FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AFTER COURSE DESIGN

COLLABORATION WITH AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Althea Anita Streater

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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**ABSTRACT**

This transcendental phenomenological study had the objective of examining the experience of faculty subject matter experts in higher education as they collaborated with instructional designers to develop online learning courses at a college in the northeast United States. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. The central research question was: What are the SME reflections on their previous pedagogical and instructional skills, and what growth, if any, can be identified after the course design process? Additional questions examined the faculty's perspective on their past and present pedagogical knowledge. The study took place at a four-year private college in the northeast. The sampling included 12 adjunct faculty members who have completed at least one online course design collaboration with an instructional designer. Data collection included one-on-one interviews, observations of course design documents, and faculty journal reflections. The researcher examined themes regarding the faculty perspective on what knowledge they acquired from the course design process and in what areas they determined professional growth. Five major themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) excited but cautious, (b) streamlined process, (c) relationship is critical, and (d) a new adventure. The examination encompassed the interpretation of the study's findings, an exploration of its limitations, and the formulation of recommendations for future research.

*Keywords*: higher education, asynchronous learning, adult learning, instructional design, faculty subject matter expert

## Copyright Page

**Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, Deborah Thompson, who received her heavenly reward on December 6, 2021, after a short battle with ovarian cancer. Following her sudden diagnosis, the time I spent caring for her during the last four months of her life was truly a gift from God. I will always cherish the memories we made as I sat by her hospital bed, my laptop and doctoral coursework always in tow. I will hold dear to the many prophetic blessings she spoke over me from her hospital bed and the belief she had in me to complete my doctorate even through such a difficult season. I wanted more than anything to share my graduation day with her, but my hope is in Christ that she has front-row seats in heaven. She imparted me with her strength, determination, and tenacity to succeed. I love you forever, mom.

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, Dr. Marcus L. Streater, whom God (and eHarmony) sent into my life just five months after my mother's passing. Marcus, you are the tangible fulfillment of my mother's prophetic words and evidence of God's ability to transform my mourning into dancing. When I began my doctoral journey as a single woman, I made a bold declaration in faith that my last name would be changed by graduation. Though I had no idea what that name would be, I believed that God would answer my prayers. I will now proudly wear the title of Dr. Althea A. Streater as evidence of God's faithfulness. My love, thank you for your unwavering support of the completion of my degree, for pushing me to keep going when I needed it, and for always believing in my capabilities. Most of all, thank you for praying the Priestly Blessing of Numbers 6:22-27 over me daily. The prayers of a righteous man truly availeth much. I love you forever and always.

And to our firstborn son, Joseph Isaiah, many years ago, I saw you in my dreams, yet I didn't know when God would send you into my life. You are an answer to many years of prayers. Always remember that your life was carefully and purposefully designed by God, and you are marked for greatness for His glory. May you always serve God with your life and pursue knowledge of Him above all else. Mommy loves you.

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To my family members who have supported me throughout this journey:

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been my stabilizer in this journey.

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**List of Abbreviations**

Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (ADDIE)

Higher Education (HE)

Instructional Designer (ID)

International Board of Standards Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Learning Management System (LMS)

Project Based Learning (PBL)

Subject Matter Expert (SME)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Overview

As world industries further embrace technology in the realms of security, healthcare, retail, and finance, the state of higher education is also working to maintain its competitive relevance in the area of technology in education. The Internet has affected advanced education by inspiring the development of web-based learning (Dhir et al., 2021). In recent years, many higher education institutions in the United States have implemented a rapidly pivoting strategy from face-to-face to remote or distance learning (Abramenka-Lachheb et al., 2021). Colleges and universities have addressed the demand for online academic programs by hiring skilled instructional designers (ID) with specialized pedagogical knowledge in online learning to work collaboratively with faculty member subject matter experts (SME) to design online courses. As the educational landscape continues to be reformed through technology, institutions are seeking to serve a larger population of students through distance learning (Mellieon et al., 2021). This chapter addresses the background context of relevant literature related to this topic, including historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The research problem statement also provides, along with the purpose statement, an explanation of the significance of the study and the contributions this study will make to the existing empirical, theoretical, and practical literature on the topic of ID and SME relationships. The problem statement examines the scope of the recent literature on this topic. The purpose of this study is followed by the significance of the current study. Finally, the research questions are introduced, and definitions pertinent to this study are provided. Additionally, this chapter includes rationalization of central and sub-research questions. This chapter concludes with key definitions of relevant terms, followed by a summary.

**Background**

This section contains a summary of relevant literature related to this topic. The following paragraphs focus on how the identified problem has evolved through history, detailing events that led to the current state of the issue. Additionally, the following paragraphs explore societal implications of the issue such as the issues adult learners face in accessing higher education. Lastly, applied theoretical concepts and principles are addressed according to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

**Historical Context**

The historical context of higher education (HE) begins with the monastic model, which originated in western Europe in the 12th century. According to Shugart (2013), the earliest universities were founded in Bologna, Paris, Salerno, and Oxford. These schools consisted of the eldest sons of wealthy families who were sent away to learn from priestly teachers. The purpose of these universities was to transmit culture and theological education Shugart (2013). Those who completed the first component were given the title of "bachelors," and those who completed the second were called "masters."

In the United States, HE originated over 200 years ago as economic and sociopolitical preferences developed in the country. Since the late eighteenth century, attitudes toward civic-mindedness, commercialism, and affluence shaped how U.S. colleges and universities responded to common needs. During the Antebellum period in American history, classical education decreased in popularity, and colleges oriented themselves more to studies involving agriculture, mechanics, and mining (Levy, 2019). Due to the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862, innovation became focused on agriculture and related industries and, later on, the challenges of industrial production, which significantly impacted HE curriculum offerings (Reynolds, 1992).

In comparison, during the Civil War in the nineteenth century, universities placed a high focus on commercialism and corporate values. Frost (2013) writes that the Civil War accelerated antebellum changes as wartime federal legislation led to agricultural and mechanical colleges emphasizing science and engineering. Additionally, schools that had previously serviced only planters' sons found themselves having to restructure as thousands of young southern men died in the war. Because of this, southern colleges sought to enroll more economically diverse students and add more curricular choices to their academic offerings. According to Wisniewski (2015), many colleges used support from the federal government to create a more practical curriculum that lowered admission barriers for middle-class, poor students, women, and some students of color.

As World War II was ending in July 1946, President Harry Truman appointed the first federal commission on higher education (Hutcheson, 2011). This notable committee became highly influential in furthering practices of federal scholarships and creating institutions that would further equal opportunity and economic good. Additionally, the post-World War II era developed a more affluent society. During this time, economic expansion caused the value of a college degree to increase. People began to seek social status and advanced professionalism. By the 1950s, the government began to offer more access to HE through Pell Grants, subsidized loans, and the GI Bill. Furthermore, the women's rights movement in America further changed the landscape of HE. Levy (2019) writes that women's participation in HE during the 1950's exceeded their pre-war enrollment peak by more than fifty thousand students. Because of this movement and its impact on HE, women advanced in the workforce.

As the American culture continues to shift, HE has remained adaptive to the needs of the common good. Although sometimes resistant to change, colleges and universities have

persevered through major cultural events and shifts. The most recent challenge in the history of HEs is the emergence of technology and online learning. Abedini et al. (2021) state that the importance of adult learning has been particularly influenced by digital technologies, which provide learning opportunities for professional and personal development.

**Social Context**

The social context of this study involves adult learners and their access to higher education. Due to the shifting landscape of society, including the advancement of technology, many non-traditional or adult learners seek flexible and convenient education within their lives (Bartlett et al., 2021). Adult learners are students who may already be part of the workforce and have career and family responsibilities. This demographic of students functions best in self-directed environments, which provides them with control over their education. Bordonaro (2020) defines self-directed learning as individuals taking initiative, with or without the help of others, diagnosing their needs, and formulating goals. This is typical of adult learners in an online learning environment. A growing body of literature has examined the needs of adult learners and instructional strategies which are pertinent to this specific demographic of learners. Because of this, the need for IDs has become evident in colleges and universities as they structure online learning programs (Chen & Carliner, 2021). If online courses are not designed to address the specific needs of this demographic of students, learners will not be successful, and therefore impact the success rate of the academic program.

The primary beneficiary of this study is the college site where the research will take place. The research will help school administration to understand the significance of IDs and the expertise they bring to the course design process. According to Richardson et al. (2019), collaboration with IDs is necessary as they are well-versed in the state-of-the-art practices of

online learning. Secondary beneficiaries may be SMEs as they become aware of the needs of adult learners. Additionally, other colleges and universities may benefit from the data results which will help in understanding the SME and ID relationship from the SME perspective and lead to faculty development initiatives. According to Dooley et al. (2019), faculty development programs and assessments are necessary for colleges and universities to provide high-quality teaching and learning.

**Theoretical Context**

According to Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, a person's expectations of efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated in the process of completing a task. Expectations of self-efficacy determine how much effort will be expended and how long this effort will be sustained as obstacles and adversities arise. This theory has helped to shape the landscape of education and learning. Over the last 34 years, educational researchers have used the notion of self-efficacy to predict and explain a wide range of human functioning, including academic achievement (Artino, 2012). The theory of self-efficacy has been the basis of education studies on human functioning and determination that an individual's ability to perform a task also includes a personal conviction that they can successfully perform the required behavior under challenging circumstances. Bandura's model explains that anticipations of personal efficacy are derived from four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Albert Bandura's theory has become a basis for understanding student learning and teacher ability in the realm of education.

Malcom Knowles (1970) developed the original theory of andragogy, which is the art and science of helping adults learn, differing from pedagogy, which focuses on how children learn. The central idea behind andragogy is that adults learn differently from young people in crucial

areas, requiring different approaches to curriculum and instruction. According to Knowles (1978), ancient Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, and Roman teachers used the Socratic method of teaching, but had no indication of specialized instruction about the means of adult learning. Ancient educators assumed that adults learned in the same manner as children; however, that created blind spots in education into the twentieth century. Knowles's theory of andragogy accepts six general principles: adults need to know the "why" of learning; adults learn through trial-and-error; adults should own their own learning decisions; adults prefer learning that is relevant to their lives; problem-based than content-based environments are preferred; intrinsic motivators are more effective than extrinsic (Fornaciari et al., 2014). The development of this theory has contributed to the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education in the twenty-first century.

John Dewey developed Project Based Learning (PBL) theory in the early 1900s to support a "learn by doing" methodology of instruction. This concept builds on Dewey's experiential, student-directed learning theories, ultimately addressing learning during a time when the United States experienced rapid industrialization and the dual revolutions of technology and information processing were shaping education (Maida, 2011). The overall approach to this theory is learning a new skill by doing hands-on work, instead of reading or hearing about a new concept. According to Williams (2017), Dewey impacted education through his belief that school should be representative of a social environment and that students learn best when in natural social settings. Project Based Learning Theory has been applied to classrooms in the 21st century, providing students with hands-on projects and real-life scenarios that provide them with experience in any academic specialty. As faculty SMEs are becoming more familiar with online learning and adult learning pedagogies, the collaborative process with

an ID reflects project-based learning. The SME engages in hands-on learning as the asynchronous course is designed, taking away a variety of learned skills and concepts from the project.

## Problem Statement

The problem is higher education faculty member SMEs are abundantly knowledgeable in their specialized academic program, yet they struggle to collaborate with IDs to design online courses, which obstructs the collaboration process (Dooley et al., 2019). Because of its enhanced accessibility and flexibility, online learning provides valuable lessons for designing more inclusive, customized, and student-centered learning experiences (Li et al., 2022). Digital technologies have recently become more widely accepted in HE classrooms. In the last decade, the use of digital technology in educational institutions has grown exponentially (Jorge-Vázquez et al., 2021). According to Rosenbusch (2020), HE institutions can serve as an incubator to redesign education for the good of society. However, faculty SMEs new to online learning may find themselves at a disadvantage in the course design process. Many faculty are unsure of the approaches to take in online learning and find themselves learners anew, often trying to tackle a steep learning curve (Guevara et. al, 2021). Likewise, for many SMEs, adopting online standards of excellence may be a departure from the standard operating procedure with faculty skillful in creating traditional courses and those who are self-taught in the online learning environment (King et al., 2019).

SMEs must continue to develop their knowledge of andragogy and online learning as the world shifts to digital dependency. The number of students enrolled in online courses in higher education in the United States of America (USA) has steadily increased over more than a decade (Bolliger, 2021). The increase in online course offerings in higher education stresses new ways

to devise learning environments, hence expanding the role of instructional designers in consulting faculty on pedagogical solutions and course design (Richardson et al., 2019). Because the faculty member–instructional designer pairing is still new to most institutions, uncertainties can develop in the relationship such as faculty concerns over losing academic freedom and autonomy over their course material (Chen & Carliner, 2021). Abedini et al. (2021) state that the importance of adult learning has been particularly influenced by digital technologies which provide learning opportunities for professional and personal development. The ID brings specialized knowledge in this area, yet research has not explored the phenomenon from the SME perspective to determine whether the SME ultimately benefits professionally from the online course design process.

This study seeks to examine whether SMEs perceive that they have acquired pedagogical knowledge as a result of their collaboration with an instructional designer and whether they perceive the course design experience to be beneficial to their professional growth. According to Mellieon et al. (2021), it is up to school administration and policymakers to provide necessary faculty support for the success of a distance learning program. However, such programs are rare in existence in higher education. The results of this study will aid in the policymaking of HE administration to establish faculty development training for SMEs to acquire knowledge of online learning design. According to Nkana (2020), the support provided to the professor is the highest influencer of academic performance. Faculty members play a central role in students' academic experience (Ippoliti, 2019). Literature studies have examined the relationship between instructional designers and subject matter experts and the importance of this collaborative process to create quality online course offerings. "In a change relationship, the purpose of instructional designers' work is not limited to one course or project, but is intended to make

changes to individual learners, institutions, and society at large" (Chen & Carliner, 2021, p. 10). The ID's role is highly important as it has an impact on the overall course design and the online academic program, yet research does not examine the impact IDs have directly on SME perceptions of professional development from the SME perspective. According to Dooley et al. (2019), a critical component of the success of higher education has long been faculty development. The problem is that the literature has not fully addressed the gap in the research that exists in the exploration of faculty perceptions of their professional improvement after working with a SME. The specific focus will observe the collaborative experience through the SME's lens and determine its success based on SME reflection.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the experience of faculty SMEs in their collaborative experience with IDs at a four-year college in New England. The collaborative course design process will be generally defined as the development of the asynchronous learning environment for adult learners.

## Significance of the Study

The relationship between ID and SME has been examined in varying studies (Bawa & Watson, 2017; Chen & Carliner, 2021; Dooley et al., 2019); however, the phenomenon has not been explored from the SME vantage point. This research will provide new perspectives on the faculty SME experience in higher education as related to online learning and add to the theoretical, empirical, and practical outlooks on the topic. The theoretical aspect of this study focuses on Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, followed by an examination of the empirical literature on ID and SME collaboration. Lastly, practical outlooks on the study are examined

such as the SME proficiency of technology use and ability to perform various roles in the collaboration process.

This study will contribute to Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Bandura first developed a social-cognitive theory which examined a person's expectation about how he or she will attain a goal (Urton et al., 2014). As his social-cognitive theory developed, Bandura saw a need to explore the individual abilities derived from self-expectations, such as self-motivation. Motivation is primarily concerned with the activation and persistence of behavior and is also partly grounded in cognitive activities (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, Bandura developed his theory of self-efficacy based on the assumption that psychological procedures aid in creating expectations of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Thus, the theory of self-efficacy provides an opportunity to explore SME abilities and motivations that are derived from self-efficacy in the development of an online course. The study will examine how SMEs perceive their self-efficacy in pedagogies of online learning after the collaboration process as compared to before the process began. SMEs will also determine how their abilities and knowledge impact their behavior and motivation throughout the process.

This study contributes to the growing body of empirical literature on online course design collaboration between ID and SMEs. A large body of work exists that examines the relationship between SMEs and ID; however, there is room for exploration of the phenomenon from the perspective of the SME. Faculty often face increasing pressure to use technology to diversify instruction (Richardson et al., 2019). Though there is a divide among faculty in the proficiency of technology use, researchers encourage teachers to utilize technology to improve their instruction whenever possible (Soomro et al., 2020). This pressure creates conflict with the SME's ability to perform in their various roles, which can become an obstacle in the ID

collaboration process. Mellieon et al. (2021) explained that the experience of faculty SMEs is highly impactful as many universities look to success stories from faculty and students to determine whether they will take on such a large task as launching online academic offerings.

Similarly, the ID plays a role in the SME experience. According to Lowell and Ashby (2018), IDs should develop collaboration and feedback skills to assist SMEs in the course design process. Dooley et al. (2019) state that collaboration with SMEs should encourage interdisciplinarity and assistance on how to use technology best. Accordingly, this study examines the experience from the SME perspective to determine how best to support their needs in online course design.

This research study has the potential to impact HE as online academic offerings continue to increase at colleges and universities. In the past ten years, the realm of distance and online learning has expanded rapidly, in some instances eliminating the need for face-to-face instruction (Mellieon et al., 2021). For this reason, universities require research that supports the importance of online learning and the necessity for IDs. HE institutions continually seek ways to enhance the quality of online courses with the intention of increasing student satisfaction, enrollment, and retention (Caskurlu et al., 2021). Lowell and Ashby (2018) state that IDs are hired by universities to demonstrate knowledge and skills from systematic and research-based design to the application of technologies. The amplified need for assistance in online learning, integration of technology into instruction, and the application of appropriate pedagogy continue to fuel the growth of active learning approaches (Nworie, 2022). As the ID brings this expertise to the online course design collaborative process, faculty SMEs are in a position to glean pedagogical knowledge as well. The findings of this research may help to highlight the challenges and victories of faculty SMEs as they participate in collaborative course design. This may allow

university administration to respond accordingly in the establishment of faculty development training in online learning or the development of supportive systems for faculty SMEs.

## Research Questions

The research problem focuses on the SME perspective of professional growth after participating in the collaborative course design process with an ID. This research was established through a central research question and three sub-questions.

### Central Research Question

What are the faculty SME's perceptions of the course design collaboration process with an ID?

### Sub-Question One

How do SMEs perceive their course design and adult learning pedagogy abilities now as compared to entering the collaborative course design process?

### Sub-Question Two

How do the SMEs perceive their ability to design online learning strategies such as learning assessments as a result of working with an ID?

### Sub-Question Three

What are the perceptions of SMEs when it comes to the need for IDs in higher education?

## Definitions

1. *Adult learners* - students aged 25 and older, making up nearly half of all students currently enrolled in colleges and universities, including those raising children and working while attending school (*Education Technology, Services, and Research*, 2022).

2. *Asynchronous* - a form of education, instruction, and learning that does not occur in the same place or at the same time (Mallin et al., 2014).

3. *Instructional Designer* - a skilled professional who enhances learning by applying instructional principles to determine appropriate learning strategies (Richardson et al., 2019).

4. *Pedagogy* - the study of different teaching methods, including teaching styles, feedback, and assessment (Wang et al., 2022).

5. *Self-efficacy* - motivation, which is primarily concerned with the activation and persistence of behavior and is also partly rooted in cognitive activities (Bandura, 1977).

6. *Subject matter expert* - a person who has specialized knowledge in a particular academic area (Castleberry et al. 2016).

