2008

Connections, confidence, and competence: the meaning of professional development for community college support staff personnel

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Connections, confidence, and competence: the meaning of professional development for community college support staff personnel

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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2008

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DEDICATION

In memory of Jack, Helen, Pat, and Mike

In honor of Craig and Kathy

In appreciation of Dan, Kelly, and Payne

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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative, phenomenological methodology this dissertation study describes and examines the meaning of participation in professional development for community college support staff and the perceived meaning, benefits, and challenges to both the individual participant and the institution. The research site is an urban Midwestern U.S. community college that offers a comprehensive staff development program. The study includes the perspectives of both support staff participants in professional development and administrative staff who work closely with the program. A total of 15, all female, participants—11 support staff and four administrative staff—took part in the study.

This study was of interest because, despite the fact that over 25% of the employees in U.S. community colleges are classified as support staff, no substantive empirical research regarding any aspect of community college support staff participation in professional development could be identified. Additionally, the literature has strongly suggested that focused professional development programs have been shown to have a positive effect on the personnel who participate in them and on the institutions in which they work. Literature reviewed for the study includes community college professional development, the learning college and learning organization, and women's ways of knowing and learning.

Study data were analyzed using the Moustakas modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for analyzing phenomenological data. This analysis resulted in nine textural themes: *gaining knowledge, personal improvement, social enjoyment, attaining career/educational goals, support and encouragement, organizational issues, equity of access, obstacles,* and *opportunities* and three structural themes: *connections, confidence,* and *competence*. Recommendations for practice from the study results include: providing

equitable professional development opportunities for all staff in the college; providing and

supporting opportunities for informal learning and networking for support staff personnel;

and providing a wide range of personal and professional development activities at flexible

times that are open to staff and faculty across the college.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Known as institutions with a focus on teaching and learning, community colleges have integrated professional development for staff and faculty into their cultures in many different ways. Professional development programs in community colleges began in the 1960's and 1970's in response to the tremendous growth experienced in community college enrollments (Burnstad, 1994; Watts & Hammons, 2002). Though four decades and more have passed since this initial surge, the reasons for strong professional development programs for faculty and staff have remained constant—to provide job knowledge, personal development, and life-long learning opportunities for faculty and staff (Burnstad, 1994; Friesen, 2002; Rostek & Kladivko, 1988), to help colleges cope with growth and change and to allow them to remain accountable (Watts & Hammons, 2002).

However, my review of the literature clearly shows that, overwhelmingly, community college professional development programs are aimed primarily at faculty and administrative staff. Programs for faculty (Angelo, 1994; Murray, 1995, 1998, 2001; Wallin, 2003) are primarily focused on instructional development through teaching effectiveness while administrative staff professional development programs have largely emphasized leadership development (Bragg, 2000; Gibson-Benninger, Ratcliff, & Rhoads, 1996; Young, 1996). Though I found ample evidence of comprehensive professional development programs that include front-line support staff personnel (Claxton, 1977; Collin, 1978; Friesen, 2002, Hammons, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace, & Watts, 1978; Oromaner, 1997; Oromaner, MacPherson, & Lopez, 1997; Overlock, 1994; Taber, 1997; Watts & Hammons,

2002), there is virtually no empirical evidence regarding any facet of professional development programs for support personnel in community colleges.

Support staff personnel are integral to the operation and success of community colleges in the United States. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in the Fall of 2005 (the most recent statistics available) just over one-quarter of all postsecondary employees were support staff personnel. The number of support staff personnel in two-year public colleges in the United States in the same year was 170,442. This represents 27.9% of the total employees (610,978) in these institutions.

With more than a quarter of the employee base in community colleges, support staff personnel (as grouped by the NCES) include *technical and paraprofessional, clerical and secretarial, skilled crafts, service and maintenance* employees (NCES, 2008). These employees are, in many cases, the front-line staff members who meet and interact with students, the public, and visitors to the community college. Of the 170,442 total support personnel, 86,649 (or 50.8%) are classified as clerical and secretarial. These clerical and secretarial staff members represent 14.2% of the total employee base in two-year public colleges in the United States.

Researcher Stance

My interest in the meaning of professional development to those who participate in it developed over the course of my careers in library science and human resources. I have observed a number of individuals (most of them female) take interest in and pursue professional development opportunities that included conferences, instructional meetings, and degree pursuit. Often, however, after working very hard to attain a certification or degree, these individuals were content with the status quo in their careers. They stayed in

the position that they held while pursuing their goal and, though most had the intelligence and possessed the skills to move up in the organization, they chose not to do so. Although I occasionally asked questions of the individuals I observed, I have never pursued study of the perceptions of individual support staff members regarding the value of professional development until I designed and conducted this study. Likewise, I had not examined the value placed on these activities by any institution that encourages such participation by the members of its staff.

These observations and curiosities, coupled with my daily observations from a human resources perspective, drove this study for me. The contributions to the community college by support staff personnel are considerable (Foucar-Szocki, Larson, & Mitchell, 2003; Friesen, 2002). When I began to research this topic early in my doctoral studies and could find almost no literature, I became even more curious. Why was this? How could there be no substantive literature on a staff group that is integral to the success of the community college? Others who have looked at front-line staff outside of the community college setting have found this same dearth of empirical evidence (Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002). This lack of specific supportive literature has been a challenge throughout the study.

Substantive evidence exists to allow a description of the history and purpose of professional development in the community college setting (Claxton, 1976; Collin, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace & Watts, 1978). And, the conscious institutional choice that was made in 1999 at the college I studied to adopt the principles of the learning college (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) allow me to place the study and its results in the context of the learning college model and in the related principles of the learning

organization (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Garvin, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Senge, 1990). Further, as my study participants were all women, the literature of women's ways of knowing and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Fenwick, 1996; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996) also resonates with my work and the results. My study was exploratory and my hope is that it begins to answer some of the questions that started me on this journey and, further, that it points clearly toward the need for further research and study of professional development for community college support staff.

<div align="center">Statement of Problem</div>

Research has shown that consistent, focused professional development programs have a positive impact on the personnel who participate in them (Bauer, 2000; Burnstad, 1994; O'Banion, 1997a; Pressley, McPhail, Heacock, & Linck, 2001; Watts & Hammons, 2002). Further, professional development programs that include support staff can provide job-specific training and organizational and personal development that support both the individual and the institution (Alfano, 1993; Friesen, 2002; Guskey, 1991; Troller, 2002). Additionally, support staff personnel who participate in on-the-job and off-the-job development activities report greater job satisfaction. The specific elements of this satisfaction include the ability to acquire skills and knowledge that affect the employees' daily competency and increased self-esteem and empowerment (Bauer, 2000). Despite these positive research findings I was unable to identify any substantive research specific to the role that professional development plays in the work and personal lives of community college support staff.

Many consider the professional, skilled workers in education to be the faculty and administrators. However, members of the front-line staff are called upon daily to deal with complex, difficult, and often emotional issues (Bauer, 2000; Foucar-Szocki, Larson, & Mitchell, 2003; Friesen, 2002; Hite & McDonald, 2002; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2003; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002). The need for knowledge, skills, development, and training for these staff members is no less important than that of the faculty or administrative staff members. Research efforts aimed at understanding training and development issues for support staff employees, who are an essential component in community college life, can serve to improve professional development efforts aimed at support staff personnel, strengthen community colleges, and improve the lives of those who serve as front-line staff.

Purpose of Study

Given the benefits of professional development, the number of support personnel in community colleges in the United States, and the important and sometimes difficult nature of the work assigned to support staff personnel, the absence of empirical evidence regarding professional development programs aimed at support staff calls for investigation. The purposes of my study are to:

a) describe and examine the meaning of the professional development program for community college support staff identified by the support staff personnel interviewed.

b) describe and examine the meaning of the professional development program for community college support staff identified by those administrative team members interviewed.

c) examine, through qualitative data analysis, the meanings, benefits, and challenges of professional development for support staff personnel to the individual and to the institution.

The participants in the study included support staff in secretarial and clerical roles in the community college I selected for study. Other study participants were administrative staff who working with the office of Staff and Organizational Development at the college. Through focus groups and individual interviews, the support staff participants were asked to comment on the meaning of the program in their own lives and to describe their perceptions of what the program means to the institution. The administrative staff participants were asked in individual interviews to describe their perceptions of what the program means to support staff participants and to the institution.

<div align="center">Research Process and Setting</div>

My study employed a qualitative, phenomenological methodology. The site for this investigation was an urban, Midwestern community college identified in this dissertation as Millennial Community College (MCC). MCC is a public, two-year, comprehensive community college. The study involves a single institution and confidentiality was requested of me by the director of research, evaluation, and instructional development who approves all outside research requests at the institution I studied. All references to information provided by college staff, from college publications, or from the college website will be referenced as Millennial Community College without providing the location of the college.

MCC maintains an active and inclusive staff professional development program through the office of Staff and Organizational Development (S&OD). The department was established in the early 1980's and the current mission statement for the department is "Staff

and Organizational Development enhances organizational effectiveness and impacts student success by providing MCC employees with lifelong learning and development opportunities" (Millennial Community College, 2008d). In 1999, MCC adopted the learning college model which places student learning at the center of the institution. The particular focus of this case study was the professional development program for support staff in office and technical roles (as classified by MCC).

I worked with a total of 15 respondents in my study, all women. The 11 support staff respondents were selected via purposeful sampling based on selection criteria that I established in collaboration with the staff in MCC's office of S&OD. The support staff participants all had the job title 'administrative assistant.' I also interviewed three current college administrators—the director of S&OD, the manager for staff development and human resource (HR) systems, the vice president for HR and organizational development, and a former staff member—the director emeritus of S&OD.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The research questions for the study are:

1. How do support staff personnel describe participation in professional development as it relates to their work responsibilities, career goals, and personal enhancement?

2. How do support staff personnel describe participation in professional development as it relates to their contribution to institutional mission, student satisfaction, and enhancement of organizational development?

3. How do administrators describe support staff participation in professional development as it relates to support staff work performance, career advancement, and personal growth?

4. How do administrators describe support staff personnel participation in professional development as it relates to support staff contributions to institutional mission, student satisfaction, and enhancement of organizational development?

Theoretical Framework

The methodological theory for this study is constructivism. Crotty (1998) declares constructivism appropriate for "epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the meaning-making of the individual mind" (p. 58). The epistemological focus is on the individual support staff workers and administrative staff members who were interviewed and the meaning they have made from the professional development program at their institution. Specifically, I asked the support staff personnel interviewed to describe the meaning of the program to their work and personal lives and to share what participation in professional development has meant to their individual educational and career goals. I also asked these individuals to describe their perceptions of the meaning of the program to the institution. I asked the administrative staff interviewed to describe their perceptions of the meaning of the program to individual support staff personnel and to the institution.

The focus of the study was on the individual interviewed and on the truth of her story. Crotty (1998) posits that this approach in qualitative research "points up the unique experience of each of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is valid and worthy of respect as any other" (p.58). Using this epistemological approach allowed me to maintain a focus on the importance and dignity of each individual within the

study. It supported every voice being heard equally and it fostered the empowerment of each support staff participant to share what was important to her regarding her professional development experiences.

The ideas and models that shaped the design and analysis of my study include professional development in general and, specifically, professional development programs in community colleges, the learning college (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999), and the learning organization (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Garvin, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Senge, 1990), and women's ways of knowing and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Fenwick, 1996; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996). The limited literature on employment and career issues related to front-line staff (Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002) also provided issues for consideration.

Reasons for developing community college professional development programs include providing pre-service or orientation training; increasing staff effectiveness and efficiency; providing training for emergent programs; technologies and initiatives; communicating institutional objectives; supporting staff through change; and enabling organizational learning, development, and renewal (Claxton, 1976; Collin, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace & Watts, 1978). Programs that include support staff do so to provide job-specific, organizational, and personal development to support both the individual and the institution (Alfano, 1993; Friesen, 2002; Guskey, 1991; Troller, 2002).

Learning-centered colleges (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) are designed for the convenience of learners rather than for the convenience of institutions and members of their staff and faculty. The learning-centered community college invites all associated with

the college—students, faculty, staff, and administrators—to be involved in continuous learning in order to maximize the student experience. As noted, MCC adopted the principles and practices of the learning-centered community college in 1999 and this alignment had a significant influence on the professional development program at MCC from that point forward.

The distinctions between the learning college and the learning organization are subtle (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, Robles, 1999) but important. Senge's (1990) pivotal work on the learning organization has strong implications for colleges who seek to become learning-centered and who develop and maintain strong, relevant professional development programs for their staff and faculty. Senge's work, though originally focused on business, has provided educational institutions with a framework that encourages using collective knowledge to face challenges and to maximize opportunities that result in a better environment for all learners—students, faculty, and staff.

Women's ways of learning and knowing are distinct from the ways that men approach learning opportunities (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996). Workplace learning (Fenwick, 1996) by women is influenced both by the individual's ways of knowing and learning, the work that she is doing, and the institution in which she is working.

Beyond pointing to a need for further research and study, the limited research on work and career issues of support staff (Hite & McDonald, 2002; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2003; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002) provides evidence that training and

development activities are meaningful in different ways to the support staff who participate in them.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Many different terms are used in the literature and in practice to describe what I refer to as *professional development* in this study. Likewise, the term *support staff* can be interpreted differently in different settings. In order to clarify the use of these terms in this study, I offer these definitions:

Professional development: Courses taken by employees of an educational institution "to enhance the attitudes, skills, knowledge, and performance related to people in specific positions within the institution." (Burnstad, 1994, p. 388). The terms **professional development** and **staff development** are used interchangeably in the literature. For consistency in this study, the term **professional development** is used when referring to the MCC program.

Support staff personnel in the community college setting: Those in support staff roles in a community college setting include all employees not classified as faculty or administrative personnel. Examples of areas of the college in which support staff personnel are employed include: technical and paraprofessional workers (computer and data processing technicians, library assistants and clerks), secretarial and clerical workers, skilled crafts workers (electricians, plumbers, heating/ventilating/air conditioning workers), service (food service, child care, book store clerks) and maintenance workers (Ebbers, Wild, and Fridel, 2003). The support staff participants in this study are all employed as s*ecretarial and clerical workers* at MCC.

Dissertation Overview

In the succeeding chapters of this dissertation, I will provide a review of the literature (Chapter Two), a description of the methodology for the study (Chapter Three), a discussion of the results and findings (Chapter Four), and the conclusions from my study as well as providing implications for future research, practice, and policy (Chapter Five). I will begin the review of literature in Chapter Two with a focus on professional development in the community college setting including the history and purpose of professional development, a description of professional development models, and elements of successful programs. This will be followed by descriptions of two active professional development programs to illustrate the content of current community college professional development programs. The section on professional development in the community college will conclude with a discussion of professional development for support staff.

I will follow the focus on professional development with sections on the learning college (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999), the learning organization (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Garvin, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Senge, 1990), and women's ways of knowing and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Fenwick, 1996; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996). The literature review will conclude with a discussion of the work focused on work and career issues of support (front-line) staff in settings outside the community college including the meaning of professional development activities to these staff members.

Chapter Three, contains an overview of the materials and the methodological approaches employed in the study, followed by descriptions of the research site and the study participants. The review and approval process I followed through Iowa State University's

Human Subjects Review Committee and the receipt of approval resulting from the internal

review process at the research site will then be described. I will note the ways in which I

analyzed the data and the role that trustworthiness played in my study prior to concluding

Chapter 3 with a final section discussing my role and reflexivity in this study. Chapter Four

will include a reporting and discussion of the results of the study and Chapter Five will

conclude the dissertation with a summary of the study, my research findings and conclusions,

and a discussion of the implications for future research, practice, and policy resulting from

my study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In approaching this review of the literature, I faced several challenges. While the general literature of training and development is deep and wide, the literature specific to training and development for support staff in community colleges is almost nonexistent. Further, this literature is comprised chiefly of descriptions of the reasons for establishing a professional development program, predictions of the benefits to the institution from a successful program, how-to manuals, and best practice narratives. There are few scholarly studies and little empirical evidence regarding professional development programs for community college support staff. This lack of literature specific to my research topic gave me confidence that the study I have chosen will fill a research gap.

However, this gap posed a distinct problem in trying to situate my study specifically in the literature of professional development for support staff in community colleges and in selecting a relevant and meaningful theoretical framework for the study. As such, this review will focus on four areas: professional development in the community college, the learning college and the learning organization, and the limited research on the work and career issues of support (front-line) staff outside the community college setting.

This review begins with a description of the history of professional development in the American community college followed by discussions of the purposes and models of professional development programs and content in professional development programs in the community college. Included next is a discussion of the literature on the training and development of persons in supportive roles inside the community college. The review also

includes a discussion of the concepts of the *learning college* (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c), of the learning organization (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Garvin, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Senge, 1990), of women's ways of knowing and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Fenwick, 1996; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996), and concludes with a review of the literature related to career and work issues of support (front-line) staff outside the community college setting (Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002).

<div align="center">Professional Development in the Community College</div>

History of Community College Professional Development Programs

The professional development movement in community colleges began in the 1970's. Watts and Hammons (2002) explained that "no singular event started the movement; it simply developed out of the rapid growth that community colleges were experiencing at the time" (p. 5). This rapid growth, of necessity, spawned new buildings, programs, and organizational structures in the nation's community colleges. Following this exponential growth and change, the need to develop those who staffed the colleges became apparent.

The literature in the 1970's is abundant with descriptions of the need for effective professional development programs in community colleges (Claxton, 1976; Claxton, 1977; Collin, 1978; Hammons, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace, & Watts, 1978). A bibliography compiled by Terry Wallace in 1975 included 66 citations of articles and books written between 1967 and 1975 (Hammons, 1979). This early literature describes the reality of the community college in the 1970's as institutions that were being established and growing at rapid rates. Faculty and staff were being hired who had little or no experience in

an educational setting. Technical faculty, especially, had strong backgrounds in their subject areas, but no formal training in teaching methods, evaluation, or classroom management (Claxton, 1976; Hammons, 1978; Hammons, 1979).

Those developing these early staff development programs were encouraged to create programs that were inclusive of all classifications of employees (faculty, staff, and administration), that were focused on the needs of the entire institution and that were not isolated from but inclusive of the other parts of the college. Careful planning and needs assessment were encouraged as was the wise use of resources (Claxton, 1976).

As the 1970's gave way to the leaner economic times of the 1980's faculty and staff development programs began to falter (Watts & Hammons, 2002). The programs that were fragmented, made up only of individual offerings scattered across the academic year, and those without strong leadership did not survive these times. Programs that were supported across the institution, had dedicated staff to lead them, and were responsive to the needs of staff were able to survive the economic hardships of the 1980's (Watts & Hammons, 2002).

The programs that did survive received support from three organizations that were established to provide a forum and gathering place for those with common interests in staff and faculty development. In 1976, the POD—Professional and Organizational Network— was founded, followed closely by the creation of the National Council for Staff, Program, and Organizational Development (NCSPOD) in 1977. And, in 1978, NISOD—the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, affiliated with the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin—held the first annual Celebration of Teaching Excellence Conference (Burnstad, 1994).

Technology began to infiltrate all areas of the community college in the late 1980's and early 1990's and a resurgence of professional development programs began (Friesen, 2002; Oromaner, 1997; Rouseff-Baker, 2002). These programs included such initiatives as the establishment of a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to provide faculty members with the tools they needed to engage learners and to incorporate technology into the classroom (Rouseff-Baker, 2002), the development of a comprehensive, mandatory professional development program for all full-time staff (Friesen, 2002), and a program that supported the professional development needs for staff in a community college transitioning from a limited-mission institution to a comprehensive community college (Oromaner, 1997).

In 1997, Terry O'Banion published *A Learning College for the 21st Century* as a call to arms in response to the failed educational reforms of the 1980's and early 1990's. The learning college movement will be discussed separately in this review but, in historical terms, the impact of O'Banion's work was significant in regard to community college professional development programs. Many colleges adopted and adapted O'Banion's (1997a, 1997b, 1997c) learning college principles and established or re-energized professional development programs that continue to grow and flourish in the 21st century.

Oromaner (1997) proposed a 'top ten' list of reasons that community colleges should engage in professional development in order to "cross the bridge to the 21st century"(p. 6). These include staying current with professional and technical knowledge, socializing new employees, facilitating role definition within the organization, allowing the institution to seek and implement creative ways of doing more with less ("rightsizing", p. 6), and addressing life-cycle developments ("burnout, mid-career plateau, professional and career vitality", p. 6).

Other reasons include training caused by a shifting and changing organizational structure, providing customer service training, meeting demands caused by external players (government agencies, accrediting agencies, competitors, and licensing agencies), and providing professional development as a staff benefit to enhance personal and professional needs and goals (Oromaner, 1997).

The Purpose of Professional Development in the Community College

Collin (1978) provided a cogent definition of the purpose of professional development by describing staff development as "a planned, system-wide educational activity designed to provide the organization with the capacity to renew itself through the development of its staff on a continuous or on-going basis" (p. 12). An effective professional development program contributes to organizational development, organizational renewal, educational program development, and planned change within the institution (Collin, 1978).

Other stated purposes for professional development programs in community colleges include providing pre-service or orientation training; increasing staff effectiveness and efficiency; providing training for emergent programs, technologies, and initiatives; communicating institutional objectives; supporting staff through change; and enabling organizational learning, development, and renewal (Claxton, 1976; Collin, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace, & Watts, 1978). Programs that include support staff do so to provide job-specific training and organizational and personal development to support both the individual and the institution (Alfano, 1993; Friesen, 2002; Guskey, 1991; Troller, 2002).

Further, professional development programs focused on community college staff members are established in order to provide a means for improving both institutional and

individual performance and to allow staff members to develop potential, achieve job

responsibilities, and be positioned for advancement (Rostek & Kladivko, 1988).

Models for Professional Development in the Community College

A number of models for professional development programs have been used over the

years. Friesen (2002) describes a shift from the traditional model of support staff

development where all-day events focused on support staff were held on designated days

during the year. The challenges with this model include the difficulty in meeting the

programming needs of a diverse group of staff (maintenance/custodial, technical staff,

clerical staff, service staff) with single; one-day events focused at large audiences. Further

complicating this approach for many colleges are the issues of distance (for multi-site

colleges), scheduling (day, evening, and night staff shifts), and back-up coverage in the areas

where participating staff work. The solution in the institution described by Friesen (2002)

was to move to an integrated model for delivering professional development.

The integrated model, also called 'comprehensive staff development' (Claxton, 1977;

Collin, 1978; Friesen, 2002, Hammons, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace, &

Watts, 1978; Oromaner, 1997; Oromaner, MacPherson, & Lopez, 1997; Overlock, 1994;

Taber, 1997; Watts & Hammons, 2002) has proved to be the most successful over time.

Comprehensive professional development programs are inclusive, they include all personnel,

and they are focused on development on several levels.

In 1978, Collin proposed building a comprehensive professional development

program model based on four dimensions: *needs*, *focus*, *mode of operation*, and

strategy/method. Selecting from the choices in each of the dimensions allows institutions to

tailor a professional development program to the needs of the individual institution. The

needs dimension includes organizational, membership (human satisfaction and development), and program needs. The *focus* dimension aims programming at the level of operations (what the organization is and what it does), regulation (aimed at "creating the capability within the organization to address novel or non-routine problems and to take advantage of changes in technology or knowledge" (p. 23). The *learning* dimension is the level at which the institution is able to set and re-set goals and priorities based on information learned within and outside the institution. At the level of *consciousness*, professional development is focused on "defining, redefining, or creating a new role for the organization in society" (p. 24).

Mode of operation includes *institutional*, *membership*, or *autonomous*. In the *institutional* mode, the program is defined by the college and the content is that which the college as an organization wishes its employees to learn or know. The institutional mode of operation employs a traditional teacher/learner model with the teacher imparting the knowledge and the learner absorbing it. The *membership* mode of operation creates a shared learning environment in which the learners are collaborators in defining learning objectives and assessing results and success. In an *autonomous* mode, the learner is in charge of his or her learning. The learner determines the "objectives, content, method and effectiveness of his [sic] learning" (Collin, 1978, p. 25).

The fourth dimension in Collin's model—Strategy/Method—includes *problem solving*, *social interaction*, and *research, development, and diffusion*. These methods are not mutually exclusive. Collin (1978) suggests that most professional development will involve all three methods in a successful program.

Characteristics of Successful Programs

Characteristics of strong faculty and staff development programs include the institutionalization of the program in a department with full-time staff responsible for program administration and in programming that is responsive to new issues and challenges. Successful programs also include all levels of staff in a comprehensive program, and they have the strong support of the president of the institution (Watts & Hammons, 2002).

Additionally, other successful programs are those that are well-defined and organized from the start, have a statement of philosophy, vision, and/or mission, have enthusiastic support and commitment from faculty and staff, are funded at an adequate level, have a designated staff member in charge of the program, and include incentives (release time, stipends, salary advancements) for those who participate (Rostek & Kladivko, 1988).

Content in Professional Development Activities

Content in staff development programs has changed markedly over the years. To provide a picture of current content in professional development programs in community colleges, I will describe two active professional development programs in community colleges. One program is the Teaching and Learning Center at the College of DuPage (IL). The other is the Employee and Organizational Development program at Maricopa Community Colleges in Arizona.

