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# Exploring the Impact of Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy Professional Development for Online Teaching

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT

OF MISSISSIPPI VIRTUAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ONLINE TEACHING

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# ABSTRACT

As online courses and programs continue to grow in number across Mississippi's community college system, an examination of the system which trains and supports faculty has gone largely unexamined. The aim of this research was to study the impact of the Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy, the state's online professional development system, on faculty. Structured interviews were conducted with nine faculty in four community colleges across the state to determine conditions that helped or hindered faculty in their implementation of content learned in online professional development courses on credit-bearing courses they would later teach. Analysis of faculty transcripts indicate faculty have implemented changes due to increased knowledge and confidence, empathy with their students, and being open/flexible to change. Faculty also reported significant challenges for student success attributed to reading comprehension and use of technology.

DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Melanie, and my son, Connor. You have both inspired me to see each day as a new opportunity, to make our small corner of the world a better place. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my loving parents and family. Your support of learning and education has made all the difference.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

MANUSCRIPT ONE: EQUITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND
ETHICS FOCUSED MANUSCRIPT

# CHAPTER 1

## Identification of the Problem of Practice

Concerns about the efficacy of online education as an equivalent modality to face-to-face instruction persist in institutions of higher education today (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Allen, 2013) and new questions are surfacing about the efficacy of this modality for first-generation students (Bettinger & Loeb, 2017). In Mississippi, online student enrollment remains high, with over 29,000 unduplicated headcount in the community college system in the fall of 2015 (Mississippi Community College Board, *Statistical Data 2015-2016*). Given the demand for online courses and programs, and the demands from accreditation entities (SACSCOC) that online courses be equivalent to their face-to-face counterparts, it is prudent to evaluate the systems that train and prepare faculty.

Researchers have conducted studies related to online student persistence and at-risk populations since the inception of online coursework in the early 2000s. We now know, for example, that African-American students, Hispanic students, male students, and students with low first-term GPAs have exhibited high failure and withdrawal rates in online classes for over a decade (Bowen, 2016; Newell, 2007; Wiggam, 2004; Xu, 2013). We also know that first-generation students, according to one study of 800 students, significantly exhibit poorer self-regulation skills in online classes than those of their second-generation counterparts (Williams,

2004). While these findings focused on states other than Mississippi, and therefore, different student populations, we do not yet know if Mississippi's online community college students will exhibit similar outcomes. We also do not yet know the role that online professional development plays in shaping faculty, who in turn shape student success.

This study aims to uncover whether faculty who complete training in the Mississippi Virtual Community College (MSVCC) Academy, the primary online professional development system for community college faculty in Mississippi, are making changes to instructional practice at a point in time following the completion of their training. To what degree are community college faculty implementing learned content, strategies, and practices they learn about in the MSVCC Academy for courses they teach, particularly professional development that address issues of student equity? The issue of equity, in particular, has not been sufficiently studied in professional development programs, according to Alicia Dowd, author of *Engaging the Race Question: Accountability and Equity in U.S. Higher Education* (2015).

## Professional Positionality and Assumptions about the Problem of Practice

### Professional Position and Experience

I began my professional teaching career in 1999 as a full-time English instructor for a community college in rural North Carolina. The online course I developed that year, which was the first for the department, depended heavily on the correspondence course "technologies" that preceded it: namely, correspondence by way of envelopes and stamps. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the reputation of online courses has long suffered such a questionable reputation— it was built upon methods of providing feedback to a student, separated by one of the high impact practices we now hang our hats on—the benefits of shortened feedback time on student learning (Clark, Nguyen, & Sweller, 2006; Clark & Mayer, 2010; Feskens, & Eggen, 2015;

Mory, 2004; Ormrod, 2011; Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015).

Following this one-year appointment, I began teaching full-time in another institution and developed ten online courses over the span of eight years. I became more proficient in developing courses and grew interested in effective practices for teaching in an online environment, as that literature and discipline came to light (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012; Conrad & Donaldson, 2010; Clark, Nguyen, & Sweller, 2006; Paloff & Pratt, 2008). One particular practice I adopted was the use of formative assessments in the online classroom to encourage greater opportunity for student practice. I became more open to the literature and practitioner literature and was open to experimentation to determine what worked best.

I became interested in how other disciplines approached online education. As an online composition and literature instructor, I realized that other disciplines (such as science or math) were necessarily different in how they approached online course development. I questioned whether faculty in other disciplines were open to learning what the field of researchers was discovering about online education and delivery. As the numbers of online students grew and the institutional investment became stronger, the questions became more pressing for all faculty at our college.

These questions led to the pursuit of an employment position at the state-level office coordinating online teaching professional development for all community college faculty in Mississippi, the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB). In 2007, as the Board's first eLearning Specialist, I was charged with developing an online course that faculty could take online, at their leisure, from any of the 15 community colleges in the state. The receptivity of this course by faculty led to the development of additional courses faculty could enroll in which to improve their understanding of tools, technologies, and best practices for teaching, and

subsequently, the formalization of an umbrella entity: the MSVCC Academy. Ten years after its inception, the Academy continues to offer faculty development opportunities for community colleges across the state, particularly small, rural community colleges who otherwise would have no access to specialized professional development about online teaching and learning. Faculty across all fifteen community colleges have earned thousands of hours of professional development credit, and the introduction of a continuing education hour credit system has ensured its long-term utilization by those in the community college system.

In 2012, my perspective of online education changed yet again, when I left the position of Director of Training and Professional Development at the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) for a faculty appointment at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi. As a health sciences faculty member and the Director of Online Learning and Instructional Development, I developed new online courses belonging to a different academic discipline (Health Sciences), while building consensus among various online program directors on issues affecting online education. I was accountable to new and different stakeholders, and my own level of involvement and investment changed accordingly. I was no longer coordinating activity across colleges in a system; rather, I was working intimately with faculty on a day-to-day basis who were each responsible for admissions, course design and development, and ultimately, student success in their respective academic programs.

**Professional Goals and Motivations**

As I grew in the position, the university began preparations in 2017 for its reaccreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). My role in this position involved creating consensus among our five online program directors. Were we being proactive in evaluating our own program efficacy? Did we

identify shortcomings? Through a dialogue with the dean of the school, we decided to implement the use of a best practices scorecard, the Online Learning Consortium's Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs, to understand program strengths and weaknesses in eight broad areas: institutional support, technology support, course development and instructional design, course structure, teaching and learning, social and student engagement, faculty support, student support, and evaluation and assessment. I spent four months collecting evidence, sharing this evidence with faculty, and ultimately, developing an environment whereby nearly twenty faculty and staff could evaluate the school, my office, and institution's commitment to online learning. Additional measures and metrics were also reviewed, such as the Quality Matters course rubric framework and guidelines put forward by the Council for Regional Accrediting Commissions, represented by all regional accreditors in the United States.

These program assessment processes have only recently begun at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC). In an interview with Dr. Kim Simpson, Director of Assessment at UMMC, as part of a course requirement for EDHE 721, she revealed that program assessment was not carried out in a formal, centralized manner for sixty-one years of UMMC's history (Simpson, 2015). Only in 2006 did the academic health science center begin a standardized process of assessment, based in large part upon changing national trends in accreditation. Since the creation of her position as the Director of Assessment in 2014, however, the tide is shifting—more and more faculty and administrators across the School of Allied Health Professions, the School of Nursing, the School of Dentistry, the School of Pharmacy, and the School of Medicine are realizing that assessment includes a significant reflective component. Faculty are no longer just asked what assessment is, how it is defined, and how often it should occur. They are beginning to contemplate the connections between what the existing data

indicates and how this data drives the future of their academic programs.

The interview revealed that my efforts as the Director of Instructional Development within the Allied Health School aligned with Dr. Simpson's broader, institutional efforts. Our school's scorecard results indicated that we needed to address areas of weakness in online course design and development. Our efforts would impact faculty, students, and department positively, and the Director of Assessment and the Director of Accreditation could share what we learned with other schools offering online programs.

**Personal and Professional Assumptions**

The course design training program we had adopted for use with our faculty, Quality Matters™, provided an opportunity for faculty to receive scaffolded support and training from our staff over a period of six months. Faculty had been working independently, reviewing the 43 standards while reading, reviewing, and reflecting on their online course design. Only after working with faculty in earnest on this measure for over a year, however, did we realize a challenge: seven faculty were finding it difficult to meet one particular standard. This standard—"The course provides learners with multiple opportunities to track their learning progress"—was initially misunderstood by faculty. Faculty felt that grades on various assignments could be construed as "multiple" opportunities, and following a re-reading of our training materials, we conveyed more clearly to faculty that the interpretation of "multiple opportunities" was best construed as "multiple strategies." The training material laid clear that "multiple," in their definition, meant diverse types: simulations or interactive games that have feedback built in; a practice quiz which self-scores, a sample answer or answer key provided for learners; or a written assignment designed for multiple drafts and instructor feedback, peer critiques, or portfolios.

Following our clarification of this standard with faculty, we questioned whether our experience was unique or common. It seemed strange to us that of 43 standards, one would be particularly confusing or challenging for faculty to meet. We discovered that this particular standard was challenging for many faculty elsewhere—between 2011 and 2013, the Quality Matters organization discovered that nearly 1,400 online courses were absent of this particular standard when courses were presented for certification (Shattuck, Zimmerman, & Adair, 2014).

Through two experiences—consultations with faculty to meet national Quality Matters certification, and evaluation of our online programs through the use of an established, validated measurement instrument, a more complete picture emerged: online programs, in all their complexities, ultimately depend upon integrated systems of support in order to operate with any level of effectiveness. Academic units, administrative units, and broad institutional units learn best from an integrated, interdependent system of support—and only when the various entities share the same goals. This realization became foundational in understanding my problem of practice.

**Impact from Doctoral Courses of Study**

Independent research and class-based activities provided the opportunity to delve into a place of deeper understanding about individualized problems of practice. For example, in our first term in the program (in EDHE 721), I was able to argue for a *culture of access* for all students, a process that begins prior to enrollment and admissions and continues well through to graduation—and to do so through a constructivist lens I adopted due to a study of educational philosophy. During this same semester, readings about micro-aggressions challenged notions I had held about the value races and ethnicities place on campus space. The following summer, in EDFD 707, we learned about Samuel Mockbee, who teaches us in *Citizen Architect* that the

university should partner with the rural communities from which it springs. The film *Philosopher Kings* reminded us that disparities in socioeconomic status affect more than the student body—they impact staff in increasingly complex ways. Our reading of Arum & Roska's *Academically Adrift* included a discussion of Vincent Tinto, who argued that "involvement, especially academic involvement, seems to generate heightened student effort," a notion that inspired a stronger research interest in the connection between teacher-student feedback and student engagement. Additional readings and videos on the topics of gender equality, service-based learning, reduced college tuition, and the importance of broadening access cemented my desire to make access a focal part of my dissertation.

As a constructivist, I am able to stand on solid footing when aligning my own belief and value systems to my field of practice. I can plan a longer project, knowing all the while it will hold to the way I see the world. It also paved the way to understanding the types of research most agreeable to me as a constructivist researcher. What it means to me at this stage in my career is that I support the ongoing development, construction, brainstorming, ideation, experimentation, and reiteration of meaningful course design principles, not just for the courses I develop but for the faculty I counsel. For example, I enjoy helping other faculty writing a particular type of feedback most conducive for student self-regulation (interesting enough, our cohort was introduced to this practice in ECDI 703, where an assigned text, *Lesson Plan: An Agenda for Change in American Higher Education*, argues that carefully prepared feedback loops yield equivalent learning outcomes as those of its face-to-face counterparts).

One wonders if the reason faculty are not integrating enough automated feedback in their courses is because they are paying attention to other things, such as the data from their student evaluations. We learned as much in EDHE 721; through the assigned book *Academically Adrift*

(Arum & Roksa, 2011) we discovered that faculty believe student evaluations are the most valuable indicator of faculty performance. One faculty member in eight considered student evaluations as critical for tenure. This may be another reason why institutions fail to be fully compliant with institutional effectiveness—faculty may be paying too much attention to end-of-term evaluations than to the high impact teaching practices that improve student learning during the semester.

In summary, over the duration of my professional career, the system of support which I have had greatest experience developing and championing, is that of the faculty development system initiated by a small team of impassioned individuals in the summer of 2007. Today, ten years after its inception, it seems an appropriate time to ask, inquire, and prompt: is the system meeting the needs of the faculty who teach in institutions today? Are faculty who take online professional development through its catalog learning practices for reaching at-risk students? Are they learning best practices that impact all students in their online classroom, regardless of their background, experience, class, or race, such as adaptive content and methods for writing automated quiz feedback? And do they feel that free and open access to a free professional development catalog should be extended to others in Mississippi's higher education system, to further empower other faculty not in their "community" of colleges?

## Contextualization of the Problem of Practice

### Urgency and Scope

It is indeed urgent to examine the impact of faculty development upon student learning. Student learning is "the heart of most institutional missions" (Suskie, 2004, p. 15), and the overarching goal for faculty development programs is to improve student learning (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, & Rivard, 2016; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006). Faculty

development offices and centers for teaching and learning are beginning to utilize methods to

measure the impact of their efforts on faculty attitudes, perceptions, and teaching behaviors,

through methods such as the pre-test/post-test, faculty peer review, and self-reported data (Haras,

Taylor, Sorcinelli, and Hoene, 2017).

Mississippi's community college system faculty development model has historically been

managed through a centralized state office, the Mississippi Community College Board. In 2016,

their Office of eLearning reported a duplicated headcount of 5,065 faculty teaching 11,404

courses (see Figure 1). The number of online courses being offered is growing, as are the faculty

teaching these courses. Faculty throughout the state's community college system are trained

through training developed through this centralized office. In 2016, 1,148 faculty were trained

through the MSVCC Academy system; 102 webinars and 50 self-paced courses were offered

(see Table 1).
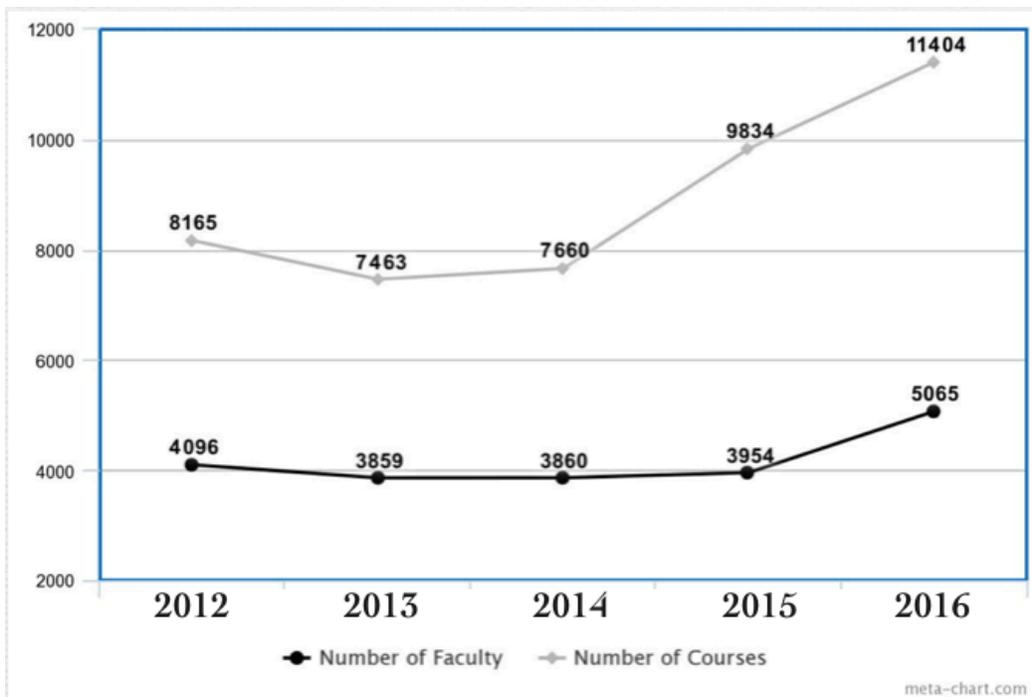


Figure 1. MSVCC faculty and courses are on the rise, 2012-2016. From Mississippi Community

College Board, Annual Report (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016). Retrieved from

http://mccb.edu/publication/publ.aspx

Table 1

*MSVCC Academy Faculty Enrollment and Training Type, Calendar Year 2016*

| Semester | Spring 2016 | Summer 2016 | Fall 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participants | 451 | 70 | 627 |
| Number of Courses | 6 | 3 | 41 |
| Number of Webinars | 43 | 0 | 59 |

Table 1. MSVCC faculty and courses are on the rise, 2012-2016. From Mississippi Community College Board, Annual Report (2016). Retrieved from http://mccb.edu/publication/publ.aspx

As faculty in community colleges are realizing that the majority of their semester credit hours are taught by part-time or adjunct faculty, faculty who are by definition displaced outside the traditional bounds of the system (Burnstad & Hoss, 2010), matters of professional development become more pertinent. These factors elevate the need for faculty development and to provide clarity about its impact.