## Summary

Chapter one of this study introduced the phenomenological study of faculty SME's perceptions of professional growth after online course collaboration with an ID. In chapter one of this study, the rationale was provided for the need to view the ID and SME collaborative process from the vantage point of the SME to examine their experience and offer insight to universities. This chapter presented the research study problem statement which identifies that SMEs struggle to collaborate with IDs to design asynchronous learning strategies for adult learners in an online course. The problem is HE faculty SMEs are knowledgeable in their specialized academic program, yet they struggle to collaborate with IDs to design online courses. The challenges that arise often obstruct the course design collaboration process. The purpose statement was also provided in this chapter, detailing the goal of this transcendental phenomenological study to understand the course collaboration experience of SMEs from their perspective. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of SMEs in their course design experience with IDs at a four-year college in New England. Additionally, this chapter provided a description of the

theoretical, empirical, and practical significance of the study. Research questions were identified in this chapter, along with definitions of key terms.

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Overview**

This systematic review explores current literature on faculty perceptions of professional growth after working with an instructional designer. There is considerable literature on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy in learning and its application to the topic. This section precedes a synthesis of recent literature regarding ID and SME roles, adult learning, and online learning. An exploration of the relationship between SME and ID follows, including what constitutes effective collaboration, and addressing challenges in the collaborative relationship. Lastly, this chapter explores the literature on faculty development and institutional support in HE. To conclude, a gap in the literature explores faculty perceptions of professional growth, which presents a need for the current study.

**Theoretical Framework**

Bandura (1977) developed the self-efficacy theory to explain how people respond behaviorally to situations based on their perception of self. Perceived self-efficacy dictates a person's decisions when facing obstacles or new tasks and applying coping mechanisms. Bandura (1977) states that self-efficacy stems from four main areas; performance accomplishments, observations of others' ability to succeed, verbal persuasions, and states of physiological arousal from stress. High levels of self-efficacy in any area determine a person's ability to succeed at the task.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy provides a robust lens for observing faculty perception of self-efficacy after working with an ID. Bandura (1977) hypothesized that expectations of personal efficacy would determine a person's coping behavior as well as how much effort they would expend on a task. Similarly, self-efficacy is associated with attitude toward a specific

behavior. Foster & Bernstein (2021) write that attitude often results from an individual's evaluation of behavior and how it will lead to specific outcomes. Many faculty SMEs enter the course design process with certain attitudes regarding their abilities producing their behavioral interaction with the ID.

The theory of self-efficacy also asserts that expectations of self-efficacy would determine how long motivation would be sustained as obstacles and adverse experiences arise. Higher education faculty SMEs will continue to be required to grow and learn as online learning expands. Recent transitions to remote teaching have brought further time-consuming work for SMEs, such as maintaining regulatory compliance, learning about underexplored technologies, and helping students troubleshoot technology-related issues (Griffin & Altinay, 2020). It is necessary to examine, understand, and address the faculty's level of self-efficacy in online learning as the demand increases. According to Bourne et al. (2021), teacher self-efficacy determines teacher behavior. Teachers possessing a higher sense of self-efficacy should invest more effort in their performance. After working with an ID to design an online course, SMEs should feel an increased level of self-efficacy in areas such as creating course outcomes, aligning learning assessments, and overall asynchronous course design.

A growing body of literature has examined the theory of self-efficacy, and it can be determined that this high expectation of personal efficacy is important for SMEs to maintain enthusiasm and determination as collaboration with IDs continues. This raises many questions about the faculty SME's perception of self-efficacy and how it determines their behavior and response to designing future online courses through ID collaboration. Bandura's theory will shape this research study as it will serve as a foundation for developing research questions that measure self-efficacy, and it will guide the data analysis stage as a framework for analyzing

themes and categories. This theory will also inform and guide the reporting of results, as data evidence will be generated through the lens of SME self-efficacy in online learning. The results of this study will aid the theory of self-efficacy in its application to higher education faculty and their motivation and ability to overcome challenges in the online course design collaboration process.

## Related Literature

The following section provides a literature summary organized into seven themes. Each theme describes specific details related to the examination of higher education faculty SMEs' perceptions of professional growth after working with an ID to design an online course. The themes found in the literature represent the role of the ID, the part of the faculty SME, adult learning strategies, synchronous and asynchronous online learning, collaborative relationships, challenges in the collaborative process, and faculty professional development and support.

### Role of the Instructional Designer

Literature on faculty perceptions of professional growth post-collaboration with an ID presents definitions of the individualized roles of stakeholders involved in the online course design collaboration process. According to Bawa and Watson (2017), several professionals, such as organizations and academic departments, may be involved at a high level in the process; however, faculty SMEs, IDs, and administrators are key stakeholders and collaborators. Contributors holding these titles play a significant role in establishing the need for the online course and oversight of the design of the academic content. The International Board of Standards developed a well-known set of standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI) which provides a series of 22 ID competencies as a core set of expectations for the profession worldwide (Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2021). Likewise, Xie and Rice (2021) explain that ID principles

include reimagining the online instructor role, leveraging the advantages of the online modality, planning for appropriate course pacing, utilizing strong asynchronous pedagogies, managing online communications, revising online assessments, accessing feedback tools, and supporting student roles in online courses. Experts contend that IDs play a significant role in the course design process, as they may function as traditional designers, course developers, technology support, and collaborative designers.

### *Traditional Designer*

The literature describes the role of the ID as the expert in the pedagogy of learning. Drysdale (2019) describes the traditional instructional designer as a designer of high-quality products, such as courses or modules working in connection with a faculty member SME. According to Abramenka-Lachheb et al. (2021), the ID's role is typically a source of support, providing flexible and responsive approaches to SME needs. A definition provided by Chen (2021) and Carliner (2020) states that IDs are professionals who provide systematic processes for analyzing learning needs. These authors note that IDs act in two main roles: consultants who advise faculty on teaching tools and strategies and experts in the functionality of the course. In this role as a consultant, the ID makes student-centered decisions based on prior learning performance, subject matter difficulty, and completion rates of the course (Muljana & Luo, 2020;2021;). In the traditional designer role, IDs do not operate independently. Lowell and Ashby (2018) pose that instructional design is not a solitary profession because it requires collaboration, problem-solving, and feedback from other professionals and experts such as SMEs. Additionally, the traditional designer provides unique support to faculty SMEs during the process of course development and through the integration of technology and pedagogy (Nworie, 2022). There may be differences in opinion and value that emerge in the collaborative course

design process; however, traditional IDs focus on mediating these differences and working toward consensus on purpose and value in the course (Drysdale, 2019). Similarly, Richardson et al. (2018;2019;) explains that collaboration in an academic environment requires the involved partners to use each other's talents to do what they could not have done at all or as well done independently.

Moreover, the traditional ID uses the ADDIE model of instructional design as a framework for the course development process. The ADDIE model of course development is defined by Trust and Pektas (2018) as an acronym referring to the major processes that comprise the process of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Branson (1978) first used ADDIC (analysis, design, development, implementation, control) as interservice procedures for Instructional Systems Development for different branches of the U.S. military. However, the ADDIE model was eventually adapted and applied to teaching design (Tu et al., 2021). Trust and Pektas (2018) pose that in course design, the ADDIE model provides an interconnected linear structure that is more effective, efficient, and relevant for planning instruction. Comparably, in their analysis of course development, Stefaniak and Xu (2020) note that the ADDIE model is the most popular model used in academic development in K-12, higher education, and corporate training. The ADDIE framework is beneficial due to its ease of use for instructional designers, as the clearly defined stages facilitate the implementation of effective training tools (Castro & Tumibay, 2021).

### Course Developer

As course developers, IDs develop instructional materials, digital media, documents, and presentations with instructional technology integration (Drysdale, 2019). According to Baldwin and Ching (2019), course design is the anchor around which learning happens. Klein and Kelly

(2018) posit that knowledge and experience with e-learning–authoring software were the most frequently listed in job description competencies for IDs. As a course developer, the ID is ultimately defined as a developer of instructional programs that address the needs of the academic program and a frequent collaborator with subject matter experts, peer IDs, and other professionals (Lowell & Ashby, 2018). In this discipline, IDs combine their knowledge, skills, and experience, along with pedagogical beliefs to make judgments in the course design process (Muljana & Luo, 2021). The course developer role also requires IDs to work within a learning management system (LMS) or e-learning software to produce course copy and content for SMEs (Drysdale, 2019). In addition, Xie and Rice (2021) state that a major responsibility of instructional designers is ensuring that the instructional materials are accessible to students with disabilities because of legal implications for denying accessible materials to students. However, these authors cite that while many HE institutions highly view digital accessibility, many lack resources and clarity about who is responsible for implementing instructional materials for students with disabilities.

### Technology Support

The impact of technology on learning environments grows every day as learners of the 21st century integrate technology (Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2021). Thus, IDs are required to function as technology supporters in the course design process. According to DeVaughn and Stefaniak (2020), seventy percent of instructional designers hold a degree in Instructional Technology or Educational Technology, 9% hold a degree in Instructional Systems, and 43% work in higher education. IDs who function in the technology support role use their prior expertise in information technology (IT) to serve as valuable resources for faculty members (Ippoliti, 2019). As mentioned by Hsu (2020), a report funded in part by the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation

showed that 60% of the ID survey participants indicated that they train someone in technology and 49% train someone in the use of online pedagogy at least once a day.

In another variation of support, IDs focus on providing customer service and training to faculty SMEs in using instructional technologies such as the LMS (Drysdale, 2019). Though this job function for the ID is less explicitly stated, Klein and Kelly (2018) explain that IDs use systematic design procedures and employ various technologies to accomplish their goals. SMEs who are less knowledgeable about various learning technologies may need more support from the ID in this area.

### Collaborative Designer

As collaborative designers, IDs view SMEs as partners in the process of conceptualizing the pedagogical work of learning designs, and they adopt a student-centered mindset (Drysdale, 2019). According to Klein and Kelly (2018), IDs must be able to collaborate effectively with stakeholders, subject-matter experts, teammates, and others. Slagter van Tryon et al. (2018) claim that teamwork and collaboration with SMEs are specified as essential interpersonal skills for instructional designers. High levels of cooperation are necessary for this role, yet Drysdale (2019) further elaborates that there is no direct decision-making authority for IDs in this role because they rely on influence and expertise to guide faculty in making innovative decisions during the collaborative process. A study referenced by Richardson et al. (2019) found that only one in four faculty members reported working with an ID to create or revise face-to-face or online courses. The author discusses that this may be due partly to the lack of IDs in higher education and partly due to the misconceptions about what benefits IDs bring. Furthermore, Drysdale (2019) poses that collaborative designers do not see faculty in one role as SMEs but as co-teachers with expertise and shared investment in the learning success of their students.

Though most faculty-instructional designer relationships involve shared responsibility, Richardson et al. (2019) claim that the collaborative relationship is essential to the successful integration of instructional designers into higher education.

**Role of the Faculty SME**

According to Griffith and Altinay (2020), the student body in the U.S. has changed drastically over the past few decades, resulting in institutions reconsidering faculty members' roles, including how they spend time in and out of the classroom meeting students' educational needs. Chen (2021) and Carliner (2020) define a Subject Matter Expert (SME) as a faculty member who is qualified with a high expertise within a specific academic program or area of study. The terms faculty and SME are used interchangeably due to this phenomenon. Colleges and universities acquire qualified faculty members to teach courses and maintain high academic standards for students. Watt and Richardson (2020) pose that there is still much to learn from the research on teachers, yet university academics take on and perform roles and identities that are broader than those of the teacher. As others have highlighted, such as Daumiller et al. (2020), faculty provide several benefits to universities, such as producers of innovative research, enhancement of disciplinary progress, contribution to institutional visibility, and the largest contributors to scientific progress. Additionally, on a societal level, faculty teaching and research can provide meaningful and fundamental components of informed citizenship, scientific advancement, economic activity, and government decision-making (Daumiller et al., 2020).

For numerous SMEs, there is a desire to create successful learning experiences for students, but (Starr-Glass, 2020) states that this can be challenging. Holcombe and Kezar (2018) attribute the challenges in faculty roles and identity in relation to the tenure system, stating research from the National Center for Education Statistics which finds that the tenure system

encompassed nearly 70% of faculty members in the late 1960s, and by 2014 just 30% of faculty members were tenured or on the tenure track, while today approximately 70% of instructional faculty are not eligible for tenure. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) explains that a tenured teaching appointment is indefinite and can be terminated only for cause or under extraordinary circumstances, such as financial demand and program discontinuation. Furthermore, The AAUP states that the purpose of tenure is to safeguard academic freedom for faculty to conduct research in education without fear of losing their positions due to speech, publications, or research findings. Mbuva (2019) asserts that the tenured position promotes job security for faculty, and the nontenured faculty are likely to experience long-term job insecurity.

As others have highlighted, most faculty members are no longer on a tenure track, accounting for only 29% of the total faculty workforce in the United States (Chun et al., 2019). Nearly three-quarters of American professors currently serve as contingent (adjunct) faculty (Smith, 2019). While historically hiring adjuncts was concentrated in community colleges, Bolitzer (2019) postulates that most HE faculty members are now working at public and private four-year institutions. Dwindling budgets in HE institutions and the speedy growth of online education have increased the hiring of adjunct faculty (Norman et al., 2020). Additional literature by Bolitzer (2022) addresses the differentiation of adjunct and full-time tenured faculty, offering the case that historically, adjunct faculty were allocated to community colleges, but now evidence shows that adjuncts work at public and private 4-year institutions. Due to the part-time nature of their commitment, Chun et al. (2019) state that many adjunct faculty report not feeling that they are a part of the academic organization and often feel out of the loop in their connection to the institution's mission, values, and curriculum decisions. There is still a considerable disparity in this area of literature as Reeder (2020) claims that there is no difference in the

overall satisfaction between full-time and adjunct faculty, yet satisfaction among part-time instructors varies due to individual variables. Reeder (2020) points to self-efficacy as a key variable regarding commitment among adjunct faculty since those with higher self-efficacy may perform persistently in their work even under difficult circumstances.

The literature further examines the role expectations of full-time, tenured, and adjunct faculty in HE institutions. Griffith and Altinay (2020) claim that many U.S. HE institutions expect full-time faculty to spend 20% of their total workload on service-related activities, including attending college functions, faculty governance meetings, college-wide committee events, and college/student/faculty-sponsored events. In addition to these responsibilities, Carliner (2020) and Chen (2021) write that faculty SMEs may generally work independently on course design due to challenges such as heavy workload, lack of work time, and unfamiliarity with pedagogies of online learning. Richardson et al. (2019) discuss the role of faculty as governed by interpersonal relationships within the professional community, such as supervisors and peers. In this study, the authors state that HE faculty often juggle several roles, including scholarship, class preparation and instruction, mentoring students, and service to academic departments. This could ultimately lead to tension in the university's demand for SMEs to stay current with instructional technologies. More recent evidence provided by Mellieon et al. (2021) states that faculty SMEs should not be left to figure things out on their own. Thus, the literature concludes that SMEs should have assistance and resources from the university in curriculum and course design. Lohman (2021) establishes that faculty are not merely subject matter experts but learning professionals capable of successfully designing, developing, and delivering courses.

**Adult Learning Strategies**

A growing body of literature has examined adult learners' characteristics and unique needs and the importance of developing instructional strategies pertinent to this demographic of online learners. Bordonaro (2020) defines self-directed learning as individuals taking the initiative, with or without the help of others, diagnosing their needs, and formulating goals. This is typical of adult learners in an online learning environment. According to Castro and Tumibay (2019,2021;), many adult learners are married, have children, are involved in part-time or full-time jobs, and have other responsibilities to meet the needs in their lives. Additionally, as the size of many metropolitan cities increases, students live far from their college or university (Castro & Tumibay, 2019;2021;). In their study on adult learning facilitators, Stephens et al. (2022) posit that obstacles such as family obligations, geographic location, and work-related responsibilities can prevent adult learners from functioning in a traditional classroom. The specific needs of adult learners are endorsed by Shi and Lin (2021) as they pose that adult online learners often have different learning behaviors influenced by their time management, course participation, and practice toward their online learning success. Abedini et al. (2020) draws our attention to self-directed adult learning involving decision-making strategies, learning experiences, and the student's responsibility in accomplishing goals. Such behaviors also include taking part-time courses and pursuing learning and skills for professional growth (Shi & Lin, 2021).

### *Andragogy*

Knowles (1970) initially developed research on the emerging role of adult education and the theory of andragogy (adult learning) in his work, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education.* In his study, Knowles (1970) identifies that the pedagogical practice of andragogy provides an understanding that the adult learning experience should be a process of self-directed inquiry,

accompanied by the resources of the teacher, fellow classmates, and support materials provided to them but not imposed on them. He further states that adult learners should be active participants, discovering learning and personal development at their own pace. Knowles' theory on adult education has been adopted by various scholars for multiple learning settings (Abedini et al., 2021) as mentioned by Exter and Ashby (2021;2022;), adult education is often discussed in terms of how to teach adults by capitalizing on their learning preferences, past experiences, individual needs, and the relevancy of information. Knowles (1970) further explains that adult education describes a set of organized activities carried on by a wide range of institutions to accomplish educational objectives. Fornaciari and Lund Dean (2014) hypothesize that andragogy principles shift power, responsibility, and motivation toward the learner and away from the instructor. Furthermore, decision-making about and ownership of learning outcomes are shared among students and the instructor. Likewise, Jones et al. (2019) summarize that andragogy is related to self-directed learning, where the students adopt greater responsibility and autonomy for learning outcomes vis-à-vis traditional pedagogical approaches.

Blackmore (1996) further developed Knowles' andragogy theory, proposing five adult learning characteristics: (1) adults are goal-oriented, (2) adults are relevancy oriented (problem-centered), (3) adults are practical and problem-solvers, (4) adults have gathered life experiences and (5) adults are autonomous and self-directed. LaVelle et al. (2020) also draw our attention to the suggestion that adults are first self-directed or goal-oriented in their learning, and they carry perceptions about the course content based on "lived" experiences. These characteristic principles of adult learners are further clarified by Abedini et al. (2021), who state that adult learners are problem-centered by nature. For this reason, Lewis (2021) supports the idea that adult learner instructional approaches consist of employing such strategies that allow learners to

use their prior experiences with a combination of experiential learning, reflective practices, and other concepts to promote a relevant learning experience.

### *Heutagogy*

Abedini et al. (2021) define heutagogy as the theory of self-determination, which is an extension of andragogy learning. Tümen Akyıldız and Fırat University (2019) explore the idea that to construct lifelong learning, students need more than the theories of pedagogy and andragogy offer. Heutagogy, as expressed by Exter and Ashby (2021;2022), is the study of self-determined or self-directed learning, which recognizes that learners seek out their own learning experiences, develop the capacity to learn, reflect on their learning processes, and apply knowledge and skills to complex problems, often in unfamiliar or changing settings. Developed by Hase and Kenyon (2000), this modern learning theory focuses on self-determined learning independent of the educator. Heutagogy infers positioning oneself in the world of the learner (Martínez & Muñoz, 2021). Hase and Kenyon (2013) framed the idea that in heutagogical learning, instructors serve as the compass for learners in their academic journey. Heutagogy is an instructional approach that recognizes learners' unique experiences and integrates those into the learning process (Moore, 2020). In essence, the focus in heutagogical learning should be on *what* and *how* the learner wants to learn, not on *what* is to be taught (Hase & Kenyon, 2013). Heutagogy is a strategy to develop learners into self-determination in their learning process, especially in higher education (Tümen Akyıldız, 2019).