The College of DuPage

Located 35 miles west of the Chicago loop, the College of DuPage (COD) serves DuPage county, IL and parts of Cook and Will counties. In 2008, estimated total credit and non-credit enrollment was 31,000 students. At the same time, COD employed 338 full-time faculty, 1,250 part-time faculty, 12 librarians, 15 counselors, 1,029 full- and part-time

support staff employees, and 49 administrative employees. The main campus, located on 273 acres in Glen Ellyn, has nine buildings. The college also provides services from six regional centers located throughout the district (College of DuPage, 2008b).

Recognized in 2001 with the Institutional Merit Award by the National Council for Staff, Program, and Organizational Development, the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) at the College of DuPage provides a comprehensive professional development program (Troller, 2002). Placed organizationally under the department of human resources, the TLC is led by a staff of three—two administrative assistants and the TLC manager (College of DuPage, 2008d). The mission of the TLC is "to promote personal excellence in teaching and enable each employee at COD to achieve excellence" (Troller, 2002).

The TLC provides and facilitates professional development for all staff and faculty. Offerings include credit courses, workshops, information sessions, specialized workshops, self-study classes, and in-service programs (Troller, 2002). A 72-hour New Employee Orientation Program is mandatory for all COD administrators, faculty, and classified staff who have supervisory responsibilities. This is the only mandatory, college-wide program (College of DuPage, 2007).

Most full- and part-time employees of the COD are able to take COD credit courses on a tuition-exempt basis. Also offered through credit is access to aerobic courses in the COD Fitness Center. Part-time employees are charged a reduced fee for this program. Registration for credit courses is handled by the TLC and facilitated through on-line registration on the TLC's website (College of DuPage, 2008c).

Workshops offered are categorized as *general, safety, supervisory*, *teaching and learning, technology,* and *wellness*. General classes include classes on communication,

setting priorities, and listening. Safety courses include OSHA and workplace safety training including CPR, use of an automated external defibrillator, and other related courses. The 72-hour mandatory New Employee Orientation for supervisory employees comprises the offerings in the supervisory category (College of DuPage, 2008c).

Teaching and learning courses are specially arranged courses aimed at improving specific teaching skills, expanding knowledge, and addressing other needs of the faculty. For example, a six-hour seminar meeting over the course of six weeks during the workday for full- and part-time Humanities faculty centered on Howard Gardner's *Five Minds for the Future* (College of DuPage, 2008c).

Technology offerings are divided into *classroom* and *self-study* offerings. The classroom courses are taught face-to-face and they focus on COD's on-line learning platform, Blackboard. The self-study offerings are comprised of more than twenty on-line learning courses aimed at providing instruction in specific program applications so that staff and faculty can learn a new application or increase skill from a basic to advanced level in the use of the application in a self-directed, on-line format (College of DuPage, 2008c).

The COD offers an employee wellness incentive and informational meetings regarding this incentive are offered through the TLC (College of DuPage, 2008c). This orientation is one link between the TLC and the Employee Wellness Program (EWP). Wellness efforts at COD began in 1982 with an employee wellness committee. In 1998, the EWP was established and a coordinator was hired (College of DuPage, 2008a).

The EWP created a program, named *Balanced Lifestyles*, in 1999 to support employee wellness and encourage COD employees to model healthy behaviors and seek balance in their personal and professional lives. In 2002, Balanced Lifestyles sought a

connection with the TLC in order to coordinate efforts with class enrollments and to integrate

the programming offered through the EWP with the TLC (College of DuPage, 2008a). Other

wellness courses offered through the TLC include an employee walking program, various

strength-training classes, a meditation class, and the credit Aerobic Fitness Lab courses

(College of DuPage, 2008c).

The TLC evaluates each program or workshop offered through the Center. The

evaluations are used to plan activities for future TLC offerings. Attendance statistics are also

maintained to assist in future planning and to determine when a program has reached an

"attendance saturation point" (Troller, 2002, p. 71).

Results reported from TLC programming include enhancing the "college's

interdisciplinary collaboration and institutional climate" (Troller, 2002, p. 71). Open

enrollment in most of the TLC programs facilitates the interaction of classified staff, faculty,

and administrative staff in professional development activities, often bringing together

people from across the institution that might not otherwise have had the occasion to share

their views and ideas. These opportunities help "the employees of an institution to navigate

through processes and results in a greater spirit of cooperation" (Troller, 2002, p. 71).

Maricopa Community College

The Maricopa Community College District is located in Maricopa County, Arizona.

The ten campuses, two learning centers, and numerous education centers that comprise the

Maricopa Community Colleges are located in and around the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Over 250,000 credit and non-credit students attend the colleges annually (Maricopa

Community College, n.d.). Over 4,500 board approved employees are served by the

Maricopa Employee and Organizational Development (EOD) department. The department

has two teams—the Employee & Organizational Learning Team and the Organizational

Process Analysis Team—and a Technology Services division (Maricopa Community

College, 2007).

EOD, in cooperation with six college committees, has developed a competency model

that includes six levels: organization, college/site, occupational cluster, role, job, and

individual. The competency categories established by the department include:

- Organizational intelligence

- Technology literacy

- Human relations

- Health and safety

- Commitment to professional excellence (Maricopa Community College, 2007).

Resources at the EOD department level are allocated to work with Maricopa's Talent

Management efforts. This program "is a conscious and deliberate process of preparing,

developing, and retaining employees to meet the needs of MCCCD now and in the future"

(Maricopa Community College, 2007). This initiative is intended to develop internal talent

for recruitment and placement into position openings throughout the college.

EOD is also responsible for the staff recognition program which includes honoring of

staff members for years of service. In 2006-2007, 623 employees were recognized for their

years of service in five-year increments including two staff members who received

recognition for 40 years of service. An annual recognition luncheon is also held for

employee groups and committees that serve the college (Maricopa Community College,

2007).

The Employee and Organizational Learning Team (EOLT) is staffed by seven professional and two support staff. In 2006-2007, the EOLT offered a total of 244 workshops with a total enrollment of 5,023—a 5% increase in enrollment over the previous year. The EOLT offers programs in employee and organizational learning. Employee learning programs are focused on these content areas:

- Supervisory Skills Development
- Occupational Health & Safety Training
- Diversity-related Training
- Career Development
- Organizational Leadership Development
- Personal Leadership Development

Programs offered by EOLT that support organizational learning include custom training and consulting throughout the college district. Established programs in the areas of community-based learning activities, diversity and inclusion training, and leadership effectiveness training are also available (Maricopa Community College, 2007).

The EOLT is also involved in supporting professional growth activities across the college. These activities include seminars, workshops, conference attendance, tuition reimbursement, paid educational and sabbatical leave, and professional internship programs. Representatives from the EOLT work with policy group committees from the various classification groups of the college (crafts, college safety, maintenance and operations, management, administration, and technology, and professional staff) to provide administration, coordination, and funding for these activities (Maricopa Community College, 2007).

The Organizational Process Analysis Team (OPAT) provides consulting services throughout the Maricopa district to facilitate "continuous process improvement, innovation, and standardization" (Maricopa Community College, 2007, p. 19). In response to a large

volume of requests for OPAT services, the team established a Business Process Analyst training course and trained 22 employees throughout the college who can work to ensure that continuous improvement principles are kept in the forefront of business process changes and improvements.

Technology Training Services (TTS) provides employee training in technology and instructional design and also operates the college technology customer support services. The team trains employees in the use of the various administrative systems through training materials, courses, and one-to-one training. The department also provides training in specific software applications and assistance with instructional design and instructional technology needs. In 2006-2007, the TTS had a total course enrollment of 4,876 (Maricopa Community College, 2007).

The Maricopa program is a comprehensive professional development effort that is aimed at supporting the vision and mission of Maricopa Community Colleges at the individual and organizational levels. The intention of the program is to provide employees with "the knowledge, skills and abilities required for the current and future needs of the organization" (Maricopa Community College, 2007, p. 1). A network of staff and work groups inside and outside the office of EOD work cooperatively to determine program needs and to provide and evaluate activities that enhance learning opportunities for all personnel associated with the institution (Maricopa Community College, 2007).

Support Staff Professional Development in the Community College

No evidence could be found of stand-alone professional development programs in community colleges serving only the support staff personnel to the exclusion of faculty and administrative staff in the institution. This same statement is not true of programs supporting

faculty development where evidence exists of programs initiated and maintained only to support community college faculty training, growth, and development (Murray, 1995, 1998, 2001).

The importance of faculty development in any educational institution cannot be argued. Faculty development programs "focus on the training, development, and revitalization of faculty. They are often comprehensive in that they include orientation, teaching skills training, recognition programs, career development programs, and pre-retirement training programs" (Burnstad, 1994, p. 388). Changes in teaching methods, advances in technology, and the development of new programs require that community colleges who expect to provide relevant training for students demand that faculty stay current through professional development.

Claxton (1976) raises an interesting counterpoint regarding programs focused only on members of the faculty. He suggests that "because the phrase 'staff development' may suggest a process of remedying weakness" (p. 34) programs aimed only at one group of the college may imply that the group served by an organized professional development program is the most in need of development.

While admitting that members of the faculty have the most direct impact on students, Claxton points out that student services staff, including financial aid officers and career counselors, can also have a direct and important impact on students in the community college. Further, he points to "front line personnel" (p. 34) such as security officers and secretaries and notes that their direct interactions with students are generally more frequent than those of professional personnel and they "have a substantial impact on the effectiveness and tone of the institution" (pp. 34-35).

As Claxton (1976) suggests, developmental needs of the support staff personnel in the community college are equally vital to the success of the institution. Kennedy, et al. (1990) found that support staff from three Virginia community colleges surveyed after joint customer service training indicated that the training caused them to examine their own attitudes and performance. Program participants also responded that the opportunity to discuss common issues with staff from other colleges was the most valuable outcome from the experience. The results of the survey led Kennedy, et al. to conclude:

> The classified staffs of the colleges are on the front line in retention, because they make the first impression on potential students and because they deal with the students' problems. If the classified staff fails, the whole college fails. Our best people must be up front and professional development training is the best insurance to help classified staff to keep giving the best service possible to students. (p.7)

Foucar-Szocki, Larson, & Mitchell (2003) described the importance of continuous training and development for staff members who have direct student contact. The need for individual development plans that include honing knowledge of student development theory as well as the knowledge base necessary to give students the right information regarding course selection, registration, or financial aid, depending on the area of focus is essential. The role of the generalist in student services offices is vital:

> Continuous open discussion and the systematization of individual development and training plans for all employees help create the desired culture of learning. The increasingly important role of the generalist should be held in high esteem. The institution should care genuinely about its people and work tirelessly to inspire excellent performance by individuals, groups, and the organization. (p. 420)

The inspiration for excellent performance that reaches across the organization is most often provided through comprehensive professional development programs. It is through these comprehensive programs that *all* staff in the community college have the opportunity to take part in personal learning and growth which will, in turn, support the organizational development of the entire college development (Claxton, 1977; Collin, 1978; Friesen, 2002, Hammons, 1978; Hammons, 1979; Hammons, Wallace, & Watts, 1978; Oromaner, 1997; Oromaner, MacPherson, & Lopez, 1997; Overlock, 1994; Taber, 1997; Watts & Hammons, 2002).

<div align="center">The Learning College and the Learning Organization</div>

As this review has shown, comprehensive staff and faculty development programs are not new phenomena. However, the movement by community colleges toward creating learning colleges and learning communities in the late 1990s strengthened and made popular the concept of comprehensive staff and faculty development as a key element in the formation of learning colleges focused on learning at every level (Cross, 1998, O'Banion, 1997a).

The Premise of the Learning College

The concept of the learning college grew out of a reform movement in American higher education that was brought about by the Wingspread Group's *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education* published in 1993 as 'An Open Letter to Those Concerned about the American Future' (O'Banion, 1997b). The goals of the movement included placing learning first and making changes to the traditional design of American education (O'Banion, 1997b). O'Banion's belief that community colleges—their mission, their structure, and their flexibility—resonate well with the goals of the reform

resulted in his learning college model. This model was greeted by community colleges with open arms and has resulted in much substantive change and, also, the requisite controversy that accompanies change (Amey, 2005; Robles, 1999).

The six key principles of the learning college are "based on the assumption that educational experiences are designed for the convenience of learners rather than for the convenience of institutions and their staffs" (O'Banion, 1997b). These principles set forth that the learning college:

- creates substantive change in individual learners.

- engages learners as full partners in the learning process and puts learners in charge of their own choices.

- creates and offers as many options for learning as possible.

- assists learners in forming and participating in collaborative learning communities.

- defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners.

- can claim success for the college and for learning facilitators only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners. (O'Banion, 1997b, p. 47)

The conscious choice to adopt the principles of the learning college can create a sea change in an institution. Policies, programs, practices—virtually every aspect of the institution—must be examined in light of the learning college principles. O'Banion (1997b) suggests that institutional analysis in the learning college mode comes down to two questions that should be asked any time a policy, program, or practice is reviewed or considered for

implementation: "Does this action improve and expand learning?" and "How do we know this action improves and expands learning?" (p.9)

Training and Development and Staff Roles in the Learning College Model

Key to O'Banion's vision are the elements of training faculty and staff and redefining faculty and staff roles (O'Banion, 1999). Training and development are essential when institutions are required to overhaul policies, programs, and practices in making this paradigm shift. Training and development focused on learning college principles for college leadership is necessary in the areas of problem-solving, decision-making, planning, budgeting, and values so that the choices made in the learning college transition are sound. Once the choices are made, training must take place at every level of the organization (O'Banion, 1999).

This kind of institutional change requires that individual and collective roles within the college be reviewed. Because every member of the staff and faculty is both a learner and a facilitator of learning (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999), it is important to identify people who are first to support the initiative and can model desired roles. Every institution has people who are under-utilized in terms of skill, competencies, and desire to serve. The learning college model encourages the institution to re-examine how every member of the staff can facilitate learning (O'Banion, 1999).

The Learning College Project

The learning college movement received attention inside and outside the community college world. Two major research projects were funded at the League for Innovation in the Community College (the League). One project was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts to enable research into assessment of learning outcomes. The other projected, funded by an

unnamed donor, provided the League with $1.1 million dollars to create learning college models (O'Banion, 1999).

The later project, named The Learning College Project, involved the selection of twelve *Vanguard Learning Colleges* by an international team of educators. The twelve colleges selected in January of 2000 accepted the responsibility of working toward transformation to a learning college over a three year period. The project's purpose was to allow these twelve colleges to serve as a basis for model programs and best practices (League for Innovation in the Community College, n.d.). The project's objectives included:

- cultivating an organizational culture that supports learning.

- ensuring recruitment and hiring programs that support hiring faculty and staff who are learning centered.

- creating professional development programs that prepare staff and faculty to be effective learning facilitators.

- using information technology to expand student learning.

- developing competencies for a core program, creating strategies to improve learning outcomes, developing assessment processes, and documenting achievement.

- creating learning centered programs to ensure the success of underprepared students (League for Innovation in the Community College, n.d., ¶4).

Cascadia Community College

The twelve Vanguard Learning Colleges created innovative and exciting initiatives through this project. One college, Cascadia Community College in Bothell, WA, focused significant effort on staff and faculty development as a result of participation in the League's Learning College project. Involvement with this project provided a formative opportunity

for Cascadia—a new community college, established by the Washington legislature and co-located with the University of Washington, Bothell. Cascadia opened its doors in 2000 (Cascadia Community College, n.d.-b).

Through participation in the Learning College Project, staff and faculty at Cascadia developed a program called Employee Learning Institute (ELI). The ELI consists of six modules—*Employee Orientation, People Valuing People, Collaborative Decision Making, Learning College, Health and Wellness,* and *Instructional Technology*. Cascadia lists the goals of ELI as serving "not only [as] a comprehensive orientation for all new employees, but also as an ongoing forum for existing employees to hold regular conversations about our mental models and how we serve our students, campus community and others in order to evolve as a learning college" (Cascadia Community College, n.d.-a).

Courses in the Employee Orientation module provide faculty and staff with the information necessary to become integrated in the culture of the institution. Awards and recognition, compliance training, evaluation and assessment, and ethics training are included in the People Valuing People module. Collaborative Decision Making includes the budget process and planning, the college assessment cycle, and the strategic plan (Cascadia Community College, n.d.-a).

A focus on learning outcomes, learning-centered hiring training, appreciative inquiry, and the college EPortfolio can be found in the Learning College module. Health and Wellness includes a variety of opportunities including ergonomics, stress reduction, time management, first aid/CPR, and work/life balance activities. The Instructional Technology module includes training for staff and faculty in software applications and the Cascadia information management system (Cascadia Community College, n.d.-a).

Cascadia's annual report for 2003-2004 (the first fiscal year after funded from the

League ended) indicated that over 85 learning opportunities were provided to 215 employees

through the ELI. Additionally, the ELI committee sponsored an All College Retreat focused

on diversity efforts within the college. The report indicated that, in future years, the

Employee Learning Institute would

> "continue to focus on providing valuable learning opportunities designed to enhance
> the knowledge, skills and abilities to better support student learning and success.
> Specifically, providing employees multiple options for learning and professional
> development through participation in employee study groups, observation of peers,
> journal writing and involvement in improvement processes" (Cascadia Community
> College, 2004).

Support Staff in the Learning College

The role of support staff in the learning college is potentially expansive though

O'Banion (1997b) cautions that many support staff members may not be ready (or willing) to

accept the challenge.

> The support staff—custodians, secretaries, bookstore clerks, technicians—who
> operate key components of the school's infrastructure can also be resistant to change.
> While the philosophies of Total Quality Management and "learning organizations"
> subscribe to flattened organizations that empower all stakeholders, including support
> staff, these staff do not always gravitate to new power easily. Placing learning first
> may change the roles of support staff…making them more visible partners with the
> professional staff. In a new learning paradigm, support staff will be called upon to
> help manage and coordinate learning activities as faculty are freed to take on new

roles as learning facilitators. While some will resonate to opportunities to take on new roles, many will feel unprepared to take on new assignments and will need encouragement, training, and recognition to overcome the natural resistance that will emerge. (p. 33)

Though the learning college model as described by O'Banion (1997a, 1997b, 1997c), necessitates an institution-wide focus on learning, training, and development, there remains little solid evidence that the movement has reached into the support staff ranks to the extent that it has permeated those of faculty and administrators. Programs described by Moskus (1997) and Ponitz (1997) in *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (O'Banion, 1997b), though they are described as comprehensive staff development programs by their authors, do not highlight support staff inclusion at the levels of participation by other members of the faculty and staff.

None of the six Sinclair Community College Learning Challenge Awards named by Ponitz (1997) are aimed at support staff in particular though there are three aimed just at faculty and two focused just on management staff. Additionally, the Sinclair *Vision for Learning Excellence* (Ponitz, 1997) includes a full description of "The Sinclair Full-Time Faculty Member" (p. 123) and of "Faculty Development" (p. 124) but does not mention support staff or even inclusive staff development.

Though Mouskus (1997) describes a classified staff member taking a leadership role in re-designing the fall, opening day convocation by staging the play *Oleanna*—an interaction between a student and a professor that explores, among other ideas, power relationships in academe—there are few other direct examples of support staff engagement in

professional development in his description of Lane Community College's movement toward becoming a learning college.

Evidence does exist in the programs at Maricopa Community Colleges (another college highlighted in *A Learning College for the 21st Century*) and the College of DuPage described earlier in this review that support staff are included in professional development efforts in the learning college. However, the lack of research and study focused specifically on support staff points to the fact that these staff members are not considered by community colleges to be of the same consequence to the learning college as are faculty and administrators.

Challenges to the Learning College Model

Taking O'Banion to task for what she characterizes as a learning environment cultivated only for students, Amey (2005) points to the importance of growing the learning college not just for student benefit, but for the benefit of all involved. She urges leaders within the learning college to find ways to answer the question:

> From a learning perspective, how do leaders facilitate a sense of validation for one's unique contribution to the organization—that may be a part of intrinsic motivation to do good work—while simultaneously encouraging employees to cultivate shared meaning and understandings that are essential to the learning environment? (p. 692)

Amey's suggestion for accomplishing this task is to involve all members of the college in a shift toward strategic thinking. She suggests that the challenge to accomplish this goal comes in asking individuals, even those not accustomed to being a part of a team, to "approach their work and engage with the organization—including with each other—on a continuum from knowledge expert to knowledge collaborator" (p. 693).

A study of California community colleges that investigated faculty, staff, and administrators' preparations to meet their institution's goal of becoming a learning college provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by community colleges seeking to adopt the learning college principles in their institution (Robles, 1999). Based on O'Banion's work on learning colleges and Senge's (1990) foundational work on the learning organization, Robles' qualitative study provided eight recommendations for community colleges moving toward the learning college model.

Among the recommendations were two pointed specifically at staff development. The first was a recommendation to conduct a training and development needs assessment in order to determine both the interests and needs of staff and faculty. The results of the needs assessment were predicted to draw attention to the fact that faculty and staff of different ages, educational levels, and longevity in their positions will have different training and development requirements. Additionally, the study stressed the need to focus on both individual and organizational learning goals (Robles, 1999).

In tandem with the call for needs assessment and for tailoring training to staff needs, the study highlighted the necessity for institutional support for staff development by defining the various ways in which support must be given. Though budget support is the obvious starting point, Robles (1999) also urged that adequate time be given for individual and organizational training pursuits and that training and development efforts and achievements be recognized.

In addition to providing recommendations specific to the training development needs for support staff in community colleges, Robles' study provides helpful comparisons of the

learning college (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) and the learning organization

(Senge, 1990). This is a comparison that O'Banion himself has made:

> In some ways, a learning organization is designed for the staff of the institution, while
> a learning-centered institution is designed for the students. There is no guarantee that
> a learning organization will become a learning-centered institution placing learning
> first for students unless those values are made clearly visible as the primary goal of a
> learning organization….Community colleges engaged in creating a learning
> organization have established an excellent foundation for launching an
> institutionwide initiative to become a more learning-centered college. (p. 26)

A third recommendation of Robles' (1999) study is that the learning needs of the

organization are as important as the learning needs of the student. This challenges

O'Banion's (1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) insistence that student learning must be the focus

for every action in the learning college. Robles argues that "the strength of community

colleges—their shared vision of student success—can also be a weakness if the organization

does not value its own success" (p. 12). Organizational learning that is purposeful (explicit),

useful, and that is assessed in meaningful ways is deemed as important as student learning

(Robles, 1999).

The Learning Organization

Senge's (1990) concept of the *learning organization* is often discussed in tandem

with O'Banion's (1997a,1997b, 1997c, 1999) *learning college* model. As noted, O'Banion

(1997b) believes that the learning organization model can provide a foundation on which

those seeking to become learning colleges can build. Senge's model is based on the five

disciplines of *systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision,*

and *team learning*. According to Kofman and Senge (1995) the learning organization defies definition:

> Just as there is no such thing as a 'smart kid'…there is no such thing as a 'learning organization.' 'Learning organization' is a category that we create in language…When we speak of a 'learning organization; we are not describing an external phenomenon or labeling an independent reality. We are articulating a view that involves us—the observers—as much as the observed in a common system. We are taking a stand for a vision, for creating a type of organization we would truly like to work within and which can thrive in a world of increasing interdependency and change. (p. 31)

Garvin (1993) was willing to risk defining a learning organization as "an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights" (p. 80). Central to this definition is the concept of 'new ideas' (new knowledge and insights). If an organization looks only at 'old ideas' and old ways of doing things, learning is not necessary. That is seldom the case in any organization, however, and it is almost never the case in an organization as complex and as prone to change as the community college.

The source of these 'new ideas' is, of course, is the individuals who comprise the organization. "Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs" (Senge, 1990, p. 141). Individual learning—the acquisition of knowledge and skill—occurs daily but Kim (1993) differentiates learning into *"know-how"* and *"know-why"* (p. 38).

Know-how is the acquisition of skill which results in the physical ability to produce action. *Know-why* is the ability, at the conceptual level, to understand the experience (Kim, 1993). Argyris and Schön (1978) believe that learning takes place only when the individual learner translates the knowledge into a change in behavior and is subsequently able to replicate that behavior.

Thus, we are back to Garvin's definition of the learning organization—one that modifies behavior as the result of knowledge and insight. A professional development program that is based on both the needs of the individual and the organization can be a tremendous source for 'new ideas' and it can facilitate the kind of changes in behavior that allow the institution to grow and to change in ways that are beneficial for all learners.

<div align="center">Women's Ways of Knowing and Learning</div>

In their oft-cited work *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986/1997) described five epistemological categories for the ways in which the women in their study came to 'know'. These categories include:

- *silence* in which women envision themselves as mindless, voiceless, and vulnerable to the whims of external authority.

- *received knowledge* in which women perceive themselves as receiving and understanding knowledge from external sources, but incapable of creating knowledge on their own.

- *subjective knowledge* in which women perceive knowledge as subjectively known or intuited rather than gained or learned from the outside.

- *procedural knowledge* in which women learn and apply objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge.

- *constructed knowledge* in which women view themselves as creators of knowledge, which they understand to be contextual, and they value both objective and subjective strategies for knowing. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986/1997, p. 15)

Procedural knowledge, according to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986/1997) is the result of either *separate knowing* or *connected knowing*. Lyons (as cited in Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997) posited that "people who experience the self as predominantly separate tend to espouse a morality based on impersonal procedures for establishing justice, while people who experience the self as predominantly connected tend to espouse a morality based on care" (p. 102). Those oriented to separate knowing arrive at knowledge through impersonal procedures—investigation, facts—while those oriented to connected knowing arrive at knowledge through care (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997).