**The Historical Context**

In Mississippi, the study of professional development by researchers within our educational system has its roots in the 1970s. More modern studies on the topic will prove more fruitful, given the study of online education. A 2012 dissertation found that Mississippi community college faculty teaching in the technical field reported "enhanced collaboration with other welding teachers within the state" as a result of professional development training

(Ferguson, 2012). Earlier, in 2009, it was determined that faculty who took online professional development did so for the reasons of affordability, convenience, and certification (Taylor, 2011). One dissertation focused on graduate students, discovering that Graduate Teaching Assistants are in need of professional development for how to implement teaching strategies and instructional techniques, particularly in the sciences (Thomas, 2010). As recently as 2009, community college administrators agreed, citing faculty preparation as their major concern for online teaching faculty (Done, 2009).

National research on professional development casts a wider net with larger student populations, and those results signal that professional development should contemplate modality type and faculty demographics during design and development. Lian (2014) studied the California State University system, surveying 892 full- and part-time faculty across nine universities. Her study found that faculty demographics played a significant role in acceptance of faculty development (hierarchical regression analysis indicated female faculty exhibited higher motivation, value, and usefulness for faculty development—as did low-ranking faculty; African American and Latino faculty demonstrated higher value scores; and minority faculty exhibited a higher perceived usefulness score). Additionally, online faculty development and off-campus faculty development significantly contributed to their motivation. Finally, Hardré (2014) found that community college faculty were primarily motivated intrinsically and based upon personal values.

**Problem of Practice in the Local Context**

Given the diversity of community college districts in Mississippi—some urban, some rural, some with predominant African-American populations, others Caucasian, it seems fitting to understand the demographic relationship of faculty teaching online professional development

courses and the faculty who participate as students. After all, the mission of the MSVCC Academy is to share resources with under-resourced community colleges in the state. Therefore, this study provides an opportunity to study the relationship between faculty as teachers and faculty as students. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to study whether courses addressing issues of accessibility and retention practices can reach first-generation and at-risk students. Finally, it provides an opportunity to study the impact of the online training system as a whole— to understand whether the system is providing adequate access to faculty in the larger system of higher education in Mississippi.

## The CPED First Principle

### A Paucity of Research

Although a considerable body of research has been conducted on the impact of faculty development (Condon, Iverson, Manduca, Rutz, & Willett, 2016), in addition to sufficient guidance for faculty developers (Gillespie & Robertson, 2010), little if any research has been conducted to analyze faculty development systems and their impact on issues of equity, access, and best practices for reaching at-risk students. This has been noted by Alicia Dowd, co-director of the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California in 2015: "Other organizational routines that impact equity in college participation and outcomes…include professional development…. Organizational routines such as these often go unexamined because they are taken for granted as 'the way we do things here'".

Several initial questions surface: Do faculty who participate in online professional development on topics of reaching at-risk students later implement the practices they have learned? For example, do faculty review their instructional materials for adherence to accessibility standards? Do faculty utilize retention tools and strategies for reaching at at-risk

students?

To delve more deeply into this last question, which if addressed can have far-reaching impact, we turn to David Labaree. Labaree argued twenty years ago that "the central problems with American education are not pedagogical or organizational or social or cultural in nature but are fundamentally political" (1997, p. 40). The issue was one of mutual goal-setting. Fortunately, an investigation of the founding, legal narrative of the community college system provides support to this political argument of broadening access, to extend the partnership to the four-year universities. Mississippi state code § 37-4-1, section (h), encourages cooperation among all entities of public education: "Coordination between public schools, community and junior colleges and universities shall complement the educational goals and attainments of individuals and the state." Given the emphasis in this narrative on the word *coordination*, and the implicit understanding the kindred goals of student success, it seems altogether fitting to explore the expansion of online professional development in the state of Mississippi. Additional mechanisms already indicate strong coordination between the IHL office and MCCB office, including the sharing of physical work/office space and ongoing committee partnerships between the two entities on issues such as college completion. Finally, educational leaders are calling for this kind of partnership: "Presidents should be expected to promote risk-taking and experimentation… this is especially true in the area of teaching methods, which must continue to evolve in new ways…" (Bowen & McPherson, 2016).

## Proposed Conceptual Framework

Two models of faculty development are pertinent here, the traditional Direct Path and the Context Path (Condon et al., 2016). According to Condon, the Direct Path theoretical frame has

been used in K-12 and undergraduate settings for many years to understand the chronology of faculty development.

The Direct Path model asks three questions:

1. Do faculty learn as intended at the professional development workshop?

2. Do faculty translate this learning into their teaching?

3. Does the improved teaching lead to improved learning?
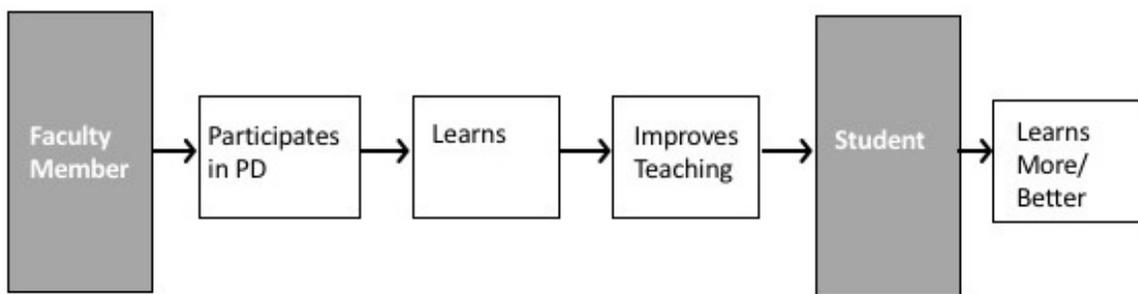


Figure 2. The direct path model. The Direct Path model aims to understand the relationship between faculty development and student learning. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by W. Condon, E. R. Iverson, C. A. Manduca, C. Rutz, and G. Willett, 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

Various methods are available to the researcher when utilizing the Direct Path model. Researchers interested in determining if faculty learned as intended at a workshop typically assess this through the use of a pre- and post-test. A pre-test is administered prior to the workshop to determine faculty knowledge of the workshop's content matter, and a post-test is

administered following the workshop to measure the change in learning. These measurements assess the first question provided in the Direct Path model—Do faculty learn as intended at the professional development workshop? (Condon et al., 2016).

For the second question in the Direct Path model—Do faculty translate this learning into their teaching?—two methods are now being commonly utilized, the method of faculty self-report (such as faculty journaling when the new method was introduced), and peer observations of teaching, where peers are tasked with identifying particular behavioral changes by the faculty member, changes encouraged during the original training (Haras, Taylor, Zakrajsek, Ginsberg, & Glover, 2017). This method is typically effective when faculty are trained in a cohort model.

The third and final question—Does the improved teaching lead to improved learning?—is typically challenging to measure due to additional time and effort but can be measured through an analysis of student work, particularly when an assessment instrument is used and that was calibrated or aligned to the learned content provided in the originating faculty workshop (Haras, Taylor, Zakrajsek, Ginsberg, & Glover, 2017).

Alternatively, the Context Path model of faculty development, a more holistic model, accommodates any number of other experiences contributing to a faculty member's development, such as colleague discussions, colleague peer reviews, and department head evaluations. It encompasses activities outside formal professional development but may be useful as a guiding frame for this qualitative case study.
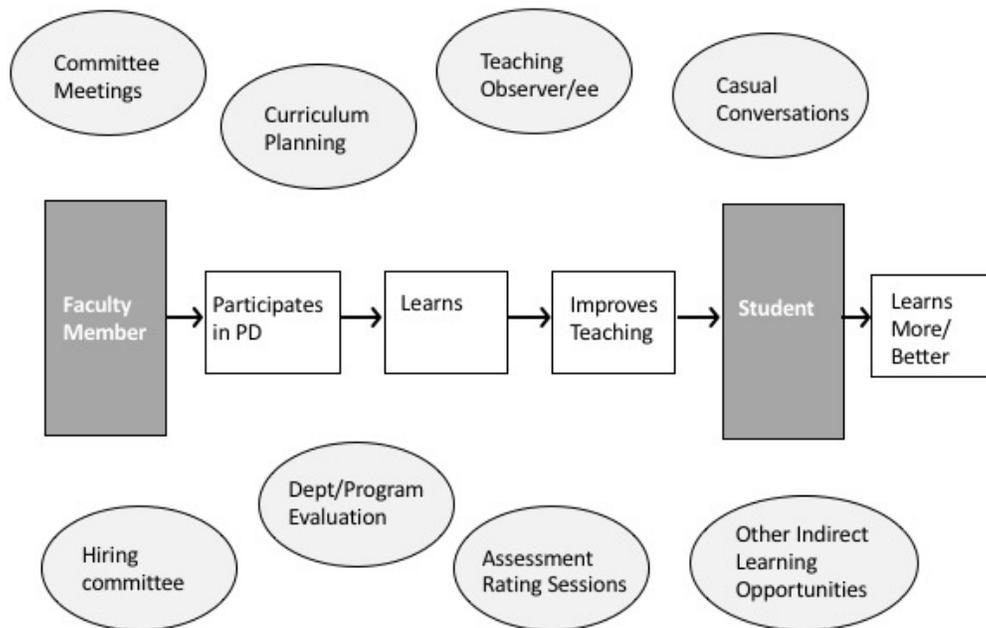
Figure 3. The context path model. The Context Path model is more complex, analyzing direct and indirect data. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by W. Condon, E. R. Iverson, C. A. Manduca, C. Rutz, and G. Willett, 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

These two logic models are presented in the text *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections.* The text includes a brief history of these two models. In my work at the University of Mississippi Medical Center, I spent significant resources contemplating the cyclical connection between training, learning, and student impact. I began building a faculty development model in 2014, with new refinements in 2017 prior to my departure. In my own version of a faculty development model, I began with faculty on-boarding.

Once faculty came to me, I utilized a document checklist to ensure they knew what was important from my office. Next, we developed and offered them training literature sent on a regular basis. This consisted mostly of news and workshop opportunities. We often interviewed other experts on campus as well. The third prong of the model incorporated just-in-time resources for faculty: a checklist which included checkoff statements they would mark when building a course (topics such as accessibility checks, the inclusion of syllabus objectives, or other school policies and procedures were included). Next, I was in the process of incorporating a faculty self-evaluation instrument developed by the California state system. Entitled QOLT (Quality of Online Learning and Teaching), the online survey was intended for faculty to complete at will, under anonymous circumstances, when eager to see how they compared against a set of standards for course design (influenced heavily by Quality Matters) and teaching/facilitation efficacy. The student assessment of instruction was to be included in the workflow. Together, these were the most common denominators impacting the workflow of our online faculty. Seeing the Direct Path and Context Path model inspired me to investigate further.

## Next Steps

For this study, six to eight Mississippi community college faculty members will be interviewed, using purposive sampling to identify qualifying characteristics. Qualifying characteristics include faculty members who are a) currently teaching at a Mississippi community college, b) have taught for six years in this same community college in a full-time capacity, c) have participated in, and completed, one of two online professional development courses offered through the MSVCC Academy: Dropout Detective—Saving Your At-Risk Students, or ADA Compliance in the past two calendar years. These courses have been chosen due to their focus on retention, persistence, and universal course design.

Once the institutional review board (IRB) and Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB) research application is completed and approved, the MCCB will provide a faculty completion report for MSVCC Academy courses. This report will indicate who has completed the two professional development courses of interest. In addition, the MCCB will provide a report indicating faculty employment data. These records will be merged to identify faculty who are eligible for the study.

Once qualifying faculty are identified, eLearning administrators will be contacted at several community colleges, including, but not limited to, Coahoma Community College, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Hinds Community College, and Northeast Mississippi Community Colleges (these colleges are pre-selected due to their contrasting characteristics to other colleges in the group: namely, by student enrollment numbers, by geographic location, and by race). These eLearning administrators will be read an oral script introducing the study, its intentions and aims. If approved, qualifying faculty at the college will be contacted; an oral script will be read to faculty to receive their agreement through a signature and release form. A follow-up interview will be scheduled during this phone call for a future date and time, where an audio recording will be created for transcription and analysis. The questions for the interview are presented in the Appendix.

Written transcripts will be generated following each interview, which will then be fed into qualitative software for theme identification, coding, and analysis. The entirety of the transcripts will be provided in manuscript two.

## Conclusion

The Direct Path model for professional development (Condon et al., 2016) provides a schema for understanding the development of the faculty member as a series of chronological

events and has been selected as the model for this study, for it calls attention to a particular point in time in the development of the faculty member—the moment when a faculty member improves his/her teaching. The simplicity of this idea has helped corral otherwise disparate interview questions into a prevailing, dominant theme and research questions:

- For Mississippi community college faculty, what factors lead to (or hinder) the integration of concepts introduced in the MSVCC Academy Retention course into a course the faculty member teaches?

- For Mississippi community college faculty, what factors lead to (or hinder) the integration of concepts introduced in the MSVCC ADA Compliance course into a course the faculty member teaches?

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24

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MANUSCRIPT TWO: DATA INTERPRETATION MANUSCRIPT

# CHAPTER 2

## The Problem of Practice

**Summary of the Problem of Practice**

Institutions of higher education nationwide have experienced thirteen consecutive years of growth in the number of students enrolled in online coursework (Allen & Seaman, 2016). In Mississippi, online student enrollment remains high, with over 29,000 unduplicated headcount in the community college system in the fall of 2015 (Mississippi Community College Board, *Statistical Data 2015-2016*). Despite this growth, doubts persist about the effectiveness of online education, particularly regarding its equivalency to traditional, face-to-face instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Allen, 2013). As these questions linger, new concerns regarding particular groups of online students have emerged, particularly students of low socioeconomic status, students attending for the first time, and minority students (Bettinger & Loeb, 2017; Xu & Jaggars, 2014). As researchers are discovering, Hispanic students, African-American students, male students, and students with low first-term GPAs are exhibiting high failure and withdrawal rates in online classes, and have done so for over a decade (Newell, 2007; Wiggam, 2004; Xu, 2013). Faculty and administrators are not surprised at these trends; 45 percent of administrators and faculty in 2014 agreed that it is harder to retain students in online programs than face-to-face programs (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Research into the effectiveness of online course designs and programs typically addresses course design, teaching presence, and at more granular level, particular behaviors employed by faculty, such as response time, the use of formative assessment, and quality of feedback (Baleni, 2015; Clark, Nguyen, & Sweller, 2006; Clark & Mayer, 2010; Feskens, & Eggen, 2015; Mory, 2004; Ormrod, 2011; Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015). However, despite researchers' well-intentioned efforts to study faculty as they prepare for, deliver, and evaluate their performance as online teachers, we do not yet understand the impact that professional development plays in developing faculty, particularly for professional development offered online.

**Professional Positionality**

My professional career began with a one-year teaching position at a community college in 1999. In the year 2000, I began teaching full-time at another community college; I developed ten online courses over an eight year span, eager to implement what I had learned from books and research into improving my own instructional practice, particularly for online courses. In 2007, I accepted a position at the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB), where as the Director of Training and Professional Development I coordinated online teaching professional development for faculty across Mississippi's fifteen community colleges. High enrollment rates for this faculty training led to additional professional development and the creation of the Mississippi Virtual Community College (MSVCC) Academy—a catalog of courses offered free of charge to all community college faculty. Both formal and informal agreements with community colleges followed. This position was vacated in 2012 as I began working for the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi. My role as the Director of Online Learning and Instructional Development encompassed faculty professional development

in addition to online teaching in the Health Sciences program, and I became a consensus-builder with faculty as they sought to improve the quality of their online programs.

**Problem of Practice and Principles of Equity, Ethics, and Social Justice**

In 1997, David Labaree, posited that "the central problems with American education are not pedagogical or organizational or social or cultural in nature but are fundamentally political" (p. 40). In Labaree's view, it wasn't that education stakeholders didn't have their heart in the game; rather, their efforts were compromised, second-guessed, or challenged by political influence. Given the gravity of this statement, and Labaree's influence as a practitioner/scholar, it is fitting to consider whether this is applicable to smaller systems, and to the Mississississippi community college system in particular, as it is the organizational focus of this study. A reading of the 1986 state statute on community colleges lays clear that coordination, inclusivity, and the citizen's right to seek and receive an education were paramount: "Coordination between public schools, community and junior colleges and universities shall complement the educational goals and attainments of individuals and the state" (Mississippi state code § 37-4-1, section [h]).