Heutagogical guidelines are explored by Jones et al. (2019) as these experts first identify that adult learners need to be involved in negotiating what and how they learn in the designing process. Exter and Ashby (2021, 2022) draw our attention to the notion of "capable learners" who have the self-efficacy to learn effectively and independently. These learners also can reflect

on their learning and apply that knowledge. Kamrozzaman et al. (2020) support the idea that

heutagogy utilizes flexible principles, self-determination, and the belief that the student can

determine the concepts he is supposed to learn. Moore (2020) points out that this process is

called learner agency, involving the empowerment of the learner to control how they learn and

how they are assessed. Jones et al. (2019) support the heutagogical guideline that the teacher

provides formative feedback that is personalized according to the learner's needs. Such a learning

environment focuses on meeting the needs of individual students. In a classroom using

heutagogical principles, learning is geared to the specific student instead of a one-size-fits-all

instructional model (Moore, 2020). Abedini et al. (2021) contends that, unlike andragogy,

heutagogy is grounded in studies in neuroscience that focus on the process generated in the brain

during the learning experience.

**Online Learning**

Literature examines online learning as a shifting force in the realm of higher education.

According to Dhir et al. (2021), around the world, over 1.2 billion students are out of the

traditional classroom. Online learning currently is one of the most popular models of learning

(Castro & Tumibay (2019, 2021). According to Evans (2022), before the onset of the

coronavirus pandemic, over 50% of community college students were already taking online

courses. The growing number of distance learning programs promise a "borderless" educational

experience in which students are essentially free to attend any institution of their choice, taking

classes from anywhere at any time (Luongo, 2018). As the number of online students increases

annually, online courses provide flexibility to learn anywhere without geographical constraints

(Mucundanyi, 2021). Research studies by Caskurlu et al. (2021) and Dhir et al. (2021) further

explain that online education has become attainable and appealing to diverse learners pursuing

their education while leading busy lives. Almajali et al. (2022) write that the techniques of online education that effectively connect students and teachers encourage students to embrace "self-learning." The term distance education is also used interchangeably throughout literature. Distance education or online learning is described by Castro et al. (2021) as a field of education that allows students to participate in classes while never setting foot inside a traditional classroom. Likewise, Swan (2021) asserts that web-based learning technologies not only eliminate time barriers, but they provide increased access to higher education and challenge our traditional notions of teaching and learning associated with HE. In their analysis of online learning Zu and Wu (2022) provide awareness that online learning is one of the most powerful responses to the growing needs for education because it offers the flexibility of time, shorter distance, higher quality of information, and lower financial cost. Another online learning advantage described by Castro and Tumibay (2019, 2021) claim that the nature of privacy in the online environment may allow more shy students to participate in online learning where they do not physically see other students. According to Lewis (2021), The National Center for Educational Statistics projected that from 2014 to 2025, there would be an 18% increase in student enrollment in educational programs, including a large number of adult learners enrolling in online academic programs. Moreover, Bolliger and Martin (2021) claim that due to the global pandemic in 2020, many institutions moved their academic offerings to remote learning platforms.

Authors such as Guevara et al. (2021) to assert that although millions of students enroll in online courses, there is no single approach to effective and engaging online education. These experts go on to explain that online courses offer an ever-expanding collection of pedagogies, constructs, modalities, and technologies. Online learning requires adjustments by instructors and

students for successful interactions to occur (Guevara et al., 2021). According to Bovill (2022), college staff and students need a greater understanding of this context of online learning to manage this to cultivate an online space which is safer and more respectful.

However, a study presented by Lewis (2021) makes it evident that the retention and graduation rates for students in online programs are lower than in traditional courses. Abramenka-Lachheb et al. (2021) state that online learning requires instructional design approaches and strategies specific to its delivery format. Evans (2022) claims that virtual faculty must establish and sustain a learning environment that supports students in knowledge construction, active engagement, and collaborative learning. Quan-Baffour (2021) asserts that some learners may be slow to grasp information, some may be shy or introverted, others may lack confidence, and some may be extroverts who like to be heard in the traditional classroom setting. This has led authors such as Grant (2021) to contend that well-designed online courses can increase student contentment. However, when done correctly, a fully developed online program or course takes several months to design (Mose, 2022). Because of this, Ramani (2022) claims that online courses that do not properly employ instructional design practices can cause a lack of sufficient student engagement and interactions resulting in a negative student learning experience that eventually can affect student retention.

Literature provides insight into the pedagogical elements of effective online course design. E-learning course design factors include structure, course design interface, testing and evaluation methods, and exchange forums between lecturers and learners (Pham et al., 2021). However, one of the major issues in online course development is the ability to address pedagogical perspectives clearly (Sandanayake et al., 2021). Lewis (2021) identifies elements of a well-designed online course, such as measurable learning outcomes and assessments of said

outcomes. Every aspect of successful online course process hinges on communicating to learners the expected outcomes from completing the course (Lewis, 2021). In their analysis of quality assurance frameworks for virtual courses, Karem et al. (2021) state that when designing class material, lesson plans and the delivery methods, activities, implementation, and management of the overall design process must be addressed. This includes outcome-based education, which provides clear learning objectives, carefully structured content, relevant student activities, and assessment strongly tied to learning outcomes (Karem et al., 2021). Additionally, an important online course standard noted by Lewis (2021) relates to providing learners with multiple ways of engaging in learning experiences that promote their mastery of content and are aligned with state or national content standards. Pham et al. (2021) claim that course design positively affects students' online learning outcomes.

Furthermore, literature studies draw our attention to different styles of online course design: synchronous and asynchronous. Maier et al. (2021) explain that the synchronous online learning environment requires simultaneous participation of instructors and learners, while asynchronous learning environments do not take place in real-time. Zu and Wu (2022) further distinguish between these online learning formats as they state that synchronous learning provides a live platform that permits direct interaction and immediate response between instructors and students. These direct communications may occur through online phone calls, web chats, or video-conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams). In their investigation of student performance and engagement in online learning, Francescucci and Rohani (2019) assess that in synchronous environments instructors have the ability to put students in groups so students can work on certain problems among themselves, emulating a traditional classroom environment. However, Lee et al. (2021) question whether this format is the most effective for

online learning, as they state that synchronous learning has limitations in HE institutions. The authors make the claim that technical difficulties, availability of electronic devices, internet connection, interface and bandwidth, and students' interest and engagement.

The equations given in recent literature also assess asynchronous learning and its developing place in online classrooms in higher education. In this format of online course design, the asynchronous structure allows the instructor to have no live instruction component. Asynchronous learning permits students to work on their schedules to view instructional content and complete assignments. According to Bush and Knisely (2021), in the absence of traditional on-campus meetings, the online course must have a structure that maintains the course content. The authors also claim that asynchronous learning thrives on constructivism and the idea that teaching and learning occur when learners are actively involved in the process of acquiring knowledge. Yet the designers of online learning must understand and incorporate the nature of social interaction that must be considered while creating asynchronous learning situations (Malik et al., 2017). This research study identifies the existence of different factors that influence asynchronous learning, such as physical, social, emotional, and psychological, and their relation to learners' involvement in an online course.

Adam-Turner and Burnett (2018) describe digital learning as a method of information delivery using technology to convey instruction for learning experiences. Similarly, Larbi-Siaw & Owusu-Agyeman (2017) describe asynchronous learning as allowing learners to engage in lengthy, thoughtful discussions, interact with students in various locations, and control their learning. Tanis (2020) states that as online classes become more popular than in-person learning, teaching-learning strategies must be carefully constructed to provide students with a quality learning experience and to counterweigh the distance associated with space and time. Authors

such as Guevara et al. (2021) to claim that asynchronous courses can be created with animations and lectures that ask for comments or feedback, along with discussion boards, but instructors must monitor and add comments to those boards to keep them active.

Current literature examines barriers to online learning, such as lack of social interaction and engagement. In a study presented by Talbert (2020), he notes that the most significant barrier to online learning is a perceived lack of social interaction. Students learning asynchronously benefit from self-directed learning; however, many students struggle in connecting with peers and instructors. Gimpel (2022) writes that 50% of surveyed students found that online courses lacked enough social interaction with the instructor, which included receiving clarification on assignment materials. Yet, Castille (2020) claims that an added benefit of asynchronous learning involves promoting social interaction and supporting teamwork and presentation skills for students, which are highly valued by employers. Baber (2021) writes that interaction is one of the success factors which increase student learning, outcome, and satisfaction, and the problems of student frustration and feeling of isolation need to be addressed. Personality structures such as social anxiety, introversion, and shyness are the barriers to interaction between individuals examined by Kesin et al. (2020). In their study of online learning satisfaction, Xiao and Li (2021) conclude that learning platforms should pay attention to the construction of social interaction so that learners can interact with teachers through the platform and exchange learning opportunities with peers. High-quality and high-frequency social interaction has a driving effect on online learning satisfaction (Xiao & Li, 2021). Tuma and Aljazeeri (2021) suggest that with advanced technology and communication, distant asynchronous studying in a group fashion has become more possible and practical, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Group learning tactics are further described by Kim et al. (2018) as including frequent email communication

between students and instructors and active online group discussions, which help students to feel that their online courses are part of their regular routines.

Additionally, sharing experiences in the asynchronous group learning where learners can learn from other learners' experiences can be structured to provide important learning objects Tuma and Aljazeeri (2021). In group learning, success is achieved only when other group members are also successful (Kreijns & Weidlich, 2021). Orooji and Taghiyareh (2018) further explore online interaction forms, asserting that online discussions can enhance the accuracy of shared knowledge and the level of constructed knowledge. Online discussions are commonly used to promote a deep understanding of a topic and facilitate student social interactions (Ye & Pennisi, 2022). Similarly, Castro and Tumibay (2019, 2021) conclude that educators should encourage students to relate their online discussions to their own experiences because the establishment of social bonds bears vital socio-affective and cognitive benefits for learning (Harasim et al., 1995).

While videoconferencing tools in the online classroom can increase socialization among learners and teachers, the downsides include students' frustration with multimedia course materials and the need for constant updating of the learning technologies (De Paepe et al., 2018). In addition, technological aspects of online courses can be especially frustrating for students and have a negative impact on their overall perception of the course (Dumford & Miller, 2018). In their research on distance learning, Coman et al. (2020) assert that in the technology era, one of the main challenges in HE is the integration of innovative E-learning systems which support both teaching and learning. E-learning requires a reliable internet connection and the necessary hardware and software (Bączek et al., 2021). According to Mohammad (2021), one of the main aims of online learning is to increase society's awareness of communication technology and its

role in teaching and learning. However, both students and teachers must be familiar with the equipment and receive technical support and guidance from the IT department before and during an online course (Bączek et al., 2021). Moreover, in their research on student perceptions of online learning, Curelaru et al. (2022) concluded that students in remote areas found online learning less efficient because they do not have the appropriate communication networks and infrastructure required to follow online learning. The authors also state that broadband connectivity issues in rural areas are as significant challenge for some students to use online learning initiatives.

Other observations by Delnoij et al. (2020) indicate a major problem in online learning called non-completion, which ranges from 78% to around 99%. A negative attribution to distance education is the challenge that comes with high dropout rates (Grau Valldosera et al., 2018). According to Tan et al. (2022), predictions of performance and the propensity of a student to not complete the course can be discovered by observing students' weekly online activities. Wang et al. (2021) claim that research defines academic persistence as the consistent investment in learning despite obstacles, difficulties, failures, and situations, yet persistence is complex and can vary from person-to-person vary from person to person. Yılmaz and Karataş (2022) provide further insight into non-completion or dropout occurrences, citing that poor orientation programs have a negative impact when students experience uncertainties and might prefer to give up. The equations given by Muljana and Luo (2019) state that completion rates in online courses are 8-14%, which is historically lower than in the traditional face-to-face classroom.

**Collaborative Relationships in Course Design**

The present literature explores the need for strong collaboration between IDs and SMEs to design quality online courses that produce student success. According to Ramani (2022), the

collaborative course design process requires the SME and ID to work together for several months, meeting regularly to exchange ideas and create, update, or revise course materials. Wilson and Edgar (2020) write that university professors often teach their courses in "silos" or in isolation. However, because instructional design is not a specialty of faculty, collaboration with the online learning team (ID) is necessary to create a quality product (Singh et al., 2022). Thus, Singh et al. (2022) further claims that key elements of creating an effective relationship between IDs and SMEs include building trust and rapport during the course design process. Recent studies indicate that collaboration requires interdependency and a formulation of joint contributions to reach a shared goal (Newell & Bain, 2020). The main argument for collaboration found in a study by Thomson et al. (2019) contends that all relevant stakeholders have input at significant points in the process. According to Richardson et al. (2018, 2019), collaboration with IDs is necessary for HE course development as they are well versed in the state-of-the-art practices of online learning. This results in positive outcomes for students and SMEs. Additionally, Muljana and Luo (2020, 2021) state that involving multiple stakeholders, including instructors and IDs in the decision-making process of course design is imperative to its effectiveness of implementation. Drysdale (2019) summarizes that instructional designers hold unique and significant expertise that faculty often do not have and are positioned to be leaders of positive change in HE.

Relationship development themes in the literature provide insight into ID and SME collaboration. Newell and Bain (2020) make clear the importance of developing specific interpersonal skills and protocols required for effective collaborative practice, especially when working in course design teams. Likewise, Mueller et al. (2022) highlight the concept that the interpersonal communication process is at the center of the instructional design process, and it is

a critical component of the relationship formed between the ID and SME. The benefit of collaboration is also made evident in studies such as Bawa & Watson (2017) which present the idea that effective collaboration between these stakeholders can lead to knowledge construction, as well as strong outcomes and products. These authors present the idea that building relationships and strong collaboration between IDs and SMEs are beneficial to both. Experiments were conducted by Chen and Carliner (2020, 2021) on the strongest factors in the collaborative relationship between the ID and SME. This study found seven factors that facilitate or encourage the interactions in developing courses in higher education. These factors include communication, attitude, trust, commitment, flexibility, empowerment, and healthy workplace culture. Newell and Bain (2020) developed a research study of participants in the collaborative course design process, and they concluded that attitudes, dispositions, and interpersonal skills are important components of successful collaborative interaction. Richardson (2018, 2019) raises the question of who is responsible for establishing the collaborative environment, concluding that this responsibility falls on the shoulders of the ID as they establish a relationship with the SME that is built on trust, openness, and reciprocity. It is suggested by Ramani (2022) that IDs build rapport with faculty by developing a sense of respect for their teaching style and communicating in a way that the professor or faculty does not feel micromanaged. According to Bawa and Watson (2017), effective collaborative interaction requires being intuitive and sensitive to one another.

**Collaborative Challenges**

The literature discusses evidence that SMEs are largely resistant to the collaborative course design process with an ID. Luongo (2018) presents the case that despite popularity trends in distance learning, only 29.1% of academic leaders report that their faculty accept the value

and legitimacy of distance learning. According to Wingo et al. (2017), the level of skepticism among faculty regarding distance education remains high. Faculty members still question the credibility of online learning, which leads to the ongoing failure of distance learning advocates (Luongo, 2018). Likewise, Mueller et al. (2022) write that the collaborative relationship between instructional designers and faculty can be complicated and contentious at times. Yet, collaboration between faculty SME and ID is fast becoming a hallmark of the ID field (Bawa & Watson, 2017). In her analysis of the ID and SME collaborative process, Ramani (2022) asserts that the SME and ID need to trust each other in the design process, but the interactions can become problematic and create conflicts. Mueller et al. (2022) identify relational conflicts that arise in the course design process over differences relating to individuals' beliefs, values, and goals, which are referred to as content conflicts." Mueller et al. (2022) also pinpoint "relationship conflicts" based on individuals' "desires for control, status, and affection" within their relationships. Instructional designers and faculty may experience both types of conflict either independently or simultaneously. In a research study conducted by Chen (2021) and Carliner (2020), data shows that the faculty/ID paring structure is still new to most colleges and universities. A key factor of conflict in HE settings, identified by Watson et al. (2019), is that conflict in HE settings is faculty are often rewarded when functioning independently; therefore, when they are asked to collaborate with others, they do not have the experience that leads to productive behaviors, which produces challenges relationally such as a lack of openness to collaboration and teamwork.

As the climate of HE is shifting additional themes of conflict emerge in literature including SMEs' lack of understanding or reluctance to comply with online learning standards or certain legal parameters such as copyright law and accessibility standards (Yilmaz et al., 2022).

Other conflict factors acknowledged by Mueller et al. (2022) include occasions when ID recommendations were incongruent with the SME's existing teaching philosophy and pedagogical strategies. In addition, Mueller et al. (2022) write that numerous conflict management scholars advise increasing productivity and strengthening workplace relationships and individual confidence by effectively managing such conflicts. According to Dancy et al. (2019), the transition in faculty teaching practices is not easy, though SMEs may have the best intentions. Chen (2021) and Carliner (2020) state that SMEs may fear losing their academic freedom in opening their course design to an ID. In some cases, creating an online course can erupt into a power struggle between SME and ID, where faculty use their content expertise as reasons to discount the advice of the ID (Xie & Rice, 2021). Moreover, Bush and Knisely (2021) claim that SMEs may struggle in the collaborative relationship due to a lack of understanding of online assessments such as tests, quizzes, case study assignments, and discussion posts. This notion aligns with a study by Abramenka-Lacheb (2021), which states that SMEs may not understand specific instructional technologies needed for an online course. As mentioned by Richardson et al. (2019), many faculty SMEs are not experienced in the pedagogical practices of adult learning and online learning. Chen (2021) and Carliner (2020) state that some SMEs may feel a sense of loss of their academic freedom or autonomy over their course, producing resistance toward the ID. Martin et al. (2019) claim that complications result from faculty perceptions related to their ability to teach online and faculty attitudes about the importance of online teaching. The concept of change is another catalyst for conflict and is a key element of the relationship between instructional designers and faculty (Mueller et al., 2022). According to Bawa and Watson (2017), additional collaboration challenges occur when SMEs are routinely confronted with the next task or design problem in a project without having adequate training to

tap into their creativity as well as developing and sustaining competencies related to the subject matter, pedagogy, curriculum, and technology. Ramani (2022) claims that SMEs may not be willing to teach online because they are comfortable with the dynamics of exchanging eye contact, observing body language and portraying an engaging personality to encourage student interest.

Moreover, technical competencies are noted in the literature as a hindrance to the progress of the course design collaboration. Advancements in technology have brought distance learning to its current accessibility status, enabling students to access their classes or download materials from anywhere (Mellieon et al., 2021). This has created a vast modification for faculty SMEs. According to Mueller et al. (2022), teaching online can be quite an adjustment and involve significant changes in the types of technology and instructional strategies utilized by SMEs. Many HE institutions are experiencing significant pedagogical and technological changes, which are forcing faculty to adapt and modify their instruction (Luongo, 2018). Furthermore, Martin et al. (2019) cites the importance of SME knowledge of educational technologies independent of pedagogy. This technical knowledge includes knowledge about how to use software, synchronous and asynchronous tools, operating systems, and learning systems and tools. In her study of SME viewpoints about teaching online, Ramlo (2021) found that keeping up with technology should be an expectation of all faculty. Similarly, Singh et al. (2019) noted that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic rapid shift to online learning, many instructors reported minimal or no training in the required technology. Stephens et al. (2022) note that a misperception among faculty was that online delivery was easy, and because they had basic technology skills, they did not see the usefulness of collaboration with an ID. Bawa and Watson

(2017) draw our attention to the faculty mindset regarding technology which can sometimes be classified as rigid due to a lack of belief in the effectiveness of educational technologies.

