner is motivated by internal factors such as self-esteem, job satisfaction, and quality of life (Knowles, 1990).

In my view, using these andragogical principles, when considering instructional practices, places the focus on the learner (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

In the context of learner-centered practices, I also consider Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory which challenges adults to critically reflect on previously held assumptions to determine distortions in thinking and consider changes in perspectives which ultimately provide a broader context of life. This critical self-reflection presents instructors and learners with alternative ways of thinking and challenges commonly held, perhaps previously unchallenged, assumptions (Brookfield, 1986). As Mezirow and Taylor (2009) argue, transformative learning is teaching for change in that:

It involves the most significant learning in adulthood, that of communicative learning, which entails the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings; critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building. (p. 3)

As a result of these considerations, I implement more active, learner-centered instructional practices that promote reflective discourse when teaching in contrast to more passive teacher-centered instructional practices. My bias towards adult learning theory and transformative learning theory could have influenced how I viewed the data and conducted the analysis. Nevertheless, I am committed to discovering, understanding, and gaining insight into the beliefs and experiences of learner-centered adjunct instructors

who share a common experience of teaching adult learners. Therefore, this study could provide valuable insight into the lived experience of learner-centered adjunct instructors regardless of whether it supports my perspective or not.

In addition to assumptions and philosophies I hold of adult learners and how they learn, I have been employed by the university selected for this study for 14 years. In my capacity, I do not screen, interview, vet, hire, orient, train, mentor, or terminate adjunct instructors. Participants only included those who did not know me in order to mitigate any feelings of obligation to participate on the part of the participants.

Problem Statement

Adult learners return to higher education with life experiences (Simms & Knowlton, 2008) which drive the adult student's need for relevant educational experiences (Chan, 2010). Adult learners' motivation to learn new knowledge and skills is often reflective of their professional, personal, and civic responsibilities (Wang, 2007). Educators advocate learner-centered instructional practices in responding to these educational needs and expectations of adult learners (Taylor et al., 2000; Ritt, 2008).

Teacher-centered instructional practices that dominate higher education classrooms (Burke & Ray, 2008; Landrum, 2010) appear to overlook this focus. While there are no inherent negative outcomes associated with the lecture method (Masikunis, Panayiotidis, & Burke, 2009), educators of adult learners advocate the use of alternative instructional practices (Day et al., 2011; Henschke, 2011).

Most of us have learned to teach using the lecture method, and research has shown that the traditional teacher-centered model is not ineffective ... but the

evidence is equally clear that these conventional methods are not as effective as some other, far less frequently used methods. (Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 3)

This trend of teacher-centered instructional practices also applies to adjunct instructors who often receive limited professional development related to teaching adult learners (Bok, 2006).

Since an instructor's beliefs often influence instructional practices (Kagan, 1994; Taylor, 2003), understanding the beliefs of learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult learners may provide insight for adjunct instructors who desire to use learner-centered instructional practices to promote adult learning. This study examines learner-centered adjunct instructor's beliefs about adult learners and learning which may foster further insight into how learner-centered practices could be implemented in adult higher education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices in a face-to-face classroom environment. .

Significance of the Study

Adjunct instructors in adult higher education are practitioners in their discipline and teach part-time (Stenerson et al., 2010). These instructors may be new to adult higher education and may draw from their own experiential background as they develop instructional strategies. This experiential background may not reflect best practices in adult higher education (Lander, 2008). Learner-centered instructional practices are congruent with adult learning theory and adult learners' educational needs and

expectations (Day et al., 2011). The focus in adult learning is to “draw out adult experiences and reflections on experience as a major strategy toward learning that can lead to changes in attitudes, beliefs, understandings, and behaviors” (Taylor et al., 2000, p. xii). Implementing learner-centered instructional practices may require a change in beliefs of teacher-centered adjunct instructors. This study attempted to ask questions and provide data that may stimulate the changes in teacher-centered adjunct instructor’s beliefs needed to meet the educational needs and expectations of adult learners.

Research Questions

Given the purpose of this study, which is to examine beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence instructional practices of learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult learners in a face-to-face classroom, the following questions guided this study:

1. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about adult learners? An instructor’s beliefs about adult learners influence how they design and deliver instruction (Merriam et al., 2007). Therefore, it is important to understand learner-centered adjunct instructors’ beliefs about adults that may influence the learning environment.
2. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about how adults learn? Instructors’ beliefs about how adults learn will translate into behavior in the classroom (Tisdell & Taylor, 2001). Therefore, it is important to understand learner-centered adjunct instructors’ beliefs about how adults learn that may influence the learning environment.
3. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe how their beliefs

influence their instructional practices? In addition to understanding specific beliefs about adult learners held by learner-centered instructors, an understanding of instructional practices that address the characteristics and educational needs of adult learners is essential to effective instruction (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Therefore it is important to understand how beliefs of learner-centered adjunct instructors influence their instructional practices.

4. What specific instructional practices do select learner-centered adjunct instructors associate with their beliefs about adult learning? Beliefs about adult learning are associated with specific instructional practices of learner-centered instructors (Cercone, 2008). Therefore it is important to understand the connection adjunct instructors make between specific beliefs about adult learners and specific instructional practices in the classroom.

Research Plan

Studying the participants in the natural setting of an adult learner's educational experience was essential to this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The action of faculty who espouse and implement learner-centered instructional practices with adult learners is best understood by observing this action in the setting in which it occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); therefore, qualitative research was appropriate for this study. A phenomenological design emphasized the lived experience of learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult learners (Giorgi, 1985; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Specifically, the goal of this study was to develop a deep understanding of the participants and their experiences and construct meaning from the experiences of the

participants (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; van Manen, 1990).

I collected data through one document review (instructor learning audit), one classroom observation, and one interview from 10 learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult learners. From a pool of approximately 700 adjunct instructors, participants were selected from adjunct instructors who were learner-centered based on the Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) (Conti, 1985). The goal of this study was to produce a composite description of learner-centered instructors' beliefs congruent with effective instructional practices for adult learners.

Delimitations

This study's focus was limited to experiences of learner-centered adjunct instructors of adult learners. Limiting the study to learner-centered adjunct instructors provided insight into the beliefs about how adults learn from a population that may have minimal training in teaching adult learners, but have developed effective instructional practices for adult learners.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The population of adult learners continues to grow across higher education campuses in the United States (Kasworm, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008; Simms & Knowlton, 2008). These students bring unique characteristics, needs, and expectations to classrooms (Merriam et al., 2007; Knowles, 1980; Miller, 1964).

The majority of instructors teaching adult learners are adjunct instructors (Drury, 2007). The need for trained adjunct instructors who understand the characteristics and meet the needs and expectations of adult learners in higher education grows as well (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazzar, 2010; Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003). The wealth of experience adult learners bring to the classroom is a characteristic fundamental to the adult learning experience (Taylor et al., 2000; Tyler-Smith, 2006). This experiential background provides a catalyst for learner-centered instructional practices (Carver, King, Hannum, & Fowler, 2007). These practices involve students' active involvement in learning and critical reflection on experiences (Mataveev & Milner, 2010) that led to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

However, teacher-centered instructional practices, specifically lectures, continue to be the most common instructional strategy in higher education classrooms (Burke & Ray, 2008). Transforming from a transmitter of information to a facilitator of learning may challenge instructors. Like most instructors, adjunct instructors receive much of their training informally and teach the way they were taught (Bok, 2006). Meeting the needs and expectations of adult learners may require adjunct instructors to reflect on their

current beliefs about adult learners and effective learning environments for these students in order to reaffirm or modify their instructional strategies. This may require transformation of beliefs about adult learners and how they learn.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices in a face-to-face classroom environment. This chapter provides a review of the literature related to this research study. It begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework of this study. This discussion is followed by a review of the literature related to adult learners, adjunct instructors, instructional practices (specifically teacher-centered practices and learner-centered practices), and instructor beliefs. The chapter concludes with a summary of how the literature provides a context for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories provide a framework for organizing findings, explaining the phenomenon, drawing conclusions, and extending the research of this study (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). First, constructivism provides a framework for describing how individuals actively construct meaning of the world by reflecting on prior experiences and current knowledge (Isman, 2011). Second, adult learning theory provides a framework describing characteristics, needs, and expectations of adult learners. These theories frame the investigation of adjunct instructors using instructional practices influenced by constructivism and adult learning theory and their beliefs about adult learners' characteristics, needs, and expectations.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a process of meaning making as learners challenge and modify beliefs to accommodate new experience (Isman, 2011). The constructivist orientation is influenced by the work of early cognitivists Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Schunk, 2008). Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky challenged the behaviorist perspective of Watson, Pavlov, Thorndike, and Skinner who argued learning was a stimulus (action of another person) - response (copying the action) process (Schunk, 2008). Cognitivists suggest a different perspective of the learning process that focuses on learners and how they processed information (Schunk, 2008). Dewey (1938) argued educational practices focused too narrowly on delivery of information and skills intended to prepare students for life and needed a broader focus that included the learner's experiences. Dewey (2009) claimed the use of prior experience is essential and foundational for creating new and continuing learning. Dewey (2009) also advocated for active learning and questioned a passive approach to learning. Dewey (2011) placed emphasis on problem solving that was related to the learner's interest.

Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), both influential in the development of constructivism, extended Dewey's cognitive discussion but each with somewhat different perspectives. Piaget (1970) argued the learning process involved acquiring schemes (mental structures). Schemes, categories of knowledge, assist learners in interpreting and understanding the world. As new experiences occur, learners use prior knowledge and experience to modify, change, or add to existing knowledge. Piaget (1970) argued the instructor does not transmit knowledge to the learner; instead the learner constructs knowledge.

Vygotsky (1978) primarily emphasized the role of social environment in the learning process. Vygotsky (1978) advocated for active engagement of learners and instructors assuming the role of facilitators in the learning process.

Constructivism represents a shift from instruction based on behaviorism to instruction based on cognitive theory. Fosnot and Perry (2005) emphasized the focus of learning is “cognitive development and deep learning” in contrast to the focus in behaviorism of “behaviors and skills” (p. 10). Fosnot and Perry (2005) argued learning is developmental; and challenging prior knowledge and assumptions facilitate learning. Learning is a reflective process and is further refined through dialogue with a community. Knowledge is actively constructed by the learner rather than passively received from an instructor.

Adult Learning Theory: Andragogy

Andragogy is “an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capacity to function as self-directed learners” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 21). Adult learning has been a subject of research for several decades and several frameworks, or models, have emerged from this research (Brundage & MacKeracher, 1980; Knox, 1977; Lindeman, 1926; Miller, 1964). These theorists and researchers strongly influenced Knowles’ et al. (2005) assumptions found in the adult learning theory.

Lindeman (1926), a forerunner in adult education, explained that adult learning is a whole life experience spanning the entire life cycle, a process beyond preparing for a vocation, a process that begins with situations needing solutions rather than beginning with established curriculum, and one in which instructors consider the learner’s experiences valuable resources in the learning process.

Miller (1964) acknowledged the unique characteristics of adult learners and focused on the role of the adult educator in meeting these needs. Miller (1964) addressed the need for instructors of adult learners to adapt to the adult's educational needs which provided additional information about adult learners and their educational needs.

Knox (1977) reported adult learners continue to learn, formally and informally, across the life span. Adults also gain experiences throughout their lifetime which may enhance or hinder new learning experiences. Effective learning for adults involves active engagement of learners in making meaning and connections between new knowledge and prior experiences (Knox, 1977).

Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) noted environments that support the learner reflect the learner's experiential background and provides relevant learning that is connected to the learner's current needs, tasks, and roles optimize learning. The researchers also highlighted the connection between the instructor and learner and emphasized that learning is a "result of the interactivity between teacher and learner, between teaching and learning" (Brundage & MacKeracher, 1980, p. 2).

While Knowles (1980) was introduced to the term andragogy by a Yugoslavian educator, the term is most often associated with Knowles' writings (Brookfield, 1986). Originally, Knowles (1980) defined *andragogy* as the "art and science of helping adults learn" in contrast to *pedagogy* "the art and science of helping children learn" (p. 43). However, upon further consideration, Knowles (1980) described andragogy and pedagogy as learning assumptions on a continuum. Andragogy and pedagogy were represented on a continuum ranging from teacher-directed [pedagogy] to student-directed

[andragogy]” (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). Researchers and educators use the term andragogy to distinguish the adult learner from the pedagogical perspective of traditional educational practices (Knowles, 1980, 1990; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2000). Knowles et al. (2005) outlined six assumptions of the andragogical model. First, adults have a need to know aspect to learning. They must understand why it is important to learn something before undertaking the learning. Second, adults have developed self-concepts that enable them to make their own decisions. Therefore, adult learners need others to recognize their ability to be self-directed. Third, adult learners come to the learning environment with a wealth of experiences. These experiences can aid a learner as they tap into those experiences in learning new knowledge. Experience may also be a barrier to learners as they have more habits and presuppositions to challenge in the learning process. Fourth, with adults’ need to know, they bring a readiness to learn to the learning environment. Fifth, adults are life-centered in their orientation to learning. They focus on task-centered and problem-centered learning that is readily applicable to life. Finally, while adults may respond to some external motivational factors (promotion, pay raise, better job) they are predominately motivated by internal pressures (self-esteem, job satisfaction, quality of life). These assumptions shift instruction from teacher-centered to learner-centered (Holton, Wilson, & Bates, 2009). Central to the theory of adult learning is self-directed learning. Knowles (1980, 1990) first assumption of adults is they become more self-directed as they mature. Knowles (1980, 1990) advocated that developing an adult learner’s capacity to be self-directed should be a goal of adult education.

Andragogy is described as a process model in comparison to a content model characteristic of pedagogy (Knowles et al., 2005). The content model focuses on an instructor determining what content, what sequence, and what way content should be transmitted. The process model of andragogy focuses on the instructor in a facilitator role who, through mutual planning with the learner, creates a climate conducive to learning. “The andragogical model is not an ideology; it is a system of alternative sets of assumptions, a transactional model that speaks to those characteristics of the learning situation” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 72). Framed in constructivism and the adult learning theories, this study attempted to better understand the lived experiences and essence of those experiences of adjunct instructors who use learner-centered instructional practices with adult learners.

Review of the Literature

Adult Learners

The undergraduate adult learner population continues to grow in universities and colleges (Drury, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) (2008) predicted continued growth in student population of degree-granting institutions between 2007 and 2018. In 2007, approximately 7 million students 25 years and older enrolled in degree programs. NCES (2008) projects this group will increase to 8.4 million by 2018. Drury (2007) reported approximately 45% of students enrolled in degree granting institutions are over 24 years old. Shifts in the age of students are also evident in graduate programs (Council of Graduate Schools, 2007). Traditionally, students entered graduate school within a few years of completing their undergraduate degree. Over the past ten years, the number of

graduate students 40 years or older reached record numbers showing a 27% increase during that timeframe.

Adult learners are typically defined as individuals 25 years or older and are independent of parents and often support others financially (Drury, 2007). Adult learners have higher levels of motivation, prior experience, and engagement in the learning process than younger learners (Russell, 2006). Life experiences, self-concept (positive and negative) and the ability to link prior experience to new knowledge and skills represent critical differences between younger learners and adult learners (Sullivan, 2009).

Adult learners are often motivated to learn by their need to know (Knowles, 1980, 1990). This need to know is in the experiential context of life circumstances, both professionally and personally (Russell, 2006). The wealth of experience adults bring to the classroom is a key foundational component of their learning process (Taylor et al., 2000). Prior life experience provides adult learners with a greater depth and breadth of experience; such experience provides context for new learning and connects new learning with prior experiences (Merriam et al., 2007). For the adult learner, these life experiences may reflect potential biases that could impede their understanding and application of new learning. Consequently, the experiential background provides a catalyst for reflection and engagement in the learning process. This process involves "students in doing things and in reflective thinking about the things they have done" (Mataveev & Milner, 2010, p. 201).

As adults mature in their self-concept, they move from being dependent on others to self-directed adults (Knowles, 1990). As adults mature, they accumulate a wealth of

experience that serves as a resource and link for understanding new knowledge and skills. As learners, adults' readiness to learn is reflected in the needs and demands of their professional and personal social roles. This need to know drives adult learners to acquire new knowledge and skills that have immediate application. The relevancy of new knowledge and skills becomes central to the adult's learning process (Knowles, 1990). These needs and expectations are met as adults assume the primary responsibility for their learning (Pew, 2007).

Adult learners may face significant challenges in pursuing higher education degrees (Askham, 2008). As adults pursue degrees in higher education, their path is rarely continuous and usually reflects several restarts throughout their educational experience (Pusser et al., 2007). Family obligations, work responsibilities, lack of educational funds, and modification in goals most influence these interruptions (Pusser et al., 2007). Adults also have multiple work, family, and civic commitments and higher education may not be their top priority (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). Most adults are also pursuing higher education in systems built primarily to meet the needs of traditional aged (18-24 year olds) full time students that do not accommodate their needs or expectations (Pusser et al., 2007). However, adult learners' motivation to return to formal education is often driven by personal, professional, and financial needs (Drury, 2007; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Instructors play a critical role in delivering relevant, dynamic learning environments for adult learners; these environments mitigate some educational challenges adults encounter (Kasworm, 2003). In a study of 90 adult undergraduates ranging in age from 30 to 59, Kasworm (2003) explored the student's learning experience

based on characteristics of adult learners. The study revealed three key influences on adult learners' construction of meaning. First, adult undergraduates expressed that the collegiate classroom was the focal point of their learning experience. Second, adult learners described learning experience as either academic or real-world knowledge. They most often described academic knowledge as surface learning while real-world knowledge was described as an in-depth level of engagement. Finally, adult learners expressed the role of the instructor and program influenced their learning. Adult learners valued learning that was most congruent with their personal and professional lives.

Cross and Gardner (2005) emphasized the need for instructors of adult learners to understand the key characteristics of adult learners in order to facilitate their learning. However, Cross and Gardner (2005) also indicated "teacher's actions, especially at the college level, are determined more by the predilections, personalities, and perceptions of the teacher than the needs of the students" (p. 10).

As the population of non-traditional aged adult learners continues to grow, understanding the factors that influence the teaching and learning environment in higher education becomes significant for adjunct instructors (Gom, 2009; Rounds & Rappaport, 2008). With the increasing numbers of adults in higher education, the need to understand adult learning principles becomes significant.

Despite years of research in adult learning, Merriam et al. (2007) argue this research has not produced a comprehensive unified adult learning theory. Instead, the research has provided frameworks, or models, for ordering research and representing adult learning. In contrast, Knowles (1980) argued the research on adult learners and how they learn provided the conceptual framework for teaching adult learners.

However, several have studied adult learning from Knowles' perspective and some question how influential this perspective is on the practice of teaching adult learners (Brookfield, 1995; Merriam, 2001; Pratt, 1993; Smith, 2002). Brookfield (1995) argued that many factors influence how adult students learn. Knowles' characteristics of adult learners fail to integrate personality, learning styles, cognition, and culture in the discussion. Brookfield (1995) argued educators are naïve in designing learning environments around the fact that all adult learners are self-directed and that adult learner instructional practices always meet the needs of the adult learner. Merriam (2001) acknowledges that Knowles (1980, 1990) presents characteristics of adult learners but argues he fails to provide an understanding about the adult learning process. Merriam (2001) also criticizes Knowles' failure to put andragogy into a historical and social context.

Despite opposing views of Knowles' (1980, 1990) study of adult learners, his research led to a focus on adult learners that continues to impact educational practices today (Henschke, 2011). Andragogy does raise questions regarding how adult learners learn and how this knowledge should inform instructional practices.

Adjunct Instructors

The makeup of instructors in higher education has changed over the past 35 years with adjunct instructors fulfilling significant teaching roles (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Umbach, 2007). Some terms used to describe instructors in higher education who teach, usually less than full-time, on a course-by-course basis without any guarantee of renewal (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007) are part-time (Bettinger & Long, 2005), adjunct (West, 2010), contingent (Umbach, 2007), and fixed-term (Gappa et al., 2007). For

consistency, this study uses the term adjunct instructors in identifying and describing these part-time instructors.

Within the adjunct population, Gappa and Leslie (1993) provided four categories to describe adjunct instructors. Career enders are individuals who have retired or are transitioning to retirement and desire teaching to play a significant role during retirement. Specialists, experts, and professionals are individuals who have full-time careers apart from teaching but provide expertise in a specific discipline. Aspiring academics are individuals who teach part-time with a desire to secure a full-time teaching position. And finally, freelancers are individuals whose part-time teaching is one of their part-time jobs. Within these categories, approximately 50% of adjunct instructors have full-time employment outside of higher education (Gappa et al., 2007; Leslie & Gappa, 2002).

An increase in adjunct instructors hired each year illustrates the changing demographics of higher education instructors (Puzzifero & Sheldon, 2009). Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) reported part-time instructors have increased by 376% over full-time instructors since 1970. Currently, approximately 50% of all faculty in higher education are adjunct instructors (Gappa et al., 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) reports 1.4 million instructors teach in higher education with .7 million categorized as full-time and .7 million categorized as part-time. The majority of these adjunct instructors teach at four year colleges and universities with 33% teaching in public institutions and 26% teaching in private institutions (Umbach, 2007). Approximately 41% of adjunct instructors teach at two year institutions (Umbach, 2007).

Not only has the number of adjunct instructors increased, but this population has also become a mainstay in higher education and fulfills important teaching roles

(American Federation of Teachers, 2009; Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Forbes, Hickey, & White, 2010). For higher education institutions, the most common reason cited for intentionally increasing the number of adjunct instructors is economics (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Umbach, 2007). The reduction of funding, such as state funding, endowments, and gifts, increases higher education institutions' reliance on tuition dollars to cover expenses. The increase in tuition costs for students, forces public and private institutions to consider ways to become more efficient and reduce expenses (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Liu & Zhang, 2007; Smith, 2007). Bettinger and Long (2005) indicated adjunct instructors save colleges and universities 80% over full-time faculty. Schneider (2004) reported a more modest saving of 33 – 40%, but still a significant saving for higher education institutions.

In a study of 1,364 higher education institutions' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Liu and Zhang (2007) concluded higher education institutions “actively design and adopt contingent work arrangements to save on labor costs and to manage their resource dependence” (p. 22). Controlling costs with lower salaries and limited benefits for adjunct instructors reduces the instructional cost for many two- and four-year colleges and universities. Contributing to cost savings, hiring adjunct instructors provides a model that allows colleges and universities flexibility in expanding and contracting the number of instructors based on the market demand of degrees and courses without long term contractual agreements (Smith, 2007).

In addition to the cost saving adjunct instructors provide colleges and universities, adjunct instructors bring enthusiasm (West, 2010), professional expertise (Stenerson et al., 2010), and a rich experiential background (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Smith,

2007) to the classroom. These qualities provide expertise in specific disciplines that otherwise would be lacking at some colleges and universities (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Bettinger & Long, 2005) and meets the expectations of adult learners for real-world experience and application (Puzzifero & Shelton, 2009). Professional practitioners bring practical real-world examples and experiences to the classroom providing a bridge between theory and practice (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Smith, 2007). Adjunct instructors also provide flexibility in scheduling especially evenings and weekends (Tipple, 2010), provide opportunities for full-time faculty to engage in research (Bettinger & Long, 2005), and provide the opportunity to screen potential full-time faculty prior to a long term contractual agreement (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011).

While the benefits may provide a compelling case for using adjunct instructors, critics argue that adjunct instructors are harmful to the academic community (Kezar & Sam, 2011). Critics claim adjunct instructors contribute to students' lack of interest in certain subjects (Kirk & Spector, 2009), drop-out rates especially between students' first and second academic year (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Jaegar & Eagan, 2010), and grade inflation (Kezim, Pariseau, & Quinn, 2005; Kirk & Spector, 2009).

Overall, critics claim adjunct instructors are less effective instructors than full time instructors (Kezar & Sam, 2011; Umbach, 2007). One factor often cited is the number of adjunct instructors who do not hold doctorate degrees compared to full time faculty (Bettinger & Long, 2005). This contributes to the adjunct instructor's lack of qualification and the inability to use effective instructional strategies (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Umbach, 2007). Kirk and Spector (2009) studied undergraduate accounting students and reported students completing introductory accounting courses with adjunct

instructors were ranked lower in performance in upper division finance courses than students who completed introductory accounting courses with full-time faculty. In a study of 17,914 instructors at 130 higher education institutions, Umbach (2007) found adjunct instructors were less effective than full time instructors in engaging with students, using active and collaborative instructional strategies, and preparing for class.

However, Umbach (2007) cautioned the college or university might influence these results in practices such as lower wages for adjunct instructors, lack of access to institutional professional development activities, and environments that marginalize adjunct instructors. Performance by adjunct instructors may not be entirely contributed to the fact they do not hold a doctorate degree, but perhaps are influenced by the relationship and support of the institution (Kezar & Sam, 2011; Umbach, 2007).

Ballantyne, Berret, and Harst (2010) maintained adjunct instructors are not under qualified, but rather institutions fail to provide needed professional support specifically in the development of effective instructional strategies. In a study of 132 adjunct instructors, Forbes et al. (2010) reported all participants were graduate level prepared in their discipline but most had no formal education training or coursework; a description which is not inconsistent with most full time faculty (Light, Cox, & Calkins, 2009).

Entering instructors in higher education bring appropriate background, knowledge, and skills in their discipline, but often know little about how students learn, how to teach, or pedagogy and andragogy principles (Minter, 2011).

While higher education institutions offer professional development opportunities to faculty, adjunct instructors are often unable to attend day-time workshops or conferences (Shattuck, Dubins, & Zilberman, 2011). In addition to the lack of

professional development access and opportunities, adjunct instructors also face challenges of engaging with the college or university community (Smith, 2007). In a study of adjunct instructors, Gappa (2000) reported adjunct instructors often feel disconnected and struggle to integrate into the higher education community. Gappa (2000) described adjunct instructors as feeling “alienated, powerless, and invisible” due to the lack of support from departments and lack of leadership by academic deans (p. 81). Kezar and Sam (2011) maintained the lack of respect adjunct instructors receive from full-time academicians and administrators is attributed to the idea that these individuals are laborers and not professionals.

While adjunct instructors acknowledge these challenges and others, such as low wages, academic status, job insecurity, and poor working conditions (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Smith, 2007), most adjunct instructors report they teach because they desire to make a difference in the lives of students (Shiffman, 2009; West, 2010). This desire attracts qualified adjunct instructors to higher education and institutions must focus on retaining qualified adjunct instructors (Charlier & Williams, 2011). Several colleges and universities are making intentional efforts to support adjunct instructors and provide mechanisms to integrate them into the academic community (Peters & Boylston, 2006; Shattuck et al., 2011; Smith, 2007). Peters and Boylston (2006) advocated mentoring programs to assimilate adjunct instructors into the academic community. Mentor programs should focus on a comprehensive orientation to specific departments as well as the college or university. Peters and Boylston (2006) also advocated mentor programs where experienced faculty, assigned to adjunct instructors, provide assistance in instructional practices, scholarship, professional development.

Leslie University has implemented such a mentoring program to support and develop effective adjunct instructors (Peters & Boylson, 2006). The program focuses on the relationship between the mentor and mentored and emphasizes academic integrity, support for effective teaching, and professional collaboration.

Given the cost saving alone (Green, 2007), higher education institutions most likely will continue to employ adjunct instructors. Those institutions who intentionally design programs to support adjunct instructors may develop experienced adjunct instructors and retain a cadre of highly qualified adjunct instructors who understand the educational needs of adult learners (Forbes et al., 2010; Green, 2007).

Instructional Practices in Higher Education

Researchers have studied the instructional practices of higher education instructors for decades (Bain, 2004; Fives & Looney, 2009, Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang, & Green, 2009; Zhao, Witzg, Adams, Weaver, & Schmidt, 2012). Instructors make decisions about student learning as they prepare to teach, but few can articulate a philosophical rationale that informs these decisions (Zinn, 2004). Brookfield (1986) asserted instructors without this rationale face challenges in teaching. Brookfield (1986) emphasizes:

[T]he danger arises when the teacher is unaware of any philosophical rationale underlying his or her activities, not when that rationale is contested by some learners. Teachers who are proselytizing ideologies are really not teachers at all; they measure their success solely by the extent to which learners come to think like them, not by the learner's development of a genuinely questioning and critical outlook. (p. 126)

Conti (2004) described this philosophical rationale as the teaching style of an instructor which consists of “the distinct qualities displayed by a teacher that are persistent from situation to situation regardless of the content” (pp. 76-77). In considering an instructor’s teaching style, “the total atmosphere created by the teacher’s views on learning and the teacher’s approach to teaching must be examined” (Conti, 2004, p. 77). Teaching styles are most often adapted from past educational experiences and rooted in various educational philosophies (Conti, 2004). While there are numerous educational philosophies (Zinn, 2004), these philosophies manifest in various instructional practices based on whether an instructor’s perspective is teacher-centered or learner-centered (Conti, 2004). Underlying differences exist between teacher-centered and learner-centered instructional practices (Kahl & Venette, 2010).