In 2005, nineteen years after the passing of this statute, online education began to gain traction across the country, promising greater access to students to educational opportunity. Anticipating this growth and greater access to higher education, a single training course was created to serve faculty in Mississippi's fifteen community colleges. The reception of this faculty development course led to the development of a umbrella entity serving broader college needs, the Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy. Today, in 2018, access to these online courses and webinars has gained the attention of those teaching in the K-12 and university setting, and hundreds of courses have been offered during fall, spring, and summer terms since the Academy's inception, awarding professional development and sharing knowledge with

thousands of faculty. Access has been broadened, not only to students seeking social mobility

through online education, but to faculty, too, who may reside in a rural community college

district. The Mississippi Community College Board, which supports this teaching academy, is

responding to those principles set forth by the founders of the Carnegie Project for the Education

Doctorate: to "bring about solutions to complex problems of practice" by developing, offering,

and creating a system of faculty support (Development…, 2018).

However, despite the state's success, little research, if any, has been conducted on faculty

teaching within these systems of support with regard to issues of equity and access more

broadly—in how faculty develop skills, attitudes, and values that support equity and access in the

online courses they teach. Greater emphasis has been placed upon connections between faculty

development programs, faculty motivation and satisfaction, as well as potential impact on

student success (Ferguson, 2012; Hardré, 2012; Perez, McShannon and Hynes, 2012). The call

for new investigations into professional development systems is new. Alicia Dowd, co-director

of the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California expressed in 2015

that professional development systems are one of many "organizational routines that impact

equity in college participation and outcomes," yet "often go unexamined because they are taken

for granted as 'the way we do things here.'"

**Proposed Conceptual Framework**

Informing this study are two models of faculty development, the traditional Direct Path

Model and the Context Path Model (Condon, Iverson, Manduca, Rutz, & Willet, 2016).

According to Condon, the Direct Path theoretical frame has been used in K-12 and

undergraduate settings for many years to understand the chronology of faculty development.

The Direct Path model asks three questions:

1.  Do faculty learn as intended at the professional development workshop?

2.  Do faculty translate this learning into their teaching?

3.  Does the improved teaching lead to improved learning?



Figure 1. The direct path model. The Direct Path model aims to understand the relationship between faculty development and student learning. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.
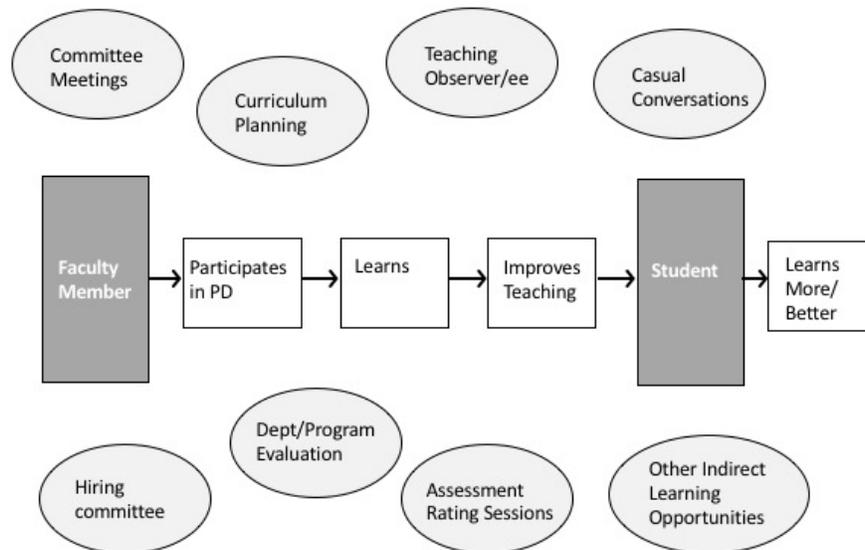
Figure 2. The context path model. The Context Path model is more complex, analyzing direct and indirect data. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon, et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

The research methods traditionally used by the researcher to investigate these three questions have been consistent, according to Condon. Faculty interested in investigating the first question—Do faculty learn as intended at the professional development workshop?—most often use a faculty pre-test (prior to workshop) and post-test (following workshop). Faculty exploring the second question in the Direct Path model—Do faculty translate this learning into their teaching?—typically rely on peer observations of teaching or faculty self-report (Haras, Taylor, Zakrajsek, Ginsberg, & Glover, 2017). Finally, when investigating the third and final question in this model, researchers typically analyze student work in tandem with faculty practices implemented as a result of an earlier workshop. A more modern and holistic model, the Context

Path model, considers many other experiences universal to a faculty member's experience, such as discussions with peers, colleague peer reviews, and performance evaluations. Researchers using this model consider factors often considered external to formal professional development.

These two models were instrumental in understanding how faculty development might be studied. It was determined, however, that a different research method should be used in order to delve more deeply into issues impacting faculty and students with regards to the CPED principles of equity, ethics, and social justice. Rather than relying on pre-tests, post-tests, faculty self-reports or assessment of student artifacts, structured interviews emerged as a vehicle for providing the opportunity to question, confirm, and probe. To gain perspective on topics pertinent to the study, four different themes were developed: faculty's value of professional development; faculty implementation of theories, concepts, or instructional practices in their courses; universal design; and at-risk students. Questions were then developed to fit those themes.

**Research Questions**

The four themes of questions were written and revised in order to align with two developing research questions guiding the study:

- For Mississippi community college faculty, what conditions lead to (or hinder) the integration of concepts introduced in the MSVCC Academy Retention course into a course the faculty member teaches?

- For Mississippi community college faculty, what conditions lead to (or hinder) the integration of concepts introduced in the MSVCC ADA Compliance course into a course the faculty member teaches?

Special terms are provided in Appendix A.

The questions used in the structured interview are provided in Appendix B.

## Data Overview

The research project was approved by the University of Mississippi Internal Review Board in November of 2017, the Mississippi Community College Board in April 2018, and community colleges in May and June of 2018. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher to gain an understanding of faculty application of concepts, theories, and instructional practice learned from online professional development into courses they teach (see Appendix B for interview questions). A total of nine faculty (seven females, two males) were interviewed, representing four Mississippi community colleges in different regions of the state (southern, central, western, northern). Faculty were selected based upon their completion of at least one online professional development course offered through the statewide MSVCC Academy: Teaching Effectively Online, ADA Compliance, or Dropout Detective. Interviews were conducted by telephone and ranged from 20-30 minutes in duration.

Interviews took place during April, May and June 2018. Each interviewee was informed of the purpose of the interview and a time estimate for completion. The researcher audio recorded each interview and made observations to highlight responses to specific questions. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher, relevant themes were identified, and faculty responses were coded in a qualitative software program. Nine pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of each faculty member who participated. The pseudonym for the faculty member and the date of his/her interview is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Faculty Interviewed and their Teaching Discipline*

| **Pseudonym** | **Faculty Discipline** | **Date Interviewed** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Halle | Business Office Technology | April 27, 2018 |
| Sue | English Composition | May 9, 2018 |
| Claire | History | June 22, 2018 |
| Kim | Music | May 31, 2018 |
| Tramont | Mathematics | April 25, 2018 |
| Kevin | English Composition | May 8, 2018 |
| Nyana | Sociology | May 10, 2018 |
| Kassandra | Learning Skills/Orientation | May 25, 2018 |
| Desiree | English Composition | June 18, 2018 |

**Limitations**

Several limitations for this study exist and should be recognized. Faculty may have learned of concepts, theories, or instructional practices through means other than the MSVCC Academy. However, directions were targeted towards concepts, theories, and practices brought about by this online professional development. In some cases, these external influencers were identified; however, in other cases, they were not. However, the conceptual model used in the study, the Context Path model, defines these external influencers, and an attempt was made by the researcher to identify these external influencers during theme creation and coding. Some success was made to identify these external influencers.

Faculty were eligible only if they had enrolled in, and completed, particular courses through the MSVCC Academy. This limited the number of available faculty. Faculty interviewed had enrolled in and completed online professional development at different points in the past. Some faculty had finished their online professional development as recently as six months prior, yet others had finished their course more than one year ago. This difference may have led to knowledge atrophy in some cases. In addition, some faculty had taken more than one online professional development course. Multiple faculty had taken multiple courses, and a result, it was challenging for the researcher to know if a particular course was influencing a behavior or implementation of a concept, theory, or instructional practice. Attempts were made to clarify during interviews where particular topics were learned; this clarity ameliorated much of the researcher's understanding and approach during coding. For example, the second question posed during the interview—where faculty were asked about things they implemented in an online course they taught—were read with special emphasis more so than other segments of the interview where faculty discussed ad hoc their implementation of an instructional practice.

An additional limitation concerned faculty availability for interviewing. Faculty were transitioning toward their time off during summer and were nearing the end of their teaching contract. In some cases, this led to a need to identify administrative faculty—faculty who held a dual role as administration and faculty. In other cases, faculty were willing to participate, regardless of being "off the clock." Additional challenges were presented with scheduling. Two faculty who initially agreed to be interviewed later declined—one due to a sudden illness and the other due to family conflict. However, the researcher's initial goal to interview at least two faculty per participating community college was attained, in every case but one.

Finally, there was a limitation with the clarity of at least two interview questions, in terms of faculty comprehension, and in the quality of the responses. One interview question asked faculty about their use of Word documents, PowerPoints, and PDFs, and was intended as a lead-in question to get at something more important—faculty knowledge and willingness to create accessible instructional material. However, analysis of faculty responses during coding provided the sense that the question did not provide any valuable information. Fortunately, this was identified during the important period of coding, and led to other investigation of responses to determine faculty willingness or reluctance to create accessible instructional material.

Several interviewees expressed concern during the interview that they were unsure if they were answering the question being presented to them. This is revealed in the transcripts. In these cases, faculty had in fact answered the question early on but had then began discussing tangential topics or details. Finally, two of the nine interviewees expressed dissatisfaction via email when reading their transcript ("there are a lot of extraneous words"; "I sound so scattered"). The researcher responded to these concerns with positive affirmation and encouragement: "It means that you were comfortable and are conversational."

No concerns were presented related to the ethical use of data or processes in place by the Institutional Review Board. Faculty were responsive to requests for interviews, but no power relationships between the scholar-practitioner and interviewees were detected, overtly or covertly. The researcher does not work for the community colleges or the community college system, and a result, it appeared that faculty were more willing to express themselves openly.

One challenge presented itself during the data interpretation phase of the study. This challenge was due to the software system being used. The qualitative software program NVivo crashed after my first day coding, and approximately 6 hours of work was lost. However, this

provided an opportunity to look at transcripts with fresh eyes and as a result the final codes used were more succinct and accurate. The technique of coding and recoding (code refinement) was recommended by the main research methodologist utilized by the researcher – Johnny Saldaña – and was viewed as an unfortunate, but valuable lesson. The third edition of his text *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* was used (Saldaña, 2016).

Data is lacking regarding faculty incentive to make instructional content accessible for all students. The data is unclear about whether faculty feel a universal concern to make all instructional content accessible, or whether they await such a mandate when a student with a disability is enrolled in their course. Such a question was not anticipated or included in the structured interview. Still, two faculty did report anxiety about learning and implementing practices of universal design to help all students. As Kim said, "it seems like I might have had some professional development about that, but I don't remember anything about it. It was really brief." Claire went further, expressing feelings of guilt: "I'm failing, really bad. I've had one student with severe vision problems that was in my class….I'm failing at this." If these are representative of faculty as a whole, a course to certify instructors in universal design could bring faculty the needed confidence and greater awareness among their peers.

## Presentation of Findings

### Participant Profiles

Seven females and two males were interviewed, representing four Mississippi community colleges. Faculty had a range of experience teaching in an online modality; seven faculty have been teaching more than 9 years, whereas two faculty have been teaching less than one year. Multiple faculty reported holding a dual office or role, above and beyond their role teaching—such as a curriculum coordinator, writing center coordinator, or support in institutional effectiveness efforts. Interviews were conducted in June 2018 and faculty reported having taken one professional development course through the MSVCC Academy or multiple courses. See Appendix C, Table C1 and Table C2.

### Faculty Motivations for Online Professional Development

The online professional development courses and webinars are offered through the Mississippi Community College Board and the Mississippi Virtual Community College, and faculty interviewed reported a variety of reasons for taking the courses. Only one interviewee cited that the course was required in order to teach online. Of the other eight faculty interviewed, one only cited reasons of professional growth; others stressed reasons of personal growth (n=6) and professional growth (n=5) or both. One faculty member expressed this dichotomy to serve both professional and personal interests quite clearly:

> I guess to have say that's personal. That's just my way. I'm one of those instructors that just likes to stay on top of technology. Our students are technology-based students. . . . while I didn't grow up in that generation, I realize we have to meet students where they are to in order to help them succeed. But then I'm also young enough to where I like to personally keep up with technology myself. . . . the professional side of that is, I'm

curriculum coordinator, so it's part of my duty and responsibility to make sure that students are getting the latest and greatest.

**Teachers Meeting Students' Needs**

**communication.**

Faculty reported that communication is, by far, the most critical component to meeting the needs of the online student. A close reading of faculty transcripts reveals that faculty discussed "communication" or "communicating" 14 times, their own sense of teaching presence 8 times, and use of the phrase "reached out" 5 times. See Table 5 below. The frequency of this strategy outweighed other strategies identified in the interviews, such as being open and flexible (occurring 4 times), instructional strategy (4 instances), engaging students (4), relevancy (2), feedback (1), and enthusiasm (1).

Table 2

*Teachers Meeting Students' Needs*

| Teacher Strategy | Number of Unique Instances |
| --- | --- |
| Communicating | 14 |
| Sense of Presence | 8 |
| "reached out" | 5 |
| Openness/flexibility | 4 |
| Instructional strategy | 4 |
| Engaging students | 4 |
| Student story | 2 |
| Relevancy | 2 |
| Feedback | 1 |

| Enthusiasm | 1 |
|---|---|

Table 2. The most important strategy for teaching online students is communicating and being present for students.

Faculty reported the need to communicate with their students through three different mediums: email, the learning management system's messaging tool, and the telephone. As Kassandra reported, "for the students that missed two weeks in a row, it's more of a phone call, and, you know, not a Canvas message because they're not replying." Several faculty stressed the importance of the frequency of feedback. Nyana said, "I tell my students all the time, I'm not here to fail you, I'm here to help you to be successful." Halle reported that communication was the single most important practice: "most importantly I believe in constant teacher feedback and interaction." Claire implied that there was no reason other faculty shouldn't make this one of their top priorities as an online instructor: "…answer their emails quickly. I mean, we have technology now, it shouldn't be more than a few hours before we get back to a student." Several faculty hinted at the two-way communication loop integral to any human experience. Kassandra said, "their opinions are important and you do want to use what they're telling you to improve the class." Kim's comments were similar: "I mean, if they don't know what you expect them to know and you don't explain it in your content, and then you test them on it, then they aren't going to succeed."

**sense of presence.**

Faculty also frequently cited "teacher presence" as a critical strategy for teaching online students, the "design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). Faculty often discussed the importance of creating the sense that they were always in the course with the students, not asking them to go it alone. As Halle said, "The instructor has to have a presence in the course site to keep it moving, to keep students on track, to let students know, Hey, I'm here for you." This was echoed by Tramont: "… I try to sensitize them and make them more, um, humanistic in terms of hey, you do have an actual instructor that is bringing this information forward to you." At times this need to be involved in the online course is prompted by a reading of the student discussion posts, as Claire indicated: "Sometimes, they'll ask a question that I may, you know, that they've asked to the whole class, and it's like, it's not a question about what does this mean, but they're bringing up some larger issue, something that connects to the real world, and everyone has a different response, so I may chime in on that kind of thing." Claire indicated that creating this kind of immediacy is difficult to create, if not impossible, if instructors create an online course that runs itself:

> The one thing that I wasn't doing before was getting involved in my discussion boards. I
> would write comments in SpeedGrader, you know, to each student, but I wouldn't be
> actually involved in the discussion board. So Teaching Effectively Online, really, and I
> had it in my head anyway, that I need, that there needs to be teacher presence, but I didn't
> necessarily think getting involved in discussion board would be the teacher presence.
> Now I do that. I'm sure to comment at least three or four times in a discussion board, so
> that really helped me.

Claire also weighed in on teacher presence and the quality of others' courses: "I think a lot of people make mistakes online, where they have a lot of automatically graded stuff, and there's not a strong teacher presence in the course."

