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Mid-career faculty involvement in learning communities:
An exploration of outcomes and vitality

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of

Shari L. Ellertson

has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University

Major Professor

For the Major Program

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This dissertation is dedicated to the generations of my family,
including my parents, whose struggles
made the privilege of education possible for me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, higher education has been urged to initiate reform by calling

attention to the quality of undergraduate education (AAC&U National Panel Report, 2002;

Boyer Commission, 1998; Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993). Specifically, the

Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University (1998) noted

problems associated with undergraduate education at research universities, suggesting that

research universities have been all but ignoring undergraduate education. "Insofar as they

have seen as their primary responsibility the creation and refinement of knowledge,

America's research universities have been superbly successful... But in the education of

undergraduates the record has been one of inadequacy, even failure" (p. 37). The Boyer

Commission suggested reforms beginning in students' first year of college, stating, "The

freshman experience needs to be an intellectually integrated one, so that the student will not

learn to think of the academic program as a set of disparate and unconnected experiences" (p.

19).

Concurrent with the calls for reform, learning communities have experienced

resurgence (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, & Gabelnick, 1996; Smith, 2001), with many of

the programs flourishing at research universities, such as University of Michigan, University

of Maryland, University of Missouri, Syracuse University, and Iowa State University. In

these environments, learning communities, in part, address the Boyer Commission's (1998)

recommendation that "Research universities should foster a community of learners. Large

universities must find ways to create a sense of place and to help students develop small

communities within the larger whole" (p. 34).

At the core of the learning community experience is the interaction of faculty and students, working together to create learning environments. Regardless of a learning community's structure, Shapiro and Levine (1999) asserted that nothing can replace the active involvement and engagement of faculty in learning community efforts. Research on the influence of learning communities on students and institutions is booming (see, for example, Epperson, 2000; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Goodsell Love, 1999; Huba, Epperson, & McFadden, 2001; Huba, Ellertson, Cook, & Epperson, 2003; Matthews et al., 1996.). However, little is known about the impact of learning community involvement on faculty. Although some have speculated that learning community involvement has far-reaching potential for influencing faculty renewal and development (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Matthews et al., 1996; Smith, 1988), evidence of this impact largely is anecdotal. Further, it has been proposed that learning communities are particularly appealing to and have specific faculty development implications for mid-career faculty (Smith) who have been characterized as often experiencing "an 'intellectually fallow' period or even professional or personal withdrawal" (Cytrynbaum, Lee, & Wadner, 1982, p. 16).

Studies of faculty productivity (Blackburn, 1985), as measured by the number of published articles over the faculty career, can be represented graphically as a saddle-shaped curve, illustrating a dip in the mid-career that is similar to the concept of the "intellectually fallow" period cited above. Productivity, however, is but one characteristic of a faculty member's career. A more holistic exploration of faculty careers is available through the construct of faculty vitality, which includes, but is not wholly expressed, through productivity. Clark, Corcoran, and Lewis (1986) described faculty vitality as follows:

Productivity and efficiency are inherent in the idea of vitality, but they are not the whole of it. Measures of effectiveness as well as efficiency must be developed. Moving beyond quantitative estimates of faculty output in publications or student credit hours, we raise the question of quality and effectiveness. (p. 178)

Clark, Boyer, and Corcoran (1985) further defined vitality as "those essential, yet intangible, positive qualities of individuals and institutions that enable purposeful production" (p. 3). According to Gooler (1991), "Generally, those [vital] professors tend to be individuals who are reading books and other materials, who are still very interested in their teaching, who are productive in scholarly activities. These professors carry about them a certain excitement and enthusiasm for their work and for their colleagues and students" (p. 13). Vitality, therefore, appears to capture a spirit of engagement that a faculty member has with his or her work.

However, faculty vitality is contextual and situational, having different meanings in disparate settings and institutional types (Clark et al., 1986). Clark et al. found the construct of vitality to be linked closely to scholarship in their study at the University of Minnesota. This finding seems to be consistent with a commonly held perception that research activities are emphasized more than teaching activities at research universities. However, with the Boyer Commission's (1998) specific appeal for research universities to reform undergraduate education and "heighten the prestige of teaching and emphasize the linkages between teaching and research" (p. 33), and given the development of undergraduate initiatives (such as learning communities) and the role that faculty must play in order to make them successful, it seems that faculty vitality is a construct potentially worth exploring.

Regarding institutional potential for learning communities, Oates (2001) indicated, "Although faculty development may not be a common reason for instituting learning communities, it certainly becomes one of the reasons for sustaining and expanding them" (p. 9). The faculty development potential of learning communities and the possible benefits of faculty involvement appear to be robust because purported outcomes such as rekindling creativity and providing collaborative opportunities strongly connect to faculty development needs as identified in the literature. With recent calls for reform in undergraduate education, it seems that learning communities provide a venue for addressing reform while potentially benefiting and contributing to overall vitality of participating faculty.

This study will examine mid-career faculty members' involvement in learning communities. It will explore the degree to which the construct of vitality can appropriately describe and illuminate faculty experiences in learning communities. The issue guiding this study is the extent to which learning communities fosters the vitality of participating faculty members.

<div align="center">Rationale</div>

According to Clark, Boyer, and Corcoran (1985), "vitality is a primitive concept that is currently considered useful for describing a complex phenomenon in higher education" (p. 6). Because there is no commonly accepted definition of vitality, and vitality is regarded as both situational and contextual (Clark et al., 1986), it is important to study vitality in various contexts in order to help elaborate on its meanings. Baldwin (1990b) concluded, "No theory of faculty vitality exists in the higher education literature" and thus, he called for studies of faculty vitality in various contexts in order to extend the body of knowledge on the construct. Kalivoda, Rogers Sorrell, and Simpson (1994) similarly recommended, "Further faculty

career development and faculty vitality studies are needed on faculty cohorts outside the traditional career path" (p. 269). The current study will focus on faculty involved with learning communities at a research university.

Because learning communities are aimed at improving undergraduate education at a major research university, participating faculty may be considered to fall outside what would be considered a traditional career path in this context. According to the Boyer Commission (1998), it is common for many research universities to hold the expectation that faculty do not interact with undergraduate students; thus, those who do would fall outside the traditional norms of the institution. According to Golde and Pribbenow (2000), "faculty at research universities who engage in these activities [residential learning communities] are performing a counter-cultural, even revolutionary, act" (p. 38).

Caffarella, Armour, Fuhrmann, and Wergin (1989) called for studying the "careers of midlife faculty from a variety of viewpoints and perspectives" (p. 408). Exploring the construct of vitality as experienced by mid-career faculty will help extend the body of knowledge, albeit in one context, about this important group of academics. Furthermore, "qualitative studies could also greatly enhance our depth of understanding of the needs and values of faculty" (Kalivoda et al., 1994, p. 269).

This study will extend what is known about the impact of learning communities on faculty members who participate in learning communities. Much of what is written about learning communities focuses on institutional outcomes (i.e., retention and graduation rates, financial gains, etc.) and student outcomes (i.e., retention, skill development, academic performance, etc.); however, little is known about the influence of learning community involvement on participating faculty. Additionally, current national discussions about

learning communities (O'Connor, 2002) have illuminated the need for additional research on and assessment of faculty involvement in learning communities. A summary of the learning communities "communities of practice" group from the American Association of Higher Education's 2002 assessment conference revealed participants' desires for "case studies and personal narratives, especially ones about the changing faculty role and the effects of learning communities on faculty" (O'Connor, n.p.).

Statement of the Problem

Studies of faculty careers often center on quantitative measures, such as the number of articles that a faculty member has published. Reward systems at research universities also tend to focus on such measures, excluding teaching and other work, such as leadership and service (Boyer Commission, 1998). Faculty members have been called upon to play a central role in undergraduate education improvement efforts, such as learning communities, and institutions have been called upon to place value on these types of faculty contributions (Boyer Commission). However, if faculty are to engage in undergraduate education reform efforts, then a new way of understanding their career development must be employed. This study proposes to examine faculty vitality as a lens through which to view the entirety of a faculty member's work, capturing their overall engagement in their work.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the construct of faculty vitality as experienced by mid-career faculty members who are involved with learning communities. The goal is to understand the experiences of and meanings that mid-career faculty members attach to their involvement with learning communities.

Research Questions

Three main research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways do mid-career faculty members describe their learning community experiences?

    -   What outcomes do mid-career faculty members identify from their involvement with learning communities?

    -   What advantages and disadvantages of learning community involvement do mid-career faculty identify?

2. Do mid-career faculty who are involved with learning communities exhibit characteristics of vitality? If so, in what ways? If not, how are they different?

3. Do learning communities provide an environment that fosters faculty vitality?

Theoretical Framework

Clark et al. (1985) discussed vitality as an often-used term that is "probably more of an imprecise than a precise concept" (p. 5). They indicated that vitality is a "primitive construct that is currently considered useful for describing a complex phenomenon in higher education" (p. 6). Vitality is primitive in that it is ambiguous so as to allow for complexities of the phenomenon to emerge. Conventional research approaches, such as surveys, would not be effective means for exploring vitality in this study. Vitality, because of its abstract and multiple meanings, can best be explored through an inductive process, one that is available through a constructivist qualitative approach and phenomenological methodology.

In the constructivist paradigm, "There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). According to Schwandt, "Proponents of these

[constructivist, interpretivist] persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (1998, p. 221). Thus, to understand participating faculty members' experiences in learning communities, the faculty members themselves must be involved in the inquiry and in the creation of knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Phenomenology is concerned with how individuals make meaning from their experiences. Crotty stated, "Phenomenology, however, invites us to do it [make meaning]. It requires us to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately" (p. 79). This study is phenomenological because it seeks to understand mid-career faculty members' experiences in learning communities and the meanings they attach to such experiences.

<div align="center">Significance</div>

Through the current study, I will attempt to contribute to both the faculty vitality and the learning communities literature. With respect to faculty vitality, Baldwin (1990b) asserted, "examination of the connection between faculty vitality and distinctive academic cultures (individual institutions, disciplinary fields) would be profitable" (p. 178). In this sense, my study will explore the extent to which a connection exists between faculty vitality and the academic subculture of learning communities that are a teaching-intensive sub-environment within a traditional research university. Further, my study will address domains of faculty involvement in learning communities that extend beyond studies of satisfaction (MacGregor, 2002).

There are a number of potential implications for this study. First, this study may help determine if faculty participation in learning communities can be used as a strategy for

enhancing faculty vitality. Furthermore, participation in learning communities as a professional developmentally appropriate experience for mid-career faculty will be explored.

Second, studying faculty vitality at Iowa State University (ISU) will ground this construct in a teaching-intensive sub-environment within a research university setting. Information gained may be of interest to administrators, faculty, and faculty development professionals at research universities because of potential implications for faculty development needs, opportunities, and incentives.

Finally, because I hope to understand faculty experiences in learning communities, there may be implications for learning community administrators and for faculty members, whether they are engaged in learning communities work or not. The study may illuminate faculty outcomes, incentives, and development needs.

Definitions

Faculty Vitality

Faculty vitality will be defined through Baldwin's (1990b) characterization of the construct.

> Vital professors typically are individuals who challenge students academically and
> contribute to their overall development. . . . participate in governance and intellectual
> life of their institution and are involved in the debates of their discipline or
> professional field.... are curious and intellectually engaged. . . . enjoy the respect of
> their colleagues and are effective in the multiple roles of members of their academic
> profession. . . . grow personally and professionally throughout the academic career,
> continually pursuing expanded interests and acquiring new skills and knowledge.
> Adjectives that would apply to vital professors include: enthusiastic, caring,

dedicated, vigorous, creative, flexible, risk-taking, and regenerative. . . . Vital

professors may be campus leaders, inspiring teachers, prolific scholars, excellent

advisors, but they do not necessarily perform all faculty roles with equal zest or skill.

(p. 180)

Mid-Career Faculty Members

Mid-career faculty members will be defined as individuals with at least the rank of

Associate Professor with tenure who have no fewer than five years remaining to retirement.

Blackburn (1985) identified promotion to associate professor and obtaining tenure as the

fourth among six academic career stages. Lamber et al. (1993) defined mid-career faculty as

being "some years past tenure but several years from retirement" (p. 16). Thus, the current

definition brings together Blackburn's career-event development theory with a definition of

mid-career faculty members similar to the one utilized by Lamber et al. Both of these studies

are presented and discussed in Chapter 2.

Learning Community

K. Patricia Cross' definition of learning communities as "Groups engaged in

intellectual interaction for the purpose of learning" (as cited by the Iowa State University

Learning Communities Working Group 1998, p. 6) provides an overarching philosophy of

learning communities at Iowa State. The ISU Learning Communities Advisory Committee

has operationalized this definition by determining a set of parameters for Iowa State learning

communities:

The Learning Community Advisory Committee recommends that in order to be

defined as a learning community at Iowa State, each learning community should

possess certain characteristics: clearly defined intended learning outcomes that reflect

the University Learning Community intended outcomes and the academic program's

intended outcomes; integrated and connected curricular learning experiences;

collaborative, active learning experiences for students, faculty, and staff; co-curricular

activities that extend learning beyond the classroom; clearly defined assessment and

evaluation procedures that provide useful data for enhancing student learning; clearly

identified program administration and faculty/staff support structure; effective

connections between academic and student affairs programs. (ISU Learning

Communities, 2003, p. 2)

Faculty Development

Faculty development focuses on cultivating various facets of a faculty member

(Diamond, 2002; Professional and Organizational Development Network [POD], n.d.),

including faculty member as teacher, as scholar and professional, and as a person (POD).

Various strategies are utilized to attend to the different facets of the faculty member, such as

consultations, peer reviews, topical workshops, and so forth.

Researcher Stance and Assumptions

My work with learning communities, particularly my interactions with learning

communities faculty, sparked my interest in this study. In particular, Iowa State has

experienced challenges in getting more faculty involved in learning community work and

deepening faculty involvement (i.e., making their involvement meaningful). My work has

focused primarily on faculty and staff development, yet little has been done to systematically

understand why faculty and staff do learning community work and what they experience as a

result of that work. Subsequently, I set out to understand the latter, along with how learning

community work fits into an academic career at Iowa State University and what connection

exists, if any, to the construct of vitality.

Several assumptions guided the current research. My assumptions were that:

- Faculty want to maintain or enhance their vitality

- Institutions desire vital faculty

- Vitality is a more holistic way of characterizing faculty careers

- Learning communities can be developmentally appropriate for mid-career faculty

    development

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that, as with any study, a number of limitations can be

noted. The most obvious limitation of this study is that it included individuals from one

institution, ISU. Because ISU learning communities are varied and do not conform to one

model, the reader will need to determine the degree to which the findings of the study are

transferable to other settings or models. Throughout the document, I attempt to provide

"thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that will assist others in determining such

transferability. A detailed discussion of transferability and other trustworthiness features can

be found in Chapter 3.