Teacher-centered instructional practices focus on the teacher and students learn by knowledge being transmitted from the instructor to the students (Harris & Cullen, 2008). In contrast, learner-centered instruction focuses on the learner and requires the learner to participate actively in the learning process (Blumberg, 2009). Ramsey and Fitzgibbons (2005) explain most instructors move along a continuum that reflects “an emphasis on teaching (doing something to students), an emphasis on teaching and learning (doing something with students), and an emphasis on learning (being with students)” (p. 335). Depending on the amount of emphasis, teacher-centered and learner-centered instruction emerges.

Teacher-centered instruction. The teacher-centered model is grounded in the behaviorist orientation (Yilmaz, 2011). In general, behaviorism states “the process of learning is behavioral change. That is, a particular response becomes associated with the

occurrence of a particular stimulus” (Gredler, 2005, p. 29). The student is passive and becomes active when a stimulus is introduced (Liu, Liu, Qiao, 2006). In the teacher-centered model, the instructor is providing the stimulus (prescribed content) and the student responds by providing the correct answers based on the content. In higher education, the teacher-centered model has dominated instructional practices (Harris & Cullen, 2008).

The teacher-centered model, essentially aligned with pedagogy (Muduli & Kaura, 2010), assigns the responsibility of learning to the instructor (Knowles et al., 2005; Ozuah, 2005). This teacher-centered instructional practice reflects four basic assumptions (Ozuah, 2005). First, learners are unable to determine their own learning needs. Second, the focus of learning is on content. It is subject-centered. Third, extrinsic rewards are the best motivators for students. Therefore, students are motivated to learn by rewards or punishments. Finally, the student’s experiences have no influence in the learning process. Students bring a blank page to the learning environment for the teachers to write upon.

The teacher-centered approach to learning is consistent with the mission of higher education of transmitting highly specialized knowledge to students (Barrett et al., 2007; Bireaud, 2007). Dovey (2006), however, argued that the mission of higher education should go beyond transmitting knowledge; universities must also consider the transferability of knowledge to specific skills needed in the workplace. Employers demand graduates who are flexible and adapt well to rapidly changing environments (Kahl & Venette, 2010). Employers complain that current graduates do not know how to apply what they know and do not know how to learn on their own (Blumberg, 2009).

Kahl and Venette (2010) argue these skills are difficult to develop in teacher-centered models.

Emphasis is on the instructor. The teacher-centered approach views the instructor as the expert who imparts knowledge to the learner (Light et al., 2009). The instructor determines what is learned, when it is learned, how it is learned, and if it was learned (Blumberg, 2009). The instructor determines what knowledge is valued and whose voice is important in the learning process (Rodriguez, 2008). Students learn because a qualified instructor teaches (Light et al., 2009). Instructors measure student learning based on how well the learner provides the correct answers to the content presented. Failure to learn is reflected in the student's inadequacies not necessarily based on the instructor's inadequacies. However, Mottet, Beebe, and Fleuriet (2006) cautioned, "teachers may not always make pedagogical decisions that are in the best interest of their students' learning" (p. 146). The instructor's focus is on teaching (transmitting the content to the students) rather than on student learning.

Freire (1993) described the transmission of knowledge to students as "the 'banking' concept of education which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposit" (p. 72). Freire (1993) argues that in this model the instructor is the subject of the learning process and the students are the object. The instructor's role "is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (Freire, 1993, p. 71). Despite this strong criticism, transmitting knowledge to students is predominant in higher education (Bok, 2006).

Instructors argue that deviating from the transmission of knowledge model, such as small group discussions and application oriented activities, reduces the amount of time to cover essential content (Kahl & Venette, 2010; White, 2011). This could lead to material not covered and result in students performing poorly on course exams (Kahl & Venette, 2010). Within the context of a teacher-centered model and in an effort to ensure content is adequately covered, instructors base instruction on what content will be covered and then organize that content into lectures (Blumberg, 2009).

Lectures. Teacher-centered higher education courses are content-based and most often delivered using the lecture method, the most widely used instructional strategy in higher education today (Chaudhury, 2011; Dalsgaard & Godsk, 2007; Rieg & Wilson, 2009; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). The lecture method of instruction is a historical mainstay in higher education (Bligh, 2000; Young, Robinson, & Alberts, 2009). Through lectures instructors deliver content and provide the appropriate answers to students (Bligh, 2000; Clark, 2008; Rodriguez, 2008). While students certainly ask questions in lectures, instructors ask the most questions and most often seek answers previously provided in the reading or lecture material (Rodriguez, 2008).

The lecture method of transmitting content to students has several advantages (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011; White, 2011; Young et al., 2009). Lectures present up to date information and eliminates the gap between the textbook information and scholarship (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Lectures also allow instructors to focus on key theories, concepts, principles, and ideas (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). White (2011) argued lectures allow instructors to demonstrate enthusiasm for the topic and model expert thinking. However, White (2011) cautioned using lectures when the

content is readily accessible to student through other resources such as a textbook or when the instructor expects students to absorb the information through rote memory.

Instructors also rely on lectures to cover large quantities of information (White, 2011; Young et al., 2009). Instructors may be reluctant to deviate from the lecture due to time constraints in covering the content (Koklanaris, MacKenzie, Fino, Arslan, & Seubert, 2008; Yuen & Hau, 2006). In a study of undergraduates, Yuen and Hau (2006) found instructors are able to cover more content in lectures than through learning-centered activities. The researchers cautioned that while more content is covered, the depth at which the students engage in the content is not as great as when they engage in active learning activities.

Despite reported advantages of lectures (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011; White, 2011; Young et al., 2009), researchers have criticized lectures (Burke & Ray, 2008; Greenop, 2007). The lecture method of transmitting information to the student is mostly a passive activity (Van Dijk, Van den Berg, & Van Keulen, 2001; Young et al., 2009). Van Dijk et al. (2001) reported students retain less than 5% of information transmitted through “telling.” This compares to 50% retention for discussion groups and 75% retention for practical exercises. Lectures also assume all students need the same information in that the content and textbooks are identical for all students.

Lectures also fail to promote critical thinking or deep learning (Greenop, 2007). Burke and Ray’s (2008) study revealed lectures presented concentration challenges for students. Risko, Anderson, Sarwai, Englehardt, and Kingstone (2012) also found students’ focus of attention decreased as a function of time in lecture. Student motivation may also be a negative consequence of lecture (Moore, Armstrong, & Pearson, 2008). In

a study of undergraduate students, Moore et al. (2008) examined the reasons students do not attend lectures. Lack of relevance most often characterized students' reasons for not attending lectures. Moore et al. (2008) acknowledged the assumption that higher education has long honored the lecture and its contribution to student achievement. Yet, based on their findings, the researchers questioned this assumption and reported students view lectures as optional, not necessarily beneficial or important. The researchers argued providing more interactive strategies in lecture classes may increase attendance, motivation, and provide greater interaction in the classroom.

Researchers have also studied students' response to lectures and the effectiveness of lectures (Fitzpatrick, Cronin, & Byrne, 2011; Revell & Wainwright, 2009). In a case study of undergraduate engineering students, 91% reported lectures were beneficial to their learning and 72% did not believe they were out of date (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Despite this reported benefit of lectures, students also reported that instructors must engage students in the learning process in order for lectures to be effective. The students suggested active instructional practices created opportunities for deep learning, problem solving, and addressed multiple student learning styles. Revell and Wainwright (2009) reported similar findings and indicated active rather than passive lectures were more effective. The students in Revell and Wainwright's (2009) study identified three aspects of teaching that defined effective lectures: a high degree of student interaction; a clear structure of the lecture; and the enthusiasm of the lecturer.

Bligh (2000) and Carrio, Larramona, Banos, and Perez (2011) reported that lectures are as effective in transmitting information as other instructional practices; although Bligh (2000) cautions lectures are not as effective in prompting thought,

interest, and behavioral skills as other instructional practices. Bligh (2000) concluded lecture alone is rarely effective. Filene (2005) concluded transmitting knowledge from the instructor's head to the student's notes is an inappropriate outcome of education.

In response to criticism of passive lectures, some instructors recognize the need to incorporate student active participation into, or alongside, the lecture (Greenop, 2007; Kahl & Venette, 2010; Revell & Wainwright, 2009; Valtonen, Hauu-Nuutinen, Dillon, & Vesisenaho, 2011; White, 2011; Young et al., 2009). The most predominate active strategy used with lectures is note taking which requires the student to comprehend the information, select what is important to know, and record the information in a meaningful way (Valtonen et al., 2011). Others argued active participation should extend beyond note taking (Clark, 2008; Revell & Wainwright, 2009). Active strategies may include effective PowerPoint presentations (Clark, 2008) which enhance the lecture rather than reiterate the lecture. Readings prior to the presentation that require students to draw from readings for class discussion rather than lectures that restate the reading are also viewed as effective (Revell & Wainwright, 2009; Knight & Wood, 2005)

In a study of upper division biology students, Knight and Wood (2005) investigated the differences in student achievement between students in traditional lecture classes and students in courses where instructors added student participation, cooperative problem solving, and ongoing assessment practices to the lecture format. Students in classes where instructors added interactive practices to the lecture method performed better than students in the lecture only classes. The researchers reported classes using active practices also developed better skills in solving conceptual problems than the lecture only classes. While these results were favorable towards active practices, Knight

and Wood (2005) acknowledged potential challenges for instructors considering the shift from lecture only to more interactive practices combined with lecture. There is substantial time required to integrate active practices into lecture only courses. Also, the physical set of most higher education classrooms is not conducive to interactive practices (Knight & Wood, 2005). Finally, instructors are comfortable with the lecture method and may be reluctant to change. Most instructors like to lecture (Knight & Wood, 2005).

Students may also present challenges initially by responding negatively since active participation removes them from their comfort zone (Knight & Wood, 2005). Students may face challenges in shifting from passive to active roles (Bok, 2006). Responding to the concern of student perception in shifting from more passive role as a learner to more active roles, Greenop (2007) studied 309 undergraduate psychology students to determine their preference of lecture styles. For two weeks, instructors taught the students using the “tell” method of a traditional lecture. The instructor then modified the lecture to include small group discussions. The majority (45%) of students indicated they preferred the lecture with small group discussion compared to 22% preferring the traditional lecture. While this is encouraging news for those who advocate reformation of traditional lectures, Greenop’s (2007) study did not include an assessment to determine if one method was more effective over the other in terms of student learning.

While lectures dominate higher education instruction, active learning strategies are increasingly implemented in higher education classrooms (Blumberg, 2009). Learner-centered instruction reflects greater engagement of learning in the learning process (Cranton, 2001; Fink, 2003).

Learner-centered instruction. Learner-centered instruction, embodied in a constructivist orientation (Elan, Clarebout, Leonard, & Lowyck, 2007; Harris & Cullen, 2010; Kayler, 2009; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008) is a paradigm shift from how instructors teach to how learners learn (Weimer, 2013; Wohlfarth et al., 2008). The shift is from teacher driven instruction to a new role for learners (Weimer, 2013). Learners use all their resources, including prior knowledge and experiences, to participate in making learning meaningful to them. McCombs and Whisler (1997) define learner-centered instruction as:

[A] perspective that couples a focus on individual learners and their needs as central to decisions about teaching and learning at both the school and classroom levels and in understanding of the research on the learning process, as it interacts with, informs, and is informed by teachers' understanding and experience of the process, how the process occurs, and how the learning process can be enhanced for all learners. (p. 34)

The American Psychology Association (1997) identified 14 principles characterizing learner-centered practices. The principles are grouped into four factors (metacognitive and cognitive, motivational and affective, developmental and social, and individual differences) that must be considered in understanding learners and the learning process. Cognitive and metacognitive factors focus on the learner constructing meaning by linking new knowledge with existing knowledge (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Motivational and affective factors emphasize motivation is influenced by the learners perception of self and is facilitated by relevant real-world tasks. Developmental and social factors consider appropriate developmental domains and social interactions

appropriate for the learner. Individual difference factors focus on learners examining their learning preferences and considering cultural and social backgrounds influencing the learning process.

Emphasis is on learning. Learner- centered instruction focuses attention on what the student is learning, how the student is learning and applying new information, and the implications for future learning (Weimer, 2013). Learner-centered practices influence various dimensions of instruction including the function of the content, the role of the instructor, the role of the student, assessment, and power (Blumberg, 2009). Learner-centered instruction provides a strong knowledge and skill foundation, provides opportunities for application of knowledge and skills, and develops independent learning skills in students. The function of the content moves from defining what will be learned to a resource to promote learning (Harris & Cullen, 2010). Instructors do not cover the content, but rather learners actively engage in the content by making connections between the topics and their prior knowledge and experiences (Saulnier, 2009). Content is learned at a deep level as learners interact, experience, and apply it.

This shifts the focus of the instructor from a transmitter of knowledge and skills to a facilitator of learning (Blumberg, 2009; Weimer, 2013). The responsibility of the instructor is to create an environment where students effectively learn. The instructor becomes a facilitator of learning and designer of active learning experiences (Saulnier, 2009; Weimer, 2013). Instructors do less of the planning and generating learning tasks; allowing students to assume more responsibility in the learning process (Weimer, 2013). As facilitators of learning, instructors model life-long learning and how skillful learners approach the learning process.

Instructors view students as active participants in the learning process with unlimited potential for individual development (Liu et al., 2006). Instructors who implement learner-centered instruction focus on the individual needs of the learner including individual difference or diversity of learning preferences, educational needs, abilities, and interests (McCombs & Miller, 2007). Instructors also provide opportunities for students and the instructor to develop interpersonal relationships (McCombs & Miller, 2007).

Similar to changes in the instructor's role, the role of the student also changes. In a learner-centered environment, students assume a greater responsibility in the learning process (Blumberg, 2009; Doyle, 2011; Weimer, 2013). Learning is a change of view that requires the learner's active participation (Mezirow, 1991). Instructors expect students to take an active role in planning, organizing, and synthesizing the content material (Wu & Huang, 2007). This active engagement provides opportunities for students to retain new knowledge and skills by allowing the brain to "create synaptic connections and anchor learning" (Bellah et al., 2008, p. 15). Learner-centered instruction also places the responsibility for learning on the student. While instructors guide the learning environment, students develop self-directed learning skills intended to result in lifelong learning. The assessment practices extend beyond assigning grades to providing meaningful feedback designed to improve student learning. Instructors use grading and assessment to promote learning.

Finally, learner-centered instruction shifts the balance of power in terms of the instructor solely making instructional decisions to a shared responsibility between the instructor and student. These decisions might include learning objectives, content, how

the student learns the content, and how learning is assessed (Blumberg, 2009). The balance of power is shifted from the instructor in control of the learning process to a shared balance of power where the voice of the learner is significant in the learning process decision making.

Proponents of learner-centered practices also address the physical setting for optimal learner-centered instruction. Zaiser (2010) identified four characteristics of physical space related to learner-centered instruction. First, higher education institutions should design space with activity in mind. These spaces should allow students to move freely and interact with other students, work in small groups, and modify the classroom set-up to respond to various learning activities (Zaiser, 2010). Second, spaces should be group friendly and allow small groups to work together and interact with other small groups. Spaces should also be highly interactive which includes opportunities for student to interact with institutional (i.e. Smart boards, computers, clickers) and personal (i.e. smart phones, tablets) technology. Third, higher education institutions should also consider offering instruction in contextual settings. Providing opportunities for students to learn in real-world setting such as business, industrial, educational, and clinical setting provides opportunities for practical application in real-world setting. Finally, connectivity is a consideration in planning for learner-centered instruction. Beyond the library resources, an institution should consider providing the technology and internet connections within classroom spaces allowing students to have vast resources available to them as they process and respond to course content. These space considerations often pose significant challenges to higher education institutions (Zaiser, 2010).

Since learner-centered instruction focuses on students and their learning, researchers have investigated students' perceptions of learner-centered instruction (Wohlfarth et al., 2008). In a study of graduate students, an instructor changed from lecture formats to learner-centered practices to include small group discussion, problem based learning, weekly assignments that reflected application, integration, and evaluation of content material, student choices in assignments, and end-of-course self-reflection and assessment. Wohlfarth et al. (2008) reported students were enthusiastic and satisfied with learner-centered instruction. In measuring the power shift from the instructor to the learner, 71% of students reported they experienced this shift during this course (Wohlfarth et al., 2008). Furthermore, 86% of the students indicated this shift in power was important to the learning process. Learner-centered instruction emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills and 100% of the students reported they recognized an intentional focus on integration, application, and evaluation of course content. Learner-centered instruction also focuses on developing self-directed learners. In this study, 90% of the students reported an emphasis of self-direction was evident and 90% of the students reported the development of self-directed learning was important to them. Overall the students reported learner-centered instruction improved their learning experience, but still noted some frustration with learner-centered instruction. Some student reported lack of skills to be a successful learner-centered learner and concern that the instructor's role not diminish to the extent that critical concepts are not emphasized or recognized by the learners (Wohlfarth et al., 2008).

Learner-centered instruction incorporates various practices to promote student engagement (Blumberg, 2009; Doyle, 2011; Harris & Cullen, 2010). No one

instructional practice is associated exclusively with learner-centered instruction; yet learner-centered instructional practices are characterized as active learning strategies (Blumberg, 2009) that promote transformative learning.

Active learning. Bonwell and Eison (1991) defined active learning as “instructional strategies involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (p. iii). Worley (2007) describes active learning as strategies “that engage students with the subject they’re studying by discussing it, writing about it, applying it in some meaningful context, or otherwise working it into the fabric of their own experience and prior knowledge” (p. 450). Active learning instructional practices span a wide gamut including service learning projects (Ethridge & Branscomb, 2009); technology integration focused on collaboration and interaction (Gauci, Dantas, Williams, & Kemm, 2009; Smyth, 2011; Tille & Hall, 2011); case studies (Krain, 2010); effective questioning (Gavalcová, 2008); and formative assessment (Steckol, 2007).

Researchers have documented the positive outcomes of active learning in student learning (Burke & Ray, 2008; Cheang, 2009; Cherney, 2008; Gauci et al., 2009; Steckol, 2007; White, 2011). Gauci et al. (2009) provided 175 second year physiology students with personal response systems (PRS). During the lecture, students interacted with the instructor and classmates using their PRS. Students rated the PRS highly and their examination scores improved with the use of the PRS. Students indicated they were more attentive and engaged in the lecture as a result of the PRS. While these results show positive benefits of active learning, in this study the questions posed by instructors during class and on tests mostly required lower-level thinking skills. Therefore, the

potential benefit of increasing higher level critical thinking through active learning was not demonstrated in this study.

In a similar study of 94 undergraduate students, Martyn (2007) investigated the use of clickers and active learning strategies to determine if clickers alone would increase student learning outcomes. One group in the study used clickers in a lecture and the other group used a variety of active learning strategies. The use of clickers did not improve the student learning outcomes to an equal or greater degree than active learning strategies. The researcher concluded the value of active learning strategies outweighs the use of clickers in a lecture. However, students did report greater engagement in the lecture when using the clickers.

Steckol (2007) investigated the effects of formative assessment, an instructional strategy in learner-centered instruction, on student learning. Steckol (2007) used one-minute papers and student generated quizzes to summarize course content. Students involved in these practices scored significantly higher on the final exam than students who did not participate in these practices. Other researchers have reported learner-centered active instructional practices promote the development of higher order thinking skills and problem solving which are expectations of employers hiring college graduates (Mataveev & Milter, 2010; Cherney, 2008). Cherney (2008) studied 250 undergraduate students enrolled in *Introductory Psychology, Introductory Statistics, and Cognitive Psychology*. The researcher requested the students to record ten things they learned from the course on the last day of the course. Cherney (2008) found students generally listed concepts remembered from activity. Students remembered concepts that required their active engagement in the material. Cherney's study presents a good argument for active

learning in classrooms; however, her study did not address remembering concepts is not necessarily transferred to understanding or application of concepts. Also, Cheney (2008) did not assess students' prior learning and therefore is unable to determine how much knowledge the student brought to the classroom prior to instruction.

In a study involving 114 undergraduate students enrolled in a course that integrated active learning strategies, Mataveev and Milner (2010) studied the effectiveness of these strategies. Students reported increased skills in team effectiveness, creativity, problem solving, oral presentation, collaboration, sharing responsibility, handling different team personalities, judgment, and critical thinking.

Cheang (2009) studied students in a pharmacotherapy course to determine if learner-centered instructional practices improved motivation and developed more complex learning strategies. Cheang (2009) reported students did show improvement after engaging in learner-centered practices in motivation strategies such as intrinsic goal orientation (focus on learning), self-efficacy for learning and performance, and control of learning beliefs (belief that learning outcomes are a result of student effort) and in learning strategies in the areas of critical thinking and metacognitive self-regulation (monitoring comprehension and making necessary adjustments). Cheang, (2009) did not correlate the students' grades with these self-reported improvements which in higher education might present a stronger argument for learner-centered instructional practice since the outcome most often measured are reflected in a student's grade (Oleinik, 2009).

While several studies report positive outcomes of active instructional practices (Cheang, 2009; Cheney, 2008; Mataveev & Milner, 2010; Steckol, 2007), others report challenges in implementing these instructional practices. Ethridge and Branscomb

(2009) investigated the active learning process of undergraduate education students involved in a service learning project. The researchers reported most students were initially skeptical of the benefit and relevance of the project to their course work as early childhood educators. However, despite initial concerns, the students eventually reported changes in their thinking regarding the value of the service learning project at the end of the study.

Ongeri (2009) also reported learner resistance to active learning strategies in a study of undergraduate economic students. Ongeri (2009) concluded this resistance reflected students' perception of the loss of the authority voice of the instructor as an expert, their fear of moving from what is comfortable to what is unknown, and their fear of the loss of guidance of an accomplished instructor. As a result, some students criticized the instructor for implementing learner-centered practices and blamed their poor grades on learner-centered practices (Ongeri, 2009). Bok (2006) reported resistance in learner-centered instruction reflected the students' desire for more passive instruction, which they characterized as less work, in contrast to more active instruction which they characterized as more work on their part. Some students may prefer passive lectures since the method requires little from them. Despite the initial resistance to active learning, studies show once students engage in active learning they prefer active participation over passive listening (Greenop, 2007).

Transformative learning. Student engagement in the learning process is not simply activity oriented. Active student engagement certainly involves the student in doing something, but that engagement for adult learners should lead to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Fundamental to the adult learning process is adults' need to make sense and order of experiences, including new knowledge and skills (Cranton, 2006). As adults mature, this process involves identifying current beliefs, examining and validating beliefs and modifying beliefs when they prove to be unreliable or inaccurate (Mezirow, 1991). This results in changes in perspectives which then offer broader frames of reference.

Frames of reference are structures of beliefs that frame an individual's point of view and influence beliefs, thinking, and actions (Mezirow, 2000). Frames of reference may be part of or outside an individual's awareness and are composed of two dimensions: habit of mind and points of view. "A habit of the mind is a set of assumptions – broad, generalized, orienting, predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17).

A point of view comprises clusters of meaning schemes – sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments – that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causability. (p. 18)

For adult learners, habits of the mind and points of view are absorbed through life experiences (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). What adult learners believe or practice are acquired through experience and interactions with family, friends, colleagues, institutions, and culture.

Mezirow (1991) identified two dimensions of transformative learning: the transformation of meaning schemes and the transformation of meaning perspectives. Meaning schemes are beliefs, attitudes, or emotional reactions held by an individual. It involves an individual reflecting on an occurrence and modifying or correcting a

misconception or misinterpretation. The transformation of meaning perspectives involves an individual's critical reflection and challenging beliefs that have constrained the way the world is perceived or understood.

The transformative process is triggered by a discrepancy between beliefs and practices creating a disorienting dilemma (Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). This leads to an examination of current beliefs through critical reflection. This examination is followed by learning new knowledge, skills, perspectives, or values (Cranton, 2006). This change reflects perceptions that are more accurate justifications of themselves and the world around them. Throughout this process, adult learners critically reflect on beliefs, explore options for new perspectives, develop a plan for action, acquire new competencies or skills, build confidence in new perspectives, and reintegrate into life with changed perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

This is not to say all beliefs learned throughout life are incorrect and all beliefs must change. Critical reflection allows the individual to reexamine beliefs to validate or modify knowledge, premises, or actions (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning shifts from passively accepting reality defined by others to actively challenging those things received by others or through experience and taken for granted (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning requires the learner to reinterpret an old or new experience by critically reflecting on the experience from new knowledge which provides new meaning and perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

Foundational to this process is adult learners' engagement in critical reflection (Duarte, 2010). Critical self-reflection involves deep examination of currently held beliefs that influence an individual's perspectives, thinking, and actions. Critical

reflection also provides the learner with a framework to consider, validate, or identify alternative perspectives reflective in society. This process facilitates the examination of reasons for and consequences of an individual's actions (Mezirow, 1990). Dewey (1910) defined critical reflection as "active, persistent, and careful considerations of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 6). Reflection involves more than simply thinking about an experience (Swanson, 2010). It involves an examination of premises on which thinking, actions, and emotions are based (Schön, 1983) and consideration of alternative perspectives (Swanson, 2010).

While transformative learning involves change, it is a specific kind of change resulting from critical reflection (Poutiatine, 2009). Change is part of daily life and is often reflected in incremental and continuous change. This change usually does not disrupt past patterns but rather is viewed as occurring constantly and continuously. Change related to transformative learning involves intentional active engagement of an individual.

Several factors influence transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Jarecke, 2009). Personal experiences that move learners outside of their comfort zone are essential to transformative learning (Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Jarecke, 2009). The need for trusting relationships also is a key factor in promoting transformative learning (Ryman, Hardham, Richardson, & Ross, 2009; Taylor & Jarecke, 2009). Taylor and Jarecke (2009) specifically identified the role of an instructor in promoting learning climates conducive to transformative learning. These learning communities allow learners to explore various beliefs and consider alternative meaning

perspectives (Ryman et al., 2009). Transformative learning is most effectively promoted and facilitated in community, specifically small groups (Jenson & Joy, 2005; Nairn, Chambers, Thompson, McGarry, & Chambers, 2012). Group processing encourages more self-awareness and examination of personal beliefs and alternative beliefs for consideration.

The theory of transformative learning is not without critics (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton, 2006; Newman, 2012; Taylor, 2009). Cranton (2006) criticized Mezirow (1991) for his lack of recognition of the influence culture and gender may have on transformative learning. Cranton (2006) and Brookfield (2000) also cautioned not all adult learners will embrace transformative learning. Adults often desire to stay within a comfort zone and challenging deeply held beliefs most likely is uncomfortable. Adults may perceive it is safer to hold on to current beliefs than to change (Cranton, 2006). Breaking habits of the mind and behavior is also challenging (Brookfield, 2000). Taylor (2007) indicated transformative learning may be highly emotional and may present significant risks to adult learners. These risks may involve the change or loss of relationships and support systems.

Newman (2012) characterized transformative learning as merely a type of learning since all learning involves reassessment, growth, and change. Newman (2012) also criticized Mezirow's (1990) ten phases of transformative learning. The idea that change begins at one point (disorienting dilemma) and ends at another (reintegrated into life) and moves through prescribed phases is inconsistent with Newman's (2012) view that learning and change are constant with no particular beginning or ending. Learning and change are products of an accumulation of a lifetime of experiences.

Despite these criticisms and cautions, research supports the value of transformative learning to promote critical reflection that enables learners to engage in intentional shifts in understanding and the integration of examined and validated perspectives (Cranton, 2006). Constructive controversy allows learners to change incompatible beliefs and perspectives into new ways of thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Transformative learning prepares adult learners to manage change in organizations through systematic and continuous critical reflection (Closs & Antonello, 2011). Employees identify this skill as essential in developing successful organizational structures. Leadership skills are also developed through transformative learning including creating and sustaining trust, developing decision making strategies, and creating a learning environment (Closs & Antonello, 2011; Thomas, 2012). Transformative learning also allows learners to address the tension between espoused values and values in practice. Espoused values are those perspectives that learners often bring to or develop during the educational experience. These espoused values may be idealistic and in conflict with day-to-day operations, responsibilities, and expectations (values in practice) (Thomas, 2012).

Instructor Beliefs

While the literature reports several benefits of learner-centered practices, the literature also indicates most faculty still employ teacher-centered instructional practices as the primary source of transmitting information to students (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011; Rieg & Wilson, 2009). This behavior may reflect beliefs held by the instructor which influence instructional practices (Pajares, 1992).