**reached out.**

Four of the nine faculty interviewed used the colloquial term "reached out", which comprises the third component related to communication. The idiom was used to describe a method to help students, with one faculty member using the phrase three times:

So last semester, I had a student who basically told me after reaching out to him, and saying, Oh, you didn't submit your assignments, let me know if there is anything I can do, because I kind of noticed that for this particular student, it was out of the norm. That they were having challenges balancing life and school and everything. And so just knowing that little bit about them and them reaching out and saying, My apologies, that was just beyond me, we were able to manage those situations, because it wasn't that they were intentionally not doing it. . . . so it's one of those okay, I'm going to reach out to you to let you know that I am concerned.

A different faculty member, Sue, alluded to the impact that faculty-initiated contact has on students: "The students are really appreciative when teachers reach out that way. Sending you an individual email instead of a bulk class email. Or picking up the phone." The word "reach" was also used in a different context, not in order to describe faculty-initiated contact but parity between how high schools provide support for students in dual-enrollment online courses: "On the dual enrollment side, I will say this. I feel like it needs more consistent framework, and that's probably something that's out of our reach…."

**openness/flexibility.**

Four faculty reported on the importance of flexibility/openness to being a strong online teacher. Halle said that this philosophy has always been one of her guiding principles: "Based on my teaching experience, with the challenges that my students have faced, I have always tried to accommodate and work with my students because we are here to serve them." For Kassandra, however, learning to be flexible has been a process: "I think it's important, and I think I've learned this, as have you, to be a little more flexible, to say that, okay, this is the plan for the course. If we get off track because something was unclear, you may have to change the course just a little bit." Later in the interview, Kassandra reported again that this was a process of personal growth: "So, where structure is good, and I like structure, I have to learn that it's okay to move this assignment or to give extra time on this assignment." Another faculty member, Nyana, discussed the positive personal return on being open and flexible: "…always perform your online courses … with a pencil, instead of a pen…you will make mistakes, but you learn from the students." Finally, Sue described what being flexible looks like:

> Be honest with your students. That if they are going to expect you to be perfect, they are going to be greatly disappointed. If you expect them to be perfect, you are going to be greatly disappointed. That dropboxes may close at 11:59 p.m. on a Friday night, but that doesn't mean that the student has to get a zero. That you have to see them as humans, so be honest, see your students as people first, who are probably full-time employees somewhere, probably making a life somewhere, that they will meet your criteria, they will meet you, what they need to do, but you need to be able to meet them as well.

**other identified themes.**

Other important themes identified in the interviews pertaining to how teachers meeting students' needs include instructional strategy (4 occurrences), engaging students (4), relevancy (2), feedback (1), and enthusiasm (1). As part of faculty instructional strategy, one teacher reported having two deadlines each week, with the first providing additional points toward their grade. Another reported the importance of explaining the big picture of the course in order to get their buy-in: "…some students are simply going through the motions to make the grade, so they can get to classes that they feel they would like much better, but helping them understand the big picture is important, because I think that people tend to do better when they understand this is the course for this reason." Methods for engaging students include Kassandra's abbreviation of long videos into more digestible pieces and avoiding PowerPoint, which was described as "boring." Faculty also discussed, briefly, the importance of developing for relevancy, being enthusiastic, and providing feedback.

**in vivo themes and student stories.**

Moments in faculty interviews of humor and surprise were identified, and they reveal that faculty often go above and beyond expectations for their role. They also reveal a strong passion towards the students they serve. Most telling, perhaps, is that the stories told about students were non-prompted and that in each case, they told a story of student challenge. Kevin indicated a challenge related to technology: "one of the students came in to the writing center, physically, came in, one afternoon, to work on a paper, but at her school they weren't in a computer lab, they didn't have access to computers, they were having to do a lot of it on their phone."

Nyana discussed a student who was unfit for online coursework:

> This semester I had a student. She was advised to take online courses because of her work schedule, and her family. But she found it very difficult to be successful in the course because her computer skills were not adequate or up to date. And not only were her computer skills not, well, she also had problems with reading comprehension as well as writing. Keyboarding skills. I'm not sure how she even got introduced to do an online course with all of these issues. But it worked better for her schedule, instead of actually helping her to be successful. So I find that to be a problem.

For Tramont, however, the student story had a happy ending, one that ended in laughter during the retelling:

> …this was in a face to face, I had one student, she was so afraid of mathematics, she would shake when she came into the room, and this was a face to face, and she would be just terrified, and to make this story short, she graduated and left us and went to one of the universities in the state, and she was a music major, and I used to always tell her, anyone that can do all those notes that are involved in music can do some math. And, well, anyway, she left, she graduated, and she came back and she was a recruiter for the school that she attended in the state. And she just happened to come back to the campus as a recruiter, and when she got to me and another instructor, she told us you all would not guess what I am doing, and we said What are you doing? And she said, I am tutoring college algebra. [Laughter] Listen, I am tutoring college algebra, and we said, We knew you could do it. Anyone that can get to a 1/32nd note can get through to college algebra [Laughter]. So, well, anyway, OK. Well that was face to face. [Laughter.]

Moments of surprise were also identified in the interview transcripts. Nyana, on two separate occasions, used the phrase "I find myself" to indicate surprise at her actions: "Sometimes I find myself extending the deadline for them so that they can achieve success through the course." Later during the interview, she said "I find myself having to do alternative assignments for them to help make things a little bit easier." Another faculty interviewed, Sue, called her own behavior "crazy": "I sent out more emails. I actually called, which is crazy. I did all kinds of things, just to make sure they knew something was due each week." She later expressed how this behavior was something similar to an out-of-body experience: "So I had to wait until something didn't come in, or something that came in poorly, or a student had to reach out, and when one of those three things happened, I was able to reach out and engage, beyond my general self, like 'Here's what we're doing this week, guys!' "

One faculty member expressed surprise at discovering how easy it would be to implement what was learned in the professional development courses taken through the MSVCC Academy: "So we looked at rubrics and how in Canvas they are already rubrics set up for you, and all you have to do is go in and choose, and tweak what you need to" (Desiree). She also expressed this mix of surprise and satisfaction when discussing the way the course utilized prior developed rubrics for faculty to use: "There's a bulk of rubrics that you can just pull from to attach to the assignments, so that was very easy…."

**Student Challenges**

Faculty reported many different types of challenges that their online students face. Table 5 illustrates the challenges reported and by count.

Table 3

*Student Challenges as Identified in Transcripts*

| Student Challenges | Number of Unique Instances |
|---|---|
| Readers/reading | 10 |
| Phone to do Work | 5 |
| Access | 4 |
| Student agency | 4 |
| Overloaded | 2 |
| Math | 2 |
| Reasons for taking online classes | 2 |
| Time management | 2 |
| Writing | 2 |
| Attention span | 1 |

Table 3. Faculty reported many different types of challenges faced by the online student.

**readers/reading.**

The theme of readers/reading appeared twice as often as any other single theme. Most compelling, faculty discussed the challenges that reading presents in various places throughout the structured interview—when discussing their reasons for enrolling in online professional development, to sections where they discussed something they wanted to implement, to a section where they were talking about at-risk students. Halle noted that the students in her technology course "are not readers, for the most part". Claire said that she has shifted towards a strategy of using video in her classes because "Students often don't want to read a whole bunch of stuff that you've written." Yet the need to rely on the written word is paramount in the online class; in Desiree's class students cannot progress unless they have read the syllabus: "Some of my initial documents, I also have them set to where, students have to have read and understand the course syllabus."

Other faculty defined at-risk students as those who cannot read. Kim suggested this that reading comprehension was the second most important characteristic for success: "And second would be the poor readers, because if you don't read well, you're going to miss something in the assignment, or you're going to miss something in the content, or how to do something." To compensate, Kim utilized some strategies she learned in her online professional development course: "I made the font bigger, I put less text, and I use more videos that are short." Her use of the phrase "you have got…but not everybody" illustrates the instructional challenge facing online teachers: "You've got to be a good reader, but not everybody is a good reader, so if you want kids to be more successful you have to give something else they enjoy to make them at least stick around and try the rest." An additional strategy Kim employs is to provide a referral to an office that can help them: "Poor readers, I try to encourage, when they turn in an assignment, and I can tell they didn't read the directions, or I can tell they didn't understand, I encourage them to go to the Learning Lab on campus."

Nyana discussed the challenge that at-risk students have in her on-ground classroom as it relates to reading: "The students don't get the comprehension, it's bad for them, they can read something several times and they don't understand. After they read a page or two, then everything just shuts down, everything starts to run together." Nyana also discussed a story of a student who was advised to take online courses because of her schedule, but after she was in her course, "also had problems with reading comprehension as well as writing."

**phones.**

Three faculty reported student challenges related to using phones. As Kim said,

> Well, I do think some of the kids try to do their Canvas work on their phone, which to me
> is, I can't believe that would be even possible. But I have had some submissions that you

could tell were probably done on a phone. A lot of times I think they just try to get it done

real quick, because it's at the last minute, or they pull something up on their phone.

This intuition was validated in a follow-up email Kim sent following the interview: "Since our

discussion, I have had two students tell me outright that they are trying to do the work on their

phones.  This substantiates my suspicions that they use their phone rather than a computer."

Claire reported that the use of phones was creating challenges related to assignment submissions:

"… recently, they had to upload something they had written through Turnitin. And the Turnitin

feature wouldn't work when they were trying to upload it….I would see that they had attached

something but it hadn't gone through Turnitin, and I couldn't open it." Kevin, who taught dual-

enrolled high school students in his online course, illustrates the challenges of using a phone for

completing coursework:

> I know a lot of them had to basically do a lot of the legwork on their phone. It kind of
>
> doubled their workload, so to speak. They would have to do a lot of stuff on their phone,
>
> and then whenever they could carve out some time to go to maybe like the public library
>
> or wherever to access an actual desktop, they would then kind of shift that, because
>
> they're typing, you know, drafts on a phone, rather than on a computer, and having to do
>
> whatever methods to edit effectively and format accordingly.

> Claire reiterated the challenge that Kevin is facing in his online class: "Sometimes my

online students will say, I don't have a computer at home, and they'll try to do everything on

their phone, and you can do most things on your phone, but there are a few things that are

difficult to do."

**access.**

Four faculty discussed the challenge of access for students. Claire said that "… some students have like no Internet access, where they live, and even if they are using the phone, they may not have wi-fi, and they're out of data, or something like that." Kevin reported something similar: "…a lot of them do not have Internet access at their home. It was just purely at the school, it was hard, you know." Kim hinted at the challenges that this creates: "sometimes, you know, you tell them they can't submit it that way and they do it anyway because they're about to miss the deadline and they don't have access to what they need."

**attention span.**

Kim discussed a strategy of creating videos in order to address reluctant readers: "I guess I already knew that students didn't have a long attention span, so I realized that they're probably not watching the long videos that I was posting." She discussed finding shorter videos or making shorter videos and posting them and later reiterated the point about this student challenge: "I don't have a lot of faith in the average student's attention span." Claire also talked about the videos she makes for her students, drawing a connection between reading and watching: "Students often don't want to read a whole bunch of stuff that you're written, and the video will grab their attention really quickly." Nyana suggested students' attention might be related to the length of time students sit: "…those who have problems who have trouble sitting for a long period of time at the computer…or maybe their attention span being very short."

**overloaded and time management.**

Four different faculty reported challenges related to students being overloaded or challenges related to time management. Kevin said he learned of his students' challenges on the very first discussion board: "…their introduction post said hey, I like work 40 plus hours."

Nyana made a connection between students who are overloaded and student success: "The students that I find that are unsuccessful, these are students who have a lot going on….Students who are working, going to school, have families, those students seem not to be as successful." Kassandra and Sue both saw a connection between time management and motivation. Kassandra, discussing at-risk students, said that the students "have poor time management skills, and they are just not self-motivated." Sue saw a similar connection when describing at-risk students: "…students who are not motivated to be individual learners…don't have that time management aspect."

**reasons for taking online classes.**

Two faculty discussed the reasons students take online classes. Halle said that "many students take classes online because their schedule is such that they can't sit in a traditional classroom." Nyana discussed a particular student that presented learning and challenges for success: "I'm not sure how she even got introduced to do an online course with all of these issues. But it worked better for her schedule, instead of actually helping her to be successful."

**math and writing.**

Particular curricular challenges were reported by some of the faculty. Tramont reported that taking math courses is "already frustrating for some students anyway, who have math anxiety" later reporting that one student "was so afraid of mathematics, she would shake when she came into the room." Desiree discussed similar anxieties with writing: "…for those students who weren't really interested in writing all the time, it really worked well for them to do PowerPoints." Kevin, who taught dual-enrolled students, was unaware that his students were not writing on a physical desktop computer. "It kind of doubled their workload, so to speak."

**student agency.**

Despite the many challenges facing online students, faculty reported stories of resiliency and student agency. Four such instances were found in the transcripts. Kevin reported that students came forward at the beginning of the course, disclosing their challenges on the initial discussion board: "a lot of them, just outright, on the front end, when we're doing a discussion board post, said hey, I like work 40 plus hours….this is the only thing that works for my schedule….I acknowledged that it would be hard and difficult. So they kind of self-identified, I guess." Nyana, on the other hand, discussed what it was like when students did not self-report their challenges:

> A lot of times I don't know there is an issue until I see a student who has withdrawn from class. You know, that shows up in the Enrollment Tool, and I'll go back and call, because there's always a possibility that I can get the student back in class. And that's what I like to try to do…to work with the student.

> For Sue, who called on three students, reported that "there was embarrassment on their part, they felt like they had let me down." Finally, for Tramont, who saw the same students on his roster from one of his prior online courses, said the students told him why they withdrew: "some have indicated that they just got to a point where they couldn't handle it and they were true to themselves."

**Equity**

Faculty often discussed issues of equity, whether directly or indirectly. Tramont discussed the student perception of online coursework: "…some have the misconception that I if do online I won't have to do many things that are required for me in face to face." Another faculty member, Claire, discussed that faculty can reinforce this perception: "I think a lot of

people make mistakes online, where they have a lot of automatically graded stuff, and there's not a strong teacher presence in the course." Claire then discussed the importance of taking professional development through the MSVCC Academy, where these teaching practices are challenged and addressed.

Faculty interviewed hold the philosophy that it is important to create equitable experiences for their students. Sue, a new online instructor, said her primary goal the first time teaching online was to create an equitable experience, later saying that "…whatever my face to face students are going through, there's a good chance that someone in my online class is going through as well." Nyana reported that she is "always trying to make sure that there's not one student being left out in the learning process."

Halle and Tramont both discussed fair treatment of students in ways different from other faculty. Halle said, "we should accommodate them to help them reach their goals, if it's something we can do. It's not something that is unfair to the other students or gives an upper hand to a student." Sue suggested they begin the course at a level playing field: "I think it's entirely possible for students to succeed. Because they've met the criteria to get into the class, that's a gatekeeper right there." Tramont said something similar:

> …everyone has an opportunity to be successful in the class, and you work your way out of that. If you have a disability, I'm sensitive to that, but you still have to perform, and since I've had others that have had disabilities perform, I kind of look at, hey, you're here, I think you can do it, you're here because you think you can do it, and let's do what we can do and hopefully we'll end up being positive for you.

Kevin discussed how he learned to create equitable experiences through concepts learned in online professional development: "One of the big things was rubric building, and not just

building, but kind of, you know, building a rubric for a specific assignment and then attaching them to that assignment within that online platform." Kim agreed, saying that "Clearer assignments related to that content with rubrics were covered, and I learned a lot about objectives and outcomes and how to make it more clear to the students."

Despite this training, faculty expressed a concern about those who were vulnerable and facing challenges in online coursework. Kevin shared that at-risk online students were "…dual enrollment students, and that is students who are at the high school level but enrolled in college-level courses. And then students who work full-time and/or have families." Nyana explained the trade-off between scheduling and modality for athletes and students who are juggling families and work: "It works better for them, the schedule does, however, their focus level of actually having to do a lot of reading and completing assignments in a timely fashion seems to be a struggle for them."

Some faculty discussed their experiences with students and their accommodations as equitable in interesting and unexpected ways. Tramont talked about the performance of a student who had dyslexia: "The student did better than some of us that did not, do not have a disability." Kim, who recalled having a student with poor vision, said she had online professional development related to the topic of disability but wanted more: "…it seems like I might have had some professional development about that, but I don't remember anything about it. It was really brief." Finally, Claire told a story about an on-ground student and her anxiety that the rest of her class would acclimate:

> Sometimes I have them do very short readings in class, that we discuss that day. If they were reading silently, they weren't even bothered anymore by the reader, who was reading out loud to the student. So I was really happy with how the students reacted to

her disability. And she was accepted.