Flannery (2000) discusses *connection* in women's learning as connection with the self and with others. She terms connection with self as *connection with/in the self* and addresses global processing, subjective knowing, and intuition. Global learners include "learners who are global, right-brained, and field-dependent [who] put things together to form wholes. They process pieces of information simultaneously and perceive the overall patterns and structures of what they are learning" (Flannery, 2000, p. 115).

Subjective learners look inside themselves for answers. The reference point for "knowing and learning, for right and wrong" (Flannery, 2000, p. 117) is the self. Those who rely on intuition for learning and knowing trust an inner instinct, a 'gut feeling.' Flannery references Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986/1997) description of intuition as a way of knowing that is based more on feelings than facts and contrasts this definition

with Schultz' description of intuition that is more certain, that is based on a combination of known facts and previous experiences that results in arriving at sound conclusions based on this method of intuition.

Flannery (2000) describes the *connection of oneself with others* in terms of learning through interactions and relationships and from the reference point of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986/1997) *connected knowing*. In describing her review of the literature of women and learning, Flannery (2000) indicates that the dominant theme is "that women both prefer to learn with others and prefer a certain kind of learning relationship with others, one that emphasizes mutual support and caring" (p. 124). Women are willing and eager to share from their experiences, to learn in a collaborative environment, and to allow others to learn from their mistakes and missteps in order to make a sister's journey less difficult.

The concept of connected knowing espoused by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986/1997) and in work done later by Clinchy (cited by Flannery, 2000) is more focused on the individual learner and how she comes to connected knowing.

Connected knowers are aware that they cannot accurately know another's world because the experiences belong to the particular person. At the same time, connected knowers use their own experiences to understand the other person. Connected knowers feel viscerally the connection with others. They seek out learning communities where they can learn in collaboration and partnership with like-minded knowers. (Flannery, 2000, p. 126)

The concept of *connection* in regard to women's ways of learning has been found by researchers to be a vital element in positive learning experiences for women. None were

willing to posit that only women benefit from learning in connection. However, that women prefer learning environments and situations fostering connection, collaboration, and social interaction has been reported in the literature (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Fenwick, 1996; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996).

<div align="center">Training and Development of Front-Line Staff</div>

As has been previously noted, I was unable to identify any empirical evidence related to the study of professional development of community college support staff employees. Likewise, the literature related to support or 'front-line' staff in other work environments is very limited. Five relevant sources were identified and several of these sources corroborate the absence of research on support staff personnel in the workplace (Bauer, 2000; Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002).

A review of the literature regarding job satisfaction factors for support staff employees focused findings from the literature on front-line staff in colleges and universities. Bauer (2000) underscores the importance of classified support staff to colleges and universities:

Very often support staff employees work on the front lines. For example, they are the first point of contact for current students, prospective students, legislative officials, and other constituents. This is especially true for clerical staff, whose attitudes and level of helpfulness can substantially contribute to the constituents' perceptions of the campus climate. (p. 87)

The review identified four factors that contribute to employee satisfaction: 1) rewards and recognition, 2) issues of work-life balance, 3) opportunities for growth through training

and development, and 4) perceptions of the work environment (Bauer, 200). The information relative to factor number three (training and development) revealed that support staff employees who receive opportunities for professional development through tuition discounts or waivers, technical training, and skill development are more satisfied with their jobs than counterparts who did not have this opportunity. Indirect benefits reported were increased self-esteem and empowerment. Challenges reported included having the time to take advantage of training and development opportunities and the negative impression that might result from a front-line staff member being absent from her workstation while engaged in training (Bauer, 2000).

Employers from small and mid-sized companies identified the lack of workforce preparedness in front-line workers as one of their biggest challenges (Jobs for the Future, 2003). Though willing to invest the resources to train these workers, the obstacles were often overwhelming. Many of the front-line workers referenced have low literacy skills that prevent them from taking advantage of traditional training programs. More specialized, flexible, or individual programs are too costly for most of the employers, especially when coupled with the cost of replacing the workers away from their worksite when involved in training.

Further, workers with the ability to participate in training or formal education are often hesitant to do so because of their belief that they would not reap the benefits of their efforts. One employer observed "There is a disconnect because of the gap between frontline workers and supervisors. Neither sees the potential of the other. I want to be frank and candid: supervisors do not see frontline workers as potential leaders or managers, and the workers lack self-esteem" (Jobs for the Future, 2003, p. 3).

To counter some of these obstacles, several employers sought proactive solutions including eliminating tuition reimbursement policies that were financially prohibitive and paying for tuition, textbooks, and other educational expenses directly. Others arranged for community colleges to offer courses at the workplace, provided controlled release time to allow front-line workers to explore advancement opportunities in the company prior to making the commitment to train for the advancement, and made access to on-line courses and a bank of annual paid training hours with which to take advantage of the on-line opportunities available (Jobs for the Future, 2003).

I was able to identify three research studies. One of the studies (Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002) was directly related to training issues, the other two studies examined career aspirations of non-exempt (non-managerial) employees and included issues related to training and development (Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002).

Bank Workers and Informal Learning

Using participant observation and ethnographic and individual interview techniques, Mitchell & Livingstone (2002) studied several aspects of workplace learning in branch workers in a major Canadian bank. The bank had long employed a largely informal training approach with its branch workers. However, during the introduction of a new financial services software, the institution shifted to a more formalized, self-study approach to training (Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002).

The results of the study showed that the shift in the bank's approach to training was not successful. The workers continued to rely on their informal approach to learning—both collectively and individually. The informal approach was identified by the workers as collaborative and supportive while the self-study approach was seen as isolating and

stressful. Further, workers did not feel that they were given the time they needed to spend in self-learning given their other responsibilities and most were less satisfied in their job as a result (Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002).

Recommendations to bank management and human resources staff included reinstituting the informal learning process with time allocated weekly for staff to engage in both individual and collective learning, the creation of a learning environment within the bank branches that is conducive to informal learning, and frequent needs assessment and communication regarding learning and training needs. Also recommended were the recognition of and reward for learning activities, mentoring, and caring and community work (Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002). The strong sense of community and cooperation among the bank workers was a necessary element in their learning that, when curtailed, proved to have a negative impact on job satisfaction and performance.

Career Development and Non-Exempt Employees

The career development activities, needs, and concerns of non-exempt employees were examined in a qualitative, exploratory study that employed a focus group methodology (McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002). The participants included 33 women and 16 men from three workplaces—a large financial company, a mid-sized manufacturer, and a state university. The researchers indicated that the lack of available research data on non-exempt employees in the area of study necessitated a qualitative approach and that the focus group methodology encouraged the collection of emergent data (McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002).

The results of the study indicated that among the important aspects of work to the participants were: "liking your work and enjoying co-workers…having fun, and working in

a positive social environment" (McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002, p, 14). Participants were asked "What activities have you participated in to help in your current or future work?" (p. 13). Responses indicated that the participants had taken part in both internal and external training on a variety of topics including computer and communication skills, product and technical knowledge, and on topics related specifically to an individual position or task. Several of the participants had also taken courses that led to professional certifications. Networking was also identified as important to current and future work. Some of the respondents indicated that networking with those with higher status in the organization could result in career advancement while others indicated that the real value of networking was the increased knowledge and teamwork that resulted from networking opportunities (McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002).

Regarding the effects of professional development activities, many of the respondents shared the belief that these activities had no effect on their jobs. Others, especially those who pursued higher education, expressed frustration that their professional development efforts did not result in the rewards that they expected (promotions or transfers). Some reported positive gain from professional development activities including one participant who indicated she gained new perspectives and ways of thinking as a result of taking courses for her Master's degree (McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002).

The researchers concluded that outcomes from participation in professional development could be divided into two categories—personal and organizational.

The personal category includes outcomes such as new perspectives, increased self-confidence, enhanced marketability, finding out something is not one's calling, and acquiring skills useful outside of work. The organizational category could include

outcomes such as acquisition of skills useful on the job, assumption of additional responsibilities, and enhanced leadership ability. Of course, some effects could fit into more than one category, such as gaining a better understanding or others and reduced stress. (p. 16)

Career Aspirations of Non-Managerial Women

Hite and McDonald (2003) also noted the difficulty of locating empirical research on women in non-managerial positions. They concluded that this is because these women are not in positions of authority in their organizations but are those "on the front lines…serving customers, making sales, or working in clerical capacities" (p. 222). They also observed and took issue with the fact that researchers may have concluded that there has been adequate exploration of the role of women in the workplace because women in managerial roles have been previously studied.

The themes that emerged from the study in regard to career aspirations were *adaptive goals, family influence, security needs,* and *organizational support*. Women in the study reported that their career goals were often not fully formed or were adapted because of other life circumstances. They also shared perspectives that showed how family responsibilities, the need for job security, and organizational support systems influenced their career success and satisfaction (Hite & McDonald, 2003).

Professional development activities did not figure prominently as having been instrumental in the career development of the women in this study. Though some reported that they took part in internal training or received tuition reimbursement, not all participants viewed professional development activities as critical to their career advancement (McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002).

The social nature of learning for persons in support roles in their organizations is an important component of professional development (Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002). The role that professional development plays in bolstering self-esteem and the empowerment of workers in supportive roles (Bauer, 2002; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002) is indicative of the personal development role of professional development in these staff members. Both the organization and the individual benefit from the role that professional development plays in developing job knowledge and skills (Bauer, 2002; Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002).

Summary

This chapter has provided a review of literature relevant to my study including a history of professional development in the community college, the purposes and models of professional development in the community college and characteristics of successful professional development programs. Two programs—the TLC program at the College of DuPage and the activities of the EOD department at the Maricopa Community Colleges—were highlighted to provide examples of content in current professional development programs. The overview of professional development in community colleges concluded with a discussion specific to community college support staff participation in professional development.

The principles and practical application of the learning college (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) and the learning organization (Senge, 1990) were discussed as were challenges to the learning college model from the field and the relationship between individual and organizational learning in the learning organization, and women's ways of

learning and knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Bierema, 2001; Fenwick, 1996; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; McDonald & Hite, 1998; Tisdell, 1996). The chapter concluded with a review of the literature related to support, classified, and front-line staff outside of the community college and included three research studies focused on support staff personnel.

The researchers in the three studies cited (Hite & McDonald, 2002; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2003; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002) found, as I have, that there is little empirical evidence in any field regarding issues related to work, career, or professional development activities for support staff. Further, they pointed to the important role of these staff members in the organizations they serve and observed that additional research focused on the work conditions, career goals, and learning needs of support staff personnel is needed. My study was designed to add to the limited body of knowledge in this area by reporting the meaning of professional development to community college support staff personnel and to their colleges.

CHAPTER 3

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Overview of Methodological Approaches

This study was constructed around the methodological framework of what Moustakas (1994) terms 'transcendental phenomenology.' The challenge of a transcendental phenomenological study is to "describe the things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). The purpose of the study was to understand the meaning of the professional development program for selected support staff participants at Millennial Community College (MCC) and to examine their perceptions of the meaning of their participation in professional development to the college. Further, I sought to understand the perceptions of selected community college administrative staff members at MCC of the meaning of professional development to the support staff who participate and their beliefs concerning the meaning of the support staff participation in professional development to the institution.

Key to transcendental phenomenology are the concepts of *intentionality*, *intuition*, *epoche*, and *intersubjectivity*. Moustakas (1994) describes intentionality as "the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness, and the object of consciousness are intentionally related" (p. 28). The reality of an object or an experience is made known only through experience and appearance in conscious thought (Creswell, 1998).

Meaning is made through the integration of the conscious experience of an object or a phenomenon and the explication of how beliefs about the object or phenomenon are acquired (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I asked the participants (support staff and administrators)

to examine the reality of their experiences with professional development and to explain how their beliefs about the specific aspects of the phenomenon were acquired. My goal was to listen to the participants, to analyze the words and phrases of their stories, and to identify the common meanings that exist in their experiences.

Intuition is "the beginning place in deriving knowledge of human experience, free of everyday sense experiences and the human attitude" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). Intuition is a very personal experience, one that is often questioned by those who have not experienced the satisfaction of following it and being rewarded by a fuller understanding of the meaning of an experience. Its importance in phenomenological methodology is great. Van Manen (1990) explained that "a universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars as they are encountered in lived experience" (p.10).

Epoche, a Greek word meaning "to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (Moustakas, 1994, p.33) is also defined in phenomenological methodology as "bracketing" (Creswell, 1998). The importance of the bracketing by the researcher of any previous experiences, knowledge, and biases regarding the participants, the research site, and the focus of the study should not be underestimated. The researcher must make constant and conscious efforts to ensure that the truth of the meanings of the lived experiences of the participants are not overshadowed or misinterpreted by researcher bias.

Intersubjectivity refers to the process by which we identify our own ideas and perceptions about an object or phenomenon and co-mingle these identifications with the shared knowledge that exists in our consciousness regarding the object or phenomenon

(Creswell, 1998, Moustakas, 1994, Schwandt, 2001). Moustakas explains his approach to intersubjectivity in qualitative research:

> I must first explicate my own intentional consciousness through transcendental
>
> processes before I can understand someone or something that is not my own,
>
> someone or something that is apprehended analogically. My own perception is
>
> primary; it includes the perception of the other by analogy (Moustakas, 1994, p. 37).

Through a blending of these elements, the researcher places him/herself in the phenomenological context for the study. By maintaining an awareness of intentionality, intuition, epoche, and intersubjectivity, the researcher has the opportunity to become immersed in making meaning of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

Research Site

Millennial Community College was established in the Midwest in 1967. The College opened its doors in August of 1969 in leased facilities with an enrollment of 1,380 students. In June of 1969, a $12.9 million bond referendum approved by county voters allowed the purchase of 220 acres of land and the construction of five buildings at the site still occupied by the college. Classes began at this site in August of 1972 with an enrollment of 3,600 students. The College was fully accredited by the State Department of Education in 1973 and by the regional accrediting agency in 1975 (Millennial Community College, 2008b).

The county in which MCC is located had a 2005 population of 506,562. Almost 91% of the county population at that time was white, non-Hispanic and 51% were female. The median age was 35.9. In 2005, nearly 95% of county residents over 25 years of age had at least a high school diploma, with 48% holding a Bachelor's degree and 16% having earned a

graduate or professional degree. There were 29 four-year colleges and universities and 11 two-year colleges in the county (Millennial Community College, 2006).

Description of the College

In the fall term of 2007, 18,680 credit students and approximately 15,000 non-credit students were served by MCC. The college offers over 50 one- and two-year certificate programs and degrees in career and technical fields and maintains transfer agreements with over 100 regional colleges and universities to allow students pursuing the associate of arts degree to continue their studies toward a bachelor's or advanced degree (Millennial Community College, 2007b).

In fiscal year 2008, the college employed a total of 2,200 staff and faculty members. Of this number, 60% were non-faculty employees. Of the non-faculty employees, 30% were classified as professional, exempt employees and 70% as hourly, non-exempt employees. Of the non-faculty employees, 60.4% were women and 13.0% were minorities. Of the approximately 400 persons employed as full-time support staff personnel, approximately 200 (50%) were classified as *office and technical hourly* staff (Millennial Community College, 2007a).

Description of the Professional Development Program

The professional development program is administered at MCC by the Office of Staff and Organizational Development (S&OD). The office is staffed by four full-time professional staff members—the director, the manager for staff development and HR systems, the technical training coordinator, and the faculty development coordinator. The office is supported by two support staff employees—one full-time and one three-quarter time—both administrative assistant II positions.

In fiscal year 2007, the office of S&OD offered 464 program sections which were attended by 2,780 staff members (an average of 5.99 per session). These attendance figures represent program offerings that required pre-registration. Other offerings sponsored by S&OD include professional development days at the beginning of fall and spring terms, non-credit offerings paid for by S&OD, workgroup training, and faculty training offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning. These uncaptured attendance figures would greatly increase the total attendance at staff development events. The budget for S&OD for 2006-2007 at MCC was $774,904, including approximately $300,000 for salaries. This expenditure represents 0.44% of the total institutional budget of $174,938,615 (Millennial Community College, Office of Staff and Organizational Development, 2008a).

Programs are categorized under the headings *Organizational Development, Professional Development, Faculty Development, Supervisor Development, Technical Training, and Personal Development*. With very few exceptions, all programs are open to all employees of the college regardless of status (faculty, administrative, or support staff and full- or part-time). The completion of an Individual Development Plan (IDP) is encouraged but is not required except to receive funding for certain types of development. In order to provide a picture of the scope of professional development offerings at MCC, a schedule from a sample week is shown in Table 1.

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Table 1

Sample Week of professional development Offerings at MCC

Date	Course	Time
2008-04-21	Basic Principles	10:30 am
2008-04-21	New Staff Orientation	8:30 am
2008-04-21	SharePoint Fundamentals	9:00 am
2008-04-21	SharePoint for Owners	11:00 am
2008-04-22	Audio Conference	12:00 pm
2008-04-22	Banner Orientation	1:30 pm
2008-04-22	MCC Resource Systems	8:30 am
2008-04-23	Admin Assistants Orientation	1:30 pm
2008-04-23	Outlook Mini Workshop	2:00 pm
2008-04-23	SharePoint Fundamentals	9:00 am
2008-04-23	SharePoint for Owners	11:00 am
2008-04-24	Angel Preview (On-line platform)	8:30 am
2008-04-24	Angel Preview	10:30 am
2008-04-24	Angel Preview	1:00 pm
2008-04-24	Angel Preview	3:00 pm
2008-04-24	Basic Principles	8:00 pm

Table 1 (continued)

2008-04-24	Outlook Mini Workshop	10:00 am
2008-04-24	Performance Appraisals	1:00 pm
2008-04-25	Book Talk	2:15 pm
2008-04-25	Metro History Tour	12:00 pm

Review and Approval

Permission to conduct this research was sought and received through the MCC internal review process. On November 14, 2007, the proposal I submitted for this study was approved by the director of research, evaluation, and instructional development at MCC.

I submitted an application for human subjects research approval for a similar research study to Iowa State University's (ISU) Human Subjects Review Board on July 21, 2005. Approval for that study was granted on August 3, 2005. I was unable to complete the original project because the program I sought to study was closed by the college it served. I submitted an IRB modification describing the current study to the ISU Human Subjects Review Board on November 15, 2007 and it was approved (Appendix A) on January 17, 2008.

Participants

Qualification of Support Staff Participants

The support staff participants in the study were chosen from the 200 full-time office and technical hourly personnel MCC. Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select a

group of 20 participants qualified to volunteer to participate in the study. The specific

criteria used for selection are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Criteria for Support Staff Participant Qualification

Qualification	Criterion
Status	Full-time
Classification	Office/technical hourly
Job Title	Administrative Assistant
Position Level	I, II, or III
Longevity	Employed at MCC for at least one (1) year
Department	Not restricted (any College department)

In addition to the criteria listed in Table 2, permission to allow support staff

participation in the study was sought from all direct supervisors. Participants qualified to

volunteer for participation also had to have an active IDP and were asked via the Informed

Consent document to allow me permission to review the document prior to our individual

interview. Finally, those who were eligible to participate had to have participated in a

minimum of two (2) professional development activities (on- or off-campus) in the one year

period prior to the focus group interview.

Rationale for Selection Criteria for Support Staff Participants

I made a site visit to MCC in December 2007 which included a meeting with the vice

president for HR/organizational development. Among the items discussed at that meeting

was the classification and status of the prospective participants. Though the Vice President

made it very clear that the selection criteria would be my purview, she suggested that a study focused on staff members holding the administrative assistant job title would yield results that would be very useful both to MCC and to me.

The reasons given by the Vice President included the frequency of participation in professional development by administrative assistants (which is reportedly high relative to other staff groupings), the variety of programming offered for this demographic by S&OD, and the past tendency of these staff members to be supportive of and participative in activities requiring volunteers. For these reasons, I chose to focus the study on staff with the job title 'administrative assistant.'

Support Staff Participant Selection Process

Members of the MCC S&OD staff provided a list of 20 names of prospective participants who met all qualification criteria. This list also included the name of the each qualified staff member's supervisor. The manager for staff development and HR systems and I sent an e-mail (Appendix B) to the supervisors of all qualified support staff personnel to request permission from the supervisors for release time of 2.5 hours total (90 minutes for the focus group interview and 60 minutes for the individual interview). We sent a follow-up message (Appendix C) to those supervisors who had not responded by the February 1, 2008 deadline.

We created a list of participants eligible for the invitation to participate by eliminating the one prospective participant not granted permission to participate by her supervisor. The manager for staff development and HR systems and I sent an e-mail to the 19 remaining support staff members (Appendix D) inviting their voluntary participation in the study. We sent a follow-up message (Appendix E) to those prospective support staff participants who

had not responded by the February 11, 2008 deadline. A total of 12 participants volunteered to participate in the study. I sent the 12 volunteers the support staff Informed Consent document via e-mail prior to the focus group interview.

At the beginning of the two focus group interviews on February 28 and 29, 2008, I answered questions from the volunteers about the study and then requested that all persons who wished to continue participation sign the support staff Informed Consent document (Appendix F). I provided each participant with a signed original of her Informed Consent document, kept a signed original for my records, and provided a copy of each support staff Informed Consent document to the office of S&OD at MCC. A total of 11 support staff participants signed the Informed Consent document. One participant who had volunteered for the study was unable to participate in either the focus group or individual interview due to illness.

Qualification of Administrative Staff Participants

I also used criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) in the selection of the administrative staff members for participation in the study. My choice of the administrative staff participants was purposeful and selective. In order to learn the ways in support staff participation in professional development makes a difference in the lives of the support staff participants and in the life of the institution from the perspective of administrative staff, I sought to speak with administrative staff most closely involved with the S&OD program. The criteria used are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Criteria for Administrative Staff Participant Qualification

Qualification	Criterion
Classification	Current or former professional/exempt employee
Department	Staff and Organizational Development or Human Resources/Organizational Development

Administrative Staff Participant Selection Process

I contacted the individual who is now the vice president for HR/ organizational development at MCC in January of 2007 regarding the possibility of conducting a research study at MCC. When that initial inquiry was made, this individual was the director of S&OD. In November of 2007, after I applied for and received permission to conduct the study through MCC's internal review process, the former director had been promoted to the vice presidency and a new director of S&OD had been selected. Because of the unique perspectives of these two individuals, both were asked to participate in the study and both agreed.

When warranted, MCC grants emeritus status to retiring faculty and staff. The individual who was responsible for leading MCC's S&OD program over a 15-year period beginning in 1988 received the title of director emeritus of S&OD upon retirement in 2003, is still active in the life of MCC, and is a consultant nationally in the area of staff and organizational development. Because of these involvements and this individual's stature in the world of professional development in community colleges, I was quite interested in

having the director emeritus participate in the study and was very pleased when my invitation was accepted.

Finally, the current manager for staff development and HR systems began working in S&OD as an administrative assistant in 1991, was promoted to staff development coordinator after receiving a Master's degree, and was promoted to the manager position in the Fall of 2007. This individual has longevity with the MCC S&OD program in a variety of service roles. This person has been primarily responsible for support staff programming in S&OD for the last several years and is also very knowledgeable about the entire MCC S&OD program. I was very appreciative when this person also agreed to participate in the study.

I e-mailed the administrative staff Informed Consent document (Appendix G) to the four administrative staff participants prior to the individual interviews. At each interview, I provided the participant with a signed original of the administrative staff Informed Consent document, kept a signed original for my records, and provided a copy of each administrative staff Informed Consent document to the Office S&OD at MCC.

In total, the study included three current administrative staff participants and one emeritus administrative staff participant along with the 11 administrative assistant participants for a total of 15 respondents. All support staff participants were involved in one 90 minute focus group session and one 60 minute individual interview. The focus group interviews were held during the last week of February 2008 and the individual interviews with support staff were held during the last week of March in 2008 allowing me to analyze the focus group data and review the IDP documents prior to the individual interviews. The administrative staff members were involved in one 60 minute individual interview only.

Three of those interviews took place during the final week of February 2008 and the fourth during the final week of March 2008.

<div align="center">Data Elements and Collection</div>

The primary source of data in a phenomenological study are interview data (Creswell, 1998). As the purpose of this study was to understand how participants make meaning of a particular phenomenon, it makes sense that asking these participants about their experience is central to the process. This section will describe the data elements that I used in the study and how they were collected.

Key Informants

I was able to identify two key informants (Creswell, 1998) during my initial visit to the research site in October 2007. One is the manager for staff development and HR systems; the other is a member of the support staff who serves as an administrative assistant II to the department of S&OD. Since the key informants have both worked in S&OD for over 20 years and were also participants in the study, their knowledge of the culture and organization of MCC, the people of the college, and their understanding of the purpose of my study were instrumental in providing me with guidance, assistance, and information before, during, and after the research phase of the study (Creswell, 1998).

Artifacts

I was fortunate to have access to several artifacts related to the offering of professional development at the research site (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). These artifacts included a wealth of institutional data both on the institution's website and from the MCC Offices of Institutional Research and Staff and Organizational Development.