Researchers have studied instructors' beliefs about teaching, learning, and learners across various educational settings including early childhood education (Lin & Bates, 2010; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2011), elementary school (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Webb & Jones, 2009), middle school (Eberle, 2008; Richards, 2012), high school (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010), and higher education (Hallett, 2010; Parker & Brindley, 2008). Topics of investigation about instructor's beliefs have included self-efficacy of instructors (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011), language learning (Young & Sachdev, 2011), student disabilities (Del Rosario, 2006), and technology integration (Sang, Valcke, vanBraak, Tondeur, & Zhu, 2011; Kim & Rissel, 2008).

Pajares (1992) argued in order to understand instructor beliefs a distinction between belief systems and knowledge systems is needed. Nespor (1985) identifies four distinctive features of belief systems: existential presumptions, alternative realities, affective and evaluative loading, and episodic storage. Existential presumptions are beliefs that exist beyond knowledge and are deeply personal, taken-for-granted beliefs and are usually unchanged with persuasion (Nespor, 1985). Beliefs are also represented as alternative realities which are conceptualizations of an ideal situation in contrast to present realities. A failure to achieve this alternative reality does not necessarily diminish the desire of this idyllic belief. In contrast to knowledge, beliefs also rely more on affective and evaluative features. Beliefs involve feelings and subjective evaluation in relationship to preferences. Finally, knowledge is systematically stored and broken down into logical schemata or concepts (Nespor, 1985). Beliefs, in contrast, are stored in episodic memory which draws from experiences or cultural influences. Applying this to

instructors' beliefs, instructors draw from prior experiences as a learner or instructor and base instructional practices on those experiences (Pajares, 1992).

Based on the connection and distinction between beliefs and knowledge, "belief is based on evaluation and judgment; knowledge is based on objective fact" (Pajares, 1992, p. 313). Clark (1988) describes beliefs of instructors as preconceptions and implicit theories. Clark (1988) indicated these implicit theories rarely followed textbooks and "tend to be eclectic aggregations of cause-effect propositions from many sources, rules of thumb, and generalizations drawn from personal experience, beliefs, values, biases, and prejudices" (p. 6).

From numerous studies on teacher beliefs (Clark, 1988; Kim & Rissell, 2008; Nespor, 1985; Pajares, 1992; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Shipton, 2011), several assumptions about teacher beliefs have emerged. Instructor beliefs influence judgment, decisions, and instructional practices of instructors (Clark, 1988; Kim & Rissell, 2008; Nespor, 1985; Pajares, 1992; Thompson, 1984). Prior experiences may be more influential in shaping instructor beliefs than teacher education or professional development programs (Gustafson & Rowell, 1995; Nespor, 1985). Critical reflection is foundational to changes in teacher beliefs about teaching, learning, and students (Waters-Adams, 2006). Understanding instructors' beliefs is essential to improving instructional practices (Clark, 1988; Pajares, 1992). Teacher beliefs are not always congruent with instructional practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009; Shipton, 2011). Beliefs provide a filter in which new information is considered (Goodman, 1988). Beliefs are often resistive to change (Bok, 2006). Faculty continue to use lecture because that is what is familiar to them. Even if an instructor perceives the need to change, it may be difficult to depart from the familiar.

Specific to instructors of adult learners, what instructors believe about adult learners influences their instructional strategies as well (Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 2003). Taylor (2003) found that instructors adopt the teaching strategies of those teachers they had positive experiences with as younger students. Interestingly, their current instructional strategies reflected the transmission of information to students. The instructors indicated lecture-type instructional strategies were the most effective. The instructors had little knowledge of active learning instructional strategies. Taylor (2003) concluded the instructional strategies utilized by instructors reflected positive feelings they had towards past teachers and not based on an evaluation of effective instructional strategies.

In a review of literature on teachers' beliefs, Kagan (1994) concluded teachers must have a change in beliefs in order to effect change in their instructional strategies. Kagan (1994) challenged if a program desired to promote growth and change in instructor's practices, it must allow instructors to identify previously held assumptions, evaluate the adequacy of those beliefs, and integrate new knowledge and information into existing beliefs systems. Brookfield (1995) argued this reflective process of investigating and evaluating closely held beliefs and assumptions may be significantly challenging for many instructors.

Schön (1983) argued one of the means of preparing instructors for the professional demands of teaching is the development of critical reflection skills. In theory, instructors solve problems by applying well defined theories and practices derived from scientific knowledge. In these situations, instructors, based on their professional knowledge, skills, and experience, notice the problem, analyze the problem, and offer a

solution. The challenge in this perspective is the recognition, analysis, and solution of the problem is limited to the professional knowledge, skills, and experience of the instructor. Schön (1983) maintains instructors must reach beyond technical knowledge (professional knowledge, skills, and experience) in order to develop professional expertise.

Brookfield's (1995) critical reflection model emphasizes four lenses instructors use in interpreting their teaching beliefs and experiences. First, the autobiographical lens relies on prior experiences and may be the most influential perspective. If instructors are satisfied with their prior experiences, beliefs and practices may go unexamined which develops uninformed or biased perspectives (Brookfield, 1995). Second, the perspective of students may confirm or challenge an instructor's accepted practices. This lens may provide the greatest surprise element as instructors critically reflect on their effectiveness in the classroom. Third, the lens of other instructors may provide significant feedback in the critical reflection process. Finally, literature on critical reflection provides a lens in which instructors confirm or challenge their assumptions in light of research-based evidence. Regardless, of the lens, through critical reflection instructors examine beliefs and practices, gain understanding and insight, and develop more consistent behaviors (Glowacki-Dudka & Barnett, 2007).

While promoting critical reflection for instructors is referenced in the literature (Liu & Milman, 2010; Hubbs & Brand, 2010; Yang, 2009), critics of critical reflection cite the lack of consistent terminology and definitions or distinctions (Procee, 2006); ineffective educational practices such as equating reflection with thinking (Smith, 2011); reflection practices that do not lead to learning (Boud & Walker, 1998); the demanding

process of reflection that few fully understand (Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007); the lack of recognizing the connections between the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of reflection (Mälkki, 2010); and critical reflection is not considered academic (Smith, 2011) as challenges to critical reflection.

Mezirow (1991) argues much of the criticism is a result of failing to distinguish between the forms of reflection. Content reflection focuses on what an individual perceives, thinks, feels or acts upon. Process reflection examines how individuals perceive, think, feel, or act. Premise reflection involves individuals becoming aware of why they perceive, think, feel, or act and identify the reasons for and consequences of possible habits. Failing to distinguish between the forms of reflection may over simplify critical reflection or distort the difference between thinking and reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

Despite criticism, instructors acknowledge the usefulness of critical reflection (Bates, Ramirez, & Dritis, 2009; Brookfield, 2009), however few find meaningful ways to integrate critical reflection into the learning experience (Duffy, 2009, Hedberg, 2009; van Woerkom, 2010; Warhurst, 2008). Duffy (2009) reported instructors indicate they have little time for critical reflection and find little support from academic departments in developing critical reflection skills

Warhurst (2008) studied 29 lecturers' reflective learning by recording their teaching practices and then their reflection on those practices. While the researcher acknowledged many of the participants would not typically reflect on their teaching practices, the required activity had increased their understanding of how beliefs influenced practices.

Van Note Chism, Lees, and Evenbeck (2002) noted that instructors most often do not reflect on current beliefs that affect instructional practices until they are dissatisfied with the results of a current practice. This may provide insight into why there is little evidence of changes in the practices of instructors in higher education institutions. The researchers seem to suggest the instructor must first be dissatisfied with a practice in order to engage in this reflective process.

While critical reflection of beliefs and the influence they have on practices is challenging (Wong, 2009), the absence of critical reflection “can result in daily instruction that fails to reflect an instructor’s teaching philosophy or instructional beliefs accurately” (Titus & Gremler, 2010, p. 182). Deliberate and sustained critical reflection that leads to informed action may meet the educational needs of adult learners and improve student learning. Titus and Gremler (2010) argue that instructors must continually engage in critical reflection of their instructional beliefs and practices “because real growth only comes when educators carefully question and challenge their instructional beliefs and behaviors” (p. 192).

Summary

While many advocate active learning to promote engagement of students and improve student learning (Fink, 2003), lecture remains a mainstay in college classrooms (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). The literature indicates effective instructional strategies for adult learners focus on active learning practices and learning environments that promote transformative learning. This literature review also reveals gaps in the research related to adjunct faculty beliefs about how adult learners learn and how those beliefs affect instructional practices. While there is a great deal to learn from the literature on

adult learners, adjunct instructors who teach adult learners, higher education instructional practices, and instructor beliefs that influence instructional practices; this study will add to this knowledge by specifically addressing the learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs affect instructional practices with adult learners. Further, the literature reports a need for additional studies that identify and evaluate the influence of instructor's beliefs on practices (Chen, 2008; Pajares, 1992; Titus & Gremler, 2010). The literature also reports a need for instructors to be able to identify their beliefs in order to understand how these beliefs influence instructional practice (Northcote, 2009). Finally, the literature indicates the need for studies that observe the instructional practices of instructors in addition to studying instructors' articulated beliefs (Rosenfield & Rosenfield, 2008). This study was designed to provide understanding of adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learners and how they learn, and observe and describe the way these beliefs influence the instructional practices of a specific group of learner-centered adjunct instructors.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices in a face-to-face classroom environment. In this study, texts about the lived experiences of learner-centered adjunct instructors were produced through instructor learning audits, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Individual interviews, observation field notes, and written personal reflections were used to gather data. This chapter presents the research design, the study participants, the data collection process, the data analysis process and the checks for validity and reliability.

Design

A qualitative research design was selected for this study in order to gain a better understanding of learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices. A qualitative study was selected since the research was conducted in the natural setting of the adjunct instructor, the classroom, and through face-to-face interaction with the adjunct instructors (Creswell, 2013). I also selected a qualitative research design based on limited literature on learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and with the goal of building a deeper understanding of these instructors' beliefs based on the description of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is designed to "listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas" (Creswell, 2013, p. 30). Characteristic of qualitative research, the researcher was the key instrument in collecting data (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research focuses on “understanding how individuals interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). The qualitative researcher develops this understanding of a particular lived experience by collecting “verbal and textual data” (Porter, 2007, p. 80) that consequently produces thick descriptions (Corney, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Thick description includes “descriptions of participants’ thoughts, feelings, and behavior in great detail and interpretation of feelings and behavior within the context of each individual participant” (Chen, Duh, Feng, & Huang, 2011, p. 134). The goal of this research was to provide a thick description of learner-centered adjunct instructors’ beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices.

While there are a variety of qualitative approaches to research (Creswell, 2003, Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009), the purpose of this study was to identify the essence of the lived experience of learner-centered adjunct instructors and their beliefs about adult learning; therefore this qualitative study was framed in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Phenomenological studies explore the lived experiences of a particular phenomenon of a group of individuals (Creswell, 2013). The focus is on explaining the meaning and perspective of a particular phenomenon shared by individuals based on their first person account (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Van Manen (1990) explains researchers borrow an individual’s experience and the explanation of that experience to understand better a particular human experience. In order to gain this understanding, the researcher is involved in prolonged interaction with the participants in the study for the purpose of

developing patterns of meaning based on the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The intent of phenomenology is to “depict the essence or basic structure of experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). An essence is identified by studying individuals’ experiences with a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Essence “refers to the sense or logic of a particular human experience, how it essentially presents itself” (Dukes, 1984, p. 199).

Researchers collect data from individuals who experience a common phenomenon and develop a description of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The description describes what the individuals experienced and how they make meaning of that experience. For this study, learner-centered adjunct instructors will describe beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices.

Researchers often use one of two approaches to phenomenology: hermeneutic (interpretative) and transcendental (descriptive) (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the lived-world of individuals and their experience of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962). Van Manen (1990) described hermeneutic phenomenology as research of lived experiences (phenomenology) and the interpretation of texts (hermeneutics). This study focuses on the meaning and interpretation of a lived experience of learner-centered adjunct instructors in the context of the real (life) world; therefore hermeneutic phenomenology was selected for the research design (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008). Heidegger (1962) argued understanding is interpretative and results from being-in-the-world. Hermeneutic phenomenology

concentrates on the interpretation of texts to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learners is a complex phenomenon. This complexity involves reasoning and thinking that is predominately unobservable (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Therefore, investigating these beliefs requires participants to become aware of reasoning and thinking that, consciously or unconsciously, develop specific beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices. Norms, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions are not always readily observable (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Therefore, the beliefs of adjunct instructors about adult learning was investigated by producing text through interviews, adjunct instructor self-reflection written narratives, and field notes.

Hermeneutic phenomenology was an appropriate research design for this study since it is based on text interpretation. Hermeneutical phenomenological research interprets experiences individuals describe in order to understand a particular phenomenon (Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, Newby, & Ertmer, 2010). Individuals interpret from understanding based on the context of being in the world (Greatrex-White, 2008). This emphasis extends beyond simple description and attempts to find meaning embedded in the description. "The focus of a hermeneutic inquiry is on what humans experience rather than what they consciously know" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728).

The focus of data collection is to produce a text that allows for a thorough examination (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) of the beliefs of learner-centered adjunct faculty about adult learning and how these beliefs influence instructional practices. Van Manen (1990) depicts this text as "bring[ing] speech to something" (p. 32). "Hermeneutic

(interpretative) phenomenology ... is concerned with interpretation of the structures of experience and with how things are understood by people who live through these experiences and by those who study them” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173).

Hermeneutic phenomenology allows for the investigation of participants’ experiences with interpretation by the researcher based on the researcher’s knowledge and experience of the topic (Nielsen & Cairns, 2009). Characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology is the potential that the participants may not fully express their understanding of a particular phenomenon. The participants own understanding may not be fully recognized by them. The meaning they attribute to an experience may be unconscious. However, the researcher interprets the text in order to uncover the implicit understandings and articulate an explicit understanding of the meaning and intentions of the participants. Essential to this interpretation is the researcher’s knowledge and experience of the lived experience under study. Understanding emerges through the interaction between the researcher and participants throughout the research process (Corney, 2008). A researcher develops an understanding of the phenomenon in order to provide interpretation of the phenomenon (Heidegger, 1962). However, interpretation is not merely the acquisition “of information about what is understood, it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding” (pp. 188-189).

The goal of this study is to produce a composite interpretation of learner-centered instructor’s beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs affect instructional practices for adult learners. Given the in-depth narrative and description of this study, ten adjunct instructors teaching at a four-year university in the Western United States were selected. Following the necessary consents and approvals, the Principles of Adult

Learning Scale (PALS) (Conti, 1985) was administered to approximately 700 affiliate faculty at the target university. From those adjunct faculty who scored as learner-centered, ten were selected to participate in this study. Data on learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learners and how they learn was collected through document reviews (instructor learning audits), semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

Data analysis included organizing the data, immersion in the data, and categorizing, coding, and interpretation of the data. Hermeneutic phenomenological orientation was selected for this study because of its rich potential to create new understandings of the complexity of learner-centered adjunct instructors' development of beliefs about adult learners and how those beliefs influence their instructional strategies. "Practical knowledge ... is embedded in the world of meanings and of human interaction" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 614).

Research Questions

Research question 1: How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about adult learners?

Research question 2: How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about how adults learn?

Research question 3: How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe how their beliefs influence their instructional practices?

Research question 4: What specific instructional practices do select learner-centered adjunct instructors associate with their beliefs about adult learning?

Participants

For hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers use purposive selection since participants must have experience with a specific phenomenon under investigation in order for the researcher to learn about the phenomenon (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Chen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012, 2013; McCloughen, O'Brien, & Jackson, 2011; Standing, 2009). This purposive selection is designed "to be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding of what" is being studied (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 474). The assumption of purposive sampling is that the researcher desires to discover, understand, and gain insight; therefore participants who can provide information rich data should be studied (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Chen et al., 2011; McCloughen et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009; Standing, 2009).

In this study, the goal of purposive selection was to select participants who reflected the typical or average (Creswell & Clark, 2011, Merriam, 2009) learner-centered adjunct instructor teaching adult learners. Participants needed to reflect and articulate the lived experience of developing beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence instructional practices in order to provide greater understanding of this particular lived experience.

The selected faith-based university has approximately 700 adjunct instructors vetted to teach in the adult learning programs. The vetting process of the university includes instructors signing a statement of faith indicating their theological views align with the university's evangelical Christian faith-based views. The adjunct faculty teach across all undergraduate disciplines including biblical studies, business, management, computer sciences, psychology, criminal justice, nursing, education, and the liberal arts.

Approximately 59% of adjunct instructors are male and 41% are female. Approximately 40% of adjunct instructors have terminal degrees and 60% hold Master's degrees. While this university offers online and in-seat courses, since this study used observation as part of data gathering, only those adjunct instructors teaching in-seat courses for adult learners were included in the study.

The adult program conducts student course evaluations at the conclusion of each course (See Appendix A). The student course evaluation includes information regarding students' perception of effective instructional practices and the value of the course to the student. The response rate of the course evaluations is approximately 85%. A rubric is used to categorize the faculty as exceptional, good, or needs improvement (See Appendix B). Approximately 88% of the instructors receive exceptional or good ratings and 12% received a needs improvement rating based the rubric. The course evaluation was used as part of the selection of participants to ensure the participants have taught adult learners and to include adjunct instructors whose instructional interactions with students are identified as positive by the adult learners.

This study focused on the lived experiences of developing beliefs about adult learners of learner-centered adjunct instructors. Therefore it was necessary to identify the adjunct instructors as learner-centered in order to be eligible to participate in the study. Researchers have used various surveys to identify a particular sample that have lived experiences relevant to the phenomenon being studied (Nielson & Cairns, 2009).

The Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) measures an individual's tendency towards a teacher-centered model or a learner-centered model (See Appendix C). The PALS measures seven factors: learner-centered activities, personalizing

instruction, relating to experience, assessing student needs, climate building, participation in the learning process, and flexibility for personal development (Conti, 1985). The construct validity of the PALS items was established by a jury of adult educators and subsequently verified by factor analysis (Conti, 1983). The reliability of PALS was determined using the test-retest method which produced a reliability coefficient of .93 (Conti, 1985). Scores range from 0 to 220 on the PALS (Conti, 2004). Most scores on the PALS fall between 126 and 166 with a standard deviation of 20 points. Scores between 146 and 220 indicate a learner-centered orientation to teaching. The author gave permission to use the PALS in this and other studies. “Note: Dr. Gary J. Conti hereby grants permission for practitioners and researchers to reproduce and use the Principles of Adult Learning Scale in their work” (Conti, 2004, p. 91). The Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) (Conti, 1985) was used to identify participants who are able to provide a rich description of beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence instructional practices from the perspective of learner-centered adjunct faculty.

The adult studies program at the selected university schedules courses based on block schedule. There are three blocks in Summer semester, four blocks in Fall semester, and three blocks in Spring semester. Class observation data for this study was collected between January 15, 2013 and March 25, 2013 which included Blocks 1 and 2 of Spring 2013 semester. Sixty-six sections were offered during these blocks. I reviewed the course evaluations of the 66 instructors teaching during these blocks. All of the instructors had been rated as exceptional or good based on course evaluations. All instructors teaching in Blocks 1 and 2 had experience teaching adults. I knew 17 of the participants so I eliminated those individuals as possible participants. Therefore an

invitation to complete the PALS was electronic mailed to 49 instructors. The PALS were distributed electronically through the university faculty electronic mail system. The survey also included demographic information including prior experience teaching adult learners, gender, highest degree earned, number of years teaching in higher education, number of years teaching adult learners in higher education, age, and discipline teaching assignments. I solicited assistance from a colleague not connected in any way to these adjunct instructors to distribute and collect the PALS. This was intended to mitigate instructors feeling pressure to respond based on perceived consequences related to teaching assignments. The email included an overview of the study, instructions for completing and returning the PALS, and instructions for completing and returning the PALS Consent Form (see Appendix D). Of the 49 invitations to complete the PALS, 36 completed and returned the PALS and Consent Form. I scored the PALS using the scoring criteria provided with the survey and recorded the demographic information included with the PALS (See Appendix E).

Of the 36 individuals who completed the PALS, 16 scored 147 or higher. Their scores ranged from 147 to 193 (see Table 1 for Eligible Instructors' PALS Scores and Demographics).

Determining the sample size in phenomenology is influenced by the need to collect rich and detailed data from each participant (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, smaller sample sizes are most common in phenomenology studies (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Dukes (1984) recommends 3 -10 participants in phenomenology research in order to produce rich thick description of the phenomenon and to limit redundancy of themes and ideas that larger samples may

Table 1

Eligible Participants' PALS Scores and Demographics

Eligible Participant	PALS Score	Gender	Degree
1	193	M	Masters
2	166	F	Masters
3	166	F	Masters
4	155	M	Masters
5	152	M	Doctorate
6	150	F	Masters
7	149	M	Masters
8	149	M	Masters
9	149	M	Masters
10	148	F	Masters
11	148	F	Masters
12	147	M	Masters
13	147	F	Masters
14	147	F	Masters
15	147	M	Doctorate
16	147	M	Doctorate

produce. “Sample size depends to a large extent on the testimonies of individuals involved, the richness of the data, and how much data can be required without

replication” (Corney, 2008, p. 168). Replication is also referred to as data saturation or data redundancy (Safman & Sobal, 2004). Larger sample sizes tend to inhibit successful analysis in terms of time, reflection, and dialogue (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Numerous hermeneutic phenomenology studies have followed these guidelines and selected samples between two and ten participants (Corney, 2008; Crain & Koehn, 2012; Hunter, 2008; Knörr, 2011; Nielson & Cairns, 2009; Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, Newby, & Ertmer, 2010; Rance & Arbon, 2008; Rose, 2011; Storli, Lindseth, & Asplund, 2008). For this study, I selected ten participants in order to thoroughly immerse myself in the data within reasonable time constraints.

Ten participants were selected based on the highest scores on the PALS and from individuals who represented the demographics of the instructors at the selected university (see Table 2 for Selected Participants’ PALS Scores and Demographics). I contacted the 10 instructors selected by phone and invited them to participate in the study. I explained, in order to participate in the study, the participants must agree to complete the following:

1. One 20 - 30-minute phone orientation session
2. One 60-minute classroom observation
3. Instructor Learning Audit (reflective written response)
4. One 60-90-minute audio taped interview session

All ten of the participants agreed to participate in the study; therefore there was no need to contact additional instructors.

Setting

The site for this research project was an evangelical Christian faith-based four-year university in a metropolitan city in the Western United States. The university is

Table 2

Selected Participants' PALS Scores and Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Experience Working with Adult Learners		PALS Score	Degree
			In Higher Education	Outside Higher Education		
Anne	F	40-49	10	11-15	166	Master's
Matt	M	30-39	2-4	2-4	149	Master's
Richard	M	50-59	5-10	11-15	155	Master's
Mary	F	50-59	1	16-20	166	Master's
Brian	M	50-59	5-10	11-15	193	Master's
David	M	60-69	2-4	25+	152	Doctorate
Julie	F	40-49	2-4	5-10	148	Master's
Kate	F	40-49	5-10	5-10	150	Master's
Ben	M	40-49	2-4	2-4	147	Doctorate
Luke	M	50-59	5-10	11-15	147	Doctorate

regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Two colleges represent the university: one serving traditional undergraduate students (approximately 1,000 students) and the other serving adult and graduate students (approximately 3,000 students). The college serving adult and graduate students offers 14 undergraduate degrees in fields of business, organizational leadership, technology, education, psychology, biblical studies, criminal justice, health care administration and nursing. An education licensure program is available for early childhood, elementary, and special education. The college also offers

three graduate degrees in business, curriculum and instruction, and counseling. Students may also earn several undergraduate and graduate certificates in business and technology, education, biblical studies, and criminal justice. The academic calendar for undergraduate adults is structured in 5 or 10 week blocks over three semesters (summer, fall, and spring). Courses are delivered face-to-face and online. The face-to-face courses are offered weekdays, evenings, and on weekends and are available in seven regional locations and on two Air Force bases.

The site was chosen because this university, through the college serving adult and graduate students, has offered undergraduate degree programs for the adult learner for approximately 20 years and the number of adult learners continues to increase. The enrollment of undergraduate adult students has increased from 900 in 2005 to 3,000 in 2013. The adult learner population is approximately 57% female students and 43% male students. The average age of the female student is 36 years old and the average age of the male student is 32 years old.

This site was also chosen based on the large number of adjunct instructors teaching in the adult degree programs. The university primarily uses adjunct instructors in the adult undergraduate degree programs. This program offers approximately 300 face-to-face course sections each academic year.

The site was also chosen because I work at the university and this allowed ease of access to the participants and flexibility in scheduling interviews and observations. My responsibilities at the university do not include screening, interviewing, vetting, hiring, orienting, training, mentoring, evaluating, or terminating adjunct instructors. Some

participants may know me as a staff member of the university; however only participants who do not know me will be invited to participate in this study.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to the collection of data, this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (2012) at Liberty University. I followed all the procedures outlined by the IRB and was granted approval for this study (See Appendix F). I was also granted approval from the university selected as the site of this study (See Appendix G). Additionally, a consent form was secured from all instructors invited to complete the PALS (See Appendix D). A consent form was also secured from each participant selected for the study. (See Appendix H).

The Researcher's Role

I have been employed by this university for 14 years in the college serving adult and graduate students. In my capacity, I do not screen, interview, vet, hire, orient, train, mentor, evaluate, or terminate adjunct instructors. While I believe my role at the university might provide a benefit to my intentionality selecting participants known to use learner-centered instructional practices in teaching adult learners, to mitigate any feelings of cohesion or obligation on the part of the participants to participate in the study, only participants who did not know me were invited to participate in this study.

I also have 16 years' experience teaching adult learners. I hold an earned Education Specialist: Teaching and Learning (Ed.S) degree from Liberty University. I have led conference workshops on topics of adult learners and effective instructional practices.

As an adult learner myself, I have participated in many courses that did not meet my needs as an adult learner. The courses were often lecture style, academic achievement was measured by tests, and interactions between the students and instructor were limited. While the courses fulfilled needed requirements for a degree program or re-licensure as a teacher, I often found myself critical of the focus of the course and the delivery of content. Sixteen years ago, I began teaching adult learners, many of them professional school teachers who brought a wealth of experience to the classroom. It was obvious to me, these students were not needing me to fill their minds with information. Therefore, I began my journey with adult learners emphasizing the experiential background and expertise these students brought to the classroom. I explored with the students what they needed to learn that would be highly applicable and relevant to their personal and professional lives.

With this background in adult education, I bring some bias to this research study. I use learner-centered instructional practices and believe this approach is an effective teaching style. It is my assumption that adjunct instructors of adult learners will not effectively integrate instructional practices without the foundational support of certain beliefs related to adult learners. This bias could influence how I viewed the data and conducted the analysis. However, I was committed to discovering, understanding, and gaining insight into the experiences of learner-centered instructors who share a common experience of teaching adult learners. Therefore, the data or analysis of the data was intended to provide valuable insight in the experience of learner-centered instructors regardless of whether it supported my perspective or not. The goal of this research study

was to better understand those specific beliefs and how they influence instructional practices.

Data Collection

The data collection involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation (classroom observation), and document review (instructor audit). I followed all research guidelines and requirements outlined by the Institutional Review Board (2012) of Liberty University. Before collecting data, I conducted a phone orientation with each participant. I contacted each participant by email to establish a convenient time to conduct the orientation. I called each individual on the designated date and conducted the orientation.

During the orientation, I described how the data would be collected including an explanation of the instructor learning audits, audio taped interviews, and classroom observations. I also emailed the consent form for the study and reviewed the form with each participants (Chen et al., 2011; Storli et al., 2008). The consent form included the time commitment of the data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I discussed privacy protection of the participants. Pseudonyms were selected for the participants to protect their identity throughout the study. In the future, participants will not be identified in any verbal or written communication resulting from the research (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Chen et al., 2011). I informed the participants they could withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Chen et al., 2011). I also secured permission for the interview sessions to be audio taped. The participants were informed they will have the opportunity to review the audio tape transcript and if not satisfied can choose to have another session re-taped or withdraw from the study.

I explained I would provide a copy of the transcripts to the participants for review (Creswell, 2013) and participants would have the opportunity to provide feedback in terms of accuracy of the transcripts. In the orientation, I informed the participants that once the data was transcribed, the audio tapes and transcriptions would be kept for one year in a locked desk drawer. Following one year, the audio tapes and transcriptions would be destroyed. In addition to the explanation of the consent form and the privacy safeguards, I also explained the purpose of the study and outlined the data collection process. Data sources for this study will include a written response from the participant (instructor learning audit), a semi-structured interview, and one classroom observation.