Second, although individual learning communities routinely report the faculty who

are involved in their learning communities, it is difficult to quantify actual faculty

involvement because of varying levels of reporting and because the true nature of faculty

involvement ranges widely as some faculty members participate more actively than others.

Thus, not every faculty member who may meet the criteria for this study was solicited for

participation and only a small number of faculty who work with learning communities

participated in this study. Criterion-based participant selection and expert consultation was used in an effort to address this limitation and to ensure that the widest, yet most targeted, net was cast in identifying participants for the study. Complete information about participant selection is outlined in Chapter 3.

Third, due to time constraints in Spring Semester 2004, there was a delay of several months in the analysis of interview data. Although verbatim transcripts, interview logs, field notes, and a researcher journal were used throughout data collection and referred to during analysis, it is possible that some of the subtleties of the interviews were diminished due to the lack of immediacy in the analysis. Member checking and peer debriefing were used as strategies to address the credibility of the findings. A detailed discussion of credibility and other trustworthiness features is included in Chapter 3.

Finally, although I sought to conduct observations of faculty members as another form of data collection, I was able to observe only two of them. The nature of learning community activities in spring semester and the timing of my request both were factors in there being limited possibilities for observations. The nature of learning communities in spring semester often changes with fewer scheduled activities being offered. Thus, the possibilities for observation were already diminished. In addition, my request for observations was sent in late March with only five weeks remaining in the semester (including finals week). Thus, many learning community activities that were planned for spring semester already had been completed by this time. The decreased number of learning community activities, coupled with the timing of my request, made it difficult to schedule observations which optimally would have been possible for each of the ten participants.

The limitations of this study, however, should not diminish its relevance appreciably. Although I explored the phenomenon of faculty vitality in a specific context and with a limited number of individuals, the work is attempting to contribute to the knowledge bases of both faculty vitality and learning communities.

Summary and Dissertation Overview

In this section, I have outlined the basis for the current study and provided an overall framework for the inquiry. In Chapter 2, I will discuss related literature and connect other research to the current inquiry. Specific methodology and methods for the study, including data analysis and trustworthiness strategies, are addressed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I will present findings of the study, addressing each of the research questions and emergent themes. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will present conclusions of the study and recommendations for practice and further research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Two major elements are the foci of this study. The first is faculty-related, including faculty career development, faculty vitality, and faculty development strategies. The second major area is learning communities, including their background, purposes, and potential for faculty development. As a study of mid-career faculty members who are involved with learning communities, and as an exploration of vitality, this study will be informed by a number of perspectives. Thus, this review of literature will examine career development in the academic profession, specifically discussing developmental challenges and appropriate development strategies for mid-career faculty. An examination of faculty vitality as a more holistic construct for the examination of faculty career development will be presented. Finally, the emergence of learning communities as a potential faculty development strategy will be discussed, and the viability of learning communities as a strategy for enhancing vitality will be explored.

Connecting Adult Development with the Academic Career

Adult and career development theories proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s as a way to conceptualize lifespan development. Such theories included the life-span development work of Erikson, Levinson, Gould, and others (Cytrynbaum et al., 1982) and career-span development, including the work of Super and Hall (Mann, 1987). In subsequent attempts to apply such theories to the academic profession, the work of Daniel Levinson emerged as a popular approach (Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989).

Levinson's (1978) conceptualization of adult development arose from his efforts to study and understand the time period from ages 35-45 in a man's life. His research illuminated patterns of events associated with particular timeframes in life that spanned

beyond his initial timeframe of interest, leading him to develop a theory that extended from early adulthood through mid-life. Levinson also hypothesized about the developmental stages beyond mid-life and ultimately formulated a theory of adult development that consisted of ten stages, each associated with particular ages of men's lives. Like its contemporaries, Levinson's theory was conceived in a framework of age-stage development. Age-stage theorists generally present a sequence of developmental stages that they associate with particular age spans in a person's life. Levinson's ten stages included: Early Adult Transition (ages 17-22), Entering the Adult World (ages 22-28), Age 30 Transition (ages 28-33), Settling Down (ages 33-40), Mid-Life Transition (ages 40-45), Entering Middle Adulthood (ages 45-50), Age 50 Transition (ages 50-55), Culmination of Middle Adulthood (ages 55-60), Late Adulthood Transition (ages 60-65), and Late Adulthood (age 65 and older).

Cytrynbaum and Crites (1989) suggested that Levinson's theory was commonly applied to the academic profession because "work and career occupy a more central role in Levinson's theory than any other contemporary viewpoint" (p. 74). In addition to including work and careers as considerations in the development of men's lives, Levinson (1978) also recognized the importance of other life components, such as marriage and family, religion, and friendships.

One of the criticisms, however, in applying Levinson's (1978) theory of adult development to the academic profession was the heavy reliance of his work on sequential age-based stages of life. Rigid application of age-stage models has been cautioned against because of the risk of oversimplifying the complexities of people's lives (Baldwin, 1990a). Another limitation of Levinson's theory is its exclusive focus on men, a concern shared by

Levinson himself (Levinson). Furthermore, Mann (1987) rejected drawing connections

between adult development theories and faculty career development on the basis of having

little empirical evidence to support such connections. Baldwin asserted, "The academic

profession does not lend itself to neat classification schemes" (p. 37). Even though

Levinson's theory has been used to analyze fictional cases (Newton, 1983) and provide the

basis for discussions of anecdotal evidence and observations (Cytrynbaum, et al., 1982;

Hodgkinson, 1974), its users also have recognized its limitations:

> One immediate danger is premature classification – that is, individuals could be
>
> arbitrarily placed in these age boxes, and self-fulfilling prophecies would result. This
>
> could retard adult growth and development. It would seem to be more useful... [to
>
> use developmental theory].... as a diagnostic tool – helping us to understand
>
> individuals in the formation and revision of their goals... (Hodgkinson, pp. 273-274).

Thus, it seems that one must look outside of traditional adult development theories to

understand academic careers. For the purposes of the current study, research that explores

faculty career development will be discussed in the next section.

<div align="center">Academic Career Development</div>

The absence of empirical evidence connecting adult development theories to the

academic career stimulated the study of faculty careers. This section will discuss studies of

faculty career development, specifically from a career-event rather than age-stage

development approach. Career-event development is different from age-stage development

in that rather than attaching developmental stages with particular chronological ages, it

connects stages of development to career events such as completing an academic degree,

obtaining tenure, and so forth. Career-event development is supported by the work of

Baldwin and Blackburn (1981), Blackburn (1985), and Blackburn and Havinghurst (1979), all of whom will be discussed in this section.

Utilizing previous cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, Blackburn (1985) attempted to develop a theory of faculty career development. He charted various dimensions of faculty work – research productivity, teaching, service, and personal characteristics – against scales of chronological age and career events. Blackburn identified six career events for his scale: obtaining a bachelor's degree; obtaining a master's degree; obtaining a PhD and launching one's career; promotion to Associate Professor and receiving tenure; promotion to Full Professor; and retirement.

In charting the faculty work dimensions, Blackburn (1985) was able to observe patterns over time, most dominantly for productivity of published articles and less on teaching, service, and personal characteristics since little data were available for comparison on these three dimensions. Blackburn noted, "productivity is cyclical rather than either linear or single peaked... There is, in most instances, more than one rise and one fall" (p. 69). Although he noted fluctuations, he discovered "they are not occurring at specific chronological times" (p. 69). However, Blackburn noted a different pattern of research productivity when examined across career events, one where the cycles fit with career event. Thus, Blackburn purported a career-event theory of faculty development that aligns faculty development with critical career events rather than chronological age as had been attempted when applying adult development theory to the academic career.

Baldwin and Blackburn (1981) studied faculty career stages in male faculty members at various ranks who worked at liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. They found some characteristics of faculty to be stable, evolving, or fluctuating across the career. For example,

stable characteristics, such as the importance placed on teaching and scholarship, are ones that remain relatively constant over time. Evolving characteristics (i.e., areas where "faculty systematically increase or decrease over time") included the amount of pressure or stress, comfort with teaching and research, and understanding of institutional operations. Finally, fluctuating characteristics (i.e., where sporadic or cyclical alterations take place) included areas in professional and personal matters, such as comfortableness with non-teaching interaction with students, career reassessment, and the belief that their individual careers are at a standstill. The fact that some characteristics evolve and others fluctuate over the career supports the concept of career-event development because characteristics did not change only with age.

Blackburn & Havinghurst (1979) studied major career events identified by male academic social scientists and analyzed them on dimensions of both chronological age and career age (i.e., years since PhD) to see if major career events were aligned with either. They found that "career events did not cluster at either chronological or career ages and hence fail to corroborate adult development theorists" (p. 553). However, their findings supported the notion that, "Academics do have distinct and definable career stages they pass through" (p. 570), but they cautioned against assuming that all social scientists would go through all the stages.

Supporting the career-event development theory, Baldwin (1990a) proposed another conceptualization of career-events through four phases of academic life, from entry to retirement. He entitled the four stages: (a) Novice professor: Getting into the academic world; (b) Early academic career: Settling down and making a name; (c) Midcareer: Accepting a career plateau or setting new goals; and (d) Late career: Leaving a legacy.

Baldwin's work seems to imply that faculty deal with different issues and have different needs during various stages of their careers. He acknowledged that his framework

> ... is not a definitive model of academic life; many successful academic careers do not fit this precise developmental pattern. Still, because the model addresses developmental issues common to many professors throughout higher education, it provides a basic foundation for understanding the evolving interests, activities, and developmental needs of college and university faculty members. (p. 31)

Faculty development strategies often are established to meet the varying needs of individuals at different stages of the academic profession (Kalivoda et al., 1994). Such strategies will be discussed later.

Overall, findings from research on faculty career development have resulted in general agreement that faculty careers are developmental, but not identical. Research on this phenomenon has suggested that faculty development is based on career-events and not on chronological age as previously was proposed by adult and career development theorists whose work stimulated the interest in exploring faculty career development. The career-event development approach provides an important conceptual framework for examining sub-sets of faculty, such as mid-career faculty whom are the focus of the current study.

Mid-Career Faculty

Mid-career faculty have been identified as being particularly viable for learning community work given the "stage in their careers" (Gabelnick et al., 1990, p. 78) or levels of interest (Smith, 1988; Strommer, 1999). In this section, I will discuss research on mid-career faculty that will help to describe this subset of faculty members.

As Blackburn (1985) charted the dimensions of faculty work across the career, he found research productivity over the faculty career graphically represented as a saddle-shaped curve, illustrating a dip in the mid-career. The general pattern of productivity across the career span was characterized by a rise, a peak, a fall, and then another rise. This pattern suggests a change in the mid-career, perhaps a developmental shift, that affects faculty productivity. A discussion of mid-career faculty development issues follows.

Among the assertions of faculty career development was an observation that midlife faculty members seemed to experience "an 'intellectually fallow' period or even professional or personal withdrawal" (Cytrynbaum et al., 1982, p. 16). Cytrynbaum et al. defined midlife faculty as "men and women in their late 30's to mid or late 50's who are consciously or unconsciously confronting midlife tasks" (p. 15). They characterized midlife faculty as reassessing personal and professional aspects of their lives, and indicated that outward evidence of the struggles of reassessment may be represented by "personal symptomotology and professional malaise" (p. 15). Caffarella et al. (1989) expressed similar sentiments about mid-life, "Middle-aged people must cope not only with career questions and concerns, but also with new personal issues such as confronting the aging process and the need to leave a lasting and worthwhile legacy" (p. 405). Although the work of Cytrynbaum et al. seems to fit with the age-stage development paradigm, the experiences they describe of midlife faculty members appear to parallel the experiences described by other studies that are connected more closely with the framework of career-event development.

Baldwin (1990a) characterized mid-career faculty as "accepting a career plateau or setting new goals" (p. 34). He described mid-career as "the long period after one feels established but before the career disengagement process begins" (p. 34). Baldwin echoed

Cytrynbaum et al.'s (1982) description of this time being consumed with reassessment – of goals, of priorities, of skills, of ideas, and so forth. Ideally, faculty members will gain new excitement and direction from their reassessment; however, this does not happen for all of them. Baldwin suggested that the cost of having "deadwood" faculty is so high that institutions should be compelled to pay attention to and create opportunities specifically for mid-career faculty.

Lamber et al. (1993) interviewed mid-career faculty members at a large public research university in an effort to understand the experiences of mid-career faculty. They defined mid-career faculty as "some years past tenure but several years from retirement" (p. 16). The researchers identified freedom, control, and recognition as overriding themes for mid-career faculty experiences – freedom and control because they have received tenure and feel they have the ability to do the things they really want to do, and recognition because they desire others to acknowledge the amount of time it takes for them to handle all the things they are expected to do and to be rewarded (such as with salary increases) as a result. Overall, Lamber et al. found that, "As faculty careers progress past tenure review and into mid-career, the boundaries between the professional roles of teaching, research, and service become less clear" (p. 24). They suggested that faculty development initiatives that traditionally have focused on instructional development would not be developmentally appropriate for mid-career faculty members who may desire opportunities related more to time-management, professional decision-making, and non-classroom teaching.

Additional proponents of developmentally appropriate faculty development initiatives were Kalivoda et al. (1994), who advocated a "multidimensional, career span approach to faculty development programs in higher education.... [that are] open to the unique needs of

faculty on their campuses" (p. 267). Kalivoda et al. suggested, "Mid-career faculty perceive themselves to be at the peak of concern about reputation and recognition" (p. 268), and therefore suggested that development activities should be aimed at preventing them from becoming "stuck" (Kanter, 1979). Additional faculty development strategies will be presented in a subsequent section.

Mid-career faculty appear to be at a point in their careers where they are reassessing their careers, goals, and dreams, and where it has been suggested that their research productivity dips. Research productivity, however, is but one dimension of a faculty member's career. Thus, the construct of faculty vitality will be presented and discussed in the next section with the hope of uncovering a construct that can be applied to faculty careers more holistically.

Faculty Vitality

In advancing a theory of career-event faculty development, Blackburn (1985) based his work primarily on faculty productivity as indicated by the number of published articles the faculty member has produced. However, utilizing this single dimension does not account for the complexities of a faculty member's career; that is, being a faculty member is more encompassing than producing publications. A more holistic exploration of faculty careers seems to be available through the construct of faculty vitality, which includes but is not wholly expressed through productivity. Maher (as cited in Bland & Schmitz, 1990) described vitality as crucial for maintaining the quality of institutions of higher education.