Claire, like Kim, wanted additional professional development to help those with disabilities. "I need a course on that, I need to know how to best handle that sort of thing. Because I know how important it is, and I need to be in compliance, and I don't know that I am, unless a student has a screen reader for the visuals."

## Summary of the Findings

**Discussion and Implications**

The conceptual model used for this research was the Direct Path model, discussed by Condon et al., 2016. This model frames professional development as a three-stage model, where faculty participate in professional development, learn, improve teaching, and finally, are witness to the student learning more or better. This relatively new model follows a recent call (2015) for additional study on professional development systems related to access, equity, and best practices. The identification of this model and this call for action led to my study on Mississippi's online professional development system, which has provided course credit and certification for over a thousand community college faculty since its inception in 2003.

Interviews were conducted with nine community college faculty at four community colleges. Colleges were chosen with an aim to represent the system in its diversity: colleges differed in setting (rural or urban) and region (southern, central, western, northern). Following interviews and transcript analysis, equity was revealed as the one of the most frequent and compelling themes identified.

Seven of the nine faculty interviewed discussed equity, whether directly or indirectly. Among these instances, faculty most often discussed the need to create equitable experiences for their online students. Faculty also revealed that other faculty and students perceive online classes

to be inferior to on-ground courses. One faculty member hinted that faculty reinforce this perception with an overreliance on automatically graded work. These teachers most often cited students with minimal computer skills, low attention, or poor communications ability as particular challenges to their success, with some faculty questioning their placement in online coursework. Finally, some faculty described their experiences with students and their accommodations as inspiring and as a driver to learn more to help them.

The theme of readers/reading appeared quite often during the interviews. Interview questions did not target reading as a topic, yet faculty discussed this often frequently during the interviews and at various stages of the interview. Faculty are making instructional changes to accommodate students who are poor readers, who have poor comprehension, or who find themselves unmotivated to read written materials, yet at least one teacher requires their students to read the syllabus closely before they can proceed through the course. Some faculty defined at-risk students as those who cannot or will not read.

**Research Questions**

In 2016, William Condon presented a model for professional development, the Direct Path model, as a model useful in higher education settings. The Direct Path model seek to illustrate the relationship, if any, between faculty development and student learning. The model asks three questions:

1. Do faculty learn as intended at a professional development workshop?
2. Do faculty translate this learning into their teaching?
3. Does the improved teaching lead to improved learning?
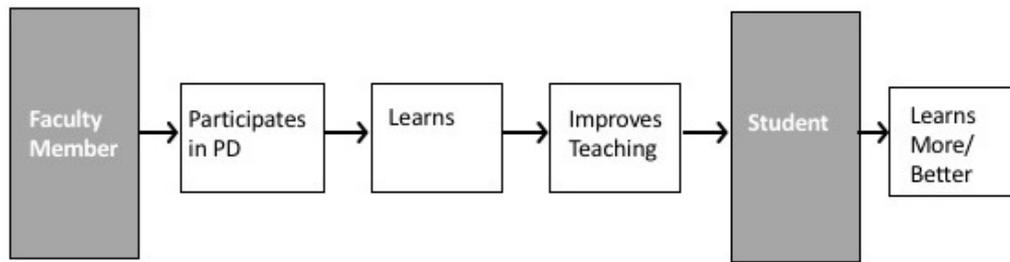
Figure 3. The direct path model. The Direct Path Model aims to understand the relationship between faculty development and student learning. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon, et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

All three questions were of interest and helped frame this study's research questions:

- For Mississippi community college faculty, what factors lead to (or hinder) the integration of concepts introduced in the MSVCC Academy Retention course into a course the faculty member teaches?

- For Mississippi community college faculty, what factors lead to (or hinder) the integration of concepts introduced in the MSVCC ADA Compliance course into a course the faculty member teaches?

Transcript analysis revealed that many conditions both led to (and hindered) faculty to integrate learned concepts into the online courses they teach. However, faculty discussed far more often those conditions which led to the integration of learned concepts than factors which hindered them. See Table 4.

Table 4

*Factors Impacting Integration of Concepts into Online Courses*

| Factors | Number of Unique Instances |
|---|---|
| Factor Leading to Integration – Procedural Knowledge | 20 |
| Factor Leading to Integration – Empathy | 7 |
| Factor Leading to Integration – Declarative Knowledge | 4 |
| Factor Leading to Integration – Teacher Adjusts from Taught PD Strategy | 2 |
| Factor Hindering Integration | 5 |

Table 4. Faculty most often expressed two kinds of knowledge gained from the online professional development—declarative knowledge or procedural knowledge.

**Factors Leading to Integration of Concepts**

Many different factors influenced faculty to implement concepts, theories, and instructional practice learned from online professional development into courses they teach. These various circumstances were identified and coded as "procedural knowledge," a signifier that faculty discussed a learned concept, theory, or practice in the context of integration into their online course. A complimentary code, "declarative knowledge" was developed, in order to distinguish where faculty discussed learning a concept, theory, or practice (as opposed to integrating it). Overall, 20 different instances of procedural knowledge were identified. These comments comprised an array of responses, from faculty discussing prior exposure to online learning theory, connections to theory and practice, to course organization, to the improvements that technology afforded.

**Factors Leading to Integration of Concepts – Procedural Knowledge**

Several faculty members discussed the connection between learned theory and their practice. Claire said that "making sure I'm present in the class, through my comments on their discussion boards, on feedback that I give, so yeah, I think through Dropout Detective and Teaching Effectively Online, they kind of both put in my head I need to have more of a physical presence online." Desiree had similar comments about the value in differentiated learning: "So all students don't want to write critical analysis of stories or poems or what have you. So for those students who weren't really interested in writing all the time, it really worked well for them to do PowerPoints." Kim articulated many different connections: "…it was just overall a good class for organization, content, outcomes, rubrics. I added rubrics to each assignment, made the grading clearer, like I said, made shorter videos. I think the class overall is completely different now." Nyana expressed similar comments: "Teaching Effectively Online has really shown me different ways to get my messages across to my students but in a more attractive way." One faculty member, Claire, expressed that the online professional development course reminded her of information already known, but that the reinforcement was important: "But what it did, of course reminded me to do and made me better at doing, is to check and see who is at risk, and then, I go to my gradebook and then email those who missed assignments."

Other faculty emphasized the improvements that technology afforded. Kevin and Kassandra both talked about video creation and integration. Kevin said, "you can make video lectures, which is what I did, and rather than just having the peer screen only, they could also see my face, see me as well." Kassandra said that "I'll do the actual video, not showing me, but actually showing them step by step and walking them through how to do it." For Nyana, who

took the Dropout Detective course, a connection between closed captioning and video creation was made: "I use a lot of videos in my class, and making sure that they were attached to YouTube so that we could do the closed captioned for them. So I have definitely have changed those things since I have taken that class."

Faculty who enrolled in Dropout Detective or the ADA Compliance course offered particular things they learned in those courses. Nyana discussed using a particular feature for identifying at-risk students in her course and attributed this know-how to what she learned about the Dropout Detective tool:

> In Dropout Detective, we are allowed to leave notes, by message. And when we are leaving a note or message for a student, you can also see a note or a message that another instructor may have left for this student regarding their attendance or missing assignments or their risk level. This allows me as an instructor to see if this is the only class the student is having problems in, or if I see some type of consistency amongst other courses the student is taking. It's very helpful to see what other instructors are doing or how they are handling the situation.

Sue, who discussed the ADA Compliance course, talked about how she learned to add additional information to photos posted in her course to make them accessible:

> Well, again this is my first semester to teach online classes, so I can tell you that the way the shell and everything is set up in Canvas, it almost requires you to make sure everything is ADA compliant. There's an ADA compliance checker on your screen, as you're turning stuff in, when you post a picture, you have to include the text, say what's going on in the picture, so that someone who is having visual issues can have it read to them instead of seeing the picture.

For Claire and Kassandra, information gleaned from the courses expanded outside the walls of their own teaching practice. Claire integrated what she learned into her teaching practices for an on-ground course for university students:

> And I'm thankful for my students at [a Mississippi University] because they are, you know, affirming all of this, and it makes me say, yes, I need to continue doing this with my [Mississippi Community College] students as well, because if these professionals say, Oh my gosh, thank you, because I was worried and other instructors often don't get back to me. You know, they're professionals, they've got a job. When you're talking about an 18 year old who is probably at risk anyway because they're at a community college, it becomes even more important to get back to them as quickly as possible. [brackets mine]

Kassandra discussed the value of the course into what she shared with others at her community college: "we do have disability staff that they may see it from the student side, so if they understand what resources are available, they're able to help the students."

**Factors Leading to Integration of Concepts – Declarative Knowledge**

Faculty also discussed the value of online professional development in ways not connected to their own particular practice or implementation. These moments were coded as "declarative knowledge." There were few such instances found throughout the interviews, particularly when compared to "procedural knowledge," and it may suggest the value of the designed courses to help faculty actualize and practice integrating concepts, theories, and strategies as opposed to merely making suggestions for change. For example, Kim expressed connecting new concepts to ways she might present her course to students:

> I actually learned a lot in that class, finally, after many hours of professional development, that one helped me related to my course content more than other sessions

have. I learned about a good way to organize the class and present the content to the

students.

Sue expressed finding similar value in a designing assignments in a synchronous manner:

One of the things we talked about was how to use simultaneous work so that we're not

doing things, like I'm not posting, and they're posting, then I'm posting, and they're

posting. I'm going to be able to communicate at the same time.

During the interview, Sue also indicated that the Dropout Detective course provided real value

about students and their likelihood to withdraw: "it tells whether students are more at risk of

dropping out or not." Kevin, who completed the Teaching Effectively Online course, stressed the

value of learning about rubrics and assignments: "One of the big things was rubric building, and

not just building, but kind of, you know, building a rubric for a specific assignment and then

attaching them to that assignment within that online platform."

**Factors Leading to Integration of Concepts – Empathy**

An additional factor leading faculty to succeed in teaching online is their ability to

empathize. For Nyana, the ability to see persons with disability in a different light was

attributable to the ADA Compliance professional development course:

It gave me the opportunity to look at online learning from the perspective of students who

are not your traditional learning students. These students are dealing with different issues,

and we have to make sure that we accommodate them, whether they are deaf, mute, or

maybe they are blind. Even those who have problems who have trouble sitting for a long

period of time at the computer, starting at that, or maybe their attention span being very

short. So I learned a lot about that.

Tramont indicated that the online professional development made him feel connected to his peers, which in turn would empower him to help his students:

I was not in a cocoon by myself…learning is more than just me. I needed to draw on some other strengths from other sources that I did not possess myself, and opening my eyes to what could help someone else." Kassandra said that "it's a learning experience for everyone. You learn to be more like your students and you ask questions and you communicate better.

Claire discussed the importance of providing pertinent and immediate feedback, and although this practice was impressed upon her when she was a college student, it continues to inform the way she views her role: "I remember being a student and the teacher not responding, and you're in a panic, and so I always said I was never going to do that to a student, that I would check my email all the time to make sure I'm getting back to them."

**Factors Hindering Integration of Concepts**

Faculty discussed obstacles that prevent them from integrating learned concepts, theories, or instructional practices into online courses they teach. Tramont discussed wanting to use synchronous video technology to connect with his students in one place at one time the same time but expressed that getting all students together at one time was challenging. "Time is a problem," he said. Other faculty indicated an unawareness of whether their changes to their online courses were impacting students positively. Kim said, "As far as the unorganized kids, maybe my organization has helped them, but I don't really know." She also talked about information she shared with students regarding the Canvas notification system, a system built to send messages immediately to students' phones, a system intended to improve speed of communication over traditional email systems: "I did post something in there about how they

66

need to set up their notifications in Canvas, but I don't know if they are doing it or not." Finally, Claire discussed a challenge of perception that teachers face, the perception expressed by her university students that faculty are not reading what students turn in. "Students have intimated that to me before, that, you know, Wow, you're actually reading this stuff, and I'm like, Yeah, I read it."

**Faculty Experience with Student Accommodations**

Faculty interviewed had a varying level of experience working with student accommodations; four of nine faculty reported having had an online or on-ground student with an accommodation. One faculty member reported a low-vision or blind student, another reported a blind student, a deaf student, and a student with dyslexia. Faculty also reported instances of students who had no physical disability but a cognitive challenge in reading, comprehension, or writing time, and they reported that these students were provided additional time to complete coursework. No instance of an online student was reported who held a hearing, vision, or speaking disability. The four instances of faculty reporting student accommodations were all of experiences in the face-to-face classroom.

**Implications for the Direct Path Model of Professional Development**

Findings support the value of the Direct Path model for understanding the impact of professional development on faculty. The model investigates the connection between newfound knowledge and faculty implementation. Interview questions were thoughtfully and deliberately constructed in order to address the stages of the Direct Path model. As a result, interviewees revealed what they find valuable in online professional development, in addition to implementation of new practices, theories, and concepts into online courses they teach.

Implications for new insights into the connections between the Direct Path and Context Path may be the most compelling findings from this study for those in the field of faculty development. It was discovered, in three separate interviews, that faculty are applying what they have learned from formal professional development into new (indirect) situations of practice. One faculty member reported an increased number of conversations with face-to-face students at a different university about the value of feedback. Another reported the reason for participation was to improve her on-ground classes. A third faculty member reported enrollment in the online course in order to support their institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). This reflects accountability to other, indirect partners, not the traditional student-faculty partner model.

Scholars and practitioners working in faculty development may therefore find an additional foci of study: a model which emphasizes entities indirectly benefitting from faculty who participated in professional development. This model is shown below and includes three distinct groups benefitting from prior professional development: students (part of the original Direct Path and Context Path models) and two new benefactors: a) Other Didactic Settings and b) Institutions. See Figure 4.
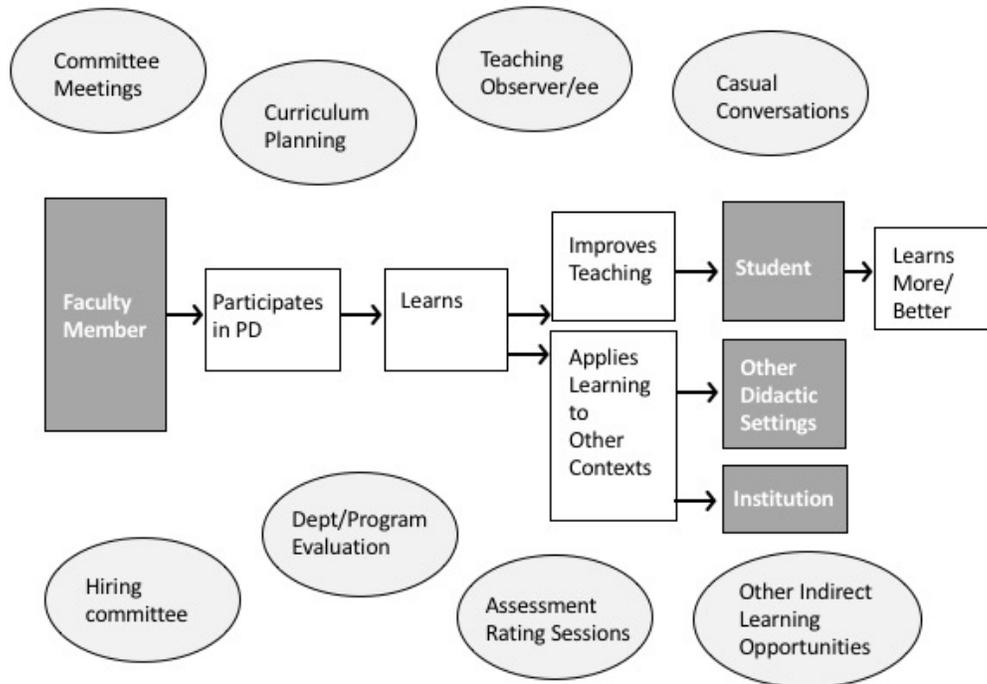
Figure 4. The multiple paths model. The Multiple Paths model illustrates that students, other didactic settings, and institutions benefit from prior professional development. Adapted from the original Context Path Model, published in *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon, et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

Analysis of nine faculty interviews reveal particular challenges facing online students today. Faculty reported, at various places in their interviews, the challenges that reading presents for their students—in comprehending assignments, in staying on pace, and in understanding instructions prior to submitting assignments. Faculty also discussed challenges students face in developing work—mentioning students' growing tendency to develop compositions on their phones, not on computers.

