

2009

Life experiences of displaced workers: From closing plants to their journey through Iowa community colleges

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**Life experiences of displaced workers: From closing plants to their journey through
Iowa community colleges**

by

Anisha La Velle Samuels

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2010

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DEDICATION

To my late father Dr. Charles L. Samuels

who wanted to be there when his baby walked across that stage to get hooded.

To my family, friends and supporters who refused to let me quit this pursuit and convinced me to continue to honor his wishes.

Thanks for all the love and support. See you center stage.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation process has been an educational experience I definitely would recommend for others. There are many people I need to thank. First and foremost, I thank my major Professor Dr. Larry Ebbers and President Rob Denson for making this all happen for me. Thank you both for giving me the opportunity to work closely with you and for your guidance. Thanks again Rob for showing me how one takes over the world by giving me access to DMAACC.

To my friend Joe Dehart, who made work enjoyable with his jokes and support—I enjoyed coming to work every day because the environment was conducive to my success. I would also like to thank DMAACC President's Cabinet: Kim Linduska, Mary Chapman, Gregory Martin, Ganesh Ganpat, Todd Jones, Joe Robbins, Sandy Tryon, Doug Williams, and Laurie Wolf for assisting me with all the many assignments Rob gave me. You all were very encouraging of my pursuit of this degree and provided me with useful materials to make my life easier. Thank you immensely.

Finally, I must thank my doctoral committee: Dr. Larry Ebbers, Dr. Frankie Laanan, Dan Robinson, Chris Duree, Robyn Johnson, and Latrice Eggleston. Thanks for sitting down with me to go over my unfinished dissertation chapter by chapter.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to illuminate the life experiences of displaced workers enrolled in community colleges for retraining and their views on obtaining employment after completion of a degree. The study is important because it provides qualitative data that will inform community college academic leadership, faculty, student affairs professionals, staff, and others. These data can be used to create a culture of evidence and inform diverse audiences about the experiences of displaced workers in the community college. Ultimately, data should be used to inform leaders, faculty, and staff about how to address the issues displaced workers face in the classrooms and how best to make accommodations for them.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

During the past 10 years in Iowa, and more recently around the nation due to the receding economy, a number of manufacturing plants have closed. The plant closures and downsizings have been the result of mergers, market fluctuations, and outsourcing to other countries to take advantage of cheap labor (Levine, 2004). Although these actions are beneficial to companies they create a strain on families who have to relocate if there are no comparable businesses or start-up plants in the area to fill the void. In many cases this also results in an increase in enrollment in community colleges as laid-off individuals prepare for new careers (Hupp, 2009).

Due to the recent closure of many iconic plants in Iowa—including Maytag, Electrolux, and International Paper Company—workers have been laid off from their positions after numerous years of employment. Some workers had been employed with their respective companies for more than 30 years and had been out of school even longer. Facing life-changing experiences, many of them decided to return to community college for retraining programs using funding from the Trade Adjustment Assistance program (TAA).

TAA, established in 1962 and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides income support, job training, and other benefits for manufacturing workers who lose their jobs as a result of international trade (Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2007). The Department of Labor must certify that workers in a particular layoff have been adversely affected by international trade in order for workers to receive TAA benefits and services. This certification process begins when a petition is filed with the Department of Labor on behalf of a group of laid-off workers. The Department of Labor then surveys the firm

undergoing the layoff and its customers and also reviews data on the firm's industry to determine whether it meets the criteria for certification (GAO, 2007). Once certification is complete workers are eligible for benefits and services. Workers enrolled in the program have access to a variety of benefits and services, including:

- *Training.* Participants may receive up to 130 weeks of training, including 104 weeks of vocational training and 26 weeks of remedial training, such as English as a second language or adult basic education.
- *Extended income support.* Participants may receive a total of 104 weeks of extended income support beyond the 26 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits available in most states. This includes 78 weeks of extended income support while workers are completing vocational training and another 26 weeks if workers are completing remedial training. To qualify for extended income support, participants must be enrolled in training by the later of two dates: either 16 weeks after being laid off or 8 weeks after the Department of Labor certified their petition.
- *Job search and relocation benefits.* Payments are available to help participants search for a job in a different geographical area and to relocate to a different area to take a job. Participants may receive up to a maximum of \$1,250 to conduct a job search. The maximum relocation benefit includes 90 percent of the participant's relocation expenses plus a lump sum payment of up to \$1,250.
- *Wage insurance benefit.* The wage insurance benefit is designed for older workers. To be certified as eligible for the wage insurance benefit, workers must have been laid off from a firm that had a significant portion of workers age 50 or over who lacked transferable skills. Workers must be 50 years of age or older and find re-

employment within 26 weeks of being laid off that pays less than \$50,000 and less than they previously earned. Workers who meet these criteria are eligible to receive 50 percent of the difference between their new and old wages up to a maximum of \$10,000 over 2 years. In order to receive the benefit, workers forgo TAA-funded training.

- *Health coverage benefit.* The health coverage benefit helps workers pay for health care insurance through a tax credit. Workers can choose to receive the benefit in two ways: as an advance option that covers 65 percent of their monthly premiums, allowing them to lower the amount they have to pay out of pocket for health coverage, or as an end-of-year tax credit that is claimed on their income taxes.

(GAO, 2007, pp. 4-5)

As an example, in July 2009 Iowa Workforce Development issued a letter to former employees of “The Plant” stating that it had been certified by the U.S. Department of Labor for retraining benefits under the Trade Act of 2009 (see Appendix A). Employees who were laid off between May 18, 2008 and the certification date were eligible to apply for TAA benefits. An informational meeting was scheduled to assist the former employees in understanding the benefits and the process for accessing them. They were asked to bring just a pen and a copy of their resume or a list of work history. Once the initial TAA eligibility paperwork had been completed and their individual eligibility was verified they discussed the benefits in detail. During the meeting, details about timeframes for accessing the services and the paperwork that must be completed for each service were discussed. This paperwork was very important because the training benefits were good as long as Congress funded this program or made no contradictory legislative changes. If the former employees did not use

these benefits at that time they still would be able to access them at any Workforce Development Office in the continental United States, but only if the eligibility paperwork was completed.

In the present study, during one interview, one of the participants of this study explained some of the issues displaced workers faced. Some displaced workers experienced difficulty in filling out the paperwork and were unable to create a resume due to lack of knowledge of computer programs and because they lacked some basic skills. They knew that because their skills from their most recent positions were not as widely needed as they once had been, they needed retraining to acquire new skills.

The pay they received from prior employment was not comparable to the entry level positions for which they would qualify. Companies such as Maytag, International Paper Company, and Electrolux paid some workers \$30 per hour. An entry level position sometimes pays \$11 per hour (Ryberg, 2007). With such a drastic pay cut many displaced workers had to find other solutions. Hundreds of displaced workers had to change careers to find employment to support their families. It is projected that the new training displaced workers receive from community colleges will assist them in making transitions into the workforce.

Problem

Companies nationally, and in particular throughout the state of Iowa, have been affected by the receding economy and have closed their doors. This has forced loyal workers to find other employment, but they lacked the skills needed to compete in today's job market. There is an abundance of research on the experiences of older students entering or returning to community colleges, and many dissertations have been written on this topic (Hogan,

2003). Little research, however, has been done to highlight the experiences of displaced workers returning to community college in rural, urban, and metro campus settings. The perception that community colleges will assist displaced workers in occupational retraining and new employment placement is explored in the present study.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the life experiences of displaced workers enrolled in community colleges for retraining and their views on obtaining employment upon completion of the programs of study. This study was designed to inform community college advisors, faculty, and leaders about the effects plant closures have on displaced workers. It addresses how those effects carry over into the decision-making process to attend community college. The intent of this study was to provide needed information and recommendations for administrators to assist displaced workers transition through community college.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to obtain information that will help community college professionals understand the issues displaced workers face when attending community college and how to best meet their needs. The overarching question asked in this research study is: “How do displaced workers make meaning of their unique experience journeying through the community college?” The following questions guided this study:

1. How do displaced workers describe their life experiences while enrolled in community colleges?
2. How do displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it provides qualitative data that informs community college academic leadership, faculty, student services, staff, and others about displaced workers enrolled in their system. These data can be used to create a culture of evidence and inform diverse audiences about the experiences of displaced workers in the community college. Ultimately, data should be used to inform leaders, faculty, and staff about the issues displaced workers face in the community colleges and how to assist them.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study I used Kübler-Ross's (1968) grief theory, and Sunoo and Solomon's (1996) stages of grief theory to explain the psychological stages displaced workers experience. To some workers losing a job is like experiencing a death. Bennett (1995) stated there are some psychological effects of job loss on workers. Many have a difficult time processing what happened to them before, during, and after losing their jobs. Displaced workers often feel they are to blame for the organization's ills. Self-esteem is sometimes destroyed; the only performance mistake former employees feel they made was to look after the company's welfare more than their own. The disappointment of losing a job can lead some displaced workers to depression, drinking, and drug problems; family difficulties; and other emotional and physical disorders (Makawatsakul, 2003).

According to Sunoo and Solomon (1996), there are six stages one goes through in bereavement: shock and denial, anger, guilt, depression, acceptance, and growth. These bereavement stages are displayed by many displaced workers experiencing job loss. Most of the participants in this study were transitioning through the stages of grief due to job loss. Using this theory assisted me in understanding which stages my participants were in as they

made meaning of their experiences as displaced workers. These different stages of grief also helped to explain why they decided to attend community college. It is through understanding these stages of grief that one can better begin to process and heal through a difficult time. Community college administration, faculty, and staff will be better able to service these individuals if they understand the grieving process.

Tentative Presuppositions

I had two primary presuppositions about displaced workers and this study. First, I assumed all study participants would be so devastated by job loss that they would find it difficult to attend community college. Second, I assumed they all would find community college coursework too academically challenging to persist (Owen & Fitch, 2003).

Definitions

This section presents definitions for key terms as they were used for the purposes of this study.

Acceptance: generally confused with the notion of being all right or okay with what happened, this stage of grief is about accepting that the old reality is gone and recognizing that the new reality is the permanent reality (Kuebler-Ross, 1969, p. 25).

Anger: an emotion that can manifest as rage, resentment, and envy; it is sometimes displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment at random (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

Community Colleges: colleges awarding no higher than a 2-year degree; generally, comprehensive institutions that provide: (a) general and liberal education, (b) career and vocational education, and (c) adult and continuing education (StateUniversity.com, 2009).

Denial: a “psychological defense mechanism in which confrontation with a personal problem or with reality is avoided by denying the existence of the problem or reality”

(Webster, 2003, p. 333).

Depression: a “sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentrating” (Webster, 2003, p. 335).

Displaced workers: individuals who lose their jobs owing to a facility shut down or layoff and who have previously maintained a stable employment history but face structural barriers to reemployment (Jacobson, Lalonde, & Sullivan, 2005).

Growth: the process by which one overcomes a difficult situation and advances to achieve established goals.

Guilt: the emotion one feels when one wishes a devastating event happened to oneself instead of to others.

Shock: the initial feeling of surprise and disbelief followed by numbness a person experiences when confronted with devastating news.

Summary

This study illuminated the life experiences of older displaced workers returning to community college. A theoretical framework based on the grief theory was utilized in data collection and analysis in order to explore the unique job loss and educational experiences of these men and women in their own voices and from their own perspectives.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature related to the various components of this study and is divided into six main sections: (a) definition of displaced workers, (b) experiences of displaced workers, (c) problems displaced workers face after job loss, (d) experience of returning to the classroom, (e) probability of employment after completing

community college, and (f) preparedness of displaced workers for employment in a different field.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the methodological approach used in this qualitative study, participants, data collection methods, data analysis procedure, trustworthiness criteria, limitations, and delimitations.

Chapter 4 includes profiles of the three men and three women who participated in this study. These profiles allow one to gain a deeper understanding of displaced workers experiences.

Chapter 5 consists of a presentation of the findings of the study, organized by the five themes that emerged from the data analysis: (a) mixed emotions, (b) adapting to an environmental change, (c) perception of community college, (d) preparedness for new employment, and (e) probability of employment opportunities in a receding economy. The application of the findings and themes to the related literature is also presented.

Chapter 6 consists of a discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study, implications for community colleges regarding displaced workers, as well as recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to uncover the issues that displaced workers face after job loss and examine the role community college plays in them obtaining employment. The review is based on examination of the literature relating to older displaced workers, unemployed due to plant closures, entering community colleges for retraining. Extensive examination of the literature showed there was an abundance of information about displaced workers and their depression and financial hardships. The six issues that are being addressed in this review are: definition of a displaced worker, experiences of displaced workers, problems displaced workers face after job loss, experience of returning to the classroom, probability of employment after completing community college, and preparedness of displaced workers for employment in a different field. In order to understand displaced workers experiences in community college a brief overview of the history and role of community college is presented first.

Brief History of Community Colleges

During the 20th century of American higher education, community colleges came into existence. Community colleges are institutions that offer a variety of programs including 6-month vocational diplomas. Some offer 1- and 2-year vocational technical and preprofessional certificates. Two-year programs in general lead to associate's degrees, which can be transferred to a 4-year college or university.

Most community colleges are public institutions and have an open access policy. This means nearly everyone who applies may be accepted. Community colleges are a unique component of higher education because the curriculum is flexible and can be tailored to meet

local and societal needs by providing one or more of five functions: general education; vocational education; technical education; adult continuing education, which includes remedial and college preparatory education, counseling, placement; and student development services (Iowa Department of Education [IDE], 2008)

The major growth of community colleges occurred after World War II. Many veterans sought to retrain for different vocations and to continue their education utilizing GI benefits, which provide additional financial and economic security to colleges. Community colleges gain funding by applying for Federal Education Grants to aid displaced workers in developing new career skills.

Brief History of Iowa's Community Colleges

There are 15 community colleges in the state of Iowa. The first 2-year postsecondary educational institution was established in 1918 by Mason City Schools. There was no law that authorized 2-year post secondary educational programs. By 1919, Mason City Junior College was accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (IDE, 2008). In 1920 additional community colleges were organized from the rapidly spreading movement. By 1930 there were at least 32 towns and cities that included public junior colleges as part of their public school system.