Other information made available to me included information on the professional development division (mission and purpose, background, and staff information), course descriptions, and individual development plans (IDP) for those subjects who were interviewed for the study. By examining these artifacts, I was able to establish knowledge of the types of programs offered and the professional development goals of individuals through their IDP prior to beginning the focus group and individual interviews.

Researcher's Field Notes and Journal

In his discussion of field notes, Patton (2002) indicates that the way a journal is used for making field notes "is very much a matter of personal style and individual work habits. What is not optional is the taking of field notes" (p. 302). I utilized two types of field notes and a research journal during the qualitative investigation. First, I made detailed field notes during each of the four site visits made to MCC in October and December of 2007 and in February and March of 2008.

These hand-written notes included my observations of the campus, notes on people I met during the site visits, minutes of meetings held, and my ideas for further investigation. Additionally, these field notes included a methodological log so that I could document decisions I made regarding any changes to the study design. Fortunately, except for the exclusion of one participant volunteer due to illness, I found it unnecessary to make changes to the study methodology in the field.

These notes were the basis for the second, more formal, set of field notes that I created for the purposes of documenting meetings with administrative staff members in S&OD and the decisions that we made in those meetings. These formalized notes included meeting minutes, timelines for the research phase of the study, interview schedules, drafts of

focus group and interview guides for review and approval, and process notes. I also maintained a personal journal of the research experience in which I recorded my thoughts and feelings about the project, the participants, and others I met during the study.

Support Staff Focus Group Interview Process

I utilized support staff focus groups as the first phase of the interview process for support staff participants for several reasons. Creswell (1998) notes that focus groups are useful in allowing the researcher to introduce his/her project at one time to several participants. Additionally, focus groups allow interactions among participants in the study that can enhance the quality and richness of the data. If most of the participants have similar thoughts and ideas about the subject under discussion, divergent ideas are easily identified and the participants tend to monitor each other and call-out false or extreme views on the issues (Patton, 2002).

The limitations of using focus groups include: being able to ask a limited number of questions, dependent on group size; the amount of time available to each participant for response; and the group facilitation skills needed to conduct a successful focus group interview. Additionally, shy or quiet individuals and those who discover their viewpoint to be in the minority are often less participative in a focus group interview. Unless the moderator has the ability and tact to draw these individuals into the discussion, their ideas may be unheard, resulting in data that does not tell the whole story (Patton, 2002).

Since there were 11 respondents, I chose to conduct two focus groups with six participants in one group and five in the other. I made this choice to maximize the opportunity for contribution by the participants and to increase my ability to make the acquaintance of the participants in a social setting that was more comfortable for the

participants than meeting me for the first time in a one-to-one interview. I accomplished the scheduling of the participants for the two focus group sessions via e-mail correspondence by polling the participants regarding their availability on several dates in late February. A mutually agreeable schedule was established and all 11 participants were able to take part in a focus group session.

At each of the focus groups, I greeted each participant when she arrived in the meeting room with a small gift bag containing colorful sticky notes, highlighters, and chocolate. Each participant also received a personalized three-ring binder. The binder was tabbed and included sections for *Study Background*, *Focus Group Interview*, *Individual Interview*, *Informed Consent Document*, and *Interview Transcript*. The *Study Background* section included a summary of the reasons for the study and the statement of purpose and the research questions for the study. Also included in that section were my vita, a one-page personal introduction that included pictures of my dogs and family, and a timeline for the interview phase of the study.

The *Focus Group* and *Individual Interview* tabs included the interview guides for each of the stated interviews. Additionally, the *Individual Interview* tab included calendars for two weeks in late March intended to assist in scheduling the individual interviews with support staff participants. *The Informed Consent Document* tab had three copies of the support staff Informed Consent document which I had previously signed and dated for the date of the focus group interview. As stated previously, each participant retained one signed, original copy of the Informed Consent document after she signed all three copies. The second and third copies went to me and to the office of S&OD respectively. The *Interview*

Transcript tab was empty, providing a place for the participant to put the transcript after I had finished the transcription and e-mailed the transcript to the participant.

This binder had several purposes. The first was to give each participant a way to keep all documents and information related to the study in one place. The second was to give the participants written background information about the study and about me for future reference. The third was to provide the individual interview questions to the participants well in advance of the one-to-one interviews in order to minimize any anxiety the participants might have about that phase of the study.

At each session, prior to beginning with the focus group interview, I provided the participants with the background for the study, discussed my role and reflexivity in the study, and provided enough personal background to foster making participants comfortable in the focus group setting. This approach ensured that all interview participants heard the same information about the project and about me at the same time, prior to the beginning of their active participation in the study.

This staging of the focus groups also served to preserve more time during the individual interviews for the participant's stories. The focus groups were also intended to make participants feel more comfortable with the interview setting. I also wanted participants to get to know me and to invite them to ask any questions they had regarding the study (Creswell, 1998). That this goal was met was evidenced by the enthusiasm with which the participants responded and the thoughtful answers that were given to the questions posed during both focus group sessions.

Both focus group sessions were scheduled for 90 minutes with approximately 30 minutes being utilized for participant introductions and my introduction of the study to the participants. The remaining 60 minutes was used for focus group participation.

Individual Interview Process

I facilitated the scheduling of individual interviews with the support staff participants through the use of calendar grids for two weeks in late March that were included in the participant binders distributed at the focus group sessions. At the conclusion of both focus group sessions, I requested that the support staff participants fill in the two calendar grids with their available dates for the two weeks offered by the researcher. I collected the responses, compared the available dates, and was able to identify three consecutive days— March 24, 25, and 26, 2008—during which all 11 of the participants could be scheduled for a 60 minute individual interview. I confirmed the interview times and dates with each participant individually through e-mail correspondence, the administrative assistant to the office of S&OD scheduled rooms for the interviews, and all 11 participants were interviewed on the date and at the time originally scheduled.

I contacted each of the administrative staff participants individually through e-mail correspondence. Three of the four were available for interview during my site visit in February when I also conducted the support staff focus group sessions. I was able to schedule and conduct the fourth interview during March when I was also conducting the support staff individual interviews. The administrative staff interviews ranged in duration from 70 to 90 minutes.

Focus Group and Individual Interview Guides

Van Manen (1990) suggests that "the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (p.66). He also cautions of the need to "guard against the temptation to let method rule the question, rather than the research question determining what kind of method is most appropriate for its immanent direction" (p. 66). Interviews can take many forms and scholars have various descriptors for the types of interviews in qualitative research. Merriam (1998) labels interviews as *highly structured/standardized, semistructured, or unstructured/ informal*. Also utilizing three distinctions for qualitative interviews, Hatch (2002) defines qualitative interviews as *standardized, formal,* or *informal*.

The constructivist methodological approach favors a semistructured or informal approach to interviewing. This, according to Schwandt's (2001) definition of contsructivism, enables interactions that "seek to understand how social actors recognize, produce, and reproduce social actions, and how they come to share an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstances" (pp.31-32). Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that participants can express their views (Crotty, 1998). I utilized a semistructured/informal approach to both the focus group and individual participant interviews and used an interview guide with open-ended questions for both (Appendix H— *Focus Group Interview Guide*, Appendix I— *Administrative Staff Individual Interview Guide*, Appendix J—*Support Staff Individual Interview Guide*).

I designed the questions to elicit responses that explored, in regard to professional development, the meaning support staff participants attach to their own experiences with

professional development, the experiences perceived by administrative participants of

support staff and, for both groups, the perceived meaning to the institution. I tape recorded

the interviews and typed verbatim transcripts from the interviews. I was granted permission

to tape record the focus group and individual interviews by each individual when she signed

the Informed Consent document.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Strategies</div>

The manner in which data are analyzed is vital to the success of the study (Creswell,

1998). This section will describe the data analysis strategies used to analyze the research

data. Analysis of focus group and individual interview transcripts was accomplished by

using the Moustakas modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of

phenomenological data. This process is paraphrased from Moustakas (1994, pp. 121-122)

and it includes:

1. Developing a full description of the researcher's experience of the phenomenon.

2. Completing the following steps using the verbatim transcripts of the experience:

   a. Considering each statement with respect to significance for description of the
      experience.

   b. Recording all relevant statements.

   c. Listing each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. (Invariant horizons or
      meaning units).

   d. Relating and clustering the invariant meaning units into themes.

   e. Synthesizing the invariant meaning units and themes into a *description of textures
      of the experience*. Include verbatim examples. (Emphasis in text.)

f. Reflection by the researcher of his/her own textural experience. Through
imaginative variation, the researcher constructs *a description of the structures of
his/her experience.* (Emphasis in text.)

g. Constructing a *textural-structural description* of the meanings and essences of the
experience. (Emphasis in text.)

In Chapter Four I will relate the meanings and essences of the experience resulting
from the analysis of the data and I will describe the meanings of professional development
for support staff personnel and administrative team members as related by the study
participants and my observations.

Trustworthiness and Validity

In a qualitative study, trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or study validity
(Creswell, 2003) can be established in a number of ways. The importance of validity, as
described by Creswell (2003) is to determine "whether the findings are accurate from the
standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (p. 195). The
discussion that follows will describe the steps I have taken to ensure the validity of the study
data.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves examining "different data sources of information by
examining evidence from the sources using it to build a coherent justification for themes"
(Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Triangulation of the study data was accomplished in several ways.
By reviewing each support staff participant's individual development plan (IDP) prior to the
individual interview with the participant, I was able to refer to the IDP with the participant
during the interview. Following the interview, I compared the information set forth in the

IDP with the information articulated by the participant in the interview setting. The field notes and journal that I kept during the research phase of the study also provided valuable references during data analysis and production of the results from the study. Additionally, data about MCC found on the college website, in artifacts collected during the four site visits, and in publications from the Office of Institutional Research at MCC were very helpful me during data analysis.

Member checking

The value of member checking is substantiated in the literature of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Hatch, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Member-checking assists the researcher by engaging the participants in a review of the data in order to validate its accuracy (Creswell, 2003). Because the majority of the administrative staff interviews were completed before the individual interviews with the support staff participants, I completed the transcription of the administrative staff interviews first and sent the transcript to each administrative staff participant as an e-mail attachment. I asked administrative staff participants to review the transcript carefully and corrections, changes, or deletions were invited. Participants were asked to either send feedback to me via e-mail or to contact me to request a phone conference regarding the transcript. Each of the administrative staff participants reviewed the transcript that was sent and responded to me via e-mail within three days. One of the administrative staff participants provided some minor corrections and clarifications to the transcript. The other three participants indicated that their transcript was accurate and requested no changes. I made the corrections requested in the one transcript and set aside the administrative staff transcripts for coding along with the support staff participant transcripts.

I was engaged in transcription of the 11 support staff participant transcripts for approximately six weeks. I completed all 11 transcripts and conducted a preliminary analysis of the transcripts prior to contacting the support staff participants. My decision to release the support staff participant transcripts simultaneously was based on my desire to maintain equity in the dissemination of information from the study and to solicit input from the support staff participants on the emergent themes from data analysis which I could accomplish only after I had transcribed all of the tapes.

As with the administrative staff, I contacted the support staff participants individually via e-mail. I sent the same message to each participant and attached the participant's transcript to the e-mail message. Participants were invited to either send feedback to me via e-mail or to contact me to request a phone conference regarding the transcript. I asked the participants to respond to me within two weeks of their receipt of the transcript. The message included the three preliminary themes (*connections, confidence and competence*) I had identified from preliminary data analysis and participants were invited to share their reactions to those themes when they responded regarding the transcript from the interview. Four of the participants requested minor changes which I made. All of the participants who commented on the themes believed them to be reflective of her experiences with professional development at MCC.

On the same day the support staff participant transcripts were e-mailed, I contacted the four administrative staff participants and the supervisors of the support staff participants via e-mail. I attached the text of the message to the support staff participants to these e-mail messages. My purposes for contacting the administrative staff participants were to update them on progress with the study and to solicit their reaction to the themes from the

preliminary data analysis. Three of the four responded within 24 hours with encouraging words for the researcher and validation of the preliminary themes.

Likewise, I also contacted the support staff participants' supervisors to update them on progress with the study and, also, to inform them that their support staff team member had received her transcript from the interview and might be engaged on paid work time in the review of the transcript and in communicating with me regarding its contents. Several of the supervisors responded to me with a return e-mail to express appreciation for the information and encouragement in finishing my study.

Negative Case Analysis

In the course of conducting interviews for this study, I encountered two support staff participants whose experiences, while common in several ways to the other nine participants, were quite divergent in other ways. Patton (2002) defines negative cases as those that "do not fit within the pattern" (p. 554) of the themes that emerge as the researcher analyzes the data. Patton encourages the qualitative researcher to engage in negative case analysis when possible as these cases may "…be exceptions that prove the 'rule.' They may also broaden 'the rule', change the 'rule', or cast doubt on the 'rule' altogether" (p. 554). He suggests that, by conducting a negative case analysis, the researcher can both strengthen her findings and lend credence to the study because "the human world is not perfectly ordered and human researchers are not omniscient. Humility can do more than certainty to enhance credibility" (p. 555).

Peer Debriefing

The use of peer debriefing can "enhance the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2003, p.196). This process involves a single individual or group of individuals who review

the study and data analysis and then question the researcher "so the account will resonate with people other than the researcher" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). I was fortunate to engage two individuals with whom I work to read and provide comment on my study. One of these individuals has two graduate degrees and her work includes the design and provision of educational opportunities and career readiness activities for high school students. The other earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at Iowa State University and has provided encouragement and mentorship throughout my doctoral studies. I am very grateful to these friends and co-workers for the honest and valuable feedback that they provided on a draft of the study.

Researcher Role and Reflexivity

Another element in study validity is the role that the researcher plays in the study. In a qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002). The experiences that the researcher brings to the study and the role that the researcher will play in the study are vital to its validity.

My role as researcher for this project was both enhanced and challenged by the background that I brought to it. Beginning in 1979, I spent 23 years working in or with libraries and those who staff them. I have held positions in a medical library, an elementary school library, a public library, and a community college library. For six years, I owned a library consulting practice in which I worked with public library staff and board members by assisting them in strategic and long-range planning and with the library building planning process.

During all of these years, I was professionally involved in the Iowa and American Library Associations (ILA and ALA). I participated on various committees and on the

Executive Board of the Iowa Library Association, serving as President of the Association in 1992. From 1999 through 2002, I represented ILA on the Council of ALA, the governing body of the larger association.

During my years on Council, ALA began an introspective look at professional development for librarians. Three invitational events titled *Congress on Professional Development* (COPE 1, 2 and 3) were held and I was involved as a delegate at COPE 1, was on the steering committee for COPE 2, and chaired the steering committee for COPE 3.

After COPE 1, I chaired the Library Career Pathways Taskforce, which was formed to look at stratification in library positions. The taskforce worked with research and professional literature on educational and organizational theory and design. The final product was the revision of a policy statement titled *Library and Information Studies Education and Human Resource Utilization*. During the work of the taskforce, the difficult issues related to the education, training, and job satisfaction of library support staff were discussed frequently.

In 2003, these issues were given the full attention of the Association when 125 delegates attended COPE 3—Focus on Library Support Staff for two days in Chicago. My participation as chair of the steering committee for COPE 3 was a life-changing event. Hearing the stories of those who serve in supportive roles in libraries and their struggles to achieve respect and equity made me reflect on the ways in which organizations marginalize those who, in many ways, keep the organization afloat.

I have always been interested in and supportive of support staff personnel with whom I have worked. I have encouraged their opportunities for professional development and advancement, even if it meant losing a good staff member. Through my work with COPE 3,

I learned that many supervisors and systems are not supportive of the people who serve in supportive roles.

Since taking my position as Director of Human Resources for Northeast Iowa Community College in 2002, I have observed many of the same issues that were dealt with in COPE 3—respect, equity, dignity, and recognition of contribution to the organization—beg for attention at the College. I have also observed a wide range of attitudes and aptitudes in those who serve the College in supportive roles. Most are loyal, capable, and willing to do whatever it takes to forward the goals of the institution. However, the sense of being an accessory, of being on the periphery of importance, and of being 'less than' is evident in our support staff members, also.

What causes these attitudes? What role can professional development and team-building play in dispelling them? How can persons serving in supportive roles in any organization be made to feel their importance and worth through the policies and actions of the organization? These are the questions that pushed me into and throughout this study.

My core values include honesty, respect, and equity. I believe strongly that every person has value and that, when treated with respect and given the opportunity to share their talents, most individuals will respond in an organizational setting by contributing positively to the success of the organization.

I am a compassionate, empathetic, and passionate person. I have strong aptitude in listening and hearing what people are trying to say, even when the words do not come easily. I am gregarious and able to make people feel comfortable quickly after meeting me. I believe that I was able to use these skills to my advantage in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Among the challenges of completing a qualitative research study is that of giving voice to the participants in a way that is meaningful and true to each participant's thoughts, feelings, and ideas. This challenge is compounded by the fact that, in order to give voice and make meaning, the researcher must sift through formidable amounts of data in the form of field notes, journal entries, artifacts from the site and from the participants, and the transcripts from hours and hours of taped interviews. The focus of a phenomenological qualitative study is the meaning that the participants make from the phenomenon observed by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

As noted in Chapter 3, the data analysis method that I used in this study was Moustakas' modification of the Stevik-Coliazzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). This analytic method requires that the researcher first record a complete description of her own experience of the phenomenon. I completed this step of the process using my field notes and journal entries from my experiences during the study and after reflection following the transcription of the two focus group and 15 individual interviews. The next step in data analysis is to use the verbatim transcripts (as paraphrased from Moustakas, 1994, pp. 121-122) to:

    a. consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.

    b. record all relevant statements.

    c. list each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. (Invariant horizons or meaning units).

d. relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.

e. synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a *description of textures of the experience*. Include verbatim examples. (Emphasis in text.)

f. reflect on my own textural experience. Through imaginative variation, the researcher constructs *a description of the structures of his/her experience*. (Emphasis in text.)

g. construct a *textural-structural description* of the meanings and essences of the experience. (Emphasis in text.)

Moustakas (1994) defines the textural experience as "the 'what' of the appearing phenomenon" (p. 78). In my study, the 'what' are the themes resulting from the support staff participants' responses to questions about the ways in which professional development allows them to enhance work, career, educational, and personal experiences. In a similar way, the 'what' are the themes from the descriptions provided by the administrative staff participants as they shared their observations of how support staff participants were involved with professional development. Further, participants shared their descriptions of the ways in which professional development makes a difference in the life of the institution and for students at MCC. These responses and descriptions contribute to the textural experience of support staff participation in professional development and the contributions this participation makes to the institution—specifically to organizational development and student satisfaction.

The structural themes in a phenomenological study are those themes that emerge during analysis of the data and through reflection on the data in the context of the entire experience (Moustakas, 1994). Structural themes emerged from the data for this study as I

listened to the voices of the participants while I transcribed the tapes of our interviews and as I read their words and coded data while trying to find meaning in their experiences with professional development at MCC.

> Texture and structure are in continual relationship. In the process of explicating intentional experience, one moves from that which is experienced and described in concrete and full terms, the 'what' of the experience, (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79) 'towards its reflexive reference in the 'how' of the experience' (Ihde, 1977, p. 50 in Moustakas, 1994).

The structural themes that emerged from this study are the synthesis of the deeper meanings of professional development in the lives of the support staff participants who experience it and the observations of the administrative staff who work with the professional development program at MCC.

My reporting of the results of this study which follows is divided into three sections. The first section describes the study participants demographically. I gathered the information using demographic interview questions during the individual interviews with the 11 support staff and 4 administrative staff participants. With the first question in the individual interviews (see Appendix I and Appendix J), I asked the participants to share information about present and past work experiences, frequency of participation in professional development, educational attainment, career and educational goals, and age.

Following the demographic data I have provided a description of the textural themes (Moustakas, 1994) from the study. In the context of this study, the textural themes that emerged from the data are the essences of the everyday lived experience of participation in professional development by support staff at MCC. These textural themes include *gaining*

knowledge, personal improvement, social enjoyment, attaining career/educational goals, support and encouragement, organizational issues, equity of access, obstacles, and *opportunities.* The textural themes are reported chiefly in the words of the participants.

The third section provides a discussion of the structural themes (Moustakas, 1994) that emerged from data analysis and my experiences during the study. As noted, the structural themes in a phenomenological study express what is happening at a deeper level of the experience—including the feelings evoked by the experience and the underlying structures of the experience. Developing the structural themes in a phenomenological study involves "conscious acts of thinking and judging, imagining and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings. Structures underlie textures and are inherent in them" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). The structures or underlying themes that I have identified from my data analysis and from my reflection on the research experience are *connections, confidence,* and *competence.* A description of these themes is shared following the discussion of the textural themes.

Study Participants

As described in Chapter 3, the study included 15 total participants—4 administrative staff participants and 11 support staff participants. The participants provided demographic data during the individual interview in response to my questions. These data are summarized below in a description of the administrative staff participants followed by a description of the support staff participants.

Administrative Staff Participants

The administrative staff participants in the study ranged in age from 45 to 66 (average age of 57) years. All four of the participants were white, non-Hispanic females. One of the

participants had been employed at MCC for all 25 years of her working life, the other three held various positions outside MCC prior to coming to the college. Longevity averaged 18.6 years ranging from 14 to 25 years of service at MCC. All of the administrative staff participants held a minimum of a Master's degree with two participants having earned a doctorate (one a Ph.D. and the other an Ed.D., both in Educational Leadership). One of the two participants with a Master's degree was in active pursuit of her Ed.D. at the time of the study. One of the participants was retired from the college but retained the title 'emeritus' at MCC.

One of the administrative staff participants had completed all earned degrees at the time of her hire at MCC; the other three participants earned (or will earn) at least one degree while employed by MCC including one of the participants who earned four degrees (associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate) while working at MCC. Three of the four participants were given full-time employment at initial hire with the college. The fourth participant was hired as a part-time student worker in a clerical position upon initial hire. All four participants indicated they participated frequently in professional development activities.

Support Staff Participants

The 11 support staff participants ranged in age from 28 to 61 (average age of 51) years and all were white, non-Hispanic females. Two of the participants had not been employed outside of MCC except for positions held while in college. One of these individuals had worked for MCC for 28.4 years, the other for 4.8 years. The remaining nine support staff participants held a variety of positions outside MCC prior to coming to the college. These previous positions included secretarial positions, retail sales positions, payroll positions, and line worker positions. One person was an elementary teacher and one person

held various management positions in business prior to accepting positions at MCC. Longevity averaged 14.5 years ranging from 3.0 to 28.4 years of service at MCC.

All of the support staff participants held a minimum of a secretarial diploma. Five of the participants had earned an associate degree. Four of the five earned their associate degree while employed at MCC with the other participant receiving her A.A. from MCC immediately prior to her employment with the college. Four of the participants had earned a bachelor's degree and two of the individuals with a bachelor's degree had also earned a master's degree—one in philosophy, the other in education. All four of the individuals with bachelor's and/or Master's degrees earned these degrees prior to being employed by MCC.

Five of the eleven support staff participants were hired full-time when they began their initial employment with the college, the other six participants were hired part-time prior to accepting a full-time position with MCC. All participants indicated frequent participation in professional development activities. The criterion for participation in the study regarding frequency of participation was attendance at a minimum of two college-sponsored professional development events per year during the last two years. All participants met this minimum criterion and many participated much more frequently in professional development activities. Most participated in professional development a minimum of one time per month. One participant reported taking at least one credit class per semester since starting work at MCC three years previous and also participated frequently in technology mini-courses, brown bag technology sessions, and wellness and exercise offerings. Another participant shared that she participated in wellness and exercise activities sponsored by S&OD at least three times a week.

Textural Themes

The textural themes (Moustakas, 1994) from the study evolved from interview data collected from two focus group interviews with the 11 support staff participants (five participants in one focus group and six in the other) and from data collected in individual interviews with the four administrative staff participants and 11 support staff participants in the study. The focus group and individual interviews were structured around predetermined question sets (see Appendix H, Appendix I, and Appendix J) and included follow-up questions when appropriate. The two focus group sessions were similar but unique in that different support staff personnel participated in each.

The interview guide used in the focus group session was similar to those used in the individual interviews with support staff participants and the textural themes that resulted from the responses to the questions in the focus group sessions mirrored those from the individual interviews. The results reported below include participant responses from individual interviews with administrative staff and support staff participants co-mingled with those from the focus group interviews with support staff participants.

To protect the anonymity of the participants, I created a letter/number system and assigned a code to all participants. I have differentiated administrative staff participants from support staff participants by the use of a single capital letter (A). The support staff participants are indicated by the use of double capital letters (AA). Individual participants have also been assigned a number with administrative staff participants given codes A1 through A4 and support staff participants given codes AA1 through AA11. The numbering system is not indicative of any order or priority and is consistent throughout the reporting of results. I have attributed all quotes to the individual participant with a parenthetical reference

to that participant's code following the quotation with the exception of instances where conversations are reported. In those cases, the code for the participant precedes the quote.

The textual themes—the 'what' of the experience (Moustakas, 1994)—which follow include *gaining knowledge, personal improvement, social enjoyment, attaining career/educational goals, support and encouragement, organizational issues, equity of access, obstacles,* and *opportunities*.