At the conclusion of the orientation, I requested that each participant thoroughly read the study consent form, sign the consent form, and return it by electronic mail to me.

Instructor Learning Audit

Once I received the consent form for the study from a participant, I sent the Instructor Learning Audit by electronic mail to the participant. Written reflective exercises are used in hermeneutic phenomenology to collect text for interpretation (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). An instructor learning audit develops instructors' self-awareness about what and how they are learning (Bookfield, 1995). The learning audit used in this study is adapted from Brookfield's (1995) teacher learning audit which focuses on instructors as adult learners and on the learning taking place in the instructors' lives as a result of teaching. Since writing is reflexive and writers often include an explanation in describing experiences (van Manen, 1990), this written narrative was designed to provide additional insight, beyond description, of the participants making meaning of their experience in developing beliefs about adult learning. Zinn (2004)

argued few instructors are able to articulate a rationale for why they make the instructional decisions they do. Brookfield (1986) maintained the ability to articulate a rationale increases as instructors critically reflect on what they are learning about students and the role they play as instructors. The purpose of this eight question learning audit was to provide a text which describes learner-centered adjunct instructors experience in developing beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices (See Appendix I).

Questions 1 through 3 were reflective and provide an opportunity for the participants to explore what they have learned about adult students, teaching, and themselves as instructors. Questions 4 and 5 were also reflective and designed to identify the beliefs the participants may hold about teaching adult learners. The beliefs instructors hold influence how they teach (Merriam et al., 2007; Pajares, 1992). While specific beliefs may be difficult to identify (van Note Chism et al., 2002), critical reflection may increase instructors' awareness of beliefs that influence instructional practices (Titus & Gremler, 2010). Prior learning experiences play a key role in the development of the rationale for instructional practices of instructors (Gusafson & Rowell, 1995; Nespor, 1985). Therefore, questions 6 through 8 were designed for the participants to provide a written narrative of their experiential background that describes how they developed their beliefs about adult learners.

Each participant completed the Instructor Learning Audit and returned the audit by electronic mail to me. While each Instructor Learning Audit was submitted electronically, I converted the written narrative to the transcript format used for all data

collected. The original instructor learning audit and transcripts were stored on an external hard drive and kept in a locked desk drawer.

Interviews

Once a participant had completed the instructor learning audit, I contacted the individual by electronic mail and scheduled a time for the interview and the course observation. All interviews were scheduled prior to the observation except for Julie's. Julie's observation was scheduled prior to the interview due to the time constraints based on the end date of the course.

In hermeneutic phenomenology studies, interviews develop a conversation between the participant and researcher which provides the narrative of the lived experience of the study (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Prolonged contact with participants prompts the participants' understanding of the experience under study (Dukes, 1984). Dukes (1984) argued participants must be allowed to describe their experience in their own way. This is effectively facilitated through lengthy semi-structured interviews (Chen et al., 2011; Crain & Koehn, 2012; Dukes, 1984). Smythe et al. (2008) describe semi-structured interviews as neither prescriptive (tight) or without purpose (loose), but rather a conversation prompted by the researcher with an openness of where the conversation may go.

I conducted one 60 to 90 minute face-to-face interview with each participant (Chen et al., 2011; Crain & Koehn, 2012; Standing, 2009). McCloughen et al. (2011) describe this prolonged interaction as shared conversation between the participant and researcher. Open-ended questions provide an opportunity for the participants to tell their story in their own words (McCloughen et al., 2010; Rose, 2011). While I designed some

questions to prompt the participants' thinking, the intent of the interview was to create an open flow of conversation (Smythe et al., 2008; van Manen, 1990) (See Appendix J).

The interviews were conducted at a convenient location for the participants. All interviews were conducted at a location associated with the site university. All interviews were audio taped which allowed for the flow of conversation and an accurate recording of the conversation (Crain & Koehn, 2012; Corney, 2008; McCloughen et al., 2011; Standing, 2009).

Each interview began with questions related to the adjunct instructor's experiences of becoming an instructor of adult learners in order to establish a rapport between the participant and myself (Creswell, 2013). The discussion related to prior teaching experiences and professional development experiences provided some insight into factors contributing to the formation of the participants' beliefs. The questions included:

1. Describe any personal experiences you have had as an adult learner.
2. How did you become an instructor of adult learners?
3. Describe your professional development experience as an adult educator.

Following these questions, the interview focused on beliefs about adult learning and instructional practices that reflect those beliefs.

The following research questions guided the semi-structured interviews:

Research question 1. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about adult learners? An assumption I made was the learner-centered instructor's beliefs about how adults learn translates into behavior in the classroom (Tisdell & Taylor, 2001). "One's educational philosophy is imbedded both in

what one believes about teaching and learning and what one actually does in their practice” (Tisdell & Taylor, 2001, p. 6). Consciously or unconsciously, these beliefs shape instructor’s attitudes and behavior in the classroom setting. Therefore, it is important to understand the beliefs about adult learners of learner-centered adjunct instructors.

Open-ended questions provided an opportunity for the instructors to identify and discuss their beliefs about adult learners. Open-ended questions included:

1. Describe your beliefs about adult learners.
2. Describe how you came to hold these beliefs.
3. What have you observed as common in adult learners?
4. Describe the ideal instructor of adult learners.

Research question 2. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about how adult learn? In addition to understanding beliefs about adult learners held by effective learner-centered educators, an understanding of instructional practices that address adult characteristics and educational needs that promote learning is essential to effective instruction (Taylor, 2008; Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Open-ended questions included:

1. Describe an instructional strategy you consistently use with adult learners.
2. Describe the ideal instructional environment for an adult learner.

Research question 3. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe how their beliefs influence their instructional practices? In addition to understanding specific beliefs about adult learners held by learner-centered instructors, an understanding of instructional practices that address the characteristics and educational

needs of adult learners is essential to effective instruction (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Therefore it is important to understand how beliefs of learner-centered adjunct instructors influence their instructional practices.

Open-ended questions included:

1. Describe the connection between your beliefs about adult learners and your instructional practices.
2. Describe the connection between your beliefs about how adult learn and your instructional practices.

Research question 4. What specific instructional practices do select learner-centered adjunct instructors associate with their beliefs about adult learning? Beliefs about adult learning are associated with specific instructional practices of learner-centered instructors (Cercone, 2008). Therefore it is important to understand the connection adjunct instructors make between specific beliefs about adult learners and specific instructional practices in the classroom.

Open-ended questions included:

1. Describe characteristics of adult learners that influence your instructional strategies.
2. Describe instructional strategies have you have found to be most effective in promoting learning in adult learners.

The interviews were all between 60 – 90 minutes in duration. Ben’s interview was conducted twice due to the poor quality of the initial audio tape. During the second interview, I asked the same questions as the initial interview. Since the interview was meant to be an open conversation, I assume there were differences in narrative between

the two tapes. However, only the narrative from the second interview was used during the analysis of the data. Following the interviews, except as noted for Julie, I conducted the classroom observations.

Observations

Observations provide a demonstration that what the participants described in their learning audit and interviews are actual practiced in their classroom (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The courses the instructors taught were five or ten weeks in duration and scheduled during evening hours. One participant's section was cancelled; therefore I conducted nine observations instead of ten. The observations took place at the location where the class was meeting at the prescribed meeting time. I observed between 60 – 75 minutes of a class session. No modifications to the setting, course content, or instructional delivery were requested for these observations. The observation sessions were not videotaped in order to eliminate introduction of an element that might further influence the behavior of the students or the instructor. I arrived approximately 15 minutes prior to the start time of the class. At the start of class, the adjunct instructors introduced me as a doctoral student studying adjunct instructors. Throughout each observation, there was no indication on the part of the students that my presence affected the class dynamics. Students interacted freely with each other and the instructors. During the class observation, I recorded field notes (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The field notes included descriptive field notes providing a physical description of the subjects, summaries and paraphrases of conversations, description of the physical setting, depiction of the activities, and my assumptions and behavior during the observation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The field notes also included “a more

personal account of the course of the inquiry” (p. 122). This reflection enabled me to note my own relationship to the data collection and ultimately the data analysis. This reflection included reflection on analysis, methods, ethical dilemmas and conflicts, frame of mind, and points of clarification. The observations demonstrated a connection between the narrative from the interviews and actual behavior in the class. I transcribed the field notes within 48 hours to ensure I was able to recall information needed to clarify my field notes.

Data Analysis

“Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 207). The purpose of data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology is to identify significant statements and meaning units that reveal the essence of the lived experience (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) explains in qualitative research, the researcher must “mine meaning” from the data (p. 86). Specific to hermeneutic phenomenology, the purpose of data analysis is to reflect on and interpret what is revealed through the text (Storli et al., 2008). The role of the researcher is to be immersed in the data in order to provide meaning and understanding of the lived experience (Liamputtong, 2009; Seidman, 2006).

Data analysis began simultaneous with the data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Liamputtong, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommend “delaying attempts at full-fledged, ongoing analysis and interpretation, but some analysis must take place during data collection. Without it, the data collection has no direction; thus the data you collect may not be substantial enough to accomplish analysis later” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 106). Miles and Huberman (1994) caution

researchers from waiting until all the data is collected to begin data analysis, in particular coding. One of the biggest challenges of qualitative research is the volume of data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are various approaches to organize and make sense of the data collected (Liamputtong, 2009). For this study, data analysis involved thematic analysis which included coding the data and identifying themes which provided understanding of the lived experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Tierney & Fox, 2010; van Manen, 1990). “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Van Manen (1990) describes thematic analysis as the “process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of the work” (p. 78).

I transcribed all data collected, including instructor learning audits, verbatim interview audio tapes, and field notes, into text for analysis. I electronically mailed the transcripts to the participants for their review and approval. Five of the participants approved the transcripts as written. Four of the participants provided clarification to some of the text. The clarification was specific to the text that was marked inaudible due to poor quality of the recording. One participant did not respond to the offer to review the transcripts.

Following the organization of the data into text, coding was the first step in the process of analytical interpretation (Liamputtong, 2009). Coding is the naming or labeling process of “certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects’ way of thinking, and events [that] repeat and stand out” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173). Van

Manen (1990) explains coding involves identifying the “structures of experience” (p. 79). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher examines the text in order to develop a reflective understanding of the structures of experience (lived experience) (van Manen, 1990).

Throughout the coding process, I used the hermeneutic circle process to reread the text in order to refine and confirm the themes identified (Storli et al., 2008). The purpose of the hermeneutic circle was to use the repetition of going back and forth between the whole and parts of the text in order to identify themes that emerge over time (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Dukes, 1984; McCloughen et al., 2011).

This does not mean interpretation was haphazard or arbitrary. In hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers use the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger, 1962) for guidance. The meaning or interpretation of the text is realized from the text and not from opinions or beliefs that a researcher is looking for in the text (Debesay, Nåden, & Slettebø, 2008). The hermeneutic circle involves a relationship between the parts and whole of a text (Whitehead, 2004). The whole and parts of the text give meaning to each other. The circular nature of interpretation is the back and forth between certain perceptions of the whole based on the parts and the moving from the parts back to the whole.

“Understanding develops as we become more engaged and concerned, through repeated experience, interaction with the issue in the real world, and reflection” (Kezar, 2000, p. 387). This open iterative process continues as interpretation is constructed. This involves “moving back and forth between examining the text, generating interpretations, and checking interpretations against the text” (Nielson & Cairns, 2009, p. 181).

“Grounds for adequate understanding must therefore be based on the fact that all

interpretation cannot be equally plausible, and that the researcher can achieve a great deal by listening to their informants and showing good judgment” (Debesay et al., 2008, p. 65).

Before actually assigning codes, I read the transcripts to gain an overview and general sense of the text (Seidman, 2006; Storli et al., 2008). Following this initial reading, I reread the text and began coding the text according to what seemed compelling, interesting, or relevant to the study’s research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006). Coding assisted in identifying what Seidman (2006) and Groenewald (2004) identified as units of meaning. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest coding all possible themes and patterns. Also coding data should be completed in a way that the code can be traced back to the original content in the transcript (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, for each code in the transcript, I identified the code by participant, instrument, and line number. For example: Respect; 2-A-44 would indicate I could find that code in Ben’s (participant number 2) Instructor Learning Audit transcript on line 44 or Community; 3-T-454 could be found in Richard’s Interview transcript on line 454.

Upon completion of the coding, I wrote each research question on the top of a large sheet (25 inches by 30 inches) of paper. I posted these 4 sheets of paper on my office wall. I then returned to the transcripts and reviewed each code. In this process, I wrote each code identified in the transcript on a small yellow post-it® note. The post-it® note included the code along with the system I used to identify where the code could be located in the specific transcript (For example: Community: 3-T-454). Each code was evaluated and identified with a specific research question the code might answer. The

yellow post-it® note was applied to the sheet of paper with the appropriate research question. If a code did not seem to answer one of the research questions, it was placed on a large sheet of paper labeled “miscellaneous”. The process continued until all the codes from the transcripts were on one of the large sheets of paper. I then reread the transcripts for a third time to determine if additional codes were not identified in the initial coding. No new codes emerged, however some narrative in the transcription were relevant to the existing codes, so those were identified and added to the large sheets of paper. In completing this analysis, the codes relevant to the study’s four research questions were identified. This allowed me to begin the process of considering relevant themes based on the study’s research questions.

Following this analysis related to the study’s research questions, I reviewed all the codes in order to cluster units of meaning that eventually revealed themes that reflected the essence of the lived experience (Groenewald, 2004; Storli et al., 2008). I evaluated each code represented on a yellow post-it® t note looking for cluster units of meaning. For example, the following codes were grouped together: co-labors; part of the instructional process; mutual responsibility; shared responsibility; all contribute to learning; learn from each other; and shared responsibilities. I hung additional large sheets of paper on my office walls and codes were moved from the research question sheets to cluster units of meaning sheets.

Following this analysis, I again went back to the transcripts and read them to determine if there was additional data in the transcripts for analysis. I did not add any additional codes or narrative from this review.

The final step in my analysis involved sorting the codes into possible themes by analyzing how various codes are combined into a theme. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2006). The significance of a theme is based on its importance to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once again, I reflected on the cluster units of meaning for possible themes. I manipulated the codes on the large sheets of paper numerous times, over several weeks, as I analyzed the codes for possible themes. Through this process, three themes were identified:

- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners' life experiences are paramount to adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe community facilitates adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners must engage in the learning process.

Each theme was written on a large sheet of paper and the codes (post-it®) were moved to the theme they represented. This allowed me to not only clearly identify emerging themes, but to also identify sub-themes relevant to each theme.

Epoche

In phenomenological studies, the purpose of the study is to allow the participants' experiences to emerge authentically through the data collection process (Bednall, 2006). This usually requires setting aside past knowledge and experiences about effective instructional practices for adult learners. Epoche, also referred to as bracketing, involves holding personal ideas and feelings in check by suspending bias for a particular period of time (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

However, in hermeneutic phenomenology bracketing is not viewed as possible or desirable (Storli et al., 2008). Heidegger (1962) emphasizes that human beings are always beings-in-the-world (Dasein), therefore; it is not possible to completely bracket previous knowledge or experiences and the researcher actually needs knowledge and experience of the phenomenon in order to provide insightful interpretation of the text (Clark, 2009; Greatrex-White, 2008; van Manen, 1990). Researchers do not bracket their pre-understanding (beliefs or assumptions) or experiences, but rather draw upon this pre-understanding and experience for greater understanding and interpretation of the lived experience (Nielson & Cairns, 2009). Bracketing is not aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology since understanding of the lived experience by the researcher is essential to interpretation of the text (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Rather than suspending any presuppositions, researchers situate themselves and their presuppositions in the context of the study (Storli et al., 2008). The researcher assumes an active role in the interpretation process of the text.

Freeman (2011) explains all human beings are insiders to the world of meaning since they are beings-in-the-worlds. However, Freeman (2011) emphasizes this does not mean that this meaning is easily accessed. Interpretation is needed for understanding a phenomenon in context and hermeneutics involves the process in which something that is unclear is clarified (Debesay et al., 2008). To the best of my ability, I actively participated in the analysis of the transcripts and the themes that emerged are a reflection of my interpretation of the narratives of the participants.

Trustworthiness

All research is concerned with the rigor in studies to ensure the findings are

worthwhile and useful (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Porter, 2007). Readers evaluate rigor based on the validity and reliability of the study (Guba, 1981; Merriam, 2009; Morse et al., 2002). While some advocate the use of the terms validity and reliability in qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002), Guba (1981) argued the terms validity and reliability, which align with rationalistic (quantitative) research, are not appropriate for naturalistic (qualitative) research. Trustworthiness of the study is the appropriate criteria when designing qualitative research studies (Merriam, 2009). Dukes (1984) and Creswell (2013) describe trustworthiness as verification. “The world of the work is believable and interesting to the extent that we recognize it as ordered by the same structural necessity as the real world” (Dukes, 1984, p. 201). In qualitative research, the researcher addresses the concerns of trustworthiness in the methods used to collect and analyze data and strategies to ensure trustworthiness are in place throughout the entire study (Creswell, 2013; Guba, 1981; Merriam, 2009). Guba and Lincoln (1982) outlined four concepts necessary in considering the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. While some have criticized Guba and Lincoln’s (1982) criteria as being too parallel to quantitative validity and reliability and not distinctive enough considering the distinct perspectives of quantitative and qualitative research (Sparkes, 2001; Lincoln, 1995), the concepts still serve as guidelines in addressing validity and reliability of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). To ensure trustworthiness of this qualitative study, I addressed the credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the study (Guba, 1981).

Credibility

Credibility answers the question, “Are the findings credible given the data presented?” (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). This involves testing the credibility of the data and interpretation with various sources (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). It includes how accurately and faithfully I described the experience of the participants (Crain & Koehn, 2012). This study addressed credibility through member check, triangulation, prolonged engagement with the participants, and peer debriefings.

Member check allowed the participants of the study to review interpretations to determine if my perceptions were accurate and the interpretation was consistent with the participants’ beliefs (Chen et al., 2011; Crain & Koehn, 2012; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Guba (1981) characterized member check as “the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (p. 85). Member check is designed to answer the question, “Does the researcher’s interpretation reflect the participants’ experiences?” I provided participants copies of the transcripts and my interpretation (themes) on two occasions prior to the final write up of the study; once following transcription of the interviews and observations and again after the themes were identified for the member check (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The participants were invited to provide feedback based on their review (Crain & Koehn, 2012).

Triangulation is another strategy designed to strengthen credibility (Chen et al., 2011; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Triangulation strengthens the overall study and its results (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For this study, I used multiple data collection methods for triangulation. The instructor learning audits, semi-structured

interviews, and classroom observations allowed for checking and cross checking data (Merriam, 2009). I checked data that participants communicated (interviews) with data observed (classroom observations) and with data that was read (instructor learning audits). Multiple data sets provide for multiple perspectives designed to clarify meaning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). For this study, data was collected using documentation review (instructor learning audit), semi-structured interviews, and observations. This provided data from multiple sources as the research questions were investigated.

Prolonged engagement with the participants allowed me to develop a rapport (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Standing, 2009) that facilitated a shared conversation about the beliefs of learner-centered adjunct instructors. The engagement with the participants was significant enough to justify the characterization of the lived experience (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Peer debriefings provided an opportunity for me to test my preliminary thinking and insights with other adult learner professionals not involved in the research study (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Peer debriefings also allowed experts to validate emerging themes (Chen et al., 2011; Dukes, 1984; Hunter, 2008; Storli et al., 2008). I used feedback from my dissertation committee chair and one committee member along with two peers with extensive knowledge and background in adult learning for peer debriefings.

Dependability

Dependability indicates the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Chen et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009). Dependability involves the extent to which other researchers can follow and understand how and why I reached specific conclusions

(Crain & Koehn, 2012). To address dependability, I established an audit trail (Crain & Koehn, 2012; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982) and conducted the study according to the methodology outlined.

An audit trail provides an opportunity for an external auditor to examine the documentation produced by the researcher to evaluate the process the data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Chen et al., 2011; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Hunter, 2008). The audit trail for this study consisted of the written responses to the learning audit (See Appendix K), verbatim transcripts of the interviews (See Appendix L), field notes of the classroom observations (See Appendix M), and a research journal (See Appendix N) that contains a running account of the research process so others can conduct similar research (Chen et al., 2011).

Transferability

Transferability addresses the issue of the interpretations of the study being generalized to other situations (Merriam, 2009). Transferability involves describing the content sufficiently so readers can determine if it applies in other contexts (Chen et al., 2011). I addressed transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the settings, participants, data collection, and data analysis. In relation to the participants, I used purposive sampling intended to provide a maximum discussion of the lived experience under study (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

I also collected and provided rich thick descriptions so others may assess the similarity between their situation and this study (Crain & Koehn, 2012; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This allows for comparison of the context of this study with other contexts.

Conformability

Conformability is the degree in which the findings of the study are shaped by the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or personal constructions (Crain & Koehn, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). While the interpretation of the data is dependent on my knowledge and experience with the lived experience, it is not constructed out of a predetermined bias. To address conformability, I included my introspections surfaced during the interviews and classroom observations, throughout the research process and documented decisions in a research journal by keeping a journal throughout the research study (Crain & Koehn, 2012; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Guba (1981) asserts intentionally practicing reflexivity allows readers to understand underlying assumptions and thinking that led to the findings of the researcher. The audit trail used to address dependability also included details identifying the data used to support all interpretations in order to confirm "that the interpretations have been made in ways consistent with the available data" (Guba, 1981, p. 88).

Ethical Considerations

"Actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher's own values and ethics" (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). As a Christian, Scripture guides my values and ethics. Central to these values and ethics is the understanding that my behavior is a reflection of my commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Whatever you do, work at it with your whole heart, not unto men, but do it unto God knowing that God will reward you" (New International Version, Colossians 3:23). My values and ethics are reflected in biblical truths and principles. Therefore, these truths and principles guide my ethical

behavior. Therefore, within the areas of my control in this project, unethical actions will not occur.

I adhered to all verbal or written agreements between the targeted university and the participants. I also gave an accurate account of all interviews and observations. No deliberate fabrications, omissions, or additions were made to transcripts or field notes. I protected the privacy of the participants and did not identify them to any internal (university) or external parties. Pseudonyms were used for all participants in verbal and written communication. The audio tapes, transcripts, field notes, and journal will be kept in a locked desk drawer in my personal office for one year; at which time they will be destroyed. Duplicate information of the study is kept in a separate locked compartment in my personal office.

My goal in life is to bring honor and glory to the name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Presenting an untruthful account of this research study would directly contradict this goal. Therefore, to the best of my ability and with the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I conducted this research with honesty and integrity throughout the entire process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

In phenomenological studies, a researcher examines the lived experience of a particular phenomenon shared by a specific group of individuals (Creswell, 2013; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). The goal in this type of study is to depict how a particular phenomenon is essentially presented based on an individual's lived experience (Moutakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). A hermeneutic (interpretative) approach to phenomenology, which focuses on the interpretation of the text in order to gain deeper understanding of the lived experience of participants, was used in analyzing the participants' narrative (Smythe et al., 2008).

Narrative provides researchers an understanding of how "participants live, experience and tell about their world" (Keats, 2009, p. 181). With a narrative of lived experiences in mind, the researcher assumes the role of storyteller (Holley & Colyar, 2009). Nash (2004) describes narrative as a mutual sharing of stories that "meet [individuals] where they actually live their lives. ... Our stories get us closer to knowing who we are, and who [others] are" (p. 2).

There are various approaches to narrative analysis and for this narrative, I adopted the thematic analysis approach (Riessman, 2008). In this approach, the researcher gathers numerous stories of lived experiences and inductively constructs conceptual or thematic groupings from the data. As the storyteller, my narrative provided in this chapter reflects the lived experiences of 10 learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult learners and represents the essence of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The following narrative reflects my perspective of the participants' stories and is influenced by my own story as an adult learner and in working with adult learners. This narrative is my best attempt to accurately portray the participants' experiences which reflect their realities in working with adult learners. The goal of this narrative is to provide insight into the learner-centered adjunct instructor's beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices.

This chapter begins with a description of the participants in the study. The participants' story of teaching adult learners begins with their experiences as adult learners. While it was not a criterion for participating in this study, all the participants had experience as an adult learner. Their story in becoming an adjunct instructor continues as they discuss the formal and informal preparation they received regarding adult learners. This description provides context for the participants' narrative regarding their beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices. Pseudonyms were used for each participant in this study. Following the description of the participants, I discuss the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' narrative to the instructor audits and interviews, and my field notes of classroom observations. The narrative in this chapter reflects modifications to the transcriptions to accommodate for the differences between the spoken word and the written word in order to provide improved fluency for the reader. For example, pauses such as *um*, *ah*, *you know*, and *I mean* and repeated words were omitted for ease of reading. Only pauses and repeated words were omitted. The pauses and repeated words did not alter the narrative of the raw data or disrupt the interpretation of the data.

Description of Participants

The participants in this study came with varied backgrounds, educational backgrounds and credentials, and life experiences (see Table 2 for Selected Participants' PALS Scores and Demographics). However, all participants were identified as learner-centered adjunct instructors teaching adult learners by virtue of them scoring at least a 148 on the PALS, thereby indicating their strong learner-centered instructional beliefs and practices. None of the participants were employed full time as a faculty member with a university. All of the participants had experience as an adult learner and teaching adult learners.

Anne

Anne is a 48 year old white female adjunct instructor who primarily teaches business courses. She has 10 years higher education teaching experience. She has 14 years' experience in instructing adult learners in higher education, seminars, and training workshops. Anne was an adult learner when she earned her Master's in Business Administration (MBA) degree. When Anne returned to school, she was a 30 year old wife and mother who was active in her community and church. However, her MBA program was designed for full time students. Anne explained:

Some [students] were full time students, but others were like me trying to take care of a family, work, and study; basically get it all squeezed in. ... I tell you about this because I was an adult student. ... I had many demands on my life. My school was often interrupted and even took a back seat to my other life responsibilities.

Anne's professional development as a learner-centered adjunct instructor of adults comes

from opportunities provided by the university's faculty development team through various webinars and in-seat seminars. Anne indicated, "I really don't have any formal education directly related to teaching adults." When asked how she formed her beliefs about adult learning, Anne stated, "Mostly from experience." Anne explained that as an adult learner, her MBA program did not meet her needs. As a result, she faced numerous barriers to completing her degree.

[T]he university seemed to take the approach that if you wanted the degree, you had to figure out how to make it happen. I totally understand the priority of education when you are working on a degree, but it seemed like my graduate program presented itself as if school is not your number one priority, maybe you should rethink being in school.

Anne describes her passion for teaching adult learners as an opportunity to learn from the students. "... I have really learned so much from the students. It has just been great."

Matt

Matt is a 38 year old white male adjunct instructor teaching mostly Biblical Studies courses. He has over 2 years teaching experience in higher education and working with adult learners. After earning his bachelor's degree, he worked for 10 years before entering graduate school to earn a Master's in Divinity. As an adult learner, Matt expressed frustration with his experience in graduate school. ... "I was surprised [at the amount] of reading, quizzing, and testing; sort of regurgitation of information that there still was at that level. ... I expected a little more freedom to explore things". Matt described his personal experience as an adult learner as the most influential training he has received as an adjunct instructor of adult learners. His dad was also an adult learner

who went back to college when Matt was a young boy. “I have his perspective [and] my own perspective.” He had one formal teaching course in seminary. Matt has also completed the new faculty orientation for the university’s which included online instruction and articles to read related to teaching adult learners. Matt stated his beliefs about adult learning are influenced by his own experience as an adult learner.

Richard

Richard is a 50 year old white male that teaches business courses. He has 5 years higher education teaching experience as an adjunct instructor. In the military, Richard was an instructor for military training for 6 years. Richard’s completed undergraduate and graduate degrees as an adult learner. Richard earned his undergraduate degree while in the military. He describes the instructors in this program as “retired military personnel so they really related to my life situation and were very supportive of me.” After separating from the military, Richard worked a few years before earning his MBA. To complete his MBA, Richard returned to the university where he earned his bachelor degree. He explained, “It was very supportive of adults working full time with busy lives. ... I had such a great experience in both my OM [Organizational Management] and MBA programs.”

As part of his preparation for being a military instructor, Richard completed two courses which he described as “helpful, but pretty military training specific.” He has also participated in seminars and webinars provided by a university’s faculty development team designed for adjunct faculty. Richard indicates these have been helpful, but attributes his experience as an adult learner as most influential in shaping his beliefs about adult learning. “I believe I have learned the most from experiencing what worked

for me as an adult learner, what meet my needs and expectation, and what did not work for me.” Richard is enthusiastic about teaching adult learners. He attributes his passion to his experience as an adult learner and his interaction with his instructors.