Future practice and policy should consider how faculty can be supported to improve clarity of written communication. The use of the University of Virginia's newly developed Assignment Rubric, a free and open-source tool, helps external parties review faculty written assignments for purpose, task, criteria/assessment, and additional learning-focused qualities. Such tools could be useful for future courses offered by the Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy. Additional online professional development could be developed by an instructional design committee, and could consider strong reading resource books and study skills texts targeted to those working in faculty development, such as *Handbook of College Reading and Study Strategy Research* (2009), *Teach Students How to Learn*, by Sandra McGuire, or *The New Science of Learning: How to Learn in Harmony with your Brain*, by former faculty developer Terry Doyle. Finally, a lexile tool could be identified and provided to instructors, in order to ensure that faculty are writing to the comprehension level of the students they teach.

Faculty reported not feeling confident in their knowledge of creating instructional materials that address students of disability. Additional modules could be developed with an emphasis on a research design using the Direct Path model. This would allow researchers to determine the extent that faculty are seeing a connection between their instructional practice and student learning. A self-report or pre-test/post-test measure could be utilized by faculty, and involvement with students would likely increase faculty empathy. This could lead to additional success in accessibility compliance, given that faculty demonstrated throughout the interviews that empathy is a guiding principle in how they view and treat students.

Finally, new hiring instruments could be developed by hiring managers within the community college system. It became clear throughout the interviews that faculty openness and

flexibility are major contributors to student success in online courses. Several faculty discussed

being closed-minded, only to later express surprise at their own change, all in order to meet the

needs of students. A hiring instrument such as the performance evaluation metric developed by

this author could be considered (Pollard, 2018).

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LIST OF APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A: SPECIAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

## Special Terms and Abbreviations

**Context Path Model of Faculty Development –** A multi-faceted model explaining the faculty development process. Emphasizes characteristics of indirect faculty development, such as committee meetings, curriculum planning and casual conversations, in addition to direct faculty development opportunities such as workshops.  Contrast with **Direct Path Model of Faculty Development**.

**Declarative Knowledge –** A code assigned to transcript narrative to indicate where faculty discussed a learned concept, theory, or practice, but without the context of integration into their online course.

**Direct Path Model of Faculty Development –** A three-stage model explaining the faculty development process. Phase 1 represents faculty participation, Phase 2 improved faculty teaching, and Phase 3 improved student learning. Contrast with **Context Path Model of Faculty Development**.

**Duplicated Headcount** – Total class count. Contrast with **unduplicated headcount**.

**IHL** – The Institutions of Higher Learning. The governing entity of the Mississippi public university system.

**MCCB** – The Mississippi Community College Board. The coordinating board of the Mississippi community college system.

**MSVCC** – The Mississippi Virtual Community College, a consortium arrangement and agreement between the 15 community colleges of Mississippi, whereby students can enroll in a course offered by a remote college.

**MSVCC Academy** – The online professional development system managed by the Mississippi Community College Board, in cooperation with the 15 Mississippi community colleges. Founded in 2003.

**MSVCC Academy Course - ADA Compliance –** A course and webinar offered by the MSVCC Academy. Faculty completing the course should be able to "explain what ADA Compliance is in relation to online courses, identify ways to ensure their course is ADA Compliant, and edit and utilize the ADA compliance checklist for their online course," according to the course description.

**MSVCC Academy Course - Dropout Detective** – A course and webinar offered by the MSVCC Academy. Faculty completing the course should be able to "identify at risk students in an online course using the Dropout Detective Risk Index Dashboard, and analyze the success of retention efforts based on the Dropout Detective Risk Index history," according to the course description.

**MSVCC Academy Course - Teaching Effectively Online I and II –** Two courses offered by the MSVCC Academy. Faculty completing these sequenced courses should be able to "identify and create sound and measurable module/unit level objectives, explore learning styles and instructional strategies in the online learning environment, align course activities and assessments to module/unit level objectives, create rubrics and outcomes using Canvas, recognize the characteristics of an effective online instructor, and explore the various external tools used to facilitate teaching and learning," according to the course description.

**Online course** – A course offered for academic credit delivered through the Internet and a Learning Management System utilized by the enrolling college.

**Procedural Knowledge** – A code assigned to transcript narrative to indicate where faculty discussed a learned concept, theory, or practice in the context of integration into their online course.

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges** – The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states.

**Teacher Presence** – the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

**QEP** – Quality Enhancement Plan. A document developed by the institution that, according to The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), accomplishes the following: (1) includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement.

**Unduplicated Headcount** – The actual number of students enrolled during a particular term. Contrast with **duplicated headcount**.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions
*Investigation of Faculty Teaching Behaviors Impacting Student Success*
Terry Pollard, Dissertation Researcher


1. Let's begin by talking about professional development opportunities you've participated in.
   a. What kinds of PD have you participated in during the last few years related to teaching and using technology?
      i. PROBE: Describe some things you learned in the PD course you described.
      ii. PROBE: (if they only discussed one course): Can you tell me about other PD courses you took within the last few years?
   b. What motivated you to take these PD courses?
2. Now I'd like to talk about an online course you have taught, one where you've tried to implement some things you learned in the PD course.
   a. What did you seek to implement?
   b. How did that go?
      i. PROBE: And you learned about this concept from the online PD you took earlier?
3. Now I'd like to talk about something more specific.
   a. Tell me about your use of documents (Word, PDF, etc.) or PowerPoints in your online class. How do you use them?
      i. PROBE: Tell me about any changes you might have made to these materials to make them accessibility compliant for students.
      ii. Have you had a student who was low-vision, color blind, deaf, mute, or otherwise had an accommodation?
         1. Follow-up: What was that like for you? For the student?
4. Let's talk about online courses in general. At your college, what students are at risk of unsuccessfully completing an online course?
   a. PROBE: How do you know?
   b. Who is at an at-risk student in the online course you teach?
      i. PROBE: If you have identified an at-risk student in the course, how did you respond to them?
         1. Follow-up: What happened next?
   c. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings changed about at-risk students since this course finished?
   d. Do you know if these at-risk students are succeeding in other courses after your class concluded?
5. We are getting close to the end of our time together. Just a few more questions.
   a. What do you think are the most successful ways to teach and manage an online class?
   b. After having these experiences, what advice would you give to someone who has just become a faculty member teaching online classes?
   c. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES AND MSVCC DATA

Table C1

*Participant Profiles*

| Pseudonym | MSVCC Academy Professional Development Course(s) Completed | Years of Experience with Online Teaching |
|---|---|---|
| Halle | Dropout Detective | 9-10 years |
| Sue | Teaching Effectively Online I, Teaching Effectively Online II | 0-1 year |
| Claire | Teaching Effectively Online I, Teaching Effectively Online II, Dropout Detective | 9-10 years |
| Kim | Teaching Effectively Online I | 9-10 years |
| Tramont | ADA Compliance | 10 years or more |
| Kevin | Teaching Effectively Online II | 0-1 year |
| Nyana | Teaching Effectively Online II, ADA Compliance | 10 years or more |
| Kassandra | ADA Compliance | 10 years or more |
| Desiree | Teaching Effectively Online II | 9-10 years |

Table C1. Faculty interviewed for this study, the MSVCC Academy courses they completed and years' experience teaching in an online modality.

Table C2

*MSVCC Academy Courses and Descriptions*

| Course Name | MSVCC Academy Professional Development Course Descriptions |
| --- | --- |
| ADA Compliance | This synchronous webinar will review quick and easy ways to ensure your course is ADA compliant. This session will include Canvas features to assist with ADA compliance. |
| Dropout Detective | This synchronous webinar will provide an introduction to Dropout Detective. Dropout Detective is a tool that allows instructors to view a list of students on their roster who are at risk of dropping or failing a course. The risk levels are determined by the students' performance in their courses. This training session will provide an overview of the risk index information and how to use it to help students be more successful. |
| Teaching Effectively Online I | The TEO: Canvas Basics course is designed to prepare instructors to utilize the tools in Canvas to create and manage course materials. The course is divided into 5 modules and completion time is estimated 5-weeks. |
| Teaching Effectively Online II | The TEO: Designing & Teaching course is designed to teach instructors how to create sound objectives and outcomes, and how to align them to assessments using Canvas Rubrics and Outcomes. This course will teach best practices, learning |

| | styles, engagement strategies, and pedagogy for facilitating online instruction. You will also learn about some external and research-based tools that you can use for teaching online. The course is divided into 5 modules and completion time is estimated 5-weeks. |
| --- | --- |

Table C2. MSVCC Academy Professional Development Courses taken by faculty and a description of each course.

MANUSCRIPT THREE: IMPLEMENTATION AND

DISSEMINATION PLAN MANUSCRIPT

**CHAPTER 3**

**Summary of the Problem of Practice**

Faculty teaching within the two-year Mississippi community college system come from diverse backgrounds and professional careers. Some begin teaching in the community college directly after master's level coursework, as young adults, whereas others discover their passion for teaching in their mid- or late- career. These differences necessarily mean that faculty enter the profession with various life and work experiences, differences that in turn shape teaching philosophies and the instructional methods they utilize. Distinct and different, too, is each Mississippi community college, located in different districts across the state, supported mostly by local tax dollars which vary widely depending on the local tax base. As a result, resources can vary greatly for hiring staff to support students. The Mississippi Community College Board, and by extension, its Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy, works within these constraints, supporting and equalizing resources and support to colleges across the system. Its online professional development system, established in 2003, has become a regional model for supporting faculty across 15 community colleges.

The mission of the state's coordinating board is to "advance the community college system through coordination, support, leadership, and advocacy," yet insight into the impact of one of its most successful outreach systems, the Mississippi Virtual Community College

Academy, has not been sufficiently researched. Researchers have not yet fully understood the efficacy of professional development systems within higher education, particularly as it relates to equity, access, and social justice, according to Alicia Dowd, author of *Engaging the Race Question: Accountability and Equity in U.S. Higher Education* (2015). To what degree are community college faculty implementing learned content, strategies, and practices they learn about in the MSVCC Academy for courses they teach, particularly professional development that address issues of student equity?

**Literature Reviewed**

The Direct Path model and Context Path model were utilized to investigate the impact of professional development courses offered through the Mississippi Virtual Community College on issues of equity and access. The models, shown below, illustrate that faculty change can be traced to professional development activity (Direct Path) as well as by external factors (Context Path).



Figure 1. The direct path model. The Direct Path model aims to understand the relationship between faculty development and student learning. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.
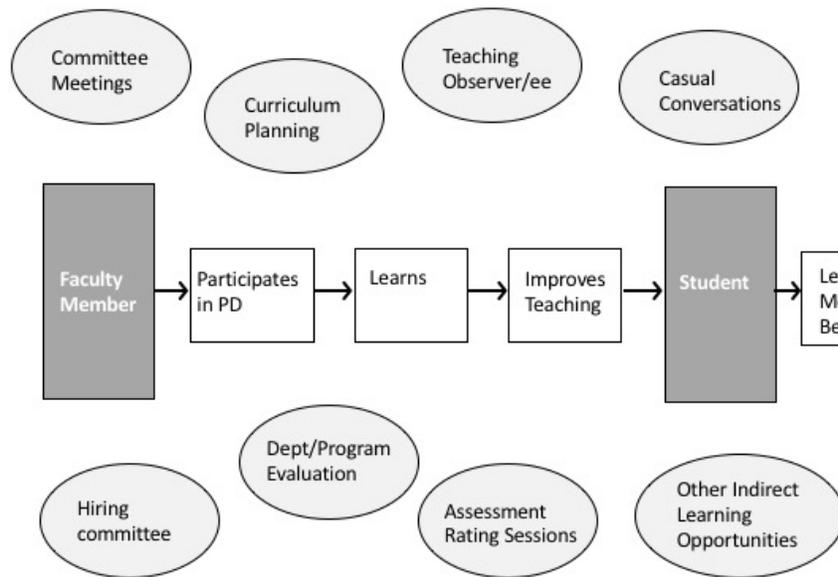
Figure 2. The context path model. The Context Path model is more complex, analyzing direct and indirect data. From *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon, et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

These frameworks were used to explore the problem of practice. Nonetheless, close study of the first three stages of the Direct Path model—Participates, Learns, Improves Teaching—provided sufficient guidance for interview questions to be developed to discern the connection between knowledge gained, implementation, and improvement of teaching. These interview questions are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1

*Alignment between Model Used and Questions Developed for Faculty Interviews*

| Stage in the Direct Path Model | Interview Question Developed and Utilized |
|---|---|
| Participates | What kinds of PD have you participated in during the last few years related to teaching and using technology? |
| Learns | Describe some things you learned in the PD course you described. |
| Improves Teaching | Now I'd like to talk about an online course you have taught, one where you've tried to implement some things you learned in the PD course. What did you seek to implement? How did that go? And you learned about this concept from the online PD you took earlier? |

Table 1. Condon et al posit that faculty learn and implement new practices based upon a sequential model of participation, learning, and implementation. These stages are listed in column 1. Column 2 indicates the questions developed by the researcher for use in faculty interviews.

**Evolution of Conceptual Framework**

The Direct Path model and Context Path model for faculty development should be further refined due to the findings of this research. Faculty in three separate interviews shared that they are applying what they have learned from formal professional development into new (indirect)

situations of practice. These new situations of practice lead to indirect benefits of learned

professional development which has implications for funding and resource allocation. It is

suggested that a Multiple Paths model be utilized, along with new research methods for

interviewing, such as a blend of asynchronous and synchronous interviewing. A mixed model of

interviewing would enable the researcher to benefit from the planning that structured question

writing provides, in addition to the flexibility needed to explore additional directions of interest

that arise from the initial set of responses. See Figure 3 below.
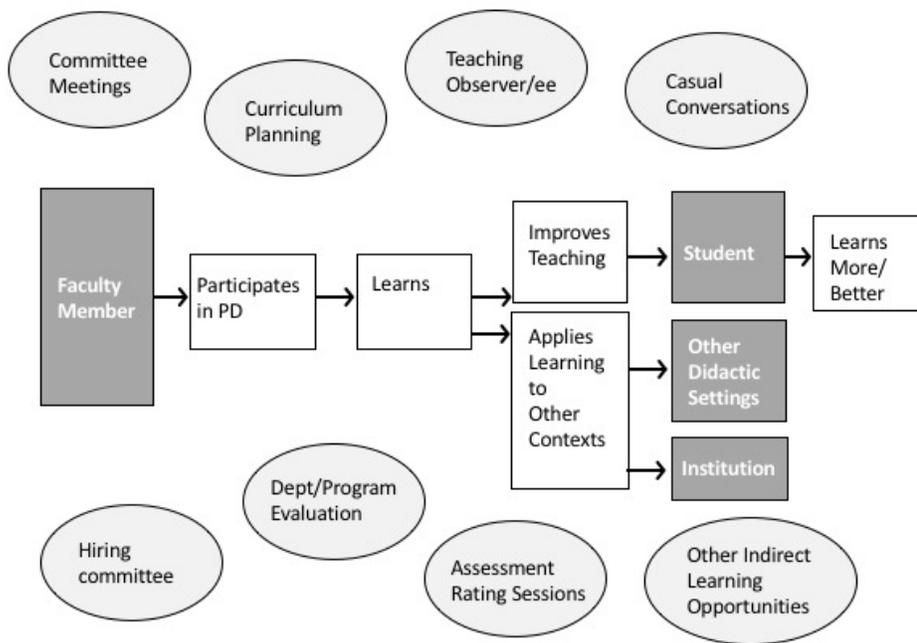


Figure 3. The multiple paths model. The multiple paths model illustrates that

students, other didactic settings, and institutions benefit from prior professional

development. Adapted from the original Context Path Model, published in *Faculty*

*Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon, et al.,

2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana

University Press. Reprinted with permission.

**Data Used in Inquiry**

Seven women and two men participated in interviews with the researcher, producing a total of 27,217 words, an average of 3,024 words per interviewee. Interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 30 minutes per faculty member. All interviews provided rich and substantive data, although faculty experience, elaboration, and depth of response varied from interviewee to interviewee. Johnny Saldaña's (2016) The *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* was referenced during the middle stage of the interviewing sessions, an ideal time to consider the intersection of codes, themes, categories, and the data being shared by interviewees. The guidance offered by that text was instrumental in understanding the coding and recoding process.

Following interviews and a member checking procedure, all transcripts were coded by hand. The nVivo software program was installed and codes were assigned to various text snippets. The software program allowed for deep insight into particular themes, facilitated the text searching process, and organized what would have otherwise been a challenging process of analysis.

## Summary of the Findings

The two most compelling findings from the study involve issues of equity broadly affecting the quality of online instruction and issues of reading as the primary challenge impacting students. Nearly all faculty interviewed  (seven of nine) discussed (either directly or indirectly) issues of equity; five faculty talked about challenges they see in their students related to their ability or willingness to read and comprehend instructions, assigned readings, or instructions and procedures posted in the learning management system.