Theme One: Gaining Knowledge

> *It's just to try to stay up with all the trends…all the updates we're always having with our computer programs and, you know, Outlook and everything. I always learn something, always, which helps me in the office (AA11).*

One of the primary reasons for professional development programs is to provide opportunities for staff to gain knowledge that will help them in their work (Friesen, 2002; Guskey, 1991; Troller, 2002). Every support staff participant mentioned this aspect of professional development and its value to her work. Changes in technology happen continually in work environments and the community college is no exception to this rule. Comments about learning new technology were prevalent. One focus group participant was clearly focused on an upcoming change at the college:

> I was looking to things like programs on new technology like new software that's coming out. The thing that comes to mind is Word 2007. We're all going to have to learn that, because Word 2003 is going away and we don't really have a choice.
> (AA1)

To which another participant responded:

> I think the same thing. I mean, I use it when there's new skills that need to be updated or if there's new technology that we are all going to have to be using in the

next few months. And they also offer things I wouldn't necessarily think to seek out

myself. (AA10)

Two of the participants specifically mentioned how learning new things through

professional development regarding technology allowed them to assist their supervisor with

projects on the computer. One was able to streamline projects:

Um…[professional development is a] huge help, especially the computer classes. I

can do so many things, you know. I'll get charts that my boss will forward on to me

and I ask him 'well, do you want to make this formula do this, and this one do this?'

and he's just so happy that I make it so much easier for him. I could never have done

that without those classes. That's been huge. (AA6)

Another participant spoke about being able to help her boss with a presentation because of

what she learned through professional development:

And, a lot of times, what happens is when I get trained, I get to help my boss or

whoever else is not as familiar with that program. And I kind of become…well,

like… my boss called me in yesterday and says 'I'm doing this PowerPoint

presentation and I don't know what I'm doing…' So, I said 'OK, OK…just calm

down…' I told him 'just give me 5 minutes, show me what you've got…just e-mail

it to me and I'll look at it.' And I had it fixed in 15 minutes but I did a class

where…it was a technical writing class…here at the College. And we got to do a

website, we got to do a PowerPoint presentation from scratch and that's where I

learned it. (AA1)

The administrative staff concurred with the value of the professional development

focus on technology. One commented "I think we do make a concentrated effort to meet

their needs…especially in technology. Because it seems like the technology is the main

focus everywhere here" (A2).

Other support staff participants commented on the fact that participating in

professional development allows them to learn new things in a variety of interest areas and to

keep up to date. One participant commented:

> …the new buzz words that are out, you know. Like…there's always new buzz words
>
> like right now it's 'strengths training.' So, right now, anything to do with strengths
>
> training I want to learn about. Because, to me, that is probably the best one that I've
>
> heard in years…(AA3)

Other participants echoed the sentiment that the professional development offered by

S&OD enabled them to keep up on new trends, new technology, and to gain knowledge that

they consider vital to their daily work. One administrative staff member considered gaining

knowledge to be the primary reason that support staff participate in professional development

at MCC:

> Oh…well, I think they participate number one because they want to learn and they
>
> want the professional development whether they want to move up or just learn. I
>
> think…I can't imagine somebody not wanting to be better than what they are. (A2)

Other specific comments that referred to gaining knowledge included learning about

new policies and procedures, learning new ways to do things, gaining organizational skills,

and learning the basics on college-specific interfaces such as Banner (administrative

software), the MCC telephone system, and scheduling software.

Theme Two: Personal Improvement

I've taken some golf classes…and I went to a cooking class. There are just a lot of things.
(AA8)

Personal improvement opportunities offered through professional development at MCC exist on several levels. The support staff participants and the administrative staff members provided a number of examples that illustrated the ways in which support staff gain personally from their participation in professional development. One participant talked about the 'holistic' benefits she receives from participation in professional development: "I'd say, for me it kind of enhances across the board…it really enhances my life and my productivity all the way" (AA6).

MCC has a fitness center on the campus and the S&OD sponsors classes daily that are available to support staff participants. Generally, these activities need to be taken on unpaid work time (lunch breaks or before or after work) but the support staff interviewed do not find this to be an obstacle. They are appreciative of the opportunity to participate in fitness and wellness activities at their workplace, and they do not resent having to use unpaid time.

One participant echoed this sentiment saying "Professional Development provides classes in the Fitness Center for staff and so I really use those. And, personally, I need that and I appreciate that" (AA8). Another participant commented, "I mean the fact that we can go take a meditation class? WOW! We have a lot of little classes we can take…yoga classes are great." (AA6).

Administrative staff also value personal enrichment but, at the same time, admit that spending college funds on personal enrichment is not always popular:

And I personally believe that, if that's what makes it relevant for the person, if that's what makes a person happier, if taking a course like this is something that helps an employee get down to work and be more focused when they are here with us, then I believe we should be doing that. So, I really ascribe to the idea that developing the whole person is worthwhile. I think whatever we can do to support well-being, it's worth it. But, not everybody buys in to that. (A1)

Another administrator noted, however, that "good words" always help when substantiating the need for specific aspects of the professional development program. The "good words" regarding MCC's personal enrichment activities she cited were a reference to "an enlightened personnel policy" from an original college vision statement and to "personal and professional development" in the faculty negotiated agreement.

So, I just always make a case that this is what has always been expected….The Wellness for Life program, the financial planning stuff that we do, the preparation for retirement, you know, history tours, the tour to the tall grass prairie…all of those kinds of things…they're personal. They don't have anything to do with your job except that you could argue that, if you are well, you are probably going to be there. (A4)

The participants also highlighted other personal enrichment activities including cooking classes, craft classes, and being provided with the opportunity to attend cultural, entertainment, and diversity events at the college.

Another aspect of personal improvement is the opportunity for personal growth through participation in professional development. Participants and administrative staff alike

were quick to point out this benefit of the MCC professional development program. One participant told me how much she appreciates this aspect of personal growth:

> Well, I think the other part of it is…is that it keeps us…it gives us an opportunity to continue grow. Whether it be with our workplace skills, whether it be the diversity things or with some of the other speakers they've brought in on different topics. It gives us a chance to grow and it gives us an opportunity to stay connected to people across campus. It keeps us fresh. (AA10)

And another participant talked about how much she needs to push herself to learn and grow:

> Well, part of it is, I think it's important to constantly be pushing myself like that. You know, constant mental stimulation and it's really easy to let a whole year go by and think 'whoa, did I do anything?' if you are not constantly in the habit of doing it. One thing about being here is that doesn't happen because I get e-mails all the time saying 'here's this little class.' So, I can do this here and that there…and I love it! (AA6)

One administrative staff member interviewed shared this observation with me about a member of the support staff she had previously supervised:

> Another support staff person who I still stay in contact with, I put her in Banner training. And she became…not only did she get trained in Banner…but she became the department, then the division expert in Banner. So, I saw her grow…and very quiet, very introverted…to this…the know-all, the go-to person that did little mini trainings for us…after we attended training. So, I don't think you ever know what it's going to be until you kind of reach in there and find what is. (A3)

Theme Three: Social Enjoyment

> *Well, part of it's social, you've got to admit that! (AA4)*

The social aspect of attending professional development activities is very important to support staff participants. Almost of all those interviewed commented on how much she enjoyed the opportunity to network and socialize during professional development events.

> I always find when I do go, I do learn things as well as having a wonderful time there. And, you never know when you are going to pick up little tidbits that are going to help you with organization or stress…you know, that's a big thing…organizing and less stress and they always have some kind of a session on those. And, I know we had some wonderful speakers here when we had the conference here. The Administrative Professional's Day has always just been a delight. It 's just very, very fun to go to. (AA4)

Another participant commented:

> Another thing I like is getting to reconnect with people from across campus. We're all busy and we don't get to see people very often. So it's nice to just get a group together and have an opportunity to visit and reconnect outside of work, because we do talk work when were calling each other. But what we don't often get a chance to do is visit so I think that's kind of fun. (AA5)

Administrative staff agreed that this is an important part of the professional development experience. "I think sometimes they do it for even just social reasons, to go out and network with their peers" (A2) and "I think they participate because it's fun and because it's a break" (A4).

One of the support staff participants commented, however, that she has to sometimes give herself permission to attend events that are more socially oriented. She explained:

I can't think off the top of my head of things that are in the schedule but some of them are just fun and they'd be interesting to learn. They provide a variety…most of it is making myself, not because I don't want to, but saying 'it's OK for me to go. It's OK for me to get away from my desk and do this.' Even though it may not be work-related necessarily but it may be something that, personally, I would benefit from. But I think that's important, too. Not everything has to be the pencil and paper part of our jobs. (AA10)

One staff member, though not critical of those who enjoy personal development activities, noted that she did not participate:

No, and I would love to do the tai chi and the meditation but I just can't take the time away from something else. It feels selfish to me to do that. You know I feel that I owe that time to somebody else or I owe that time to me to get something done so I don't have to do it when I get home. (AA7)

Theme Four: Attaining Career/Educational Goals

The classes I've taken here on campus, I think, of course they were the classes I knew I needed for the Associate degree but they were also classes that broadened my scope on a lot of things. (AA3)

Beyond the aspiration to earn an Associate degree through the tuition exempt program at MCC, only three of the support staff participants expressed the intent to earn a degree or other credential that would lead to career advancement. All three of these participants have already earned at least a Bachelor's degree. One of them had started, but not completed a Master's degree, and was hoping to earn a doctorate. One already had a

Master's degree, began a doctoral program and decided against finishing it, and the third

aspires to a Master's degree and a professional position at the college or elsewhere.

When asked about the fact that the majority of the support staff interviewed did not

aspire to a higher degree or a significant career change, administrative staff members had

varying responses. One indicated:

> Oh, I think that's really all over the board. I really think that we have some that are
>
> just very comfortable, satisfied with what they are doing now. And, that's OK. I
>
> think we have some that would like to be higher. I don't know whether they really do
>
> want to be higher…I don't want to give the impression that one's better than the
>
> other…(A2)

Another stated:

> I think that with support staff it is really individually driven. And the reason I say
>
> that is because, even though we're supportive of it, we don't offer incentives for them
>
> to do it. There are not very many extrinsic rewards for them to participate. So, I
>
> think its individual. So many of the support staff have to have their own motivation.
>
> (A1)

And a third verified that many of the support staff are very content to stay where they are and

that loyalty to a department or work area may take precedence over advancement:

> Lines up completely. And, if you look around…again, I know it's not just here, I
>
> think it's a cultural thing in a lot of educational organizations. Even very young
>
> staff…and I don't like to stereotype, but even my young staff that I would really stay
>
> on top of…very content to be a support person. I've got a person that I worked with
>
> [in another area] that not only has her Bachelor's but has started her Master's. Has no

desire [to move up] is perfectly content in what she does. Um, I mean I've just

watched it over and over. I've seen it at all ranges…people staying in those jobs…the

interesting thing, too…this is the one I can't figure out. You even will see them stay

at the same level as a support staff and not go for level 2's and 3's because they start

to be so loyal to those departments that they work in. (A3)

Most of the participants, when asked how professional development assists in

attaining career or educational goals, talked about earning their Associate degree. The three

support staff participants mentioned previously talked about their individual aspirations, one

for an undergraduate science degree that she hoped would be the first stepping stone to a

doctorate, another who wants to earn her Master's degree in organizational development, and

the third who is working toward attaining a certificate as a project manager.

One support staff member talked about her struggle to earn her Associate degree:

When asked about her highest level of education, she responded:

Well, I have 97 hours of college and I do not have a degree. And, I have to tell you,

and I wrote that down here, too…I feel like my obstacle is Math. I took

Fundamentals of Math and I don't know…I started having thyroid problems…and

they said that sometimes it is triggered by stress. But I was so stressed…I wanted to

understand so that I could finally get my degree and I studied every night and I was

doing OK until I started having issues with my thyroid and my heart was palpitating.

And, so then, I didn't take the final. And then, I decided that maybe I'd better audit

the class the next semester and so I audited it again. Then I took the final and I got

my A. And then I enrolled in another class. But it is very stressful to me and I tell

myself I don't have to have an 'A' but it doesn't matter. When I get there…(AA9)

The desire for career advancement or higher educational attainment, while it had appeal for some of the support staff participants in the study, did not prove to be a strong motivating factor for most of the women. There was evidence of a strong contentment among these support staff employees. All were willing and eager to attain skills and knowledge that can help them on the job, but less committed to the goals of career or educational growth. The reasons for this reticence to seek career advancement or further education are not clear from the interview data. Most of the eight women who had no further aspirations talked about the goals they had already achieved or about retirement when questioned about career and educational goals.

Theme Five: Support and Encouragement

I really do think that MCC really does value professional development over all....[It's] in concrete as kind of a pillar of support....The education, the camaraderie, the education, and the learning. It's just so necessary over all, I think. (AA1)

Every support staff participant commented on the support for learning they have experienced at MCC. This extends from supervisor support to attend professional development classes, to support from the office of S&OD for offering classes that meet the needs of support staff, to support at the institutional level where policies are made that provide for tuition exemption for MCC classes and other support for learning activities. Comments such as "it's encouraged in my office" (AA6), "these guys [S&OD staff] are just great. I mean they'll do whatever" (AA10), and "Oh, my gosh…she encourages me. Um…every time an e-mail comes out you know to everyone she'll ask 'did you want to participate in this?' So, she's very encouraging." (AA2) were common in the focus group and individual interviews.

One staff member reacted with tears both in the focus group session and in the individual interview when she talked about the support she receives from her supervisor.

I guess the biggest thing for me [crying]…sorry…is that my boss sees that I'm working toward something…sorry. So, it's not stagnant, it's just like finding what you want to do…and they support you in getting there. (AA9)

Another support staff member was equally effusive about support from her supervisors:

I would also say to make that even more…the support of my direct supervisors. It's not just that they tell me verbally 'yes' and that they, on my performance reviews say that they want me to keep doing it, they just radiate it. You know how there are some supervisors who are just 'OK, we've been told…and the culture is…that we are supposed to encourage you in that…so sure.' But, everything about their attitude tells you 'I really don't want you to do it.' That is totally not the case [with my supervisors]. It is a totally, heart-felt 'YES, absolutely do it.' And, you know as an employee that you are always looking for those little subtle nuances 'do you mean what you are saying?' and that's a huge thing…. My supervisors have been outstanding. (AA6)

Theme Six: Organizational Issues

Professional development absolutely forwards the mission because it takes me away from the task-level thinking to the mission-level thinking. (AA7)

I asked participants about several issues that related their participation in professional development to organizational issues including the college mission, student satisfaction, and organizational development. Support staff participants had a strong grasp of how their participation in professional development might have a relationship to student satisfaction

and most had an opinion about how the investment in professional development for support staff by the college forwards the mission of MCC. I heard little concrete understanding, expressed, however, on the part of the support staff participants regarding the concept of organizational development. The administrative staff participants were clear and articulate about the ways in which the S&OD program was designed to forward organizational learning and development.

Mission

The 'tag line' from the MCC mission is: *Learning comes first at MCC*. I asked participants how support staff participation in professional development forwards the mission of the institution. Two comments from administrative staff participants were especially cogent on this issue. One said:

> Oh, absolutely, absolutely. You know, for me, the 'learning comes first' were new good words. If that's an enlightened personnel policy, then learning comes first is what we're all about. And so, as a college that advances life-long learning, which is also in the mission statement, then life-long learning is exactly what we are about….I think our support staff for all practical purposes understand the comprehensive nature of the community college probably better than some of the faculty do. And, I think they understand the importance of supporting all students. They understand the diversity initiative. I don't have any real question about whether our support staff know and understand what the college is about. I think that they get it from the very beginning. (A4)

Another administrative staff member spoke of her beliefs that the mission is focused on student learning and that support staff are integral to forwarding that mission. She commented:

> I believe that the support staff are a key component to what we do and if we look at student learning as our mission, it doesn't matter what department an Admin is supporting, they are supporting our students and [they are] supporting employees who are, in turn, supporting people who are supporting faculty in the classroom, and also directly supporting the faculty in the classroom, or people who are helping students find money to go to school. I mean, we are all connected. So, I really believe, that no matter where they are, when people participate in professional development, it forwards the mission and, in turn, helps our students learn. (A1)

Many support staff told me that their participation in professional development does forward the mission. Comments included how professional development helps not only the staff member but, also, the college and the wider community:

> I believe that they [S&OD] do, I believe that they do. They are very helpful at every level that…if you want to take a class, or the professional development….I really think that that is important to them and I think that that helps us in turn in our own offices and campus-wide and community-wide. Because I think it gives us a real picture of how we can help the community as well as our own working environment. (AA4)

Participants also praised the wide variety of opportunities for staff;

> I think that their [the college] commitment to professional development is completely in keeping with the mission. I mean, I looked at the mission and right down the

whole line…life-long educational programs and services, professional training

opportunities, opportunities for personal growth, and cultural enrichment…Caring

supportive environment…the whole thing, absolutely. Oh, I feel that it definitely is.

More than any place that I have ever worked, it is… I don't think that there is any

better way that they could get the message in front of us and give us opportunities that

[say] 'we value your on-going education.' (AA6)

While most support staff voiced affirmative responses when asked if support staff

participation in professional development forwards the mission of the college, there were a

few dissenting voices on this issue. One support staff participant commented on the lack of

consistent support in saying "I think it is valued but…the support is not necessarily there

across the board for hourly staff (AA10). Another said:

I don't think that's the first thing that people think of….Learning comes first—

students are the main thing. And then faculty—getting to be able to go to their

conferences. Even pouring money into that wouldn't be a bad thing. So staff, yes,

we are there to support so many that we cannot be out of the office a lot but I don't

think that learning comes first for staff members. I don't think that's the biggest goal

of MCC as a community college. (AA9)

Student Satisfaction

In a learning-centered community college, student learning is the focus of the

institution (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999). In a system that places student learning

at the center "the role of the student will change from a passive receptor to an active

participant" (O'Banion, 1997b, p. 34). When students become active participants in all

facets of their learning, the whole institution becomes involved in facilitating student needs and student learning.

Support staff and administrative participants alike expressed the importance of meeting students' needs and were articulate about the positive role that professional development for support staff personnel has in contributing to student satisfaction. One administrative staff member commented on the way S&OD approaches the provision of appropriate professional development for support staff to better prepare them for meeting the needs of students:

> Well, I'm thinking of one…an individualized training that we in staff development designed for a supervisor who wanted training for her front line staff in customer satisfaction. So, in designing this, we looked at: 'What are some of the challenges these staff face?' 'What's going on?' So, by doing that, we were able to put together a program that allowed us to give these staff [members] the tools they needed to discuss the issues and face the challenges. So with that one, it was a needs analysis that allowed us to determine what was needed in a particular department….We looked at what was going to make the workgroup better as a whole and what individuals needed. But, honestly, I think that all staff development that an institution can provide can have the potential to improve student satisfaction. (A1)

This same administrator, however, acknowledged that focused training on service issues, while necessary, is not enough:

> The institution has to really care about customer satisfaction because there are just too many staff members who touch students. And, personally, I'm not so sure that a focus on customer service training is the right approach. I think we have to look

deeper than that—at values. We need to ask 'What are the things that we value?' and, once we've identified those, we need to make sure we understand that we do these things for our students, we would do them for our co-workers. That we establish things we value and ways we are going to treat people and we carry through. (A1)

Support staff participants offered clear evidence of how they believe their involvement in the professional development activities offered by S&OD allows them to contribute to student satisfaction. Examples included learning new software, learning how to use new technology (flash drives and MP3 players were mentioned), and mastering the MCC administrative systems. One support staff participant explained:

Well, ultimately, the goal of the entire college is to create an atmosphere and an educational opportunity for our students and who are our students? Whoever comes to these classes. To me, by professionally developing the faculty and the staff, ultimately, we help the students. If I take a class on…on Astra, the student that walks into my office just haphazardly in the morning and says 'I forgot my class…where I'm supposed to be.' Because I've taken a class in Astra I know how to get on to Astra and look up a class for that student. I've helped that student. (AA3)

Support staff participants in professional development also recognize the role that training in interpersonal skills plays in assisting students:

You know none of them [the students] want to be discounted, they are upset or they truly have a question that they need an answer for. Um, and I think that, you know, between the combination of that—the staff development opportunities and the supervisors I've had to look up to over the years—that's made a huge difference in how students are treated when they walk in the door. And I think that is really a big

part of our training of our front line staff, too. To ask that next question and don't just shoo them away or send them off to somebody else. If you don't know the answer, see if you can find out before you send them or transfer a call or whatever that might be. (AA10)

Another support staff participant suggested that administrative assistants at MCC can play a key role in helping students become independent. She indicated that she is always happy to show students the steps they need to take to get what they need. She tells them "this is what you need to do to get your problem solved. My job is to show you so that the next time you know how to do this" (AA7).

One of the ways that MCC ensures that the support staff employees who work most closely with students receive the professional development they need is the Student Services Professional Development Program (SSPDP). This program, a cooperative effort between the department of Student Services and S&OD, was born of necessity. The office of S&OD provides several days of professional development for staff and faculty immediately prior to the beginning of the Fall and Spring terms. These Professional Development Days conflict with the busiest times in student services.

To remedy this problem, the support and professional staff members established the SSPDP. One support staff member who has been active in that program explained:

We've had it for what, 7 or 8 years now. We can do some of that kind of programming and offer things for our staff because we can't go to the ones at the beginning [of the semester]…. We do other things throughout the semester…the workshops and things. It gives staff the opportunity to attend things and it also gives

us the opportunity to get together, maybe not for the whole day but for a couple hours

here and there. (AA10)

The programs offered through SSPDP are specific to the needs of the staff in the student

services department. Programming has included diversity, student development,

communication and team-building, strengths training, and other activities appropriate for

those who work with students. Except for department meetings that include programming,

these SSPDP activities are open to all staff at MCC providing a wealth of knowledge about

issues relating to MCC students that allows support and professional staff to build their skill

and knowledge base to better serve students.

I questioned participants about whether the program in student services conflicted or

was in competition with the S&OD program. One administrative staff member explained:

And, you know, student services has their own professional development committee

and they do their own programming and I did everything in the world to help them. I

did some consulting with them on how to set that up and, you know, and came over

and did programs for them when they had time, and gave them money and stuff like

that. And, [another department director] said 'you would let them do that?' and I said

'oh, absolutely.' Partly because I would let every supervisor do that for the people

they supervise, too. I mean, it can't all come out of one office. (A4)

This cooperative spirit and focus on the end-result rather than on turf battles seems to have

fostered a mutual respect between student services and S&OD. By joining forces, these two

offices plan and offer programming that places student satisfaction and learning at the center

of the institution.

Organizational Development

As noted, the role of the office of S&OD in organizational development was not universally understood or recognized by the support staff participants interviewed. Many of them indicated that they receive communication about organizational activities, projects, and initiatives through other outlets—the office of the President, department/division heads, their own supervisors—but not directly from S&OD. The concept of 'organizational development' to the support staff participants seemed to center around receiving communication about the organization.

> Well, it does seem kind of odd that Staff & Organizational Development really doesn't play a role in that. Maybe they do but it's just not obvious. We pretty much get an e-mail from the President or maybe from the head of the whole division. But, it could be that we don't get that much information because they are not really giving that much yet. (AA6)

Another participant remarked:

> I think they [S&OD] have a huge role and I don't think that they do it at all. And, again, I think that's part of our evolution. I don't think there has been an opportunity for them to participate. And, I think that right now we are just so scattered trying to get through the day. (AA7)

When I pointed out to participants that professional development is provided by the Office of Staff and *Organizational Development*, one support staff participant responded "…actually, I didn't know that it's called Organizational Development" (AA8).

Another member of the support staff acknowledged that organizational development occurs at MCC, but shared that she did not feel that support staff were included as they

should be. She remarked that training on the *Basic Principles for the Collaborative Workplace* (AchieveGlobal, 2001) which MCC has adopted was done only for the "upper level" (AA10). When questioned further about this, she said:

> I think, if those kinds of focuses are going to be put on the institution and the staff that are at the institution, we all need that training. Because, again, we are the front line folks and if that's supposed to trickle down on how we treat our students then we need to learn the same information. And that doesn't happen very often. (AA10)

Burnstad (1994) defines OD as "programs designed to enhance attitudes, skills, knowledge, and performance related to institutional effectiveness" (p. 388). The administrative staff members who were interviewed see a different picture in regard to organizational development activities for support staff at MCC than that described by the support staff participants. The administrative team envisions organizational development efforts that are in line with Burnstad's (1994) definition.