I know how much I was able to achieve because of their encouragement and dedication to me, so I guess that was the attraction to teaching... I think I am most attracted to teaching when I think about the relationship with the students and being a part of them achieving a goal.

Mary

Mary is a 50 year old white female adjunct instructor, with a Master’s degree, who primarily teaches general studies courses. She has one year higher education adjunct teaching experience and over 16 years experience in instructing adult learners in the military and private practice through training and consulting venues. As an adult learner, in her MBA program, Mary described the most effective environment for her involved making connections between what she knew and had experienced and new information and skills. “... [T]ake something that was unfamiliar to me and convert it to something that was familiar ... then I can make a connection to that.” Mary’s professional development related to adult learners was mostly in the military in preparation for training military personnel which focused primarily on the specific content rather than the cognitive process of learning. “[The training involved] the information that needs to be conveyed to students and the ways you can do it. But it doesn’t bring theory into the picture. So, I haven’t had any theory classes yet...” Since teaching in higher education, Mary has attended a seminar provided by a university’s faculty development team focused on effective grading. Mary indicated the teachings of the Bible influences her

beliefs about adult learning. “I really believe we are all teachers and that no matter what environment, if we emulate Christ and his teaching style, then we will be fine.” Mary describes her love for teaching as rooted in her passion for students. “I love my job.”

Brian

Brian is a 59 year old white male adjunct instructor teaching general studies and Biblical studies courses to adult learners. He has over 5 years higher education teaching experience and over 15 years of experience in teaching adults in church settings. He is a board certified chaplain for hospice and has a Master’s of Divinity (MDiv). His experience as an adult learner came when Brian returned to school to earn his MDiv. After completing his bachelor’s degree, he worked for a few years before returning to school at the age of 27. During seminary, he took off one semester to get married. As an adult learner, Brian indicated he approached education differently than he did as a young undergraduate student. “I wouldn’t allow myself to be patronized as if I didn’t know what the real world was like. Because I had been working and went back to seminary.” He also indicated, “[I]f I saw something that did not work for my education goals or path ... I would say I am not going to do that.” As an adult learner he focused on what was necessary to achieve his goals. Brian attributes the seminars provided by university’s faculty development team, interaction with his instructors in graduate school and a chaplain program, and his personal work experience in church as a pastor and director of education as valuable resources to his position as an adjunct instructor in higher education. “[They help me understand] the students we interact with. The different experiences they bring to class. It helps in understanding how to interact with the students.” When asked how his beliefs about adult learning were developed, Brian

explained his “education, learning about teaching, and then [his personal] experience of ... what works and does not work with adults” formed his beliefs. Brian described teaching adult learners as meeting a need to use, what he calls, “a giftedness” for teaching.

David

David is a 61 year old white male adjunct instructor who teaches philosophy and business courses in higher education. He has an earned Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Transformational Leadership. David has over 3 years teaching experience with adult learners in higher education and over 25 years of experience teaching adult learners through Campus Crusade for Christ ministries. After earning his bachelor’s degree, David was on staff with Campus Crusade where, as an adult learner, he attended classes at the Institute for Biblical Studies for five summers. His experience as an adult learner continued when he earned his doctorate degree. David indicated, “... [A]dult learning has just been part of my life.” He describes this experience as very experiential and application oriented designed to impact life.

So, all of [my education] has helped form my understanding of education; that it’s just much more than knowledge transfer, if it doesn’t translate into impacting the way I think and actually live and understand the world, it’s kind of a waste of time.

David attributes his beliefs about adult learning to his personal experience as an adult learner, teaching adult learners, and his interaction with his father-in-law. His father-in-law has a Doctorate in Adult Learning with numerous years of experience in working with adult learners. “I’ve learned a lot from him over the decades.” David describes

teaching adult learners as a privilege to learn in community with the students. “I’ve loved learning all my life. But learning in community is something that’s been a real high value.”

Julie

Julie is a 44 year old white female teaching adult learners in higher education primarily in communication, writing, and Biblical studies courses. She has over 2 years of experience in higher education and over 10 years of experience working with adults in a church setting and as a professional speaker. As an adult learner, Julie expects her instructor to respect her and her life experiences.

...[Y]ou don’t deserve to have me as a student or an audience if you don’t respect me. So, I think that is the underlying principle in terms of success for me as an adult learner. I need to know you respect me and I need to know you love and respect your subject.

In terms of professional development, Julie has not participated in much that is specific to adult learners. In preparing to teach adult learners, she did complete an orientation which included some articles specific to adult learning. She also completed an online course which focused on teaching strategies specific to adult learners. She attributes most of what she believes about adult learning to her personal experiences. “I’ve relied on the experiences I’ve had in other realms and the learning I’ve done in other realms.”

Specifically Julie explains her beliefs come from seeing things done poorly or ineffectively. “Yes, it was based on my experience [and] in [my] case what I thought of as ineffective.” Julie’s passion for teaching adult learners is influenced by learning in community.

... [I]t can be so enriching, it's just great. ... [I] feel like I have expertise in this area and [students] have expertise in these areas and we both contribute to what we do in class. We are all learning from each other. And that is something I love about adult learners.

Kate

Kate is a 48 year old white female adjunct instructor who teaches general education courses to adult learners. She has over 8 years of experience teaching adult learners in higher education. Her experience as an adult learner included her graduate studies in education. She has attended webinars focused on adult learning provided by a university where she teaches. Kate's beliefs about adult learning were formed by her personal experiences.

My beliefs about adult learners probably come from experiences I had that I thought were very ineffective. Mostly from sitting in classes with long lectures and no interaction. I was bored and distracted. I guess I assume my students will be bored and distracted if I teach that way. So, I look for ways to connect them to the learning process.

Kate's motivation to teach adult learners is to see them accomplish their educational goals. "I work with some students who have been trying to complete their degree for years. They are incredible individuals with amazing persistence. I love being part of this journey with them."

Ben

Ben is a 40 year old white male adjunct instructor teaching Biblical studies and theology courses. He has over 2 years of experience teaching adult learners in higher

education. Ben describes himself as an adult learner when earning his Master's of Divinity (MDiv) and Doctorate degrees. His MDiv was in a traditional program; however the schedule was altered to accommodate students who were working full time. He attended classes Mondays from 8:00am to 10:00pm.

[I]n traditional college, school was your main focus, ... as an adult learner this may be a little bit more difficult. So, there is really a focus on managing your time; especially with space, being able to plan for spaces of time when you can prepare so you are not cramming everything in the week before.

Ben indicated he did not have much formal education or professional training related to teaching adults. He identified his wife as his primary resource. Ben's wife is an educator and provides Ben with resources he integrates into his instructional practices. Ben acknowledged personal experience formed his beliefs about adult learning. "[I considered] what did I enjoy about my education and did I not enjoy." Ben describes teaching adult learners as one of his personal passions. "I love teaching and that is one of my personal passions is to teach. And I think a part of that teaching aspect ...[is] the coaching and mentoring part ... helping people discover learning."

Luke

Luke is a 54 year old white male adult learner adjunct instructor primarily teaching math and business courses. Luke has over 7 years of experience teaching adult learners in higher education and over 15 years training adults in the workplace. As a husband, father, and employee, Luke returned to earn a bachelor's degree in his mid-30s as an adult learner. He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in an adult education program. Following his master's degree, Luke completed his doctorate degree

through an online program. Luke described his educational experience, which he uses in relating to his students, as getting his credentials up to his aptitude. “All of my learning, I’ve been a non-[traditional student] the whole time.” Luke has not had any formal education or training related to teaching adult learners. Luke described his beliefs about adult learning developed from his own experience as an adult learner and also from receiving feedback from students. “... I learn from the students... [I]t is more intuition on my part of listening to the students.” Luke explains he teaches adult learners from a motivation to assist the students in reaching their goals.

Overview of Themes

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors’ beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices in a face-to-face classroom environment. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about adult learners?
2. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about how adults learn?
3. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe how their beliefs influence their instructional practices?
4. What specific instructional practices do select learner-centered adjunct instructors associate with their beliefs about adult learning?

I collected data through instructor audits (written response), interviews, and classroom observations. For analysis, I transcribed the participants’ narrative and three

primary themes emerged from the analysis of the narrative data:

- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners' life experiences are paramount to adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe community facilitates adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners must engage in the learning process.

The themes, which portray the essence of learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices, are not linear in relationship to one another. The themes are interconnected. Life experiences of adult learners influence a community of learners and engagement. A community of learners reflects the collective life experiences of learners and fosters engagement among learners. Foundational to engagement in adult learners are life experiences and the community of learners.

Theme One: Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructors Believe Adult Learners' Life Experiences Are Paramount to Adult Learning

Without exception, all participants expressed their belief that an adult's life experience has considerable significance in their learning emerged from their narratives. The participants emphasized adult learners bring a plethora of life experience to the classroom. "I have come to appreciate the rich experience [adult learners] bring to the classroom" (Richard). "I think one of the biggest advantages adults have over younger students is their wealth of experience" (Anne). Matt explained, "The adult learner brings

more to the classroom environment. They bring more life experience, more work experience, more victories, and more failures.”

[Adult learners are] full of pain and heartache and disappointment and yet somehow they learn from all the stuff that kind of comes their way and are better people for it. And it’s what makes the classroom; it’s just a rich experience.

(David)

The participants also shared their belief that adult learners actually expect instructors to value their life experiences.

[Adult learners] are coming back to school and ... there may be some hesitation, embarrassment, maybe shame in their thinking that they should have gotten this done a long time ago. But then I think they also recognize that life experience has enriched their lives and taught them skills and they have picked up knowledge from living life and working. So, I think they want to complete their degree, but at the same time, they want their life experiences to be valued and respected and important to their learning. (Anne)

“I believe [adult learners] expect an instructor to recognize their life experiences whether they have been to college before or not, life experience counts for something” (Richard).

I try to be respectful of the fact [adult learners] have a lot of life experience that does pertain to the subject matter. And so, I want to hear what they have to offer or I want the other students to hear what they have to offer, because some of it is quite valuable. They have wisdom to share. So I try to draw out some of that experience ... so other students can learn from them. (Matt)

Kate also believes adult learner's life experiences provide a valuable perspective to learning.

Some of my students could probably teach the classes I teach. They have a lot of life experience and skills. They bring a lot of wisdom to the classroom. In the beginning of class, some students are timid to contribute to the discussion. But, as I try to highlight how their life experience enhances the discussion and our overall learning, they loosen up pretty quickly.

Luke respects the fact that many adult learners have accumulated significant life experience and enrolling in school validates and formalizes that experience. Luke used the phrase "getting [adult learners'] credentials up to their aptitude" as he discussed his perspective on adult learners' life experiences.

This emphasis is consistent with the well-known assumption that adult learners have vast life experience than enhances learning. (Cerecone, 2008; Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Kasworm, et al., 2002; Knowles, et al., 2005). However, the participants' narrative on the experiential background of adult learners went beyond the fact that adults have lived longer than younger students and therefore they bring more experience to the learning environment. These participants carefully weighed the impact of this experience and intentionally addressed how life experience plays a paramount role in adult learning. Four subthemes emerged when participants discussed their belief that life experiences of adult learners are paramount in adult learning: *The Connection between Prior Knowledge and New Learning*; *Contribution to Learning*; *Barriers to Learning*; and *The Daily Life of an Adult Learner*. Research questions 1, 2, and 3 are addressed in the participants' belief that life experiences of adult learners are paramount in adult learning (Theme One).

The Connection between Prior Knowledge and New Learning

Seven participants acknowledged the connection between prior knowledge and new learning. Mary explained that students' understanding of content is often driven by prior experiences. Ben indicated life experience enhances learning. David believes the shared life experiences of adult learners provide opportunities for new ways of thinking and processing content.

Richard described how positive and negative experiences provide connections between adult learners' experiences and new learning.

I think the experiences [adult learners] bring to the classroom are huge. I think it is a big mistake if an instructor overlooks this fact. Whether that experience is helpful or harmful, because I do think some experiences can be a barrier to the student's learning, but that is not the point. The point is that the experiences of adults influence the learning environment and instructors have to recognize this, in my opinion, if they are going to help the students evaluate the experience and then use it to facilitate new learning. The experience enables the adult student to grasp the information quickly. The instructor does not have to spend as much time building a foundation for the new information. Adult students' experiences provide a great foundation to build on in terms of theory and new knowledge.

Kate also discussed the value of life experience to new information:

I see all the time the ah-ha moment in adults. They often say, 'I have always done this. I didn't know there was a theory behind it.' Their experience allows them to connect new information to past experience which I think improves their retention of new information.

Anne indicated that life experience provides valuable hooks or context for the students as they process new knowledge.

[Adult learners] don't come with a blank slate. They have accumulated a lot of life experience and knowledge that provides hooks for students to hang new knowledge on. ... They have experienced leadership styles whether they can label those styles or articulate theories behind the styles. But as they are introduced to the terms or theories, they have experience that put the new knowledge into a context that makes sense to the adult learner.

Anne intentionally designs opportunities for the adult learner to draw on their experiential background to foster connections between experience and prior knowledge and new knowledge and skills.

Contribution to Learning

Julie, Richard, Anne, Kate, Ben, Julie, Mary, and David acknowledged adult learners' life experience is a valuable contribution to learning. David and Mary characterized life experiences as providing a rich environment for learning. Julie acknowledges the contribution of adult learners based on their life experiences. "I try to communicate, 'You are valued and your contribution encourages learning for all of us.'" Richard attributes adult learners' experience to fostering learning. "Students have such a depth of experiences that fosters learning. Each student has a unique contribution to the learning environment as a result of their experience."

Anne describes how she incorporates her belief regarding the contribution of life experience to learning:

Since I think the experience that adult learner brings to the classroom is beneficial to the student and to others, I try to incorporate opportunities where the student makes connections between their prior knowledge and experiences with the content of the course. One way I do this is through the use of case studies. I will give a group of 3-4 students a case study. I ask them to use their prior knowledge and experience and discuss the case study from that perspective. Then I have them look at the case study from the perspective of their week's reading or the week's content. Finally, I have them take into consideration all their input and provide a possible approach to the case study.

Specific to instructional practices, participants believe adult learners' life experiences facilitate the application of new learning. Julie discussed the impact of life experience on instructional practices such as application strategies.

I think that adult learners bring to the classroom a level of life experience and professional experience that you can't expect from younger students. And that's really refreshing. Where in the classroom you immediately see application to what they are already doing in their life or profession. ... And they also are able to contribute to the classroom and to the discussion in ways that younger students can't because of their professional experience.

Kate also draws on life experience in application activities.

I think sometimes the students are surprised at how much of life experience relates to what they are learning. But, I think it is so valuable for [the students] to make these connections. It enables them to see the practical application of what they are learning more readily.

Ben mentioned the influence of adult learners' experience to application strategies. "... [E]xperience in life allows [adult learners] to glean things from other work, career, and life experiences and apply those principles and truth to the college setting."

Barriers to Learning

Nine participants also believe experiences can negatively influence adult learning. For example, according to Anne:

Adult learners bring lots of experience to the classroom. That experience most often greatly enhances the learning environment, but there are some experiences that have negatively affected the adult learner. My job is to help the student overcome those negative experiences in order to achieve their goal.

The participants specifically identified fear, lack of confidence, and daily life as common barriers adult learners must overcome for success.

Fear. Luke, who teaches math, indicates many adult learners have experiences failure in math related courses. He believes helping adult learners overcome fear is essential to learning.

... [Some adult learners] have more than likely had a bad experience early on in math. I have to help them overcome their fear of continued failure in [math] before we will have any success at all ... They just need to be reassured.

Julie agreed with Luke that fears inhibit learning. "They are not going to learn if they don't get rid of some of the fears." Julie teaches oral communication and explained her care for the students involves reducing their fear about public speaking. She indicated, students often ask:

‘Can I do this?’ I don’t know if I can do this.’ And so, for me that means [overcoming this fear] is as important as the competence and skills. They are not going to learn the skills if they don’t get rid of some of the fears. ... I know they can get there, and it is sort of my job to love them past that anxiety.

Brian also teaches oral communication and uses positive feedback to reduce the student’s fear. He focuses on strengths when providing feedback. “I believe as [I] bring [adult learner’s] strengths up, the weakness will [improve]. ... So, with adult learners, [I] build on those and then they find that the weaknesses get pulled up along the way.” When I visited Brian’s classroom, after each speech, the students in class would give feedback to the presenter. They all started with the strengths of the presentation. Then Brian asked the presenter to identify any weaknesses. Every presenter was able to identify the weaknesses without Brian or the classmates identifying them. It appeared the positive feedback provided some confidence for the presenter to identify weaknesses.

When observing Luke’s classroom, I noticed him addressing the student’s fear of the upcoming final. Luke reassured the students and reminded them that they were reviewing each week prior to the final. Luke spent a portion of his class time going over each of the mathematics problems point-by-point allowing the students to ask questions during the process.

Lack of confidence. Mary explains that raising the confidence of adult learners enables them to reach their potential. Matt discussed the effect confidence has on learning. “... [T]hey just need a little encouragement. ... [Y]ou encourage them and you just know what it has done to their self-confidence and even their career and their own desire to learn more.”

Matt believes building confidence in adult learners is in part an instructor's responsibility.

I have also found teaching often takes the form of encouraging. Some of my best adult students have been outside a formal learning environment for a considerable length of time and simply needed to rebuild their confidence in their own scholastic abilities.

Ben agrees that addressing potential barriers can significantly improve adult learners' confidence. "... [M]aybe high school wasn't the most encouraging or the best experience for them. ... they just need to be affirmed and their confidence rises or improves dramatically and quickly. That's fun to see."

Kate describes how she builds confidence in adult learners:

Adults have a lot of the good, the bad, and the ugly that they bring into the classroom. So many of my students are completing their degree in their 40s and 50s because of really bad experiences in school. But with some success in the classroom, I really see them put those things behind them rather quickly. I emphasize the experience they bring to the classroom and how valuable it is to their learning. That helps build their confidence.

Participants provided several examples of their practices designed to build confidence in the adult learner. I observed this practice when I visited Anne's classroom. She acknowledged to her students she understood it was "tough to stay on track with school with so much going on". Anne recognized they were busy individuals with school, work, and home but encouraged them to carve out time to focus on school and keep up with assignments. "You can do this. Just take each class one week at a time."

Mary explains her approach when students express self-doubt in a hypothetical conversation with a student.

[If] I've got a student in the class that says, 'I can't write' and I look at her and say, 'I bet you can. I bet I can tell you something that will help you get there.

And I am going to take the time to do it.'

David builds confidence in adult learners through feedback on assignments. He told the students if they continued to respond to his feedback and do the work, they could expect successful grades. David believes the result of this feedback is students realize, "I'm smarter than I thought I was. I'm much more articulate than I thought I was. I'm a better thinker than I thought I was. I can do this." While visiting Luke's classroom, he gave encouraging and supportive comments to the students, "You're going to be successful', 'You will get through this'."

The Daily Life of an Adult Learner

Finally, when asked to describe an adult learner, part of the response from Anne, Matt, Richard, Brian, David, Julie, and Luke included the busy lives of adult learners. For the participants, this is a result of the personal, professional, and community responsibilities of adults and the fact they have added formal education to those responsibilities. When asked to describe her belief about characteristics of adult learners, Anne responded:

I think the first thing that comes to mind, in my opinion, is that they are so very busy. Almost all of my students are adding the goal of a degree to an already full schedule. Some of them come to school because they have gone through some crisis like maybe a divorce, which most likely are women, but some of them have

lost their job or students getting out of the military. ... [T]hey have big events going on in their life.

Richard's description was similar, "[Adult learners] are very busy. They are setting a goal for completing a degree, some who started it many years ago, on top of a very complicated life."

In his instructor audit, Luke said one of the most important things he has learned about adult learners is that they are busy. "[Adult learners] generally have many irons in the fire and higher education is just one aspect of life for which they are trying to budget time and energy." Matt said he expected adult learners to be busy with family and work responsibilities. However, he expressed surprise with the complexity of their lives.

I expected that students would be busy, but I was surprised at, I don't know if chaos is the right word, but how much is going on; how many stressors there are in the lives of these adult students. There is often some clearly significant transition in their life [and] they just add school on top of that.

Brian described the day-to-day stressors he has encountered with the adult learners. His students have experienced the loss of a job, changes in work responsibilities, sick children, and medical emergencies such as a student hospitalized for an atopic pregnancy.

David described his students as overcomers.

... [Adult learners] lives are very complex. Lots of pressures that they already manage. ...[T]hey're overcomers. They overcome tremendous adversity. And I am absolutely amazed at the stories of so many of my students. So many single moms. Incredible stories of survival... [A]nd they are not just surviving, they're flourishing.

The busyness of daily life also impacts the adult learners' priorities regarding their education.

The lives of adult learners are very full and academic scholarship is not their only, nor even their primary, focus. I have read how many adult learners may be forced to 'economize their learning efforts because of the many roles they juggle.' (Matt) Brian stated, "...[S]chool is not the primary piece of their lives. ... [T]heir education is part of their life but not the whole of their life." Ben agreed with Brian's assessment, "I understand that being a student ... is probably priority number 3, 4, 5, or even lower." Richard discussed that some instructors may think, if school is not the first priority then perhaps the students are not serious students and may need to reconsider if they should pursue a degree. Richard disagreed with this thinking.

School may not be the first priority of students. In light of their life responsibilities, I am not sure it should be their first priority. Instructors need to understand this and support the fact that students, with so many demands on their lives, are more than capable of reaching their goals. The level of priority should not be held against students. There is only so much they can do.

Ben acknowledged that while school may not be the adult learners' first priority, they make sacrifices to earn their degree. "... [S]chool may be number five on the list of importance, but it is still extremely important and [there are] other things they are giving up to earn this degree."

The participants expressed their belief that acknowledging adult learners' complex and busy lives is an important element that enhances learning. The participants

believe that acknowledging day-to-day stressors and encouraging their adult students provides motivation for the adult to persevere.

During the classroom observation, I saw evidence of acknowledging stressors and encouraging students. Prior to the start of class, several of the participants acknowledged the students by name as they entered the classroom. The participants asked the students about their week. Ben asked one student about his father that was in the hospital. Anne, Luke, Brian, and David also inquired if the class had heard from students who were absent. Brian responded to a student's personal life circumstance that required her to leave class early. Brian acknowledged the student's circumstance was stressful and made accommodations for the student to present her speech early in the evening, so she would be free to leave when necessary. Each of the participants observed prayed at the start of the class. Anne specifically prayed for the students based on concerns students had shared in conversation. Brian encouraged students to set aside distractions prior to his prayer. "Let's set aside those things for the next four hours. We are not saying they are not priorities in our lives, but I am asking the Lord to enable you to set those things aside that will distract you and interfere with the work you need to do tonight."

In response to the day-to-day stressors in the life of adult learners, Brian and Matt reported they provide flexibility in schedules, due dates, and assignments. As Brian stated, "On a practical level the adult student has a full life outside of class and does better in class when the professor works with their schedules as much as possible." He went on to add that:

Unless I have reason otherwise, I give as much flexibility as I can to accommodate the students schedule. I believe the adult learner wants to be in

class, missing class is a stressor. But, sometimes there are other priorities they just have to attend to, so they may be a few minutes late, or they have to leave early, or they have to miss a class. They are adults, they assume the responsibility but I try to be as accommodating and reasonable as I can.

Matt also provides flexibility on due dates. "... I tend to be a little bit flexible on paper deadlines or I try to be respectful if they have a crisis that comes up."

Summary

The first main theme, *Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructors Believe Adult Learners' Life Experiences Are Paramount to Adult Learning*, was predominant in the narratives of the participants when describing their beliefs about adult learners and how the life experiences of adult learners influence their instructional practices. As previously stated, this theme is consistent with the assumption that adult learners bring a wealth of life experience to the education endeavor that provides the context for new learning (Cerecone, 2008; Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2005). The participants extended this discussion by highlighting how they use adult learner's life experience to facilitate application of new knowledge.

The participants also broadened the discussion of life experiences that serve as barriers to learning. The literature certainly addresses barriers of adult learning and the potential that life experiences contribute to those barriers (Falasca, 2011), but the participants focused on barriers related to life experience and emphatically argued that unless adjunct instructors address these experiences, the adult learner will suffer significant challenges in the learning process. Finally, the participants addressed the day-to-day life experiences that adult learners navigate in order to achieve their educational

goals. The participants provided numerous examples of instructional practices that are influenced by their beliefs about the life experiences of adult learners.

Theme Two: Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructors Believe

Community Facilitates Adult Learning

As participants shared their lived experiences teaching adult learners, their belief about the importance of learning in community emerged. Ben for example believes community is part of life and therefore should be part of the classroom.

Life is about relationships; so community is important to learning. I think there is, in that community, accountability. [The students] know one another and know their strengths and weaknesses. ... [I]n that community they begin to care about each other as students, but also as a person. Hopefully [students] are developing some deep relationships overtime and that when life happens maybe they can step in and support and encourage. ... You can't get away from community.

Brian also values community and views community for adult learners "as a place where [adults] come and they are with like-minded people ... sharing something exciting."

Kate and Richard described how community facilitates learning. "Learning occurs as students develop relationships with other students and their instructor. Community often provides the motivation for learners to keep going. There is support and a genuine caring for each other that occurs in community" (Kate). Richard describes the importance of community to adult learning, "It is critical for instructors to recognize the vast resources for learning when you assemble a group of adult learners. To not tap into those resources is a waste. Adults want to contribute."

Anne also valued the role of community in learning for adults when she stated, “Every week, when I review the week’s topic, I intentionally think of ways that will engage the students with the content and each other. This comes from believing that learning is fostered in community”. Mary engages students “in a way that they know their participation is valued. It contributes to the learning of the entire class. I think adults want to know they are personally valued by members in the class.”

I observed evidence of community when I visited the participants’ classrooms. In all the classrooms I observed, the students were interacting with each other and the instructor prior to class. When I arrived at Julie’s class 15 minutes early, all of her students were already present, sharing food, and exchanging personal stories. In Ben’s class two students invited two other students to join them for coffee following class. In Mary’s class, she provided a short break and only one student left the classroom. The other students stayed and talked with each other. Julie’s, Anne’s, Richard’s, and David’s students brought in food to share. Luke’s and Julie’s classrooms had a relaxed atmosphere with ample humor and conversation between the students and with the instructor.

Sadera, Robertson, Song, and Midon (2009) argue the sense of community positively influences student learning and success. The participants’ discussion of community specifically focuses on the role of students and instructors in building community. Four subthemes emerged as participants shared their belief about the importance of community to adult learning: *The Role of Trust in Community*; *Respecting Differences*; *Shared Responsibility in Learning*, and *The Instructor’s Role in Community*.

Research questions 1, 2, and 3 are addressed in this second main theme, participants' belief that community facilitates learning in adult learners.

The Role of Trust in Community

As part of the participants' story of teaching adult learners, I asked them to describe the ideal learning environment. Richard indicated the ideal learning environment for adult learners is in a community of trust and respect.

I think the ideal environment is one where students trust and respect each other. ... Trust is important because it creates an environment that allows students to express their ideas, opinions, and thoughts without feelings of judgment or being put down. ... I want the students to have the opportunity to view things from various perspectives.

Julie fosters trust in the learning community "by opening discussion, reinforcing the positive in what [students] are saying, using what they say as a springboard to further discussion, and not shutting down ideas." Anne believes that allowing students to share from their experiences can create trust among students.

It may take some time for the students to realize I respect their ideas and contribution to class discussions. Sometimes, I think they are surprised that I actually expect them to contribute. But, I think it is my reaction, and that of other students, that makes or breaks trust. As a class, I model for the students how to validate others ideas and challenge ideas without belittling others or becoming defensive. Over time, adults come to know, right, wrong, off-the-wall, goofy, whatever; ideas are open for discussion and examination. That process alone contributes to learning.

David explained he has learned that teaching is a “process of creating an environment of community [and] trust... The role of community as a safe place with a huge level of trust is huge. So, people are in a community where they can be vulnerable and there’s a shared experience.” David also believes vulnerability is part of learning to trust. “[W]e can’t learn to trust each other if we don’t feel vulnerable. And the problem with being vulnerable is you’re vulnerable. But what [students] discover is that it is okay.” David encourages vulnerability by checking the “emotional wellness” of his student as class begins each week. He used a technique he calls SASHET.

[I]t’s a word that captures your week or your emotional well-being. I’m sad, I’m anxious or angry, I’m scared. I’m happy, I’m excited, or I’m tired or tender. It’s pick one of those words that kind of encapsulates what you’re feeling. And what that does, it’s kind of vulnerable to share how you’re feeling. But that’s the point, that we can’t learn to trust each other if we don’t feel vulnerable.