The first law authorizing the establishment of public junior colleges was passed in 1927 by the 42nd General assembly. This law permitted schools offering instructional programs at a higher level than a four year high school course to be established. These colleges were able to provide postsecondary courses of one or two years. Between the years 1918 and 1953 a total of 35 different public junior colleges were established through public school systems. Some community colleges closed and then reopened leaving a final total of

15 community colleges in Iowa by 1967. Legislation provided fiscal support for community colleges through student tuition and federal, state, and local funds. (IED, 2008)

Today Iowa community colleges operate on a statewide strategic plan that is evaluated every five years. The plan was approved by community college presidents, the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees, and the State Board of education, and legislature in 2001. The Specific goals of community colleges include: provide high quality education programs assessable to all Iowans; develop high-skilled workers to meet the needs of Iowa's changing economy; maximize financial and human resources to provide comprehensive community college services to Iowans and allow Iowans to compete on a notional and international level; demonstrate the achievement of system mission goals effectively and efficiently; and "recruit, enroll, retain and/ or graduate persons of underrepresented groups (i.e., gender, race, socioeconomic status) in all programs" (IED, 2008, p. 3).

Definition of Displaced Workers

In the literature the common definition of a displaced worker was "a person on layoff with a stable employment history who has little chance of being recalled to a job with their old employer or even in their old industry" (Owen & Fitch, 2003, p. 191). Another researcher defined displaced workers as "fulltime workers who have been permanently separated from their jobs and their paychecks against their wishes" (Uchitelle, 2006, p. 5). And still others, such as Jacobson et al. (2005), defined displaced workers as individuals who lose their jobs owing to a facility shut down or layoff and who have previously maintained a stable employment history but face structural barriers to re-employment.

Displaced workers differ from the unemployed who quickly find a new job with the same skills because displaced workers are more affected by the cyclical economic downturns in the region. They tend to work in declining industries. Moreover, re-employment for dislocated workers is more difficult because their job search skills are extremely outdated and they either lack basic skills or possess skills that are no longer desired in their regional economy (Jacobson et al., 2005).

Due to recent plant closings, downsizing, outsourcing, and technological advances many people find themselves out of work. Retraining of workers from industries and jobs that have either moved abroad or ceased to exist also has become a growing need, and President Bush designated community colleges as the primary agent for accomplishing that retraining (Levine, 2004). Many displaced workers have no other choice than to enroll in community colleges for either technical training programs or other training programs in order to eventually find meaningful employment. Typically, dislocated workers range in age from 25 to 54, and their racial characteristics mirror those of the national labor force. Males, however, tend to be slightly more affected by this type of job loss (Templin, 2004).

Templin (2004), in his article “Meeting the Needs of a Changing Society,” stated that “capacity is rapidly becoming the most critical challenge facing community colleges” (p. 231). More students ages 35 and up are enrolling in community colleges. Not surprisingly, older adults choose community colleges because of its academic and special programs (Laanan, 2003). Older adults are increasing the community college’s enrollment rate as well.

Experiences of Displaced Workers

Many displaced workers share the same sentiment of being betrayed by the company that had shown them loyalty for so many years. They were once proud to work for

the company and proud of the skills they possessed. Their employment provided them a great life, great car, nice house, and excellent benefits. Often there was prestige that was associated with the company and the occupation, making it difficult for workers to detach themselves from it. According to Carroll, Blatner, Alt, Schuster, and Findley (2000), remaining in the occupation but leaving the company provided a sense of continuity and mitigated the sense of loss associated with losing one's job. It is not easy for displaced workers to find employment that pays close to the amount they were making. They have to take a pay cut and find jobs that offer health benefits. According to Mauer (2001), these workers, considering their age and experience in different areas, have a difficult time finding jobs because of their lack of training or education.

Problems Displaced Workers Face after Job Loss

As in any crisis situation, displaced workers are faced with feelings of scorn, resentment, fear, inadequacy, depression, and hope, to name a few. With the loss of health benefits there is an increase in the number of mental health issues that go undetected and untreated (Longworth, 2008). There are a lot of feelings of "down and out" because society "mandates" that people should work hard for a living. The loss of a job to many means the loss of identity. Maida (1989) stated that a person with a lengthy attachment to a company, when threatened with job loss, experiences crisis and separation similar to that experienced during bereavement, divorce, or a natural disaster. It is difficult for some displaced workers to reinvent their life stories for themselves. They no longer find identity within their jobs. In today's job market people are switching careers and places of employment within a couple of years. Some displaced workers have been on the same job for 20 years or more. Sennet's (1998) work showed that adaptation to these new economic conditions may be particularly

difficult for those with few resources with which to reconstruct themselves into new kinds of workers. This can cause depression or other mental health issues. Although there are programs to help displaced workers through these trying times, some issues are not attended to because of lack of insurance (Sennet).

One problem quite evident during any loss of employment is financial hardship (Makawatsakul, 2003). Once the loss of employment sets in and the unemployment check runs out, life starts to spiral downhill if displaced workers are not prepared. The financial burden of house payments, utilities, car insurance, and other everyday expenses is difficult for many to maintain. Some bills go unpaid and possessions may start being repossessed. Lack of money can cause displaced workers to buy cheaper products, which in turn could lead to poor health issues. Perrucci, Perrucci & Targ (1997) stated that doctor visits are few and far between because of the lack of insurance or additional monies to pay copayments; the copayment for an office visit could be used instead for food.

Another problem that occurs is relocation. Often the company from which displaced workers have been laid off has moved overseas and there are no other existing companies in the area that pay nearly the same wage. The jobs that are left in that area pay minimum wage and cannot support the displaced workers' expenses or families. Being forced to relocate to another city is challenging in itself. In addition, there may be no money to relocate and some displaced workers who previously owned houses may have to downsize to an apartment. This affects the stability of the family. Owen and Fitch (2003), in their study on displaced workers, found that financial pressures due to plant closings increased marital problems as well as behavioral problems of the children. Children tend to act out their frustrations in

school as well. The relocation of the family to a new town causes anxiety in children and the entire family.

Fear of change is consistent in many displaced workers and their families. Once the fear subsides and the displaced worker decides that continuing his or her education is a priority, new challenges of entering the classroom begin (Owen & Fitch, 2003)

Experience of Returning to the Classroom

Many of the displaced workers enrolled in community college training programs and developmental education classes find it difficult to get into the “swing of things.” They are not used to being students and may feel overwhelmed with school as a whole. Literature shows that displaced workers are usually older than most of the students in the classroom (Templin, 2004). Some displaced workers have children the same age as their classmates. The feelings of being too old to learn new things can become a deterrent for displaced workers.

Community colleges offer basic skills classes. Many displaced workers have not had a math class in years (Owen & Finch 2003), and sometimes there is a need to be refreshed in the area. The fear of not being able to understand the material being taught can discourage many displaced workers. Once fear and pride dissipates and the displaced workers start to take advantage of the assistance offered to them, such as career counseling and study groups, there can be successful outcomes. Their stint in community college can be rewarding.

On the other hand, Jacobson et al. (2005) stated that older displaced workers have shorter work lives than do younger students. Therefore, enrolling in a community college may not be a wise decision for some displaced workers. Time may be better spent looking for employment, especially if learning is not taking place as rapidly as it does for the younger

students. Employment opportunities may pass by some displaced workers while they are pursuing education. Generally speaking, displaced workers who have chosen to further their education are willing to take that chance.

Research has shown that many of the displaced workers do not persist in college if they have high basic skills needed for employment (Simmons, 1995). The higher skilled displaced worker is defined as a worker who has had some formal education. This worker may finish a certification course only if employment doesn't come before completion of classes.

On the other side of this argument, Simmons (1995) stated that dislocated workers with little previous education and low basic skills were more likely to persist than were the better educated workers. This persistence is partially due to enrolling in training for high paying occupations, attending classes full time, completing the credits in which they were enrolled and making long-term commitments to their retraining goals.

Occupational–technical certificate programs attract dislocated workers who want to become a more productive part of the workforce again. These programs provide students with the opportunity to meet their career goals while meeting the goals of the community colleges (Lohman & Dingerson, 2005). Still, even with these opportunities for new training skills, displaced workers seem to drop out of these programs before a certificate is awarded.

Probability of Employment after Completing Community College

The probability of employment after attending community college depends on the length of training, class attendance, credits, and type of jobs for which displaced workers are applying. Literature suggests women, minorities, and less educated workers exhibit significant disadvantage in their re-employment outcomes (Vinokur, Price, Schul, &

Juori,2000). However Jacobson and colleagues (2005) argued it is important to allow some transition time immediately upon leaving community college to find gainful employment. Workers' employment rate tends to be lower immediately after leaving community college than it is after some time has passed. Research has shown that some displaced workers are worse off than they were prior to enrolling in community colleges. Within a year following training, employment rates of displaced workers tend to rise. There is hope for gainful employment after community college completion but it is all situational. Jacobson et al. (2005) suggested that data and a tracking system be developed to ensure complete data on displaced workers employment rates after completion of community college.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), there are more than 2 million jobs for nurses in the country, and the profession is one of the 10 occupations projected to have the largest numbers of new jobs in the coming years. Displaced workers who enroll in nursing programs have a higher probability for employment in these areas. Community colleges can track the number of students completing the nursing program as well as others.

Iowa displaced workers can increase their probability of employment through community colleges and the training programs the state has established targeted toward workforce development. Those programs include: the Iowa Industrial New Jobs Training Programs (260E), the Iowa Jobs Training Program (260F), and Accelerated Career Education (ACE 260G). Community colleges are responsible for delivering these programs, but funding is provided by the Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDE, 2008).

The Iowa Industrial New Jobs Training Programs (260E), assists businesses in the creation of new jobs or new positions in Iowa. Training certificates are issued by the

community college in the district where the new or expanding business is located. The number of individuals trained increased to 38,687 in 2008. (IDE, 2008).

The Iowa Jobs Training Program (260F) is administered by the Iowa Department of Economic Development. Fifteen community colleges in Iowa provide services for this program. Each works with eligible businesses to assess training needs of current employees, determine available funds, and provide training. To date 3,296 students have completed the program (IDE, 2008).

The goal of Accelerated Career Education (ACE 260G) is to provide Iowa's workforce with enhanced skilled workers. This is achieved by supporting the development of educational programs. Students are offered positions with an average starting wage of \$15.82 after completing the program. In 2008 220 individuals were offered positions (IDE, 2008).

Preparedness of Displaced Workers for Employment in a Different Field

Community colleges offer a variety of programs that meet the demand of the workforce. Some fields that displaced workers are entering are nursing, electrical construction, accounting, and other occupational training courses.

One way to understand how prepared a displaced worker is to enter the workforce after completing training at a community college is to view self-efficacy during and after enrollment. Self-efficacy for development and improvement of career-related skills is the belief by the worker that he/she is capable of improving and developing his/her skills. The more confident the displaced worker is that he or she can perform the task successfully the more apt he or she is to participate in other activities (Mauer, 2001). As can be expected there is some apprehension by displaced workers about returning to community college for retraining, but if the displaced workers hold a positive "can do" attitude one they are more

likely to persist to completion. Even with a “can do attitude some displaced workers face educational skills barriers and must enroll in developmental or remedial education courses.

Community colleges are charged with the task of teaching students college course level material, but students and displaced workers arrive with low academic skills in a few subject areas. The community colleges address this issue by providing developmental education to strengthen skills so students can complete courses successfully. Bailey (2008) posited developmental education is not always successful in overcoming academic weakness because students that are referred to developmental education do not always finish the sequence of courses. They find the courses too complicated and chose to drop out of community colleges. Bailey (2008) recommends community colleges reform their developmental education programs by exploring new teaching techniques and continue to track students with weak skills through their experience in community colleges.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the life experiences of displaced workers enrolled in community colleges and their views on obtaining employment after completion. Additionally this study sought to understand how displaced workers viewed their experiences in community colleges. This chapter provides information on the philosophical assumptions of this study, the research approach, information about the participants, data collection, analysis procedures, trustworthiness criteria, and delimitations and limitations of the study. Prior to collecting data, applications to conduct research involving human subjects were submitted to the Office of Research Compliance at Iowa State University, which approved this study on February 4, 2009 (see Appendix B).

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do displaced workers describe their life experiences while enrolled community colleges?
2. How do displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment?

Methodological Approach

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study, which allowed each displaced worker to voice his or her lived experiences in community colleges. Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective. All qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p.

6). Thus, “qualitative researchers try to understand the meanings of social events for those who are involved in them” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 3).

Esterberg (2002) described how “qualitative researchers . . . look at their own lives to see if they can find anything interesting to study, an unusual angle, or puzzling event or phenomenon” (p. 26). It was through my own lived experience as a displaced worker returning to college for retraining that I chose this topic for my dissertation. I had experienced being laid off from a career from which I had considered retiring and enrolling in college to retrain for a different career. I was able to draw upon those experiences to help identify with my participants. My experiences were different from theirs: I was not employed by a factory that was closing or going to a community college; I was employed by a school district that had laid off its teachers, and I enrolled in a 4-year college. The process of being laid off and coping with job loss and the experience of returning back to school contributed to the commonality between the study’s participants and me. Yet my experiences also may have caused me to develop biases and assumptions about what it is like to be a displaced worker returning to community college. For instance, my own experience as a “displaced worker” returning to college was shrouded with feelings of resentment toward the former employer and of being out of place in college, In order to better understand how these experiences and assumptions may have shaped my understanding of the phenomenon under study, I had to insure that I remained reflexive and straightforward about my biases.

For this study, I chose a basic interpretative qualitative approach. In basic interpretive research, “the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the research as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 6).

This approach allows the researcher to identify common themes that cut across the data from the participants. Participants in this study provided rich descriptions of their experience as displaced workers in community colleges. For the purpose of this study, I sought to understand the perspective and make meaning of the experience of workers displaced due to plant closures and enrolled in community colleges in Iowa. I traveled to three different rural cities in Iowa to collect my data.

Epistemological and Philosophical Assumptions

The goal of this study was to make meaning of displaced workers' life experiences in community colleges. The philosophical assumption underlying this study is constructionism. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). Thus meaning is not discovered but is constructed by humans as they engage in and interact with their world. After all, the term "human being" literally means "being-in-the-world" (Crotty, p. 45). Constructionists do not create meaning; rather, meaning is constructed through work with the world and the objects in that world. For the purpose of this study I explored each individual's experience and interpretation of the phenomenon and how meaning was constructed.