In the quest for vitality, it may be that we are seeking an elusive chemistry that
catalyzes a rare integration of individual and institutional energy, commitment, and

creativity... For the sake of quality in our institutions and effectiveness in our

educational programs, however, we had best renew the quest. (p. 60)

Characterizations of Vitality

Clark et al. (1985) discussed vitality as an often-used term that is "probably more of

an imprecise than a precise concept" (p. 5). They indicated that vitality is a "primitive

construct that is currently considered useful for describing a complex phenomenon in higher

education" (p. 6). Vitality is primitive in that it is ambiguous enough to allow for

complexities of the phenomenon to emerge. Nevertheless, Clark et al., as well as others,

have attempted to articulate the essence of vitality. Several characterizations of vitality

follow.

> Productivity and efficiency are inherent in the idea of vitality, but they are not the
>
> whole of it. Measures of effectiveness as well as efficiency must be developed.
>
> Moving beyond quantitative estimates of faculty output in publications or student
>
> credit hours, we raise the question of quality and effectiveness. (Clark et al., 1986, p.
>
> 178)

> Vitality refers to "those essential, yet intangible, positive qualities of individuals and
>
> institutions that enable purposeful production." (Clark et al., 1985, p. 3)

> Vital professors typically are individuals who challenge students academically and
>
> contribute to their overall development. . . . participate in governance and intellectual
>
> life of their institution and are involved in the debates of their discipline or
>
> professional field. . . . are curious and intellectually engaged. . . . enjoy the respect of

their colleagues and are effective in the multiple roles of members of their academic profession. . . . grow personally and professionally throughout the academic career, continually pursuing expanded interests and acquiring new skills and knowledge. Adjectives that would apply to vital professors include: enthusiastic, caring, dedicated, vigorous, creative, flexible, risk-taking, and regenerative. . . . Vital professors may be campus leaders, inspiring teachers, prolific scholars, excellent advisors, but they do not necessarily perform all faculty roles with equal zest or skill. (Baldwin, 1990b, p. 180)

For me, vitality in the professoriate includes (but is not limited to) at least the following characteristics: the professor continues to be intellectually curious and probing... has an understanding of both individual and institutional purposes and a sense of honest commitment to both... takes a strong measure of satisfaction in what he or she does professionally... exhibits on a sustained basis the kinds of behaviors that might be predicted of a person who is intellectually active, is committed to some identifiable purposes, and is generally satisfied with what he or she is doing professionally, and... positively anticipates and generally finds enthusiasm for what lies in the future. (Gooler, 1991, p. 8)

While there may be some differences of opinion about whether or to what extent a particular individual possesses professional vitality, most professors, when asked, can quickly identify their colleagues who possess vitality. Generally, those professors tend to be individuals who are reading books and other materials, who are still very

interested in their teaching, who are productive in scholarly activities. These

professors carry about them a certain excitement and enthusiasm for their work and

for their colleagues and students. (Gooler, 1991, p. 13)

Clearly, vitality is a construct that is complex and not easily defined. Vitality represents,

however, at its essence a description of the presence of stimulation in and engagement with

one's work. Vitality appears to be somewhat analogous to what Kanter (1979) classified as

"the moving" faculty (as opposed to "the stuck"). Kanter characterized "the moving" as

follows:

It is only the moving who can afford to set high goals, who can afford to be ambitious

and achievement oriented... The moving tend to develop a very high estimate of their

own skills and abilities... [the moving have] the willingness to take risks... Whereas

the moving still have a sense of progress that connects them strongly to the work they

do, the stuck often disengage.... the moving are likely to keep their political alliances

alive and still look up, become concerned about the big picture in their organization,

what the decisionmakers are doing and thinking... the moving are likely to engage in

active, constructive forms of protest; they are likely to organize to get something

done; they are likely to make a constructive change because they feel decisionmakers

will listen to them – that they can have an impact. (pp. 5-6)

Although Kanter's classification scheme draws a dichotomy that may not be completely

indicative of faculty, her description of "the moving" seems comparable to faculty who are

vital. Notable studies of faculty vitality include an institutional case study conducted at the

University of Minnesota (Clark & Corcoran, 1985) and Baldwin's (1990b) study of faculty in

the liberal arts college setting, both of which will be discussed. Other researchers' work,

such as that of Bland and Schmitz (1990), Karpiak (1997), and Kalivoda et al. (1994), also

relates to faculty vitality. Their work also will be discussed.

Studies of Vitality

Clark and Corcoran (1985) conducted an exploratory institutional case study in which

they sought to examine "individual and organizational conditions related to faculty vitality"

(p. 118). They interviewed "highly active ideal types" who were identified through

nominations and defined as individuals who "continuously publish, teach, and perform

administrative and/or professional services at highly productive levels" (p. 119). They found

that highly active ideal types viewed themselves as such, enjoying the balance between

teaching and research activities. Further, on dimensions of vitality – having goals,

productivity over their career stages, general energy level, and willingness to choose

academia if given another chance – Clark and Corcoran concluded that their group of highly

active ideal types could be characterized as a vital group of faculty. Additional data

collection with a control group of faculty (which they called "representative") provided

subsequent avenues for analysis by Clark and another team of researchers (1986).

Clark et al. (1986) analyzed three groups in total – a highly active ideal type (e.g.,

vital), a representative group (i.e., non-highly active ideal types), and a group of individuals

from the representative group who were promotion delayed. They used Clark and

Corcoran's (1985) definition of ideal and representative types as described above, and they

defined promotion delayed individuals as "individuals who had served at the rank of

associate professor for nine years or longer" (p. 182). Not surprisingly, indications of

declining vitality were more present in the delayed promotion group than in the other two

groups. It is not known, however, if the declining vitality was a precursor to or consequence

of the delayed promotion. Second, the representative group reported the highest decline in energy level, a possible hint of declining vitality. Finally, Clark et al. found, "the highly active group was differentiated primarily in their self-ratings of success and in the energy items. This group overlapped considerably in vitality with the representative group, and the typical faculty member in the fields surveyed stood relatively high on the vitality indicators" (p. 183). Clark et al. concluded that "faculty vitality does not currently appear to be uniformly in jeopardy" (p. 190) although they noted, "the vitality problem presents itself most frequently as a problem of interrupted or declining productivity and scholarship, and only secondarily, if at all, of teaching" (p. 190).

Bland and Schmitz (1990) asserted, "whether faculty activities are considered productive (vital) or not depends on whether they relate both to the faculty member's personal and professional goals and to the institution's mission" (p. 45). In the Minnesota case perhaps the highly active ideal type and representative groups signify a positive interplay between these individuals and the institution. Clark and Corcoran (1985) also emphasized that "consideration of faculty vitality cannot and should not be separated from the mission(s) of the institution" (p. 117). Can vitality be maintained even when faculty members' activities seemingly conflict with the dominant institutional functions? The current study seeks to illuminate this type of question in that faculty who teach in learning communities at a research university probably are performing a secondary function of the institution by engaging in a teaching-intensive activity.

Baldwin (1990b) sought to expand the concept of vitality to the liberal arts college setting. He involved faculty from four institutions and interviewed full professors in two categories – vital and representative. Baldwin found that vital faculty members "have more

defined, concrete goals... work more hours and distribute more of their time among nonteaching activities, particularly scholarship... have more complex, multidimensional careers... have more fluid careers" (p. 174). Baldwin concluded, "faculty vitality is a discriminating concept that has practical utility" (p. 175). He characterized vital professors as dynamic and enjoying challenging opportunities whereas representative faculty exhibited characteristics of individuals at a career plateau.

Karpiak (1997) conducted a qualitative, exploratory study of associate professors who were both mid-career and mid-rank. Although not explicitly studying faculty vitality, Karpiak proposed a conceptual framework for examining the relationship between individuals and their environments, supporting Clark and Corcoran's (1985) claim that institutional and individual factors are intertwined in examinations of vitality. According to Karpiak's study, mid-life professors interact on dimensions of caring and interest with their institution, resulting in a schema of four categories. High care and interest for the faculty member resulted in meaning whereas low interest and caring resulted in malaise. High interest and caring on the institution's part resulted in mattering, whereas low interest and caring on the institution's part resulted in marginality. Karpiak's characterization of malaise – as fatigue, exhaustion, low self-esteem, and need for renewal – is similar to other researchers' characterizations of mid-career faculty members' developmental challenges. She asserted, however, that faculty members are not stuck in any one of the categories in her schema; specifically, Karpiak said there is mobility between the categories of meaning and malaise. Further, those faculty members who exhibit meaning – "high degree of involvement in and high quantity of physical and psychology energy devoted to the academic experience" (p. 26) – seem opposite to being stuck (Kanter, 1979) or having reached a plateau (Baldwin,

1990a). In some sense, Karpiak's characterization of meaning seems to be consistent with characteristics of faculty vitality.

In another related study, Kalivoda et al. (1994) studied Lilly Teaching Fellows at a large, public, research-oriented university. Their goal was to "expand the understanding of faculty career development with the hope that faculty development efforts might be better tailored to meet the distinctive career-stage needs of the professoriate" (p. 258). They found that goals pursued by faculty are similar across their career spans, but the emphasis on certain goals is different during different career stages. Specifically, they noted that associate professors had a strong desire to "improve their other creative talents including curriculum design, interdisciplinary work..." (p. 266). These observations about mid-career faculty lend support to suggestions that curricular innovations, such as learning communities, may be attractive to mid-career faculty members.

<div align="center">Faculty Development Strategies</div>

A general purpose of understanding faculty career development is for the creation of environments that can address faculty members' needs and provide them with appropriate development opportunities and services. According to Corcoran and Clark (1984),

> Since higher education's future is greatly dependent upon its faculty resources, renewed efforts to understand faculty careers in specific institutional contexts should result in informed strategies to enhance quality of performance, productivity, and satisfaction. (p. 150)

Because the post-tenure faculty career generally lasts for an extended period of time, it is in the best interest of institutions to develop and offer programs and policies of faculty development that maximize faculty members' potential and promotes their continual

engagement with their work. Centra (1985) suggested that faculty development programs can be used specifically to help keep faculty vital.

Traditional Approaches to Faculty Development

Traditional faculty development approaches have included a variety of strategies and incentives (Bowen, 1985; Schuster, 1985). A few examples of faculty development strategies include developmental grants, creative projects, sabbatical leaves, faculty forums, travel stipends, and recognition. However, not every strategy is appropriate for every faculty member. Lawrence (1985) recommended that, "Administrators ought to be sensitive to the developmental issues and direct professors' energies in ways that are mutually beneficial to the individuals and to the institution" (p. 66).

Mid-Career Faculty Development

In keeping with developmentally appropriate strategies, several approaches aimed at mid-career faculty development have been suggested. For example, Baldwin (1984) suggested: career assessment and/or planning opportunities; small-grant programs to stimulate research, to promote growth in disciplinary fields, to find solutions to critical institutional problems; summer internships and exchanges; and service in a short-term administrative role, such as chairing a university committee or task force. An example of this may be participation in a task force the aim of which is to research, develop, and implement learning communities as an approach to improve undergraduate education and increase retention. Such opportunities seem to fit well with mid-career faculty members' needs.

Another major topical area for mid-career faculty development relates to collaborations, networks, and other forms of building connections among faculty. For

example, Lawrence (1985) proposed using colleague groups to stimulate interdisciplinary work. The colleague groups involve individuals from disparate disciplines who collaborate on projects for which they have a shared interest. Support networks are another idea for assisting mid-career faculty development in that the groups help "faculty know they are not alone" (Kalivoda et al., 1994, p. 37). Frost and Taylor (1996) indicated that collaborations are important to the "middle rhythms" (p. 220) of faculty members' careers, particularly since the "early rhythm (pretenure stage)" (p. 220) is such a solitary time as one works toward tenure.

Finally, intangible incentives, such as an institution's sense of community, the quality of students, the stimulation of colleagues, and encouragement have been suggested as powerful, yet difficult to control and create, approaches to faculty development and vitality (Bowen, 1985; Schuster, 1985). Congruent with these intangible incentives is Kalivoda's assertion that institutions need to "humanize," meaning that they should have "more realistic expectations of faculty and recognition and support of the different efforts and contributions that they bring, e.g. teaching" (p. 37).

Baldwin (1984) summarized mid-career faculty needs; he said:

> Whatever their field of expertise, mid-career faculty members need opportunities to identify new professional endeavors, to experiment with new roles, and generally to expand their overall career horizons. They need to get involved in activities that will keep them excited about their work in higher education. (p. 48)

Baldwin seems to be suggesting activities that provide stimulation and excitement so as to promote vitality and engagement.

Learning Communities as Faculty Development

Matthews et al. (1996) indicated that because of opportunities for combining disciplines, team collaborations, and so forth, "faculty members view learning community teaching as a special faculty development opportunity" (p. 471). Furthermore, Matthews et al. stated, "Our experience suggests that some of the simplest approaches to maintaining the intellectual vitality are often overlooked.... Simply providing creative opportunities and structures to work together is apparently one of the keys" (p. 173). Learning communities work seems to provide the kinds of opportunities for mid-career faculty that have been discussed in previous sections (e.g., Kalivoda et al., 1994). Smith (1988) advanced this notion by suggesting mid-career faculty are at a particular point in their careers that makes them even more viable for learning community work. She concluded, "Our experience also suggests that mid-career faculty are ready and eager to make more substantial commitments to long term institutional improvement" (p. 174).

Smith (1988) discussed learning communities as a structural reform with faculty development potential:

> LC curricular designs structure the educational environment to provide greater curricular coherence, a sense of purpose and group identity, more opportunities for active learning, and more intensive interaction between students and faculty. They redefine faculty roles and "encourage faculty members to relate to one another both as specialists and as educators... and help overcome the isolation of faculty members from one another and their students" (National Institute of Education, 1984). (p. 169)

Research on faculty involved with learning communities and the outcomes of such involvement will be discussed in the next section.

Learning Communities

Given the relatively recent resurgence of learning communities, it has been suggested that engagement in learning community work is a viable and innovative form of faculty development (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Oates, 2001; Smith, 1988). Before discussing studies of faculty involvement in learning communities, I will provide a brief overview of the history and concept of learning communities, as the structural dimensions of learning communities help to explain why faculty involvement in such initiatives is indispensable.

History of Learning Communities

The roots of the modern day learning community can be traced to the work of Alexander Meiklejohn and John Dewey (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Meiklejohn is considered a father of learning community work, with his Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin taking shape in the 1920s. Meiklejohn's approach was revolutionary in that he reorganized the structure of the curriculum in order to provide an integrated education where topics were not studied in isolation (Gabelnick et al.). Meiklejohn's goal was to seek coherence among the curriculum (Gabelnick et al.). Thus, Meiklejohn contributed to modern day learning communities through the creation of alternative curricular structures. His legacy fits with a contemporary definition of learning communities provided by Matthews et al. (1996), "Learning communities are conscious curricular structures that link two or more disciplines around the exploration of a common theme" (p. 457).