A body of literature has emerged in recent years, providing helpful insight into improving the collaborative relationship between IDs and SMEs. According to a study presented by Lowell & Ashby (2018), the professional competencies for IDs are communication, collaboration, and the ability to give and receive feedback. The inability to execute these skills hinders the success of the relationship. Additionally, this study states that The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI) provides guidelines for IDs to use effective collaboration, have active listening skills, and solicit, accept, and provide constructive feedback. Lohman (2021) claims that effective IDs engage in perspective-taking in one-on-one interactions and collaborations, including empathy and acknowledging the totality of SME responsibilities and busyness. Similarly, in a study developed by Abramenka-Lachheb et al. (2021), empathy and understanding were exhibited in a collaborative nature of working with SMEs through mutual brainstorming, focused discussions, and making the best design decisions efficiently. Drysdale (2019) posits that techniques for improving collaboration begin by asking questions about the faculty member, their course, and their unique experience and perspective, demonstrating that the ID values the faculty member and wants to work collaboratively.

**Faculty Professional Development and Support**

Literature has expansively explored the area of faculty professional development and institutional support in HE. Steinert et al. (2019) define faculty development as all activities developed to improve faculty knowledge, skills, and behaviors as educators, leaders, researchers, and scholars, in both individual and group settings. According to Dooley et al. (2019), faculty professional development has been a critical component of HE since the 1950s and 1960s, when

the focus was placed on developing research skills and productivity. Moving into the 1970s, Dooley et al. (2019) explain that faculty development shifted into focusing on improving teaching skills and abilities, while the 1980s focused on faculty-centric programs. Finally, the 1990s shifted to the age of learner focus, leading to today's age of the network, which focuses on collaboration across faculty to assist in the best use of technology. However, formal training in technology use and online course design and development is not often a part of the institutional infrastructure in HE (Luongo, 2018). Macdonald et al., (2022) claim that most faculty only get leadership development when they move to a chairperson position within the academic institution.

Further evidence claims that one of the biggest deterrents to teaching distance learning courses is the perceived lack of institutional and departmental support (Luongo, 2018). According to Dooley et al. (2019), faculty development programs and assessments are necessary for colleges and universities to provide high-quality teaching and learning. Frankel et al. (2020) explain that SMEs require foundational training before they engage in online teaching. This study also suggests that SMEs are offered ongoing access to supportive educational materials to sustain high-quality teaching. The ability of faculty to develop and integrate online instruction is an essential skill in the 21st century. In her study on professional development for online faculty, Berry (2018) concludes that a lack of training for online faculty has dangerous implications for online students, and faculty that are not prepared are less likely to assist with student engagement, learning collaboration activities, and cultivating a sense of community. Martin et al. (2019) note that experienced faculty members cite ways higher education institutions can provide support in the areas of online course design and delivery, such as the engagement of support staff (e.g., instructional designers) to help in the active cycle of an online course. However, a research

study presented by Bartlett et al. (2021) provides evidence that 68% of instructors reported less than two years of experience with online course instruction.

According to Dooley et al. (2019), teaching growth is established through a supportive community where challenges can be addressed, and experts in education can share knowledge. Mellieon et al. (2021) provide a study on faculty perceptions of condensed online learning, indicating that if SMEs are assured by their school administration that online learning is a viable means to teach, some of their worries would be alleviated. Dancy et al. (2019) mentioned teaching growth can be accomplished through a supportive community where faculty members can learn from peers and other experts in education such as IDs. Further evidence by Mellieon et al. (2021) reveal that successful faculty members will embrace new and creative strategies to help their students become successful. Additionally, literature supports the idea that faculty development should include training on building social connections with the students they teach (Carpenter et al., 2022). According to Trolian and Parker (2022), effective faculty teaching practices have been associated with numerous positive student outcomes, including cognitive and critical thinking gains, academic motivation, and positive learning orientations.

HE faculty benefit from participating in communities of practice that focus on developing and improving their own instruction (Soto et al., 2019). Supporting post-secondary faculty is examined in a study offered by Bartlett et al. (2021) who conducted research at a four-year university to examine the needs of SMEs as they transition to online teaching. The authors state that faculty participants fell into three groups: those who were experienced at online teaching or used instructional technology regularly, those who use instructional technologies occasionally, and those who seldom or never used instructional technologies. The university developed an online website to help faculty transition to remote instruction. Webinars were also used to help

faculty create plans, answer questions, deliver lectures, communicate with students, and assess student learning online. The authors noted that professional development for faculty centered around digital literacy was beneficial in developing faculty self-efficacy. Faculty members shifted from panic to vitality in their online teaching role. Similarly, Bandura (1993) states that a teacher's self-efficacy for motivating learning impacts the type of learning opportunities that are created for students and their level of academic achievement. Likewise, Bloomberg (2022) claims that developing an academic community through coaching and mentoring allows faculty to more fully engage with each other, share experiences and resources, and model effective teaching practices to support their colleagues. According to Macdonald et al. (2022), supporting the development of faculty ultimately taps into a broader talent pool and supports the work of the college in delivering on its mission. Bolstering faculty members' identities as teachers could help them feel valued, pursue educational activities, and participate in faculty development offerings (Steinert et al., 2019). According to Evans (2022), when online teachers are warm and emotionally supportive, they provide students with a sense of trust, connectedness with the institutional environment, increased motivation, academic achievement, better retention, satisfaction from studies, and a positive climate in the learning environment. Thus, it can be concluded that strong academic success in online learning begins with the self-efficacy and competence of faculty SMEs.

**Summary**

This chapter begins with an examination of the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy which will serve as the lens through which the experiences of faculty SMEs will be investigated. Self-efficacy theory is based on the belief that a person is more likely to maintain motivation to complete a task based on the personal belief in their

performance ability. Faculty members' self-efficacy with online teaching technologies is affected by a myriad of factors such as verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, physiological arousal, and mastery of experiences (Awofala et al., 2017; Englund et al., 2017; Almajali et., 2022). This idea is explored in the literature related to SME and ID roles in the online course design process. Then, the collaborative relationship data in the literature is presented with insight into how SMEs and IDs work together, including the areas of professional and relational challenges. Literature is then presented in relation to various adult learning pedagogies, followed by an examination of literature studies on the advantages and disadvantages for students in online learning environments. Lastly, faculty professional development is explored in literature studies to establish the need for pedagogical support and resources for faculty who are tasked with transitioning to online teaching. Factors which influence faculty support in the online classroom are also discussed. The literature on this topic shows the importance of the roles of the ID and the faculty SMEs in the collaborative course design process can be determined. However, a gap exists in literature with no exploration of the SMEs' perception of their own professional growth after the collaboration process with an ID through the lens of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and guided by Knowles (1970) theory of andragogy.

More specifically, the literature has not addressed the results of the collaborative ID and SME relationship from the faculty SME perspective of self-efficacy. It is not yet known what the SMEs' perception is of their professional growth after working with an ID. Literature has not explored whether the SME has increased knowledge of adult learners, asynchronous online learning, online course development pedagogies, or successful student engagement techniques. There is still a need to explore the SME's perception of knowledge gained in online learning pedagogies and technologies. It has also not yet been investigated whether SMEs benefit from

learning to create strategic course learning outcomes for students to measure academic success. This area of course design is important as the success of the course can be determined through the assessment of course outcomes. There is considerable room available to fill this practical significance by gathering data that focuses on the SME perspective of self-efficacy post-online course design with an ID.

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

**Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological approach study is to examine faculty SME perceptions of self-efficacy as a result of working with an ID. This chapter begins by introducing the design of the study, including full definitions of all variables, followed by the statement of research questions. The participants and setting, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis plans are presented. This chapter includes a description of why phenomenological research was chosen, followed by descriptions of the research setting, participants, procedures, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations for this study.

**Research Design**

This study uses a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of SMEs. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in a phenomenological study, the goal is to comprehend the core essence of a phenomenon. The phenomenon described in this study is the process of collaboration between SMEs and ID to design an asynchronous course. A phenomenological study aims to investigate the significance of an individual's experience related to the identified phenomenon. This study does not focus on the life of SMEs but rather on understanding their experiences regarding instructional ID collaboration.

Moustakas et al. (1994) transcendental phenomenology will be used in this study because it places a greater focus on the experience of the participants. With this approach, the researcher puts aside his or her experiences and deeply investigates the phenomenon from the lens of the participant. By relinquishing any bias, the researcher can use a fresh lens to view the experience of the participants. However, it is important that the researcher has experienced the same phenomenon to connect with that of the participants. As a professional ID, I will be able to use

my experiences to aid in the interpretation of SME data. To prevent my professional role from influencing participants, they will be encouraged to speak openly without repercussions for their honesty. The focus of my study is to understand the experiences of SMEs and learn how higher education faculty development programs can improve the SME experience. According to Mellieon (2021), it is up to school administration and policymakers to provide necessary faculty support for the success of a distance learning program. However, there should be research data to support this need.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), it is typical for qualitative researchers to gather multiple forms of data such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisuals. Data in my study will be derived from interviews, field notes, and observations to examine the phenomenon in depth. Qualitative observations closely align with the topic of my research because during a qualitative observation, the researcher takes notes on the behavior and activities of participants at a specific location. This will be useful as behavioral observation data will be necessary to learn about SME interactions with IDs. Additionally, a phenomenological study explores the phenomenon as experienced by several individuals. Participants who have all experienced the phenomenon will be selected through volunteer responses to participation requests. This closely aligns with my topic because I will gather several participants from one four-year college institution. All SME participants will have experienced the same format for ID collaboration and asynchronous course design, ensuring that the phenomenon is viewed from various perspectives.

## Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this transcendental phenomenological study:

**Central Research Question**

What are the faculty SME's perceptions of the course design collaboration process with an ID?

**Sub-Question One**

How do SMEs perceive their course design and adult learning pedagogy abilities now as compared to entering the collaborative course design process?

**Sub-Question Two**

How do the SMEs perceive their ability to design online learning strategies such as learning assessments as a result of working with an ID?

**Sub-Question Three**

What are the perceptions of SMEs when it comes to the need for IDs in higher education?

**Setting**

The setting for this study is the online adult learning program at a rural four-year college in Massachusetts with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 1,600 students and 350 post-graduate students. The organization's leadership consists of the college president, vice president for administration, provost, and director of online learning. The academic programs offered include undergraduate and graduate studies, and the college opened its academic offerings to online learning approximately four years ago. The online programs are in their early stages, launching asynchronous course offerings for academic disciplines such as communication arts, business, accounting, and management, graduate education, public health, and graduate leadership. Creswell and Poth (2018) write that narrative researchers should focus on emerging stories as all people have a story to tell. The online adult learning program is still in the process of expansion which creates a need for a research study such as this to aid in the program's

development. This study will seek to improve the experience of faculty SMEs and IDs, while providing an opportunity for their stories to be told.

**Participants**

Participants in this study are adjunct faculty members in the established college setting, consisting of both undergraduate and graduate subject matter experts. All participants have advanced degrees from master's to doctorate and have more than ten years of teaching experience in traditional classroom settings. All participants have worked with an ID to design at least one asynchronous course for the college. Using Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology approach in this study will allow for a deeper understanding of the human experience of the established 12-15 participants.

## Researcher Positionality

As an instructional designer, I understand the daily challenges in online course design. I have experienced the relational and pedagogical struggles that occur within the collaborative process with faculty SMEs. These challenges are more complex than interpersonal relationship challenges, which has led me to seek more understanding on the issue through the lens of social constructivism. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that social constructivism explains that knowledge is constructed through social interaction. This leads me to believe that there is more to be discovered in the collaborative relationship between IDs and SMEs.

**Interpretive Framework**

The theory of social constructivism and its focus on social interaction helped to guide me in developing this study. Creswell & Poth (2018) state that through social constructivism, multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences. Because this study examines the experiences of faculty SMEs in response to the collaborative course design process with an ID,

this interpretive framework will allow in-depth contact with the participants. Because faculty SMEs are integral to the success of asynchronous courses and the success of the educational system, it is necessary to examine this phenomenon from their perspective. Social constructivism aligns with this study because of its focus on understanding meaningful relationships in connection to their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

## Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that all people bring certain beliefs or philosophical assumptions to their research. My philosophical assumptions provide a lens for the reader to understand how I view the world, which in turn creates a lens for how I approach the research in this study. This section discusses my ontological assumptions, which are connected to my faith in Jesus Christ. Next, my epistemological assumptions are examined to provide context to the phenomenology of this study. Lastly, this section discusses my axiological assumptions, which involve my personal values and how they influence the biases I bring to the research study.

### *Ontological Assumption*

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), an ontological assumption is a philosophical assumption about how reality is viewed. I am a Christian, and this is derived from my belief that Jesus is the living Son of God, the creator and ruler of the universe. I believe that eternal life and the power of salvation are found only through Jesus Christ. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Romans 1:16). There is no other living God who leads to eternal life and, ultimately, the redemption of mankind. "In Him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Ephesians 1:7).

### *Epistemological Assumption*

Epistemology describes the relationship between the researcher and that being studied as interrelated and not independent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My epistemological assumption that provides a lens for this study is based on my experience as an adjunct instructor. I began teaching at a community college over a decade ago, and I have learned to navigate the world of adult learning. As an adjunct instructor, I discovered the challenges that non-traditional/adult learners face in their educational journey. Through many mistakes and learning experiences, I discovered the benefits of higher education and specifically engaging this demographic of students. I became passionate about helping adult learners to pursue their educational goals, and by doing so, I developed a passion for higher education. During this time, I also participated in teaching online courses and learned about their challenges and benefits. These experiences give me a reason to set aside my own biases and preconceptions to examine and understand the faculty SME experience in higher education transcendentally.

### *Axiological Assumption*

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers make axiological assumptions by making their positions evident in the study. As the researcher in this study, I bring my own values and biases into seeking more knowledge on this topic. I deeply value education for people of all ages, and more specifically, I value higher education for adult learners. I come from a family that immigrated to the United States in 1987 from Guyana in South America. My late mother had never earned a college degree in her lifetime, and my father earned his bachelor's degree in his 50s. It is a great accomplishment for me to earn a doctorate degree, which shapes my values on education. I believe everyone should have access to higher education, no matter the cost, or socioeconomic background. For this reason, Moustakas (1994) discusses bracketing as a

means for the researcher to set aside personal values and approach the research authentically, allowing the participants' experiences to be highlighted. With this knowledge, I will bracket my experiences and cultural history to focus on the phenomenon as experienced by the participant faculty SMEs. Greening (2019) explains bracketing, the first step of the phenomenological design, as the process where the investigator identifies preconceived beliefs and opinions with the intention of holding those ideas in abeyance.

**Researcher's Role**

I currently work full-time as an instructional designer at the site of research for this study. I work remotely, which allows me to interact with subject matter experts from various parts of the country and internationally. In this role, I have the opportunity to design asynchronous undergraduate courses in communications, as well as asynchronous graduate courses in education and finance. This has allowed me to interact with many different adjunct faculty members with varying years of teaching experience and varying levels of comfort in online learning. As an ID, I have experienced the collaborative process firsthand, including its challenges and victories. These experiences have prompted me to design this study because I see the need for better understanding and equipping SMEs. I do not have a position of authority over the participants in this study. To further reduce bias, I will seek to work exclusively with individuals who are not my collaborative partners. I am aware of the bias I bring to the study because I have a vested interest in the success of the college. I am also a part of the online learning development program, so I desire to see its expansion and use this research to improve our interactions with SMEs. This bias will be set aside as I collect and analyze data, positioning myself as a researcher and not an ID. In addition, participants will be encouraged to participate

honestly and objectively as well. As the researcher, I will encourage professionalism and integrity in the data collection, not allowing relationships to skew the process.

## Procedures

In this section, the phases of research will be identified, including the site approval and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The additional phases of the procedural plan will be discussed, including recruitment, sample size, and rationale regarding each. Finally, this section will provide detailed information on the data collection plan and analysis for this research study.

### Permissions

I will complete my proposal for this study and then gain approval from the IRB to conduct research (Appendix A). This will include submitting an IRB application and site permission form for my dissertation chair and committee member. Prior to doing this, I will need to formally request approval from the college and receive approval to conduct research. Once IRB approval has been confirmed, I will work with the college's Director of Digital Learning to solicit participants and prepare for data collection.

### Recruitment Plan

This study will include between 10 and 15 participants who are selected from a group of 150 faculty members, including both adjunct and full-time at the four-year university. The appropriateness of the sample size will be determined by the Liberty University Doctoral Handbook guidelines and according to Creswell and Poth (2018) description of the need to facilitate the fullness of the study. The sample group of participants will be determined based on their participation in the online course design process at the college. With the goal of examining the experience from the SME perspective, the sample group will be able to confirm that they have completed at least one full course design collaborative process with an ID. According to

Creswell and Poth (2018), sampling should be purposive and provide the researcher with opportunities to determine participants who are able to best inform their research inquiry under examination.

The recruitment process of participants for this study will include email invitations to faculty SMEs (Appendix C). Those willing to participate will be provided with consent forms (Appendix E), notifying them of the use of their responses to be published within this study. All participants who volunteer to participate will be accepted without restriction. It is important to establish rapport with the participants, so they feel safe and comfortable to engage without restriction. Velardo and Elliott (2018) write that participants are more inclined to discuss their responses and issues authentically when trust is established. The responsibility falls on the researcher to establish trust within the data collection process.

## Data Collection Plan

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative researcher engages in a series of activities to collect data. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described five elements of authenticity to consider when evaluating a constructivist inquiry including fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. In this fashion, my qualitative data collection will include document analysis, individual interviews, and journal prompts to collect data from participants to support the person-to-person interviews. The rationale behind this data collection plan is to acquire the necessary data in the most ethical fashion, while also showing the participants that their responses are secure and safe with the researcher.

**Document Analysis Approach**

To begin data collection, documents will be collected from the research site that represent each of the participants' course design process. Document analysis is a social research method and is an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation, the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). The first document that will be analyzed is the course design blueprint and course plan. This document contains both a high-level blueprint plan of the course, as well as a detailed development of each course module. This document also houses record of the collaborative communication between ID and SME. The researcher will observe comments in the document to gather insight on how the communication flowed from ID to SME and vice versa. This document will also allow examination of course learning outcomes and how they were addressed in online learning format. Lastly, the blueprint course plan document will also provide data on the timeframe of course completion as compared to the 16-week expectation, allowing the researcher to seek further details on what issues caused delays or what circumstances accelerated the process. The next document which will be examined for data collection is the meeting agenda and notes document. This file is used throughout the course design process to document meeting notes, as well as progress and action items for both the ID and SME. Examination of this document will allow the researcher to analyze any notation of collaborative struggles, items that continually remain unaddressed from one session to the next, and notation of any changes or progress. Lastly, the researcher will examine any additional course design document used by the ID and SME throughout the process. Documents such as these may include brainstorming documents, high-level course outline planning documents, etc. All documents will be primary sources of detailed interactions and records of the course design process created by the ID and SME. Each data collection file will be accessed via Microsoft SharePoint with permission from the Director of Digital Learning.

*Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan*

In-depth analysis of all document data will be conducted using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis. The researcher will first determine the relevancy of each document as it pertains to the study. Next, the documents will be examined to determine the authenticity, credibility, accuracy. Additionally, the researcher will consider the original purpose of the document and whether this was achieved through its use. The analysis will include an initial skimming of the documents, followed by thorough re-reading for examination. After the initial document skimming, the researcher will engage in focused re-reading to review the emerging content and themes. This will be an iterative process to ensure all documents are fully examined. According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition where emerging themes become categories for analysis. Using an Excel spreadsheet for organization, the researcher will manually document categories for each of the identified themes discovered in the document analysis.