Broido and Manning (2002) noted that in the constructionist paradigm:

1. The researcher-respondent relationship is subject, interactive, and interdependent.
2. Reality is multiple, complex, and not easy quantifiable.
3. The values of the research, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research. (p. 436)

Constructionism was appropriate for this study because I wanted to understand the unique journey of an individual experiencing a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). Through interviews with the participants, I wanted to understand how they made meaning of their experiences of being a displaced worker in community college.

Research Approach

To “understand how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon; this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 6). This study addressed how displaced workers I interviewed constructed meaning of their experiences as students in community college. The methodology employed was the phenomenological perspective.

Merriam and Associates (2002) pointed out, “The defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the ‘essence’ of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it” (p. 93). Phenomenology focuses on the structure of the lived experiences (Merriam & Associates). The goal for this study was to explain the experiences of displaced workers in community college, thus enabling career counselors, academic advisors, and administrators to understand the journey and begin making further accommodations for the influx of these older students.

Phenomenology “involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Moustakas explained that in phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specified topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives the findings that will provide the basis for further search and reflections (p. 47). In addition,

Moustakas posited that in a phenomenological investigation the researcher, during the course of the study, becomes an expert on the topic, knows the nature and findings of prior research, has developed new knowledge on the topic, and has become proficient enough in recognizing the kind of future research that would deepen and extend knowledge on the topic (p. 162).

After completing this study, I acquired an understanding of the experiences displaced workers endured while attending community college.

Phenomenology

“Phenomenology is the study of human experience and the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experiences” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 23). In order to understand phenomenology and its many intricate parts one must first understand its history and the founders’ views of its existence. Philosophically and psychologically based, this methodology gathered its roots from great philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. These individuals were considered the pioneers of phenomenology. Their research has been expanded and criticized by many other great philosophers including Jacques Derrida, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Emmanuel Levinas.

Each philosopher’s view on phenomenology is similar. Hegel (1977) said, in essence, that phenomenology is an approach to philosophy that focuses on the phenomena or object that presents itself to us in our state of conscious experience. It is a means for us to grasp the absolute, logical, ontological, and metaphysical spirit that is behind the phenomena. He called this “dialectical phenomenology.” Dialectical phenomenology is a process Hegel (1977) used to understand truth. He would state a thesis and then develop an opposition to that thesis. Next, he would combine them and resolve them in a coherent synthesis. It was

similar to making a point, then making a counter point, then coming up with a conclusion that incorporated both points—in other words, finding a “happy medium.”

Edmund Husserl (1977) viewed phenomenology as a “reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Richardson, 2003, p. 37). Consciousness takes the intuitive experience of phenomena as its starting point then extracts the most important aspects of the experiences and the essence of what we experience. This is called “transcendental phenomenology.” Transcendence is not only the fusion between the knower and the known but also among the knower, the intuition, and thought (Richardson). In other words, individuals reflect on their experiences and tell only the parts that they feel are important to them. It is how individuals make meaning of what they have experienced. It is one’s intuition of what one is feeling or experiencing. It is the way individuals view things that are happening around them. When I interviewed displaced workers they told me of the circumstances of being without a job and how they were experiencing anger, resentment, fear, and disbelief. I wondered what parts of the story they were leaving out. Many of the workers were informed 6 months to a year in advance that they would be without a job; what *was* important to them were their feelings and experiences.

What was important to Heidegger (1988) was his belief that Husserl overlooked a few things with respect to his philosophy on phenomenology. Because Heidegger was Husserl’s graduate assistant he worked closely with Husserl and had a good understanding of his views on phenomenology. Heidegger (1988) felt the basic structural features of the subject and the object were not being addressed. He added to Husserl’s phenomenology by making it a method to understand the experience of Being itself. This led to the study of Being.

Participant Selection

“Qualitative researchers usually choose research participants for the specific qualities they can bring to the study” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 93). In keeping with qualitative research design, purposeful sampling techniques were used. “Purposeful sampling involves choosing particular informants for information rich cases that hold the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon” (Jones, 2006, p. 66). The sampling criterion was that participants all experienced the same phenomenon of being a displaced worker (Creswell, 2007): The participants had to have been displaced from a closing plant or company and enrolled in a community college.

An additional sampling technique discussed by Patton (1990) is known as purposive sampling. He noted that “information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposive sampling” (p. 169). For this study, I interviewed 6 displaced workers from closing plants who were enrolled in community college. Participants were three men and three women over the age of 30. I utilized purposive sampling, which occurs when researchers “sample research participants for the specific perspectives they may have” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 93). Participants in this study provided me with rich information about their experiences as displaced workers and students. The criteria that had to be met in order to be a participant in this study were that the individual had to: (a) identify as a displaced worker, (b) have been employed for over 10 years with the closing company, (c) be over the age of 30, and (d) be enrolled in community college for retraining. Study participants were three White men and three White women, all attending community college.

Participants' Community Colleges and Factories

The three community colleges I selected for this study, North Community College (NCC), East Community College (ECC), and West Community College (WCC) were chosen for several reasons. First, each community college is located in the Midwest. Second, the community college was in close proximity to the closing plant. Third, funding had been provided for each community college to service the displaced workers (which will be addressed in Chapter 5). Finally, the massive layoff forced some displaced workers to attend community college in that area.

NCC is located in Rural City, Iowa and services nine counties (see Table 1). The town's population is 7,800. The student population of NCC was 5,678 in 2008 (NCC President's Report, 2008). The closing factory in Rural City, referred to here as "The Plant," was manufacturing refrigerators, dishwashers, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. As of 2009 approximately 1,000 workers of the 2,400 employed had been laid off. Federal funding of \$333,000 was provided to develop an advanced manufacturing training center at NCC (www.census.gov).

ECC is located in East City, Iowa, which had a population of 15,049 in 2008 (Census, 2000; see Table 1). As of 2008, over 2,200 students were enrolled at ECC (ECC Annual Report 2008). Many of students enrolled in ECC are former employees of The Factory. The exact number of displaced workers enrolled in ECC is not documented (a limitation to the study, which will be addressed in Chapter 5). The Factory manufactured washers and dryers but closed in 2007. Due to the closure, 1,800 employees were laid off. ECC was to receive \$650,260 from the city's Project Fund for construction of new buildings (Census, 2000).

WCC is located in West City, Iowa, which had a population of 26,407 in 2008 (Census, 2000; see Table 1). As of 2008, WCC student enrollment was 1,200 at that specific campus. The Industrial Unit had been located in West City and manufactured paper packaging for the food service industry including McDonald's and Taco Bell. It closed in 2005.

Table 1. *Community College and Closing Factory Information*

| Town | Name of community college | Enrollment | Factory | # of lay offs | Funding amount |
|------------|---------------------------|------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Rural City | North | 5,678 | The Plant | 1000 | \$333,000 |
| East City | East | 2,200 | The Factory | 1800 | \$650,260 |
| West City | West | 1,200 | Industrial Unit | 463 | \$278,427 |

Gaining Access to Participants

Access to displaced workers in community colleges was important to this study. “Because interviewing involves a relationship between the interviewer and the participant, how interviewers gain access to potential participants and make contact with them can affect the beginning of that relationship and every subsequent step in the process” (Seidman, 2006, p. 40). The Institutional Research Gatekeeper holds statistical information as well as other needed information about the community college for this study. He indicated a willingness to assist in the initial identification of participants through the generation of a master list of those individuals meeting the sampling criteria. This process was unsuccessful—displaced workers did not self-identify when enrolling in community college and the Institutional

Research Gatekeeper did not track them as displaced workers. This was a limitation to the study. Access to participants was made easier because of professional relationships I made at each one of the three community colleges. At ECC, the Institutional Research Gatekeeper assisted me in contacting the provost who worked specifically with displaced workers from The Factory. While attending a Community College leadership conference I met two administrators from NCC and WCC who referred me to displaced workers meeting the criteria at their community colleges. Creswell (2007) referred to this method of data collection as snowball sampling: “Snowball or chain sampling identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 127).

I telephoned each individual and explained my study and the criteria. All met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. Participants were contacted by telephone to arrange a face-to-face semistructured interview. I met with the participants individually at their respective community college in a room provided by the college. Permission was verbally granted by the staff at each community college to use their facilities. Three interviews were conducted with each participant, each interview lasted 60 minutes, and each interview was tape recorded for accuracy. Participants were given a brief outline of open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C). Each participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent form.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviewing

Qualitative researchers use a variety of methods to gather data. For this study, I used interviews as the method to collect data. Janesick (as cited in Esterberg, 2002) defined an interview as a “meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions

and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (p. 83). Rubin and Rubin (2005) made the following suggestions for conducting qualitative interviews: Identify interviewees who know about your research problem from first-hand experience or direct knowledge, ask them questions about their experiences and knowledge, and listen intently to their answers. Then keep questioning until you have a good, rich, and credible answer to your research problem (p. ix). Seidman (2006) stated that interviewing begins with an interest in understanding the experiences of other people. An interviewer wants to make meaning out of those experiences and listen to their stories. The stories of worth in this study were the life experiences of displaced workers in community colleges.

There are several types of interviews, including structured, semistructured, and unstructured. I conducted semistructured interviews as I found them useful in exploring the lived experiences of the participants more openly, which allowed the interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words. Using this design, I was able to “listen carefully to the participant’s responses and to follow his or her lead” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87).

There are several formats an interview can take. How an interview is formatted depends largely on the goal of the research. To fully understand each participant’s experience, I chose the three-interview series designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 17). Seidman described the three-interview series:

1. “Interview One: Focused Life History – In the first interview, the interviewer’s task is to put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time” (p. 17).

2. “Interview Two: The Details of the Experience – The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of the study” (p. 18).
3. “Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning – In the third interview, we ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience” (p. 18).

During the initial interview, I collected data on each participant’s life story. Using pre-established open-ended questions, I gathered information that set up the context for each of the following interviews. Those questions allowed me to develop a rapport and trust with the participants. Interview two focused on the study and their experiences as displaced workers in community college. In interview three, I provided the participants with some emerging themes and asked them to reflect on those themes.

Thus, I collected data by conducting three individual, 60-minute, in-depth interviews. This approach allowed the participants to reconstruct their experience, put it into the context of their lives, and reflect on what it meant to them. I was able to place the phenomenon within the context of the lives of the participants and those around them. Framing the interviews within this context gave me the space to explore the meaning behind each experience of these displaced workers in community college.

Seidman (2006) suggested spacing interviews from 3 days to 1 week apart. Due to travel conflicts, I had to conduct some of the interviews a week apart. I conducted two of the participants’ first interviews on one day, then waited three days to conduct the second interviews by phone. A week later I returned to speak with the two participants to conduct a face-to-face third interview. With the other four participants I conducted the first interviews

face to face and the second interviews via telephone with 2 or 3 days spacing between each. The third interview was held a week later, face-to-face, to review emerging themes.

Seidman (2006) suggested that alternatives to the three-interview structure are acceptable as long as structure is maintained. The structure must allow the participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives. Because my time for travel was limited and the displaced workers were busy, alterations to the three-interview series were necessary. I still was able to maintain the credibility gained through the three-interview series to collect rich descriptive data from the participants.

The interviews I conducted were phenomenological in nature. According to Tesch (1992), “Phenomenological interviewing is to gain access to the meaning an individual makes of his or her own experience” (p. 63). Kvale (1983) described six possible phases in phenomenological interviewing:

1. “The interviewee describes his or her life-world with respect to the phenomenon of interest” (p. 180).
2. “The interviewee discovers new relations, sees new meaning in his or her life, world on the basis of the spontaneous descriptions” (p. 180).
3. “The interviewer during the interview condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee describes and, perhaps, sends the interpreted meaning back for confirmation or clarification” (p. 181). I did show a copy of my interpretations to the participants and they all agreed I captured their story accurately.
4. “The interviewer or another person alone interprets the completed and transcribed interview on three different levels: (a) the self-understanding of the interviewee; (b) a common-sense interpretation that involved extending the meaning of what

the interviewee said by reading between the lines and by drawing in broader contexts than the interviewee did; and (c) more theoretical interpretations, based on, for example, an existing social or sociopsychological theory” (p. 182).

5. “The interviewer gives the interpretations, based on his or her analysis of the completed interview, back to the interviewee in a second interview” (p. 182).
6. “There may be an extension of the description–interpretation continuum to action” (p. 182).

During the third (final) interviews, the participants and I reflected on the interviews, the overall study, and how their experience as a displaced worker affected their lives in community colleges. It is important to note that this study did not include all six phases listed above and that those stages did not need to be followed in chronological order. Phase 3 suggests the interviewer during the interview condenses what the interviewee said and returns the interpretations back to the participants (Kvale, 1983). I clarified meanings with the participants but did not interrupt excessively during the interviews. I did not want the interview to appear too structured where participants would not be comfortable expressing the views.

Insider/Outsider Status

As mentioned previously, my “insider status” was instrumental in my ability to connect with the participants and build trust quickly. Schwandt (2007) described the differences between insider and outsider perspectives: An internalist or insider perspective holds that knowledge of the social world must start from the insider or social actor’s account of what social life means. To know the world of human *action* is to understand the subjective meanings of that action to the actors. In contrast, an externalist or outsider perspective argues

that knowledge of the social world consists in causal explanations of human behavior (Schwandt, p. 152)

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is “the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 111). Moustakas (1994) described a method of organizing and analyzing phenomenological data derived from methods suggested by Stevick, Colaizzi, and Keen (as cited in Moustakas). The following steps are presented in the order of analysis:

1. Using a phenomenological approach, obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.
2. From the verbatim transcript of your experience complete the following steps:
 - a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
 - b. Record all relevant statements.
 - c. List each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.
 - d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
 - e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into *a description of the textures of the experience*. Include verbatim examples.
 - f. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variations, construct *a description of the structures of your experience*.
 - g. Construct *a textural–structural description* of the meanings and essences of your experience.