I observed this technique when I visited David’s classroom. The students shared the following feelings:

- Tender: Student shared a story of a coworker going through a divorce. David shared his own personal experience of his daughter’s divorce.
- Anxious: Student described her week as crazy.
- Tired: Student shared she was exhausted.
- Happy: Student shared God had given him another day.
- Excited: Student shared he was excited what the Lord had in store for him.
- Happy: Student shared she was happy the class was together that evening.

Respecting Differences

Kate indicated all adults bring unique experiences to the classroom and are navigating through unique “life circumstances”. “Every student is different. One size fits all does not work in the classroom” (Anne). When asked the most important things she has learned about adult learners, Mary said:

... [T]hat people are unique and will each learn and respond differently.

Instructors ... can expand the learning opportunity for students by giving more focus on his/her students’ learning styles and capacities. In doing so, we communicate to students that they have value, we validate their differences are both good and welcomed. We promote their learning by removing the cookie cutter stigma of what all students should be like.

When describing the ideal learning environment, Anne expressed her belief that not only instructors need to respect differences in students, but other students need to respect these differences.

As we get to know each other, I spend some time discovering and sharing the diversity of the class. We talk about learning styles, personality traits, professional backgrounds and personal interests. I share with the students my learning preference is visual. I tell them on the Myers-Briggs I am an introvert. Just things that help them see me as an individual. We then talk about their differences and we discuss how differences in learning styles, personality, perspectives don’t mean wrong. Differences mean differences and if we respect each other’s differences we will probably broaden our perspectives and learn from each other.

Matt explained that often there are controversial discussion topics that lead to varied opinions on the part of adult learners. He said while some students “are sometimes shocked to encounter other perspectives” on certain topics, still he encourages respectful discussion. Matt stated his goal is “to be able to generate that respectful dialogue and even debate on different views and really dig into some of the material I think is important. And I believe students want to get to that point.”

The participants also discussed the importance of instructors respecting learning style differences in adult learners and modifying instruction to address those differences. David often uses the learning style questionnaire Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic (VARK) (Fleming, 2012). This provides adult learners with an indication of their preferred learning style. “So, everyone learns something about themselves and each other and how they learn... So, implementing those learning styles in every class whether something visual, something audio, [something requiring] reading, or they’re doing something makes for a pretty good class” (David). “There are different learning styles and as a teacher [I try] to, in some way each week, hit on those learning styles” (Ben). Brian also uses a variety of instructional practices in response to adult learners’ differences. “[I use] a varied approach in class presentations allowing hands on activity, small groups, lecture, media, and audio/visual experiences.” Anne indicated she “intentionally plans for different learning styles, different personalities, different experimental backgrounds, and different perspectives brought into the classroom.” Mary explains she intentionally looks at students’ differences as an opportunity to enhance learning.

I believe fully in meeting people where they are ... Students have different learning needs, approaches, abilities, fears, hopes, stressors, likes ... and on and on. I look for these variations early on and find that if I can connect with one or more things that are unique to each student, they will respond more and reach more and gain more of the content.

Shared Responsibility for Learning

The participants highlighted the shared responsibility for learning when describing the role of community in fostering learning. Anne emphasized the need for shared responsibility in learning.

I can want [learning] badly for the students, but they have to take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning. I am responsible to create an environment that fosters learning. I have a role to play as an instructor. But I cannot teach enough that students learn without the students engaging with the content and others in the class.

Richard agreed that it is important for adults to know “they are not by-standers or spectators. They are important players in the instructional process.” David believes, “The best teacher is the student. They just don’t know it yet.”

Anne also described shared responsibility begins with a “recognition that the adult learner has something to contribute.” Richard, Mary, and Julie believe in community all members contribute to the learning of others. “I want [the students] to understand that their knowledge and experience can contribute to another student’s learning” (Richard). “I look for ways to engage the students in a way that they know their participation is valued. It contributes to the learning of the entire class. (Mary). Julie indicated, “I feel

like I have expertise in this area and [the adult learner] has expertise in these areas and we both contribute to what we do in [the] class. We are all learning from each other.”

David, Brian, and Kate described themselves as co-learners. “I can and will learn from the students. The adult learner appreciates knowing the professor is willing to learn alongside the students” (Brian). “I learn so much from the students and how they continue to be students of themselves ... in the midst of very complex lives” (David). Kate describes herself as a “co-laborer” in assisting students in the learning process.

The participants shared how their beliefs about shared responsibility for learning are reflected in their instructional practices. Anne clearly communicates this expectation to her students.

[I] treat them as adults in terms of expectations. [I let] them know, I expect them to take responsibility for their own learning. ... I am not just going to spoon feed them everything I think they need to know. ... They have something to contribute to their classmates’ learning as well.

Richard realizes not all adult learners immediately grasp this shared responsibility.

Night one, I work hard to build connections between the students and find common ground for us as a learning community. I want the students to understand they all share in the responsibility of learning in the class. I am not saying that all students automatically buy into this. But most students I have encountered respond to this culture of respect and responsibility.

David explained adult learners may not expect there to be a lot of interaction in class.

David believes this is related to past experiences of the “talking head and a lecture” based approach to instruction. In David’s experience, adult learners respond well to the

expectation “that people engage with each other as people. Not just with the material [of the course] but as people.”

Mary integrates numerous discussions in the classroom to emphasize shared responsibility. Through this discussion she emphasizes the goal that “[adult learners] see the value not only that [they] are learning, but how [they] can teach others ...their input is important.” Ben also uses discussions to draw on adult learners’ experience to facilitate shared responsibility for learning. “[I] allow other people in the class to share their life experience [which] provides greater understanding to others in the class.” Anne uses discussion to provide opportunities for shared responsibility of learning.

All the students and [I] contribute to learning that takes place each week. Each student has experiences, knowledge, and understanding that can foster learning in other students. Their perspectives open up opportunities for discussion and learning that would not be possible if I am solely responsible for covering the material each week.

Kate uses small groups to promote shared responsibility for learning:

Some students are fine with coming to class and kind of hiding in the back. They may surf the internet, zone out, or even fall asleep. That’s not acceptable.

Students are responsible for their learning and responsible to contribute to the learning of others. Small group activities help to keep all the students engaged.

David expects students to share in the responsibility of providing feedback to other students. David’s students proofread each other’s papers which fosters interaction between students and highlights the concept of shared responsibility. “[Adult learners] are resistant at first to [proof read each other’s papers]. It’s like ‘Oh my gosh, I’m so

unintelligent, so unarticulate, so un everything.’ But then the students find most of their classmates have similar feelings.” David indicated this actually builds confidence in the students and the improvement, based on their classmates’ feedback, is significant.

Anne builds a sense of shared responsibility for learning by soliciting feedback from adult learners. “I constantly talk to my students and ask for their feedback and reflection on the courses I teach. I ask them what works for them and what doesn’t.”

Julie believes many adult learners expect to share in the learning process of others. “I think that there’s an expectation that [the adult learner’s] contribution to class is recognized and appreciated. And that they’d be allowed to contribute to the culture, to the discussion, to the content of the course.”

The Role of Instructor

As learner-centered adjunct instructors encourage a community of learners, the instructor’s role changes. The participants characterized this change as a shift from dispenser of knowledge to facilitator or guide. When asked what was the most important thing he had learned about teaching adult learners, Matt said, “I have learned that the instructor [of adult learners] is more of a facilitator, coach, and guide than an academic expert ...” Richard shared his story from a lecturer to a facilitator.

I have slowly learned that if I am the only instructor in the class there is only one perspective being shared. Many times, the students in my class have amazing experiences and insight into the course content. I find it easier to be the lecturer and more difficult to actual facilitate learning. But, as I have worked on facilitating learning rather than doing a content dump, I have found adult students engage at a level that truly contributes to the learning of all students. Once I

started seeing myself as a co-learner, an adult learner myself, a facilitator of learning, I have seen a dramatic change in the dynamics of my courses and the level of engagement from the students.

Richard acknowledges his role as facilitator, but keeps the focus on the shared responsibility for learning in his instructional practices. “I play the role of the facilitator to challenge students’ assumptions and thinking, but the students are responsible to identify for me connecting points between the content and their lives; personal and professional.”

Kate believes when instructors facilitate learning, students more readily engage in the learning process.

So as the instructor if I can connect with the students and create an environment that says I am here not as the authority but as a resource to guide, I think it is easier to engage in the kind of conversation that leads to students making application of the content and finding the relevance of the material in the context of their own needs or maybe goals.

Participants also emphasized their belief that the role of facilitator does not diminish their role as a content expert. Matt expressed his belief that adult learners expect him to be knowledgeable in the subject matter. David stated one characteristic of an ideal instructor of adult learners “is someone who knows what he’s talking about.” Ben believes adult learners expect their instructor to have “a certain level of expertise. The instructor is reading the text and engaging in the content from a perspective of some knowledge ...” Richard made the connection between content expert and facilitator:

I can't be the all-knowing expert. I think I need to know my content area; I think the students expect me to be knowledgeable about the content area. But I have to use that knowledge as a means to facilitate learning, guiding the learning, and not take on the responsibility to push the knowledge or learning to the students. Brian believes that students expect instructors to "know what we are talking about [and] would know the material."

As the content expert, the instructor provides opportunities for students to make connections between life experiences and new knowledge and create opportunities for application. Mary does this through analogies. She explains, "[I] take something that [is] unfamiliar to [the adult learner] and convert it to something that [is] familiar to the common population. Then [they] can make a connection to new information."

The participants indicated as facilitators, providing feedback to students is critical to their learning and motivation. Richard believes adult learners expect relevant feedback from their instructors. Mary encourages the students to discuss the feedback she provides with her.

[I]f you get a grade you are not comfortable with; we should talk about it. ... I think students don't expect me to be available to them on that level. But I am... So when they run into a problem on a paper; I will let them know again, I am seeing a reoccurrence here, so if there is something you don't understand, you need to contact me. Use the feedback you are given to improve.

During my visit to Julie's class, I observed her giving feedback on student speeches. The feedback was positive, highlighting the student's strengths, and constructive when addressing challenges in the presentation. Julie used this feedback to solicit reflection

from the student's perspective regarding needed improvements. Mary explained she uses feedback to motivate students and keep their momentum up. She acknowledges adult learners are often tired and may lose momentum halfway through a course. "So, what I try to do is provide feedback to keep the momentum up."

Summary

The second theme, *Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructors Believe Community Facilitates Adult Learning*, emerged from the narratives of the participants when describing their beliefs about adult learners and how the idea of community influences their instructional practices. As instructors interact with students, students interact with instructors, and students interact with each other a community of learners develops. The participants shared in community, adult learners share common goals and provide support and encouragement to each other. Participants believe establishing trust among the students and with the instructor is foundational to learning in community. The participants emphasized the need for instructors to facilitate learning in community.

The literature supports this shift in roles of instructors. Doyle (2011) emphasized community develops as instructors move from a position of power to a shared learning experience with students. In this process, power and control is shifted from the instructor to a shared exchange between an instructor and students (Karge, Phillips, Jessee, & McCabe, 2011). The participants contributed to the discussions of the role of community in adult learning by describing specific instructional practices they utilize to foster community among adult learners.

Theme Three: Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructors Believe Adult Learners Must Engage in the Learning Process

A third and final theme that emerged from the data was the participants' belief that effective instructional practices for adult learners require their active engagement in the learning process. When discussing engagement, the participants used various terms such as "engage", "engaging", "active learning", "actively involved", "connecting", and "participate". "My [instructional] approach is more from a belief that adult learners learn more if they engage with the content. Adult's experiential background can provide a valuable context for new knowledge for themselves and other learners" (Anne). When considering engagement, Richard believes:

[T]he strategy of engaging the students in their own learning is critical for learning that lasts or is embedded in the students life beyond the start and end date of a particular course. [Adult learners] must invest and engage in the learning process if they expect to get something out of it that is meaningful to them.

Mary believes engagement is essential in connecting the students to the learning environment. "I try to engage [students] so they get out of that 'I'm so comfortable, I'm not even paying attention' attitude.' When students are not engaged they become passive and their brains go numb." When asked to describe the ideal learning environment. Mary stated, "As long as you can get to an environment where [adult learners] are engaging with each other, I think you've got an ideal setting."

Kate explained that not all students want to engage in class. Some students are content to passively sit back and let the instructor do the work.

I have had plenty of students who come to class, sit back, and want to be left alone. I think this might be out of being programmed to think school is about just soaking in the information. I have to work harder on those students to get them to engage or participate. But once a student gets a taste that the course content can be dynamic, they find themselves expecting that to be true in all their courses.

Two subthemes emerged as the participants shared their experiences in actively engaging the students in the learning process: *Relevance and Application of New Knowledge* and *Active Instructional Practices*. Research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 are addressed in the participants' belief that engagement in the learning process produces meaningful connections for adult learners.

Relevance and Application of New Knowledge

The participants expressed their belief that adult learners expect learning to go beyond the theoretical and provide practical knowledge. "I believe [adult learners] need an education that is relevant to their life and helps them become a better person because of that education" (Richard). Kate believes adults need relevant education to better cope in life personally and professionally.

Education is not just about getting a better job. Education should enrich the adult learner's life. Relevant content enables students to better cope in life. It provides a means to be a more effective employee, leader, manager as well as a more effective husband or wife, mother or father, a more informed citizen.

Matt indicated "[Adult students] seek to relate the academic knowledge they gain directly to their real-world situations and interests. Adult learners are looking for

practical knowledge ... that can be effectively embodied to positively influence their particular communities.”

The connections made between theory and practical knowledge involves active engagement on the part of adult learners. Luke stated, “Adult students invest a lot of money into their education. They are looking for relevance and not theoretical jargon. Instructors need to help them make the connection between [relevance and theory].” Anne stated, “Relevance is specific to each individual student. Students must process the content in such a way that they determine relevance in their own lives.” Julie agreed that the adult learner’s education should extend beyond the classroom and adult learners should connect new knowledge to their daily life circumstances. “Hopefully, they are connecting some aspect of [the content] at a heart level or a relational level. Because life doesn’t happen solo and so if they can connect relationally with others based on what is going on in the classroom, then that’s going to cement the content and principles.”

Luke believes that students have not gained knowledge until they are able to apply theory. “One of my operatives is applied theory equals knowledge.” Julie believes “[adult learners] expect the content to be valuable and applicable in terms they can say, ‘Yes, this applies to what I am doing or wanting to do.’ [I]t’s not just head theoretical sort of knowledge...”

Kate connects her beliefs about the importance of application and her instructional practices.

[S]tudents want the content to be meaningful and applicable to what they do in real life. I think this is best achieved when the student engages with the content and other learners. So in my class, we break up into small groups a lot. I often

give them a discussion question to grapple with as a group and then I always have them share with the class their collective thoughts on potential application considerations of the topic.

When I visited Anne's class, I observed her students in small groups. The class was discussing the Vroom-Yetton Contingency Model. Promoting application, Anne asked the students what evidence of the model they observed in their personal, professional, or community life that week. The students got into groups of three and shared evidences they had observed. After approximately 10 minutes, the students came back together as a class and shared their observations.

During the class observation, Mary encouraged students to consider lessons learned when studying various world civilizations. One student gave a brief presentation on the Roman civilization. The conclusion of the presentation included possible applications to present day. The student pointed out one potential lesson learned was the similarity between the economic situation of ancient Rome and the present day United States economy. He then pointed out various consequences to the economic model and practices of the Roman Empire.

Richard believes adult learners "have a low tolerance for busy work or work that seems to be so theoretical that it has no practical application." When I visited Richard's classroom, the topic was leadership styles. The class briefly reviewed a listing of leadership styles. The instructor had assigned the reading related to leadership styles the previous week. For further discussion, the students gathered in groups of 3-4 students. To extend the discussion beyond knowledge, students discussed which leadership style

they worked best under and then identified which style best characterized their leadership style.

Ben discussed how some general education studies courses seemed challenging for adult learners to see opportunities for application. Ben intentionally looks for application opportunities. In my visit to his theology class, I observed Ben's "Practiology" exercise with his students. The emphasis of this instructional practice is on application. He asked the students these questions: "What did you learn about God this week?" "What did you learn about yourself this week?" As the students responded, Ben asked clarifying questions and questions that extended the discussion. Following the exercise, Ben encouraged the students to, "Stop every day and ask yourself, 'What did I learn about God today?' 'What did I learn about myself today?'"

In his interview, Brian discussed how he has observed application outside of the classroom. In teaching a marriage and family course, Brian shared some warning signs of situations that may create challenges in a marriage. One warning sign was marrying young. Two students came up to him after class and told him they fit that characteristic. Brian explained to them he and his wife were also married young. The issue is not the information but what you do with that information. Brian shared with them that he and his wife found a couple who had been married for many years to mentor them. The students told him their husbands waited up for them to get home at night so they could talk about what they were learning in class.

Active Instructional Practices

The participants discussed or demonstrated several instructional practices they

described as promoting engagement. When discussing these practices, the participants often referred to these instructional practices as active learning activities. Two predominant instructional practices are used by the participants: *group work* and *discussion*. Other active instructional practices also emerged in the instructors' narratives and in my classroom observations. Participants believe one instructional practice that is not as effective with adult learners is lecture. Some of these instructional practices have been mentioned in the discussion of Theme One and Theme Two; however, the following discussion emphasizes the frequency of specific instructional practices of the participants.

Kate believes a community of learners fosters engagement:

Together as a class we will ask questions, suggest answers, and build an understanding of the content together as a class. I'm not looking for students who just absorb content. I'm trying to prompt active engagement with the content and with others in the class.

Group work. All the participants discussed or demonstrated group work as an instructional practice. Collaborating with other students enhances learning (Dolye, 2011). Most of the group work discussed by the participants involved discussing topics in small groups (Anne, Richard, Brian, Mary, Kate, Ben, & David). David stated “[E]very week at some point during the class there’s small group interaction...” Richard and Anne use small group work for problem solving and case study analysis.

When visiting Richard’s class, I observed students working in small groups. He was teaching an introductory course which included the topic of success as an adult learner. Richard explained that prior experiences may positively or negatively affect learning. Students paired up and interviewed each other. Richard assigned the following

two questions to the students: “What experiences have you had that would positively impact your learning?” and “What experiences have you had that would negatively impact your learning?” The students worked together for several minutes. Then Richard called them back together and asked students to share their answers. Richard wrote the answers and then put tallies beside the answers that were repeated. For example, one answer was “boring content” negatively impacts learning. There were 15 students in the class and 11 of the students shared a similar answer. This part of the activity quickly illustrated to the students they shared similar experiences; positive and negative. Richard then sent the students back to their partners to discuss how this shared information could assist them as they continue working on their goal of completing their degree.

In Kate’s class, the students worked in groups to complete the final assignment. This group project required the students to examine data presented from a research project, prepare a mock presentation to a hypothetical Board of Trustees explaining the data, analysis of the data, and recommendations based on the analysis. The students had a prolonged period to work on their project. Kate was available to answer questions and consult with each group regarding their progress.

Brian described a group project in a literature course:

We were reading *Mere Christianity* for the C.S. Lewis Film and Literature class. C.S. Lewis says the claims he presents are universal truths. The book was written over 70 years ago. If that is true, these should still be truths today. So, we went over to the computer lab for about 45 minutes and broke the students up into groups of 2 or 3. They looked for things on the internet that would show the truth (or not) of these values that Lewis spoke of in his book.

Discussion. "... [D]iscussions elicit higher levels of reflective thinking and creative problem solving, including synthesis, application, and evaluation" (Doyle, 2011, p. 90). Doyle also argues information learned through discussion is retained longer than information passed to the student through lecture. The participants explained the role of discussion in their classrooms. Matt stated his goal in instruction is for students to interact with the material on a level that they can actively engage in discussion. His goal is substantial discussion where a student's life experiences intersect with the course content. Anne explained she uses discussion to promote active learning.

I expect them to take responsibility for their own learning. Respecting the fact that every student has goals they are trying to achieve and they need to participate in their education. I am not just going to spoon feed them everything I think they need to know. So class discussion, in a large group or small groups, helps [students] understand they have a positive influence in the goals of other students, as well as their own goals.

Richard explained he facilitates lively discussions to engage students in applying what they are learning to their personal and professional lives.

When I observed Mary's class, she led the students in a discussion based on a previous online discussion assignment. Mary solicited thoughts from the students regarding the topic of discussion. She used this to allow student to clarify the concepts shared online and extend the discussion to include additional thoughts. She guided the discussion by asking questions of the students.

Ben also used this technique in his class. As Ben led his class in a discussion, I observed him asking clarifying questions and questions that extended the discussion.

Ben also led the students in a guided discussion related to the week's readings.

Throughout the guided discussion, the flow was a back and forth between the instructor and students. Ben posed a question. The students responded. Ben asked clarifying questions. The students responded. The instructor asked other questions based on the students' responses. This continued for several minutes. Ben would summarize by saying, "What I hear you saying is..."

When observing Luke's class, his discussion techniques were similar to Ben's techniques. Luke had a couple of students who were not as engaged in the discussion. Luke drew them into the discussion from time to time. When the class was working on mathematical problems together, Luke would check the students' understanding by asking for feedback from the students.

In David's class, he led a discussion of what it means to be a whole person after the student read a short article. He asked open ended questions such as, "What comes to mind when you think of a the words 'whole person'?" He then engaged the students in further discussion related to assumptions they each brought into the discussion when considering what it meant to be a whole person.

Other active instructional practices. Group work and discussion were the prominent instructional practices the participants used to promote engagement. But other practices were discussed by the participants. Brian uses self-reflection in asking students to evaluate their own performance at the conclusion of a speech. David uses self-reflection for student to examine their assumptions and to challenge their current belief systems. Richard also uses self-reflection with his students.

I try to get students to understand that learning is not all about new information. It's also about examining their current knowledge, understanding, assumptions, and beliefs. It's about making connection between new knowledge and existing knowledge and then determining how that impacts their life.

Julie, Anne and Kate use role playing to engage students. Richard, Julie, Mary, and Brian use student presentations. Richard uses various instructional practices to engage students.

I think students solving a problem or case study in a small group and then sharing their conclusion and rationale for those conclusions is effective in engaging the students. I also have students stop and reflect on their learning. Just something that makes them stop long enough to ask themselves, 'So what?' 'How does this affect me?' 'How could this change me?'

Ben most often chooses to engage students in the learning process rather than lecture. "[I]instead of just passing on the information; I engage the students in questions to allow them to discover and think through [content]".

Lecture. While the topic of lecture was not part of the interview questions or instructor audit, several participants addressed their belief regarding the role of lecture. "I have not found [lecture] to be an effective way for students to learn in a way that they begin find relevance between the content of a course and their lives" (Anne). Participants used lecture as a springboard to active instructional practices. In my classroom observations, I observed Ben, David, Mary, Kate, Anne, and Richard lecture. These lectures varied from approximately 10 minutes to 17 minutes in a 60-90 minute

observation. An active instructional practice followed each lecture. Matt, who was not observed, stated he used lecture as foundational information for class discussion.

While the participants used some lecture, they mainly focused on negative aspects of lecture in their narratives. “[Instructors] have to engage their students. Assuming the role of the ultimate content expert isn’t effective. I know what you need and you need to listen to me is just not going to work with adult learners” (Anne). Richard explained adult learners do not want to listen to an instructor regurgitate information they have already read. “Students tell me they have instructors who go with ‘death by PowerPoint’ and just go over the same information the students were assigned to read the previous week.” Kate stated, “[T]he ideal instructor understands they are not there solely to push information to students.” David believes, “[I]t’s much more than knowledge transfer; if it doesn’t translate into impacting the way [students] think and actually live and understand the world, it’s kind of a waste of time.” David characterizes an instructor who lectures at length as “a talking head.” David suggests instructors “minimize lengthy protracted lecture” in order to keep students engaged. Ben explains while there is a place for lecture in the classroom, it is less effective over time than active learning. Luke agrees with Ben, “a monologue” is not effective with adult learners.

Summary

The third theme, *Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructors Believe Adult Learners Must Engage in the Learning Process*, was evident in their narratives and in observed instructional practices. The participants’ belief in active instructional practices is supported in the literature (Kasworm, 2003; Saulnier, 2009; Wu & Huang, 2007). However, the participants broadened the discussion by providing a narrative from an

adjunct instructor's perspective. These adjunct instructors portrayed a strong bias that passive learning fails to draw on adult learners' life experiences, eliminates the need for a community of learners, and places the burden of learning on the adjunct instructor.

The participants extended Taylor, Hunter, Melton, and Goodwin's (2011) discussion that engagement elicits cognitive connections in learners by relating engagement to relevance and application of content. Adult learners desire relevant content and meaningful application of new knowledge (Kasworm, 2003; Knowles et al., 2005). However, the participants put this discussion in the context of engagement in the learning process which presents a different perspective to the discussion.

The participants highlighted their belief that adult learners are life centered in their learning (Knowles et al., 2005) and emphasized application of knowledge is an active learning process. Their narratives emphasized the active process students engage in as they transform theory into practices readily applicable to life. While the literature addresses the passive nature of learning in many higher education classrooms (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011; Reig & Wilson, 2009; Young et al., 2009), the participants' narratives added to this discussion by including their intentional strategies to engage adult learners in the learning process. Finally, the participants demonstrated various active instructional practices they utilize to engage adult learners in the learning process.

Summary of Findings

This chapter discussed the findings of data collected from ten learner-centered adjunct instructors of adult learners. Data was collected through an instructor audit (written), interviews, and classroom observations. Through data analysis, this study

captured the essence of lived experiences of learner-centered adjunct instructors. From the analysis of the data three themes emerged:

- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners' life experiences are paramount in adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe community facilitates adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners must engage in the learning process.

I used direct quotations from interviews and instructor audits (written responses) as well as comments from field notes to portray the participants lived experience exactly as I heard and observed them. The themes provided the framework for answering the four research questions of this study. The final chapter presents a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices in a face-to-face classroom environment. For this study, 10 learner-centered adjunct instructors shared their story of teaching adult learners. These stories were guided by the four research questions of this study:

1. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about adult learners?
2. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe their beliefs about how adults learn?
3. How do select learner-centered adjunct instructors describe how their beliefs influence their instructional practices?
4. What specific instructional practices do select learner-centered adjunct instructors associate with their beliefs about adult learning?

From the participants' narratives, three themes emerged that addressed the four research questions. This chapter presents a summary of findings and discussion related to each theme. This chapter also explains how the literature related to adult learners, adult learning, and instructional practices supports the narrative provided by the participants. Finally, a discussion regarding the study's limitations, implications of the study, and recommendations for future research is included.

Summary of Findings

The population of adult learners continues to grow across colleges and universities in the United States (Sandmann 2010). This growth in the adult learner population increases the need for highly qualified instructors of adult learners. In many higher education institutions, adjunct instructors meet this need (Baldwin & Wawryznski, 2011; Umbach, 2007). Currently, more than 50% of instructors in higher education are adjunct instructors (Gappa et al., 2007). Based mostly on economic factors, adjunct faculty are a mainstay in higher education today (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). However, most adjunct instructors have no formal education or training in how adults learn or effective learner-centered instructional practices.

The adult learning literature promotes learner-centered instruction (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Liu, Liu, & Qiao, 2006; Ross, 2008). Learner-centered instruction emphasizes how students learn and apply new knowledge (Weimer, 2013). Learner-centered instructional practices promote student engagement in the learning process (Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, & Fergus, 2010; Worley, 2007). However, teacher-centered instruction, designed to transmit content to students and elicit specific responses from students, dominates higher education instructional practices (Chaudhury, 2011; Rieg & Wilson, 2009; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). The use of specific instructional practices selected by adjunct instructors may reflect beliefs they hold regarding adult learners (Merriam et al., 2007; Nespor, 1985; Pajares, 1992; Taylor, 2003).

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about how adult learn and how these beliefs influence instructional practices in face-to-face classroom setting. Data were collected from 10 learner-centered

adjunct instructors through instructor learning audits (written responses), interviews, and class observations. The data were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and organized first by research questions and then by themes and sub-themes guided by the theoretical framework of this study described in Chapter 2.

I examined the participants' narratives to gain an understanding of individual perspectives and of the interconnectedness of the individual stories of learner-centered adjunct instructors. Hopefully, this understanding provides insight into beliefs and practices reflective of learner-centered instruction.

A predominant theme that emerged in this study was the participants' beliefs that life experiences influence all aspects of adult learning. The participants discussed the benefits and challenges life experiences present to adult learners. They also discussed how life experiences influence the development of community and how adults engage in the learning process.

This chapter represents my observations and interpretations of the following three themes:

- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult life experiences are paramount to adult learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe community facilitates learning.
- Learner-centered adjunct instructors believe adult learners must engage in the learning process.