**Individual Interviews**

Individual interviews will be executed with SMEs to allow them the opportunity to share their experience of course design collaboration with an ID. Interviews will be conducted virtually using Zoom, which will allow for recording of each session, lasting approximately 30-45 minutes (Appendix F). Participants will be encouraged to choose a setting that is free from distractions and will allow them to speak openly. The in-depth, individual face-to-face interview is the most common technique for the research to gain a deep perspective on the participant experience. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), interview questions should be sufficiently focused so the homogenous group will have shared experiences about the topic. The interviews will be semi-structured with guides for the SMEs to respond on the same topics. The

rationale for this form of data collection is to gather an in-depth view of the experiences of SMEs as they engage in the online course collaboration process with IDs and learn their perspective on how they have grown from the experience.

### *Individual Interview Questions*

1. Describe your initial reactions upon learning about the course design collaboration with an ID. SQ1

2. What online learning pedagogical knowledge did you have prior to the collaboration process with an ID? SQ2

3. Describe the elements of support you experienced during the online course design process. SQ1

4. What elements of adult learning did you feel less knowledge in *before* the course design process? SQ2

5. Describe the areas of adult learning you feel more knowledgeable in *after* the course design process. SQ3

6. Describe the challenges you experienced in the collaborative course design process. CRQ

7. What online course design techniques or technologies did you become familiar with as a result of the collaborative course design? SQ2

8. Describe any knowledge you gained in regards to designing student learning assessments in an online platform. SQ2

9. Describe any knowledge you gained in regards to designing student learning outcomes in an online platform. SQ2

10. Describe your perceptions of the completed asynchronous course as compared to the traditional course format. SQ3

11. What are your overall perceptions on the collaborative course design process in regards to relationships with instructional designers? CRQ

12. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with ID course design collaboration that we haven't discussed? CRQ

A total of 12 questions will be asked of faculty SMEs which provide insight into their background, teaching experiences, and reflections on their collaborative course design experience, in correlation to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Questions one through four help to develop an understanding of the background experience of each participant and their perception of self-efficacy as related to online learning. Teaching growth occurs through a supportive community where teaching challenges are acknowledged and where peers and experts in education can learn together (Dancy et al., 2019). To be a supportive community, we must first understand teachers and their history.

Questions five through eight provide insight into the SME perceptions of the ID relationship and the collaborative process. According to Chen and Carliner (2020, 2021), clarifying the roles and managing expectations of the SME and ID relationship contributes to stronger working relationships, resulting in stronger online courses in higher education. It is necessary to understand the SME perceptions of this relationship to improve their overall experience. Data retrieved from questions these questions will answer SQ1 and SQ2.

Questions 8-12 focus on understanding the SME perception of the challenges and results of the course design process. Griffith and Altinay (2020) write that recent transitions to remote teaching have brought further time-consuming labor for faculty members as they learn about new technologies. The ID must work at the level of the SME when designing an online course, assisting them in the technology challenges as well as the pedagogical

challenges. This group of questions will aid in understanding these challenges as well as the SME perceptions of the end result. Questions 10 and 11 offer an opportunity for the SME to compare traditional and asynchronous courses and reflect on the newly designed course. Data retrieved from questions these questions will answer CRQ, SQ2, and SQ3. The research committee chair and committee members will review and refine these questions with a small sample outside of the study to ensure clarity of wording.

*Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan*

For this study, each SME will participate in virtual one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews is to allow the investigator to gather deep insight into the faculty SME experience in collaboration with an ID. The data from each interview will be analyzed for discovery of common themes and patterns. Interviews will be transcribed for accuracy through a transcription software, ensuring integrity in this narrative analysis. The transcriptions will go through member checking, allowing the participants to verify the accuracy of the transcription. The researcher will then carefully read the interview transcripts and take notes on first impressions, narrative themes, and biases that may stand out. Next, the researcher will make meaningful annotations in the transcripts such as labels for relevant words, phrases, or sentences. The next step in interview analysis is to create categories and subcategories for the organization of content regarding themes. By organizing the data into several categories in epoche phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. The interviewer can see the full picture from all participant interviews and determine the importance of each category or theme and determine their order of relevancy. This also allows for a deep examination of the categories and how in they work within the overall research narrative.

**Journal Prompts Data Collection Approach**

Journaling is a fairly new approach to data collection. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the participant journal as a method of documentation during case studies and narrative research. The participants will be provided with five journal prompts and will be expected to write for 10 minutes after two sessions within the course design collaboration process to keep in mind the busy schedule of faculty SMEs (Appendix G). The rationale for this approach is to allow the SMEs to prepare responses and reflect on their contribution to the study, while having the freedom to make edits and finalize their responses. The following are journal entry prompts.

1. What was on the agenda of the collaborative meeting for reflection in this journal entry?

2. What challenges, if any, did you perceive in today's session?

3. What support did you receive from the ID in this session?

4. What new skills, if any, did you acquire in this session?

5. What are your recommendations for improvement based on today's collaborative interaction?

**Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan**

Creswell and Poth (2018) write that journaling is a popular data collection process in narrative research. This study will require participants to respond to journal prompts for 10-15 minutes after each course design session. Participants may choose whether to type or write journal entries to be collected via email. The researcher will carefully read each journal entry and take notes and highlight major themes, ideas, and topics. The researcher will take time to observe patterns among participant journals for further investigation. The notes will then be organized by hand into a model which places shared themes and ideas into categories.

**Data Synthesis**

Patton (2015) states that phenomenological data synthesis aims to grasp the meaning, structure, and essence of a phenomenon's lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) suggests steps for data analysis including epoche, phenomenological reduction, and synthesis of textual and structural descriptions. This includes using various techniques such as bracketing, horizontalization, clustering, descriptive summarization, and synthesis. This can become overwhelming to the researcher if not planned appropriately. For this study, the researcher will engage in epoche to gain a fresh outlook on the course design process. Engaging in epoche requires the researcher to identify any personal bias regarding the phenomenon. Thus, no position will be taken in the process of analyzing documents, transcribing interviews, or analyzing journal entries. Moustakas (1994) notes that phenomenological reduction focuses on the qualities of participants' experiences. To complete horizontalization, the researcher will watch Zoom recordings of conducted interviews, carefully examining participant responses. Likewise, after manual transcription of each interview, transcripts will be examined to code the responses of each participant. This will allow for the maintenance the unique nature of each participant's experience. Additionally, the researcher will synthesize and the describe the essence of the lived experience from the SME perspective from collected themes, concepts, and subthemes evident in journal entry submissions. This technique also provides a method to ascertain a textual structural description in the form of a unified statement that described the essence of participants' experience as it related to the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). Notes will be taken by hand as journal entries are reviewed, then an Excel Spreadsheet will be used to organize themes and to draw connections and patterns.

**Trustworthiness**

A qualitative research study should ensure trustworthiness, which gives integrity to the investigation and results. Trustworthiness in research is achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. "We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). This research study will establish the various forms of trustworthiness in detail to ensure the findings are received by the reader with reliability.

**Credibility**

According to Wood et al. (2020), when the researcher is explicit about the framework and methods used, it establishes the credibility of the study. The credibility of this study will be proven through establishing the framework, as well as prolonged engagement and persistent observation. In establishing credibility, methodological congruence will be achieved between the researcher and the analytic procedures. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that the use of member checking plays a significant role to the participants, as they check for accurate information, adding to the researcher's credibility. To achieve credibility in this study, all interview transcripts will be shared with participants to verify that all information is accurate. The use of triangulation will also ensure credibility through the use of multiple data collection sources.

**Transferability**

Transferability in research refers to the ability for findings to be applied to another context. As the researcher, I will identify which findings in my research have transferability conditions such as application to other situations outside of this study. This will be achieved by using dense descriptions in each category of my findings. This will allow readers to understand how to transfer the information in other research studies accurately. According to Creswell and

Poth (2018), providing explicit details in writing about the themes and descriptions of the findings will also aid future researchers.

**Dependability**

Dependability of the research establishes that the findings are consistent. In addition to transferability, dependability ensures that the research can be replicated. To establish dependability, this study includes detailed descriptions of each procedure used in the data collection methods in the study. Additionally, an inquiry audit will review the process and products of the research by the dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), peer review includes an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the level of neutrality in the findings that are determined by the interest of the participants. Conformability in this study will be established through confirmability audits and audit trails. These will ensure there is no researcher bias or motivation. An audit trial establishes confirmability when the researcher documents the data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of collected data. By recording topics for triangulation, the researcher can provide rationale for merging codes and theme explanations.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure ethical credibility, the research for this study will not begin until approval has been granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University and the research site. Approval will also include consent for the research and observation site, as well as permission to record interviews and store audio files. The researcher will ensure various aspects of participant involvement, informed consent, and data collection that confirms the research has

been ethically conducted, including participant consent and confidentiality agreements using pseudonyms. The voluntary nature of this study ensures the right for participants to withdraw at any time. Moustakas (1994) writes that phenomenological research requires the researcher to examine the findings openly and without bias or prejudgment. Addressing researcher biases adds to the credibility and ethical considerations of the study, contributing to the overall trustworthiness of the study. Revealing any hazards associated with the study, protecting the confidentiality of the participants, and clearing up misconceptions are extremely important in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). For this reason, confidentiality in data collection will be upheld through the anonymity of participants and the security of data storage through password protection.

## Summary

Chapter Three included detailed descriptions of the qualitative research design, which is a transcendental phenomenological approach. This design approach examined the experiences of faculty SMEs during the collaborative course design process with an ID. The research questions focused on understanding the background and strengths of the participants, as well as their perceptions of challenges and victories in the collaboration. The location of the research study was addressed, and the selection process of participants was identified. Additionally, details of the procedures and the researcher's role was identified. Chapter Three also provided a description of the methods of data collection in alignment with the transcendental phenomenological which includes a series of opportunities for the researcher to engage in the SME experience such as individual interviews, observation sessions, journal data.  Data collection methods include document observations, journal analysis, and one-on-one interviews. Also in alignment with the research design are data analysis methods including social research

observations, a data collection matrix to organize themes, concepts, and ideas into categories to

develop interpretations, and discovery of patterns through analysis. Finally, this chapter

discussed the issue of trustworthiness in research and ethical considerations regarding this study.

**CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

**Overview**

This qualitative phenomenological study had a central objective: to thoroughly explore and understand the dynamics of professional growth among faculty SMEs following their collaborative course design experiences with an ID. The research inquiries that guided this investigation focused on the SMEs' preparedness for the collaboration, support received, challenges encountered, knowledge acquired, relationships formed, and the overall growth experienced.

This chapter serves a critical purpose in presenting the culmination of my data collection efforts. By examining the findings within the context of the research questions, we gain valuable insights into the intricate process of faculty development and transformation in the realm of course design, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the faculty SME experience.

**Participants**

This study encompassed data from 12 participants, comprising nine males and three females with ages ranging from 40 to 65. This age diversity reflects a wide spectrum of experiences in teaching. All participants identified more than ten years of classroom experience whether traditionally or online. Furthermore, the participants represented various ethnic backgrounds, including White (W), Hispanic (H), and Black (B). These variations in age, gender, and ethnicity enriched the study by bringing forth a range of perspectives and experiences. Nine of the participants have an earned PhD, and three participants have a master's degrees, indicating a range in formal education. In addition, all participants have worked with an ID to design at least one asynchronous course for the college. All participant demographics are identified in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

| Participant Pseudonym | Gender | Age Range | Teaching Status | Ethnic Group | Formal Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frank | Male | 60-65 | full-time | White | PhD |
| Greg | Male | 60-65 | adjunct | White | PhD |
| Harry | Male | 60-65 | adjunct | White | PhD |
| Henry | Male | 40-45 | adjunct | White | PhD |
| Leah | Female | 50-55 | adjunct | White | Master's |
| Lyle | Male | 45-50 | adjunct | Hispanic | PhD |
| Monica | Female | 45-50 | adjunct | Black | PhD |
| Matthew | Male | 60-65 | adjunct | White | Master's |
| Nathaniel | Male | 40-45 | adjunct | White | PhD |
| Shawna | Female | 40-45 | adjunct | White | Master's |
| Scotty | Male | 60-65 | adjunct | White | PhD |
| Ulysses | Male | 60-65 | full-time | White | PhD |

**Frank**

Frank is a professor at the research site with an earned PhD who is between the ages of 60 and 65. He has 15 years of teaching experience collectively at various institutions. He has been employed at the research site for three years. Frank openly expressed his range of experience in course design, yet he was transparent in sharing areas of possible weakness. "I'd have a lot of knowledge, more than many academicians on learning outcomes and scaffolding those learning outcomes, measuring assessment. So, I felt I was ahead of many faculty there.

And yet when I met with the course designers, I realized there was just a lot of their skill set that I did not have because they had a particular training. That was certainly beyond my skills and expertise at that time."

**Greg**

Greg is an adjunct professor at the research site who has an earned PhD and ranges in age from 60 to 65. He has taught in HE at three institutions since 1999, bringing a wealth of experience to the study. Greg stated, "Having taught residentially in universities, I was pretty knowledgeable about different types of learning techniques and understanding the learner and putting in a variety of educational techniques that would enable them to not only benefit from the class but also to use their knowledge and their abilities because not all learners learn the same way." Greg spoke positively of his course design experience, as he said, "If an instance ever came up where the institution wanted me to do another course development, I'd be happy to do that."

**Harry**

Harry is a white male ranging in age from 60 to 65. He has earned a PhD and states that he has been "involved for seven years now teaching to adult learners in online situations." He explained that his collaborative course design experience was not completely unique, stating that, "I've had a lot of experience with adult learners and had designed courses before. So, it was pretty much the same experience that I've had before." He reflected on his experience at the research site in comparison to course design at other HE institutions. He stated, "This process at [the research site] has been a lot more positive and cooperative than before. And the previous designs, let's just say it's been a very high level of aggravation of the whole process. That people

who are designers were not allowing sufficient time content to be developed. Whereas in the [research site] case, it was sufficient time."

**Henry**

Henry is a white male between the ages of 40 and 45. He has earned a PhD and has been employed at the research site in both part-time and full-time positions over the course of 12 years. When speaking of his experience, Henry said, "I'd been teaching online at other institutions for about 10 years. I had taught online courses previously, but like I said, I'd never worked with an instructional designer, much less an instructional design team." He spoke transparently about his lack of self-efficacy as began the process with an ID, as he stated, "I hadn't worked with anyone else before to design an online course and felt a little bit like, 'Okay, I don't know what I'm doing. Am I the best one to go through this? Are there other people who would be better off working with the team?' That was my initial reaction."

**Leah**

Leah is an experienced educator with a master's degree. She is between the ages of 50 and 55, and she is an adjunct professor at the research site. Leah revealed her lack of experience in course design as she stated, "I didn't honestly have a lot [of experience] because I had never taken a course online. I definitely had done professional development online but only kind of through the Covid experience. I had taught a hybrid course one semester prior to starting this experience, and it was like a crash course in preparing to teach that so that was challenging." Yet after completing one course design collaborative experience, Leah speaks with a higher sense of self-efficacy. "I think like anything that's new, it's harder the first time through. So, if I were to do it again, I feel like now that I kind of have an overview of what we're doing, it would be so much easier."

**Lyle**

Lyle is a Hispanic male in his early 50s with a PhD degree. He has been an adjunct at the research site for three years; however, he explains that his first experience teaching an online course was about 10 years ago. Lyle openly admitted his shortcomings and how they influenced his preparedness to work with an ID as he stated, "I tend to be, I want to say disorganized, but I'm happy with chaos sometimes. So, I also was interested in learning how to build something that was more sustainable." He anticipated that the course design process would benefit him. He said, "But my weakness is precisely what this methodology that [the ID] had in place was going to fix." Lyle acknowledged a notion of self-confidence, stating, "I think I have good ideas," however, he expressed that those ideas "sometimes maybe sound better in my head than what they really are." He spoke of being happy to have someone "to bounce ideas back and forth."

**Monica**

Monica is an African American adjunct instructor at the research site. She holds a PhD and is in her late 40s. She openly shared her views on online learning, stating that, "My perception is that it is interesting how much we can get in an online course that is actually in a traditional course, and we pack that all in, and they are still able to get it, learn it, and apply it." Monica says she is proud of the final product after the course design collaboration. "I think students get the same experience whether they're in the traditional classroom or in that online format. It's just not someone standing over them lecturing them. It's more of the motivation factor on their side to get it done." Monica credits the success of the completed course to having worked with an ID. She stated, "I think [IDs] are awesome to have, to help navigate through the coursework. It helped to have that person sit there and talk through it with you. My perception is that they are truly needed, and they are an asset."

**Matthew**

Matthew is a seasoned adjunct instructor in his early 60s with a master's degree. He has taught at the research site for three years. He expressed his gratitude for being a part of the collaborative experience as he stated, "I think a tremendous amount of effort was put into developing the course plan. And I felt like I was kind of learning along the way because I'd never gone to that level of detail where you're dealing with a document that's trying to specify every possible element of the course." Matthew also acknowledged the support he received from the ID. He said, "I received quite a bit of coaching in terms of exactly how to organize and stage the course and then also how to link it to educational outcomes and all those other details." He referred to the course design process as "classic teamwork" and he stated that "my experience has been actually very, very good. I felt like the designer that I worked with took the time necessary to help me kind of grasp what the task was at hand. And I would say we were both motivated to produce the best course plan and then the best-looking course that we could."

**Nathaniel**

Nathaniel is an adjunct instructor at the research site. He is in early 40s and has a PhD in his area of expertise. He spoke of his perceived ability by saying, "It probably would have been a little overwhelming for me to figure out what to do on my own to get it together from scratch. So, it was good to have [the ID] guiding things." Nathaniel also identified his personal struggles in the course design process. He said, "I guess I sort of was being encouraged to shift my entire educational philosophy, but I wasn't really directly told that. So, it was sort of implied, and then I was told, no, no, you don't have to shift your entire educational philosophy. But really, I did." He admitted that was "kind of tough to reckon with." Ultimately, Nathaniel expressed his preference

for courses taught traditionally in the classroom. He stated, "I still think it's not nearly as good a course as the traditional one is, but there's definitely some value, you know, in taking it."

**Shawna**

Shawna is an adjunct instructor in her early 40s and has a master's degree in her academic field. She spoke about the benefits she experienced from designing an online course as she stated, "I think definitely [I became] more knowledgeable when designing, working sort of that backward design. What are our overarching objectives? And then keeping everything in line with that." She spoke about "designing coursework and textbook readings that are directly targeted to those objectives and then assessments that directly target those." Shawna stated that the backward design "helped really streamline and keep the focus of the course, making sure the assessment was matching the instruction and that our outcomes were actually being met."

**Scotty**

Scotty is an adjunct instructor at the research site. He is in his early 60s and has a PhD He expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy as he stated, "I've been writing online courses for over 20 years, and it's been an interesting process particularly as during that time the industry was growing. When I first started, we didn't have the slick learning management systems that we have now. So, I have grown with the industry, but it's been a good thing all the way around. I'm happy to have been able to do what I've done and learned what I've learned." Scotty acknowledged that he "loves the asynchronous format" of the online course. However, he misses the element of "being in the classroom." He said, "I miss meeting the students. But I think the asynchronous format is wonderful."

**Ulysses**

  Ulysses is a full-time professor at the research site. He has a PhD in his academic area and is in his early 60s. He has designed online courses for five different HE institutions, which allows him to have a strong sense of self-efficacy. He expressed the need for the SME to have an understanding of the overall criteria of the collaborative process. He said, "It's useful, especially in the very beginning, to have a sense of what the requirements are." Ulysses urged IDs to "know who they're working with." He said he once was one of the people who needed help and that's where the ID is most needed. However, he expressed his desire for more autonomy in instances when the SME is confident and more knowledgeable. "I really feel like the instructional designers can just sort of take a step back or two and listen to the professor, and then either build the things that they want to build, or if there's something that the professor maybe wants to try."