3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the other co-researchers, complete the above steps a through g.
4. From the individual textural–structural descriptions of all co-researchers’ experiences, construct a *composite textural–structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience*, integrating all individual textural–structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole. (p. 122)

I used Moustakas’s (1994) method of organizing phenomenological data as a guide in coding and analyzing the data I collected from displaced workers in community colleges. In addition, it provided a useful format to complete data analysis.

Throughout the interviews, I reflected on my own experience of being a displaced worker and the interactions between the participants and myself. I mentioned my Positionality at the beginning of the interview to the participants but did not continually relate their experience to mine verbally. I began transcribing the taped interviews between interviews. I also transcribed by hand the six audio-taped interviews I conducted over the phone. I started to analyze data after my first interviews on July 30, 2009 and continued through my last interview on September 22, 2009. After I completed transcribing, I began open coding, “working intensively with the data, line by line” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158), developed tentative ideas, and placed them into “invariant meaning units and themes” (Moustakas, p. 122). Specifically, I made notes in the margins of my transcripts and highlighted passages in the transcripts using different colored markers, each color representing an emerging theme. I placed the content of each emerging theme into a Microsoft Word document. Through horizontalization data analysis, these units resulted in

themes that led to interpretations and findings. Horizontalization is the stage when all data are treated as having equal importance and weight before being clustered into themes (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness is a key component of qualitative research. The issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were addressed throughout the study.

Credibility

Marshall and Rossman (1995) explained that the goal of credibility “is to demonstrate that the inquiry was constructed in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described” (p. 143). Credibility was maximized through the process of member checks and peer debriefing. I utilized member checks by asking each participant to review the data and my analysis in order to determine the accuracy of my interpretations and findings. Member checking is the process when the researcher takes the information obtained from the participant back to them and discusses what has been said as well as the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Jones, 2006). Maxwell (2005) stated that member checking “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on” (p. 111). I telephoned participants and reviewed transcripts of each individual’s interview to member check. Member checks provided participants the opportunity to comment on my interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Moreover, I conducted several peer debriefing sessions with two of my fellow doctoral students. During this debriefing, I presented my findings and asked them to question and comment on the

study. They both give me positive feedback and could follow how my themes had been developed.

Transferability

Transferability was completed via rich, thick descriptions of the data collected. My goal was to provide detailed information about the experience of displaced workers in community colleges. This detailed information and analysis was designed to “transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Transferability was assured by interviewing men and women displaced workers with similar experiences at three different community colleges.

Dependability

Dependability is achieved when the researcher “attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for the study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145). The phenomenon in this study is the experience of displaced workers in community college. Two of the participants were from ECC and our interview was conducted in the academic achievement center. The other four participants were interviewed on their campuses. The participants who I interviewed on campus selected the location (e.g., private room in the campus library and quiet space in the student center). The location of the interviews did not make too much difference in the data collection process. Although I did want to observe them in a classroom setting, I was not granted permission. All of the interviewees felt comfortable and spoke openly about their experiences.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the establishment that a study's findings, interpretations, and recommendations are supported by data. A major technique in establishing confirmability is the confirmability audit or audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail is the keeping of records that have been collected, created, and utilized during an inquiry. There are six categories of records that constitute an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): (a) raw data (e.g., written field notes, recorded materials), (b) data reduction and analysis products (e.g., condensed field notes), (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products (e.g., findings and conclusions), (d) process notes (e.g., methodological notes), (e) materials relating to intentions and dispositions (e.g., personal notes and expectations), and (f) instrument development information (e.g., observation formats and surveys). This qualitative study did not produce materials such as surveys and observation formats. I kept records from the other five categories for audit trail purposes. I maintained a reflexive journal that included the following (recommended by Lincoln & Guba): (a) the schedule and logistics of the study; (b) a personal diary for reflection, speculation, and insights; and (c) a methodological log to record decisions and rationale related to methodological choices.

Delimitations

As noted in chapter 1, this study examined only workers displaced due to plant closures in rural cities and attending community colleges. However, this study could definitely be replicated by examining displaced workers from any downsized company attending community colleges or 4-year universities.

Limitations

The principle limitation surrounding this study was the sampling of participants. Given the fact that displaced workers were not identified by the institutional research office, I was not able to access information as to how many displaced workers were from a particular company and in what programs they were enrolled. I wanted to enrich this study by examining how many displaced workers received funding and which programs enrolled the most displaced workers.

Summary

This study was undertaken to better understand the experiences of displaced workers in community colleges. This chapter included a review of the qualitative methodology for the study: epistemology of constructionism; theoretical perspectives of the stages of grief theory and phenomenology; and methodology using phenomenological interviewing procedures. I used the three interview series of phenomenological interviewing to collect data from 6 participants. I analyzed the data using open coding to develop themes designed to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting and discussing the profiles of the three men and women who were chosen to participate in this study.

CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter presents a description of each participant and an insight into their lives and educational experiences in community college. The profiles, although comprehensive, will provide only a small glimpse into the lives of each participant. The information presented here reflects their educational background prior to community college, their job experiences, and their journey through community college.

Participants

The six participants interviewed for this study were three men and three women formally employed by The Plant, The Factory, or Industrial Unit companies in Iowa. Pseudonyms were used to conceal participants' identity, places of employment, and community colleges attended. A male and a female displaced worker from each company were interviewed. The participants ranged in age from 32 to 55 and were employed for more than 10 years by these companies. Two participants were in their 30s, two were in their early to mid 40s, and two were in their 50s. All participants were White. The 10 years of employment criterion was chosen to establish workers who perceived an identity and connection to their place of employment and their job title.

Table 2 provides a summary description of each participant including each program of study. The data in the table were all self-reported. A detailed description of each participant follows; the following profiles provide a brief description of the participants along with other personal information as it is relevant to the study.

Table 2. *Participant Description Summary*

| Pseudonym | Age | Former employer | Yrs. with company | Marital status | Children | Community college | Program enrollment |
|-----------|-----|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Ann | 39 | The Plant | 12 | Single | 2 | North | Nursing |
| George | 32 | The Plant | 11 | Single | 3 | North | Mechanics |
| Jeff | 55 | The Factory | 30 | Married | 2 | East | Business Info |
| Kim | 53 | The Factory | 10 | Married | 3 | East | Business Admin |
| Karen | 43 | Industrial Unit | 10 | Single | 2 | West | Criminal Justice |
| Tim | 43 | Industrial Unit | 10 | Married | 2 | West | Surveying |

Ann

My story is a little different from other people's story at The Plant. I wasn't as devastated as the other people were about losing their jobs. My educational background is different than a lot of the people working there and I had more opportunities in life than most people living in the town.

Ann, a 39-year-old mother of two who grew up in Rural City, Iowa, explained that her mother had dropped out of school in the 8th grade to work at a gas station her dad owned. She eventually attained her GED in the summer she turned 18. Ann's father finished high school but chose to work right away. He started a dry ice factory that made him a multimillionaire. Later he sold it and retired at the age of 40. The belief that one could make millions without an education soon disappeared. Ann explained:

My parents think those days are over and that people need an education. That is why they sent me to boarding school. I had a totally different educational experience from

my friends who were in public school. I feel I was highly educated whereas in public school they don't teach the students how to write well and think critically.

After high school Ann proceeded straight to community college but dropped out during the first year when she met her then-husband (Ann was going through a divorce at the time of the interview). She shared with me:

I got pregnant. I got married. I had a couple of kids and stayed home for a while then I started working at The Plant for 7 years. Then I quit, went back to school, then quit school and went back to work for The Plant for another 5 years. I was so close to graduating with a Medical Lab Technician degree but there aren't any jobs in that area.

When asked further about the lack of jobs she said,

If you look at the hospital setting, on one shift there may be 30 nurses and only 2 people in the lab. It is all automated in the lab so you don't need a lot of lab techs. It is kind of hard to get a job then.

The interview began to progress toward her experience at The Plant. She explained that she did a lot of quality control in the factory. Her boss was a firm believer in education. He knew that everyone would eventually lose their jobs at The Plant. Having insight on the layoffs that was approaching, he convinced Ann to go back and finish her education. She commented: "I went back because of him. I finished my medical lab technician degree and now I am working on my nursing degree. I chose nursing because there are a lot of jobs everywhere."

Ann was planning to move out Iowa because most businesses in the city revolved around The Plant. Other participants in this study shared the same sentiment about The

Factory in Iowa. The Plant and The Factory both were manufacturing washers and dryers. There were a lot of small companies that were servicing The Plant and when it left Iowa the other companies would close too. Ann said:

It is the same situation as The Factory. The 20-year veterans are still trying to hold on to the belief that it won't happen to them, but it will. They are the ones that are most affected by this layoff.

Ann went on to describe her feelings about her coworkers.

I am really going to miss my friends. The people I worked with became my friends and were like family. They travel from all over Iowa just to come to work for The Plant. You just don't run into them at the grocery store because they don't live in Rural City. If you don't see them every day you lose touch. It will be a lonely town when The Plant leaves.

During the interview Ann was asked to explain her classroom experiences in community college. The first day of school was filled with fear for Ann. When she walked in the room she noticed 15 people who were at least 10 years younger than she was and some who 20 years younger. She explained:

It was kind of depressing. I could have been some of these girls' mothers. At first I thought "why am I starting a new career at this age?" That feeling went away because the girls were so nice and I remembered I had more life experience than they did and had experience with kids so I could easily deal with these girls.

George

George, 32-year-old father of three, was the youngest participant in this study. His mother and father did not have degrees and stressed the importance of working. George

moved from Illinois to Rural City, Iowa, and worked for The Plant for 11 years. He started off on the line painting the washers.

I got my start at The Plant working on the floor, painting washers. After about a year I started moving up the ranks and was the paint supervisor for the last eight years. I was in charge of quality control for the paint department. I worked hard and moved up the ranks. I made \$30 an hour plus overtime.

In March of 2009 he was laid off. He went through hardships and indecisions on what to do next. He had three children, a mortgage, bills and more responsibilities. George started asking himself questions as to what he was going to do with his life to make a living.

I had to figure out what I would do for money. I was laid off but I still have responsibilities and kids to take care of. The bills don't stop coming when you lose your job. I hated going to the mailbox because I knew there wasn't a check in there. There were only bills, bills, and more bills.

George faced the reality that his high school diploma and lack of a college education was not enough to find employment at the same pay. Now that he was unemployed the hardest part for him he said was trying to figure out how he could get a job with just a high school diploma. He said the chances are slim:

There are too many people laid off and not enough jobs. With the economy the way it is now I have to compete with college grads for jobs that you normally didn't need a degree for. At one time a high school diploma was enough. The chances are slim that I will get the kind of job I want. I will have to take what I can get or go back to school. I am going back to school.

George stated he worked unofficially as a mechanic in the past. He could not apply for regular mechanic positions because of his lack of certification. He practiced on his friends' cars in the alley behind his house. "I fixed a lot of my friends' cars in the past but I am not certified. I tinker around on the weekend but I am not sure if this is something I want to do full time." He expressed getting certified as a mechanic would probably be his best option in supporting his family, and that

I wouldn't mind being a mechanic but I would really like to pursue my dream which is to be a pilot. I have always wanted to do it. I love flying. When I was a kid that is what I wanted to be but my parents said I needed to work and forget about that. They thought it was unrealistic. Now is the time for me to do it because of the funding. I can pursue my dream if I want.

George was eligible for the government's TAA program which would provide him the funding to attend community college. He was enrolled in the auto mechanics program but was considering changing to the aviation program. He described his apprehension about returning to the classroom:

I was kind of afraid, well not scared, but it was an odd feeling. I had been out of school for so long, not used to doing homework. Definitely not used to studying. I don't remember what I learned in high school. Now I had to go to class with these kids. I felt old. I know I look young but I feel old when it comes to them. It was awkward at first going back to school but I am getting used to it.

Jeff

Jeff formerly worked for The Factory in East City, When I asked him about his parents' views on education he said they were not educated past high school. He was brought

up knowing that he would get a job when he was old enough to work. Education was not stressed in his home. Hard work and providing for a family was the focus. Most of his relatives had the same values. Many of Jeff's family members worked at The Factory as well. It was what everyone expected. They were good paying jobs right out of high school.

When Jeff was told he would be laid off from The Factory he was numb at first. With The Factory closed, Jeff mentioned that there were a few things he missed and the one particular thing he did not miss about The Factory was the heat.

I miss the money. I miss the people but we don't miss the hard work and the heat in the summer. When it is 90 degrees outside it is 110 degrees inside. There was no air conditioning or anything. It got hot! It took a toll on you by the end of the day.

You're ready to go home. Now when I walk out of the air conditioning, I notice it is nice not to have to be in that hot building.

Jeff, a 55-year-old father of two, had been working for The Factory for over 30 years and had felt he would retire there. When he heard of the upcoming closure he, unlike some of his colleagues, had started to prepare for the worst:

Our situation is different. We heard about it 2 years ago so we made sure we got everything paid off. The only thing we owe on now is our house. All of our vehicles are paid for. We are really scrimping right now. Trying to figure out how we are going to pay for two kids in college right now. We're doing pretty good. It's amazing how less you can live on if you really try.

He went on to describe his experience of when he was told he was laid off:

At first you are kind of stunned. But, I've been here for 30 years; what am I going to do? I'm 55 years old. There are not a lot of places that will hire me right off the street.

Then you worry about how you are going to pay bills, insurance is a big, big thing. My wife was working full time so she could get the insurance. You just think about all of those things. I had a pretty decent wage where I could go out and do pretty much what I wanted. Then you have to stop and think well I can't do this and I am not going to be able to do that. All of that is kind of scary.

The fear of not being able to provide for his family assisted Jeff in making the decision to return to community college. He stated that after 6 months of debating about whether or not to go back to school he decided to pursue business information systems. Returning to school was a complete change for him. He described his experience:

Well, it's a lifestyle change, I know that. First thing I noticed that got me the most was I'd go to The Factory from 6:30 am. until 3:00 pm. So I had from 3:00 until you know to go to bed or do whatever I wanted. Now I go to my classes then I have to come home and do my homework all night. At first I thought this was going to be hard. I thought I'd have quite a bit of free time. Well, I don't. It's a rude awakening.

When asked to describe his experience in community college he expressed that he had to get caught up with some of his math classes. He added that in order for him to be eligible for the college core classes he needed to take remedial math. Algebra was a difficult class for him.