Countering the idea that the front-line staff may not matter to the institution as is sometimes expressed by support staff employees, one administrator commented:

> I really believe that, like a lot of other things, staff development has to be systemic. If you only bring it so far down and then you say 'We don't care about these other people.' or 'They're expendable.' And, I know this because I've been there, they are key to our success as an institution. They run the offices. More so than I do, more so than most of us, they do the work. They do the work that allows us to get done what we need to in the classroom. So what they do, if they didn't do it, school would not be in session. I really do believe that their professional development is crucial for us to be successful as an organization. (A1)

The necessity of focusing organizational development efforts at the strategic level in the institution was acknowledged by another administrative staff participant. She also commented on the need to put organizational development plans into action and to 'close the loop' and encourage reflection on what's been learned:

So, for me, from an organizational standpoint, I would like to have that [organizational development] woven into the strategic plan…those initiatives. That's where I see my role and then to work as a consultant to drive that on through the organization. I also think that we need to do more consultative one-on-one, get within those departments, see what their strategic initiatives are and see what we need to do to support that, and then look further. I mean, you know how they take that cut in time…and I think that colleges are notorious for this because we take the cut in time and we never go back and reflect on it…we move to the next thing. Because now it's due again this year…we never loop back. I would like to use more of an OD focus on that to say 'OK let's talk about that, let's make the initiative line up with that, but then let's do a loop back.' (A3)

Another administrative staff participant addressed the dichotomy of opinions regarding organizational development. She explained that organizational development efforts are relatively new and may not have touched many members of the support staff in a meaningful way because of their longevity with the institution:

It would have filtered in, in thinking about organizational development, with anyone who came through the orientations from about '99 on. Um, but for people who have been there 20 years, I can well understand that they don't have an idea in the world what organizational development means. (A4)

Theme Seven: Equity of Access

Most things are open to everybody. And then they have certain things just for the faculty you know and then just for the support staff. So I think that they support everyone equally. (AA2)

Well, actually, the one *negative here and it really didn't get in the way. My manager was absolutely [supportive] but there was a little political issue with his boss who said he didn't want me taking classes any more. So, by the time it all got worked out, I was reassigned to another department. (AA6)*

One of the criterion for support staff participant selection in the study was participation in at least two professional development activities per year for the two years preceding the focus group interviews. Most of the support staff participants had attended many more than four events in two years. Typically, the participants took part in professional development about twice a month. The prevailing feeling among the participants regarding the equity of participation opportunities was that the college in general and the office of S&OD in specific encouraged and supported professional development activities for all members of the MCC staff.

The breakdown in equity of access, according to both support staff and administrative participants, was at the individual supervisor level. Several of those interviewed made strong statements about the fact that some members of the support staff were not able to attend professional development activities as often as they wished. One support staff member explained this situation by saying "unfortunately, there are some administrators that don't support professional development because they are more interested in their employees being right there when they need them" (AA3).

Four support staff participants indicated that they had made voluntary transfers within the institution in order to leave an office where professional development was not supported at a level that met their needs. The departments to which they transferred were known for

being supportive of professional development. These support staff members reported being much happier after their move. Speaking of her transition, one support staff participant said:

> "There's lots of non-verbals. And it filtered down into other things, too. Not just the [office professionals' association] but also any kind of speakers…if the President, through Staff Development, offered something…I always felt like 'do I need to ask permission?' Where [my new boss] always says 'Would you like to go?'…he always wants you to attend those things. Never did I know what was going on over there [in the former office]. (AA8)

Administrative staff interviewed concurred with the support staff participants on this issue and readily acknowledged that some supervisors did not support or encourage participation by support staff team members in professional development activities. One said, "The supervisor doesn't want to give them time because then there won't be someone there to answer the phone or to help the students" (A1). Another of the administrators characterized those supervisors who did not encourage support staff participation in professional development as "traditional" saying:

> If they have a boss that's very traditional in their approach and, the bottom line is, they will tell them 'you don't have time to go there.' I've also observed that for years in some of the management styles. It's that 'their job is to be here, their job is that when the phone rings to be here. If they are gone, somebody else has to do it.' So, they have to do it…and I think that comes from [being] very traditional… but the reality is people don't leave here and there are some people who have been here too long and they are very much the old school. And they don't get this whole development thing at all levels. I don't think it's the norm, but I think it's here. (A3)

When asked whose job it is to encourage supervisors to be more liberal about support staff participation in professional development, one administrative staff participant responded:

> I don't know…See, I don't know that answer because I've been fighting this ever since I've been in this position. You can tell them 'yes you can let your people go' and you can do as much training as possible. And I don't know whether it's the President saying 'we support professional development for everyone and that includes doing this, this, and this.' Plus, I think it's a training issue but we have enough supervisors…like me, I've been here 20 years. We have so many employees that have been here a long time. Even if the training was offered for some of those supervisors, they wouldn't come because they think they know the information. They don't buy into that philosophy. (A2)

Another administrator indicated that, when she worked in a business environment, she required professional development from her staff and rewarded their compliance with bonuses. "I had an incentive goal with all my managers that if their employees didn't get a certain number of hours of development then there would be a certain percentage taken away" (A3). Acknowledging that education is different and that the culture of MCC does not support a mandatory stance, she indicated, however, that she would be willing to take on the supervisors if necessary:

> I think that, if it's really an issue…and, again, I'm just going to speak for me …I would address it. I have no problem doing that. I'd say 'you know, you've got a lot of people, they are not taking advantage of these things, what can I do to help you? What can we do to help support you so you can give them [professional development

opportunities]?' And, if that doesn't work, and you see a constant pattern of turnover

in exit interviews in HR, then it has to be dealt with at a higher level. But, I would

have no problem addressing that. (A3)

Theme Eight: Obstacles

I guess I don't think so much about the obstacles, I just kind of go around them. One of those is tuition reimbursement. But, at this point in my life, I'm not ready to go out and get my Master's because of what I'd have to give up. (AA9)

When asked about obstacles to participation, support and administrative staff offered

the expected responses of time, money, and other obligations and responsibilities. They

provided some unexpected and interesting responses as well. In what could be considered a

compliment to the efforts of the S&OD office, one support staff participant indicated that

having "so many options" (AA9) was an obstacle to her because the number of relevant

choices made it hard to choose what to attend. Another indicated that not finishing her

Bachelor's degree was an obstacle to the kinds of opportunities she was able to attend:

> The degree has stood in my way for some things that I would have liked to have
>
> done…I couldn't participate in the Chair Academy. I think that I was cut off from
>
> NCSPOD from not being able to go anymore because of the position I'm in and
>
> not…you know. So, I think that if I were to tell anybody anything…[I'd tell them] 'if
>
> you want to advance, get a degree. The End.'(AA3)

The administrative staff offered perspectives on how peer pressure and perception

provide obstacles to participation in professional development by the support staff at MCC.

One administrator commented:

> I often found it was their own peer groups who didn't want to support it, not so much
>
> the directors. We were the ones pushing for them to go and we got the heat about it

because so and so says that they are going to too many [trainings]. Give you an example…I had a support person…they called her a ringleader. But, basically (and she was) but she had her ideas…and I was very supportive of [her attending training]. I knew that was what she liked. I knew…she's not going to move…I don't care. She's happy here. I wanted her to be content, this is her job. We came up with a department policy to say how many hours a year a support person could take…[a department policy]—not a college [policy]—that's how crazy it was. And I fought and fought and I said it has to be college-wide and they said 'no' because you have some people who want to go to training all the time. But I said 'we get our work done. I mean it's between myself and my staff' and there were two of us who were really fighting it. But, it was completely peer driven and those peers never went to any training…zero…zilch. So, I think they are a bigger barrier than [administrative] staff, in my opinion….And, it tends to be the peer set that is at a higher level….So it's like that Level 3 [Administrative Assistant]…and they have a lot of control. (A3)

Another administrator talked about support staff perceptions regarding professional development participation. In her view, these perceptions might be more accurately described as deceptions:

Obstacles to participation—I think there are two….One is time and the other is perception. And, the time one, is the belief that we never have enough time to do things and the perception one is 'my boss won't let me do it.' And, very often, for support staff, that perception one overtakes the time one and they don't participate because they don't ask. And you've missed them…they've not been included in your study, they are the people that are not there. They're the people that haven't

participated…and there are a bunch of them around the campus and it's not because

their bosses wouldn't let them participate. It's because they are afraid to ask or

they're afraid to be gone because someone might find out they are not indispensable.

(A4)

Theme Nine: Opportunities

> *I think it would be nice if they would do a one-month sabbatical for Admins. (AA5)*

As might be expected in an institution with a strong emphasis on professional

development, participants in and advocates of professional development for support staff had

many ideas about other opportunities for professional development that could be offered at

MCC. The opportunities mentioned included offering specific professional development

programs and activities; making available to support staff programs that are available to other

staff classifications including sabbatical, leadership training, and emeritus status; making

professional development available to staff on different shifts; and providing a certification

program for administrative assistants. There was also a great deal of discussion by the

support staff participants about mandatory participation in professional development for all

staff.

Requests for Specific Programs and Activities

Several support staff participants mentioned specific programs and activities they

wanted to see offered by the S&OD. These included programs on organizing and time

management, programs on changes made to the computer network and systems at MCC, and

more opportunities for personal development. Said one participant "more classes like we've

had in the summer time, when we have more time to take classes, like making stepping

stones…" (AA3). The participants also suggested classes on retirement—money management, investing, and planning for retirement.

One participant requested that programs about retirement include "not the money part of retirement but the mental part of it" (AA3). Some participants also spoke of a mentoring program for administrative assistants that was established several years ago but has not been as active in recent years. There was general agreement that this program had been very beneficial to new support staff and that S&OD should revitalize the program and make it available to all new administrative assistants who wish to participate.

A strong desire was expressed by several support staff participants for regular meetings for administrative assistants from across the college. One participant provided these suggestions for scheduling:

> Even quarterly…or if we had a meeting during professional development days…and I know that the problem is that is when we are taking care of everybody else…but, if we had a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday…same thing three times…one in the morning, one in the afternoon, one at night so that we could all go. And [with that] even though we aren't in the same room at the same time there's still a good mix and we all hear whatever it is that we need to hear. (AA7)

Equity in Access to Sabbatical and Other Opportunities

Three specific programs or distinctions that are available to faculty and administrative staff—sabbatical, emeritus status, and leadership training—but are not open to hourly employees were mentioned with interest by the study participants. Participants discussed having an opportunity for sabbatical during one of the focus group interviews:

AA3: I don't know if this is considered professional development or not but, if I have a project that I want to do. Something I feel would benefit the staff on our campus. There's really no extra time in my day to do that. And, I would love to see admin assistants be able to take a sabbatical. I have no idea of how to start the process but…I have watched people who have been here for 7 years—faculty—get to go on a sabbatical to get to do this kind of stuff. And, I don't have that opportunity. And I really feel that's something that, professionally developing myself—including going and getting a degree. We don't have necessarily the time to always take classes. But if we had a six month sabbatical possibly we could start that process and then weave it in to our working ability when we get…later on…when we come back, by taking night classes. But at least getting a good handle on it…when you're not going to work all day for 8 hours and then trying to take a class at night…possibly starting that process…

AA6: I agree with that because I've heard [administrative assistants]…some of them have some really outstanding ideas for developing new processes and new things for their department but they literally don't have time and…

AA3: Yeah, I need a sabbatical to work on how to do a sabbatical…how to get a sabbatical process started!

AA7: Salaried staff can take sabbaticals but our hourly staff can't…so we're half-way there, we just need to…the next step.

AA11: And, I think we don't need a six-month sabbatical…

AA3: We don't necessarily…

AA9: Even if we could have three months to start…

AA11: One month…one month would be…

AA6: One month…

AA9: Or, even if it's a day off a week to go take a class…not three months…maybe it's just Mondays I get off…

AA3: I think we need…after 21 years I feel like I…I would really benefit from having a whole month off to really focus on something that would really help the college and me, personally, professionally…both.

There was administrative staff support for this idea, also, as illustrated by these comments:

You know something else that I was never able to do for support staff that I would so have loved. They are the one group on campus that there is no leave opportunity for…no sabbatical. And, you know, I understand why they find that to be very insulting because there are sabbaticals for faculty, there are sabbaticals for administrators. Now, AMS sabbaticals…and then there's sabbaticals for deans and above…special leave opportunities for deans and above. You know, this is one of those things that I sometimes wondered why the Board didn't figure out. Because the Board [members] are the ones that absolutely mandated that we have a financial award opportunity for every employee group on campus. (A4)

Discussions similar to these regarding emeritus status and entry into leadership programs for support staff also occurred during focus group sessions and individual interviews.

Flexible Scheduling of Professional Development Offerings

Both administrative and support staff participants expressed concern about the fact that the majority of the professional development offerings occur during 'normal' working hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) while many support staff employees work other shifts for the

college. They also discussed the fact that staff on the 'day shift' don't always have time to attend classes during busy periods. These issues have been recognized by S&OD and plans are underway to expand the professional development offerings:

> We are working on an evening training plan and it's a whole plan that will be rolling out within a month or two. It will be interesting to see if anybody besides just the evening employees attend. It will be made available for anyone…like if they can't get away from their work during the daytime, they can take advantage at night. (A2)

Administrative Assistant Certification Program

All of the administrative staff voiced the desire to develop a certification program for administrative assistants at MCC. One of the staff members interviewed indicated that such a program existed several years ago in a different context:

> We used to have more of a…at that time they were called secretaries and we had a certified kind of program that they could go through and take the classes…I used to teach in those. This has been 14 or 15 years ago. It was a national kind of certification thing. I know that's not there now but I do know that there is some training available for support staff and that there are resources available here on campus that would fund that. There's some really cool on-line stuff. So, I would like to bring that back and offer that as, say, a certificate or something for them that's very directed. But, I don't want to just throw that out, I want to work closely with [the office professionals' group] to develop it. (A3)

Mandatory Professional Development

An interesting and somewhat surprising finding was the strength of support for mandatory professional development among the support staff participants. Requiring a

certain amount of professional development for all staff at MCC was seen by the participants to be beneficial for the institution and for the participants. There were varying opinions on what types of things should be required by the college. One support staff participant expressed her belief that orientation should be mandatory:

> I don't know if it's mandatory now but if you are a new administrative assistant, you should have to go to the orientation because you are in a position where you should know the information and when you're in there for several months and still go 'I don't know, what do I do?' that reflects poorly on everything. (AA5)

Another participant indicated that orientation should be required as a pre-employment training:

> I wish there was more required. You know what I mean? I haven't been to that [New Admin Orientation] for years. And, I would like to go to that once every two years….But I think it needs to be required for new people. Required meaning before you ever accept the position, you will be enrolled in that class for this day and time and learn what you need to learn because there's a lot of misinformation being given out. (AA1)

Others indicated that a certain level of participation ought to be required. When asked about what changes they would like to see in professional development at MCC three individuals in one of the focus groups responded:

> AA7: We want mandatory training…
>
> AA8: I think it would be great because we have people with a poor attitude and I think it could be turned around. So many people don't take advantage of what we have.

AA10: I think it would be great because with all the opportunities that we have here…even if it was mandatory and you had to go to two things a semester.

One participant indicated that a cultural shift is taking place at MCC that might lead to a greater acceptance for mandatory professional development. When asked in her individual interview if she thought mandatory training might be possible, she responded:

Given our past environment—no. Given our current environment—absolutely moving in the right direction. Because, in the past, we couldn't use the word 'mandatory.' Nothing was allowed to be required. Um…and that put all the power back on the supervisor to decide whether or not you were eligible to go. So, I'm an officer in [the office professionals' group] and some [office professionals' group] members have to take it on their lunch hour and some [office professionals' group] members can do whatever they want whenever they want because it is up to their supervisor. Some people here have scheduled lunch hour…'you go from 12:30 to 1:30 every day because that's more convenient for me.' It's not even like 'well, tomorrow I need to go at 12:00, is that OK?' And they don't even ask because…and I'm like 'but you work for the same place I do.' I don't think that's right. If it is an institutional goal…and the irony here is that we educate everybody but ourselves. So, it should be an institutional goal and I think it's becoming an institutional goal. (AA7)

Two administrative staff members touched on mandatory professional development with one acknowledging the cultural attitude regarding a mandate. When asked about how to address the fact that not all supervisors encourage or support professional development participation by members of their staff in supportive roles, she indicated: "I think that, bottom line, it has to be an organizational issue. I'll tell you how we've worked around it in

the past in other organizations—before here—is we've made it mandatory. Now, the culture's just not set up that way….This culture will never be that way" (A3). Another administrative staff member raised the issue of staff attitudes toward anything that is required by the institution. Also addressing the issue of inequity in supervisor support, she said:

> Well, I think if there was a mandatory requirement and everybody, you know, you've got to go to at least 4 hours or whatever, then that would release…give the permission for the support staff to be able to do that without, you know…feeling that they've overstepped or whatever. But yet, on a person, when you say it's mandatory then you've got an attitude thing of 'they're making me do it' and I don't want that either. (A2)

A postscript regarding mandatory training is necessary. At the March 2008 meeting of the MCC Board of Trustees, which was held the day after I finished the interviews for this study, the MCC Board adopted a mandatory training policy. The policy requires all new staff members to attend new employee orientation within 90 days of hire and all supervisors to attend new supervisor orientation within 90 days of accepting supervisory responsibilities. It also requires appropriate compliance training of all new employees within 90 days of hire, of all existing employees within two years of the adoption of the mandatory training policy, and of all employees on two year intervals on a continuing basis.

Those serving on campus hiring committees must have completed mandatory hiring-committee training in the fiscal year of the assignment. Failure to attend the mandatory orientations is just cause for progressive discipline and those who do not complete the required hiring-committee training will be disqualified from serving on a hiring committee

until the training is completed (Millennial Community College, 2008c). The culture has shifted.

Structural Themes

Each of the textural themes described provides some insight and understanding of the apparent meanings of professional development to the support staff participants at MCC. Describing the textural themes is an important step in data analysis when using the Moustakas modification of the Stevik-Coliazzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994). In the subsequent step of data analysis, the structural is meshed with the textural to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994).

Keen (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) defines structures as "that order embedded in everyday experience which can be grasped only through reflection" (pp.78-79). The structures for this study emerged as I analyzed the data and reflected on my research experiences. The underlying (or structural) themes describe the meaning of professional development to the support staff participants in this study on a different level than the textural themes. Moustakas (1994) maintained "the relationship of texture and structure is not that of object and subject or concrete and abstract but of the appearance and the hidden coming together to create a fullness in understanding the essences of a phenomenon or experience" (p. 79). The structural themes identified from the study are *connections*, *confidence,* and *competence*.

Connections

Perhaps the most striking and prevalent structural theme that emerged is that of *connections*. The study participants described being connected through professional development in a variety of ways. The strongest sense of connection as described by the

support staff participants and observed by the administrative staff participants was the social connection that occurs between support staff employees and other staff and faculty when they take part in professional development activities. These connections enable members of the support staff community to share on a personal and professional level with staff across the college. The participants described feeling positive, happy, engaged, and supported by the social interactions with their peers during professional development activities.

The support staff participants also expressed a greater feeling of connection with the institution because of participation in professional development activities. This institutional connection allows the support staff participants to gain knowledge and skills that help them perform better in their role at the office, department, division, and college levels. It also gives them a greater understanding of the underlying values of the institution and of the institutional expectations of all members of the college community to support student learning and the mission of the institution.

Another point of connection on the institutional level for support staff is the advocacy for their participation in professional development that many experience. This advocacy for their active participation in the program comes from their supervisors, from others within the institution, and from institutional policies. The importance of this connection was expressed this way by one support staff participant:

Between the tuition exempt part of it and also my boss allowing me to take classes during the day, as part of my work day, was huge. Before I had kids and then, even after my daughter was born, that was huge because I don't know that I could have done that, or given myself permission to have done that, in the evening. (AA10)

This desire to remain connected to the institution, even in retirement, was expressed by another support staff participant who said, "This is my life-line, my blood runs…or the school runs through my blood, one of the two. But it just can't be cut off like that, it will kill me" (AA3). This participant and a group of other staff from across the college have formed a committee to build a bridge between MCC and its retirees for mutual benefit and sustained connection.

An enhanced connection with self through participation in professional development activities was another benefit described. Several participants talked of discovering new aptitudes, learning new ideas, and gaining the ability to look at life from a different perspective as a result of their participation in professional development. Also expressed by the participants were feelings of being more connected and comfortable with their own abilities and interests. One participant stated this aspect very simply "I've really grown. I know I've grown" (AA3) and another said, "I think when you take those classes and you learn about yourself, you're not quite as judgmental when somebody makes a decision that you don't like. You're more aware of all the possibilities and you just don't get as bent out of shape" (AA8).

Confidence

The feelings of self-connection described by support staff participants are closely related to the confidence they gain from participating in professional development. One participant described being "absolutely terrified" (AA10) at the thought of speaking in front of a group of any size. However, because of her experiences first as a participant and later as an organizer of professional development activities for the student services division, she built her confidence to the point that she successfully made presentations about the MCC student

services professional development program at two national conferences. She attributed this new-found confidence to her participation in professional development and the support of her supervisors and peers.

Many women described how their confidence in relating to others at different levels across the institution grew because of their participation in professional development. One participant described how proud she was after having lunch with the president of the college. She was able to converse with him about the college strategic plan, mission, and vision because she had been exposed to these documents and ideas through professional development participation.

Another support staff participant expressed her feelings of confidence in taking on leadership responsibilities:

> I think it's helped me be more creative. I think I've learned how to be a leader. That I was capable of being a leader and that I didn't hold back on anything. I mean I've always taken part in any of the volunteer work in the organizations for administrative assistants. I've always been very active in them. And I think that taking those classes taught me that I could do that. You know, not to be afraid to try something. Um, it taught me how to organize. Because I never, I wasn't brought up, unfortunately, learning skills on organization. (AA3)

Other staff members described the confidence that was instilled by learning how to manipulate complex software applications and by mastering the integrated management information system used at the college. One individual related that, though she didn't ever want to leave her job with MCC, she was confident that she would have marketable skills and abilities because of what she had learned through professional development.

The administrative staff participants shared several examples of how support staff employees at MCC grew in confidence and ability through their participation in professional development. Their observations highlighted how new skills and knowledge gave support staff participants the confidence to lead projects both in their departments and across the college and to address the mission of helping students learn. One administrator shared part of the thought process involved in developing activities that will build confidence:

> But, sometimes it was us looking in general at 'What do the Admins need?' 'What's going to help them do their jobs?' 'What is going to help them feel more confident in their position?' Because, when they feel more confident in their positions, they are going to be much better able to help students. (A1)

Competence

Growth in competence also contributes to the confidence that support staff participants gain from their participation in professional development. Competence is gained from learning new knowledge and skills through participation in professional development. The support staff participants described gains in competence in workplace and interpersonal skills. Every participant interviewed mentioned the growth in competence with technology that she gained through professional development classes and activities. Also frequently mentioned was the increase in competence that participants receive from meeting new people, being exposed to new ideas, and learning new things.

Administrative staff participants reported that the growth of competence experienced by support staff who participated in professional development activities provided strong benefit to the individuals and to the institution. A specific example is the increased knowledge of software applications that results in more efficiency and organization in

individual departments. Another outcome is the mentoring and peer training between support staff that takes place across the college as the result of development activities. One administrative staff member explained this:

> And so, they want to take the job that they have and expand it out as much as they can to be a better contributor. But I truly believe at the end of the day that those people who go out and get that development really are critical pieces in the department that then come back and mentor and coach other people…kind of three or four layers removed…is I think that's the best way for me to explain it. And, I would say that about staff I've had in the past. There are some that really just want to take that initiative and come back and that's what they own and then it gets to be their place in the department. (A3)

Summary

Support staff participants that I interviewed for this study included administrative assistants at Millennial Community College (MCC) who both enjoyed and took frequent advantage of the professional development offerings at MCC. The textural themes (the 'what' of the experience, Moustakas, 1994) that emerged from the study include: *gaining knowledge, personal improvement, social enjoyment, attaining career/educational goals, support and encouragement, organizational issues, equity of access, obstacles,* and *opportunities*.

The participants expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to network and socialize during professional development activities and most participants indicated that they often pursue activities that provide new knowledge and information regarding new technology and applications as well as programs that inform them of changes and new

initiatives at the college. Most of the support staff interviewed also reported participating in programs that enhance personal development and wellness. Administrative staff participants shared their observations with me of support staff participation in these activities and concurred with the reasons that support staff gave for participating in professional development.

Though professional development opportunities include the ability to take MCC classes, certain non-credit classes, and other learning opportunities with little or no cost to the support staff participants, only three of the 11 support staff participants talked about their active pursuit of activities that would lead to career or educational advancement. Five of the 11 support staff participants had earned an Associate degree from MCC. Those individuals expressed satisfaction with attaining that goal and indicated little desire to pursue furthering their education.

The administrative staff expressed to me their knowledge of the relative lack of interest in educational or career advancement and noted that most administrative assistants at MCC are content in the positions they hold and have a strong sense of loyalty to their departments. They told me that this loyalty contributes to reticence by the support staff at MCC to participate in further degree pursuit or opportunities for career advancement.

I discussed organizational issues with the participants including the role of support staff professional development as it relates to the MCC mission, student satisfaction, and organizational development. The MCC mission tag line is "Learning comes first at MCC." Support staff and administrative staff participants shared their perceptions that support staff participation in professional development forwards the mission of the college.

They also expressed that the ways they believe the mission is forwarded are by the provision of learning opportunities and skill development for support staff personnel. Learning and skill development, in turn, are believed to enhance the personal and professional development of the support staff who participate in professional development activities. The majority of participants also voiced their conviction that the learning opportunities and skill development for support staff contribute to student satisfaction and student learning. The administrative staff participants communicated their strong sense that support staff participation in professional development contributes to organizational development and organizational learning. The support staff participants, however, did not seem able to grasp these concepts or the importance of organizational development to the institution.