Discussion of Findings

In the following section, I will discuss the findings from the perspective of the theoretical framework of this study. Andragogy and constructivism guided the study and

provided a context for the findings. This section also provides a discussion of the findings from the perspective of relevant literature on adult learning and learner-centered instruction.

Discussion and Implications Relevant to Theoretical Framework of Study

The adult learning theory, that Knowles (1990) coined andragogy, framed this study. The findings of this study, directly or indirectly, reflected Knowles (1990) six assumptions of the andragogy model. While the participants' narratives may not reflect the terminology used by Knowles in outlining his six assumptions, the connection between his discussion and the participants' narratives is evident.

First, adult learners are motivated to learn by a need to know (Knowles et al., 2005). Adult learning involves the learner knowing why they need to learn something before they engage in the learning. Knowles (1990) argued the importance of instructors of adult learners understanding their role in assisting adult learners to become aware of their "need to know" (p. 58). The participants discussed this need to know in terms of relevant learning. Relevant content raises the need to know awareness in adult learners by connecting new knowledge and immediate opportunities for application. The participants understood that education goes beyond new knowledge, new skills, and credentials. In the context of need to know, the participants understood relevant content motivates the adult learners and enhances their lives. Kate stressed, "Education is not just about getting a better job. Education should enrich the adult learner's life. Relevant content enables students to better cope in life."

Second, adult learners approach life with a self-confidence of being responsible for their own decisions and a desire to be treated as capable self-directed individuals

(Knowles et al., 2005). Six of the participants characterized this as an adult's desire to be treated as an adult. However, there may be a disconnect between adult learners' self-direction in life and their willingness for self-direction in educational settings. Based on past experiences, adult learners expect learning to be directed by an instructor. Based on the andragogy theory, the instructor assumes a facilitator role with the responsibility to "create learning experiences in which adults are helped to make the transition from dependent to self-directed learners" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 65). Therefore, learners are no longer passive recipients of information; they engage in the learning process. Ben, Anne, Matt, Richard, Mary, Julie, and Kate espoused the need to engage adult learners in the learning process. This belief may come from their experiences as adult learners. Some participants expressed their frustration when they, as adult learners, were required to absorb information transmitted by instructors. Richard argued, "[Adult learners] must invest and engage in the learning process if they expect to get something out of it that is meaningful to them."

Third, adult learners bring extensive life experience to the learning environment which presents a wide range of difference in adult learners. This creates vast differences in learners such as experiential backgrounds, learning style preferences, motivations, interests, needs, and goals. Knowles et al. (2005) emphasize life experiences provide rich resources for adult learners. The participants' narratives on the role of experience in adult learning are congruent with this assumption. Life experience was prominent in the participants' beliefs about adult learners, adult learning, and learner-centered instructional practices.

Knowles et al. (2005) also acknowledged life experiences may create barriers to learning. The participants emphasized the daily life of adults and its impact on adult learning. When asked to describe characteristics of the adult learner, Ben, Anne, Matt, Richard, Julie, Luke, David, and Brian discussed, first and foremost, the busyness of adult learners' lives and the need for flexibility in educational settings. At times, the participants seemed to apologize for affording adult learners flexibility. They indicated they may be going against some university procedures, but they clearly believed this flexibility assisted their students in successfully completing their course.

Fourth, adult learners bring a readiness to learn based on their real-life situations. As adults mature, their readiness to learn is oriented to real-life experiences. Despite the fact that adult learners bring a readiness to learn based on real-life situations, Knowles et al. (2005) cautions instructors to assess adult learners' readiness to learn. Dependence on instructors and low self-confidence may influence adult learners' readiness to learn. While the participants did not focus on adult learners' dependence on instructors, Ben, Anne, Matt, Luke, David, Mary, and Kate highlighted the role of confidence in adult learners' readiness to learn. The participants explained most often adults are competent learners, but they may need encouragement as they re-enter the formal education environment. This belief reflects the participants' understanding that adults may return to higher education with negative experiences that influence how they view themselves as learners.

Fifth, adult learners have a life-centered orientation to learning that is presented in the context of real-life application (Knowles et al., 2005). Knowles et al. (2005) argued learning for younger students is in the context of future application; whereas adult

learners seek immediate application of content. Ben, Anne, Matt, Richard, Julie, Luke, Mary, Kate, and Brian believe that content must have real-world application which is consistent with Knowles' (1990) discussion. Luke believes adults have not gained knowledge unless they can apply theory to life-situations. Therefore, the participants engage with adults in learning activities that emphasize application to professional and personal situations.

And sixth, adult learners are largely motivated to learn based on intrinsic factors (Knowles et al., 2005). However, barriers related to life experiences also influence adult learners' motivation. Barriers related to life experience, emphasized by the participants as fear and lack of self-confidence, may thwart adult learners' motivation. The participants in this study extended Knowles' et al. (2005) discussion regarding adult learner motivation, specifically barriers to motivation, by emphasizing the need to acknowledge and address these barriers in order to engage adult learners in the learning process. Julie said it well, "They are not going to learn if you don't get rid of some of the fears." The participants shared how they interact with adult learners in order to reduce fears and build confidence.

Constructivism also framed this study. The constructs of constructivism have influenced the literature on adult learning (Brandon & All, 2010; Merriam et al., 2007; Roessger, 2012). There are various forms of constructivism but the framework used for this study focused on the tenets of constructivism that emphasize the influence of prior knowledge, active engagement in the learning process, students and instructors engaging in active dialogue, and the role of the instructor as facilitator and coach. The influence of prior knowledge (life experience) and active engagement in the learning process were

addressed in the discussion of adult learning theory (andragogy); therefore the following discussion includes the tenets of dialogue and instructors as facilitators.

Active dialogue involves learners dialoging with each other and with the instructor. Beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and perspectives are challenged and examined in community where dialogue is encouraged (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). The concept of students and instructors engaging in active dialogue is present in the participants' belief that there is a shared responsibility for learning between students and instructors.

Dialogue focuses on the students as valuable contributors to the learning process. Ben, Anne, Richard, Julie, David, Mary, Kate, and Brian facilitated this active dialogue by building community, designing participatory activities, and soliciting feedback from students regarding instructional practices. Julie communicates to her students, "I feel like I have expertise in this areas and [the student] has expertise in these areas and we both contribute to what we do in [the] class. We are all learning from each other."

Constructivism also shifts the focus from the instructor, as the content expert transmitting information to the learners, to a role of facilitator (Brandon & All, 2010; Fosnot & Perry, 2005). While all the participants are academic experts in their field, they assumed the role of facilitator in their description of how adults learn and in my classroom observations. Ben, Richard, Julie, David, Mary, Kate, and Brian shared Matt's belief that "the instructor of [adult learners] is more of a facilitator, coach, and guide than an academic expert." When observing the participants, they characterized the role of facilitator more than simply transmitters of information.

While the participants may or may not be aware of the theoretical perspectives or terminology of andragogy and constructivism, their stories of teaching adult learners

reflected tenets of these two theories. Their narrative added to the understanding of these frameworks from the perspective of adjunct instructors teaching adult learners.

Discussion and Implications Relevant to the Literature

Three themes emerged in the participants' narratives as they addressed the four research questions that guided this study. First, participants believe adult learners' life experiences are paramount to adult learning. In addition to the literature on the six assumptions of andragogy, the literature on adult learning and learner-centered instruction also emphasize the influence of life experiences on adult learning (Cercone, 2008; Chan, 2010; Day et al., 2011; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam et al., 2007). Knowles et al. (2005) adult learning theory argues there are significant learning differences between children and adults. The volume and quality of life experience of adults is a significant consideration for instructors. The participants believe instructors are amiss in their instructional practices if they fail to recognize the value of the adult learners' life experience. Kolb (1984) contends, "Learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Adult learners draw on past experience and prior knowledge to make connections to new learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Learning is easier when the learner has previous experience or background applicable to the new information. For the adult learners, prior experience and knowledge provides rich resources for adult learning (Cercone, 2008; Chan, 2010). As previously stated, the participants' narratives revealed their belief that adult learners' life experience plays a significant role in adult learning. Some educators approach learners as blank slates that instructors write content upon (Grumman, 2009); however, consistent with the literature on adult learning, the participants believe adult learners

bring a wealth of life experiences that fosters learning. They believe that adult learners' life experience provide connections between past experiences and new learning, contributes to learning, and may cause barriers to learning. The participants also emphasized the need for instructors to recognize the value of life experience in planning instructional practices for adult learners. The participants added to the discussion on the adult learners' life experiences with their emphasis that instructors must address real and potential barriers related to life experiences in order to foster learning. The participants' narratives also added a perspective to the literature on adult life experiences by identifying beliefs of a group rarely represented in the literature; learner-centered adjunct instructors.

The second theme to emerge from the participants' narratives was their belief that community facilitates adult learning. Learning in community is prevalent in the literature and includes online communities (Ke & Hoadley, 2009; Maddix, 2013), informal learning communities (Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2012), professional development learning communities (Gruenbaum, 2010; Hord, 2009), and learning communities in higher education (Stewart, 2012; Vesely, Bloom, & Sherlock, 2007). It should be noted, that the participants' discussion of the role of community in adult learning may be influenced by their Christian faith-based views. A tenant of the Christian faith is the role and importance of community in Christian living (Milacci, 2006). Therefore, since all participants in this study espoused views aligned with the university's Christian faith views, this theme of the role of community in adult learning could be influenced by their views on the Christian faith. While the participants' Christian faith may have influenced their discussion of community, their use of the word "community" focused on adult

learning and seems consistent with three elements of community identified by Vesely et al. (2007):

- “A sense of shared purpose
- Interaction among members (both faculty and students)
- A level of trust, respect, and support among community members” (p. 4).

Learning in community enhances the learning experience of students (Maddix, 2013; Stewart, 2012). A learning community enables students to learn collectively in ways they could not learn on their own. Ben, Anne, Richard, Julie, Luke, David, Mary, Kate, and Brian used the term community in describing their belief about how adults learn. Brian described community as learners with a shared purpose. Richard emphasized that there are vast resources in the collective life experiences of adult learners. Kate shared her belief that community provides an opportunity to development relationships that ultimately foster significant learning.

The participants expressed trust was crucial to building an authentic community of learners. This belief is consistent with the literature on effective learning communities. Trust, respect, and support are foundational to building community (Vesely et al., 2007). Without trust, Brookfield (2013) argues it is difficult for adult learners to critically reflect on their experiences, to challenge assumptions, and to consider alternative perspectives. Richard’s belief about trust in community reflects Brookfield’s argument. “Trust is important because it creates an environment that allows students to express their ideas, opinions, and thoughts without feelings of judgment or being put down...” (Richard).

The participants also discussed the rich differences of adult learners that provide extensive resources to all learners. These differences include life experiences, personalities, learning styles, assumptions, and life perspectives (Brookfield, 2013; Stewart, 2012). While these differences can create challenges to adjunct instructors, Ben, Anne, Matt, David, Mary, Kate, and Brian shared their belief that these differences create rich resources that benefit the entire community. A primary goal of the participants is creating an environment that fosters trust is to open up opportunities for students to share in a manner that learners consider multiple perspectives. Several participants shared their belief that all learners are unique. Every student brings a unique view of course content that reflects their individual differences. Anne explained, “Differences mean differences and if we respect each other’s differences we will probably broaden our perspectives and learn from each other.”

In both the andragogy and the learner-centered model, there is an assumption that adult learners assume a large portion of responsibility for learning (Knowles et al., 2005; MacKeracher, 2010). The adult learner assumes more responsibility for their own learning as instructors create an environment that fosters “interpersonal relationships based on trust...” (MacKeracher, 2010, p. 217). The participants believe that a shared responsibility for learning is fostered in community. The shared responsibility for learning is a shift in power from instructors solely making decisions about learning to instructors and students sharing in the responsibility for learning. A goal of education is to assist learners in developing life-long learning skills (MacKeracher, 2010). This enables learners to become self-directed in their learning endeavors. However, when instructors assume responsibility for student learning, it may be difficult to foster self-directed skills.

The participants had a keen sense that adult learners must take responsibility for their learning. The participants' narratives on shared responsibility is consistent with the literature. The participants definitely took an active role in the learning process, but they did not assume full responsibility for student learning. Anne summarized this belief well:

I can want [learning] badly for the students, but they have to take a great deal of responsibly for their own learning. ... I have a role to play. But I cannot teach enough that students learn without the students engaging with the content and others in the class.

The final theme to emerge from the participants' narratives was their belief that adult learners must engage in the learning process. This belief aligns with the literature on learner-centered instruction. While there are several tenets associated with learner-centered instruction, active engagement by the learners is central to the discussion. Adult learners draw on past experience and knowledge to actively make meaning of new knowledge (Saulnier, 2009). Learner-centered instructional practices actively engage the learner in the learning process (Doyle, 2011; Harris & Cullen, 2010). Active learning promotes critical thinking skills, builds community, and facilitates learning (Karge, Phillips, Jessee, & McCabe, 2011). This engagement increases retention and promotes meaningful connections for the adult learner to new information. The participants believe that learning is an active process that promotes learning. Therefore, the adjunct instructor must intentionally design instructional practices that require adult learners to engage with the course content and with other learners. The participants characterized being engaged in the learning process as the opposite of being a passive "left alone" (Kate) learners.

Limitations

The significance of these research findings was limited to 10 Caucasian adjunct faculty teaching at the same university in an undergraduate adult degree program. Adult degree programs and higher education institutions vary; therefore the narrative provided by these particular adjunct instructors may vary from colleagues teaching in different adult degree programs or across various higher education institutions.

Another limitation of this study is the self-reporting nature of the PALS. The PALS was used to identify participants that indicated an orientation to learner-centered instruction. The results reflected the participants' view of themselves as an instructor which may or may not be accurate. While all the participants reflected beliefs and practices consistent with a learner-centered orientation, some participants articulated stronger beliefs congruent with a learner-centered orientation than others.

Finally, this study may be limited to my experience in qualitative research; specifically with interviewing techniques. The ability to conduct an interview in order to glean a rich description of a particular phenomenon improves with experience (Rowley, 2012). My experience in interviewing for the purpose of qualitative research is limited. The participants willingly shared their stories based on semi-structured interviews. They provided a rich narrative regarding their beliefs about adult learning and instructional practices they use in teaching adult learners. However, should I replicate this study, there are lessons learned related to the interview process that I would modify in order to enhance the participants' narratives. Researchers with more experience might construct a narrative based on the participants' stories different from the one I constructed.

Implications

The findings of this study revealed life experiences as paramount to adult learning. Secondly, community facilitates adult learning. And finally, adult learning is an active process requiring engagement on the part of adult learners.

The population of adjunct instructors teaching adult learners continues to increase (Sandmann 2010). This is evident of the instructional population at the site of this study where adjunct instructors teach approximately 85% of all undergraduate adult students. Like most instructors in higher education, adjunct instructors have little or no formal education or training in adult learning or effective instructional practices for adult learners (Day et al., 2011). None of the participants had any formal education focused on teaching adult learners. A few had some training in teaching adults; and some were participating in professional development opportunities offered by the university. However, this research indicated that adjunct instructors may draw on past experiences and mentor relationships in formulating beliefs about adult learners that promote learning as described in Chapter Four. The following implications are applicable to adjunct instructors and higher education institutions that utilize adjunct instructors in teaching adult learners.

Implications for Adjunct Instructors

This study demonstrated how beliefs of adjunct instructors influence their own instructional practices. The participants' beliefs about adult learning were consistent with many assumptions reflected in the andragogy, constructivism, and adult learning literature. Based on their beliefs about adult learning, the participants utilize instructional practices consistent with learner-centered practices. Therefore, it seems plausible for

those teaching adult learners to examine their beliefs about adult learning and evaluate if they are consistent with learner-centered instructional practices.

One tool was used in this study to identify learner-centered adjunct instructors. The Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) indicates the adjunct instructor's orientation towards a learner-centered or teacher-centered model (Conti, 2004). Another inventory, the Personal Adult Learning Scale Inventory is a self-assessment that measures an individual's general orientation to adult learning (Knowles et al., 2005). Adjunct instructors, and administrators, should not limit the results of these inventories to merely identify whether instructors are more learner-centered or teacher-centered in their orientation. Rather, these inventories should raise the awareness of one's beliefs and encourage the use of instructional practices that focus on learner-centered instruction. These inventories provide information that begins a process of assessing beliefs and identifying practices that may enhance or inhibit adult learning. This examination provides a context for modifying instructional practices that best meet the learning needs of adult learners.

Second, just as adjunct instructors encourage adult learners to develop skills as lifelong learners, they too are lifelong learners (Dean, 2004). The literature on adult learning provides characteristics of effective instructors. From these characteristics, checklists are available to self-assess instructional practices. Baptiste (2003) developed a three-phase model that provides a method for instructors to examine and improve their teaching. Cullen and Harris (2009) developed a self-assessment instrument that evaluates the learner-centeredness of instruction based on an evaluation of the instructor's course syllabus. A rubric is used to provide feedback regarding a learner-centered or teacher-

centered orientation of the course. This provides the adjunct instructor with an opportunity to understand aspects of the course that may need modification if they desire a learner-centered orientation to instruction.

The beliefs about adult learning and instructional practices identified in this study could be adapted as self-assessment resources for adjunct instructors. For example, based on the participants' belief and practices regarding adult learners' life experiences, the following questions may be appropriate for consideration:

- What evidence in your teaching demonstrates your acknowledgement of adult learners' life experiences?
- What evidence in your teaching demonstrates you respect adult learners' life experiences?
- How do you guide adult learners in connecting past experiences with new knowledge (course content)?
- What benefit do you see in connecting past experience with new knowledge (course content)?
- How do you draw on adult learners' life experiences to contribute to their learning?
- How do you identify potential barriers to learning for adult learners?
- How do you address barriers to learning for adult learners?
- How do you respond to the busyness of adult learners' daily lives?

The answers to these questions may indicate areas adjunct instructors need to modify their instruction in order to meet the needs of adult learners.

Finally, adjunct instructors may consider moving from a lecturer to a facilitator of adult learning. Adjunct instructors may primarily lecture since that is traditionally what instructors know and do. Doyle (2011) provides a four-step process designed to move an instructor from a lecturer to a facilitator. This process includes developing learning outcomes, planning instructional strategies, engaging students in meaningful practice, and providing feedback to improve student learning. Engaging in Doyle's (2011) instructional design process, which includes various questions for consideration, may raise awareness of differences between lecturers and facilitators. The process also provides specific steps for adjunct instructors to implement which lead to effective facilitation of adult learning.

Implications for Higher Education Institutions

The adjunct instructor population continues to grow as higher education institutions utilize these individuals to meet the growing adult learner population (Baldwin & Wawryznski, 2011; Umbach, 2007). Adjunct instructors report they often feel isolated from the institution and orientation to the institution is minimal (Smith, 2007). Student learning is critical in higher education; therefore institutions must invest in adjunct instructors and provide significant resources for their success in teaching adult learners. Hiring highly qualified adjunct instructors may be a consideration for higher education institutions. Many adjunct instructors are well qualified in terms of credentials and practical experience in their field of study. However, as the participants in this study reported, they may lack formal or informal training in working with adult learners. Using the PALS (Conti, 2004) as part of the hiring process may assist the institution in understanding the orientation of the potential adjunct instructor. This inventory indicates

if instructors are more learner-centered or teacher-centered in their orientation to learning and teaching. This is not to say, if an instructor scores as a teacher-centered instructor they would be ineligible for hire. But the inventory results open a dialogue between the institution and the instructor regarding expectations of those teaching adult learners. Also, the use of the PALS indicates to candidates that the institution values content knowledge and knowledge about adult learning.

Higher educational institutions should also adhere to adult learning principles in training adjunct instructors and in providing on-going professional development opportunities. My experience with professional development opportunities is often individuals transmitting information to learners, similar to lecture in the classroom. In designing professional development opportunities, institutions should model adult learning principles desired in the classroom. Implement hands-on learning, dialogue, small group discussions, case studies, and problem-solving activities. This models learner-centered instructional practices to adjunct instructors.

In assimilating adjunct instructors into the institution, a mentor program may be effective. Without mentors in academia, success of the instructor is challenged (Daloz, 2012). Mentors provide wisdom to novice instructors based on their wealth of experiences, successes, and failures in teaching. In the context of adult learning, the picture of a mentor is one in which the mentor takes the novice on a journey to share their insights into the world of teaching adults. An effective mentor program would pair an experienced highly qualified learner-centered instructor of adult learners with a novice adjunct instructor of adult learners. The novice would journey with the mentor and explore and experience all aspects of teaching adult learners. This would include

curriculum development, instructional design, instructional practices, policies and procedures of the institution, classroom observations, pitfalls to avoid, and tips for success. The mentor would meet regularly with the novice adjunct instructor throughout the course of their first teaching assignment for discussion and reflection on experiences of the novice. Mentoring provides ample opportunity for novice instructors to build effective skills in teaching adult learners from highly skilled seasoned instructors.

The literature claims most instructors use teacher-centered instructional practices (Chaudhury, 2011; Rieg & Wilson, 2009). However, the literature also espouses learner-centered orientation when teaching adult learners. In order to make a shift in orientation, adjunct instructors may need to develop critical reflection skills. Critical reflection is most beneficial in a community of learners. Brookfield (1995) explains it is difficult for individuals to become aware of their own assumptions: “No matter how much we may think we have an accurate sense of ourselves, we are stymied by the fact that we’re using our own interpretative filters to become aware of our own interpretive filters ...” (p. 28). Brookfield (1995) offers a process for individual assessment and collaborative critical analysis. The Good Practices Audit (GPA) is a three phase process designed for instructors to share experiences in teaching and then analyze those experiences. Once skills in critical reflection are developed, adjunct instructors use those skills continually to examine their practices and behaviors in teaching adult learners. Another added benefit of developing critical reflective skills in adjunct instructors is they in turn introduce and model critical reflective thinking to adult learners.

A final implication relates to lesson planning. Institutions should consider developing a template for learner-centered instructional planning for adjunct instructors.

The participants in this study teach at an institution that provides the course content to the adjunct instructors. In other words, the adjunct faculty do not develop the courses they teach. However, the adjunct instructor is given freedom to infuse their own teaching style, personality, and professional expertise into the course content. If lecture is adjunct instructors' primary means of instruction, they may have limited resources for substituting active instructional strategies for lecture. Providing a template that reflects learner-centered instructional practices may assist the adjunct instructor in planning learner-centered instructional activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

While numerous studies reflect interest in adult learners (Brookfield, 1995; Merriam, 2001; Pratt, 1993; Smith, 2002), learner-centered orientation (Burke & Ray, 2008; Cheang, 2009; Cherney, 2008; Wohlfarth et al., 2008), and adjunct instructors (Kirk & Spector, 2009; Liu & Zhang, 2007; Umbach, 2007), there are few studies specific to adjunct instructors who teach adult learners. With the growth in population of adjunct instructors in higher education, additional studies may provide insight into strategies for developing highly qualified learner-centered adjunct instructors of adult learners.

This study included 10 Caucasian adjunct faculty teaching in a small private university. Expanding this study to include a larger sample of adjunct instructors may produce greater diversity in participants such as educational background, educational experiences, teaching experiences, and professional development opportunities. These differences in the background may yield difference responses than the current study. Also the increase in sample size may yield a greater understanding of adjunct instructors'

beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence instructional practices. The sample size may influence the variety of instructional practices reported by the participants. They primarily focused on group work and discussions. Enlarging the sample size may provide a greater variety in instructional practices. Finally, expanding the sample size would allow researchers to study adjunct instructors' beliefs across demographics.

Since one of the theme's in particular, community facilitates adult learning, may have been influenced by the participants' Christian faith-based views, examining the views of adjunct faculty at non-faith based universities may provide different narratives from adjunct instructors. Is the theme, community facilitates adult learning, consistent across universities or is this theme specific to faith-based universities?

None of the participants in this study hold a master's or doctorate degree related to adult education. It would be interesting to examine adjunct instructors', with advanced degrees in adult learning, beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional strategies. Their responses may differ from those in this study and would provide additional understanding of adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how adjunct instructors form these beliefs.

Also, the adjunct instructors in this study taught in face-to-face environments. The online population of adult learners is experiencing significant growth (Sener, 2010). Since this growth will likely affect adjunct instructors, it is important to determine online adjunct instructors' beliefs about online adult learners and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices. Do their beliefs about adult learning change? Do their

instructional strategies change? Are their online instructional strategies consistent with their beliefs?

This study focused on learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how those beliefs influence their instructional practices. The PALS used to identify learner-centered adjunct instructors also identifies teacher-centered instructors. This study could be conducted using teacher-centered adjunct instructors to determine the differences, if any, in their beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices from the current participants. This may provide a broader understanding of the population of adjunct instructors who most often teach adult learners in higher education.

A final recommendation for future study involves expanding the study to include student feedback. All of the participants self-reported their use of learner-centered instructional practices in teaching adult learners. I observed the same in my brief classroom observation, but these observations represented just a fraction of the instructional time. This study could be expanded to include the students' perceptions of adjunct instructors implementing learner-centered instructional practices. Do students observe evidence of adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning congruent with their instructional practices?

Final Thoughts

The population of adult learners in higher education continues to grow. Many higher education institutions use adjunct instructors to teach adult learners. Therefore, the need for highly qualified instructors also increases. For the adult learner, a highly qualified instructor is knowledgeable in their field and knowledgeable in adult learning.

This study provided an opportunity for me to interact with individuals who I would characterize as highly qualified instructors of adult learners. Their beliefs about adult learners are reflected in their attitudes, dedication to student success, and instructional practices. They demonstrated a high regard for adult learners and a deep commitment to meeting their learning needs.

Since adjunct instructors' instructional practices are likely to be congruent with these beliefs; hopefully, this study brings attention to the need to examine the beliefs of adjunct instructors. This examination is the catalyst for transformative learning on the part of adjunct instructors and may be the difference in adult learners achieving their educational goals or facing barriers that become roadblocks in their educational pursuits.

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APPENDIX A: COURSE EVALUATION FORM

Course Evaluation Form

1. Please answer the following questions about your learning experience. (Required)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The terminal course objectives (student learning objectives) for this course were clearly stated and explained at the start of the course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt challenged to think critically about the content of this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a result of taking this course, I gained new knowledge relevant to the course content and objectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident that I can apply what I learned in this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in finding out more about the ideas/materials presented in this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was able to answer the essential questions presented for each class week/session.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident that I met the terminal course objectives (student learning objectives).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Please answer the following questions about your instructor. (Required)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The instructor demonstrated knowledge and skills relevant to course content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The instructor conducted the course in a professional manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The instructor presented course materials using a variety of instructional methods.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The instructor covered the content as reflected in the course shell.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The instructor provided clear grading criteria for all graded assignments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The instructor provided constructive feedback.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The instructor encouraged me to critically think about issues and ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. On average, my graded assignments were returned: (Required)					
<input type="radio"/> More than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due					
<input type="radio"/> 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due					
<input type="radio"/> Less than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due					

<input type="radio"/> After the next assignment was due					
<input type="radio"/> I still have not received grades on my assignments					
4. On average, the instructor responded to my questions and requests for assistance made in-person, by phone or online: (Required)					
<input type="radio"/> Within 24 hours					
<input type="radio"/> Within 48 hours					
<input type="radio"/> Within 72 hours					
<input type="radio"/> More than 72 hours					
5. My instructor utilized a rubric when evaluating my assignments. (Required)					
<input type="radio"/> Yes, my instructor used a rubric					
<input type="radio"/> No, my instructor did not use a rubric					
6. Please answer the following questions about the learning environment. (Required)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The instructor effectively presented the course content from a biblical worldview perspective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I was encouraged to actively participate in my learning process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I engaged in insightful discussions with my professor and fellow classmates utilizing assigned readings, course materials, and personal experience to support the discussion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. The topics and activities were organized in a logical and meaningful way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. The course shell was easy to navigate and use.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I am satisfied with my learning experiences in this course. (Required)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. If you answered "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" please explain using the space below.					
9. This course met my expectations. (Required)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. If you answered "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" please explain using the space below.					
11. What did you like most about this course?					
12. Did this course change any of your previously held ideas, assumptions, perspectives or attitudes? If yes, please explain.					
13. What did you like least about this course?					
14. How can this course be improved?					
15. Anything else you would like to comment on?					