<div align="center">

**Results**

</div>

  This study sought to examine the experiences of faculty SMEs, analyzing their reflections on the course design process with an ID and exploring their perceptions of self-efficacy after the collaborative process. In phenomenological research, the theme development process consists of data collection, data analysis, and horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). The data in this study were collected using individual interviews, document observation, and journal entries to develop themes. Five themes and seven subthemes were identified from the collected data (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

***Codes, Themes, and Subthemes***

| Themes | Subthemes | Keywords |
|---|---|---|
| Excited but Cautious | Delightful and Challenging | exciting, mixed emotions, overwhelmed, positive, daunting, reluctant, hesitant, intense |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Streamlined Process | Systematic Course Design | enjoyed, streamlined, seamless, smoothly, cooperatively, enormously helpful, better |
| Surrounded by Support | Helpful Input/ Feedback | responsive, encouraged, practical, team, step-by-step, welcomed |
| | Necessary Coaching | confidence, respectful, coaching, guiding |
| Relationship is Critical | Collaborative Experience | questions, ideas, learn, involved, brainstorm, professional, team, polite, problem solve, communication, mutual |
| A New Adventure | Learning Experience Personal Gains | first time, new concept, new system |
| | | comfort zone, skills |

## Excited but Cautious

From the participant responses, a theme emerged which revealed that SMEs were generally excited about the idea of working closely with an ID to design an online course. Yet, while they were excited to begin the process, a level of cautiousness was still expressed. Nathaniel positively stated that he was "open to it" and similarly, Matthew said, "my first reaction was positive." When speaking about her initial reaction, Monica reflected, "It did seem a little daunting at first. I was excited about the fact that there would be an instructional designer to work with one-on-one closely." However, Scotty quipped, "[I felt] ambivalence probably more than anything else. Maybe a little cautionary, kind of like, 'Oh, how's this gonna work?'" Additionally, Henry expressed his initial apprehension as he stated, "I was a little bit hesitant, not knowing I hadn't worked with anyone else before to design an online course, and felt a little bit like, okay, I don't know what I'm doing." The mixture of emotions was also evident in Lyle's transparent reflection as he stated, "Part of me was interested. Part of me was cautious."

### *Delightful and Challenging*

SMEs expressed the need to overcome challenges in their own thinking as they approached the course design process with an ID. This subtheme recognizes the significance of resilience and adaptability as essential attributes in their course design journey. Lyle revealed, "A challenge in my particular case was I think I'm a fast thinker, but I think sometimes it's good to slow down and see the big picture." He added that "my recollection of the time was that it was intense." Similarly, Frank expressed, "I found it delightful and challenging in a good way." Greg articulated that the challenges he faced were in "learning to think in more of a creative approach." He further explained that his thought process required "considering that people have different experiences and backgrounds coming into the class, so I think maybe those types of things are challenging."

**Streamlined Process**

The second major theme developed from the data was that a streamlined process produced positive results for SMEs in their overall reflections of self-efficacy. This theme suggests that when SMEs use a more efficient and simplified approach, it leads to improved self-belief in their ability to succeed. Monica said, "It seemed like a real streamlined process." In his reflection, Harry stated, "The process between myself and the designer went very smoothly and very cooperatively." Greg reflected on the process by stating, "[I] liked how the process worked the entire way through it." Likewise, Ulyssess agreed that "the process was good." Lyle further noted that "The process for me was very seamless."

*Systematic Course Design*

SMEs expressed appreciation for the organized and systematic structure of the course design process. This subtheme highlights the SMEs' recognition of the value in the organized and systematic structure of the course design process, as they particularly appreciated the utility of a

blueprint template and course design document in facilitating their work. Matthew reflected, "I think a tremendous amount of effort was put into developing the course plan [document]." Monica said, "Using the blueprint [document] was different for me as well. I've seen courses developed in different ways, but I like the format of how it was laid out." In her interview, Shawna identified the benefit in using structured course design documents as she stated, "it felt a bit sort of tighter in some ways." Frank attributed his success to the "systematic way of thinking about course design" and he reflected that "what was helpful was that systematic scaffolding." In his interview, Henry also commented on the course design, stating that he was grateful for the "use of that template and guiding course design document."

**Surrounded by Support**

Data revealed that SMEs appreciated the level of strong support they received from their ID during the course design process. This robust support system contributed to the SME's feelings of self-confidence. This finding emphasizes that the high level of support provided by IDs played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of self-confidence among SMEs as they navigated the course design process, further impacting efforts on self-efficacy. Lyle stated, "If you would have told me, 'You have three months to put together this class. This is what I need from you,' and I didn't have that support that I had, I don't think the course would have looked as good as it did." In her interview, Monica stated that "If I ever needed to reach out to my instructional designer, she was available. She would answer emails fairly quickly. The director was responsive as well." Lyle also expressed his gratefulness for the support system, saying "it was good support on the big picture and on the little details." Similarly, Greg shared that the ID was helpful in specific areas where he needed support. He said, "The team was really helpful in helping me to

meet those needs." Additionally, Frank stated, "I felt very supported throughout the process, and I welcomed that."

### *Helpful Input/Feedback*

SMEs welcomed input from their ID and were grateful for an open exchange of ideas. The data revealed that SMEs trusted the ID's feedback and respected the ID as an expert in the course design process. This illustrates the mutually beneficial relationship between SMEs and their IDs, as the willingness to engage in an open exchange of ideas and the expertise of the ID fostered a collaborative environment conducive to innovation and effective course design. In her interview, Shawna stated, "I felt like the designers were helpful. Our meetings were really helpful in terms of 'Here's what you need to do next' and 'Here's the due dates for this,' and [they were] really responsive to email." Similarly, Matthew reflected on his experience by saying, "We had some conversation with the designer and with also the online learning supervisor. All those were helpful." Matthew continued, "I felt like the designer that I worked with took the time necessary to help me kind of grasp what the task was at hand. Some of the things like the [assessments] were very unfamiliar, so I needed more input from the designer in terms of how to structure that." Frank also stated that "feedback was really helpful." Lyle commented on his application of the feedback from the ID as he said, "I would hear [the ID's] feedback, and I would walk away with homework about how to fix things." Henry attributed his success in the course design process to "a very open exchange of ideas with every member of that team."

### *Necessary Coaching*

Additionally, several participants disclosed that the element of coaching from the ID was beneficial to their success. This displays the pivotal role of ongoing coaching and mentorship

from IDs in enhancing the SME's self-belief and skill development, demonstrating the effects of personalized support on self-efficacy. In his interview response, Matthew stated, "I received quite a bit of coaching in terms of exactly how to organize and stage the course and then also how to link it to educational outcomes and all those other details." Nathaniel positively reflected on the coaching he received from his ID as he said, "It was good to have her guiding things." Additionally, Scotty shared, "I don't recall ever being late for anything I didn't do in getting a course done but having somebody there that I had to meet with on a regular basis kind of helped with that." Henry also identified that the ID's coaching was responsible for "bringing out the best in the faculty member." In his response, Lyle said, "I've been supported in terms of the content and the confidence."

**Relationship is Critical**

Eight participants consistently emphasized the significance of nurturing and maintaining a positive and collaborative relationship with their ID. These insights shed light on the central role interpersonal dynamics played in the course design process, revealing that the quality of this working relationship profoundly influenced SMEs' overall satisfaction with the course development process and their motivation to engage productively. Leah reflected, "The relationship is critical, to just have like open communication, know how to reach each other, and just kind of be able to figure out a mutual pacing." Scotty reflected on his relationship with the ID by stating, "So personality-wise I had no trouble working with an instructional designer." In his interview, Nathaniel candidly shared about his relationship with his ID. He said, "We had a couple of disagreements and stuff, but I think we worked professionally very well together. I kind of felt that going into it that she perceived that it could go south with me. She was trying really hard not to show those cards, but I think in the back of her mind or maybe even in the

forefront of her mind, it was like possible that I wasn't going to like what she told me to do. So that was really hard for her."

### Collaborative Experience

Participant responses emphasize the impact of collaboration with their ID on their overall success in the course design process. Teamwork, open communication, and shared expertise not only enriched the course design experience but also played a role in shaping the SME's perceptions of success. Leah stated, "I was really excited to work with an ID, like to have that collaboration and to learn from, you know, someone who had a lot of expertise in putting together an online course." Lyle also expressed his thoughts on the collaboration by stating, "I think personally, I think I had a good relationship. I really enjoyed it. I kind of miss those meetings. It was fun." Shawna also reflected positively on her collaborative experience as she stated, "I think the course design team was always very responsive to questions and concerns along the way."

### A New Adventure

Participant responses unveiled that the course design experience was a new adventure. A significant number of SMEs candidly shared their limited prior experience in several areas. This theme sheds light on the valuable potential for innovation and growth that can emerge from such a new journey. In her interview, Leah reflected, "I don't really feel like I came in with a lot of experience with the online piece." Lyle said the course design process was "a new adventure for me. It was a new place for me." He additionally said of the process that it "pushed me out of my comfort zone." Shawna also reflected on the new experience as she said, "I worked previously with courses on Canvas, but not in the asynchronous format." Matthew expressed an alternative experience as he said, "I was familiar with asynchronous courses, but I had never taught one."

Harry revealed that the newness of the adventure for him was centered around development of the course project. He said, "[This was the] first time I had designed a course project."

***Learning Experience***

SMEs openly discussed new skills learned such as using learning technologies, designing learning assessments and instructional strategies, and developing video content. This subtheme reveals the educational nature of the course design process and highlights the participants' willingness to embrace continuous learning and their recognition of their roles as both learners and educators within the course design domain. Monica revealed, "I learned new strategies on how to put the [learning] outcomes together exactly with the assignments. I know how to do it, but I think it was strengthened by going through this process." Matthew also shared his newfound knowledge as he said, "I feel a lot more knowledgeable about how particularly to run an asynchronous course." For Harry, developing video content for his course was a learning experience. He stated, "I learned about designing introductory videos." Shawna also identified the design process for course videos as a challenging area for learning. She said, "Some of the challenges were writing the scripts, word for word for the videos. [I had a] blank slate with how do I turn this into a script? So, the course recordings were probably most challenging." Nathaniel also shared his learning experience with the creation of course video content. He said, "I think some of the challenges might've been, well, I remember one thing was the videos were tough." Monica agreed, "The video development was challenging, and I questioned what type of video would be appealing to our student population." Scotty's reflected on what he learned through the development of course videos. He said, "On the async format where they can watch the videos over and over it gives [students] opportunities to literally walk through particularly some of the more technical [quiz] questions."

*Personal Gains*

Participants experienced personal and professional growth through their collaborative course design journey with their ID. Participants spoke of gaining not only new skills but also a deeper understanding of pedagogical principles, effective communication, and the art of translating their knowledge into engaging learning experiences. This subtheme celebrates the participants' journey of self-discovery and their emergence as more knowledgeable and confident educators. In his interview, Frank revealed, "I am a better designer now. I felt my professionalism and my ability to design and to teach courses improved as a result of these interactions. I've just found it enormously helpful. I feel I've professionally grown through the process." Lyle reflected on his new knowledge acquired by saying, "One thing that I learned is how to make things evident and how to make the assignments and how to make everything fit in a way, especially because we had a longer piece, a longer project that we were working through." Leah also shared an area where she experienced personal growth as she stated, "I just deepened my knowledge I guess of how to use those different platforms, mostly of Canvas." Henry also identified an area of personal gain as he stated, "A major gain for me, was looking at how the rubric could be tied to the learning outcomes right in Canvas."

**Outlier Data and Findings**

The participants acknowledge that working with an ID was beneficial to their success in the course design process. However, one participant shared his significant challenges with the collaborative process. Scotty reflected on the experience and said, "In looking back at the end of the process, I felt like the baseline requirements and guidelines for writing classes were not fully expressed up front." He expressed that on one occasion, he was working for a while and then suddenly found out that he needed to go in a different direction based on guidelines specific to

the college. "So, I'd have to back up and move and go over again. We really not only ran up against the timeline on this class but wound up running behind beyond it because I had to go back and redo a lot of work along the way. I think I could have been better informed up front and know whether that's the designer or the overall design process." He explained this situation as frustrating, as it increased his time spent on the course design. Scotty added, "I mean frankly if I was asked today, would I work with a designer versus working without one, I would say I'd work without one." He explained this sentiment further by stating that there were many times he felt that he was "spinning my wheels." Additionally, Scotty expressed frustration with the framework document for developing the course. He said, "They had an Excel workbook that kind of put everything together, and the Excel workbook sometimes just didn't really make sense to me, and I live in Excel. I worked in the predecessor to Excel a long time ago, and kind of grew up through Excel. So, it was a frustration. It's not so much Excel. It's just the way the things were designed." At the end of his interview, Scotty reiterated that he would have liked "a better outline of the parameters and expectations as far as what the course is going to look like at the end."

**Research Question Responses**

The data collection unveiled a total of five significant overarching themes along with seven additional subthemes. These findings proved instrumental in illuminating the core research inquiries and sub-queries within the scope of this transcendental phenomenological investigation. The sub-queries align closely with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, encompassing the SME's contemplation of their interactions with the ID, their pedagogical aptitude, and their competence in assessment design. Participants provided rich narratives detailing their experiences and the influential factors contributing to their perceived self-efficacy.

**Central Research Question**

What are the faculty SME's perceptions of the course design collaboration process with an ID? Eleven out of 12 participants overwhelmingly expressed positivity regarding the course design process, highlighting the multitude of advantages they derived from it. These participants emphasized the pivotal role of the relationships developed during the process, which not only facilitated collaborative work but also led to significant professional and personal growth. Matthew stated, "I felt that I learned quite a bit in terms of exactly how to structure modules, how to set some learning goals, and how to anticipate some of the questions that students might have during the class. So, all those would be positive things."

**Sub-Question One**

How do SMEs perceive their course design and adult learning pedagogy abilities now as compared to entering the collaborative course design process? The participants consistently conveyed their positive feedback concerning personal development, with SMEs energetically discussing both personal and professional advancements. They expressed gratitude for the valuable experience and, in some instances, articulated their intentions to apply the newfound knowledge to future course design opportunities. Henry stated, "The piece that I feel I grew in the most was just a knowledge of how you really can create a professional learning community in an online asynchronous online class."

**Sub-Question Two**

How do the SMEs perceive their ability to design online learning strategies such as learning assessments as a result of working with an ID? The SMEs expressed favorable reflections on their acquired knowledge in the realm of learning assessment design. Notably, several participants found themselves in unfamiliar territory, as they had never before created

online quizzes or crafted comprehensive course projects with recurring submissions. It was collectively recognized among the SMEs that assessments for asynchronous courses required a higher level of detail, as adult learners often operate independently without constant instructor guidance. One SME candidly admitted to holding onto conventional assessment approaches, and the collaborative process played a pivotal role in encouraging him to expand his perspective. Nathaniel reflected, "I do think it was good. You know, the ID helped me to let go of some of my, like, traditionalism for the sake of traditionalism, like having long exams and stuff. She helped me to see the value in shorter assessments, which are probably less intimidating for students. I guess I did become familiar with the technique of organizing a class into modules and slapping a couple of videos per module or something like that, or doing a quiz per module as opposed to, you know, my classes were just organized by date before that."

**Sub-Question Three**

What are the perceptions of SMEs when it comes to the need for IDs in higher education? The responses from the participants were overwhelmingly positive, with eleven out of the twelve SMEs expressing a strong inclination to collaborate with an ID in the future. Many participants recognized that the success of the course design was, in large part, attributable to the expertise and guidance provided by the ID. Additionally, SMEs highlighted the development of positive rapport with the ID as a crucial factor contributing to the effectiveness of the course design process. Their appreciation for being respected, listened to, and valued facilitated harmonious interactions with the ID. Lyle stated, "The course wouldn't have been good if the ID hadn't been there."

**Summary**

This chapter discussed five themes and seven subthemes derived from data collected from twelve participants. First, SME's reactions to the course design process, included a mixture of excitement and cautiousness. This disclosed personal challenges to overcome by the SMEs. The data also identified the benefits the SMEs experienced in working within a streamlined process, followed by a discussion on the systematic course design elements and how they were helpful to SMEs. Next, the impact of strong support on SME self-efficacy was explored, including how input, feedback, and coaching all played an intricate role in the success of the course design process. The crucial element of relationships between the SME and ID was discussed, along with elements of collaboration and teamwork. Finally, the nature of a new adventure for SMEs was revealed and how this contributed to their enthusiasm, including new learning experiences and overall personal gains experienced by the SMEs. These findings not only provide a holistic understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences within the course design process but also explore the multifaceted nature of their journey, highlighting the challenges, benefits, transformative relationships, and the thrill of embarking on a new educational adventure, ultimately enriching our understanding of this vital educational domain.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to analyze the experience of faculty SMEs in their collaborative course design experience with IDs at a four-year college in New England. This study seeks to learn the SME's perceptions of professional growth and self-efficacy as a result of the working relationship with an ID. By delving into these aspects, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of instructional design, ultimately benefiting higher education institutions seeking to enhance their teaching and learning practices. This chapter is organized into five distinct discussion sections covering: (a) the interpretation of findings, (b) the implications for policy and practice, (c) both theoretical and empirical implications, (d) acknowledging limitations and delimitations, and (e) providing recommendations for future research.

### Discussion

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the perceptions of professional growth experiences by SMEs after a course design collaborative process with an ID. Using Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy as a framework, major themes and subthemes were developed. Participants contributed to one-on-one interviews and journal entries, and the researcher observed documents related to the course design process. The following sections will provide a summary of the interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations and recommendations for future research.

**Interpretation of Findings**

This section begins with an overview of the thematic findings discussed in chapter four, setting the stage for a deeper exploration. These findings are a product of an extensive analysis that incorporated one-on-one interviews, document observation, and journal entry submissions. From this dataset, a total of five overarching themes, each comprising seven insightful subthemes, came to light. The following discussions delve into the interpretations of these themes, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

**Summary of Thematic Findings**

This phenomenological qualitative study, focusing on the perceptions of faculty SMEs who participated in collaborative course design with an Instructional Designer (ID), revealed a range of experiences and emotions. Through in-depth interviews, journal entries, and document analysis, five distinct themes emerged, shedding light on the journey of these educators. Each theme paints a unique facet of the collaborative process, from the initial feelings of excitement and caution to the development of a streamlined process and the critical importance of the faculty and ID relationship. Additionally, the themes uncover the sense of being enveloped in a supportive environment and the overarching sense of embarking on a new adventure in the world of online learning. These themes provide a holistic understanding of the transformative impact of collaborative course design on faculty professional growth and self-efficacy.

***From Teacher to Student.*** One of the most compelling revelations to emerge from this study was the remarkable ability and willingness of each participant to undergo a profound transformation – to shift from the familiar role of seasoned educators to that of eager and receptive students within the collaborative partnership with an ID. As noted in literature, Lohman (2021) states that faculty are not merely subject matter experts but learning professionals capable of successfully designing, developing, and delivering courses. The mindset

transformation revealed through this study represents a pivotal juncture in the SME's professional journeys, where the boundaries between teacher and learner become fluid, and the pursuit of knowledge takes on new dimensions. This finding supports the notion presented by Reeder (2020) which points to self-efficacy as a key variable regarding commitment among adjunct faculty since those with higher self-efficacy may perform persistently in their work even under difficult circumstances.