I spent a lot of time trying to work on the math problems myself. I hadn't had math in so long I have forgotten how to do it. Eventually I gave up and went to get some tutoring. It helped a lot and there were a lot of older people in there as well getting help. It was nice to know I wasn't the only one.

As the interview continued Jeff stated that he is majoring in business information systems. He expressed that he was confident that there will be jobs in this area.

I have a nephew that works for Target and he's a computer programmer for them. I've talked to him a little bit about what opportunities are available. He said they are pretty much wide open. At first I thought about going into accounting but I have a cousin that works for a law firm in accounting. She said with a 2-year degree at my age it's going to be hard to get a good paying job in accounting because most of them want 4-year degrees with 5 years experience. So by the time I get all that I should be retired.

Kim

Kim, a 53-year-old mother of three, had worked for The Factory as an office manager for over 10 years. Her family believed in education but neither of her parents had attended college. She stated, "I grew up in a small town where the focus was on working in The Factory." Kim wanted to do something different with her life instead of working for The Factory: "I worked in the community for about 14 years before I started working at The Factory. I wanted to get an education but I would start classes and then have to stop because of family issues." She thought about finishing community college but chose to get married instead. Her focus became her children and her husband. Eventually she went to work for The Factory.

There were a lot of good paying jobs in The Factory. The whole town basically worked there and many employees have been working there for 20 or more years. I chose to work there when my children were old enough to go to school.

Although she didn't manufacture any washers or dryers her plight of losing her job had some of the same effects as the others. She stated:

When you are told that you are going to lose your job and you are 50 years of age, you thought you were going to retire there it is like someone pulled the rug from under your feet. My husband works but it is difficult to live on one income with three kids.

After reviewing her options on employment or continuing her education Kim decided to enroll in community college. She described her experiences in the classroom:

At first I was reluctant to enter the classroom knowing that I would be with students who were right out of high school. I eventually got used to it since I was the one with real work experience. These kids haven't worked for as long as I had. I was able to mentor a lot of the students because I guess I have the mothering personality.

Tim

Tim, a 43-year-old married father of two, had lived in Iowa all his life and worked for Industrial Unit for over 10 years. He had been a press operator. He had worked doing a lot of temporary jobs around the city, including construction, before he went to work for Industrial Unit. Tim said he hadn't wanted to work at Industrial Unit because he felt the whole town worked there. He commented: "The jobs paid well there but I wanted to do something different. I tried not to work there but after my temps jobs ended eventually I found my way to Industrial Unit."

I asked Tim to describe his experiences of job loss and his journey toward community college. He replied:

When I was told they were laying off I did not know what to think. I had been working there for over 10 years. I got into the routine. I knew what my job was and how to do it. I worked the paper press and basically it was an easy routine once you get used to it.

When Tim was finally laid off he said he was shocked and confused:

It was scary knowing that you have to get back into the workforce and compete with everybody. It finally dawned on me that I was unemployed. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think the unknown was the scariest part of being laid off. You just go numb because you don't know what is coming next.

Tim decided to look for employment in areas he felt were hiring. With his prior work history he felt he could easily get a job. He explained:

When I got out of high school I just went to work. Wherever they hired me I would do the job. I was a janitor, painter, plumber, construction worker, you name it. I had a lot of different jobs. I didn't have a degree and I didn't think I needed one.

His lack of education past high school hindered Tim from getting the desired positions.

After repeatedly getting turned down for jobs I realized that I had to do something to make myself more marketable. What I had been doing wasn't working anymore.

They don't need press operators because a lot of factories are closing. I figured I had to go to school. I took the funding and went to community college.

Tim described his family's views on education and the role it played in his decision to presently pursue community college:

My parents thought high school was as far as you needed to go. Their parents didn't stress it so my parents didn't stress it. I think it was mostly a financial decision. We

didn't have a lot of money so they were not putting any college thought in our heads. They thought it was more important to work than go to school.

Tim stated there were not any college role models for him to emulate:

No one ever said school is what you are supposed to do. No one said college is where you are supposed to go. College was so far out of people's minds because no one was doing that. Everyone went to high school and then got a job. The whole town did that.

After one year of applying for different positions with other companies Tim realized that he had to do something to improve his situation, so he decided to look into community college to better his education. He enrolled in the surveying program. Tim described his experiences in the classrooms:

I felt very uncomfortable in the classroom. I realized that I had a different level of maturity. My maturity level was quite different than the students who were much younger. It was also difficult for the instructor to keep their attention which impacted my ability to get an understanding of the material because of the students being immature. On the same token they had a lot of energy or a lot more enthusiasm about the whole concept of surveying. I found that to be a positive as opposed to negative.

Tim was studying surveying and explained his reactions to the coursework.

Some of the coursework was difficult because I had to spend a lot more time on it than I thought. I think just getting back into the framework of being able to understand the concepts and material I was reading was difficult. Algebra is the hardest. You have to keep up with math and memorize those formulas you forget if you don't practice. I go to tutoring a lot.

Karen

Karen, 43 years old, was the mother of two teenagers, a 15-year-old son who was a star athlete on the varsity football team and a 13-year-old daughter who was playing numerous sports. She explained the role education played in her background as a child reared in Iowa. She made the statement: “Neither parent went to school. Dad and mom both worked for the same company for 20 years.” School was not stressed by her parents. They did not mention that college was a choice for her after high school. She said, “Kids follow what their parents do.” When she graduated from high school she wondered what she was going to do at the age of 18. She had no examples of what else to do except work. Her parents never mentioned that she had options for what do with her life. They never suggested that she could go to college and major in criminal justice or that she could do almost anything she ever dreamed of doing. Karen explained:

I decided to go to community college back when I was 18. Since I had no guidance from my parents on what courses to take I just looked at the catalog and picked the shortest program. It was such a waste of time. I was not interested in the Dental Assistant program. I did not really want to put my hands in people’s mouth and fix their teeth not to mention the bad breath. I do not know what I was thinking.

Karen went on to describe her experience further:

If someone had suggested back then that I could have been a cop I would have been one. No one did. They all just wanted me to get an office job and work. I had no support to stay in community college so I dropped out and started working as a secretary. I went on and became a mother of two. That is why now I stress to my kids that they can do anything. I explain to them different options and support their

interests. I also stress the importance of a good education and I want them to both go to college. My daughter is into forensics and I tell her she can do it.

Following what was expected for her by her parents, Karen became an accounting clerk for Industrial Unit. She worked there for 10 years and was told that the company was downsizing and she would be losing her job. She described what it was like for her when she lost her job:

Immediately, financial worry set in. I wondered what I was going to do since unemployment wasn't going to cut it. It wasn't going to cover what I needed covered as far as finances go because I have my own house, car and I am a single parent. So those were the main things on my mind.

Karen wasn't as panicked at first. She was stunned, but knew she was going to get unemployment and she would be able to work one day a week for them. She would still earn money from a day's work. She also mentioned that she was collecting child support for her two children. Since money would be coming in from those sources:

I knew I wasn't going to completely fall apart because I had money coming in. The job market was not going to be what I wanted it to be. I started to worry about how I was going to continue the lifestyle that I made for myself.

There was a significant pay cut in the jobs she had been applying for. She stated that most of them were paying \$7 an hour and she had been making significantly more. Karen described her decisions to attend community college and how long the process had taken:

It was pretty much an immediate decision because I wanted to go into a field where I would always have a job. There is more guarantee than the one I had and I knew the pay rate would be what I could manage and still keep my house.

As the interview continued Karen stated that she was majoring in criminal justice. She expressed that she was confident that there would jobs in the probation area. She said, “I figure there will always be criminals so they will always need probation officers.” The journey through community college was difficult for Karen but not as difficult as she first had thought. She had had reservations about attending school because she hadn’t attended for so long. She described her thought process before making the final decision to attend:

I thought that I would not be able to keep up but they make it very easy to fit into your lifestyle as an adult with kids. At this point in my life the course work was easier than I expected. The only challenging class was Algebra.

Summary of Participants

Although the participants expressed a variety of views and challenges, the similarities in their experiences in being laid off and their educational experiences in community college offered a wealth of data. For example, Karen and George were attending community college to pursue their childhood dreams. Karen wanted to become a police woman and George wanted to be a pilot. Jeff, Ann, Tim, and Kim were pursuing careers based on their views of job probability. All participants were confident there would be employment after completing community college. Chapter 5 will explore the main themes of this study with supporting evidence found in the data.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe and illuminate the life and educational experiences of displaced workers enrolled at community colleges in Iowa. This chapter is dedicated to presenting the findings from this research study. The findings were derived through phenomenological data analysis (Jones, 2006), which yielded five different themes related to the two primary research questions guiding this study:

1. How do displaced workers describe their life experiences while enrolled in community colleges?
2. How do displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment?

Themes and Analysis

The five major themes that emerged from this study were: (a) mixed emotions, (b) adapting to an environmental change, (c) perception of community college, (d) preparedness for new employment, and (e) probability of employment opportunities in a receding economy. Each theme is presented in the context of the stages of grief theory and its process of acceptance and growth. Themes were chosen based on participant's words. Key phrases were used as they related to the grief theory. A brief overview of the themes follows.

The mixed emotions theme was extracted from a quote one participant used. It described different emotions ranging from anger, indifference, devastation, contentment, acceptance and the stages of grief (described below).

The adapting to an environmental change theme describes the new classroom environment the displaced workers entered. This setting differed from the manufacturing

plants where displaced workers spent 10 or more years. The experience of exiting one environment and entering an extremely different environment caused shock for some of the participants.

The theme of perception of community college elucidates the participant's opinions and views of community college prior to and during their enrollment. They expressed their experiences of entering a classroom with younger students and the progression culminating in acceptance of the students and becoming mentors.

The preparedness for new employment theme explains how the participants viewed their coursework and program enrollment in preparation for new employment. They explained how their retraining and learned skills could help them compete in today's job markets. This theme exemplifies the growth stage of grief in which participants mourned, accepted job loss, and prepared for new opportunities.

The final theme of probability of employment opportunities in a receding economy is based on participants' expectations of new employment after completing their programs. The confidence the participants displayed in this theme was immense. Although participants were confident, there was also an underlying sentiment of fear. At the time of this study the job market was receding. Participants expressed that they had chosen retraining in skills needed in high demand fields, but the number of job openings was unknown.

Although these themes may seem quite broad, each will be presented and developed with references to participant data followed by its relevance to the grief theory.

The Stages of Grief

The natural psychological response to loss is presumed to follow an orderly progression through distinct stages of bereavement and has been widely accepted by

clinicians and the general public (Maciejewski, 2007). The first stage theory of grief was developed by Bowlby (1980) and Parkes (1972) for adjustment to bereavement. The four stages were shock–numbness, yearning–searching, disorganization–despair, and reorganization. Kübler-Ross (2005) adapted Bowlby and Parkes’s theory to describe a five-stage response of ill patients to awareness of their impending death: denial–dissociation–isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. For this study I used the six stages of grief—shock and denial, anger, guilt, depression, acceptance, and growth—later developed by Sunoo and Solomon (1996). The stage theory of grief has been generalized to a wide variety of losses including children’s reactions to parental separation, adults’ reactions to marital separation, clinical staffs’ reactions to the death of an inpatient, and for the purpose of this study, job loss (Maciejewski, 2007).

There is a general sequence of grieving suggested to constructively deal with job loss (Blau, 2008). The first emotion experienced is denial resulting from the shock of being notified about the impending job loss. Participants in the study articulated that they had received written notification from their employer and workforce development about the layoff years in advance. The next emotion is denial, which acts as a buffer after the unexpected news and allows the individual to mobilize other defenses. One participant described disbelief regarding The Factory closing and had chosen not to look for employment immediately. Anger is the emotion resulting from a feeling of betrayal (Sunoo & Solomon 1996). Depression, the next emotion, is the feeling of sadness and withdrawal due to loss or control (Blau, 2008). Over time displaced workers reach a stage of peace and acceptance. They are not as angry about their layoff. Blau (2008) posited that “there is a willingness to explore new possibilities. Through exploration there is hope for the future, that

is, that some type of positive opportunity will come” (p. 530). Displaced workers have mourned the job loss and begin the acceptance stage. The themes below illuminate the participants’ experiences.

Findings by Themes

Mixed Emotions

The participants stated that when they were informed about being laid off they had experienced mixed emotions. Some had gone through the stages of grief right away. The following statements from the participants outline their experiences as related to the grief theory.

Jeff had felt an initial shock when informed and then denial set in. He remembered being forewarned about the plant’s closing but said he had not thought it would happen to him. The next stage of grief he entered was guilt. Guilt is the feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense. He acknowledged earlier that although he had prepared financially for the layoff he was concerned about the other workers who were less fortunate: “I know some people who didn’t prepare and it’s really hit them in the face right now. They have big car payments and a big mortgage payment and they’re struggling.”

Karen stated that she had not been that devastated because she knew she was not going to completely fall apart because she had money coming in.

I think I was more angry with my kids’ father than I was about losing the job. I think I just transferred the feeling toward him. I felt stuck. He left us and now this . . . I lost my job, now what?

Karen was asked to explain her thought process of losing her job and then making the decision to go back to college. She said,

At first I was kind of shocked but financial worry set in. I was wondering how I was going to pay my bills. I wondered why all this was happening now at the same time. I guess I was in disbelief and then I didn't feel like doing anything. That didn't last too long because of the kids. When you have kids to support you just have to find a way. That's why I went back to school.

Karen's experience can be summarized using the grief theory as well. She described she had felt shocked, angry, and depressed and then had found her way toward acceptance and growth by making the decision to return to community college.

Tim's experience of job loss was different than Karen's. Both stated they were devastated, but the level of devastation was not equivalent. Tim described that he was in the depression stage after losing his job. Bowlby (1980) suggested that depression was a normal mood most people experience on occasion and is an "inevitable accompaniment to any state in which behavior becomes disorganized as it like does after a loss" (p. 246). During the interview Tim revealed he had difficulties concentrating on everyday activities. He further explained that simple tasks where routine was involved were forgotten:

I would forget how to do the simplest things. I would start something and then forget what I was doing. One time I was making coffee and I forgot to put the coffee in the filter. The water started flowing through the maker but there was no coffee in the pot. It was clear. I would stand there dumbfounded. I was pretty much in a daze for a while and boy did I make a lot of mistakes. This was because I lost my job and my work routine.