Dewey, on the other hand, made contributions to modern day learning communities through his philosophy of education (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Dewey's views on education are aligned with a constructivist epistemology; that is, according to Dewey "education is seen as more open-ended inquiry process rather than a teacher-dominated process of 'handing

down' knowledge as a finished product" (Gabelnick et al., p. 16). Dewey promoted close relationships between students and teachers and advocated for more coherent (and less fragmented) learning (Gabelnick et al.). Overall, both Dewey and Meiklejohn's views have contributed to the development of contemporary learning communities.

Although learning communities developed at a number of institutions on both the East and West coasts during the 1960s and 1970s (Matthews, et al., 1996; Shapiro & Levine, 1999), the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education and the National Learning Communities Project embedded within it have been credited with stimulating the recent development of learning communities around the country (Smith, 2001). Both of these initiatives are housed at The Evergreen State College. By 2003, learning communities were implemented in various forms at over 600 colleges and universities in the United States (The Evergreen State College, 2004). In the next section, I will provide a brief overview of learning community models and outcomes.

Learning Community Models and Outcomes

In the past ten years, learning communities have emerged as an example of how some institutions have responded to the calls for national reform to higher education. The Wingspread Group (1993), the Boyer Commission (1998), and the AAC&U Greater Expectations National Panel (2002) all called for the re-focusing of education on student learning, and the AAC&U Greater Expectations National Panel cited learning communities as an example of a best practice.

A number of learning community models have been developed and implemented at institutions around the country. Examples of learning community models include coordinated studies, federated learning communities, clustered courses, Freshman Interest

Groups (FIGs), linked courses, Gateway Courses, and general education (Matthews et al., 1996). In general, the differences in these models have to do with the structure of the curriculum, faculty roles, the use of seminars, and types of community-building activities (Gabelnick et al., 1990). Additional institution-specific models have emerged as individual institutions have implemented their own versions of learning communities, sometimes by adapting or modifying the aforementioned models.

Some learning community programs have incorporated living-learning environments while others have not. Also, some learning community programs have developed from or been built into existing campus programs, such as the First-Year Experience (FYE). In general, however, learning communities are comprised of groups of students and faculty who are brought together through intentional curricular structures in order to deepen student learning and provide connected curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Although faculty development is a purported outcome of learning communities (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Oates, 2001; Smith, 1988), reports of learning community impact generally have focused on institutional and student outcomes. Student outcomes, such as persistence, skills development, academic performance, intellectual development, and so forth have been reported as favorable for learning community participants (Epperson, 2000; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Goodsell Love, 1999; Huba et al., 2001; Huba et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 1996). Institutional outcomes, such as increased retention and graduation rates, and financial gains also have been reported (Epperson, 2000; Gabelnick et al., 1990; Goodsell Love, 1999; Huba et al., 2001; Huba et al., 2003).

Studies of Faculty in Learning Communities

Although it has been speculated that learning community involvement has far-reaching potential for faculty renewal and development, much of what is known is anecdotal. For example, Matthews et al. (1996) asserted, "Learning communities rekindle the creative side of teaching and provide new challenges for well-established teachers" (p. 472). Strommer (1999) reported that "Mid-career faculty are most likely to find the experience of teaching in a learning community to be rejuvenating and thus make good recruits to staff new learning community programs" (p. 42). Rekindling creativity and rejuvenating faculty are congruent with perceived developmental needs of mid-career faculty, during a period where it is possible for faculty members to experience a professional plateau.

Through their discussions with learning community faculty, Smith and MacGregor (1991) reported that faculty members' experiences with learning communities provided them with opportunities to assess their teaching, re-examine dynamics in the courses, and learn from other faculty. In particular, faculty learned new subject matter and pedagogical approaches from each other.

Another purported positive outcome for faculty involved in learning communities is the benefits of collaboration. Smith (1988) indicated, "Faculty generally report that the experience [collaboration] substantially alters their subsequent patterns of collegial interaction and gives them an enhanced sense of camaraderie and respect for one another" (p. 173). Hellenberg, Stephens, and Versteeg (2000) echoed the sentiments of collaboration and collegiality as themes from their qualitative assessment of learning communities at Spokane Falls Community College. They concluded that faculty in learning communities appreciated "respecting the skills and performance of a colleague, being a mentor or (on the other hand)

having a senior colleague as a mentor, feeling rejuvenated... simply enjoying the socializing among colleagues" (p. 28).

Evenbeck, Jackson, and McGrew (1999) discussed learning communities as having a powerful potential to be transformative for faculty members who are involved. According to Evenbeck et al., "Many of the faculty development outcomes in learning communities are transformative. They go beyond enhancement of traditional faculty roles..." (p. 53). Transformative outcomes identified by Evenbeck et al. include: collaborative work on teaching; increased knowledge and use of campus resources; enhanced collegiality among faculty; movement toward an interdisciplinary perspective; creation of a comprehensive professional community focused on new students; and creation of student-centered learning environments. Evenbeck et al. also suggested that learning community involvement impacts faculty beyond the immediate experience, saying, "Faculty often adopt a learning- or student-centered approach in the courses they teach outside the learning community" (p. 55). Perhaps most powerful, however, is the developmental and reflective potential of learning community involvement. "Certainly, it is possible that the experience may lead to new perspectives on the self, on other faculty... on staff, on students, and on pedagogy" (p. 55-56). It would seem that insights such as these speak to the transformative potential of learning communities (Gabelnick et al., 1990). In addition, reflection would seem to contribute to positive growth and development of faculty members, thus stimulating vitality and meeting their need for reassessment (Baldwin, 1990a).

Strommer (1999) collected anecdotal data through an electronic list serve survey of learning communities faculty from institutions of all types and sizes. Emerging themes from responses revealed both perceived advantages and disadvantages of teaching in a learning

community. The major advantage cited by respondents was their relationships with students and colleagues, which led to many secondary benefits, such as "[connections with students] improves teaching... by 'grounding it in experiential realities'" (p. 44). Respondents also reported having more cooperative classroom atmospheres, gaining the stimulation of thinking across disciplines (characterized as "invigorating"), and making new connections and insights with implications for their research projects. Finally, Strommer found that learning community involvement encouraged the improvement of teaching. Disadvantages of learning community involvement included the time and effort required (i.e., "not allowing enough time for research and tenure-granting activities" [p. 44]) and challenges of community development with students and with other colleagues. Despite the disadvantages, Strommer reported "most of the respondents did find the experience of teaching in a learning community sufficiently rewarding that they will do it again" (p. 45).

Stassen (2000) and Barefoot (1993) studied the development of faculty who were involved in first-year programs. These programs often have properties that are similar to learning communities, such as an emphasis on first-year students, helping students acclimate and successfully transition to college, and a goal of student success. Barefoot (1993) cited research from a mid-sized comprehensive state university where a large percentage (over 70%) of full-time faculty who taught their first-year seminar reported learning more about first-year students, learning more about the university, and using new or different teaching techniques (then trying the techniques at least once in another course) as a result of teaching the first-year seminar course.

Through a qualitative inquiry, Stassen (2000) identified several benefits for faculty involved in a living-learning program (which fits with a common model of learning

communities). Four major themes of outcomes emerged from her inquiry: better understanding of first-year students; rethinking the teaching-learning process; developing collegiality around teaching; and changes in other aspects of the faculty role (i.e., their participation influenced their "broader academic identity" p. 272). Stassen concluded, "The findings do suggest the promising nature of first-year programs for giving faculty members a teaching experience that provides new and stimulating challenges and important opportunities for professional growth" (p. 275). Stimulation, creativity, and challenge are all potential characteristics of initiatives that appeal to the specific needs of mid-career faculty members.

Finally, Rye (1997) conducted phenomenologically-based interviews with faculty members from two community colleges who were teaching in coordinated-studies programs (CSPs), a type of learning community. She found, "…faculty experience revitalization and empowerment in CSPs, alleviating redundancy and boredom from teaching the same courses. The CSP framework allows for self-direction, spontaneity, and freedom from the barriers and restrictions experienced in traditional courses" (p. ii). Rye posited that CSPs provided unique opportunities for innovation, creativity, collaboration (shared ownership), and freedom from traditional boundaries that all contribute to faculty rejuvenation and empowerment. She concluded, "Faculty value in this experience the opportunity to tap into a reservoir of energy for change and innovation within the institution. The CSP becomes an antidote to disaffection" (p. 146).

In summary, the variety of opportunities – collaboration, work on institutional issues, interdisciplinary work, etc. – along with the transformative and reflective prospects of learning community work seem to converge with faculty development principles and needs.

In particular, mid-career faculty needs may be addressed through learning communities, particularly if reflective practice occurs, allowing them to evaluate and re-assess their career, their place in the faculty, and their place in the institution. The stimulation of innovative work and collaborations also may positively impact vitality and diminish the amount of "plateauing" or "malaise" experienced by this group.

With regard to the institutional potential for learning communities, Oates (2001) indicated, "Although faculty development may not be a common reason for instituting learning communities, it certainly becomes one of the reasons for sustaining and expanding them" (p. 9). The faculty development potential of learning communities and the possible benefits of involvement appear to be powerful. With recent calls for reform in undergraduate education, it seems that learning communities provide a venue for addressing reform while at the same time benefiting and contributing to the overall vitality of involved faculty.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed research in the major topical areas informing this study. I discussed academic career development, specifically honing in on mid-career faculty. I then presented several characterizations of vitality, attempting to capture the essence of this complex construct. Next, I presented information about faculty development strategies and linked the qualities of faculty development programs to the kinds of opportunities available through learning communities. Finally, I summarized and discussed outcomes that have been suggested to result from faculty involvement in learning communities. These benefits include: increased collaboration and interdisciplinary work, better understanding of first-year students, improved teaching and use of new pedagogies,

and positive collegiality. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss the methods for this study.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD

In this section, the method for the current study will be discussed. First, I will present

the methodology informing the study, followed by descriptions of the site, participant

selection, data collection, and data analysis. Then, I will discuss trustworthiness features of

the study, and conclude the section with a discussion of my role as researcher and my

qualifications.

Methodology

The qualitative paradigm most appropriate for this research is constructivism. A

basic tenet of constructivism is that there is no universal truth waiting to be discovered;

rather, constructivists argue that knowledge is created through active engagement of

individuals with each other and their environments (Crotty, 1998). According to Schwandt

(1998), "In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover

knowledge so much as construct or make it" (p. 237). In constructivism, the building of

knowledge is dependent upon the connection and interaction between the researcher and

participants. Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated, "Epistemologically, the constructivist

paradigm denies the possibility of subject-object dualism, suggesting instead that the findings

of a study exist precisely because there is an interaction between observer and observed that

literally creates what emerges from the inquiry" (p. 44). These principles of constructivism

are unlike positivism where the aim is to discover truth or law in an objective manner while

the researcher attempts to control all aspects of the inquiry and to remain detached from and

independent of the participants (Guba & Lincoln; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Guba and Lincoln

rejected the positivistic paradigm and asserted, "They [constructions] do not exist outside of

the persons who create and hold them; they are not part of some 'objective' world that exists apart from their constructors" (p. 143).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1998), in the constructivist view "realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature... and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding these constructions" (p. 206). Thus, to address the questions of this study, it is essential that interviews be conducted with individuals who hold the constructions about which I hope to learn. Constructivist qualitative inquiry, therefore, is the most appropriate approach for this inquiry.

Phenomenology is a theoretical framework and methodology seated within the epistemology of constructivism (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology is concerned with the meanings that individuals ascribe to their experiences (Crotty). Kvale (1996) asserted, "Phenomenology attempts to get beyond immediately experienced meaning in order to articulate the prereflective level of lived meanings, to make the invisible visible" (p. 53). In addition, phenomenology lends itself to multiple realities, where different (and even divergent) constructions are considered meaningful (Schwandt, 1998). The current study is exploratory in nature and relies strongly on participants' perspectives to inform this exploration. Moreover, it would have been very challenging to address the research questions I posed by studying anything other than the participants' realities.

Phenomenology, however, is not simply a description of everyday events. According to Crotty (1998),

> Far from inviting us to explore our everyday meanings as they stand, it
>
> [phenomenology] calls upon us to put them in abeyance and open ourselves to the

phenomena in their stark immediacy to see what emerges for us. True enough, the

phenomena in their stark immediacy – the 'things themselves' – will prove elusive.

In describing what comes into view within immediate experience (or even in thinking

about what comes into view), we necessarily draw on language, and culture. For that

reason, we end, not with a presuppositionless description of phenomena, but with a

reinterpretation. It will be as much a construction as the sense we have laid aside, but

as reinterpretation – as new meaning, or fuller meaning, or renewed meaning – it is

precisely what we as phenomenologists are after. (p. 82)

Thus, it is the elucidation of deeper meanings that is the aim of a phenomenological

approach. Phenomenology is the appropriate methodology for the current study because the

aim of the inquiry is to understand the lived experiences and realities of mid-career faculty

members who are involved with learning communities and their interpretations of their

experiences. This fits with Schwandt's (1998) characterization of constructivism as having

the aim of "understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the

inquirer) hold, aiming toward consensus, but still open to new interpretations as information

and sophistications improve" (p. 211).

Research Site – Learning Communities at Iowa State University

Iowa State University (ISU) is a large, research-extensive institution located in the

Midwest. The first learning communities began at ISU in 1995 as a grass-roots movement

driven by faculty and staff who wanted to improve student learning; they were not centrally

administered (Huba et al., 2003). However, learning communities grew in number and

eventually became institutionalized as the result of a three-year internal presidential grant

from 1998-2001. During that time, the number of learning communities grew from 23 to 48,

and student participation nearly doubled, going from 1,114 to 2,103 participants (Huba et al.). In 2003, 43% of first-year full-time students participated in a learning community. Although most ISU learning communities are geared toward first-year students, some sophomore, transfer, and other upper-level communities have been developed (Huba et al.). In addition, most learning communities at ISU are discipline specific (i.e., agronomy, computer engineering, biology, etc.). For a complete list of Iowa State University learning communities for 2003-04, see Appendix A.

Learning communities at ISU do not fit one particular model. Most of the learning communities could be characterized as having qualities of three aforementioned models: the linked courses model, clustered courses model, and Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) model (as described in Chapter 2). In addition, approximately one-third of the learning communities offer a residential living environment for their students. Another important feature of most ISU learning communities is the participation of undergraduate peer mentors who fulfill a variety of social and academic responsibilities within the community.

Organizationally, learning communities are required to have a designated coordinator and are encouraged to have a broad-based planning team consisting of others who serve in supporting roles for the learning community. Coordinators are faculty or staff members who assume the bulk of the responsibility for determining and meeting the short- and long-term needs of the learning community. Academic advisors most often fill the role as coordinator, although sometimes the coordinating role is filled by a faculty member. Planning team members may include course instructors, faculty members, academic advisors, undergraduate peer mentors, graduate research and teaching assistants, department chairs, and even off-campus partners, such as industrial mentors and service-learning providers. Regardless of

infrastructure, Lenning and Ebbers (1999) suggested that learning communities will not be successful without faculty support for their implementation.