Both the support staff and administrative participants expressed concern for equity of access to professional development at MCC. All participants agreed that, though life-long learning through professional development is a shared value of the college, not all supervisors encourage or support members of their staff by allowing uniform participation in professional development. Several support staff participants shared with me their proposed solution to this inequity—mandatory professional development. MCC did, in fact, institute mandatory new staff and supervisor orientations and compliance and hiring committee training shortly after the interviews for my study were completed.

The participants were of like mind regarding the primary obstacles to support staff participation in professional development. These included time, money, and personal and professional responsibilities. Other obstacles that were mentioned by support staff included having too many good choices in program offerings and not having a Bachelor's degree.

One support staff participant believed her lack of a degree disqualified her from participation in some professional development opportunities such as leadership training. The administrative staff members shared with me that peer pressure and support staff perceptions of lack of supervisor institutional support are other obstacles to support staff participation in professional development.

Participants also talked openly and with enthusiasm about their ideas for opportunities for change and growth in the professional development program. These included a support staff certification program; the availability for sabbatical leave, leadership training, and emeritus status for support staff; and more flexible scheduling of professional development activities so that support staff who work afternoon, evening, and night shifts would have access to programming.

The structural themes that emerged from the study during my data analysis and reflection include: *connections, confidence,* and *competence*. The ways in which support staff participants find *connection* through professional development include social connections with peers and other staff during professional development activities, connections to the institution resulting from support expressed through college investment in professional development for support staff and from supervisors, and the connection to self that is experienced by support staff through their learning and development activities.

Support staff gain *confidence* through their participation in professional development activities because of opportunities for social and interpersonal interaction and through activities that enhance their job performance, personal well-being, and their understanding of the college. This confidence seems to be a direct result of the gains in *competence* that stem from professional development programming aimed at providing the support staff who

participate in professional development with new knowledge and skills that contribute to individual and institutional learning and growth.

In Chapter Five I will summarize the study, relate the results to models of the *learning college*, the *learning organization*, and the literature reviewed on support staff in the workplace, and discuss my conclusions and the study delimitations and limitations. I will conclude with implications for practice and recommendations for further research and study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I will present a summary of my study and the conclusions that I have drawn from the results reported in Chapter Four. I will also discuss the findings of my study in relation to the learning college and the learning organization and the limited literature on support staff personnel in settings outside the community college. I will provide the delimitations and limitations of the study along with recommendations for practice and for further research and study.

Summary of Study

I designed this study using a qualitative, phenomenological methodology to describe and examine the meaning of participation in professional development for community college support staff. My purpose was to examine the meaning of participation in professional development by support staff employees in an urban U.S. community college that offers a comprehensive staff development program for its staff and faculty. I also sought to learn from the observations and perceptions of administrative staff who work closely with the professional development program what they believe the program means to support staff participants. Further, I investigated the perceived meaning, benefits, and challenges of support staff participation in professional development to both the individual participant and the institution from the perspective of both support staff participants in professional development and administrative staff who work closely with the program.

This study was of interest because I could not identify any empirical research regarding any aspect of community college support staff participation in professional development. I found this troubling in light of the fact that over 25% of the employees of

community colleges in the United States are classified as support staff (NCES, 2008).

Additionally, the literature has strongly suggested that focused professional development

programs have been shown to have a positive impact on the personnel who participate in

them and on the institutions in which they work (Bauer, 2000; Burnstad, 1994; O'Banion,

1997a; Pressley, McPhail, Heacock, & Linck, 2001; Watts & Hammons, 2002). Finally, the

role of support staff in the community college is both challenging and important (Foucar-

Szocki, Larson, & Mitchell, 2003; Friesen, 2002) and the people who serve in these vital

supportive roles in the community college are deserving of study and of the insight and

changes that often result from looking more closely at a phenomenon.

The theoretical framework of constructivism guided me in the study. The

epistemological focus I employed for the study was individual support staff workers and

administrative staff members who were interviewed and the meaning they made from the

professional development program at their institution. I asked administrative and support

staff participants to describe the ways in which support staff participation in professional

development assists support staff in attaining professional and personal development goals

and career and educational goals. I also asked the participants about institutional support for

and institutional benefit from support staff participation in professional development.

Additionally, I asked the participants to describe obstacles and opportunities in regard to

professional development for support staff at the institution.

There were four administrative staff participants and 11 support staff participants in

the study. The participants were chosen using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002).

Administrative staff members in the study were invited to participate based on current or

former assignment with the institution's office of Staff and Organizational Development

(S&OD). Support staff criteria for invitation included holding the job title of administrative assistant, being employed by the college full-time for at least one year, actively participating in professional development, and filing of an individual development plan (IDP) with the office of S&OD. Though my study criteria did not include a gender criterion, all study participants were women.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Support staff volunteers were asked to participate in one 90-minute focus group interview and one 60-minute individual interview. Administrative staff participants were involved in one 60-minute interview only. With permission received from participants through the informed consent document, I tape recorded all interviews and then transcribed them. I analyzed the verbatim transcripts of the interviews using the Moustakas modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). My data analysis resulted in nine textural themes including *gaining knowledge, personal improvement, social enjoyment, attaining career/educational goals, support and encouragement, organizational issues, equity of access, obstacles,* and *opportunities*. Three structural themes emerged from my data analysis and reflection: *connections, confidence,* and *competence*.

<center>Findings Related to the Literature</center>

My study focused on the individual support staff participants in a comprehensive professional development program at one community college. I could identify no scholarly research on this population and only a few studies outside of the community college setting with any focus on support staff personnel. The literature that I discussed in Chapter Two provided a framework for understanding the history, development, purposes, and content of professional development programs in the community college. I offered that background

because my study sought to understand the meaning of such programs to support staff participants and to the institution in which they work. The discussion was, I believe, important to an understanding of professional development in the community college and why it might benefit both to the individuals who participate in it and to the institution.

Further, I provided information on the *learning college* (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) and the *learning organization* (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Garvin, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Senge, 1990) to provide a context for the particular focus and purpose of the professional development program in the institution that I studied. My research identified that the institution studied—Millennial Community College (MCC)—adopted the learning college approach in 1999 and has built the staff development program since then on the model of the learning college and the principles of the learning organization. Because of this action, these frameworks were relevant to the study.

However, providing a comparison of the history, development, purposes, and content of professional development programs in the literature to the professional development program at MCC or an analysis of how MCC's professional development program conforms to the learning college model, or a discussion of the how the principles of the learning organization relate to professional development at MCC are not congruent with the results of my study.

My study was intentionally focused on individual members of the support staff and on the meaning of professional development in their lives and their perceptions of the contributions made to the life of the institution by their participation in professional development activities. The results speak to the ways in which those individuals personally experienced professional development and how they believe professional development has

assisted them in achieving professional, personal, educational and career goals. The results

also address the ways in which the support staff and administrative staff interviewed

perceived that support staff participation in professional development forwards the mission

of the college and contributes to student satisfaction and success. At this intersection—the

knowledge and perception of benefit to the individual and the perception of benefit to the

institution—I believe that the results of my study can be compared to selected elements of

the learning college model and to certain principles of the learning organization. The study

results can also be compared to the research I identified on support staff in settings outside

the community college.

The Learning College

The learning college model (O'Banion, 1997b):

- creates substantive change in individual learners (O'Banion, 1997b).

Participants in this study expressed the belief that, because of their participation in

professional development, they were changed in a positive way. Support staff participants

talked about their growth both personally and professionally. They shared that they were

more confident and competent because of participation in professional development.

Administrative staff participants validated these changes in support staff with anecdotal

evidence of observed growth in support staff participants who take part in professional

development opportunities.

- engages learners as full partners in the learning process and puts learners in
  charge of their own choices (O'Banion, 1997b).

Support staff participants in professional development at MCC that were interviewed

expressed a high level of satisfaction with the opportunities available to them, for the support

given them by the institution, and for the freedom to make choices appropriate to their own interests and needs.

- creates and offers as many options for learning as possible (O'Banion, 1997b).

One support staff study participant described the number of options for professional development as 'an obstacle' because of the difficulty she experienced in choosing from so many appropriate and interesting offerings. Support staff participants in the study were very positive about the willingness of the office of S&OD to be responsive to stated needs for support staff development and, also, about their ability to create customized programming for individual departments within the college.

The Learning Organization

Senge's (1990) principles for the learning organization include the five disciplines of *systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision,* and *team learning*. Results from this study can be discussed in regard to the learning organization principles of *personal mastery* and *mental models*. Senge defines personal mastery as "the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively" (p. 7). Thoughts and ideas shared by many of the support staff participants reflect the characteristics of Senge's definition of personal mastery.

Support staff participants in the study indicated that their participation in professional development allowed them to achieve better knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses and of more effective ways to communicate and connect with others in the workplace. One support staff participant talked about the ways in which her participation in

professional development had helped her to understand the organization better and to be more patient when things didn't always go her way.

The concept of mental models involves "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures, that influence how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p. 8) and is, I believe, more closely related to the results from my study. Kim (1993) expands on Senge's principle of mental models with his concepts of "know-how" which is the acquisition of skill and "know-why" which is the ability to describe and understand experience. Or, in other words "what people learn…and how they understand and apply that learning" (p. 38).

Though not in the same words, support and administrative staff participants described the ways in which support staff participation in professional development contributes to building "know-how" (Kim, 1993, p.38). The acquisition of various skills, knowledge and concepts by support staff participants in professional development was articulated by every participant in the study.

Participants described having opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge through their participation in professional development activities. They talked of learning new software applications and of improving their knowledge of college policies, procedures, and processes. Administrative staff described developing opportunities for learning and growth that were specifically tailored to the 'know-how' needs of support staff participants in professional development at the college.

The concept of "know-why," the understanding and application of learning, delves deeper into Senge's (1990) concept of mental models. Kim (1993) further defines this concept:

Mental models represent a person's view of the world, including explicit and implicit understandings. Mental models provide the context in which to view and interpret new material, and they determine how stored information is relevant to a given situation. They represent more than a collection of ideas, memories, and experiences—they are like the source code of a computer's operating system, the manager and arbiter of acquiring, retaining, using, and deleting new information. (p. 39).

Kim (1993) posits that the ability of an organization to learn (to develop the 'know-how') is dependent on the ability of the individuals within the organization to improve their mental models. Kim indicates that studies have shown that organizations with high turn-over rates have a difficult time maintaining organizational knowledge because the experience base is being constantly replaced. In order to improve organizational learning through mental models, an explicit shared mental model that contains those elements important to the success of the organization—values, mission, goals—must be established and communicated.

My study was not designed to explore organizational learning at the depth of Senge's (1990) work or of that done by Kim (1993) nor did it evaluate the types of learning experiences offered by MCC from a theoretical perspective of adult learning practices. It did, however, provide some insights into the meaning of professional development for support staff in the community college setting. Though the support staff participants in the study were largely unable to articulate or recognize the concept of organizational learning when asked about it directly, their responses to a number of questions suggested some evidence of the concepts developed by Kim in his work with organizational learning.

Participants talked about how their outlook was changed by their participation in professional development activities. They explained that they were better able to understand the organization and others within the organization from the programs they attended and from their interactions with other staff and faculty in those programs. The organizational tenets of mission, values, and purpose were frequently and clearly articulated by the participants. This suggests to me that organizational learning is taking place and that the potential to build on Senge's (1990) mental models principle exists at MCC. Further, opportunities for developing (or expanding) shared mental models as described by Kim (1993) seem to exist within the framework of the professional development program at MCC and the support staff participants in the study appear to be willing and able to participate in learning at this level.

Additionally, an opportunity appears to exist for changing the mental models of some members of both the supervisory staff and support staff with regard to the institution's stance on support staff participation in professional development. Participants in my study both experienced and observed supervisors who did not universally encourage support staff participation in professional development. Likewise, some members of the support staff who preferred not to participate made clear their disapproval of other support staff who did take advantage of opportunities to participate.

Based on the resources allocated to professional development at MCC, it seems evident that the college values staff participation. Efforts to change the mental models of faculty and staff at all levels who do not enthusiastically support professional development may result in more broad-based support of the program and would further the goals set by the college to support and encourage staff and organizational development.

Perhaps, these efforts might also lead to a cultural shift in the institution that would negate the need for mandatory attendance at new staff and supervisory orientation and at compliance training. If the mental models of supervisory staff at MCC are altered in such a way that the benefits of professional development and training are fully accepted, mandatory training may become unnecessary.

Women's Ways of Knowing and Learning

Almost universally, the women in my study voiced preference for *connected learning* experiences. One study participant could be described more as a *separate learner*, but she also acknowledged the value of learning in collaboration with others. As Flannery (2000) found in her review of the literature of women's learning "that women both prefer to learn with others and prefer a certain kind of learning relationship with others, one that emphasizes mutual support and caring" (p. 124), a valued element of attending professional development at MCC is the opportunity to see and learn with others.

The women in my study talked about how much they were able to learn from others during professional development activities and in informal learning opportunities. They asked for more scheduled meetings with their peers to talk about changes at the college, to share creative ways for dealing with workplace challenges, and to get to know and mentor new members of the support staff community. These strong preferences expressed by participants formed the basis for the structural theme of *connections* that emerged from my study.

Front-Line Staff in the Workplace

Several findings from my study concur with key points in the limited literature on issues related to front-line (support) staff in the workplace. Bauer (2000) identified from her

review of the literature on support staff personnel that participants in professional development activities received the direct benefit of greater job satisfaction from their participation. The support staff participants in my study expressed satisfaction with their jobs and talked often of the support they received from their supervisors and the institution. Further, the average longevity at MCC of the 11 support staff participants was 14.5 years which may also be a reflection of job satisfaction. Additionally, four individuals interviewed shared that they requested internal transfers from departments where support staff participation in professional development was not encouraged to those where it was supported. This seems to indicate that professional development is a source of job satisfaction for support staff at MCC.

Two indirect benefits from participation in professional development activities by support staff are self-esteem and empowerment (Bauer, 2000). Study participants at MCC made frequent reference to the confidence they gained from participating in professional development activities. Individual participants shared examples of feeling accomplished when they were able to assist their direct supervisors with projects because of the knowledge they gained through professional development.

The sense of community and cooperation experienced by bank workers engaged in informal learning practices (Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002) was echoed by the participants in my study. Again, the structural theme of *connections* identified in my analysis of study results resonates with the importance of allowing support staff workers to network, communicate, and problem-solve in teams which were identified in Mitchell and Livingstone's study.

Similarly, McDonald, Hite, and Gilbreath (2002) reported from a study involving support staff workers in business, manufacturing, and educational settings that "liking your work and enjoying co-workers…having fun, and working in a positive social environment" (p.14) were the most important aspects of work to the participants in their study. Support staff at MCC spoke often about the importance of the social aspect of professional development. They shared that it provided both personal enjoyment and important knowledge and information that allowed them to be more successful in their work.

One aspect of my study I found to be surprising was substantiated by a study completed by Hite and McDonald (2003). Only three of the 11 support staff participants indicated a desire to pursue educational or career advancement despite the fact that MCC supports those aspirations by providing tuition exemption and reimbursement and some paid time off. Hite & McDonald learned from their study of women in non-managerial roles that the participants did not consider these kinds of professional development opportunities crucial to their growth or advancement.

The results of my study seem to resonate in some meaningful ways with the model and concepts of the learning college (O'Banion, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) and the learning organization (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Garvin, 1993; O'Neill, 1995; Senge, 1990) but do not, in any substantive way, explain these concepts relative to the design of the professional development program at MCC or its outcomes.

Many of the results from my study are similar to those found by others who have studied support personnel in other settings (Bauer, 2002; Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002; Mitchell & Livingstone, 2002). However, many avenues of research regarding this topic are still waiting for exploration. In a subsequent

section of this chapter, I will explore two ideas for additional research and study focused on the role of support staff within the community college and the ways in which participation in professional development can provide individual and institutional growth.

Conclusions

The purposes of my study were to describe and examine the meaning of the professional development program for community college support staff identified by the support and administrative staff interviewed and to examine, through qualitative data analysis, the meanings, benefits, and challenges of professional development for support staff personnel to the individual and to the institution.

The responses that I received in the study from support staff personnel and those given by administrative staff at the research site were very similar. The only notable difference in the findings between what was expressed by support staff compared to what was articulated by administrative staff was in regard to the concept of organizational development. The administrative staff participants interviewed were clear and articulate regarding the presence and importance of organizational development at MCC. The support staff participants were much less clear on the meaning and presence of organizational development at the college. However, as noted previously, though support staff participants did not relate their participation in professional development activities to the concept of organizational development, many of their descriptions of the learning that took place as a result of their participation in professional development described learning experiences that suggest organizational learning and development (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Kim, 1993; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Support and administrative staff participants in the study described the meaning of support staff professional development by the opportunities it provides to those who are active participants. From my interviews with the participants and my analysis of the data, I have concluded that these include the opportunity to:

- feel connected to other staff and faculty, to the institution, and to one's own strengths and abilities.

- develop and build confidence and self-esteem and to experience personal and professional growth.

- increase competence by learning new knowledge and skills.

The benefits to support staff personnel from participation in professional development mirror the meanings expressed above. The challenges to participation in support staff development described by study participants included time, money, other personal and professional obligations, too many opportunities from which to choose, and unsupportive supervisors. Also mentioned by one of the administrative staff interviewed is the perception of some support staff employees that it is not permissible to participate in development activities. Though these challenges are not insignificant, they were not viewed by the participants in my study as major impediments to participating in development opportunities.

I have also concluded from the study results that participants believe that the institutional support for support staff participation in professional development at MCC is at an appropriate level. All of the support staff participants in the study indicated that they were personally supported in their professional development activities by their supervisors and by the institution. They did, however, note that encouragement of and support for participation in professional development by support staff was not uniform across the college. The

solution to this inequity proposed by support staff participants in the study was to institute

mandatory participation in professional development.

<center>Study Delimitations and Limitations</center>

This study was delimited by place, time, and participants. The place was a single

community college with a strong professional development program available to all staff

members. The time delimitation was the period of time I spent observing, reviewing

artifacts, conducting individual, and focus group interviews, and in doing member-checking

after preliminary data analysis.

The interviews with all participants took place during the spring term of academic

year 2007-2008. My results are bounded by the time period in which the data were collected,

by the climate and activities of the institution at the time they were collected, and by how the

climate and activities affected the attitudes of the participants toward the study during their

participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

My purposeful selection of the study participants further narrowed the study as did

the fact that I talked only with support staff participants who were actively engaged in and

satisfied with professional development at MCC. Other members of the MCC support staff

employees who do not participate or who participate infrequently in professional

development may have a much different view of professional development and of the

professional development program at MCC.

A limitation of narrowing the study as I have is that these results cannot be

generalized to all support staff professional development programs or even to other specific

programs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Instead, the results of my study provide an in-depth

look into the professional development program at MCC through my observations and

through the eyes of those interviewed. Further, because this study included a limited number of participants, the results cannot be generalized to all support staff participants in professional development.

The study included four administrative staff—all female, all white, non-Hispanic, and all between the ages of 45 and 66. Similarly, the 11 support staff participants were also all female and white, non-Hispanic. Though the ages of the participants ranged from 28 to 61, the average age was 51 and there was only one participant who was under the age of 40. Additionally, the support staff participants were all employed as administrative assistants at MCC. There were no men, persons of color, or individuals working in other support staff roles included in my study.

The use of artifacts including college reports, individual development plans (IDP), and other documents in this study, brought additional limitations to the study. Merriam (1998) indicates that a chief limitation of using documents in a qualitative study is that most documents are not developed for research purposes. In contrast to interview and observation data, documents relate to the program under study, not to the study itself. I remained mindful of these limitations during their use but found that the artifacts provided much useful background data, especially the IDP documents for each of the support staff participants interviewed.

<div align="center">Implications for Practice</div>

One of the motivations for me in this study was the desire to learn why and how support staff participation in professional development is important to those who take part in it and to understand how the lessons learned from my study might foster growth of new professional development programs and improvement of existing programs. From my

reading, my observations, and my research, I believe that support staff personnel in community colleges play an important role in the institution (Foucar-Szocki, Larson, & Mitchell, 2003; Friesen, 2002). Based on what I learned from the participants in my study, I believe that there are many individual and institutional benefits from participation in professional development by community college support staff.

These benefits include an increase in job knowledge and skills, a better understanding of the policies, practices, and processes of the college; better self awareness; an increase in confidence and self-esteem; and a sense of being connected to the institution and to others in the institution. These benefits appear to foster organizational learning and they were perceived by the study participants to positively influence student satisfaction and learning.

The favorable results that I observed during my research from an institutional investment in professional development indicate to me that other community colleges who do not already have an active program should consider how to provide meaningful workplace learning opportunities for all faculty and staff in the institution. Issues of staffing and funding are always problematic but these can be minimized by utilizing the human and technical resources that usually abound in the community college setting.

O'Banion's (1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) learning college model, Senge's (1990) principles for the learning organization and Kim's (1993) interesting work in the application of Senge's mental models principle to understand and develop the link between individual and organizational learning provide strong operational models on which to build or strengthen a comprehensive community college professional development program.

Based on my experiences with this study, I believe that an emphasis on organizational learning through a strong staff development program has the potential to provide growth and

learning in every staff member who chooses to participate. College-sponsored professional

development opportunities that are focused on meeting the personal and professional needs

of the faculty and staff and that are inclusive and purposely welcoming of and relevant for

support staff personnel also have strong potential to positively affect student learning and the

forwarding of the institutional mission.

Based on my work in this study, I can offer three recommendations for involving

support staff more actively in established professional development programs in community

colleges and for providing support staff with experiences that are satisfying and meaningful.

These recommendations include:

1. Provide and support equity of access to professional development opportunities for all
   staff.

2. Provide and support informal learning and networking opportunities for support staff
   personnel.

3. Provide and support variety, flexibility, and openness in professional development
   opportunities for all staff.

Equity of Access

Support staff participants in my study expressed concern with the fact that not all

supervisors provided encouragement and support to members of their staff for attendance at

professional development activities. This was perceived by study participants as inequitable

and unfair. The support staff participants in the study expressed the belief that mandatory

professional development is the answer to this dilemma. In some institutions, this may

provide a workable solution. I believe that, prior to instituting a mandatory professional

development requirement for all staff, the interim step that MCC has just instituted might be more reasonable and successful.

MCC now mandates attendance at new employee orientation, new supervisor orientation, and compliance training appropriate to a staff member's position. All three of these requirements provide essential information to enhance and improve job performance. New employee orientation, however, may also succeed in introducing new staff to professional development opportunities and encourage a pattern of participation. Over time, this initial exposure by new staff coupled with continued encouragement for all to participate from the leadership of the college may result in greater participation by staff and make it more uncomfortable for those supervisors who aren't supportive of participation by members of their staff.

Another issue of equity noted by support and administrative staff participants in my study was that support staff personnel are not eligible for sabbatical leave, emeritus status, or leadership training though all other regular college employees can participate. This creates resentment and emphasizes stratification. I recommend that colleges only provide programs through the professional development program that include all staff classifications or that they not offer them at all. Having variations of the same program available to different staff classifications was offered by support staff participants in the study as a solution to this inequity.

At MCC, for instance, faculty can apply for a semester-long sabbatical leave at full pay after seven years of full-time employment. Study participants suggested a one-month sabbatical after ten years for support staff as a reasonable proposal. Providing different standards and criteria for different staff classifications did not seem to be an issue for the

several participants who raised this question during the study but not having the opportunity to participate was of great concern.

Informal Learning and Networking Opportunities

Support staff personnel in the study placed a high value on the informal learning and networking opportunities provided to them through professional development. They expressed a desire for more frequent opportunities to meet informally with other administrative assistants in small work groups, in their departments and divisions, and across the college. Providing these opportunities is not costly and it does not require a great deal of planning or organization. It does, however, call for commitment on the part of the departmental and division leadership of the college. One support staff participant who works in a large department where there is a standing Friday morning meeting for all department administrative assistants reported how valuable this meeting was to her. Other support staff across the college—maintenance and custodial workers and technical support staff for instance—could also benefit from regular opportunities to meet and share information and knowledge with their peers in an informal setting.

Variety, Flexibility, and Openness

My final recommendation is to provide as many professional development offerings as possible given the resources available and to offer choices of activities that offer both personal and professional development to participants. Program offerings should be scheduled so that staff members working different shifts have at least occasional access to programming during their work hours and programming should include frequent opportunity for staff from different classifications and program areas to meet and learn together.

Study participants made numerous mentions of these characteristics of the MCC program. They voiced appreciation for the opportunity to participate in both personal and professional development activities. While they suggested that more offerings be made available to afternoon and evening shift employees, they applauded the efforts of S&OD for providing such a variety of programming at frequent and convenient times. They also expressed a strong conviction that having the opportunity to meet and learn with staff and faculty from across the college made them feel more connected and also helped them learn more about those with whom they worked and about different facets of college life. The participants indicated that the result of this connection was an increased ability on the part of the support staff who participate in professional development to understand their role in the college and to better contribute to the college mission.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Research and Study</div>

Because so little has been written about professional development for support staff in community colleges, others who are interested in this topic have many opportunities for study. My study was narrowly focused on support staff with the job title 'administrative assistant.' The support staff personnel in my study were all front-line secretarial/clerical workers.