Most often, conversations of equity centered around faculty awareness that their online classes should be equal to the quality of their face-to-face counterparts, particularly when it comes to the manner and frequency with which they communicate with students. Faculty are also aware that perceptions exist among the general population that online classes are viewed as inferior to face-to-face classes. They cited this perception as the reason that some students are at-risk of failing; they are enrolled not because online classes are considered of equal quality to face-to-face classes but because online classes fit students' schedules.

Yet, at the same time, faculty revealed through the interviews that their empathy, care, and understanding for their students provides motivation for them to succeed as online faculty, and it is this empathy and care that could bring about a sea change in how online programs are developed, marketed, and ultimately, offered. Most often, faculty empathy was illustrated through methods the teachers employed to communicate with their students—to remind students of a deadline, to re-clarify the intention of an assignment or how to complete work. The care that faculty exemplified—coupled with the many challenges for student success identified in the interviews—suggests that new modalities for offering college credit should be explored. For example, a pilot course, offered synchronously during a set day and time each week, could still

help to broaden access while addressing student schedule challenges head-on related to student reading and teacher presence. To support the traditional asynchronous online faculty, new professional development courses emphasizing strategies for supporting challenged student readers can be developed and offered.

**Research Questions**

The focus of this research was to identify and understand the conditions leading to, and hindering, faculty to implement prior learned concepts, theories, and practices from MSVCC Academy course participation into the online courses they later teach. Analysis of faculty interviews reveals that many characteristics lead to their implementation of learned material, such as procedural knowledge (20 instances), empathy (7), declarative knowledge (4), and circumstances that hindered integration of learned material (5).

Other research on online learning at the community college level is yielding similar findings and calls for reconsiderations of what online courses should be. In 2014, Theresa Capra, a community college faculty member, experienced online instructor, and published researcher on online program efficacy, frames the challenge of quality online instruction as one not living up to the original promise for broadening access. She now argues that "I have come to believe that it's not the renaissance of learning so frequently extolled, at least for most undergraduates. It's becoming clear that we need to rethink Internet courses across the board." Four years later, a research study interviewing online community college faculty in California found that students "may face equity challenges that are amplified online." It is becoming increasingly clear that the decades-old narrative that online courses bring greater access to the student masses has created unfulfilled expectations for faculty and at-risk students in particular. Practical solutions that are mindful of what is best, virtuous, and commendable in the existing system can bring about

changes to elevate the quality of online courses and programs.

## Improving Practice to Enhance Equity, Ethics and Social Justice

### Policy and Practice Recommendations

The Mississippi Community College Board, which oversees and coordinates activity within the Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy, should consider several policy and practice initiatives in order to meet the changing needs of the faculty it supports.

### Recommendation 1: Reconsider the MSVCC Academy Vision

Faculty revealed many different motivations throughout the interviews. Chief among them is the desire to empathize, care for, help, understand, and empower the online student. This philosophy of care was a compelling finding, one that should be considered as a guiding principle or vision for the MSVCC Academy. Community colleges should see an opportunity to identify and share faculty stories about student perseverance and faculty care when communicating with their prospective students, in forms such as newsletters, websites and advertising. Sharing stories of student success and faculty care will foster a stronger culture of equity in the communities served, and enable colleges to shift away from marketing messages focused on convenience.

### Recommendation 2: Capitalize on the Best Traits of Online Instructors

Given the research findings that faculty openness and flexibility were instrumental in faculty success, colleges should consider how to instill these virtues into faculty that currently teach for them, in addition to thinking about how to hire faculty with these soft skills. An instrument such as the Emotional Intelligence Quiz from The Institute for Health and Human Potential could be utilized by distance learning departments and hiring managers in order to impress upon hires the importance of these character traits. This particular quiz is free and includes 17 questions. Other emotional intelligence assessments could also be reviewed; the

Harvard Extension School website maintains a list of three additional instruments with a description and link to each. For colleges hiring instructors who are hiring full-time online instructors, a more robust process might be used, such as a variation on the performance instrument developed by this researcher for use by hiring committees (Pollard, 2018). Following minor adjustments to the instrument, the hiring committee could interpret faculty soft skills and the associated challenges with being an online teacher.

**Recommendation 3: Consider Additional MSVCC Academy Courses and Models**

Given the value faculty shared about the MSVCC Academy and its impact on their teaching practice, college distance learning staff should also review their requirements for faculty teaching online. The courses ADA Compliance, Teaching Effectively Online, and Dropout Detective were all discussed in positive and affirming ways. Community colleges and the Community College Board may also consider additional courses and assessment methods to address particular challenges expressed in the interviews, such as faculty anxiety over accessibility compliance and forgetfulness about important processes. Perhaps a course model using a one-year check-in would be appropriate, or the development of a course or module that is offered in two parts (12 months apart) to reinforce prior taught material and to share prior teaching implementations. Additional development on courses related to accessibility, universal design, and compliance might focus on student stories occurring within the colleges. A model developed by other institutions could be identified and followed, such as San Francisco State University's Center for Teaching and Learning. This center developed multiple workshops, resources, and faculty guides, and many of their materials are open-source, making them available for other state systems and colleges. This method may be particularly effective, as interviewed online faculty in this study revealed the importance of empathy in their professional

roles. Students with disability may even be asked to facilitate the courses, which could bring about hands-on practice in a live setting.

**Recommendation 4: Prioritize Efforts Towards Improving Student Reading and Reading Strategies**

One of the most surprising findings of this study was faculty expression of student challenges related to reading and comprehension. Faculty were not prompted to discuss reading during the interview, yet reading challenges were initiated and discussed by faculty twice as often as any other student challenge identified through transcript analysis. Moreover, faculty talked about challenges related to reading throughout the interview—at the beginning, at the middle, and towards the end. Given this finding, additional research was conducted to understand modern challenges of reading and writing in colleges. A brief history of reading in the university setting is provided below, in addition to scholar-practitioner context, followed by a recommendation to develop an online professional development course with multiple modules.

**history and context.**

Normal Stahl and Sonya Armstrong, two education scholars with a research emphasis on college reading, provide a history of reading pedagogy in higher education in their article *Re-claiming, Re-Inventing, and Re-Reforming a Field: The Future of College Reading* (2018). According to Stahl and Armstrong, the first dedicated reading program was created in 1915 at Harvard and the first research investigation in 1894. Despite progress in the 1980s and 1990s, the authors contend, our standards are now at a low point:

> …reading is not necessarily expected of nor practiced by many community
>
> college students in the community colleges to the degree of established beliefs
>
> and historical myths might suggest. Research suggests that as a response, faculty

members have adopted a culture of work-arounds that deliver content while

avoiding their responsibility to promote, integrate, and instruct either content

reading techniques or disciplinary literacy practices in their respective classes.

Stahl and Armstrong cite many additional factors contributing to the issue: reading has

never been fully recognized as its own academic field, yet is typically "owned" by those in

composition, mathematics, and reading; reading and literacy is addressed by faculty with

different academic training and approaches; scholarship has waned as national associations

involved in reading and literacy are focused on K-12 literacy, and others. Indeed, the need to

develop strategies to assist all community college faculty with their students' reading is clear;

Nist and Simpson (2000) point out that "nearly 85% of all learning in college involves reading."

Fortunately, the authors call for a "re-claiming" and "reframing" of reading in the

postsecondary level, arguing for a shift whereby college reading experts move into a field of

professional practice supporting other faculty, out of their traditional focus as faculty developing

student skills in their own classes. These reading specialists, they contend, are best suited for the

task, particularly if they collaborate with study specialists to contextualize differences in reading

and study strategy based upon academic discipline. Stahl and Armstrong see professional

development as the system to centralize this effort: "…if formal academic programs do not exist

specific to college reading, the need for in-depth professional development must become an

option."

Given the value proposition of the MSVCC Academy (free and open online courses, to

all faculty in the community college system) it seems fitting to consider online professional

development as one way to answer this call. Online professional development courses offered to

community college faculty in the state of Mississippi regularly involves cross-college

collaboration between instructional designers, subject matter experts, educational technologists, and professional development specialists. A process is in place to ideate, brainstorm, design, develop, implement, and evaluate online professional development courses. Subject matter experts—in this case, reading, rhetoric, and composition specialists—can be brought into a course development team in order to develop materials that fit within existing courses, to develop new modules placed in various courses, or in stand-alone courses that faculty at all colleges can benefit from.

**Proposed MSVCC Course: Improving Student Reading**

Most college courses require students to master general and specialized terms related to the field of study. As a student's vocabulary development is a building block necessary to develop more sophisticated language skills, special emphasis could be placed upon each stage of vocabulary development and delivery and assessment technologies that support (or hinder) these processes from taking place. The modules in the course might be presented to faculty in a scaffolded manner that mimics the sequence of cognitive development they desire to see in their online students, as shown in the tables below. Column 1 lists the module name, whereas Column 2 lists topics and progression.

Table 2

*A Proposed MSVCC Module Focused on Improving Student Vocabulary Development*

| Module Name | Topics and Progression |
| --- | --- |
| Vocabulary Development | <ul><li>The stages of vocabulary processing:<ul><li>Associative processing</li><li>Comprehension processing</li><li>Generative processing</li></ul></li><li>Identifying faculty philosophy about student word development (Baumann et al., 2003; Joshi, 2005)</li><li>Matching faculty philosophy to a chosen assessment method</li><li>Assignment:</li></ul>Vocabulary Lesson Redesign—Faculty Philosophy, Assessmen Technology |

Table 3

*A Proposed MSVCC Module Focused on Improving Students' Use of Dictionaries*

| Module Name | Topics and Progression |
| --- | --- |
| Thinking through the Dictionary | <ul><li>Introduction:<ul><li>Faculty's first response: "Look it Up"</li></ul></li><li>Discussion</li><li>Option 1: Faculty review several dictionaries previously used/available for students and reevaluate their efficacy, based upon published criteria for comprehending dictionaries (McKeown, 1993; Nist & Olejnik, 1995)</li></ul> |

| | • Option 2: Faculty design an assignment for students to elaborate upon course terms, creating a "context dictionary" (the terms paraphrased in student words) |
|---|---|

Table 4

*A Proposed MSVCC Module Focused on Improving Students' Comprehension Development*

| Module Name | Topics and Progression |
|---|---|
| Comprehension Development | • Introduction:<br>   o The Benefits of Elaborate Matrix Displays to Enhance Student Comprehension (p. 107-8)<br>   o The Node Acquisition Technique (Diekhoff, Brown, & Dansereau, 1982)<br>   o The Vocabulary Overview Guide (Carr and Mazur-Stewart, 1988)<br>• Assignment: Design a lesson using<br>   o Node Acquisition and Integration Technique<br>   o Vocabulary Overview Guide<br>   o Other method |

Table 5

*A Proposed MSVCC Module Focused on Improving Students' Organizing Strategies*

| Module Name | Topics and Progression |
|---|---|
| Organizing Strategies | • Graphic organizers<br>• Previewing the Reading<br>• Isolating key information<br>• Underlining and highlighting<br>• Questioning |

- Annotation
- Elaborating:
  - Elaborative interrogation
  - Elaborative verbal rehearsal

Table 6

*A Proposed MSVCC Module Focused on Improving Students' Study-Reading Strategies*

| Module Name | Topics and Progression |
| --- | --- |
| Strategic Study-Reading | <ul><li>Planning What You'll Say:<ul><li>Encouraging Student Experimentation</li><li>The Forethought Phase—Clarifying Students' Tasks, Helping Students Set Goals and Strategy</li><li>As They Read Phase—Monitor One's Progress, Use Appropriate Strategies, Use Fix-Up Strategies when Needed</li><li>Reflection Phase—Students Reflect on Success of Strategies; Plan for Effortful Learning in the Future</li></ul></li></ul> |

Table 7

*A Proposed MSVCC Module Focused on Improving Faculty's Comprehension of Lexile Level and Content Readability*

| Module Name | Topics and Progression |
| --- | --- |
| Analyzing Faculty Writing | <ul><li>Introduction:<ul><li>What is faculty-to-student communication? (written communication and lexile level;</li></ul></li></ul> |

email communication,

instructional/procedural content)

- Readability index tool— https://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp
- Other readability tools: https://www.webpagefx.com/tools/read-able/
- Literacy/Reading Software to help students http://ra.fulltiltahead.com

## Gaining Stakeholder Involvement

In order to gain support for these efforts, meetings will be requested with the Mississippi Community College Board and committees supporting the Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy. Findings from this study can be distilled and shared with hopes that progress may be taken on the recommendations from this study. Consultations with chief academic officers, deans, and eLearning staff at the community colleges may also be fruitful. Perhaps modules and courses developed can be offered to a larger regional or national audience through publishing modules directly on open educational resource websites such as OER Commons or through direct collaboration with other state entities similar in mission to the Mississippi Community College Board. This could create a mutual partnership between state agencies, which could strengthen networking opportunities, practices, and operational guidelines.

## Personal and Professional Identity

For this researcher, doctoral coursework and dissertation work has instilled a stronger sense of respect for how knowledge is gained and shared among scholar-practitioners. Much effort was expended along the way but much was gained. During the dissertation phase, interviews brought about a richer, more robust understanding of the challenges and successes

facing community college faculty today. Interviews also imparted a newfound respect for the

research method itself. It is doubtful that a quantitative measurement, such as a faculty survey,

would have provided such rich and deep understanding.

The researcher shifted between two workplace settings across two states while enrolled in

this program, from a Research 1 level institution to a mid-level regional comprehensive with

roots as a teachers' college. This diversity of experiences—along with the experience and

doctoral work—is bringing new opportunities for understanding faculty challenges, for empathy,

and for relationship-building. Since the professional move, greater involvement nationally and

internationally has taken place. Professional involvement in national and international

organizations, such as the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher

Education (POD), and the International Conference for Educational Development (ICED), has

brought about meaningful opportunities to network with, and grow along with, those supporting

faculty development across the globe. A panel discussion, led by the researcher, took place in

Atlanta, Georgia, in June of 2018 on a topic instilled in large part due to principles of the

Carnegie Project in Education: equity in hiring. Process development for hiring staff candidates

led to a more equitable hiring process within our teaching and learning center. The effort

continues to bear fruit, as new staff are hired and the center maintains focus on hiring the most

qualified candidates, minimizing political influence and unfair hiring practices.

**Dissemination of Findings**

Findings for this study will be disseminated through contacts with individuals in the

researcher's professional network in Mississippi's community college system. Manuscripts will

be revised and submitted for professional publication to academic journals such as the *Journal of*

*Faculty Development, Adult Education Quarterly* (which focuses on continuing education), the

*American Journal of Distance Education*, and *Change* (focusing on new insights and ideas that analyze the implications of educational practices), as well as other like-minded journals and publications. Scholar-practitioner work will continue to discern the impact of the researcher's teaching and learning center on faculty teaching practices and student learning outcomes. The development of the Multiple Paths model of faculty development will bring about significant opportunities for a flexible research model—one which has opportunities to anticipate—and immediately act upon—responses provided during semi-structured interviews.

**Summary of Manuscript**

Despite the decades-old promise that online education would broaden access, we are discovering that online education continues to present challenges for particular populations of students. Through analysis of large and small datasets, researchers have discovered that Hispanic students, African-American students, male students, and those with low first-term GPAs continue to be at-risk of completing online coursework (Bowen, 2016; Capra, 2014; Hulett, 2018; Lorenzo, 2011; Newell, 2007; Wiggam, 2004; Xu, 2013).

The primary focus of this research was to investigate the Mississippi Virtual Community Academy, an online professional development system, through interviews with faculty who participated in courses that emphasized concepts of equity, ethics, and social justice. It was not known if faculty were implementing concepts, theories, and instructional practices that support at-risk students in the courses they teach. Faculty interviewed were selected if they had enrolled in, and completed, courses such as Teaching Effectively Online, Dropout Detective, and ADA Compliance. Nine faculty were interviewed and represented community colleges in the southern, central, western, and northern regions of the state.

Faculty reported that students at-risk in online courses are students who face any number

106

of challenges: attitudinal (motivation, time management, self-regulation), skill-related (reading, computer proficiency, experience with online coursework), access to computers, or challenges related to a demanding home, work, and student schedule. Faculty revealed that issues of equity were paramount in planning and delivering courses of quality. Faculty were direct and vocal about student challenges related to reading and comprehension, factors that are challenging their ability to succeed.

The research question focused on faculty implementation—were they implementing what they have learned in online professional development courses offered through the Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy? Indeed, they are. Factors that lead to their implementation and integration of concepts, theories, and instructional practices include their knowledge of such practices (declarative knowledge), their understanding of how to make changes (procedural knowledge), and their empathy and care for the students in their courses.