Individual learning communities, through their annual requests for funding and end-of-year annual reports, provide documentation of faculty participation in learning communities at Iowa State. It is difficult to quantify actual faculty involvement because of varying levels of reporting by individual learning communities. Even within self-reports, the true nature of faculty involvement ranges widely as some faculty members participate more actively than others.

In its original vision for learning communities, Iowa State University Learning Communities Working Group (1998) expressed four desired outcomes for faculty involved with learning communities. The outcomes were that faculty would:

- increase interaction with students, staff, and other faculty

- employ active and collaborative teaching strategies

- increase involvement in faculty development opportunities, and

- increase participation in scholarly and interdisciplinary endeavors in teaching, research, and outreach.

However, no efforts to measure these outcomes have been undertaken. Furthermore, the outcomes are descriptive and general (i.e., increased contact by faculty with students) and less focused on the outcomes of such activities (i.e., improved use of pedagogical techniques, increased stimulation and creativity, positive collegiality, etc.). This study sought to explore underlying outcomes as reported by the faculty member, with the hope of uncovering experiences of involvement that may illustrate learning communities as a viable strategy for addressing faculty vitality.

In 2003, the Learning Community Advisory Committee developed and adopted a new vision statement and intended outcomes for participating students, faculty, and staff (Iowa State University Learning Communities, 2003). The faculty/staff outcomes were modified and broadened from the 1998 document to include specific areas in which faculty/staff members would experience positive effects. The outcomes were that faculty/staff would experience:

- increased collaborations with students, faculty, and staff

- increased implementation of active and collaborative teaching and learning strategies

- connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences

- increased knowledge about students and their development

- improved reflective practice

- disciplinary and interdisciplinary collegiality

- increased knowledge about university resources

- increased involvement in professional development activities

- increased connections between their learning community work and their scholarship

- increased recognition and reward

Although the list of outcomes were expanded and adopted, no efforts to measure these outcomes have been undertaken to determine if they have occurred.

Participants

Participants for the study were selected from the pool of faculty participating in learning communities. In this section, I will discuss the selection approach and criteria, as well as identification of participants.

Approach

Criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) primarily was used to select participants for this study. Criterion-based selection "requires that the researcher establish in advance a set of criteria or a list of attributes that the units for study must possess" (LeCompte & Preissle, p. 69).

Criteria

Criteria for participant selection follow. In order to be selected for this study, an individual must have:

- Held at least the rank of Associate Professor with tenure

- Had no fewer than five years remaining to retirement

- Been involved with a learning community during the current academic year

- Had a minimum of one semester of involvement as a coordinator or course instructor for a first-year learning community

The first two criteria are consistent with the definition of mid-career faculty member as outlined in Chapter 1. The third criterion was to ensure that participants currently were engaged in learning community work. I believed the richness of their experiences would be heightened and their descriptions more vivid if they were involved with a learning community during the current academic year. During the course of interviews, it was

discovered that one participant who had indicated a match with the criteria of the study in fact was no longer involved with a learning community during the current year.

The final criterion was essential for identifying faculty members who have experienced at least one full unit of the academic calendar, a semester, with a learning community. As learning communities ebb and flow throughout the semester, I believed it was important for the participants to have experienced one complete semester in order to reflect on and make meaning of their experiences. The rationale for utilizing faculty who are involved with first-year learning communities was to identify individuals who, by nature of their involvement with a first-year learning community, fell outside of what may be considered traditional norms of a research institution. This group provided the opportunity to explore the construct of vitality as called for by Kalivoda et al. (1994), who suggested, "Further faculty career development and faculty vitality studies are needed on faculty cohorts outside the traditional career path" (p. 269). As the Boyer Commission (1998) indicated, it is common for many research universities to hold the expectation that faculty do not interact extensively with undergraduate students (particularly first-year students); thus, faculty members who are involved in a teaching-intensive sub-environment, such as learning communities, fall outside a traditional role. Moreover, faculty members who participate in first-year learning communities may be even further from the traditional path in that it is perceived to be less than common for them to be interacting with first-year students.

Identification of Participants

I reviewed two years of individual learning community annual reports (2001-02 and 2002-03) to identify participants who met the criteria for participation in the study. To make sure I cast the widest net possible in identifying participants, I reviewed the list of potential

participants with the Co-Directors of Learning Communities. Given their positions with the program, they were able to provide additional insights and suggestions that helped me develop as comprehensive a list of potential participants as possible.

Using the aforementioned criteria, I selected a diverse group of participants, both men and women, who represented a variety of departments and learning communities and invited them (via an e-mail letter) to participate in the study. A copy of the e-mail letter can be found in Appendix B. Ten faculty members agreed to participate in the study and two declined, one because she believed she did not meet the criteria for selection and the other because he was out of the country and unavailable. Of the ten participants, four were women and six were men, and they represented 10 different learning communities. Participants also represented four different disciplinary categorizations, according to the taxonomy of seven disciplinary categorizations used by the Iowa State University Graduate College (2004). Further delineation of participants' demographics is provided in Chapter 4 findings. Table 1, also provided in Chapter 4, depicts participants' demographics.

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

Three qualitative methods of data collection were utilized in this study: phenomenologically-based interviews, document analysis, and observations. To the greatest extent possible, I allowed for an emergent design in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated,

> Designs must be emergent rather than preordinate: because meaning is determined by
> context to such a great extent; because the existence of multiple realities constrains
> the development of a design based on only one (the investigator's) construction;
> because what will be learned at a site is always dependent on the *interaction* between

investigator and context, and the interaction is also not fully predictable; and because

the nature of mutual shapings cannot be known until they are witnessed. (p. 208)

As such, observations were added as a data collected method for the study after it was

determined that no new information was being elicited through interviews. In this section, I

will discuss the methods and protocols that were used.

Phenomenologically-Based Interviews

According to Kvale (1996), "With the focus of the interview on the experienced

meanings of the subjects' life world, phenomenology appears relevant for clarifying the

mode of understanding in a qualitative research interview" (p. 53). Open-ended questions fit

well with phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 1991). Seidman maintained that, "Their

[the interviewers'] major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to

those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within

the topic under study" (p. 9).

Seidman (1991) presented a structure for phenomenological interviewing that

included a tripartite focus: (a) on the participant's life history, (b) on the "concrete details of

the participants' present experience in the topic area of the study" (p. 11), and (c) on

reflection of the meanings of participants' experiences. For this study, I conducted in-depth

interviews with participants in which I attempted to weave together the three foci suggested

by Seidman. I conducted 75- to 90-minute interviews with 10 participants and used a semi-

structured interview protocol to provide a base from which the interview could be expanded.

One participant was scheduled initially for an interview as a pilot study in order to test the

protocol for language, clarity, coherence, and timing. After this interview, the protocol was

re-focused by rewriting and reordering some of the questions and deleting others. The final interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed within one month after the interview was completed. Transcripts were sent to participants via e-mail to provide them the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy and make any clarifications or corrections. Two participants responded with minor corrections and/or clarifications to their transcripts. A technology failure occurred during one of the interviews and approximately 20-30 minutes of the interview was not audiotaped. With this interview, I relied on my interview notes to fill in period of time that was missing from the transcript. Two questions were sent as a follow-up to all participants via e-mail (see Appendix D).

Informational redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was attained through the inclusion of 10 participants and, thus, contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the study. Informational redundancy occurs when "no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 202).

Document Analysis

Documentation obtained from the learning communities office was used to discover descriptive information, faculty involvement, participation rates, and so forth. Annual reports supplied by individual learning communities were reviewed for two years to identify a pool of potential participants who met the criteria for participation in the study.

Curriculum vitas of the participants also were reviewed to gain an understanding of participants' careers and professional experiences. According to Merriam (1998), documents, because they were not generally created for research purposes, can provide rich insights into the phenomenon under study. Because examining learning community work as

part of the academic career was central to this study, curriculum vitas provided the kind of documentation that would illuminate participants' careers from their perspectives.

Observations

Participant observations were used as another phase of data collection in this study. According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), "Participant observation is a check, enabling the researcher to verify that individuals are doing what they (and the researcher) believe they are doing" (p. 197). For this study, observations provided an opportunity to see the faculty member "in action" with the students in their learning community.

The researcher, in participant observations, observes, listens, and interacts with the participant in a setting appropriate for the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). In this study, all participants were invited to participate in an observation of them interacting with learning community students in a learning community class, seminar, or informal event (i.e., meeting or social occasion).

Due to the timing of the observations, only three participants had instances of one of these three events occurring in the timeframe remaining in the academic year. I was invited by each of these three individuals to conduct an observation, one in each of the three categories. However, one observation could not be conducted due to an unexpected scheduling conflict in the faculty member's calendar. Observations were conducted with the two other faculty members for approximately one hour (or the duration of the activity) in a learning community class and at a learning community picnic, respectively. A de-briefing session was held immediately following the activity with the participants to discuss the activity, ask follow-up questions, and review the "field notes to correct researcher misperceptions and misinterpretations" (LeCompte & Preissle, p. 198).

Data Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described inductive data analysis as "a process for 'making sense' of field data" (p. 202). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined data analysis as tripartite, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. They suggested that these three items occur continuously throughout a research project, with one feeding into the other. Their characterization seems analogous to the constant comparative approach to data analysis, which I utilized in this study. The constant comparative approach "combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed and coded" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 256). Inductive category coding, therefore, emerges from the data as opposed to the data being analyzed by pre-determined categories that have been imposed by the researcher (i.e., a deductive process). From the outset of the study, I attempted to identify emerging patterns (e.g., working codes) and working hypotheses in order to include them in the study.

As "analysis can be viewed as a staged process by which a whole phenomenon is divided into its components and then reassembled under various new rubrics" (LeCompte & Preissle, p. 237), I utilized various strategies to assist in this process, such as analytic memos and a contact summary form (interview log). The contact summary form, as adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994), provided one mechanism for me to immediately reflect on each interview episode. Using the form also allowed me to begin to identify themes and circulate these and other insights from the interviews into the study. The contact summary form can be found in Appendix E.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim within one month following the interview. During an initial reading, I highlighted passages of interest and items that were particularly

emphasized. From this, I created a list of initial themes from the study which were refined

through continued analysis during which I used a matrix of themes for data reduction and

display. Final themes were established through a process of categorical clustering in which

themes having a similar baseline issue were clustered for discussion in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

Just as principles of reliability and validity are essential features of quantitative

research, qualitative inquiry also has established similar frameworks for ensuring its

trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four trustworthiness criteria:

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I will describe each of these

criteria and discuss the ways in which I addressed them in this study.

Credibility

Credibility is analogous to internal validity; that is, the extent to which findings and

interpretations are authentic and believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman,

1994). In this study, I engaged in triangulation of sources and methods, meaning that I

included multiple interview participants and utilized multiple data collection strategies

including document analysis, interviews, and observations. These are two strategies used to

ensure credibility.

Secondly, I participated in peer debriefing with a colleague who is familiar with both

learning communities and qualitative inquiry. Peer debriefing provides an opportunity to

process the study in an analytic manner with a person who is on the outside of, but not

necessarily altogether unfamiliar with, the research at hand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer

debriefing can assist with testing working hypotheses, discussing emerging methodological

design strategies, and providing a cathartic opportunity for the researcher (Lincoln & Guba).

Perhaps most important, is that peer debriefing can provide the opportunity for "the inquirer's biases to be probed, meanings explored, the basis for interpretations clarified" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 308). In essence, peer debriefing provided me the opportunity to be challenged on all aspects of my study with a caring peer who does not hold a position of power over me. Mimi Benjamin was utilized as a peer de-briefer for her knowledge of both learning communities and qualitative research methods. I provided her with contact summary forms (interview logs) from all interviews, copies of several transcripts, and an analytic display of themes in a matrix. She and I met two times during the study, during analysis and again during the final writing stage.

Negative case analysis is another way to ensure credibility of the study by recognizing that possible alternative or discrepant interpretations may emerge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, not all participants may report the same (or similar) experiences. According to Maxwell (1996), both supporting and discrepant data must be evaluated in order to "assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion, being aware of all of the pressures to ignore data that do not fit your conclusions" (p. 93). As such, I analyzed all data, giving as much consideration to discrepant data as to the data that supported my claims. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "Negative case analysis may be regarded as a 'process of revising hypotheses with hindsight.' The object of the game is continuously to refine a hypothesis until it *accounts for all known cases without exception*" (p. 309). Although I remained open to possible alternative explanations, no negative cases emerged in this study.

Finally, I engaged in member checking with all interview participants to ensure that summaries, interpretations, and conclusions were accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member

checking refers to a process by which data (e.g., transcripts), interpretations, and conclusions are shared with participants and participants are given the opportunity to react and provide feedback (Lincoln & Guba). Lincoln and Guba characterized member checks are "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). In this study, participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and to provide feedback, clarification, or corrections. In addition, a summary of findings was shared with participants and they were given the opportunity to share their reactions and feedback. Five participants responded and reaffirmed the findings that I had shared with them.

Transferability

Transferability is similar to external validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994), although in a unique way. In qualitative research, the recognition of multiple realities and nonexistence of universal truths means that generalizability is not a goal of the study. However, qualitative researchers can provide "thick description" in order to assist the reader in determining the degree to which the study may be transferable to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, "It is the responsibility of the inquirer to provide a sufficient base to permit a person contemplating application in another receiving setting to make the needed comparisons of similarity" (pp. 359-360). Thus, I have attempted to provide "thick description" in this study to maximize the possibility of assisting others in determining transferability.

Dependability

Dependability is similar to reliability. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "The underlying issue here [in dependability] is whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods" (p. 278). In this

study, I attempted to connect the research problem and purpose with methods of data collection that are consistent with my epistemological beliefs and methodological frameworks. I also utilized feedback from professors and peers in the formulation and development of the study, thereby strengthening the likelihood that the study exhibits qualities of dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability attempts to address the issue of how conclusions are reached and the degree to which the conclusions are supported by data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "The inquiry auditor also examines the *product* – the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations – and attests that it is supported by data and is internally coherent so that the 'bottom line' may be accepted" (p. 318). To improve confirmability of a study, researchers establish an audit trail that includes raw data, the products of data reduction and analysis, the products of data reconstruction and synthesis, process notes, instrument development information, and other documents. In this way, an audit trail keeps a record of how the researcher moved through the process, getting from Point A (intentions/proposals) to Point B (findings and conclusions). In keeping with the aims of confirmability, I maintained detailed notes and files throughout the study to create an audit trail. Accordion style folders, field notes, and computer files provided filing and organizational systems for this study. The use of peer debriefing, as previously discussed, also contributed to the confirmability of this study.