APPENDIX B: COURSE EVALUATION RUBRIC

Course Evaluation Rubric

<i>Evaluation Demonstrating Excellence</i>	<i>Evaluation Demonstrating Need for Improvement</i>										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions #2, #3, and 1st question on #6 (bib. world view) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If eight out of nine instructor questions received mean scores ≥ 4.5, then the evaluation would be flagged for review with the academic deans. <p><i>For the shells that do not have content, if seven out of eight instructor questions received mean scores $\geq 4.5^*$, then the evaluation would be flagged for review with the academic deans.</i></p> <p><i>(*Excludes question pertaining to course shell content)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question #3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of respondents marks should fall within the categories below <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">More than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due</td> <td style="text-align: center;">48 hours prior to the next assignment being due</td> </tr> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question #4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of respondents marks should fall within the categories below <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Within 24 hours</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Within 48 hours</td> </tr> </table>	More than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due	48 hours prior to the next assignment being due	Within 24 hours	Within 48 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions #1, #2, #6, #10, & #12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any area with a mean ≤ 3.5 would cause the evaluation to be flagged for review with the academic deans. Question #3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half of the respondents marks fall within the categories below <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Less than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due</td> <td style="text-align: center;">After the next assignment was due</td> <td style="text-align: center;">I still have not received grades on my assignments</td> </tr> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question #4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half of the respondents marks fall within the categories below <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Within 72 hours</td> <td style="text-align: center;">More than 72 hours</td> </tr> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question #5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> $\leq 60\%$ of the respondents marks fall within the category below <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">No, my instructor did not use a rubric</td> </tr> </table>	Less than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due	After the next assignment was due	I still have not received grades on my assignments	Within 72 hours	More than 72 hours	No, my instructor did not use a rubric
More than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due	48 hours prior to the next assignment being due										
Within 24 hours	Within 48 hours										
Less than 48 hours prior to the next assignment being due	After the next assignment was due	I still have not received grades on my assignments									
Within 72 hours	More than 72 hours										
No, my instructor did not use a rubric											
	<i>Or</i>										
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A striking written comment or a majority of students commenting about the same thing would cause the evaluation to be flagged for review with the academic dean. 										
<i>Action Taken by ID & A Team</i>	<i>Action Taken by ID & A Team</i>										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation will be highlighted and departmental administrative assistants will make a note in CASM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation will be called to the academic dean's attention during monthly evaluation review meetings. 										

APPENDIX C: PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING SCALE (PALS)

“Note: Dr. Gary J. Conti hereby grants permission for practitioners and researchers to reproduce and use the Principles of Adult Learning Scale in their work” (Conti, 2004, p. 91).

Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS)

Directions: The following survey contains several things that a teacher of adults might do in a classroom. You may personally find some of them desirable and find others undesirable. For each item please respond to the way you most frequently practice the action described in the item. Your choices are Always, Almost Always, Often, Seldom, Almost Never, and Never. Highlight in yellow 0 if you always do the event; highlight in yellow number 1 if you almost always do the event; highlight in yellow number 2 if you often do the event; highlight in yellow 3 if you seldom do the event; highlight in yellow number 4 if you almost never do the event, and highlight in yellow number 5 if you never do the event. If the item does not apply to you, circle number 5 for never.

After completing the survey, save the PALS as a Word document. Email the PALS as an attachment to gwhite@ccu.edu.

NAME: _____

Always	Almost Always	Often	Seldom	Almost Never	Never
0	1	2	3	4	5

1. I allow students to participate in developing the criteria for evaluating their performance in class.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. I use disciplinary action when it is needed.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. I allow older students more time to complete assignments when they need it.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. I encourage students to adopt middle class values.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. I help students diagnose the gaps between their goals and their present level of performance.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. I provide knowledge rather than serve as a resource person.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. I stick to the instructional objectives that I write at the beginning of a program.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. I participate in the informal counseling of students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. I use lecturing as the best method for presenting my subject material to adult students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. I arrange the classroom so that it is easy for students to interact.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. I determine the educational objectives for each of my students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. I plan units which differ as widely as possible from my students' prior experiences.	0	1	2	3	4	5

13. I get a student to motivate himself/herself by confronting him/her in the presence of classmates during group discussions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. I plan learning episodes to take into account my students' prior experiences.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. I allow students to participate in making decisions about the topics that will be covered in class.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. I use one basic teaching method because I have found that most adults have a similar style of learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. I use different techniques depending on the students being taught.	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. I encourage dialogue among my students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. I use written tests to assess the degree of academic growth rather than to indicate new directions for learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. I utilize the many competencies that most adults already possess to achieve educational objectives.	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. I use what history has proven that adults need to learn as my chief criteria for planning learning episodes.	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. I accept errors as a natural part of the learning process.	0	1	2	3	4	5
23. I have individual conferences to help students identify their educational needs.	0	1	2	3	4	5
24. I let each student work at his/her own rate regardless of the amount of time it takes him/her to learn a new concept.	0	1	2	3	4	5
25. I help my students develop short-range as well as long-range objectives.	0	1	2	3	4	5
26. I maintain a well-disciplined classroom to reduce interferences to learning.	0	1	2	3	4	5
27. I avoid discussion of controversial subjects that involve value judgments.	0	1	2	3	4	5
28. I allow my students to take periodic breaks during class.	0	1	2	3	4	5
29. I use methods that foster quiet, productive desk-work.	0	1	2	3	4	5
30. I use tests as my chief method of evaluating students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
31. I plan activities that will encourage each student's growth from dependence on others to greater independence.	0	1	2	3	4	5
32. I gear my instructional objectives to match the individual abilities and needs of my students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
33. I avoid issues that relate to the student's concept of himself/herself.	0	1	2	3	4	5
34. I encourage my students to ask questions about the nature of their society.	0	1	2	3	4	5
35. I allow a student's motives for participating in continuing education to be a major determinant in the planning of learning objectives.	0	1	2	3	4	5
36. I have my students identify their own problems that need to be solved.	0	1	2	3	4	5
37. I give all my students in my class the same assignment on a given topic.	0	1	2	3	4	5

38. I use materials that were originally designed for students in elementary and secondary schools.	0	1	2	3	4	5
39. I organize adult learning episodes according to the problems that my students encounter in everyday life.	0	1	2	3	4	5
40. I measure a student's long term educational growth by comparing his/her total achievement in class to his/her expected performance as measured by national norms from standardized tests.	0	1	2	3	4	5
41. I encourage competitions among my students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
42. I use different materials with different students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
43. I help students relate new learning to their prior experiences.	0	1	2	3	4	5
44. I teach units about problems of everyday living.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Demographic Information: Please highlight your answers in yellow.

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

Below 30

30-39

40-49

50-59

60-69

70-79

Over 79

3. Higher Education teaching experience: Including this year, how many years of higher education teaching experience have you had?

1 year

2 - 4 years

5-10 years

11-15 years

16-20 years

21-25 years

More than 25 years

4. Adult learning teaching experience: Including this year, how many years of adult learning teaching experience have you had?
 - 1 year
 - 2 - 4 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - 21-25 years
 - More than 25 years

5. Which of the following disciplines do you most often teach?
 - Biblical Studies
 - Business and Technology
 - Criminal Justice
 - Education
 - General Studies (English, Communication, Humanities, History, Behavioral and Social Sciences)
 - Nursing
 - Psychology
 - Health Care Administration

6. Academic Qualifications: What is the highest level of degree you hold?
 - Bachelors
 - Masters
 - Education Specialist
 - Doctorate

APPENDIX D: PALS CONSENT FORM

Principles of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) Consent Form

Sarah Scherling
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to complete the Principles of Adult Learners Scale (PALS), which is designed for instructors of adult learners.. The results of the PALS will be used to select participants for a study examining instructors' beliefs about adult learners and the influence of these beliefs on instructional practices. You were selected to receive this survey because of your favorable course evaluation(s) from Colorado Christian University courses. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before completing the PALS.

This survey (PALS) is being conducted by Sarah Scherling a doctoral candidate at Liberty University in the School of Education.

Background Information:

The PALS reflects instructional practices and preferences of instructors teaching adult learners.

Procedures:

If you agree to complete the PALS, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete the PALS. This survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers on this survey. The instructional style of instructors is varied from instructor to instructor. The answers on the survey should reflect your experience in teaching adult learners and your preference regarding instructional practices. While you are asked to identify yourself on the survey, this survey will not be used in any manner related to evaluation of your performance in the classroom, selection for future teaching assignments, or future compensation. From the results of the survey, I will invite ten instructors to participate in my study. Completing the survey does not obligate you to participate in the study nor does it guarantee you will participate in the study.

Risks and Benefits of Completing the PALS:

No participation in surveys is without risk. While the risk in completing this survey is minimal, the completion of the survey has some risks. Minimal risks may include:

- Loss of time: Loss of time may cause discomfort to the participant. Loss of time is likely in completing this survey. Therefore, the time commitment involved in completing this survey is identified prior to the instructor signing the consent form.
- Documented ideas and thoughts: Documenting participants' ideas and thoughts on the survey may cause discomfort to the participants. Since written documentation is part of completing this survey, it will occur in this study. Therefore, completing the PALS is strictly voluntary.
- Identification: Identifying the participant may cause discomfort to the participant. Therefore, individuals who complete the PALS will not be identified and their responses will not be shared with anyone other than myself.

The PALS may provide benefits to the individuals who complete the survey. These benefits may include:

- Individuals completing the PALS may benefit from an increased awareness of their instructional practices.
- Individuals completing the PALS may be invited to participate in a study that examines the connection between beliefs of instructors and instructional practices. However, completion of the PALS does not obligate you to participate in this study nor does it guarantee you will be invited to participate in the study.

Compensation:

There is no financial compensation for completing the PALS. Participation or non-participation will not affect any present or future teaching contracts negatively or positively. Results from the PALS will not be used in any way to evaluate your performance as an instructor.

Confidentiality:

The results of the PALS will be kept private. The researcher will not reveal the participants' identity in any verbal or written communication during or after the PALS is completed.

Results of the PALS will be stored in a locked desk drawer that is accessible only to me, the researcher. The results of the PALS will be destroyed three years after the survey is completed. The identity of those who complete the PALS will remain anonymous.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this survey is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Colorado Christian University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question on the survey without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Sarah Scherling. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her or her advisor at:

Sarah Scherling
 sscherling@liberty.edu
 303-524-5198

Dr. Frederick Milacci (advisor)
 fmilacci@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1444.111512

IRB Expiration Date: 11.14.13

APPENDIX E: PALS SCORING CRITERIA

Scoring PALS

Positive Items

Items number 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 39, 42, 43, and 44 are positive items. For positive items, assign the following values: Always = 5, Almost Always = 4, Often = 3, Seldom = 2, Almost Never = 1, and Never = 0.

Negative Items

Items number 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 40, and 41 are negative items. For negative items, assign the following values: Always = 1, Almost Always = 1, Often = 2, Seldom = 3, Almost Never = 4, and Never = 5.

Missing Items

Omitted items are assigned a neutral value of 2.5.

Factors

Factor 1 Learner-Centered Activities

Factor 1 contains items number 2, 4, 11, 12, 13, 16, 19, 31, 29, 30, 38, and 40.

Factor 2 Personalizing Instruction

Factor 2 contains items 3, 9, 17, 24, 32, 35, 37, 41, and 42.

Factor 3 Relating to Experience

Factor 3 contains items 14, 31, 34, 39, 43, and 44.

Factor 4 Assessing Student Needs

Factor 4 contains items 5, 8, 23, and 25.

Factor 5 Climate Building

Factor 5 contains items 18, 20, 22, and 28.

Factor 6 Participation in the Learning Process

Factor 6 contains items 1, 10, 15, and 36.

Factor 7 Flexibility for Personal Development

Factor 7 contains items 6, 7, 26, 27, and 33.

Computing Scores

An individual's score on the instrument is calculated by summing the value of the responses to all the items. Factor scores are calculated by summing the value of the responses for each item in the factor.

Factor Score Values

Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	38	8.3
2	31	6.8
3	21	4.9
4	14	3.6
5	16	3.0
6	13	3.5
7	13	3.9

APPENDIX F: LIBERTY IRB APPROVAL



The Graduate School at Liberty University

November 15, 2012

Sarah Scherling
IRB Approval 1444.111512: Learner-Centered Instructors' Beliefs About Adult Learning: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Sarah,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054



Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX G: SITE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL

Note: This is a copy of the university’s IRB approval form. All identifying names and signatures were removed in order to protect the privacy of the participants. Identifying the site (university) of the study may reveal the participants identity. I certify the appropriate signatures were secured for this study.

OFF-SITE APPROVAL (Complete only if the project will be completed off XXXXX grounds)

I certify that this project will be completed on my site and will follow XXXXX IRB guidelines.

Off-Site Administrator _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____ Title _____

Mailing Address _____

SIGNATURES:

I certify that the protocol and method of obtaining informed consent as approved by the Institutional Review Board will be followed during the period covered by this research project.

I also certify that any future changes will be submitted for IRB review and approval prior to implementation.

I also certify that I will notify the IRB when this project is complete.

A. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(CCU Faculty Member)

Sarah Scherling _____ Date _____

B. RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS:

1) NA _____ Date _____

2) NA _____ Date _____

C. DEPARTMENT CHAIR NA _____ Date _____

D. DEAN OF SCHOOL NA _____ Date _____

NOTE: University President XXXX has been informed of this study. He has given his approval for this study to take place at XXXXX University and to involve XXXXX adjunct faculty.

IRB USE ONLY:
EXEMPTION REVIEW

PROJECT EXEMPT: _____ PROJECT NOT EXEMPT: X

IRB Member #1 Signature signed _____

IRB Member #2 Signature signed _____

FINAL IRB REVIEW

PROJECT APPROVED: X PROJECT NOT APPROVED: _____

CAGS Chair, IRB Board signed _____ Date 10.3.2013

President of XXXX signed _____ Date 10.5.2013

PROJECT APPROVED: X PROJECT NOT APPROVED: _____

APPENDIX H: STUDY CONSENT FORM

Learner-Centered Instructors' Beliefs About Adult Learning: A Phenomenological Study Study Consent Form

Sarah Scherling
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study examining learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence instructional practices. You were selected as a possible participant because of your favorable course evaluations and the results of the PALS you recently completed which indicated you describe yourself as a learner-centered instructor. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Sarah Scherling a doctoral candidate at Liberty University in the School of Education.

The purpose of this study is to examine learner-centered adjunct instructors' beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence instructional practices.

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

2. Attend an orientation session. I will meet with the participants for a 30 minute orientation using a webinar format. During the orientation, I will review the contents of this Consent Form including the purpose of the study, procedures, risks and benefits, compensation, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study. Participants will be able to ask questions during the webinar. The Consent Form will be mailed or emailed directly to me if you agree to participate in the study.
3. Complete an instructor self-reflection audit. The instructor audit is a written reflection exercise each participant will be asked to complete prior to the interview and classroom observation. The purpose of this eight question instructor audit is to provide a written response which describes learner-centered adjunct instructors' experience in developing beliefs about adult learning and how these beliefs influence their instructional practices. This exercise should take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The written responses will be kept in a locked desk drawer for three years. After that time, they will be destroyed.
4. Participate in a 60-90 minutes interview. I will conduct one 60 to 90 minute face-to-face interview with each participant. The intent of the interview is to engage in a conversation related to adult learning and instructional practices. The interview will be audio-recorded which allows for the flow of conversation without extensive note-taking. The audio recording will be transcribed. I will also use the audio tapes to check for accuracy in the transcript. Participants will have an opportunity review the transcripts to check for accuracy. The audio recordings will be kept in a locked desk drawer for three years. After that time, they will be destroyed.
5. Allow the researcher to observe 60 minutes of a class session you are teaching. The observations will take place at the location where the class is meeting at the prescribed meeting time. No modifications to the setting, course content, or instructional delivery will be requested for these observations. The observation session will not be videotaped in order to eliminate introduction of an element that might further influence the behavior of the students or the instructor. During the class observation, I will record field notes

and review them within 24 hours for further clarification. These notes will include descriptive field notes providing a physical description of the subjects, summaries and paraphrases of conversations, description of the physical setting, and depiction of the activities. Participants will have an opportunity review the field notes to check for accuracy. The field notes will kept be in a locked desk drawer for three years. After that time, they will be destroyed.

Overall the time commitment to this study is approximately 8 hours (including review of transcripts and field notes which is optional) over an eight week period of time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

No study is without risk. While the risk in this study is minimal, the study has several risks.

Minimal risks may include:

- Loss of time: Loss of time may cause discomfort to the participant. Loss of time is likely in this study. Therefore, the time commitment involved in this study is addressed during the orientation process prior to the participant signing the consent form.
- Documented ideas and thoughts: Recording and/or documenting participants' interview regarding his/her ideas and thoughts may cause discomfort to the participants. Since written and audio documentation is part of this study, it will occur in this study. Therefore, participants are given the opportunity to review all transcripts and request the transcript of his/her interview be modified to accurately reflect participants' intent or be omitted from the research data. Participant may also withdraw from the study at any time if they desire.
- Class room observation: Observing the instructor in a classroom setting may cause discomfort to the participants. Since observation and field notes are part of this study, they will occur in this study. Therefore, this aspect of the study will be discussed in the orientation prior to the participant signing the consent form. To minimize some discomfort on the part of participants; the classroom observation will not be videotaped. Also, participants are given the opportunity to review all field notes and request the field notes of his/her observation be modified to accurately reflect participants' intent or be omitted from the research data. Participant may also withdraw from the study at any time if they desire.
- Identification: Identifying the participant may cause discomfort to the participant. Therefore, participants in this study will assume a pseudonym. No demographic information will be included in this study that would specifically identify a participant or the location of the study.

This study may provide benefits to the participants and the academic community. These benefits may include:

- Participants may benefit from an increased awareness of their instructional practices and specific beliefs associated with those practices.
- Participants may benefit by developing reflective skills during the instructor audit, interview, and classroom observation which may improve their instructional practices.
- Adult educators may benefit from a greater understanding of beliefs of learner-centered instructors as they evaluate their own beliefs and instructional practices.
- Educators may benefit from a greater understanding of the connection between beliefs and instructional practices.

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study. Participation or non-participation will not affect any present or future teaching contracts negatively or positively. Data from this study will not be used in any way to evaluate your performance as an instructor.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish or present, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. For this study, each participant will select a pseudonym which will be used to report information provided by the participant. The researcher will not reveal the participants' identity in any verbal or written communication during or after the study.

Research data (instructor audit, audio recordings of the interview, transcripts of interviews, and classroom observation field notes) will be stored in a locked desk drawer that is accessible only to me, the researcher. The research records (data) will be destroyed three years after the study is completed. The research records (data) will be used in a written dissertation and may be used in future writings and presentations. However, the location of the study and the identity of the participants will remain anonymous.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Colorado Christian University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Sarah Scherling. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her or her advisor at:

Sarah Scherling
sscherling@liberty.edu
303-524-5198

Dr. Frederick Milacci (advisor)
fmilacci@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I understand the interview will be audio-taped. I give my permission to the researcher to audio-tape the interview session(s).

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Selected Pseudonym: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date:

APPENDIX I: INSTRUCTOR LEARNING AUDIT

Name: _____

Date: _____

Course: _____

“Part of developing self-knowledge as a teacher is coming to see what and how we are learning about teaching” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 75).

This audit is adapted from Brookfield’s (1995) teacher learning audit which focuses on instructors as adult learners and on the learning taking place in the instructor’s life as a result of teaching. The purpose of this audit is to provide a semi-structure method to identify what you are learning as an instructor and how this has influenced your teaching practices. It may also provide information that enables you to identify knowledge and skills that you need to improve in as an adjunct instructor of adult learners.

Directions: Reflect over the past year and answer the following questions in as much detail as possible.

1. The most important thing I have learned about the adult learner is...
2. The most important thing I have learned about myself as an instructor is...
3. The most important thing I have learned about teaching is...
4. The assumptions and beliefs that I have about teaching adult learners that were most confirmed this past year are...
5. The assumptions and beliefs that I have about teaching adult learners that were most challenged this past year are...
6. Reflect on how you learned what you have identified.
7. What contributed to your learning?
8. How did you conclude what you had learned was beneficial or not to your teaching adult learners?

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Study Title: *Learner-Centered Adjunct Instructor Beliefs About Adult Learning: A Phenomenological Study*

Sarah Scherling, Principal Investigator
Liberty University

1. Describe any personal experiences you have had as an adult learner.

Prompts:

- Formal education
- Job training
- Professional development

2. How did you become an instructor of adult learners?

3. Describe your professional development experience as an adult learner educator.

Prompts:

- Earned degrees or certificates
- Individual courses
- Professional development
- Readings
- Conferences

4. Describe your beliefs about adult learners.

Prompts:

- Characteristics
- Educational needs
- Educational expectations

5. Describe how you came to hold those beliefs.

6. What have you observed as common in adult learners?

7. Describe the ideal instructor of adult learners.

8. Describe an instructional strategy you consistently use with adult learners.

Prompt:

- Rationale for instructional strategy

9. Describe the ideal instructional environment for an adult learner.

10. Describe the connection between your beliefs about adult learners and your instructional practices.
11. Describe the connection between your beliefs about how adults learn and your instructional practices. (Note: I will only ask this if this connection is not made when answering question number 10.)
12. Describe characteristics of adult learners that influence your instructional strategies.
13. Describe instructional strategies you have found to be most effective in promoting learning in adult learners.

APPENDIX K: SAMPLE INSTRUCTOR LEARNING AUDIT TRANSCRIPT

NOTE: Anne's page one of her Instructor Learning Audit Transcript. Her responses

(Word document) were transferred verbatim to the transcript format.

Participant ID:	Anne
Audit Name:	Instructor Learning Audit
Date of Audit:	1.19.13
Transcriber:	Sarah Scherling
Audit:	01_Anne_1.19.13

	Instructor Audit Transcript	Coding	Notes
1	The most important thing I have learned about the		
2	adult learner is ...		
3	P: ...they are trying to reach a goal set on top of		
4	extremely busy and demanding jobs. Going back		
5	into the academic world is a significant sacrifice. It		
6	is a sacrifice financially to be sure, but maybe more		
7	dramatically it is a sacrifice of their time and		
8	navigating through many other priorities in life. If I		
9	respond to that, then I believe adults become aware		
10	that I am not just an instructor, but I am a co-laborer		
11	this them as they pursue this goal. I am here to		
12	encourage them and help them establish habits and		
13	behaviors that reduce the barriers to them attaining		
14	their degree.		
15	The most important thing I have learned about		
16	myself as an instructor is ...		
17	P: ...I am here as an educator which means more		
18	than just pushing information to students. I have to		
19	be a student of my students. I need to get to know		
20	them well enough to know what they need in order		
21	to learn effectively. Every student is different. One		
22	size fits all does not work in the classroom. So, I		
23	intentionally plan for different learning styles,		
24	different personalities, different experiential		
25	backgrounds, and different perspectives that are		
26	brought into the classroom.		
27	I: The most important thing I have learned about		
28	teaching is ...		

APPENDIX L: SAMPLE VERBATIM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS WITH CODING NOTES

Note: This is a sample page from a transcript with coding notes. The original was handwritten. This is the typed verbatim copy of the original.

411	opinions, and thoughts without feelings of judgment or		
412	being put down. I want the students to have lively		
413	(discussion) I want the students to have the opportunity	discussion	RQ #4
414	to view things from various perspectives. That isn't	various perspectives	Specific practice – discussion
415	going to (um) you know happen unless they realize they		
416	are (um) in an environment where they can trust they	TRUST	RQ #1 & 2
417	won't get shot down if they look at things differently		
418	than others do.		
419	I also think the ideal environment is one in which the	REFLECTION	RQ #1 & 2
420	students understand that learning is not all about new	CRITICAL REFLECTION	
421	information (um) (pause) it's also about examining their	Examine	
422	current knowledge and (um) understanding. It's about	- current knowledge	
423	making connections between new knowledge and	- understanding	
424	existing knowledge and determine how that impacts the		
425	students life. I want them to ask themselves, "What	CONNECTIONS	RQ #1 & 2
426	action do I need to take based on what I am learning." I	- new knowledge	
427	don't want students just to get more knowledge I want	- existing knowledge	
428	them to make sense of the new information based on		
429	their needs or situation. How can they apply what they	APPLY	
430	are learning? Does it make any difference in their lives.	- influence in their life	
431	So, the environment has to be one where the students		
432	understand they play an active (um) role in their	ACTIVE ROLE	
433	learning. Someone can't just open their brain and pour		
434	it in. For, (pause) (um) this is learning at a level that	ENGAGE	RQ #1 & 2
435	becomes very personal and it (um) may be difficult for	- personal	
436	students to engage in this kind of learning and (um) it	- changes in thinking	Most resist change
437	could be uncomfortable at time when students come to	- changes in behavior	
438	realize they have to make some changes in their		
439	thinking or (um) their their behavior. Most of us resist	TRUST	RQ #1 & 2
440	change. So, the learning environment has to be	- supportive	
441	supportive of this this kind of process. It is not always a		
442	quick process, it can be confusing to students, it it (um)		
443	can be really challenging for students.		
444	And also, I think the relationship I have with the	INSTRUCTOR	RQ #2 & 3
445	students is paramount to their learning. Maybe not	- role	
446	paramount, but I guess (ah) what I am saying is that the	- relationship	
447	relationship. I teach because I care about students. I	- care	
448	want them to learn. I want them to be better because of	COMMUNITY	RQ #2
449	their education. And I (ah) (pause) think that is	- contribution to others	
450	enhanced when I have a genuine caring relationship	- contribution to student learning	
451	with my students. I want them to be successful. I want		
452	them to have confidence. I want them to (ah) develop	confidence	
453	an understanding that their knowledge, and experience,		
454	and learning can (ah) contribute to another student's		

03_Interview_Richard_1.23.13_XXXXXX

11

APPENDIX M: SAMPLE FIELD NOTES TRANSCRIPT

Note: My field notes were handwritten. I transcribed them following the classroom observation.

Participant ID: Luke
 Observation Name: Classroom Observation
 Date of Classroom Observation 1.30.13
 Transcriber: Sarah Scherling
 Observation: 10_Luke_1.30.13

	Field Notes	Coding	Notes
1	The class observation was scheduled for 60-90 minutes on 1.30.13 in the XXX regional center.		
2			
3	The class was scheduled to meet from 6:00 – 10:00pm. I arrived at 5:45pm. I greeted the instructor. There were no students in the class when I arrived. There was a table in the back of the class which was not part of the seating arrangements for the students. So, I sat at that table.		
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10	The door of the class is in the front of the class. The instructor greeted 2 students who came into class. “How’s it going?” Student #1, “Better”. Student #4, “Fine.” The two students talked back and forth. As students arrived, the instructor talked to each of them. He also stood in the hallway and chatted with students going to other classes.		
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17	Instructor: Good, evening how’s it going? Student: Good, how about you? Instructor: Good, no complaints.		
18			
19			
20	While the students arrived the instructor and students talked about the weather, a remodeling project, and work. It was obvious that the students and instructor had shared and talked together in previous sessions. Much of the conversation was a continuation of previous conversations. Students knew what was going on with the instructor and the instructor knew what was going on with the students. The student and instructor laughed at funny stories. Students seemed comfortable with the instructor. Instructor was conversational with t		
21			
22			
23			
24			
25			
26			
27			
28			
29			
30			

APPENDIX N: SAMPLE RESEARCH JOURNAL

Note: This is a page from the research journal I kept during data collection and analysis.

Originally the page was handwritten. This is a typed verbatim copy of one journal page.

Date	Event	Notes
12.2.12	Spg bk 1 & Bk 2 instructors identified 66 in-seat sections 17 eliminated b/c I know instructor 49 to invite to complete PALS	
12.3.12	49 invites to complete PALS emailed	
12.5.12	I completed w/consent	XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX
12.9.12	8 completed w/consent	XXXXXX XX
12.11.12	2 completed w/ consent	
12.12.12	11 PALS scores 193, 132, 130, 166, 125, 125, 113, 135, 130, 127, 166	
12.14.12	3 completed w/ consent	
	3 PALS scored 155, 120, 113	
	Invitation (email) to participate in study sent to Bryan, Mary, Anne, Richard	All accepted
12.15.12	2 completed w/ consent	
	2 PALS scored 110, 130	
12.15.12	#1 193 male masters #6	Accepted
	#2 155 male masters #7	Accepted
	#3 166 female masters #8	Accepted
	#4 166 female masters #9	Accepted
	#5 #10	
12.16.12	Reminder email sent out to non-responders	
12.17.12	1 completed w/ consent	
12.18.12	Phone orientation	Conducted phone orientations with Mary, Richard, and Anne
12.19.12	1 PALS scored 129	
	Mary's study consent returned	Acknowledged in email
12.20.12	2 completed w/ consent	
	2 PALS scored 152, 132	
	Richard's study consent returned	Acknowledged in email
12.21.12	1 completed w/ consent	
	1 PALS scored 132	
	Phone orientation	Phone orientation w/ Bryan