Tim was asked to describe his experience of job termination. He responded:

I was devastated. I pretty much built my career working for the company and over 10 years of experience and it was a family-oriented company so it was like they were a part of theirs so when they gave me the news it was so devastating. I had a horrible time dealing with everything. My life changed the day it finally sunk in I was unemployed.

He explained the loss of the job was like losing his family:

I will miss the people but not the job. You get so attached to the people you work with. It is hard to let them go. I thought a lot about them at first but as time passes you kind of move on. I have a family I have to concentrate on.

Tim explained he lost more than his job and the people he worked with.

I lost everything I had—family, home, income—and a lot of things I had accumulated—vehicles, transportation. So I was now having to hitch a ride to class a lot of times. Catching the bus most of the time was certainly an inconvenience but it was something that I was just determined to do.

When asked to explain his thought process for returning to community college, Tim said: “It took a year for me to decide to go back to school. I worked through my loss and realized I lost but I gained. Losing my job meant I gained an education and hopefully a better job.” Tim did not express how his experience related to the grief theory using the same terms, like denial, shock, acceptance, etc., as the other participants. Instead the essence of his experience underlines the grief theory.

Five of the six participants expressed they would miss their coworkers but not their jobs. They explained their family needs came first and that had motivated them to go to community college. Ann stated she had kids at home she had to take care of. Attending

community college to become an R.N. is how she was planning to provide for her family.

George articulated his experience:

You can't understand what just happened. Then you get nervous because you never expected it to happen. I had to worry about myself but my main concern was my family. The fact of life is there was nothing I could do about losing my job. You have to keep going everyday grinding it out. You have to accept it and keep going. You cannot dwell on what you can't control.

Kim explained her feelings about job loss as “mixed emotions”:

I had mixed emotions about the whole situation. I was not happy about losing my job and I did worry about how I was going to pay for things. I have kids so I went out looking for any job I could get. I was kind of looking forward to starting a new career and finally doing something I wanted to do. So I went back and forth on my feelings.

This theme *mixed emotions* answered the research question of how displaced workers describe their life experiences while enrolled in community colleges. The participants described their emotions about losing their jobs and how that affected their quality of life. They also described how that experience led to the decision to attend community college.

Adapting to an Environmental Change

This theme emerged as participants expressed their views on entering the classroom for the first day of class. This was a different environment from their former factories. The participants had to adapt to their new classroom environment, which included students of all ages. The stages of grief are examined, as in death and loss, in adapting to new environments and change. Initially, because of the students and the setting, some participants were in shock as they entered the classroom.

The unfamiliarity of this experience led Ann into the depression stage of the grief theory. For Ann depression set in when she went to community college and saw the younger students. She stated earlier that she felt old enough to be some of the students' mother. She also felt depressed about not being challenged in community college. The coursework did not challenge her. She expressed she never had to open a book. She moved into the stage of acceptance when she realized that the students were very nice. She was willing to assist them in their course work, which showed the growth stage of grief. In the growth stage Ann overcame her depression and advanced to achieve her established goals while assisting others. She became an asset to the other students because of her age and educational background and she was proud to help. She explained,

I helped a lot of students especially with the writing part. I don't know if it is the public schools in my area but people can't write at all. I spent a lot of time writing in boarding school and developed a passion for writing. I would write in my journal every night and write letters to my parents. In boarding school the teachers spent a lot of time focusing on the mechanics of writing. When I got to community college I was disappointed that a lot of people don't like to write or know how to write well. I got tired of the group projects we had to do with the younger students. They couldn't write well in my opinion so I would just edit the paper. I wasn't going to turn it in like that. I have high standards.

Kim explained her positive experience in the classroom. She was not in the depression stage like Ann when she entered the classroom. Kim was in the acceptance stage:

I was excited to go back to school. I love the teachers. I was older than a lot of them but overall I had a very positive experience. At first I had to get used to the newness

of my surroundings. I mean I walk in with my notebooks and materials for class and then I see these young faces. The instructor is not that much younger than me. It felt different but I am an out-going person so I just introduced myself to the class. I was able to mentor a lot of the younger students so I felt better about being in community college.

Participants went on to describe their experience working with younger students. Tim expressed views similar to Kim's. He mentored the students as well after adapting to the environment change. As he explained:

I had to get used to going back to the classroom. Don't get me wrong, it was weird at first. I got used to it. I am used to going to work every day. This was different. I had a routine at work. This school stuff kind of messed that whole routine up. In school everything was new to me for the first week. I reminded myself why I was in school in the first place. I didn't want to complain a lot because I want to set a good example for my kids. If I start complaining about school they will too. I want them to see the importance of getting a degree and then a better paying job.

Tim continued to describe the classroom experience:

Being in the classroom with the folks who were younger gave me the opportunity to share with them a lot of times my experience. Obviously, I had a lot of experience, more than they did, and that made a big difference to them. They could ask me questions that they otherwise would not be able to ask their peers. I worked the press so they would ask me a lot of mechanical questions like how did it work and what did I do? I just started telling them stories about what my life was like working at Industrial Unit.

The participants also had to deal with difficult coursework. Jeff experienced initial shock at the amount of time he had to spend on some of his assignments:

Going to school is a lot harder than I thought it would be. I didn't realize in the college level all the classroom time was used for lecture time and your work was outside the class by yourself. That was an adjustment. The first class I had was algebra and the teacher said you can expect 2 to 4 hours outside of class each day on homework. I was like, "what are you talking about?" That's not what I was thinking. It has been all right. It was nice to have someone in class that I could work on this with. Last summer I had a communication class and I had to give two speeches. That was a little nerve wracking. I didn't have to give speeches at work. I was on the line. I practiced my speeches over and over until I felt comfortable. When I got to class I was kind of nervous. I wondered what everyone would think of my speech. It went well. I just remembered how much work I had to put into it.

All the participants commented on the amount of time and effort spent on class assignments. Most needed assistance from the staff and tutoring services. Participants were not reluctant to ask for assistance. Karen shared her views on getting assistance from the staff:

I spent a lot of time in the academic achievement center. That was my new home. I practically lived there. Anytime I had a problem I could go in there and if I couldn't understand it they would find me someone else who could help me understand the math problem. It was great because when I left there I felt better and understood the problems. It really helped boost my confidence.

She continued:

I already know I can't do math. So there is no need for me to pretend I know what I am doing. I am trying to get A's a B's so anything that is going to help me achieve that goal I am doing it. Pride goes before failure. I am not trying to retake a whole bunch of classes. I am ready to get a job in the criminal justice field.

Karen adapted well to the new environment. She embraced the change of the Achievement Center's environment stating that was her "new home."

George was asked to describe his experience in the classroom as well. He equated his classroom experience to his loss of employment:

It is exciting and brand new and scary. Going into the classroom is almost as scary as losing a job because it is brand new. It is something you haven't experiences in a million years. Change is hard. You just don't know the outcome and there is nothing much you can do but prepare and wait and see what happens.

He continued:

I think the hardest thing about community college is math. Yep, math is the hardest. You have to stay up on math. You have to keep practicing math. You forget the formulas. I have to write them down. When I get home from class I tried to go back over what I learned. Half the time I can't remember all the steps, so I take a break. My mind gets overloaded with all this school stuff and life problems. I keep at it because I need to get better employment.

The participants all explained their adaptations to the new environment as a positive experience. Initially there was shock when entering the classroom and engaging with the younger students. Participants stated they processed through that stage and became mentors. They were apprehensive about the coursework, specifically math, but were able to receive

assistance from tutors and counselors. Through the guidance and assistance from the staff and fellow students, this led to a positive perception of the participants' community college experience.

This theme *adapting to an environmental change* answered the research question of how displaced workers describe their life experiences while enrolled in community college. The participants described their classroom experience and adjustment to the younger students. The interaction between the student and their instructors was explained. One participant explained the negative impact an instructor had on the students by cancelling classes. Other participants explained the coursework challenges and their need for tutoring services. Their overall view of their experiences in community college was positive.

Perception of Community College

In this section participants were asked to describe their overall opinion and experience about the community college. The participants all explained their views on the community college as a positive experience. This theme reflects the acceptance stage of grief. Participants had prior fears about attending community college. They began to adapt to the environmental change and to accept changes.

George said he liked the smaller classes and the fact that the instructor had more time to spend with students:

My class is like 27 people I think. It's not too much. You kind of get to know the ones you want to. Everyone has their own life so you have those students who just come to class and then leave right when it is over. I don't blame them. Some have to go to work or pick up kids from day care or something.

He continued to describe the campus setting:

I like the convenience of it and not having to walk 10 miles from the parking lot to the building. Right now there is enough parking but some days I have to circle the lot a couple of times to get a parking spot. It is going to get crowded if enrollment increases, and it will. People are coming back to school because of the layoffs. Right now it is easy to navigate around the campus because of the maps and the signage. I am able to find my classes. If someone doesn't know I am sure someone will be able to tell them. The people are nice here.

Participants were asked about their decision-making process in enrolling in community colleges. The recent presidential election influenced Kim's decision to return to community college. She explained how she was encouraged to further her education:

Barack, Barack! Barack is very encouraging of moms going back to school, at this point. There are a lot of monies available. There's just an overwhelming enthusiasm from colleges that want to do everything they can to bring you in and get you started. That was a smooth process for me to get into school.

Kim was referring to President Barack Obama's proposal to spend \$12 billion over 10 years to improve programs, courses, and facilities at community colleges (Parry & Fisher 2009). The funds would position 2-year institutions to produce 5 million more graduates over the next decade and facilitate a leading role in rebuilding the economy (Parry & Fischer). President Obama proposed an increase in Pell Grants, the federal need-based student aid program, making it an entitlement (Parry & Fisher 2009). To accomplish these overarching goals, the president's proposal would increase higher education access and success by restructuring and expanding college financial aid and by making federal programs simpler, more reliable, and more efficient for students (The White House, n.d.).

At some level all the participants spoke of how the funding they were receiving influenced their decision to attend community college. Tim expressed his prior perception of community college as well. Tim explained that in the past community college had a negative connotation—he had believed it was for remedial students who weren't smart enough to continue to a 4-year college. He commented, "I have a greater respect for community colleges after going through this experience."

Tim continued,

The community college certainly was a step in the right direction for me to learn to do surveying. It gave me the opportunity to regain the confidence in the areas of math and English and to some degree the science courses. Also, it increased my awareness that even though my age difference in relation to other students was pretty large in terms of the gap. It was really nice to learn from them and they learn from me.

He further explained,

That has certainly made a difference for me to go out into the marketplace to be able to relate to the younger generation. Another positive aspect of community college is that there were various services that they were offering, like tutoring, that I thought was very beneficial. Also the financial aid package that is offered was very good. I didn't have a lot of funds available to me when I was applying for courses but community college was very helpful in providing financial aid assistance.

Ann had a positive experience in community college as well, as reflected in her comments:

My experience in community college was good. I would highly recommend it to other people especially those leaving the workforce and going back to school for the first

time. I think sticking them in a 4-year school where they walk into a lecture room of 300 people is pretty scary. I sat in one of my friend's classes at the 4-year college ages ago and was overwhelmed by all the people. It is not personal at all. You really don't get to know the instructor or the other students unless you sit by them every class. It's kind of hard to ask for help let alone raise your hand to ask a question. It's intimidating to have 300 people looking at you thinking you are dumb for asking such a question.

She continued,

When you work at a factory for so long you develop strong relationships. You become sort of a family. When you come to community college and the classes are small it is comforting after you figure out that everyone is friendly. I just think you don't get that in a class with 300 students. It's just not for me. Community college was a better choice.

Jeff felt that there were advantages to attending community colleges, but also recognized some of the disadvantages:

There are a lot of advantages for getting a trade degree. I think it's the cost, it's cheaper, it is a more hands-on experience and the teachers. The disadvantages are some of the teachers. Well, it depends on the teachers. I think they could use more quality instructors. I heard some of the students my age complaining about the way the instructor teaches. He has another job. I think he is a lawyer or something.

Anyway this is all hearsay but they were saying he seems preoccupied with other stuff. He cancels a lot of classes at the last minute without telling the students. They just show up for class and there is this note on the door.

He continued,

People drive from out of town to come here to class. They are pretty upset when they get here and no class. The instructor doesn't realize that if he keeps cancelling class the students can't learn what they are supposed to learn to take the next sequence of classes. They haven't really met the prerequisite. When the instructor does manage to show up he is 15 minutes late. He just shows up with this sorry apology. I think they should get another teacher for that class and let him be a lawyer somewhere else. If this is how he does his law practice I sure don't want him to be my lawyer. I also think they need more teachers and more sections of classes. I have to schedule my life around school instead of school around my life.

Karen mentioned the complaints about her algebra instructor as well but in this passage shared her acceptance of being a student again:

It is actually kind of nice being a student now. I don't have to go back to the nine-to-five every day, but the money situation is still out in the forefront of things, but I guess it has been kind of a break almost. Not to mention that it has been great to actually be reading and learning something versus just sitting there pushing papers daily. My mind was not getting stimulated by my job, so this has been pretty refreshing. I love learning new things especially what I am interested in. This criminal justice program is definitely what I wanted to do so I am pretty happy with my decision to go back to school.

The participants in this study expressed how their degree programs would provide the needed credentials to obtain employment. As described earlier, George mentioned that he needed certification to become a mechanic. This theme *perception of community college*

answered both research questions of how displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment and how they describe their life experiences while enrolled in community colleges. The participants explained their preconceived ideas of community college. One participant stated he thought community college had a reputation of being for remedial students only. That opinion changed once the participant enrolled in community college. The participants described why they chose to attend community college, their classroom experiences and how their degree programs will aid them in employment obtainment. Through the participants words the theme *perception of community college* was formed which again answered the research questions. The next theme reflects the other participants' views on how well community college coursework would prepare them for employment.

Preparedness for New Employment

The participants all shared the sentiment that their community college education has prepared them for future employment. George described his hopefulness for employment as well. Hopefulness is a part of the growth and acceptance stage. It is a coping mechanism used to replace the difficult situations with more positive ones (Kübler-Ross, 1969). George stated,

I think I will be prepared for a job when I finish. I have a more specialized learning program. It meets my needs. The specialized degree was my direct solution to my unemployment problem. I will be able to get back to work in a shorter period of time instead of going to a four year college. I wanted to get back to working quickly and with the funding this was the shortest time investment I could make.