There are many other workers in community colleges that are classified as 'support staff' and their training and development needs are also important to the success of the college. These staff groups include: technical and paraprofessional workers (computer and data processing technicians, library assistants and clerks), skilled crafts workers (electricians, plumbers, heating/ventilating/air conditioning workers), service (food service, child care, book store clerks) and maintenance workers (Ebbers, Wild, and Fridel, 2003). Studies

focused on one or more of these groups or based on a cross-section of support staff employees have the potential to provide needed information for colleges on the professional development needs of these employees who are vital to the college.

There are a number of theories, models, and guides for practice that can be considered in regard to support staff participation in professional development in the community college setting. How and why one chooses one of these possibilities as the framework for a study depends entirely on an individual's interests and the purposes for research. I will share two concepts that I found intriguing and meaningful in regard to the focus of my study as my work progressed. They are *transformative learning* (Mezirow & Associates, 2000), *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Mezirow conducted a comprehensive research study in the late 1970's of women in re-entry programs in community colleges (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). He credits the women's movement and the innovation and consciousness-raising that it inspired for pioneering transformative learning. Mezirow's study included a grounded theory field study of 12 community college re-entry programs, on-site observations of 24 other programs, and a quantitative survey that generated 314 responses. The concept of *perspective transformation* was the major theoretical finding of the study.

The women in the re-entry programs studied either entered initially or returned to a community college learning environment and the result was "becoming more critically aware of the context—biographical, historical, cultural—of their beliefs and feelings about themselves and their role in society" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. xii). This new-found self-awareness caused the women studied to challenge their previously held assumptions and expectations and, in many cases, to alter them. Mezirow concluded that the changes made by

these women "constituted a learned transformation [and] the process resulting from it was designated transformative learning" (p. xii). A study that looks at community college professional development programs for support staff through the lens of transformative learning might inform practice by identifying the professional development activities that encourage transformative learning and finding ways to assess whether desired organizational learning and change occurs from support staff participation these activities.

Wenger defines communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Communities of practice are established to help organizations manage knowledge and they offer opportunities for developing shared knowledge so that organizations can function most effectively. Wenger (1998) acknowledges that most individuals are part of many informal communities of practice and suggests that intentional communities of practice can benefit the individuals who participate in them and the group, organization, or other collective that they serve.

Questions that might be considered in a study that looks at a possible relationship between community college professional development programs and communities of practice include: Are community college professional development programs communities of practice at the program level? Do these programs create, foster, or encourage other communities of practice within the program or college? Do the individuals who participate in a community of practice benefit from their participation? If they do, how do they benefit? Does the college benefit from formal and informal communities of practice? In regard to support staff, one might consider if and how support staff personnel engage in communities

of practice and whether this engagement fosters individual personal and professional development and benefit for the college.

Other issues that were raised during the course of my study that may provide other avenues for future research include the social justice/workplace equity concerns raised by support staff and administrative staff participants in regard to the fact that not all supervisors support professional development participation by members of their staff. There may be administrative development and leadership training issues involved with this situation as well. Additionally, because professional development in the community college setting is aimed at adults, there are many other adult learning theories beyond transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) that could be explored in future studies.

Support staff working in roles other than clerical and secretarial may have a very different perspective about their training and development needs, how best to meet them, and if college efforts are successful in providing appropriate opportunities. Interesting perspectives in this regard might be heard from support staff employees with very specialized positions including building system support personnel (plumbers, environmental control workers, etc.) and those working in other technical areas such as computer information systems and networking.

Similarly, other administrative staff members that are not associated directly with staff development may also have very different opinions regarding the value of support staff participation in professional development. Also important are support staff personnel who choose not to participate in staff development and supervisors who do not support participation in development and training by those they supervise. These voices were not

heard in my study and they may provide both interesting and important information to further inform research and practice.

Regardless of the path the next researcher who studies support staff personnel in the community college setting takes, I hope that the path is taken again—and soon. My conviction that those who serve the community college in a supportive role are vital to the institution was only strengthened during the course of this study. I concur wholeheartedly with this administrative study participant:

> [Support staff] are key to our success as an institution. They run the offices. More so than I do, more so than most of us, they do the work. They do the work that allows us to get done what we need to in the classroom. So what they do, if they didn't do it, school would not be in session. I really do believe that their professional development is crucial for us to be successful as an organization. (A1)

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Appendix A

Iowa State University IRB Approval

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Assurance
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

DATE: 18 January 2008

TO: Juliana G. Huiskamp
722 E. 3rd Street, Cresco, IA 52136-1126

CC: Larry H. Ebbers
N226 Lagomarcino

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

TITLE: **Individual and Institutional Participation in Professional Development for Support Staff Personnel**

IRB ID: 05-351

Approval Date: 17 January 2008
Date for Continuing Review: 16 January 2009

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the modification of this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.

- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.

- **Immediately inform the IRB of** (1) **all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.

- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Appendix B

Initial E-Mail to Supervisors of Prospective Support Staff Participants

Dear Support Staff Supervisor:

The Office of Staff and Organizational Development at MCC is working with Julie Huiskamp, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University and the director of human resources at Northeast Iowa Community College, on a dissertation research study. The title of the study is Individual and Institutional Participation in Professional Development for Community College Support Staff Personnel and it will involve both full-time support staff from across the College and administrative staff from Staff and Organizational Development at MCC.

You are receiving this message because XXX XXXX, an Administrative Assistant under your supervision, meets the criteria to receive an invitation to voluntarily participate in the study. Prior to issuing this invitation to XXX, we are asking for your permission to include her as a prospective participant in the study.

Participants in the study will be involved in a 90-minute focus group interview during work hours. This interview is tentatively scheduled for the week of February 25, 2008. The exact date and time will be determined once the participants are finalized. In addition to the focus group interview, participants will also meet with Ms. Huiskamp for a single 60-minute individual interview in mid- to late March, 2008. The individual interview will also take place during work hours. If requested by the participant, final interview will take place by phone for the purpose of reviewing the transcript of the individual interview. This interview is anticipated to take 30 to 60 minutes and it will be held sometime in April, 2008.

Permission to request support staff participation during paid work time has been given by XXX XXXX, Vice President for HR and Organizational Development. Permission is being secured from all direct supervisors of the persons who qualify for participation. No Administrative Assistant will be invited to participate without prior approval from her direct supervisor.

If you are willing to allow XXX release time from your department for approximately four hours (including travel time to and from the interview site), please respond to this message by Friday, February 1, 2008. If you give your permission, you will be notified in advance of the dates and times for the focus group and individual interviews.

If you have questions about the study or about your staff member's participation, please contact Ms. Huiskamp directly by phone (800-728-2256, x300) or via e-mail (*huiskamj@nicc.edu*). We both appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX, Manager   Julie G. Huiskamp, Doctoral Student
Staff Development and HR Systems   Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Millennial Community College   Iowa State University

Appendix C

Follow-Up E-Mail to Supervisors of Prospective Support Staff Participants

Dear Support Staff Supervisor:

On January 25, you received an e-mail (copy below) about a research project currently underway at MCC. Your permission to allow XXX XXXX to volunteer to participate in the project is being sought. If you give your permission, XXX will receive an e-mail describing the project and will have the option to either participate or to decline. Please respond to XXX XXXX at your earliest convenience to let her know if you would permit XXX to participate if she so chooses or if you would prefer that she not participate in the project. Your time and consideration are greatly appreciated.

XXX XXXX and Julie Huiskamp

Message sent on 1/25/08:

Dear Support Staff Supervisor:

The Office of Staff and Organizational Development at MCC is working with Julie Huiskamp, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University and the director of human resources at Northeast Iowa Community College, on a dissertation research study. The title of the study is Individual and Institutional Participation in Professional Development for Community College Support Staff Personnel and it will involve both full-time support staff from across the College and administrative staff from Staff and Organizational Development at MCC.

You are receiving this message because XXX XXXX, an Administrative Assistant under your supervision, meets the criteria to receive an invitation to voluntarily participate in the study. Prior to issuing this invitation to XXX, we are asking for your permission to include her as a prospective participant in the study.

Participants in the study will be involved in a 90-minute focus group interview during work hours. This interview is tentatively scheduled for the week of February 25, 2008. The exact date and time will be determined once the participants are finalized. In addition to the focus group interview, participants will also meet with Ms. Huiskamp for a single 60-minute individual interview in mid- to late March, 2008. The individual interview will also take place during work hours. If requested by the participant, final interview will take place by phone for the purpose of reviewing the transcript of the individual interview. This interview is anticipated to take 30 to 60 minutes and it will be held sometime in April, 2008.

Permission to request support staff participation during paid work time has been given by XXX XXXX, Vice President for HR and Organizational Development. Permission is being secured from all direct supervisors of the persons who qualify for participation. No Administrative Assistant will be invited to participate without prior approval from her direct supervisor.

If you are willing to allow XXX release time from your department for approximately four hours (including travel time to and from the interview site), please respond to this message by Friday, February 1, 2008. If you give your permission, you will be notified in advance of the dates and times for the focus group and individual interviews.

If you have questions about the study or about your staff member's participation, please contact Ms. Huiskamp directly by phone (800-728-2256, x300) or via e-mail (*huiskamj@nicc.edu*). We both appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX, Manager   Julie G. Huiskamp, Doctoral Student
Staff Development and HR Systems   Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Millennial Community College   Iowa State University

Appendix D

Initial Message to Support Staff Qualified to Participate

Dear_____:

The Office of Staff and Organizational Development at MCC is working with Julie Huiskamp, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University and the director of human resources at Northeast Iowa Community College, on a dissertation research study. The title of the study is *Individual and Institutional Participation in Professional Development for Community College Support Staff Personnel* and it will involve both full-time Administrative Assistants from across the College and administrative staff from Staff and Organizational Development at MCC.

You are receiving this message because you meet the criteria for the study and you are being invited to consider voluntary participation in the study. The selection criteria include:

- Full-time Administrative Assistant
- Level I, II, or III
- Employed at least one (1) year at MCC
- Supervisor approval for participation

- Active Individual Development Plan (IDP)
- Participation in at least 2 professional development activities in past year

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to volunteer, Ms. Huiskamp will provide you with a document called an *Informed Consent Document*. The *Informed Consent* will explain the study in more detail and it will be signed by both you and Ms. Huiskamp. You will be free to stop your participation in the study at any time.

As an Administrative Assistant participant in the study, you would be involved in a 90-minute focus group interview with other Administrative Assistants during work hours. This focus group interview is tentatively scheduled for the week of February 25, 2008. The exact date and time will be determined once the participants are finalized. In addition to the focus group interview, you would meet with Ms. Huiskamp for a single 60-minute individual interview in mid- to late March, 2008. The individual interview will also take place during work hours. If requested, final interview will take place by phone or in person for the purpose of reviewing the transcript of your individual interview. This interview is anticipated to take 30 to 60 minutes and it will be held sometime in April, 2008. Ms. Huiskamp is also requesting access to your IDP so she can discuss it with you during your individual interview.

The questions asked of you during the focus group and the individual interview will deal with your reasons for participating in professional development activities, the role that professional development plays in helping you meet your workplace, educational, and career goals, and about the role you believe professional development plays in furthering the mission of MCC.

Permission for your participation during paid work time has been given by XXX XXXX, Vice President for HR and Organizational Development and has also been secured from your direct supervisor in advance of your receipt of this invitation to participate in the study.

If you are interested in volunteering to participate in this study, please respond to this message **by February 11, 2008**. If you have questions about the study before or after making your decision about participation, please contact Ms. Huiskamp directly by phone (800-728-2256, x300) or via e-mail (*huiskamj@nicc.edu)*. We both appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX, Manager   Julie G. Huiskamp, Doctoral Student
Staff Development and HR Systems   Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Millennial Community College   Iowa State University

Appendix E

Follow-Up to Support Staff Qualified to Participate

Dear_____:

About a week ago, you received an e-mail from XXX XXX and me inviting you to participate in a research study that I am conducting a MCC. The purpose of the study is to understand the value of professional development for those who participate in it and for the college.

You have not yet responded to the invitation so this message has two purposes: 1) to assure you that it's not too late to accept the invitation if you are still interested in participating in the study and 2) to provide you with more information about the study if you are unsure about participation.

I have attached the Informed Consent document for the study for your review. This document describes the study in a bit more detail and it might answer questions that you have about the study. You are also welcome to contact me directly by e-mail (huiskamj@nicc.edu) or phone (800-728-2256, x300) if you have questions.

Let me assure you that your participation is entirely voluntary and if you are not interested or are too busy to participate, I understand and I thank you for your consideration of my request.

Should you decide that you would like to take part in the study, the focus group interviews will be held at MCC on Thursday, February 28 and Friday, February 29. Your commitment would be for one of those days for approximately 90 minutes during work time.

If you are interested in taking part in the study, please let me know with an e-mail response by Wednesday, February 20. Again, thank you very much!

Julie Huiskamp

Appendix F

Informed Consent Document for Support Staff Participants

ISU IRB #1	05-351
Approved Date:	17 January 2008
Expiration Date:	16 January 2009
Initial by:	jlc

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INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: *Individual and Institutional Participation in Professional Development for Support Staff Personnel*

Investigators: Julie G. Huiskamp
Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Iowa State University
Mailing Address:
Human Resources Office
Northeast Iowa Community College
1625 Highway 150
Calmar, IA 52132
563-562-3263, x300
huiskamj@nicc.edu

Dr. Larry H. Ebbers, University Professor
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Iowa State University
N226 Lagomarcino Hall
Ames, IA 50011
515-294-8067
lebbers@iastate.edu

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to understand the benefits and challenges of staff development requirements for support staff personnel in community colleges. You are being invited to participate in this study because you hold (or previously held) an administrative staff position at Millennial Community College that is affiliated with the Office of Staff and Organizational Development.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately three months. During the study, you may expect the following study procedures to be followed:

- your participation in an individual interview with the investigator will be requested. During the interview, you will be asked questions about the professional development program at MCC. During the interview, you will be free to tell the investigator that you would

ISU IRB #1	05-351
Approved Date:	17 January 2008
Expiration Date:	16 January 2009
Initial by:	jlc

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> prefer not to answer any of the questions asked of you and the investigator will honor your request. This interview will take approximately sixty (60) minutes.

- your participation in a follow-up interview to discuss a draft of the interview analysis with the investigator will be requested. Prior to this follow-up interview, you will be given the draft to read. This follow-up interview will take approximately thirty (30) minutes.

Please note that the individual interview and the follow-up interview will, with your prior permission, be taped and transcripts will be made from the tapes. The tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the investigator's home and will not be made available to anyone other than the investigator. Your name will not be used in the transcripts or in the dissertation that is written from this study. The tapes will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. Your signature on this Informed Consent Document provides the investigator with your permission to tape the focus group and individual interviews.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you beyond the opportunity to think about and discuss your experiences with professional development at MCC. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing new insights into the value of professional development for community college support staff personnel and the improvements that can be made to staff development programs to enhance the benefits and level of satisfaction for those support staff personnel.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study nor will you be compensated monetarily for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

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To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- the tapes from the interviews will be stored in a locked file cabinet and they will be used only for transcription and use in the dissertation.

- you will be assigned a pseudonym (a made-up name) and it will be used when you are quoted or described in the dissertation.

- all computer files of transcripts, interview notes, and other confidential materials will be password protected.

If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact *Dr. Larry H. Ebbers, University Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University, N226 Lagomarcino Hall, Ames, IA 50011, 515-294-8067, lebbers@iastate.edu*. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact: *the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu*, or the *Director of the Office of Research Assurances, (515) 294-3115*, both are located at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you withdraw from the study, your comments will be deleted from the transcript and not used in the study.

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

_____   _____
Subject's Signature   Date

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INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Julie G. Huiskamp, Investigator   Date

Appendix G

Informed Consent Document for Administrative Staff Participants

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INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: *Individual and Institutional Participation in Professional Development for Support Staff Personnel*

Investigators: Julie G. Huiskamp
Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Iowa State University
Mailing Address:
Human Resources Office
Northeast Iowa Community College
1625 Highway 150
Calmar, IA 52132
563-562-3263, x300
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Dr. Larry H. Ebbers, University Professor
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Iowa State University
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This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to understand the benefits and challenges of staff development requirements for support staff personnel in community colleges. You are being invited to participate in this study because you hold (or previously held) an administrative staff position at Millennial Community College that is affiliated with the Office of Staff and Organizational Development.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately three months. During the study, you may expect the following study procedures to be followed:

- your participation in an individual interview with the
  investigator will be requested. During the interview,
  you will be asked questions about the professional
  development program at MCC. During the interview,
  you will be free to tell the investigator that you would

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> prefer not to answer any of the questions asked of you
> and the investigator will honor your request. This
> interview will take approximately sixty (60) minutes.
>
> - your participation in a follow-up interview to discuss a
>   draft of the interview analysis with the investigator will
>   be requested. Prior to this follow-up interview, you
>   will be given the draft to read. This follow-up
>   interview will take approximately thirty (30) minutes.

Please note that the individual interview and the follow-up interview will, with your prior permission, be taped and transcripts will be made from the tapes. The tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the investigator's home and will not be made available to anyone other than the investigator. Your name will not be used in the transcripts or in the dissertation that is written from this study. The tapes will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. Your signature on this Informed Consent Document provides the investigator with your permission to tape the focus group and individual interviews.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you beyond the opportunity to think about and discuss your experiences with professional development at MCC. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing new insights into the value of professional development for community college support staff personnel and the improvements that can be made to staff development programs to enhance the benefits and level of satisfaction for those support staff personnel.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study nor will you be compensated monetarily for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

ISU IRB #1	05-351
Approved Date:	17 January 2008
Expiration Date:	16 January 2009
Initial by:	jlc

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To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- the tapes from the interviews will be stored in a locked file cabinet and they will be used only for transcription and use in the dissertation.

- you will be assigned a pseudonym (a made-up name) and it will be used when you are quoted or described in the dissertation.

- all computer files of transcripts, interview notes, and other confidential materials will be password protected.

If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact *Dr. Larry H. Ebbers, University Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University, N226 Lagomarcino Hall, Ames, IA 50011, 515-294-8067, lebbers@iastate.edu*. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact: *the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu*, or the *Director of the Office of Research Assurances, (515) 294-3115*, both are located at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. Should you withdraw from the study, your comments will be deleted from the transcript and not used in the study.

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

_____   _____
Subject's Signature   Date

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INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Julie G. Huiskamp, Investigator   Date

Appendix H

Interview Guide for Focus Group Sessions

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. Why do you participate in professional development? What motivates your participation?

2. What types of professional development activities have you found to be most valuable to you? By types, I mean activities that enhance your work, activities that continue your formal education, or activities that provide personal development.

3. What have been the most valuable outcomes from your participation in professional development activities?

4. What obstacles to your participation in professional development activities have you encountered? How have you been able to work around/through these obstacles? If so, how? If not, why not?

5. Do you believe that Millennial Community College (MCC) values professional development for its staff and faculty? Is participation in professional development by staff and faculty a priority for MCC?

6. Does MCC value participation in professional development equally among all staff groups (faculty, administrative staff, and support staff)?

7. What benefits do you believe MCC receives as a result of your participation in professional development?

8. Do you believe that the students of MCC benefit from your participation in professional development? If so, how? If not, why not?

9. What changes would you like to see made to professional development at MCC?

10. Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you would like to contribute?

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Appendix I

Interview Guide for Administrative Staff Interviews

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

1. Personal/Demographic Information:
   a. Years of service to MCC.
   b. Job title.
   c. Description of primary duties.
   d. Highest level of education achieved.
   e. Relationship to Staff and Organizational Development.
   f. Other positions held at MCC.
   g. Other positions held outside of MCC.
   h. Frequency of participation in professional development.
   i. Age.

2. Describe the specific reasons you believe support staff have for participating in professional development.

3. How do you believe participation in professional development assists support staff in performing their work at MCC?

4. How do you believe participation in professional development assists support staff in attain their educational and/or career goals?

5. How do you believe participation in professional development allows support staff to achieve personal development?

6. What are the obstacles to support staff participation in professional development?

7. Are there other ways, in addition to participation in professional development, that support staff are able to enhance work skills? Career/educational goals? Personal development?

8. Do you believe that MCC supports professional development for support staff at an appropriate level? If so, describe why you have this belief. If not, why not?

9. Do you believe most MCC supervisors encourage support staff participation in professional development? Why do you feel this way?

10. Do you believe most MCC departments value support staff participation in professional development? Why do you feel this way?

11. Are there professional development activities that have not been made available to support staff that you believe would be beneficial? If so, what are they?

12. Describe the mission of MCC as you understand it. Do you think that support staff participation in professional development forwards the mission of the institution? If so, how? If not, why not?

13. Do you think that support staff participation in professional development contributes to student satisfaction? If so, how? If not, why not?

14. Do you think that support staff participation in professional development contributes toward MCC's organizational development? If so, how? If not, why not?

15. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you would like to contribute?

Appendix J

Interview Guide for Support Staff Interviews

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH SUPPORT STAFF

1. Personal/Demographic Information:
   a. Years of service to MCC.
   b. Primary work setting/department.
   c. Description of primary duties.
   d. Highest level of education achieved.
   e. Educational goals.
   f. Frequency of participation in professional development.
   g. Other positions held at MCC.
   h. Other positions held outside of MCC.
   i. Career goals.
   j. Age.

2. Describe the specific reasons for your participation in professional development.

3. How does participation in professional development help you with your work at MCC?

4. How does participation in professional development help you attain your educational and/or career goals?

5. How does participation in professional development help you with your own personal development?

6. What are the obstacles to your participation in professional development?

7. Are there other ways, in addition to participation in professional development, that you enhance your work skills? Career/educational goals? Personal development?

8. Do you believe that MCC supports your professional development at an appropriate level? If so, describe why you have this belief. If not, why not?

9. Do you have the support of your direct supervisor for participation in professional development? Why do you feel this way?

10. Does the department in which you work value support staff participation in professional development? Why do you feel this way?

11. Are there professional development activities that have not been made available to you that you believe would be beneficial? If so, what are they?

12. Describe the mission of MCC as you understand it. Do you think that support staff participation in professional development forwards the mission of the institution? If so, how? If not, why not?

13. Do you think that support staff participation in professional development contributes to student satisfaction? If so, how? If not, why not?

14. Do you think that support staff participation in professional development contributes toward MCC's organizational development? If so, how? If not, why not?

15. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you would like to contribute?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.
Cicero

It is difficult to write this page after a nine-year journey. I am very fearful that I will neglect to thank someone who has helped me along the way. I must begin with my major professor, Larry H. Ebbers, Ph.D. Dr. Ebbers doesn't know the meaning of the word *quit*. He never quits himself and he won't let anyone else quit either. Among his many stellar qualities, I am appreciative of his support, his sense of humor, and his keen editing skills. The other members of my POS committee have also provided support, encouragement, and wisdom along the way. My thanks to: Frankie Santos Laanan, Ph.D.; Patricia Randolph Leigh, Ph.D.; Barbara L. Licklider, Ph.D.; and Daniel C. Robinson, Ph.D. Eternal thanks go also to the *Queen of Customer Service*, Judy Weiland, Records Analyst for the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at ISU, for all of her help. I am also grateful to all the wonderful faculty members during my ISU years.

A big thanks to all the members of the Fall 2003 ISU-ELPS cohort and to those who joined us along the way. Everyone in the cohort has a hand in this dissertation in one way or another. My special thanks to Kelly Faga, Ph.D., Wendy Lingo, Wendy Mihm-Herold, Nancy Muecke, Ph.D., Robin Shaffer-Lilienthal, Lisa Stock, Ph.D., Mollie Teckenburg, Joan Williams, and Laurie Wolf, Ph.D. for the after-class therapy sessions, for the e-mails of encouragement, for listening (endlessly), and for getting me through a very rough spot in my life. Thanks also to my friends and mentors, Lynn Scott Cochrane, Ph.D. (Scottie) and her husband, Louis I. Middleman, Ph.D. (Louie) for their encouragement and support. I must also invoke the memory of Gerald G. Hodges, Ph.D. a fabulous teacher, a wonderful librarian, and a trusted friend who helped launch me on this journey.

My friends and co-workers at Northeast Iowa Community College have been eternally patient with and very supportive of me. Thank you to NICC's president, Penelope H. Wills, Ph.D., for truly tremendous support and encouragement and to the other members of Cabinet—Janet Bullerman, Tracy Kruse, Dan Neenan, John Noel (my boss), Cindy O'Bryon, Curt Oldfield, Linda Peterson, Ph.D., Ken Vande Berg, and Liang Chee Wee, Ph.D. My special thanks to the women who really run the office of human resources at NICC—Lois Poshusta and Joy Sim. My thanks also to Dr. Linda Peterson and Katherine Whitsitt for enduring and helping me with a (very) rough draft of this study.

Thank you to all of the very special people at *Millennial Community College*. I can't name you, but you know who you are. You wrote this dissertation with your stories, your dedication, and your commitment to the mission of the community college. I will always be grateful for your help, your support, and your friendship.

Finally, and most especially, I extend my sincere thanks to my family. To my nephew and niece, Scott and Shannon, thanks for taking me in during my research and for listening to my endless stories. To my brother, Craig, who kept asking "Are you done yet?" in his e-mails. To my sister, Kathy, who will listen (if not agree) no matter what. To my sons, Kelly and Payne, who always make life interesting, but who I wouldn't trade for anything. And to Daniel…we've been through so much in 33 years together. Thank you for your patience, support, and love. They mean everything to me.

VITA

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