The Direct Path model and Context Path model were the dominant models followed in this research. The Direct Path model provides a way of understanding how faculty learn, implement, and ultimately teach students, and the Context Path considers how faculty might be influenced by external factors outside the formal training experience. One of the more compelling findings of this study is how faculty find utility for what they have learned in online professional development for use in other settings. This suggests the need for the use of a model that builds upon the Direct Path and Context Path model. A new model has been proposed, the Multiple Paths model, which accommodates the chronology emphasized by the Direct Path and the indirect factors emphasized by the Context Path. The Multiple Paths model emphasizes that additional benefactors may arise as part of an individual faculty member's development,

benefactors which were not originally anticipated by the researcher but may be of use or interest to others within the field. This model is illustrated below.
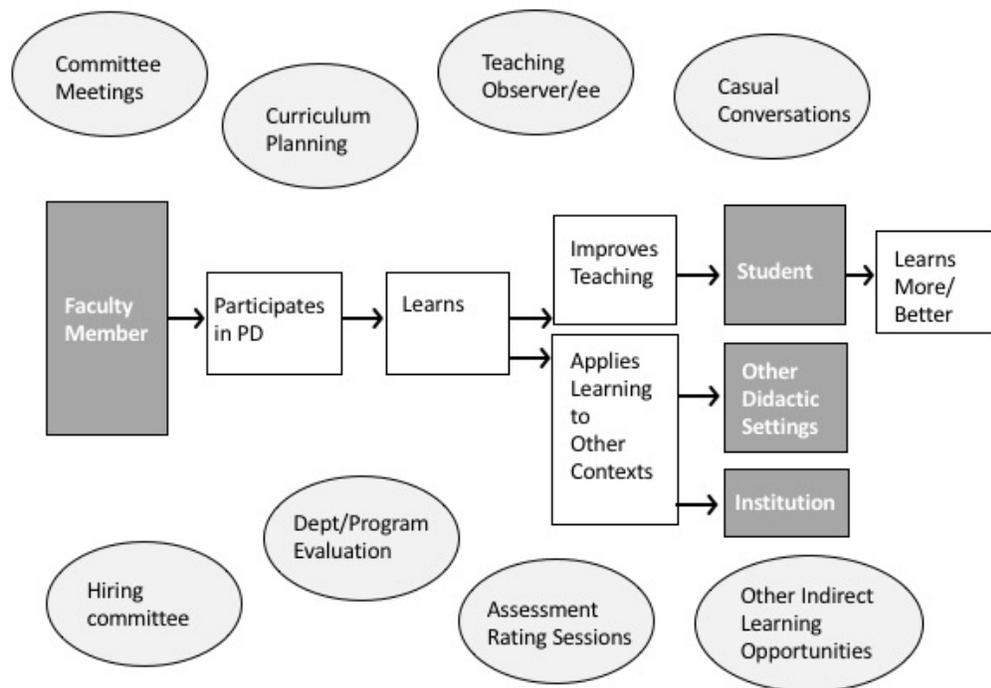


Figure 4. The multiple paths model. The Multiple Paths model illustrates that students, other didactic settings, and institutions benefit from prior professional development. Adapted from the original Context Path Model, published in *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections,* by Condon, et al., 2016, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Copyright 2016 by the Indiana University Press. Reprinted with permission.

Stakeholders involved in the success of the MSVCC Academy should consider several recommendations posed in this study in order to address the dominant themes discovered through this research: 1) reconsider the MSVCC Academy Vision, 2) capitalize on the best traits

of online instructors, 3) consider additional MSVCC Academy courses and models, and 4) prioritize efforts towards improving student reading and reading strategies. A review of the MSVCC Academy Vision may bring about new opportunities to help colleges pivot toward an identity of quality based upon faculty empathy and care, rather than one of convenience and access. By reviewing their hiring practices, colleges can identify soft skills such as openness and flexibility in their faculty candidates, as those traits were found to be instrumental in faculty success and persistence to reach all students. New models for delivering courses is recommended, particularly if new models are applied that help faculty look-back, reflect on prior development and implementation practices. Finally, particular modules or courses should be considered to address chronic challenges related to student reading and comprehension.

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Condon, W., E. R. Iverson, C. A. Manduca, C. Rutz, and G. Willett (2016). *Faculty development and student learning: Assessing the connections*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hulett, M. T. (2018). *Online teaching strategies and best practices from the perspectives of effective community college online instructors: A phenomenological study.* (Doctoral dissertation). Abstract available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

Jaggars, S. S., & Bailey, T. (2010). Effectiveness of Fully Online Courses for College Students: Response to a Department of Education Meta-Analysis. Community College Research Center, Columbia University.

Lorenzo, G. (2011). Online education learner engagement and academic success strategies at community colleges. August). SOURCE on Community College Issues, Trends & Strategies. Accessed at: www.edpath.com/images/OnlineLearningReportFinal2.pdf

Newell, C. C. (2007). *Learner characteristics as predictors of online course completion among nontraditional technical college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

Nist, S. L., & Simpson, M. L. (2000). College studying. In M. Kamil, R. Barr, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), Handbook of reading research (3rd ed., pp. 645–666). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Pollard, T. (2018). Leveling the hiring process—how a teaching and learning center can create greater equity and fit during hire. Panel, Atlanta, GA.

Stahl, N. A., & Armstrong, S. L. (2018). Re-claiming, re-inventing, and re-reforming a field: The future of college reading. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 48(1), 47-66.

Wiggam, M. K. (2004). Predicting adult learner academic persistence: Strength of relationship between age, gender, ethnicity, financial aid, transfer credits, and delivery methods. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://etd.ohiolink.edu/rws_etd/document/get/ osu1092748628/inline

Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. S. (2011). Online and Hybrid Course Enrollment and Performance in Washington State Community and Technical Colleges. CCRC Working Paper No. 31. Community College Research Center, Columbia University.

# VITA
## TERRY W. POLLARD, Ed.D.

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## EDUCATION

**Ed.D. in Higher Education**, School of Education, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS. Major field: Online professional development. Research interests: human learning, faculty development, leadership. Dissertation: *Exploring the Impact of Mississippi Virtual Community College Academy Professional Development for Online Teaching.* Chair: Associate Professor Amy Wells-Dolan. December 2018.

**Master of Arts,** Literature, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS. Thesis: Capturing "Mrs. Brown": Virginia Woolf's Notion of Character in her Diary and Mrs. Dalloway through Visions of Ottoline Morrell. December, 1996.

**Bachelor of Science**, English, University of Southern Mississippi, August, 1994.

## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2017 – Present        Senior Faculty Developer, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina

Teach English 202: Writing and Critical Inquiry (online; adjunct)

Teach MHS 693: Health Education Technology and Pedagogy (online; adjunct)

| | |
|---|---|
| 2012 – 2017 | Director of Instructional Development and Distance Learning, The University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson, Mississippi |

Doctor of Health Administration, Affiliate Faculty
Health Sciences, Affiliate Faculty, Assistant Professor
Dental Hygiene, Affiliate Faculty

| | |
|---|---|
| 2010 – 2012 | Director of Training and Professional Development Mississippi Community College Board, Jackson, Mississippi |
| 2007 - 2010 | eLearning Specialist Mississippi Community College Board, Jackson, Mississippi |
| 2000 - 2007 | English Instructor Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Gulfport, Mississippi |
| 2000 - 2007 | English Instructor Central Carolina Community College, Sanford, North Carolina |
| 1998- 1999 | Program Assistant North Carolina State University Water Quality Group North Carolina State University |
| 1997 – 1998 | Publishing Coordinator Mentis Corporation, Durham, North Carolina |

## PUBLICATIONS

Rogers, P., Killian, C., Hudgins, E., & Pollard, T. (2016). Transitioning from Clinician to Manager. SIS Quarterly Practice Connections, American Occupational Therapy Association, 1(2), 20-24. Retrieved January 1, 2017.

Pollard, T. (2016). "Garnering faculty buy-in to improve online program quality: implementation of the Online Learning Consortium scorecard to encourage shared governance." Handbook of Research on Building, Growing, and Sustaining Quality E-Learning Programs. IGI Global: Hershey, PA. 2016.

Pollard, T. (2013). "Virtual Space (e-Learning Faculty Development)." *New Horizons in Teaching and Learning.* Wiley Press.

Pollard, T. (2006). "Book Spine." *Mississippi Poetry Journal*, Spring 2006.

**PRESENTATIONS**

"Leveling the Hiring Process—How a Teaching and Learning Center Can Create Greater Equity and Fit During Hire." June 7, 2018. The International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) Conference. Atlanta, GA. With Martha Diede, Ph.D. and Jeanine Irons, Ph.D.

"Encouraging, Measuring, and Ensuring Quality in Teaching and Learning in Higher Ed." October 2, 2017. UNC Cause. Greensboro, NC. With Martha Diede, Ph.D., and Jonathan Wade, Ph.D.

"Active Learning Classrooms and the Infinite Possible." Terry Pollard, Guest Lecturer. Skills in Clinical Anatomy II. Collaboratory classroom, School of Health Related Professions. February 3, 2016.

"Transition Lassoed by QM: Capitalizing on a new LMS by Integrating QM Principles in Training." Terry Pollard, Rebecca Butler, Jessica Bailey. Quality Matters National Conference. San Antonio, Texas. November 2, 2015.

"The Flipped Classroom: The What, Why, and Getting Started." Presentation to Jackson Public High School Teachers, Collaboratory classroom, School of Health Related Professions. August 3, 2015.

"Map Making, Classroom Shaping: How Maps Can Inspire Better Classrooms." Keynote Speaker. Creating Futures through Technology Conference. Biloxi, Mississippi. March 3, 2015.

"Increasing Foot and Mind Traffic through Improved Classroom Spaces." Terry Pollard, Mark Weber, Elizabeth Carr. Creating Futures through Technology Conference. Biloxi, Mississippi. March 3, 2015.

"The Best of 2014's eLearning Conferences." Terry Pollard, Heidi Shoemake, Christian Pruett. Creating Futures through Technology Conference. Biloxi, Mississippi. March 3, 2015.

"Harmonious Implementation: Med Center's Concerto." Heidi Shoemake, Terry Pollard, Christian Pruett, Elizabeth Jacobs, Teresa Walter. 2015 InstructureCon conference. Salt Lake City, Utah. June 15, 2015.

"A Happy Marriage: An Interprofessional Online Cohort Embraces Innovative, Community-

Building Online Tools."  Penny Rogers, Terry Pollard, Jessica Bailey, Elizabeth Carr. The Association of Schools of Health Related Professions conference, Orlando, Florida.  October 24, 2013.

 "A Day with Emerging Technology: Experiential Learning with OT 3 students." University of Mississippi Medical Center.  School of Health-Related Professions.  November 19, 2013.

"Realizing Meaningful Interactions Online through OER cartoons and prompts." Educause Southeast Regional Conference. Atlanta, Georgia. May 29-31, 2013.

"Building Strong Online Community Through the Use of OER Cartoons and Prompts." Webinar. Presented for the Sloan Consortium.  May 23, 2013.

"Jones County Junior College: e-Textbook Initiative Successes and Challenges." 15th Annual Creating Futures for Technology Conference, Biloxi, Mississippi. March 7, 2012.

"New Guidelines for Accessibility: A Manageable Process for Creating and Modifying Documents in Online Courses." 15th Annual Creating Futures for Technology Conference, Biloxi, Mississippi. March 9, 2012.

"The Adjacent Possible. "  Keynote Speaker.  Presented at the Annual Conference of Two-Year College Association Mississippi Conference, September 24, 2011.

"Proof and Possibility for the iPad in Education."
Presented for the 4th Annual International Symposium, Emerging Technologies for Online Learning, SLOAN Consortium Conference, March 23, 2011.

"Why Aren't They Learning It? Mistakes and Missteps of College Trainers and Teachers."
Presented at Creating Futures through Technology Conference, March 1, 2011.

"Innovative Use of Images for Your Online Course"
Presented at Creating Futures through Technology Conference, February 28, 2010.

"Interact with Me, DVD: The Process of Creating Interactive Materials for your Course"
Presented at Two-Year College Association Southeast, Myrtle Beach, SC, 2006.

"Removing Red Riding's Hood: The History, Culture, and Symbolism of the Universal Fairy Tale."  Presented as Mississippi Humanities Teacher, 2004.

"What is a Poem?  Active Learning and the Journey of Discovery"

Presented at Two-Year College Association Southeast, Huntsville, AL, 2004.

"Turnitin.com: A Discussion of Plagiarism-Detection Software"
Presented at MS Gulf Coast Community College, 2003.

"How to Use and Create Audio in Your Blackboard Course"
Presented at MS Gulf Coast Community College, 2003.

## EXHIBITS

"A Purpose Driven Course Redesign: How Implementing Quality Matters' Online Standards Resulted in Increased Student Satisfaction."  Rebecca Butler, Angela Burrell, Terry Pollard.  SHRP Research Day.  April 22, 2016.

"A Happy Marriage: An Interprofessional Online Cohort Embraces Innovative, Community-Building Online Tools."  Penny Rogers, Terry Pollard, Jessica Bailey, Elizabeth Carr.  SHRP Research Day.  April 25, 2014.

"A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words: Developing A Curriculum Graphic To Convey Complex Ideas To Students, Fieldwork Managers, and Accreditation Bodies."  Terry Pollard, Christy Morgan, Robin Parish, Penny Rogers.  SHRP Research Day.  April 25, 2014.

"A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words: Developing A Curriculum Graphic To Convey Complex Ideas To Students, Fieldwork Managers, And Accreditation Bodies."  Terry Pollard, Christy Morgan, Robin Parish, Penny Rogers.  Proceedings.  The Association of Schools of Health Related Professions.  October 24, 2013.

"The Tools Change, But are We?  Building a Professional Development Program for Anytime, Anywhere with Blackboard and Wimba."  Blackboard World Conference, 2009.

## GRANT ACTIVITY

Science Teaching Excites Medical Interest (STEMI). 2016-2021. National Institutes of Health. Funded at 2.5 percent of FTE. Project resource for technology integration. University of Mississippi Medical Center, 2016-2021.

Implementation of Adaptive Learning to Improve Student Outcomes: A Pilot Study. 2016-2017. $10,000 grant to build adaptive learning publication library and to fund partnership with adaptive learning vendor.

***Online Courses Taught:***

Pedagogical Concepts in Health Education (Health Sciences 418, SHRP) (1 year online)
Professional Writing – blended (Dental Hygiene 303, SHRP) (2 years online)
Traditional Grammar (1 year on-ground, 3 years online)
Expository Writing, ENG 1113 (11 years online)
Reading Enhancement I, REA 1113 (1 year online)
Reading Enhancement II, REA 1123 (1 year online)
Argument-based Writing, ENG 112 (2 years online)
Literature-based Writing, ENG 1123 (8 years online)
American Literature, ENG 2223 (2 years online)
American Literature II, ENG 2233 (1 year online)
World Literature, ENG 2413 (5 years online)
Creative Writing, ENG 2133 (4 years online)
Professional Research and Reporting (1 year on-ground)
Science, Technology, and Society (1 year on-ground)
Introduction to the Internet (1 year on-ground)

***Certifications and Credentials:***

Applying the Quality Matters Rubric Face to Face Facilitation Certificate, December 2018
Team-Based Learning Collaborative Fundamentals Certificate, November 2018
Quality Matters Peer Reviewer, February 2015
Blackboard Certified Trainer, July 2009
Wimba Certified Trainer, April 2009

***Key Accomplishments:***

Developed internal evaluation and assessment plan for all faculty center workshops, increasing accountability, transparency, and insight into quality improvement
Developed project-based system for student workers, resulting in increased transparency and clarity
First to implement *Quality Matters* course certification program at Mississippi institution of higher education
Trained 1,600 faculty in the Mississippi community college system
Innovated statewide registration system to automate registration and professional development
Oversaw redesign of Mississippi electronic library web site, averaging 1,200 unique visitors per month

***Awards and Honors:***

2018 Phi Kappa Phi Nomination, University of Mississippi
2013 Graduate of University of Mississippi Medical Center Leadership Development Program
2006 Mississippi Poetry Society President's Award (First Place) for "Book Spine" (poetry)
2006 Mississippi Poetry Society Poet Laureate Award (Honorable Mention) for "Earthshine"
(poetry)
2005 and 2006 - Nominated for MS Gulf Coast Community College Instructor of the Year
2004 Mississippi Humanities Teacher, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College

***Professional Organizations and Affiliations:***

Educause, 2012 - Present
Quality Matters, 2014 - Present
Team-Based Learning Collaborative, 2018 – Present