All the participants described their program of study and how it met their needs .Tim described his program of study:

Actually the surveying coursework prepares you for doing project estimating. It involves being able to go out and do site layouts for projects and it is also along the lines of engineering where you are doing topographic maps of properties. I really didn't have time to really take classes. So by me losing my job it gave me the opportunity to pursue surveying.

He continued,

Our instructor worked in the area and did lots of surveying. It is good that the community college hired someone with years of practical work experience. I feel like I am learning actual skills that I can use when I get to the job. They teach you about the surveying equipment and how to use it. I learned how to use the equipment fast. I was a press operator so I like using my hands. It is definitely different equipment but I need to learn something new. I am learning how to use the CAD and the computer programs. I will definitely have the training I need to get a job once I take all the surveying classes.

The nursing program is something Ann had been interested in for a while. She explained the details of her program and how it was preparing her for the industry:

I think I was prepared for the job market before I went to community college. I was in trigonometry in high school. So then when I had to back track because I was required to take algebra I thought that was kind of silly. When I finally started taking my nursing classes I was happy. I just wanted to get past all the core courses and get to the nursing classes. I plan to be an R.N. and we go on practicum and get hands-on

training. They teach you a wide variety of subjects. We go to nursing homes, deal with drug patients, mental health patients and learn about medicine. It is a science. You learn what doses of medicine to give to a patient. You have to take the age, the weight, other medications, and other details into consideration before you can calculate the dose. I mean you are dealing with someone's life. Nursing is a life learning process. I will forever learn new things and technologies.

All the participants felt that community college prepared them for future employment, but Jeff explained that the individual's persistence determines preparedness. He stated,

Community college has prepared me for a job but I think it depends on the individual—your drive. If you aren't motivated then you will drop out. I know some people that dropped out of community college that worked over at The Factory with me. They couldn't handle the coursework. It was too hard for them. They couldn't get past the core courses. I mean I had trouble with algebra but I didn't give up. I got help. I think they were just not ready to ask for help. School's not for everyone. I don't know what kind of work they are doing now but I know it doesn't pay nearly as much as we were making at The Factory. I am looking forward to getting out there and working in my new career.

Participants stated they lacked extensive experience in the new field the retraining program prepared them for. Their prior employment skills at the factories were being replaced with new skills more applicable to today's job market. Karen rationalized her views on prior job experience:

Community college has prepared me for the job market. I am sure I will get a job. It would probably help if had some on-the-job training or prior experience at being a

cop. I don't, but I think they are still looking for quality people and you have got to have a degree. I can go through police training or other training for the job. I proved that I can get through community college so I know I can learn any new on-the-job skills. I just wished that when I was 18 my parents would have encouraged me to pursue my dream of being a cop. I was skinny then. I have to get into shape or I am not getting into any academy. That is why I want to work as a probation officer. At this point I will take any job in the criminal justice field that pays and I like what's offered to me.

The participants reiterated the point the economy will determine whether or not they get a job. They felt prepared for employment and discussed job probability as presented in the next theme. This theme, *preparedness for new employment*, answers both research questions of how displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment and how they describe their life experiences while enrolled in community colleges. The participants repeatedly used the word "prepared" and then explained how the coursework and the community college degree will assist them in Auto Mechanics, Nursing, Surveying, Criminal Justice and Business Information careers.

Probability of Employment Opportunities in a Receding Economy

The final stage in the grief theory is growth. During this stage participants were able to move beyond their prior feelings of devastation, resentment, denial, and anger and proceed forward with their lives.

Four out of five participants stated that they were confident they would obtain employment after completing their programs in community college. The fields that the

participants had chosen—nursing, mechanics, business information, business administration, criminal justice and surveying—are in demand.

Both George and Kim felt a degree would help them obtain employment. Kim stated, “I think an AA degree will open up a lot more opportunities for me than a high school diploma would.” George stated, “I can always get a job as a mechanic and this certificate will definitely help.” George worked on cars in his garage at home as a hobby. When he was laid off he chose the mechanics program:

I can work for the shop close to my house if I want to. It is a family-owned shop. I was thinking I would work for a chain company like Freedom Tires or something like that. I think I will have more security in my pay check if I work there. There is more business at Freedom Tire. But who knows. With this certificate I can go anywhere. I may finish here and decide to do what I really want, which is aviation. I will just wait and see.

Kim commented,

I think definitely it is a success. It will be certainly proven when I am able to transition but I think that just being able to know what I am capable to apply for positions that I didn't think I was able to.

Ann explained her probability of employment: “When I graduate I will be a R.N. So there will be jobs everywhere. My probability of getting a job is a 90% chance. June 21, 2010, is my last day of school.” I asked Ann to expound on her job searching process. She explained,

I have to wait until I pass the boards. You can only take the boards every 6 months so if you apply for a job and you are accepted but you don't pass the boards you have to

wait another 6 months. They don't want to do that so they won't consider you without a license.

Jeff had concerns about the economy but continued to pursue his education. He explained:

Sometimes I wonder if I will get a job based on the economy. Everyone's getting laid off. I know I will be prepared for a job but will there be any jobs. I try to think positively but at times I just wish I wasn't laid off. Then I remember I could be in that hot building instead of learning something new. I don't miss the heat. This is definitely better. They say the economy will pick up and there will be more jobs. It can't stay like this forever. When I finish at least I know I got the retraining I needed and I am qualified for the position.

Karen explained her other options for employment:

The program that I am in covers a wide variety of areas for this profession. So I think don't think a probation officer is my only choice. I might be able to do something else even if it is in an administration capacity until I can get to where I need to be.

This theme *probability of employment in a receding economy* answers the research question of how displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment. The participants stated they were confident the training and education they received from the community college would enable them to find gainful employment. One participant stated there were numerous jobs in the Nursing field. It is the participants' perception that community colleges provide substantial retraining and new skills for employment in fields that are in high demand, even in a receding economy.

Grief Theory Revisited

The above stories of the participants illustrated how they proceeded toward acceptance and growth within each of the themes. As mentioned in the mixed emotions and classroom experience themes, participants initially had experienced shock when first facing job loss and fear when returning to the classroom. Once the shock had subsided participants navigated through the next stages: anger, guilt, depression, eventually arriving at acceptance and growth. The acceptance and growth stage was illuminated in the perception of community college, preparedness for new employment, and probability of employment opportunities themes. Stroebe and Hanson (1993) stated that everyone does not experience each stage of grief in order. “Grief is not a linear process with concrete boundaries but rather a composite of overlapping, fluid phases that vary from person to person.” (p. 23).

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the study, identifying five major themes from the data: (a) mixed emotions, (b) adapting to an environmental change, (c) perception of community college, (d) preparedness for new employment, and (e) probability of employment opportunities in a receding economy. When presented collectively, these themes provide an understanding of the experiences of displaced workers in community colleges. Based on my conversations with the participants, I provided a detailed description of their experience as it related to the grief process.

In chapter 6, I provide a summary of the study, present the findings as they relate to my research questions, and discuss the findings in light of previous literature. The chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations of the study, the implications for community

college professionals, recommendations for practice and for future research, and personal reflections.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to illuminate the life experiences of displaced workers entering community colleges and their views on obtaining employment after completion. The guiding theoretical framework for this study was the stages of grief theory. Through the use of individual interviews and observation of participants, data were gathered regarding the life experiences of 3 men and 3 women formerly employed at closing plants and currently attending community colleges. The data revealed ways the participants made meaning of their life experiences as well as educational experiences in community college. Thematic findings of the study were expanded upon in chapter 5. This chapter outlines discussions, implications, and recommendations based on the findings of this study and the two original research questions guiding this study:

1. How do displaced workers describe their life experiences while entering community colleges?
2. How do displaced workers perceive community colleges in providing substantial retraining and new skills for gainful employment?

Discussion

The five major themes that emerged from this study were mixed emotions, adapting to an environmental change, perception of community college, preparedness for new employment, and probability of employment opportunities in a receding economy. The first theme, mixed emotions, emerged as all of the participants described how they felt about their job loss. Some of the emotions were, as described in chapter 5, shock, denial, guilt, anger,

devastation, depression, and relief. One participant stated she had “mixed emotions.” These mixed emotions fit with Kübler-Ross’s (1969) grief theory and Sunoo and Solomon’s (1996) stages of grief theory. The participants explained their past experiences working for a factory and the relationships they built with coworkers. The loss of their job was equated to losing a family member. They explained they not only lost their job but experienced loss of finances, home, family, and friends. The participants all processed each loss as in some stage of the grief theory. Once the participants approached the acceptance stage of their job loss they encountered some of the same feelings when enrolled in community college. They all explained how they approached the acceptance and growth stage in community college as well. The theme of adapting to an environmental change further explains this process.

Adapting to an Environmental Change

All of the participants stated that they had positive experiences in the classroom overall. At first many expressed that they felt a little old but, as one participant stated, she “was there to take care of business” and did not pay attention to the age difference. The participants stated they were working with the younger students and helping mentor them and the younger students were helping them with class work. Jeff stated that at times he was a little put off by the younger students’ attitude toward tardiness and professionalism. Thus, the theme adapting to an environmental change emerged. The participants had to adjust and adapt to the ways the younger students interacted in their environment. It was different from the plant environment. One participant recalled a time when he had to work on a group project with the younger students and they would show up late. He mentioned their disregard for him as he told them about proper courtesy. The students would “pretty much ignore my views on that subject.” Participants were used to their work environment where orders were

given and employees followed them. It was mentioned that when an employee showed up late there were consequences. Sometimes a loss of pay per minute late was enforced. The classroom environment does not allow a dock in pay. The instructors may enforce their own docking system but it is usually not universal. There are different rules for each class and displaced workers had to adjust to those differences.

A subject that all but one participant for this study agreed on was the difficulties they had with algebra. Five out of six participants felt apprehensive at first and found it very difficult to complete the problems after being out of school for so long. The participants used the academic achievement centers and tutoring and also met with the instructors on numerous occasions. One participant explained that when he signed up for the surveying class he didn't realize how much math and calculations there would be. He said, "I had to ask the younger students for help with the mathematical computations." Another participant had a difficult time with algebra as well. He said he needed so much help understanding it that he thought about dropping out. He commented, "If I had not met Ann I would not have passed. She helped me out a lot."

Another participant's experience with algebra was completely the opposite. She had taken trigonometry in high school, so algebra was extremely easy for her. She helped tutor students in her algebra class. She felt it was a "waste of [her] time to be in the algebra class" given her academic background.

When asked about the course work one participant said, "At times I found it kind of slow." One of the instructors she had wasn't the best. "I felt I could have gotten up there and done a better job than he did."

Preparedness for New Employment

In regards to the participants feeling prepared to enter employment in another area, all expressed that they felt their education at community college would assist them in their new field. Ann said she was more than prepared before she came to community college: “This just enhanced my nursing skills.” Jeff stated, “Community college has given me the tools and the resources that can be applied in the workforce. I have job skills and an education in a shorter time than going to a 4-year college.” The views of the above participants suggest that community college was beneficial for their future employment. It also establishes what stage they are in the grief theory process. The positivity of such statements places the participants in the growth and acceptance stage. Previously participants were apprehensive about returning to community college but over time they have come to a place where the benefits of their journey through grief has provided them a better opportunity for employment.

Probability of Employment Opportunities in a Receding Economy

The final theme to emerge in this study was the participants’ views on obtaining a job in the field in which they received retraining. The participants all noted their probability for employment was great even with the receding economy. The positivity of these views also reflects the growth stage of the grief theory. Participants were hopeful of their future. They have moved past the depression stage of grief and began to look forward to their future. They pursued degrees or certificates in nursing, mechanics, business information systems, business administration, and surveying based on the demand for qualified workers in these fields. Jacobson et al.’s (2005) study about displaced workers’ earning gains found it depends on the courses displaced workers take in community college. Courses teaching quantitative or more technically advanced vocational techniques had higher earning potential. The

difference in my study is that most participants stated they chose programs and coursework based primarily on job availability and earning potential was secondary. It was more important for participants to find steady employment after community college. One participant stated he made his decision for a program based on earning potential.

The participants were filling a need in the job market. There is an increasing need for nurses due to the aging society. Ann chose the nursing program because there are jobs all over the country. Karen expressed that as long as there are criminals there will be jobs in her field. The men in this study were confident there would be jobs available in their field. They were planning to use the career placement office for assistance.

Discussion of Research Questions

In this section the findings are examined by how they relate to each of the primary research questions guiding this study.

How Do Displaced Workers Describe Their Life Experiences While Enrolled in Community Colleges?

Displaced workers described their experiences in community college as having been reluctant to return to the classroom with younger students. It was a natural transition for them to move beyond fear toward acceptance. All the participants stated they had continued their education regardless of the other students' ages. They had a desire to learn and proceed toward attainment of the certificate or degree needed for employment. One participant stated she was there to take care of business. The ages of the students did not affect her because she wanted an education. She focused on her coursework and not the students' age. Another participant described her depression when initially seeing the younger students in her class. She soon began to mentor them after she established they were all friendly.

The participant's told their stories in terms of the feelings or emotions they had while enrolled in community college. This was their life experience and the participants showed how they made meaning out of all that was happening to and around them.

All of the participants were having a positive experience in community college and expressed that the advisors, instructors, and administration were helpful. Although a few courses, including algebra, were difficult, many of them stated the academic achievement center and tutoring helped.

How Do Displaced Workers Perceive Community Colleges in Providing Substantial Retraining and New Skills for Gainful Employment?

Participants in this study expressed that community college does provide adequate training but perception depends on the individual's skill set and motivation. Ann expressed she found the course work easy and Kim felt the pace at times was too slow. They expressed it takes three semesters to get through one textbook as opposed to one semester in a 4-year college. The pace could be faster for those who are more academically prepared for community college.