Researcher Role and Reflexivity

According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), "We refer to these influences [personal life experiences, cultural ideologies, disciplinary training, philosophical commitments and

issues, etc.] as informal, personal, and tacit theory, and we call attention to them because to the extent that they are not made explicit, they can become a significant source of distortion in research" (p. 125). Thus, it is important that I identify and discuss who I am within the context of the current study. My role in this study is informed both by my background academically as well as professionally.

My role in this study was to serve as the instrument through which data were collected as well as analyzed, a role as both "participant and facilitator in this process" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 211). My interaction with participants was a key component of the research process and I served as a "'passionate participant' (Lincoln, 1991) actively engaged in facilitating the 'multivoice' reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants" (Guba & Lincoln, p. 215).

My master's degree in Counseling and Student Affairs afforded me with extensive experience interviewing people for the purpose of making meaning and self-discovery. Although I have not been professionally employed as a counselor, I have taken several courses in counseling skills (i.e., interviewing, listening, etc.) that required me to spend blocks of time in counseling settings for each of the courses. Because understanding and eliciting meaning is central to a phenomenological study, I believe my counseling and interviewing skills are an invaluable part of what I brought to this study.

Professionally, I have worked with learning communities at Iowa State University for four years. I have extensive working knowledge of learning communities and I have established a high level of rapport with many faculty and staff who are involved. Thus, I had easy access to participants and each of them was very willing to participate and share their experiences. One fear that I had was that participants may have viewed me as a member of

the administrative team, and depending on their feelings toward the administrative team, a perception such as this could be a potential danger to eliciting full and honest opinions. The pre-existing rapport that I had with most participants made the interview setting very comfortable and little time was needed to establish relationships and trust. Thus, I do not believe my work with learning communities inhibited this study in any way. Instead, my perception is that the participants were very open and honest and not reluctant to share their perspectives. The participants, of course, were informed of their right to not respond to any question that may make them uncomfortable; however, none of the participants refused to respond to any of the interview questions.

Through my work with learning communities, I also have worked collaboratively with many faculty and staff on various pedagogical, assessment, and other faculty/staff development initiatives. I have witnessed the dedication and passion that many faculty members have for learning communities, particularly noticing that mid-career faculty seemed to be especially energized by this work and not "plateaued" as some of the literature might suggest. Thus, I developed a strong belief that learning communities provide a creative outlet for mid-career faculty (that is developmentally appropriate) and may be a potential source for developing or actualizing vitality.

Finally, regarding the rights of human subjects, I take seriously the issues of anonymity and confidentiality and my responsibilities as a researcher to participants. I discussed these topics directly with participants and worked closely with them so that their anonymity and confidentiality were assured to the greatest possible extent. For example, I used pseudonyms for each participant and utilized the taxonomy of disciplines employed by the ISU Graduate College in order to protect participants' names and departmental

affiliations. I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Research Office prior to beginning data collection for this study, and provided all participants with a copy of the informed consent form that they signed before participating in the study. A copy of the informed consent form can be found in Appendix F.

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the method for the current study, beginning with an overview of the methodology and theoretical framework that inform the study. I then discussed the site of the study and outlined procedures for identifying and selecting participants. Next, I provided a description of data collection methods and data analysis strategies. I concluded with a discussion of the trustworthiness features of the study, and a reflection on my role as the researcher. In Chapter 4, I will present findings of the study and I will conclude in Chapter 5 with conclusions, recommendations, and future research.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The previous chapters set the context for this study by introducing the topic,

presenting a review of relevant literature, and outlining the methods that were undertaken to

conduct the study. In this chapter, I will present the findings of the study.

Introduction to Findings

In the last decade, research universities have been called upon to reform

undergraduate education (Boyer Commission, 1998). Concurrent with the calls for reform,

learning communities have experienced resurgence (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, &

Gabelnick, 1996; Smith, 2001), with many of the programs flourishing in research university

environments. Faculty are essential to the implementation and success of learning

communities (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999), and it has been speculated

that learning communities have far-reaching potential for influencing faculty renewal and

development (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990; Matthews et al.; Smith,

1988). However, relatively little is known about the impact of learning community

involvement on participating faculty.

The purpose of this study was to explore the construct of faculty vitality as

experienced by mid-career faculty members who are involved with learning communities.

My goal was to understand the experiences of and meanings that mid-career faculty members

attach to their involvement with learning communities. Furthermore, I sought to uncover the

outcomes experienced by faculty members as a result of their learning community

participation.

Three main research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways do mid-career faculty members describe their learning community experiences?

   - What outcomes do mid-career faculty members identify from their involvement with learning communities?

   - What advantages and disadvantages of learning community involvement do mid-career faculty identify?

2. Do mid-career faculty who are involved with learning communities exhibit characteristics of vitality? If so, in what ways? If not, how are they different?

3. Do learning communities provide an environment that fosters faculty vitality?

Data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were gathered and analyzed to address these questions.

Findings of this study are presented and discussed in this chapter, and the chapter is divided into four subsections. First, I will present a brief overview of the participants of this study. Next, I will discuss learning community work as part of the academic career of my participants. This includes characteristics of "who" they are as professionals and how the learning community work fits as part of their whole careers. Third, I will present outcomes identified by participants as resulting from their learning community work. Both positive and negative outcomes, as well as other identified advantages and disadvantages, will be discussed. Finally, I will present insights on faculty vitality as gleaned from this study. Throughout this chapter, I will connect the findings to the research questions, relevant literature, and theoretical underpinnings while utilizing participants' voices to illustrate the findings of the study.

Participants of the Study

As presented in Chapter 3, 10 faculty members agreed to participate in the study. Of these, four were Associate Professors and six were Full Professors. Their years of service on the faculty at Iowa State University ranged from five to 33 years. Four of the participants were women and six were men, and they represented 10 different learning communities. Four participants have been involved with more than one learning community whereas the remaining six have worked with only one learning community. Finally, the 10 participants represented four different disciplinary categorizations. A list of participants' pseudonyms, ranks, and disciplinary affiliations is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Pseudonyms, Ranks, and Disciplinary Affiliations

Pseudonym	Rank	Disciplinary Affiliation[a]
Joseph	Associate Professor	Biological and Agricultural Sciences
Mark	Associate Professor	Engineering
Sharon	Professor	Biological and Agricultural Sciences
Jack	Professor	Computational and Physical Sciences
Zoie	Professor	Arts and Humanities
Harry	Professor	Engineering
Byron	Associate Professor	Biological and Agricultural Sciences
Kent	Professor	Biological and Agricultural Sciences
Meredith	Associate Professor	Biological and Agricultural Sciences
Nancy	Professor	Biological and Agricultural Sciences

[a]Using the taxonomy of disciplines identified by the Iowa State University Graduate College (2004). These include: Arts and Humanities, Biological and Agricultural Sciences, Business and Management, Education, Engineering, Computational and Physical Sciences, & Social Sciences.

Learning Community Involvement as Part of the Academic Career

A premise of this study was that faculty careers must be examined holistically rather than unidimensionally. In keeping with that principle, the issue of how learning community participation fits into the academic career was explored through the interviews as well as through document analysis of participants' curriculum vitas.

How learning community participation fits into the academic career led to an exploration of matters of *"who"* these faculty are (i.e., what common characteristics of participants were uncovered in this study?). This is important in understanding the participants of the study in a way that sets the context for further findings. It also helps to illustrate that learning community participation fits into academic careers as part of the whole and not as a fragment of it. In this section, I will discuss common characteristics of participants as well as how learning community involvement seems to fit into the academic career. I will conclude this section with a discussion of how these findings relate to the research questions and literature.

Common Characteristics of Participants

Participants shared a number of common characteristics that were revealed in this study. These characteristics included: a commitment to undergraduate students and their learning; empathy for students based on their own experiences; an early interest in teaching; participation in teaching enhancement activities; frequently being recipients of teaching awards; holding teaching roles and responsibilities; and maintaining connections to disciplinary activities. I will present and discuss each of these items in this section.

Commitment to undergraduate students and their learning. First, participants in this study articulated a clear and compelling dedication to undergraduate students in general (not

just learning community students) and their learning. Further, participants have a shared interest in working with first-year students and often view this as a way to have a large and lasting positive impact on them. In a sense, they viewed their influence on first-year students as having a lasting impact for students' remaining years at Iowa State and beyond. Mark described his interest in undergraduate students, saying "my bent is definitely toward student success, student learning, student engagement."

One aspect of participants' commitment to undergraduates was the enjoyment they gained as a result of working with them. Zoie said that generally she is "the happiest when I'm around students." Likewise, Harry discussed his interest and pleasure in working with undergraduates, saying

> [It] keeps you young, sort of... I've enjoyed the job [as a faculty member] because I like to see students develop. You know, they change from the time you first meet them when they're freshmen until the time they graduate. So, it's an interesting, interesting, satisfying job.

Another aspect of participants' commitment to undergraduate students was the opportunity to have a large and lasting impact on them. Having a large and lasting impact on undergraduate students was described as happening by reaching larger numbers of students through introductory, first-year courses and through the faculty member sharing their passion for the discipline. For example, Joseph believes there is an opportunity not only to reach a large number of students through introductory courses, but also to share his passion for his discipline and hopefully make a lasting impact on students' knowledge. Joseph said,

> Recognizing that a relatively small number of people are really going to continue on into any discipline, and so your potential to have the biggest impact on the largest

number of people is at that first level... I was writing papers that maybe six or eight

or ten people in the world would actually be really interested in, you know, would

read with some care. And yet there's such a tremendous need for people in general to

understand more about [my discipline]. In part because [it's] just cool and really

everybody ought to be [in my discipline], but in part because of the current issues

with regard to environmental problems that we face... Lots of people, certainly

undergraduate students coming in as freshmen, are pretty unaware of those things

[contemporary issues related to the discipline] and, I guess, I wanted to take an active

role in being sure they didn't leave unaware of those kinds of things.

Nancy also discussed the value of teaching first-year students and said she believed she could

help them more at the first-year level, thus having a larger and lasting impact. She said,

I like teaching first year students because you can help them more. That sounds very

odd, but if they're having difficulties with learning something it's a challenge but at

the same time it's fun to be able to help them figure it out... but I think I probably

have made an impact. I visually can see it, the impact. I think at the senior level the

impact is also there and there's a lot of excitement because they see more direct

linkages to the information and so on, but I think you see it more easily at the lower

level.

In essence, faculty in this study expressed their commitment to undergraduate

students and their learning and faculty gained tremendous pleasure from working with

undergraduates. Furthermore, they often regarded first-year students as more likely to be

positively influenced because of being able to reach more of them through large introductory

courses, thus attempting to make a larger and lasting impact on the students.

Empathy for students based on their own experiences. Participants in this study discussed the impact of their own experiences, including their undergraduate experiences, as attuning them to students' needs and fueling their interest in learning community work. Participants described a sense of empathy for students through which they wanted students to learn from their own experiences and to make college a positive experience for students. As indicated by Mark, "It [getting involved with learning community work] was based on my own experience which was, I wouldn't have made it though engineering without really smart engineering friends." Zoie described a similar experience of empathy which contributed to her interest in learning community work. She said,

> I have always been looking out for the student and particularly freshmen students
> because I just realized, I just know, that it has to be a very big change, very big
> adjustment in their life. I didn't have any trouble with that whenever I went and [yet I
> know that many students do].

Kent discussed the opportunities he missed as an undergraduate and how he uses his experience to try to better the experiences of his students.

> My college experience was okay. I had really good teachers, really good classes but
> my focus was on becoming a military officer, so the interesting thing is that I look
> back now at how much I missed. I wasn't very active in clubs, I was very active in a
> fraternity, and very active from day one in Army ROTC so college was a method of
> getting there. Then I realized at the end when I was offered the graduate opportunity
> how good my education really was, but that I hadn't been very involved with it and I
> think that is what really made me become more involved in the educational process as
> a faculty member. So, every morning when I got to class at 8:00 the first thing I do is

I go in, I have everything fired up, but at least two to three minutes ahead of time I

run through every flier I can find – 'this club meets tonight, here's why you need to

go there, this event's going on' and so when 8:00 comes up they've already had three

minutes at least of intense 'here's what you need to do and I know that because I

didn't take advantage of that when I was a student.'

Thus, learning communities faculty in this study shared the characteristic of relying on their

own experiences in order to positively influence the experiences of their students.

Early interest in teaching. In addition to their commitment to and empathy for

undergraduate students, the faculty in this study shared common characteristics related to

their teaching. For example, participants exhibited an early interest in teaching, most often

citing early experiences with teaching as important to their careers. According to Meredith,

I think I really came to terms that I wanted to be a teacher in my PhD program

because when I was in my masters program I just pretty quickly decided to go on [for

my PhD] so I didn't have to think about a career in that sense.

Moreover, most participants discussed their graduate school experiences as teaching

assistants (TA) as influencing their affinity for teaching. Joseph described his TA

experiences by saying, "I actually found my opportunities to be a TA some of the most

interesting and stimulating kinds of experiences I had in graduate school, some of the things I

enjoy the most, I guess." Thus, graduate school experiences shaped the early affinity for

teaching that was described so often by the learning community faculty in this study.

Participation in teaching enhancement activities. A fourth similarity among nearly

all participants was their active participation in one or more campus teaching enhancement

activities, such as Project LEA/RN, Wakonse Fellowships, and Miller Faculty Fellowships.

Each of these programs provide a different type of faculty development experience. Project LEA/RN (Learning Enhancement Action/Resource Network) is a teaching-enhancement activity whereby participants meet regularly with a supportive group to focus on teaching improvement. Wakonse Fellows are selected once per year by the Center for Teaching Excellence and are sent as representatives of Iowa State University to a teaching conference in Michigan. Miller Faculty Fellowships are awarded once per year and provide grant funding for projects aimed at the improvement of undergraduate education at Iowa State. Participants' involvement in these activities suggests that they possess a core interest in teaching and that they are active in campus-wide efforts aimed at teaching/learning improvement.

Frequent recipients of teaching awards. A fifth similarity among participants is that they received teaching awards frequently. These awards include departmental, college, and institutional teaching awards as well as other teaching related awards, such as the Learning Communities Innovations Award. That faculty who work with learning communities are award winning teachers suggests that they have a proclivity for teaching and subsequently have been recognized for it. While being recipients of awards is a common characteristic of participants in this study, it is not why these faculty do learning communities work. As stated by Mark, "I just think the joy of knowing that I've helped people succeed, I mean, that's what I enjoy. Whether I get the awards and stuff, I mean, I've gotten a lot of awards, but those aren't... that wasn't why I did it [my learning community work]."