Despite the wealth of classroom experience, with each SME boasting a minimum of ten years of pedagogical expertise, there was a shared awareness that within the course design process, they would willingly adopt a more student-centered posture. Henry explained that he "never worked with an instructional designer." Matthew said, "My knowledge and experience was limited in terms of designing an entire class before it's actually launched." The internal transition was marked by an openness to not only embrace but actively seek out innovative pedagogical techniques and practices offered by the ID. According to Bourne et al. (2021), teacher self-efficacy determines teacher behavior. This study supports the literature by revealing SME receptivity to fresh perspectives and their commitment to staying current in a rapidly evolving educational landscape. Leah said, "I was not super familiar with Canvas or the online or hybrid model that I was currently working with, so I was really excited to work with an ID to have that collaboration and to learn from someone who had a lot of expertise in putting together an online course. So, it was purely completely jumping in with both feet and [I was] totally excited." Additionally, Nathaniel stated, "I was open to it. You know, I had never done an online course before. So, I was kind of looking forward to learning from what I perceive to be an expert."

While Carliner (2020) and Chen (2021) write that faculty SMEs may generally work independently on course design due to challenges such as heavy workload, lack of work time, and unfamiliarity with pedagogies of online learning, the remarkable shift in roles, from educator to student, is a testament to the transformative power of collaborative course design. Lyle said, "[This] pushed me out of my comfort zone. Part of me was interested. Part of me was cautious. I was really happy to have someone to bounce ideas back and forth." Sentiments such as this highlight the humility and adaptability of faculty SMEs as they recognize the value of continuous learning and the benefits of integrating the expertise of IDs into their own pedagogical toolkit. Frank expressed the awareness of the need for humility when he said, "Some faculty hate having to work with an instructional designer. There's almost a sense that they're the masters of their course content. And this is the way it has to be. And this is the way I've always taught it." Lyle acknowledged the difficulty IDs can experience in working with SMEs as he stated, "I thought it was very, very helpful, but I could see how [the ID] is going to face resistance from faculty. I think colleges and universities tend to be slow moving dinosaurs." This mindset transformation reinforces the idea that, in the realm of education, the roles of teacher and learner are not static but, rather, dynamic and interdependent.

***The Significance of Perceived Respect.*** From the analysis of the gathered data, it became evident to me that the perception of respect played a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of the SMEs within their collaborative relationship with the ID. A profound aspect of this dynamic was the SMEs' unapologetic acknowledgment of their academic expertise and deep instructional knowledge. They entered the collaborative course design process with a keen awareness that this realm was not an area of weakness for them but rather a domain of strength and proficiency. Ulysses said, "One of the things that I think is important as an instructional designer is that the

instructional designer knows who they're working with. There are people who are, like I was once, very new and need help. That's where instructional design can come along. After that, for people who have more experience, I really feel like the instructional designers can just sort of take a step back or two and listen to the professor and then either provide for them, build the things that they want to build, or if there's something that the professor maybe wants to try." The revelation of the importance of mutual respect supports the idea presented by Watson (2017), which states that effective collaborative interaction requires being intuitive and sensitive to one another.

The SMEs did not seek to diminish their own expertise; rather, they desired a collaborative partnership where the ID would complement and augment their existing skills and knowledge. This finding supports that idea presented by Singh et al. (2022) which claims that key elements of creating an effective relationship between IDs and SMEs include building trust and rapport during the course design process. Likewise, Ramani (2022) states that IDs build rapport with faculty by developing a sense of respect for their teaching style and communicating in a way that the professor or faculty does not feel micromanaged. Lyle stated, "I felt like I was valued as, 'Hey, you know what you're talking about.' 'You tell us what you need, and we'll be there to support you.' That felt like, okay, I'm not being judged." SMEs yearned for the ID to serve as a valuable resource, a guide who could help them further develop their pedagogical repertoire while respecting their existing mastery. Frank said, "I found the instructional designers very professional in that they were encouraging but unafraid to say, 'I don't think that's going to work, and here are the reasons why.' I felt very supported throughout the process, and I welcomed that." It is important to note that this recognition of academic expertise was not born of arrogance but of a genuine desire to maximize their potential and effectiveness as educators.

While Mueller et al. (2022) write that the collaborative relationship between instructional designers and faculty can be complicated and contentious at times, the findings in this study disprove this idea. Instead, the respect extended by the ID toward the SMEs played a pivotal role in establishing a solid foundation for their professional relationship. When the ID openly acknowledged the expertise and instructional knowledge possessed by the SMEs, it conveyed a message of professional validation and esteem. Nathaniel said, "It's just a very tough situation where the online learning expert is trying to get someone to modify a way of teaching that they've been doing for a long time that they believe is really good, that they've poured their heart and soul into for years." Affirmations not only nurtured mutual trust but also validated the SMEs' sense of self-worth within the collaborative process. Drysdale (2019) writes that techniques for improving collaboration begin by asking questions about the faculty member, their course, and their unique experience and perspective, demonstrating that the ID values the faculty member and wants to work collaboratively. Henry said, "Again, just to be a member of the team and see that this is meant to be a collaboration, bringing out the best in the faculty members and supporting them as best they could through all aspects."

The symbiotic relationship between respect and collaboration became evident as the ID's recognition of the SME's expertise laid the groundwork for a partnership where ideas were exchanged, expertise was leveraged, and the course design process was elevated to new heights. As stated by Bawa & Watson (2017), effective collaboration between these stakeholders can lead to knowledge construction, as well as strong outcomes and products. In addition, Mueller et al. (2022) pinpoint the concept that the interpersonal communication process is at the center of the instructional design process, and it is a critical component of the relationship formed between the ID and SME. In essence, it was through mutual recognition and respect for each other's strengths

that a rich ground for professional collaboration was cultivated in this study, enabling both the SMEs and the IDs to collectively embark on the course design journey.

***An Expectation of Expertise.*** A compelling revelation emerged from the data analysis – a resounding desire among SMEs for the ID to function as a true pedagogical expert. This role, characterized by deep knowledge, competence, and a keen understanding of educational theory and practice, held deep importance in the eyes of the SMEs. Abramenka-Lachheb et al. (2021) write that the ID's role is typically a source of support, providing flexible and responsive approaches to SME needs. Drysdale (2019) presented the idea that IDs focus on providing customer service and training to faculty. When the ID assumed the role of a pedagogical expert, a transformation occurred within the collaborative partnership. The SMEs, who might have initially harbored a degree of anxiety about the course design process, found that their apprehensions began to dissipate. This transformation was marked by a growing sense of trust, as the ID's expertise provided a reliable compass for navigating the complexities of curriculum development. Shawna said, "I felt like the designers were helpful. I mean, I feel like they knew they were talking about in terms of how to put the course together, how to answer questions that came up."

According to Klein and Kelly (2018), IDs must be able to collaborate effectively with stakeholders, subject-matter experts, teammates, and others. However, when the ID fell short in terms of organization or pedagogical expertise, a noticeable ripple effect occurred. In his journal entry, Henry stated, "I suggest that IDs have a working knowledge of the content area they are collaborating on. I think this would help make the course feel more like a collaboration rather than simply a sharing of tasks." Mellieon et al. (2021) write that faculty SMEs should not be left to figure things out on their own. In this instance, the SMEs who had come to rely on the ID for

guidance began to experience frustration. Scotty said, "So personality wise I had no trouble working with an instructional designer. Technical-wise, I'm not sure that the instructional designer knew all the little ins and outs that needed to be addressed." Scotty added, "Also, I think the instructional designer needs to have a good understanding of the parameters and what the course is supposed to look like at the end." This frustration stemmed from a perceived breakdown in the collaborative process. It signaled a disassembly of the carefully constructed framework of course design. This breakdown could potentially jeopardize the quality and efficacy of the educational experience under construction for the SME.

***The Acquisition of New Knowledge.*** Upon further examination of the dataset, it became abundantly clear that the collaborative course design process served as a source of knowledge acquisition for the SMEs. The journey from initial collaboration to the finalization of course materials was marked by the continuous implementation of new knowledge. This encompassed a broad spectrum of pedagogical skills and competencies that extended beyond the boundaries of their traditional roles as educators. Martin et al. (2019) cites the importance of SME knowledge of educational technologies independent of pedagogy. Matthew acknowledged, "My knowledge and experience was limited in terms of designing an entire class before it's actually launched." Harry stated, "I'm always looking to discover new things and to add to how I may address students in the future. And so just on the process, [it was] a learning experience for the instructor. And in developing the content for the course, I came up with interesting stuff that I will use conceptually in other courses."

The SMEs articulated their gratitude for the wealth of new skills they had acquired during the collaborative process. Dancy et al. (2019) write that teaching growth can be accomplished through a supportive community where faculty members can learn from peers and other experts

in education, such as IDs. In this study, SMEs highlighted their growth and newfound proficiency in essential areas such as crafting learning outcomes that align with instructional goals, designing effective student assessments, constructing rigorous rubrics for evaluation, and implementing innovative course design techniques. Henry learned "how to incorporate learning outcomes more fluidly," and he stated that his newly acquired knowledge of learning outcomes "freed me up to think about the learning outcomes as relational elements, things that I was guiding students to." Similarly, Matthew stated, "The process of defining and finding language for the learning outcomes, I think, was helpful in working in the online environment because you're more explicitly stating exactly what the learning outcome is and how that is tied to particular assignments.

Additionally, SMEs expressed new knowledge gained in the use of rubrics as necessary learning tools. Nathaniel reflected, "It taught me something about rubrics." Additionally, Matthew said, "So with the rubrics, you're able to weight everything a little more clearly versus when you're in the (traditional) classroom environment, there are rubrics that you're using but not necessarily for everything." New knowledge of the use of rubrics was also evident to Henry as he said, "The assignments that I used, we used rubrics, which I had done previously, but those rubrics for the first time were tied to learning outcomes. [This process] allowed for some analysis for me of what types of assessments should be used to deepen their knowledge." Shawna stated that she gained new knowledge such as "...being sure that whatever it is that you're asking the students to do is directly linked with one of the outcomes that you've identified and whether it's mastery, is a student progressing toward that?" Frank said, " I don't know how many rubrics I had to design, but more than I've ever had to do in my life before, that's for sure. And so that was

also helpful, incredibly time consuming at the front end, enormously helpful when it comes to grading."

Shawna also identified new knowledge gained in designing quizzes as learning assessments. "Quizzes...making sure those are streamlined to match reading. I learned about building those and just the necessity of those to kind of keep accountability for readings as well." Additionally, Shawna expressed that she was "more knowledgeable when designing, working sort of that backward design." Similarly, Frank acknowledged his discovery of the advantages of automation in grading in an online course. He stated, "When you design online classes, you can actually design them in a way that part of the whole assessment piece is automated. The advantage of that is that assessment is really important. It helps you to know whether you're actually teaching the things that you think you're teaching and whether the program is current, whether it's up to date, whether it's a quality program." Frank added that "systematic scaffolding. I found that very, very helpful." Lastly, Nathaniel acknowledged that he "became a little bit more familiar with Bloom's taxonomy" as a useful tool in designing learning assessments. Finally, SMEs revealed knowledge gained in the use of online learning technologies. Leah said, "I definitely became a lot more adept with Canvas." Likewise, Frank said, "I've not used Canvas before, so it's just good to get used to a new technology." These newfound skills not only expanded the SMEs' pedagogical knowledge but also reinvigorated their approaches to teaching and online course development. Such evidence supports the idea presented by Evans (2022), which states that when online teachers are warm and emotionally supportive, they provide students with a sense of trust, connectedness with the institutional environment, increased motivation, academic achievement, better retention, satisfaction from studies, and a positive climate in the learning environment.

***A Sense of Achievement and Satisfaction.*** Starr-Glass (2020) states that it can be challenging for SMEs to create a successful learning environment for students; however, upon examination of the data collected, a prevailing sentiment emerged among the SMEs - a profound sense of achievement and satisfaction with the courses they designed with the guidance of the ID. Monica said, "I was proud of my final product." Likewise, Lyle acknowledged that the process "helped me really put together a course that to this day, I think it's very solid." The satisfaction derived from the completed courses served as tangible evidence of their professional growth. This satisfaction was a testament to the SME's willingness to embrace new ideas, their capacity to adapt to changing educational landscapes, and their commitment to continuous improvement. Frank stated, "I've been very, very pleased with the courses so far. The courses are strong and easy to navigate." Similarly, Shawna stated, "I think the quality is really high. Seeing it all come together was pretty exciting. Also, it felt a bit sort of tighter in some ways. everything was aligned with the course outcomes, and I feel like navigating it for students has been fairly straightforward." Pham et al. (2021) claim that course design positively affects students' online learning outcomes. The impressions developed from this study affirm the potential of collaborative course design as a catalyst for professional development and the creation of impactful, student-centered learning experiences. As stated by Grant (2021), well-designed online courses can increase student contentment.

**Implications for Policy or Practice**

The results of this research contribute to the existing body of literature discussed in Chapter Two. Although prior studies have explored the dynamics between faculty SMEs and IDs, this study stands out by amplifying the previously unheard voices of SMEs themselves. The primary aim of this investigation was to delve into the experiences of SMEs, focusing on their

perspectives regarding professional development through collaborative course design with an ID. This study spotlighted the following key facets of their perceptions of success: readiness for collaborative efforts, the quality of their relationship with the ID, the acquisition of new skills, self-efficacy, and satisfaction with the final course product.

### *Implications for Policy*

I have concluded that the results of this study call for (a) implementation of faculty professional development policies (b) recognition and incentive policies and (c) professional growth and self-efficacy policies. These implications for policy are intended to support effective collaborative course design practices, ultimately benefiting both faculty SMEs and students in the college setting.

First, implementation of faculty professional development policies would encourage HE institutions to consider developing or enhancing policies related to faculty professional development, particularly in the context of collaborative course design with IDs. Such policies could mandate or encourage faculty in this specific area of online course design by engaging ongoing training and development opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge in instructional design. Dooley et al. (2019) write that faculty development programs and assessments are necessary for colleges and universities to provide high-quality teaching and learning. Additionally, recognition and incentive policies would encourage HE institutions to recognize and reward SMEs who actively engage in collaborative course design with IDs. Such recognition might include considerations for promotion, tenure, or monetary incentives, fostering a culture that values and encourages such collaborations, ultimately impacting the academic institution positively. In addition, professional growth and self-efficacy policies could focus on promoting and measuring the professional growth and self-efficacy of SMEs involved in

collaborative course design. This might involve defining benchmarks and outcomes related to these aspects and developing strategies to track and enhance them. Such policies support the idea presented by Bloomberg (2022) which claims that developing an academic community through coaching and mentoring allows faculty to more fully engage with each other, share experiences and resources, and model effective teaching practices to support their colleagues.

### Implications for Practice

These findings indicate the significance of SMEs perceiving heightened self-efficacy when they cultivate a rapport with the ID and receive substantial support throughout the course design journey. Practical implications stemming from these insights encompass the initiation of meet and greet sessions for SMEs and IDs, providing training courses for SMEs, and the development of ID training on institutional policies.

**Initiating a Meet-and-Greet Session.** HE institutions may consider introducing an initial orientation or acquaintance session for SMEs and IDs prior to embarking on their collaborative project. This dedicated session can exclusively concentrate on building rapport and establishing a strong working relationship between SMEs and IDs. Ramani (2022) asserts that the SME and ID need to trust each other in the design process. Incorporating a preliminary meet-and-greet session can offer several additional benefits for both SMEs and IDs. Firstly, it provides an opportunity for participants to become acquainted on a personal level, enabling them to understand each other's working styles, preferences, and communication preferences. This deeper insight can help prevent potential miscommunications or conflicts that might arise during the collaborative process. Secondly, the initial rapport-building session allows SMEs to gain a better understanding of the expertise and value that IDs bring to the table. It can help dispel any misconceptions or reservations SMEs might have about the role of an ID, thereby fostering

mutual respect and appreciation for each other's contributions. Richardson et al. (2019) claim that the collaborative relationship is essential to the successful integration of instructional designers into higher education. Additionally, this proactive approach demonstrates the institution's commitment to facilitating successful partnerships and sets a positive tone for the entire collaborative journey. It signifies that the institution recognizes the importance of the human element in educational design and values the collaborative efforts of both SMEs and IDs. Richardson et al. (2018;2019;) explain that collaboration in an academic environment requires the involved partners to use each other's talents to do what they could not have done at all or as well done independently. Ultimately, instituting a preliminary meet-and-greet session focused on building rapport between SMEs and IDs can serve as a strategic and valuable step in enhancing the overall effectiveness and success of course design collaborations within HE institutions.

  **Providing Online Learning Training for SMEs.** HE institutions can offer specialized training courses for SMEs to equip them with the necessary knowledge of online learning techniques and practices prior to engaging in collaborative course design efforts. Such support can help alleviate any apprehension on the part of SMEs, cultivate their willingness to actively participate, and boost their overall self-efficacy perceptions. Berry (2018) writes that a lack of training for online faculty has dangerous implications for online students, and faculty that are not prepared are less likely to assist with student engagement, learning collaboration activities, and cultivating a sense of community. By providing preparatory support, HE institutions may aim to address potential apprehensions or uncertainties that SMEs might have when engaging in online course design. These training courses would serve a dual purpose: firstly, they would empower SMEs with a deeper understanding of the pedagogical and technological aspects of online learning, enabling them to contribute more effectively to the design process. Martin et al. (2019)

cites the importance of SME knowledge of educational technologies independent of pedagogy. Secondly, by investing in the professional development of SMEs, HE institutions would demonstrate their commitment to facilitating successful collaborative efforts and promoting a culture of continuous improvement in online education. Thomson et al. (2019) contend that all relevant stakeholders have input at significant points in the process.

Additionally, offering such training opportunities can instill confidence and enhance the self-efficacy perceptions of SMEs. As they become more proficient in the nuances of online learning, SMEs are likely to feel more capable and motivated in their collaborative roles. This boost in self-efficacy can have a positive ripple effect, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the course design process. Providing specialized training courses for SMEs may represent a proactive approach by HE institutions to prepare and empower their faculty for collaborative course design efforts. According to Dooley et al. (2019), teaching growth is established through a supportive community where challenges can be addressed, and education experts can share knowledge. Such initiatives may not only foster a culture of collaboration and innovation but also contribute to the continuous improvement of online education offerings.

**Enhancing ID Training on Institutional Policies.** To further elevate the collaborative course design process within HE institutions, it is equally crucial to consider enhancing the professional development of IDs. Lowell & Ashby (2018) state that the ID is a developer of instructional programs that address the needs of the academic program and a frequent collaborator with subject matter experts, peer IDs, and other professionals. One key facet of this development may involve educating IDs about institutional policies and procedures specifically related to online course design. By deepening their knowledge of these policies and procedures, IDs would be able to navigate the intricacies of institutional guidelines more effectively,

ensuring that the course design process aligns seamlessly with institutional expectations. This investment in ID support may yield numerous advantages for the collaborative partnership. Firstly, it would empower IDs to act as informed advocates for both institutional and pedagogical considerations, promoting an alignment between course design and institutional objectives.

Secondly, when SMEs perceive that IDs possess a comprehensive understanding of institutional policies and procedures, it fosters trust and confidence in the collaborative relationship. SMEs would be able to rely on IDs as knowledgeable guides, reducing instances of ambiguity and streamlining decision-making processes. Drysdale (2019) writes that instructional designers hold unique and significant expertise that faculty often do not have and are positioned to be leaders of positive change in HE. However, when both SMEs and IDs are well-versed in institutional policies, it may lead to smoother, more efficient workflows, reducing potential delays or setbacks during course design. This, in turn, enhances the overall productivity and effectiveness of the collaboration.

**Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

This section encompasses both the practical and theoretical implications of the study. The study's results affirm Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, which posits that an individual's belief in their efficacy influences their coping behaviors and the level of effort they invest in a given task. The following section delves into an examination of how the gathered data aligns with the existing body of empirical and theoretical literature.