Two participants articulated that there is a need for more instructors. It was expressed there is still a stigma that community college is for remedial work only. The instructors taught to the lower performing students, and the more advanced students became disinterested. Jeff stated that lack of motivation would be a cause to drop out. The affordability of community college is also a reason students drop out. The cost is not as much as a 4-year school. As one participant expressed, "If you drop out you haven't lost a lot of money." Although this may be a true statement for this participant community colleges are focusing on retention. They want students to persist through the system. It becomes a

problem for all involved. The student has lost money on courses and does not receive the credits or the education for that course. The community college is affected by the loss of the student and money as well. The enrollment numbers decrease and the function of educating and retraining students are stalled.

Limitations

This study was limited by the participants' willingness to share personal details about their lives. As I was interviewing some of the men I could tell that they really were not interested in sharing their feelings. I learned quickly that the word "feelings" did not work too well during the interview with them. It was like the word caught them off guard. I observed them take a pause as if I had said something shocking. Although they answered my questions I felt that they were not as detailed as the women. When I asked the women about their feelings they were very descriptive. There was no mistake how they felt about a topic. Their voice changed when they were angry or disappointed. The men kept the same tone.

Another limitation was the number of participants. I ended up with 6 participants, 2 people from each company. I chose 1 man and 1 woman from each company. Two men worked on the production line and the women worked in the office. One man formerly had worked on the production line and after years with the company had progressed to a managerial position. I wanted another perspective from a man in a managerial position, but I was unable to locate a willing participant to share his experience. The resulting five themes were consistently repeated throughout all the interviews and, thus, saturation was reached.

The third limitation was that the information gathered for this study was from three community colleges as well as three different companies in different parts of the state. The Plant and The Factory both produced washers and dryers but Industrial Unit did not. The

participants' stories were unique to those factories including logistics, company, and community colleges. Their stories cannot be generalized to other closing companies or other community colleges in the state.

Implications

The findings from this study provide various implications for practice for student services professionals, especially career counselors, advisors, and administrators. Findings from this study demonstrate how displaced workers make meaning of their life experiences in community colleges. The findings illustrate how displaced workers view their experience in community colleges.

Career counselors need to review the academic skill level of displaced workers to determine which programs are most suitable. They should be able to redirect displaced workers who are not academically prepared for a program. Many displaced workers are not aware of other careers and the requirements for them. They may chose programs that are too difficult and may not pass the remedial courses needed to enroll in the programs. This failure leads to additional monies spent on retaking the course. Financial aid and NAFTA funding could be depleted on remedial coursework. NAFTA funds 2 years of education starting from the date enrolled. Displaced workers cannot stop attending classes or drop out for a semester and expect funding to be placed on hold—the funding is for 2 continuous years. Funding ends after 2 years whether a displaced worker has completed a program or has spent it all on remedial classes. This is a policy issue that leaders should address in order for change to occur to provide additional monies and expansion of time requirements. Career counselors should be aware that it is possible for a displaced worker to leave a community college with

no retraining skills, no degree or certificate, no money, and no job potential. Counseling would be needed to determine the next steps for those individuals.

Other counseling services may be needed to assist displaced workers in dealing with their recent job loss. This study identified the grief process as it related to job loss. Although the participants seemed well adjusted in their grief process and community college other displaced workers may not be. Counselors will need to consider the stages of grief when dealing with some of the displaced workers, especially those who have had no college experience.

Not every displaced worker needs remedial courses or counseling, but the majority do. Those who do not may face another obstacle: program waiting lists. The increase in enrollment at community colleges may force some displaced workers to sit out for a year until they can enroll in their program of choice. This decision can lead displaced workers to choose other programs for convenience. In this study one participant wanted to enroll in the aviation program but chose auto mechanics instead because of waiting lists. Although he had had prior experience in auto mechanics and felt he would get a job, others may find themselves not interested in available programs. The administration needs to increase course offerings and faculty to accommodate the influx of students. One recommendation is to provide additional online classes. Sometimes available building space is an issue for community colleges. Online courses would remedy part of that issue. Another remedy would be to fundraise to build new buildings on campuses or community colleges could work with city officials to occupy empty buildings.

This study indicates that displaced workers perceive their experiences in community college as positive because of the staff, students, and faculty. The participants stated the

tutoring and academic achievement centers assisted in the success. With the onset of additional course offerings, the need for tutoring services should increase as well. Additional tutors will need to be hired to service all students. Administration should consider other options to funding these services including initiatives, grants, and alumni gifts.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study suggest that student affairs professionals, community college faculty, and campus administrators need to be more intent on taking steps to address the needs of displaced workers who attend community colleges. For example, one issue that came to light from this study was the number of quality instructors for core courses.

Administrators and Department Chairs could evaluate the current teaching methods to determine strategies that could be implemented to improve student learning outcomes. Adult learners are different than the traditional aged students. They have been out of school for many years and some lack basic computer skills that the younger students possess.

Additional basic computer skills courses are needed to raise the skill level of displaced workers or adult learners. Once basic computer skills are addressed, tutoring services online as well as in person are needed to assist those displaced workers who do not have the basic skills to make it through the system. Community colleges will have to increase the number of personnel in these areas, which will require increased funding.

Another recommendation is to provide additional programs to assist the displaced workers with remedial coursework. Administrators reported some displaced workers were not at an academic level to complete the course work needed for degree programs. The average educational level of displaced workers in manufacturing plants was eighth grade (Census, 2000). Although some participants in this study had some college education before re-

enrolling, other displaced workers arrive at community college with an eighth grade equivalent education (Owen & Fitch, 2003).

Participants stated they were tutoring the other students in the classroom and vice versa. Establishing learning communities at the beginning of the semester would benefit displaced workers as well. Ann, the nursing student, suggested a nursing learning community to help prevent some of the students from dropping out of the program. From her experiences, it was difficult to re-enroll in the nursing program once you dropped out. A learning community would be effective for all other programs as well.

As the numbers of displaced workers on community college campuses continue to increase, special attention should be given to the implementation of support services that address the academic, financial, and personal needs of these students. These support services could involve collaboration between admissions and financial aid as well as tutoring and advising. As an example, one participant in this study indicated that, although she received information about the need to complete a federal application for financial aid, other people often relied on other students to tell them about additional resources that would assist them with nonacademic finances such as rent, car repairs, or childcare. With regard to academics, participants also spoke of the importance of being able to talk with others about private issues and challenges. To assist students in this endeavor, community colleges could add personal counselors to their staff, as many students and displaced workers are unable to afford private counseling or are unaware of the steps necessary to secure counseling services.

This study may also assist displaced workers who may be considering enrolling or re-enrolling at a community college. Through reading about the participants' experiences and encounters, these potential students may gain valuable insight into potential challenges to

their persistence and how to overcome those challenges and barriers. Awareness of potential obstacles, including waiting lists and remedial requirements, may assist future displaced students in achieving their educational goals. Community colleges should increase the number of programs, especially those in high demand and with waiting lists.

Also mentioned by participants in this study was the lack of basic skills possessed by students. Partnerships with local K–12 schools should continue to be cultivated to stress the basic skills needed to persist through community college.

Community college career professionals should help displaced workers increase the number of occupations they are considering beyond a self-directed search. For instance, volunteerism and paid internships offer students the opportunity to participate in on-the-job training. On-the-job training opportunities have the potential to either confirm or refute preconceived expectations (Owen & Fitch, 2003).

The final recommendation is that there is a need for additional funding for the TAA program beyond 2 years. Participants stated they were using the TAA benefits to pay for remedial classes. Although the participants in this study had not used up their funding, prior interviews I conducted for a capstone report for ECC, suggested displaced workers were spending all the funding on remedial classes and were not able to complete the academic programs. Additional funding is needed beyond the 2 years mandated. There are additional challenges with TAA. States encounter challenges in providing services to workers, including the lack of flexibility to use training funds to provide displaced workers with case management services, such as counseling, to help them decide whether they need training and which training would be most appropriate. States also have reported that their efforts to

enroll workers in training are sometimes hampered by the training enrollment deadlines and by confusion surrounding deadlines (GAO, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study helps fill some of the gap in the literature about the experiences of displaced workers in community college. As mentioned in chapter 1, this study focused on plant closures and its effects on the displaced workers.

Future research is needed about workers displaced from all industries due to the economic recession and how community colleges are addressing their needs. A parallel could be drawn to demonstrate the differences in the community college's actions in addressing the magnitude of the layoffs. A study on the differences and similarities in educational backgrounds of displaced workers in community colleges is needed. In this study, some participants had attended community college before but had dropped out. They were more experienced in writing and math than were displaced workers in the literature. Filling out the paper work for admittance and TAA funding was not a problem. More research should be conducted on displaced workers with an eighth grade educational level and the barriers they face while in community colleges. A sampling of displaced workers who have difficulty filling out the paper work to receive benefits yet are enrolling in community college should be interviewed. Researchers should investigate how community college instructors teach students at the eighth grade level effectively and determine if the retraining programs are too difficult to complete.

Personal Reflections

Through my research, I have uncovered the lived experiences of displaced workers enrolled in community college. In my conversations with each participant, I realized all of

them were able to move beyond their negative experiences with job loss. They no longer identified with their past factory work and were committed to retraining in community college for a new career. They all shared they had a positive experience in their classrooms and with the staff and students.

When I started this study it was in my first year taking graduate courses and I felt similar to the displaced workers I was interviewing: out of place. I was an elementary teacher enrolled in higher education. My classmates were directors and vice presidents of community colleges in Iowa. I thought my fellow classmates knew more than I did. They seemed to always talk in class and ask questions that led to long discussions. Half of the time I did not know what they were talking about. I realized my classmates had different learning styles and needed to process things out loud. During the breaks they would ask me how to do the assignments or explain to them what the instructor's expectations were. I remember wondering if they were listening. It was apparent they were not. They were as confused as I was on some issues. Through the years I reached the acceptance and growth stage and began to enjoy their discussions in their entirety. Like the displaced workers in this study I was a positive experience in college as well.

At the time this study began, the local factory was closing and there was a sense of panic in the area. People were moving out of that town because there were no other industries moving in at the time. I met a coworker who was living in the area and who began telling me the plight of the workers. We talked about the effects the closure would have on everyone and how the community college was planning to accommodate them. It was stated, "How are we going to retrain them when they have been working at the same job for 30 years?" My

experience in returning to the classroom after job loss and the conversation with my coworker led me to explore this topic.

I recall researching and reading everything I could find about displaced workers from this particular factory. At the time I was unable to find a lot of literature about research regarding displaced workers in community college in the years 2000 and later. Most information dated back to the 1990s. The literature was about older adults in community college enrolled in continuing education classes or displaced workers in general. As the years progressed I was able to find a plethora of information. Everyday there was an article in the newspaper explaining how distraught a worker was about being laid off. There were comments about the company abandoning the town as well as the workers. I talked to a few people in passing, and they described the history of the factory and the connection they had with the previous owners. Everyone I talked to was unhappy about its closure.

I chose to broaden this study because the economy was forcing other industries to conduct massive layoffs as well. I wanted to compare those displaced workers' experiences in other parts of Iowa with those I previously had met. They were all very similar and I enjoyed listening to their experiences. The goal of this study was to help community colleges meet the needs of displaced workers.

APPENDIX A
TAA ELIGIBILITY LETTER

Chester J. Culver, Governor

Patty Judge, Lt. Governor

Elisabeth Buck, Director



July 24, 2009

TO: Former Employees of
FROM: Lindsay Anderson, TAA Coordinator
RE: Certification for Retraining Benefits under the **Trade Act of 2009**

, has been certified by the U.S. Department of Labor for retraining benefits under the Trade Act of 2009 (Petition # 70123). If you were laid off during the time period of **May 18, 2008**, through the current date, you are eligible to apply for Trade Adjustment Assistance (Trade Act retraining benefits). In an effort to assist you with the understanding of these benefits and the process for accessing them, an informational meeting has been scheduled for your convenience.

The informational meeting will be held on Monday, August 3, 2009, in Room 3 of the Science Building (near the parking lot) at the Community College Campus in

The meeting will begin at 10:30 a.m. The meeting is scheduled to last approximately 2 ½ hours. The length generally depends on the number of questions.

This meeting will provide you the menu of benefits that will be available for you to choose from once you have been laid off, you have completed the initial Trade Act eligibility paperwork, and your individual eligibility has been verified. We will discuss these benefits in detail, including the timeframes for accessing the services and the paperwork that must be completed for each service. All the benefits, training or support, will be reviewed during the meeting.

The initial Trade Act eligibility paperwork will also be completed at this meeting. **Please make sure you bring a pen to write with as well as a copy of your résumé or a list of your work history that you can leave with us.** This paperwork is very important because the training benefits are good as long as Congress funds this program or makes no contrary legislative changes. If you do not use any of the benefits at this time, you may access them at any Workforce Development Office in the continental United States, but only if you have completed the eligibility paperwork.

If you have any questions in the interim, please contact me at 515-281-9022.

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD 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: February 5, 2009

TO: Anisha Samuels
2916 Heathrow Drive #56, Ames, IA 50014

CC: Larry Ebbers
N221A Lagomarcino

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

TITLE: **The Experiences of Displaced Workers in Community Colleges**

IRB ID: 07-315 **Study Review Date:** 4 February 2009

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair has reviewed the modification of this project and has declared the study remains exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application**, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- **Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes**, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to **use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The first interview will focus on the participant's life history.

Sample questions:

- What is your parents' educational background?
- What is your educational background?
- Where did you grow up?
- What did your family do for a living?
- What did the people in your town do for a living?
- What type of jobs did you have?
- What did you do for the company you worked for?
- How long did you work for that company?

The second interview will focus on participants' experience as a displaced worker due to plant closure.

Sample questions:

- What was your prior career before entering community college?
- What was it like when you were told you would no longer have your job?
- What issues did you face when you lost your job?
- How long before you decided to return to community college?
- How did you decide college was your best choice for career options?
- How did you choose what program to enroll in?
- How has your experience in community college been?

- What was the transition like from working and now attending community college?
- How has community college prepared you for your new career?
- What job opportunities have you found that your training in community college has prepared you for?
- Do you feel community college has been successful in retraining and preparing you for the job market again? Describe.

The third interview will focus on a reflection of their experience.

Sample questions

- How do you feel/think now in comparison to the way you felt/thought before attending class/beginning college?
- What do you think of the program?
- What do you think of the support services?
- What do you think of the college?
- How do you compare your initial expectations with your actual experiences?

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