Teaching roles and responsibilities. A characteristic shared among six participants of this study is that they are considered "teaching faculty" or hold administrative responsibilities related to teaching. Some individuals are characterized as teaching faculty, meaning that the

highest percentage of their work is assigned to teaching (e.g., an official appointment of 70% teaching and 30% research). At Iowa State, this strategy for faculty appointments appears to be used predominantly in the Biological and Agricultural Sciences category of disciplines. Therefore, in this study, it is unknown whether faculty members outside these areas hold similar appointments. Another characteristic of several participants in this study was having administrative responsibilities related to teaching, such as being responsible for assigning courses or overseeing the first-year curriculum. Therefore, it appears faculty who work with learning communities are likely to have commitments to teaching either through their official faculty appointments or through administrative responsibilities, again suggesting that learning communities faculty have a certain propensity for teaching-related activities.

Maintaining connections to disciplinary activities. A final common characteristic shared by participants in this study was the connections they have maintained to respective disciplinary activities; for example, they have maintained records as scholars, as well as teachers. In this study, nearly all of the faculty members exhibited engagement with their discipline through contemporary scholarship appropriate to their discipline. This is evident by activities such as publications they have produced and leadership in disciplinary organizations (i.e., editorial roles, professional association leadership, etc.) as cited on their curriculum vitas. Additionally, many of the faculty members have strong national or international reputations for their expertise in their given discipline. Thus, it does not appear that faculty in this study have abandoned their disciplinary interests in pursuit of their teaching-intensive work with learning communities.

Summary. Taken together, the above characteristics suggest that learning communities faculty have a certain propensity for teaching-related activities that was shaped

early in their careers through graduate school experiences. Furthermore, these faculty have been actively engaged in teaching improvement activities and they also have been recognized for their teaching efforts. They also exhibited commitment to undergraduate students and empathy for students that seems to be stimulated through their own experiences as undergraduates. Their empathy fuels their desire to help others learn from their experiences and seems to stimulate their interest in doing learning community work. However, the faculty in this study also have maintained connections to disciplinary activities and have not abandoned their disciplinary interests to solely pursue the teaching-intensive work of learning communities.

Identifying these common characteristics helps to understand the individuals underlying this study. Furthermore, knowing these characteristics may have implications for identifying, recruiting, and engaging new faculty in learning communities that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Learning Community Involvement as Part of a Whole

Learning community work has become embedded in various aspects of faculty careers and faculty viewed their learning community work as part of their whole career and not a fragment of it. Moreover, many faculty in this study regarded learning community work as a way to carry out their life's purpose. In this section, I will discuss how learning community work fits into faculty careers and how it is used as a vehicle by some for fulfilling a larger purpose in life.

Because a curriculum vita is a document produced by faculty members as a depiction of their career, it provides insights as to the faculty member's perception of various activities within their career. A review of their curriculum vitas revealed that most faculty listed their

learning community work as a separate item on their vita, and learning community work

crosses all categories of the vita in some cases becoming its own category. For example,

learning community work appeared under the categories of "teaching," "grants," "service,"

"awards," and "scholarship/publications" on vitas. Learning community work was not

treated indiscriminately or as inferior; rather it was presented purposefully and often given

particular emphasis (i.e., a category of work unto itself). As mentioned previously, faculty in

this study often are nationally- or internationally-known scholars, many of whom are

recipients of large external research grants. One item of note is that small learning

community grants of a few thousand dollars awarded by Iowa State often were listed

alongside major external grants of hundreds of thousands (or even millions) of dollars. Thus,

though the sum of the learning community grant may seem inconsequential when regarded as

part of the whole of the faculty member's work, it does not appear that they treated it as such.

Not only does learning community work appear to cross the categorical boundaries of

curriculum vitas, many faculty described the work as fitting into their larger purpose in life.

In other words, learning community work is not something they do only as part of their work

life; they do it also because it fits into their larger purpose or philosophy of living.

According to Meredith,

> My work is people development and so, not only do I want to just give them this
>
> technical information, but my classes require writing. I'm looking at lifelong learning
>
> and so I'm trying to develop these people into professionals. And so instead of just
>
> coming in and doing PowerPoint presentations, it's [about] molding them.

Mark discussed the purpose of his life's work and said it is "To help people succeed. You

know, from my wife to my kids to [my church group] to my graduate students, to undergrads,

to the people around me." Mark and Meredith both connected the purpose of their life's work to helping others. Byron, discussed his work in terms of responsibility beyond even the students with whom he works. He said,

> It's an honor to be a professor. The citizens of Iowa, the citizens of the United States, expect me to not teach poorly when I'm in the classroom but to excel at teaching. And I strongly believe that's my responsibility and so if that is my responsibility, then do I go for the minimum what it takes and go for a maximum promotion impact or do I go for what the citizens of the state and of the United States and the world possibly think professors should do? And I'm a fan that, in this case, maybe because I like teaching even, but I'm going to go for doing what I think is right.

Learning community work, therefore, cuts across all categories of faculty members' work. This boundary crossing has potential connections for faculty vitality, which will be explored and discussed in the next section as well as in a later section of this chapter. Furthermore, learning community work not only fits into various aspects of work, but in how many faculty perceive their life and their life's purpose.

Summary and Connection to Research Questions and Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore vitality with mid-career learning community faculty rather than to determine a causal or predictive relationship between learning community involvement and vitality. This study also does not aim to compare the participants of this study with faculty who do not engage in learning community work. Thus, although I assert that faculty in this study exhibit characteristics of vitality, I do not suggest that faculty who do not participate in learning communities are absent of it. The findings presented in the section above illuminated characteristics of the faculty in this study and how

their learning community participation fits into their academic careers. In part, these findings help address the second research question of this study which focused on whether mid-career faculty who are involved with learning communities exhibit characteristics of vitality.

According to Baldwin (1990b), "Vital professors may be campus leaders, inspiring teachers, prolific scholars, excellent advisors, but they do not necessarily perform all faculty roles with equal zest or skill" (p. 180). It appears that faculty in this study not only have a propensity for certain teaching-related activities, of which learning communities are an example, their involvement in this work has not diminished other areas of their professional lives. For example, many faculty serve their disciplines through leadership roles (i.e., editorships, professional association leadership, etc.), produce scholarship appropriate to their discipline (i.e., articles, books, etc.), and conduct research that is funded by external granting agencies. In other words, embracing the work of learning communities has not meant that faculty have rejected their other roles. Baldwin (1990b) found that vital faculty have "more complex, multidimensional careers" (p. 174). Learning community faculty in this study have not abandoned their wide-ranging work interests in sole pursuit of learning community activities, thus suggesting they have maintained complex careers which is consistent with Baldwin's assertion.

The propensity toward teaching-intensive activities and strong commitment to students demonstrated by participants in this study also is consistent with an in-house study conducted with faculty at Iowa State University. Through a survey, Brooke and Ellertson (2004) also found that faculty who participate in learning communities showed a penchant for certain curricular- and co-curricular practices such as engaging in mentoring relationships with students, spending time with students out of class, developing ways to enhance students'

in- and out-of-class learning, and using collaborative teaching/learning strategies. Baldwin (1990b) and Gooler (1991) both suggested that vital faculty often are excited about their students and enjoy challenging students academically while contributing to their development. Faculty in this study shared a commitment to students and their learning, as well as empathy for students, which engaged them with their work. Faculty also actively participated in teaching enhancement activities as a way to help improve their teaching and student learning. All of these are consistent with what might be expected of a faculty member who exhibits characteristics of vitality. Moreover, because these characteristics were pre-existing in the faculty members in this study, I believe that learning communities attract faculty members who already are vital and engaged with their work in an overall sense.

Participants in this study also revealed that learning community involvement was not a fragment of their work, but rather spanned the various roles that faculty members fulfill. It is (or has become) a boundary-spanning activity that does not fit solely into the teaching category of their work. Lamber et al. (1993) found that "the boundaries between the professional roles of teaching, research, and service become less clear" (p. 24) as faculty progress into their mid-career. Learning communities, therefore, provide an environment in which faculty members can bring together various aspects of their work such as teaching, grants, service, awards, and scholarship. Thus, learning communities may be serving a developmental need of mid-career faculty, suggesting that learning communities are an appropriate faculty development strategy for mid-career faculty as was postulated by Smith (1988) and Strommer (1999).

Although findings of this study suggest that learning community faculty seem to exhibit characteristics of vitality (posed in the second research question of this study), I will further address this question in the final section of this chapter on vitality. In the final section of this chapter, I also will discuss findings related to the third research question of whether learning communities provide a venue to foster vitality.

Conclusions

In summary, faculty members in this study shared a number of characteristics and viewed their learning community work as part of their whole career and not a fragment of it. For example, participants exhibited a propensity for teaching and teaching-related activities, while remaining active with their disciplinary-related interests (such as conducting research, preparing grants, and serving professional organizations). Furthermore, learning community participation crossed the categories of faculty work as presented on curriculum vitas, such as "teaching," "grants," "service," "awards," and "scholarship/publications." Moreover, many faculty described their learning community work as going beyond their professional responsibilities and fitting into their overall life's purpose. In the next section, I will present the outcomes, both positive and negative, that participants identified as resulting from their learning community work.

<div align="center">Outcomes</div>

One of the goals of this study was to uncover outcomes, including the advantages and disadvantages, that faculty members identify as resulting of their learning community experiences. In-depth interviews were used to elicit responses and develop an understanding of faculty outcomes. In this section, I will first present and discuss the positive outcomes (or advantages) identified by participants. Then, I will present and discuss the negative

outcomes (or disadvantages) of learning community participation as identified by faculty in this study. Throughout, I will discuss how these findings relate to the research questions and literature, and I will conclude with a summary of both positive and negative outcomes.

Positive Outcomes or Advantages

Many positive outcomes for faculty members were identified as a result of their learning community participation. In this section, I will present and discuss the seven themes that emerged in this study. They included: satisfaction/pride in work; opportunity to experiment/take risks; relationships with students; relationships with colleagues; scholarship of learning communities; opportunity to educate for democracy/citizenship; and personal insights and reaffirmation of one's work.

Satisfaction/pride in work. It was difficult to get faculty to begin thinking about outcomes they experienced as a result of their learning community participation. Overwhelmingly, they instead discussed how the learning community positively impacted the learning community students with whom they interacted, with student benefits often being the first outcome they identified. With further probing, it was discovered that they gained satisfaction and enjoyment and had pride in their work from seeing students benefit from the learning community. Faculty gained satisfaction from knowing they were doing good work, from watching students develop and grow, and from knowing that students were benefiting in ways such as making friends and being retained. According to Nancy,

> One of the things [outcomes] might be very strange but there is a satisfaction with knowing that you're trying to do all you can for the first year students... in my mind I cannot possibly see why there would ever be a curriculum that wouldn't want this [a learning community]. I know there are but I cannot for the life of me understand why

you wouldn't provide this chance. I know that not all students want to participate, they have other reasons, they have personal reasons, they have all sorts of reasons why they don't want to participate and that's fine, they can make those choices. But why, when it's such an excellent program, why you couldn't provide this opportunity [is beyond me]. There is like a pleasure or happiness or actually a good feeling of satisfaction knowing that this program [learning community] is in place for our students, so I think that would be one of the benefits that I get.

Others, such as Jack, simply discussed that "Students like it and it makes you feel good. It's good for the ego," meaning that he gained personal pride or satisfaction from putting effort into his learning community. Mark concurred, saying, "I just think the joy of knowing that I've helped people succeed. I mean, that's what I enjoy [from my learning community]."

Other faculty members gained enjoyment from knowing that students develop and grow from the learning community experience. Harry said, "It's fun to be around students and I just like to see them... develop." Byron's satisfaction also stemmed from student growth benefits. He shared, "I like people and so seeing recent high school graduates evolve into happy undergraduates who are progressing, that's very rewarding [for me] as a person and as a professor."

Finally, faculty gained satisfaction knowing their students were benefiting in other ways, such as making connections with other students and being retained at Iowa State. Jack shared an example of how students interact before his learning community class meets.

Well, I liked the idea [of a learning community] but now I finally understand what a learning community is. I really now like the idea.... if you, go down [before my learning community class] you'll see a bunch of students, they're sitting on the floor

and they're talking to each other and they're very lively... those are our students down there, all right. I mean, this class actually likes each other, I mean *everybody* [italics added] in this class likes each other. I mean they're all friends, I've never seen [that] in a class before.

Kent also talked about the satisfaction obtained from knowing students are personally benefiting from the learning community. He discussed student retention and happiness and how it connects to the pride he has for his work. He said,

I'm doing something [my learning community work] that's going to attract more students and keep more students. Keeping more students means what? More happy students. They enjoy the way it's set up, they enjoy the learning linkages, and they enjoy learning with students they know, twelve other students.

Overall, faculty members in this study enjoyed the benefits that students gained from their learning community participation and this provided a great deal of satisfaction, joy, and pride to the faculty members. Their satisfaction derived from knowing they are serving students well, that students are growing and developing from the learning community experience, and that students are gaining other benefits such as making friends and being retained. The satisfaction and pride in their work expressed by participants in this study is consistent with the spirit of vitality where vital faculty "takes a strong measure of satisfaction in what he or she does professionally" (Gooler, 1991, p. 25). This satisfaction and pride also appear to oppose characterizations of mid-career faculty who experience malaise, or lack of excitement, with their work (Karpiak, 1997). Thus, gaining satisfaction from their learning community work appears to meet both a mid-career faculty development need as well as have potential connections to their vitality.

Opportunity to experiment/take risks. Another outcome identified by faculty in this study was the opportunity to experiment/take risks as afforded through learning communities. They identified learning communities as providing an environment in which they could readily experiment with course content and pedagogical approaches. In a sense, learning communities provide a laboratory for experimentation, which seems to be an appropriate connection given the research-extensive university environment of Iowa State University. Some faculty, such as Jack, saw the learning community itself as an experiment. He said, "I thought maybe I would just do it [the learning community] once. It was just an experiment. I thought I would just do it once, and then it turned out not only to be good but a lot of fun too."

Learning communities also appeared to provide an impetus for implementing change. Nancy discussed the learning community as an environment to try new "things." She said,

I think back to my teaching, what has kept me energized, and students will say 'well this isn't what they did last semester' because I constantly change and try new things and maybe that's what the learning community gives me another chance to do, constantly change and try new things.

Many of those "things" are connected to the pedagogical approaches that learning communities faculty experimented with and employed. Faculty in this study experimented with a number of new pedagogies, including active learning strategies (such as teamwork), service-learning, and alternative forms of content delivery.

Utilizing active learning was one way in which faculty experimented with pedagogy. According to Sharon, learning communities provided an avenue for trying out "theoretically-grounded active learning." Mark was excited to discuss the use of active learning. He said,

It's [the learning community] given me a renewed sense of excitement for what I

teach... it's a great venue to try out a lot of these new concepts, kind of cutting edge

learning developments... and to help the students see the value in what we're doing."

Within active learning strategies, teamwork was most prominently identified as having been

a pedagogical change resulting from the learning community. Kent attributed his

experimentation with teamwork to his involvement with the learning community.

The learning communities have made me think more about the non-technical things in

my teaching. It made me think more about how students are learning, so how I

present things. I really think they, learning communities, have caused me to think a

little bit more about team building activities and issues and so on in my teaching as

opposed to just the science of what I'm teaching.