*Empirical Implications*

While previous research has focused on the success of online courses from the perspective of students, these results show that the success of online courses begins with the perceived self-efficacy of the SME. Bandura (1993) supports this notion by stating that a

teacher's self-efficacy for motivating learning impacts the type of learning opportunities that are created for students and their level of academic achievement. Building on this study's findings, it became evident that SMEs demonstrated a remarkable willingness to transition from their conventional role as instructors to the role of students within the course design process. This adaptation suggests a significant avenue for enhancing their perceived self-efficacy – by remaining receptive to learning from IDs during collaborative endeavors. Conversely, the study highlighted that success can be impeded when SMEs resist embracing this learning-oriented mindset. Wingo et al. (2017) asserts that the level of skepticism among faculty regarding distance education remains high. As articulated by Lyle during his reflection on common faculty attitudes, the perception that "We're a tough crowd to work with" may prevail among SMEs. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize that this does not have to be the prevailing sentiment. Mueller et al. (2022) write that numerous conflict management scholars advise increasing productivity and strengthening workplace relationships and individual confidence by effectively managing such conflicts. When SMEs open themselves to the invaluable knowledge and insights offered by IDs, it positively impacts the entire course design process. This openness fosters a collaborative environment where expertise is shared, innovative ideas flourish, and the educational experience is ultimately enriched for all stakeholders involved. In essence, the study's findings reveal the transformative potential of a mindset shift among SMEs – from seeing themselves solely as teachers to embracing the role of learners in collaboration with IDs. This shift not only enhances self-efficacy but also contributes to more effective and successful course design partnerships in HE.

This study marked the significance of another critical element in the collaborative dynamic – the sense of value and respect within the relationship. The study revealed that SMEs

highly valued feeling respected by the ID during their collaborative interactions. Newell and Bain (2020) make clear the importance of developing specific interpersonal skills and protocols required for effective collaborative practice, especially when working in course design teams. The finding from this study suggests that when SMEs perceive themselves as respected partners, their overall experience becomes markedly more positive. This idea is also supported by Mueller et al. (2022), which highlights the concept that the interpersonal communication process is at the center of the instructional design process and is a critical component of the relationship between the ID and SME. Henry added to this sentiment as he stated, "Let me say that I worked with a fantastic instructional designer in this experience, and I felt like we had a great relationship from the start. We were able to share about our families, our lives, what was going on with us, what we had experienced that could help the other. I would not change anything about the way that we work together." Conversely, the study's insights also emphasize the potential for collaboration to face significant obstacles when the faculty's expertise is not acknowledged and respected by the ID. Richardson (2018, 2019) concludes that the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the ID as they establish a relationship with the SME that is built on trust, openness, and reciprocity. A lack of respect for the SME's role as the expert in their academic domain can hinder the collaborative process, leading to miscommunication, friction, and a less effective partnership. Ramani (2022) state that IDs build rapport with faculty by developing a sense of respect for their teaching style and communicating in a way that the professor or faculty does not feel micromanaged. This study's findings shed light on the pivotal role that mutual respect and recognition play in fostering a productive and harmonious collaborative relationship between SMEs and IDs. When this respect is present, the collaboration becomes a dynamic space where expertise is

acknowledged, ideas are freely exchanged, and the shared goal of enhancing education is pursued with vigor and enthusiasm.

This study revealed a noteworthy expectation among faculty SMEs regarding the role of IDs in the collaborative course design process. Abramenka-Lachheb et al. (2021) state that the ID's role is typically a source of support, providing flexible and responsive approaches to SME needs. In this study, SMEs expressed an expectation that IDs should possess in-depth knowledge of the college's guidelines and policies pertaining to course design, as well as a strong command of online learning pedagogy. As articulated by Scotty, one of the participants, "I'm not sure that the instructional designer knew all the little ins and outs that needed to be addressed." This expectation implies that SMEs are significantly influenced by the self-efficacy of the ID in these areas. This finding further establishes that the success of the course design process is not solely contingent on the knowledge and capabilities of the SME. The ID's expertise in college policies and online learning pedagogy is equally vital. Slagter van Tryon et al. (2018) claim that teamwork and collaboration with SMEs are specified as essential interpersonal skills for instructional designers. In essence, trust and confidence are integral components of the collaborative relationship, and they hinge on the ID's ability to navigate institutional guidelines effectively. When the ID does not function as the authority in college policies and online learning pedagogy it can have a ripple effect on the SME's experience and comfort level within the collaborative relationship. Essentially, the temperature of the relationship is set by the ID, influencing the SME's sense of comfort and trust throughout the course design process.

The study's findings exposed the course design process as a valuable platform for SMEs to acquire a diverse range of new skills. This notion highlights the enduring principle that, as faculty members, the pursuit of learning and improvement should be ceaseless. SMEs should

never reach a point in their professional journey where they perceive they have exhausted their capacity to learn. Stephens et al. (2022) note that a misconception among faculty was that online delivery was easy, and because they had basic technology skills, they did not see the usefulness of collaboration with an ID. Yet, the collaborative experience with an instructional designer ID serves as just one of many avenues through which SMEs can perpetually cultivate their knowledge and personal growth. As expressed by Harry, one of the participants, "I'm always looking to discover new things and to add to how I may address students in the future." This perspective emphasizes that faculty members must remain committed to ongoing growth and the acquisition of fresh insights. Soto et al. (2019) write that HE faculty benefit from participating in communities of practice that focus on developing and improving their own instruction. The academic programs, in turn, stand to benefit immensely from faculty who continually rise to the challenge of expanding their expertise. Given the evolution of technology and the online educational landscape, it becomes imperative for faculty to adapt and remain pertinent. If faculty members do not proactively embrace opportunities for growth and stay attuned to emerging trends, the academic programs they contribute to may experience stagnation. In essence, as the educational realm undergoes constant transformation, faculty must embark on a journey of evolution to ensure the sustained relevance and excellence of their teaching and curriculum design.

A profound sense of accomplishment became evident as faculty SMEs reflected on the culmination of their courses. This outcome strongly implies that the successful completion of a course design acts as a powerful motivator for engaging in subsequent collaborative projects. Lyle noted, "The more you work beforehand, the easier it is when you deliver the course," revealing SMEs' readiness to invest the necessary effort to achieve a successful outcome. This

dedication stems from their genuine concern for the quality and effectiveness of student learning experiences. Carliner (2020) and Chen (2021) write that faculty SMEs may generally work independently on course design due to challenges such as heavy workload, lack of work time, and unfamiliarity with pedagogies of online learning. Yet, this study reveals that while SMEs acknowledge the upfront workload involved, they are wholeheartedly willing to commit to it in order to produce high-quality educational offerings for their students. Shawna's perspective on her completed course further affirms this commitment, as she remarked, "I think the quality is really high." Her motivation is directly linked to the excellence achieved in the completed course, bolstering her self-efficacy not only in the present but also in future course design endeavors.

### *Theoretical Implications*

According to Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, an individual's perceived self-efficacy influences their choices when encountering obstacles or new tasks. Bandura (1977) contended that within each person lies a foundational set of beliefs that shape their perceived competence in task execution, leading to distinctions in high and low self-efficacy. Those possessing high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate unwavering commitment and resilience when confronted with challenging situations. Conversely, individuals with low self-efficacy are often perceived as less committed, necessitating greater resilience to adapt to change. The data obtained from the 12 participants in this study unveiled that although all participants were enthusiastic about commencing the course design collaboration process, half of them also expressed apprehension or caution stemming from their perceived lack of self-efficacy. These initial sentiments of hesitancy significantly impact SME's motivation and their capacity to navigate challenges throughout the process. These initial hesitations and reservations have far-

reaching consequences, as they influence the motivation and problem-solving abilities of SMEs as they navigate the various challenges in the collaborative process. This finding also aligns with the perspective put forth by Foster and Bernstein (2021), which suggests that one's attitude often emerges as a result of one's evaluation of behavior and the anticipated outcomes associated with it. Thus, understanding the connection between self-efficacy, attitude, and the navigation of complex tasks provides valuable insights into how individuals approach and manage challenges in collaborative endeavors.

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory aligned with the findings of this study, as the collected data illustrated that SMEs experienced an enhancement in their self-efficacy perceptions through development of strong rapport with the ID and the implementation of strategic coaching provided by the ID. An illustration of this improved self-efficacy can be gleaned from Frank's reflection, in which he expressed, "I found the instructional designer delightful and challenging in a good way. So, I felt my professionalism and my ability to design and to teach courses improved as a result of these interactions." This particular instance of heightened self-efficacy directly emphasizes the positive impact of the SMEs' relational experience with the ID. Likewise, SMEs experienced a heightened level of self-efficacy when they established trust in the ID.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations and delimitations of this study are discussed in the following section, including constraints produced by these limitations. In analyzing these factors, the researcher aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the scope and potential boundaries of the research. The objective is to offer a comprehensive insight into the research's scope and the potential boundaries that could affect its outcomes.

*Limitations*

The participant pool for this study was constrained by several limitations. First, the size of the pool was limited as only a small number of faculty SMEs at the research site had successfully engaged in a course design collaboration with an ID. Additionally, recruiting participants presented a challenge due to the predominantly part-time employment status of SMEs and their geographical locations across the United States and overseas. Consequently, all interviews were conducted via Zoom, which restricted the possibility of in-person interactions. In only one instance, the audio quality was poor, but I addressed this issue by asking the participant to repeat the statements that were unclear. The study encountered an additional limitation concerning the necessity to preserve participant anonymity, primarily due to the limited size of faculty populations in certain academic programs at the research site. During the research approval phase, a valid concern was raised regarding the potential risk of identifying faculty members, given the small and closely-knit nature of some academic departments. To address this concern, precautionary measures were taken to eliminate any potentially identifying details about the participants, including their specific academic programs and areas of subject matter expertise. However, this protective measure had the consequence of restricting the depth and specificity of discussions related to course design, particularly in the context of specific academic offerings. Consequently, the study was unable to delve into detailed discussions related to certain academic programs due to the need to maintain participant confidentiality.

Another limitation of the study pertained to gender and ethnic diversity within the participant group, reflecting the composition of the faculty pool at the research site. Of the twelve participants, nine were male and only three were female, resulting in an unequal representation of gender perspectives. Similarly, there were limitations in terms of ethnic

diversity, with ten participants identifying as white, one as Hispanic, and one as black. These demographic constraints limited the range of perspectives stemming from racial diversity.

*Delimitations*

A study delimitation was established, stipulating that each participant must possess a minimum of 10 years of teaching experience in either a traditional classroom or online setting. This delineation was strategically implemented to guarantee that participants had substantial experience, thereby facilitating meaningful comparisons and reflections which were advantageous to the researcher. By defining the study's scope in this manner, it precluded the inclusion of perspectives from individuals who were relatively new to the field of academic instruction.

## Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations, I have determined that there are several recommendations for future research in this area of study. First, this study was limited in its gender and ethnic diversity among participants due to the demographics of the college. I recommend that future researchers seek a specific gender demographic, such as all-female or all male participants, to determine whether gender plays a role in the perceived self-efficacy of faculty SMEs. Likewise, due to this study's limitation in its ethnic diversity, I recommend studying the phenomenon from the lens of a specific ethnic group of SMEs, such as black women in HE. Future research could examine the experiences of black women instructors and explore their perceptions of self-efficacy after the course design collaboration. Research could be conducted as a case study to fully explore the experiences of select SMEs.

In addition, this study was limited in its exploration of how the collaborative course design process was impacted in the context of specific academic offerings. For example, a future researcher could examine the phenomenon through the lens of developing finance, psychology, or communications courses. Examining the SME experience through the lens of a specific academic course offering would provide further insight into the needs of faculty. Each academic program may have nuanced needs in its online course design that could provide further help to the SMEs. Finally, I recommend that future research address the topic of power dynamics in course design collaboration. How do power dynamics play a role in faculty SMEs' willingness to collaborate with an ID? What types of power dynamics impact the course design collaboration negatively? The field can continue to expand upon my research by exploring these suggestions for future study.

## Conclusions

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to gain insight into the perceptions of self-efficacy among faculty SMEs following their collaborative course design experiences with IDs. The prevalence of online learning in higher education has prompted academic institutions to expand their distance education offerings, necessitating collaborations between SMEs and IDs to create high-quality asynchronous online courses. However, a challenge arises as SMEs, despite their abundant subject matter expertise, encounter difficulties in effectively collaborating with IDs during the course design process, leading to impediments in the collaborative endeavor.

This study's theoretical framework was grounded in Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, offering a context for understanding how SMEs perceive their own capabilities before and after engaging in collaborative processes. Data were collected from 12 participants, comprising both male and female SMEs, each holding postgraduate degrees ranging from

master's to doctorate levels. The research methodology encompassed one-on-one interviews, journal reflections provided by participants, and document observations of the course design process, all of which collectively formed the foundation for the study's conclusions. The study yielded five themes and seven subthemes, which included: excited but cautious initial reactions from SMEs, the need for a streamlined course design process, the desire for SMEs to be surrounded by support, the critical element relationship plays in the success of the endeavor, and the learning experience offered to SMEs in the course design process.

A significant revelation arising from this study is the expressed desire among SMEs for IDs to be highly knowledgeable of the HE institution's policies surrounding course design and to embody the role of a genuine pedagogical expert. This entails possessing not only deep knowledge but also a high level of competence and a profound understanding of educational theory and practice. This expectation has a direct bearing on SMEs' apprehensions regarding the course design process. From the SME's perspective, the ID should assume a leadership role in this capacity within the collaborative effort. Furthermore, the findings of this study concluded the necessity of fostering a sense of value and mutual respect within the relationship between SMEs and IDs. It was evident that positive interactions hinged on the presence of these elements. Ultimately, SMEs who perceived themselves as respected, valued, and free from judgment by the ID reported notable enhancements in their self-efficacy. Ultimately, several factors exist that impact positive perceptions of self-efficacy for SMEs. These elements, including cultivating mutual respect in relationships and enhancing instructional design expertise, can be an ongoing focus for HE institutions. Their continual improvement can significantly influence the creation of high-quality asynchronous courses that ultimately benefit students.

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**Appendix A**

**Site Approval Letter**

**Subject:** IRB approval: Faculty Perceptions of Professional Growth

April 13, 2023

Dear Ms. Streater,

The IRB has now reviewed your proposal for an investigative project titled "Faculty Perceptions of Professional Growth After Course Design Collaboration with an Instructional Designer." Thank you for addressing the concerns of the board with respect to participants' departmental affiliation and being willing to redact any identifying information that may arise during interviews.

Following the procedures and precautions as outlined in your proposal and in this letter, the study is now approved **for one year** as of 4/13/2023. Should you need an IRB approval number, you may use [redacted]. Please note that if at any point revisions are made to previously approved protocols or materials, these specific revisions (but not the entire protocol) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Should any adverse events occur during testing involving human participants, these must be reported immediately to the IRB.

This project requires continuing review by the IRB on an <u>annual</u> basis. If you anticipate that your project will continue beyond the approved timeline, you will need to submit a request for an extension prior to the expiration date. All research records must be retained for a minimum of <u>three years</u> after completion of the study. The Board wishes you every success in your research endeavor.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

With best wishes for the project,
[redacted]

**Appendix B**

May 4, 2023

Althea Streater
Sharon Farrell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1309 FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL
GROWTH AFTER COURSE DESIGN COLLABORATION WITH AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Althea Streater, Sharon Farrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in
accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug
Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.
This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in
your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations
in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR
46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests
(cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or
observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the
following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity
of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to
the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required
by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be
found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study
on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the
consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information
electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available
without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification
of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**
***Administrative Chair***
**Research Ethics Office**

**Appendix C**

**Recruitment Letter**

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the experience of faculty Subject Matter Experts in their collaborative experience with Instructional Designers (ID), and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be part-time or full-time faculty members in the established college setting, consisting of both undergraduate and graduate subject matter experts. All participants must have advanced degrees from master's to doctorate and have more than ten years of teaching experience in traditional classroom settings. All participants must have worked with an ID to design at least one asynchronous course for the college.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to respond to individual interview questions (30-45 minutes) and respond to journal prompts (10 minutes each) for two writing sessions. The interview will be audio-recorded. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me via email to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me via email before the start of the interview.

Sincerely,
Althea Streater
XXX-XXX-XXXX/altheastreater@[redacted].com

**Appendix D**

**Follow Up Letter**

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. [Last week/two weeks ago/etc.] an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants, if willing, will be asked to respond to individual interview questions (30-45 minutes) and respond to journal prompts (10 minutes) for two sessions. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please reply to this email.

The attached consent document contains additional information about my research. Because participation is anonymous, you do not need to sign and return the consent document unless you would prefer to do so.

Sincerely,

Althea Streater
XXX-XXX-XXXX/altheastreater@[redacted].com

## Appendix E

## Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** Faculty Perceptions of Professional Growth After Course Design Collaboration With An Instructional Designer: A Phenomenological Study
**Principal Investigator:** Althea Streater, Doctoral Candidate. School of Education, Liberty University.

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time or part-time faculty member in the established college setting. All participants must have advanced degrees from master's to doctorate and have more than ten years of teaching experience in traditional classroom settings. All participants must have worked with an ID to design at least one asynchronous course for the college. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between faculty subject matter experts and instructional designers, focusing on the faculty perspective after the online course design process to determine whether professional knowledge has been acquired.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Participate in an audio-recorded Zoom or Microsoft Teams interview that will take no more than 45 minutes.
2. Complete two journal writing sessions of 10 minutes each with personal reflections on the collaborative course design process.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society may include more in-depth understanding of the online course design process and the relationship dynamics between faculty members and instructional designers. With results of this research, it may be possible for institutions of higher education to respond better to the needs of faculty members in relation to online learning development and instruction.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

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

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Althea Streater. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at XXX-XXX-XXXX and/or altheastreater@[redacted].com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sharon Farrell, at [redacted]@liberty.edu.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.*

*The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

## Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

## Legally Authorized Representative Permission

By signing this document, you are agreeing to the person named below participating in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I agree for the person named below to take part in this study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record the person named below as part of their participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Printed LAR Name and Relationship to Subject


_____
LAR Signature                                    Date

**Appendix F**

**Interview Questions**

1. Describe your initial reactions upon learning about the course design collaboration with an

    ID. SQ1

2. What online learning pedagogical knowledge did you have prior to the collaboration

    process with an ID? SQ2

3. Describe the elements of support you experienced during the online course design process.

    SQ1

4. What elements of adult learning did you feel less knowledge in *before* the course design

    process? SQ2

5. Describe the areas of adult learning you feel more or less knowledgeable in *after* the

    course design process. SQ3

6. Describe the challenges you experienced in the collaborative course design process. CRQ

7. What online course design techniques or technologies did you become familiar with as a

    result of the collaborative course design? SQ2

8. Describe any knowledge you gained in regards to designing student learning assessments

    in an online platform. SQ2

9. Describe any knowledge you gained in regards to designing student learning outcomes in

    an online platform. SQ2

10. Describe your perceptions of the completed asynchronous course as compared to the

    traditional course format. SQ3

11. What are your overall perceptions on the collaborative course design process in regards

    to relationships with instructional designers? CRQ

12. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with ID course

design collaboration that we haven't discussed? CRQ

**Appendix G**

**Journal Prompts**

1. What was on the agenda of the collaborative meeting for reflection in this journal entry?

2. What challenges, if any, did you perceive in today's session?

3. Did you receive adequate support from the ID in this session?

4. What new skills, if any, did you acquire in this session?

5. What are your recommendations for improvement based on today's collaborative

interaction?