Faculty in this study seemed to be convinced of the value of teamwork and active learning in

their teaching. They attributed learning communities as providing them with an environment

in which to try out teamwork activities. The success of the teamwork activities further

convinced them of the value of the pedagogy. Thus, learning communities provided not only

the environment to experiment, but also the validation of the pedagogy based on success of

using it in the learning community. Mark shared an example of how his teaching with

teamwork has changed through the learning community.

Up until two years ago, [my learning community class] was just a lecture format. I

had mentors that would come in but they would just be there to kind of confirm or I

would ask them to hand things out... but we didn't break up into small groups, but I'd

have 40 in a lecture room. And three years ago when I got my instructor evaluations

back, out of a 5 [point scale] I got a 4.9-something you know... So you look at that

and you think 'I'm not going to change a thing, I mean I've reached the pinnacle of what I can possibly do here.' And I wasn't satisfied with it at all, and I thought we need to... [be] breaking them up in teams of four or five and have the mentors facilitate discussion so that the students are getting a lot more out of this instead of just listening to me talk up here. Now what I did... [I] discredited my instructor evaluations significantly. Why? Because all of a sudden I wasn't the center of attention – my mentors were – so I would start the class, give a little presentation and say 'okay, now I'm moving to the mentors' and do the exercise. But I didn't care, you know, I was still doing fine [on my evaluations] but it wasn't a 4.95 or whatever it was. So it [the learning community] allowed me to take a risk because I knew it would ultimately be better for the students even though it would be detrimental to me [on my course evaluations].

Another new pedagogy that participants experimented with in the context of the learning community was service-learning. Without the learning community as the vehicle for experimentation, it is doubtful that some of the service-learning projects would have been developed or carried out. According to Nancy, she was able to get resources from the central learning communities program that helped make the project possible.

When this opportunity came to have a service learning project, we got a little bit of money to rent the van, to get the kids out there, to take the food down to the mission or the food pantry. That [financing such an activity] was always [problematic] because we work on such limited budgets, so that [receiving resources] from a personal standpoint was a wonderful thing and it's been a really great experience.

Zoie also initiated a service-learning project through her learning community. She indicated

that it was a new approach for her class and provided a learning experience for her as well.

> I've learned a lot... well one thing that I've become more and more aware of is this
>
> service-learning project. I think it's very, very good for the students to reach out and
>
> to give of themselves, but then also to determine what did they give and what kind of
>
> thing did they come away from it with... This [service-learning project] is new... I
>
> could almost say for sure that no other course in this building does that kind of thing.

Thus, service-learning was identified as a pedagogy employed in learning communities both

because learning communities provided an environment for experimentation and also

because some resources were made available to initiate the projects.

The final pedagogical approach learning communities faculty in this study

experimented with was alternative forms of content delivery. Jack shared that he combined a

personal interest of his, "contemporary issues" in his discipline, with how he delivered the

course content. Rather than using a traditional textbook and following it chapter by chapter,

he utilized current affairs from his discipline in his daily lectures and course discussions.

This has been a completely new approach for him, one he could readily experiment with in

the learning community.

Likewise, Kent discussed how he changed his approach to teaching from a big-

picture approach to one in which he relies on smaller units of instruction in order to match

how students are learning. His example follows:

> I begin to put things together in units that I can get the teams to work on. I think
>
> about how they're learning as a group and so I tend to do things I think now in my
>
> teaching that unitize more so that now I can say 'okay learning community, we've

gone through a week, here's what you ought to be getting out of this, here's how you ought to be looking at it.' So I'm kind of looking at how they're learning and it's impacting my teaching... if I went back 20 years, I was enthused about teaching but I had this semester thought process, 'I'm going to do all these lectures in a row and they're going to come out with a semester of activities.' Now I know that the learning communities study in lumps, they get together on a weekly basis let's say and they study in this lump, so now I think about the lump I put [together] for them as opposed to this whole semester that I used to put together, you know maybe aiming at the final exam and the end result. I break them [concepts] down because the students break them down into lumps... so I first really begin to think about breaking my course into thirds, big lumps, and within that I break them into smaller lumps and that's how the students are learning the material and I try to teach to that.

In both of these cases, the learning community provided the venue to experiment with alternative modes of content delivery.

Overall, learning communities faculty identified the opportunity to experiment/take risks as a major outcome stemming from their learning community work. Learning communities appear to provide an environment in which experimentation and risk-taking readily can take place. Perhaps it is because learning communities are smaller units within departments, colleges, and the university where the risk of failure is more minimal. Or, perhaps it is because the overall learning communities program at Iowa State University was developed as an experiment and thus has fostered environments where it is acceptable to take risks and try new things. Regardless of the reason, new pedagogies have been implemented through learning communities because learning communities provided living laboratories for

experimentation. This finding is consistent with findings from related studies where faculty have been found to improve their teaching (Strommer, 1999), utilize new pedagogical approaches (Barefoot, 1993; Smith & MacGregor, 1991), and develop "interactive, collaborative, and problem-solving teaching strategies in learning communities" (Brown, 2004, n.p.) as a result of their participation in a learning community or related activity. The opportunities to experiment in a learning community may help "rekindle the creative side of teaching" (p. 472) as suggested by Matthews et al. (1996). Furthermore, this outcome fits with perceived faculty development needs of mid-career faculty such as providing them opportunities to "experiment with new roles" (Baldwin, 1984, p. 48) and work creatively on curricular issues (Kalivoda et al., 1994). Thus, learning communities may be helping mid-career faculty meet their developmental needs.

Relationships with students. A third major outcome identified by faculty in this study was the opportunity to develop relationships with students through the learning community. In addition to getting to know more students, faculty reported that the learning community provided an environment for deepening their relationships with students and learning about student growth.

Learning communities have given faculty opportunities to get to know more students and to establish deeper relationships and connections with students. Meredith viewed her work with the learning community as her "ticket" to establishing relationships with students. She said,

> I realized that [the learning community] was my ticket in to establishing relationships with students for all four years and to be able to see that growth because I would see them as freshmen and then later I would see them as a junior or senior and that I

would be able to then see this development but I would also have the opportunity because of the relationship maybe to make a difference if there were times when they needed someone.

Similarly, Kent said that the learning community has "connected me closer/quicker to new students in a group atmosphere. It has been an opportunity for me to connect to the thoughts, concerns, [and] goals of new freshmen in an informal atmosphere."

Faculty also have been able to get to know students on a deeper level than they might otherwise have and make meaningful connections with students through their learning community. Meredith shared a story of how her deepened relationship with a student was meaningful to her.

> [This past] Friday, there is a senior who we connected up in the learning community and she took my class last spring. She also is a work-study student in [a nearby] lab and Friday [the person in the lab] came down and said [the student] came to work crying... I had a relationship with her, [so] I went up to her and we talked and she told me her mother had a nervous breakdown two days before and she's crying. And I was able to be in the place where I could just hug her and just talk through to her. You don't have a relationship [like that] with having somebody in your class for one semester... It gives me great satisfaction because I helped somebody in need at the time that they needed it and I knew her enough to know what to do... I just was able to do more for her because I had a relationship, you know, I wouldn't hug somebody who I only had in class for one semester but I've known her for four years.

Learning communities also have provided a way for students to get to know the faculty member better. According to Zoie,

They [students] know me too better because they see me outside of class in a different role... It's just this exchange that goes on [with students], that's what I really like... I think any teacher feels that way, it's never a one [-way conversation]; it's an exchange.

Further, learning communities also provided an environment and opportunities for interaction between faculty and students that affect their relationships. Kent discussed how his learning community afforded him with a venue to develop relationships with students that impact their lives.

I went to an [recruiting] event a year ago and the mother said 'I'd like to have my son see about [your major], his father's not too much into education.' Her son wasn't there, but dad showed up midway through the conversation and he said 'no, I need to keep this young man home, I need the labor... I don't want my son talking to you.' Well, mom persevered and brought him to orientation; he is a freshmen with us. Last night I went to dinner with him, it was an event, a learning community event we had at the dorms... I was clear up in northeast Iowa at a meeting, it would have been much easier for me to stay at the meeting [and then] come home... and not worry about squeezing that hour in between. But I said you know [if] this young man has me go to dinner with him he's more likely he'll stay at Iowa State, get that career and someday not just be labor for his dad living in the same bedroom he lived in before. That's how I've always felt about working with students, this guy, we need to go the extra yard for.

Likewise, Joseph shared how his learning community provided an environment for interactions with students that would not occur naturally.

I had an interesting discussion with a student at our [LC] picnic this fall. We were

talking about various things and at some point she had mentioned that she had read

this book and asked if I had read it. It [that kind of interaction] doesn't happen in any

kind of a class setting. It happened outside of class. Why was I with this student

outside of class? Because of the learning community. Otherwise, [it] never would

have happened.

Thus, learning communities, often through informal social interactions, provide settings

where connections with students are fostered.

Faculty also benefited from their interactions with students in the learning community

by learning about "who students are." Essentially, they learned about student growth and

the learning community helped them stay in touch with students' needs. Kent said,

It's [the learning community] also helped me be engaged with who freshmen are.

That's not very easy, who are freshmen and they change... I also get more insights

into the social cultural changes that groups of students go through as they transition

from high school to ISU.

According to Nancy, she also learned about students' development through her learning

community. She shared,

The learning community, institutes and things, have taught me [the] developmental

thing. I actually kind of watch out for them... last spring, when I had the learning

community students and I actually halfway through the semester had them kind of list

what tasks they need to do to be successful for the remainder of the semester, not just

in [my] class but in the biology and all the other things.

This knowledge of students and student growth helps faculty in other aspects of their work, such as teaching. Joseph related an example of how he uses his interactions to learn about students and change his teaching.

> I learn things [from the learning community] that I think make me a more effective teacher in the classroom. Okay, and basically, some of it's sort of re-learning, sort of remembering what you were like when you were that age. But of course, you know, you're only one person, so you're getting a broader sort of spectrum of 'where are these students at? What kinds of things are they thinking about? What kinds of things are they concerned about? What kinds of things are they aware of?' ... it gives you at least the potential to be able to relate things more to their lives or to put things in a context that makes more sense to them, that they can relate to better, simply because you know them better. It's not this room full of faces that... you might have some notion [of], say, because you were 18 once or because you had children who were 18. But you have a much better, much clearer, much broader kind of notion of this group of people. I find that to be useful in terms of thinking about what kinds of examples I might choose to use in class or what kinds of knowledge I might presume they already know. In many cases, the light going on is realizing I'm presuming too much, that they really don't know that and so what that means if I want to pursue that line of thinking [is] I need to first explain this first part.

Therefore, the relationships developed with students led to a better understanding of students' needs and development which faculty could use to improve their teaching.

Overall, learning communities have provided an environment where faculty can develop relationships with students and where students also can presumably get to know

faculty. The out-of-class opportunities that are afforded through learning communities, such as informal events like having meals, provide settings for building relationships that would not otherwise be naturally occurring. Faculty placed value on the relationships developed with students in learning communities both because of how students can benefit from the relationships and because of how they benefited by learning about student growth and being able to apply that knowledge to how they teach and interact with students. Strommer (1999) also found that relationships with students in learning communities helped "improve teaching... by 'grounding it in experiential realities'" (p. 44), and Stassen (2000) discovered that faculty in a living-learning program gained a better understanding of first-year students. Gaining relationships and knowledge of students as a result of learning communities relates well to Baldwin's (1990b) suggestion that "vital professors typically are individuals who challenge students academically and contribute to their overall development" (p. 180). Thus, faculty who recognize the value of such relationships with students and who perceive it as a positive outcome of their learning community participation appear to be realizing an aspect of vitality.

Relationships with colleagues. Not only do faculty experience enhanced relationships with students as a result of their learning community work, they also indicated that relationships with colleagues were a positive outcome of their participation. Participants indicated that they developed relationships with colleagues in their own departments as well networked with colleagues from across campus. A positive result of these relationships for several faculty has been enhanced interdisciplinary collegiality and cross-disciplinary knowledge and appreciation. These aspects of colleague relationships all will be discussed in this section.

Relationships with colleagues in the faculty member's own department or college were fostered through their involvement with learning communities. Sharon cited "collaboration with P&S staff within my own college" as something that was different about her learning community work as compared to other professional experiences she has had. She continued by saying that through these relationships she "learned more [about] their [P&S staff] capabilities and interests and their dedication to students." In a similar vein, Meredith said that her learning community work afforded with the opportunity to develop relationships quicker with her colleagues than might have been. She said, "in the very beginning, my relationships with [colleague] and [colleague] who is the other person, I mean of course we just developed a much greater, quicker, friendship."

Developing relationships and networking with colleagues across campus also has been a positive outcome of learning community involvement. Faculty in this study valued the opportunities for networking with colleagues on campus who also are committed to student learning. According to Joseph,

> I feel like because I got involved in learning communities, it allowed me to make some connections with other people on campus who I probably wouldn't have met in any other context because we don't have any disciplinary connection. I met them because they were interested in connecting with students, interacting with students, really trying to provide students with exceptional learning experiences not just run-of-the-mill learning experiences.

Thus, having common interests in undergraduate education provided opportunities to meet other "like-minded" faculty from other disciplines.

Cross-disciplinary relationships often were fostered through the infrastructure of the Learning Communities program (i.e., participation in the on-campus Learning Communities Institute or service to the Learning Community Advisory Committee or subcommittees) or from working with faculty in other disciplines on linked learning community courses. Involvement with a learning community gave faculty an opportunity to meet and interact with other faculty who share similar interests. Joseph cited the on-campus Learning Communities Institute as a venue for these interactions. He said, "The learning community Institute is another good example of that kind of [networking] opportunity. I wouldn't have had that kind of opportunity if I wasn't involved in learning communities."

Nancy cited her work with a learning communities committee as a chance for positive networking and new learning. Through this involvement, she has felt stimulated through new learning and encouraged to try new things with her work. She said,

> I like learning new things and, in the learning communities, I can't remember ever even being at a committee meeting where I haven't learned something. And it may have been the person from business made some comment about how they did something for their pre-business students and me thinking 'oh, that's something that would work.' I like learning new things so if I had not joined the learning community initiative. and that includes you know the committees and everything else, I would be missing those things, I wouldn't be learning new things… I wouldn't feel real great about it.

Nancy further described the networking she has experienced through learning communities as going beyond surface-level pleasantries to meaningful cross-disciplinary relationships.

For example, Nancy shared a story about a professional relationship that evolved through her involvement with learning communities.

> I think of all the people I would never have met if I hadn't been in this [learning community]. So, I think that to me, the networking, the meeting of the people [has been really positive]... I would never have met all the people that we had on our [learning community] committee. [Because of that committee, a person in another discipline] asked me to evaluate his teaching and to write a letter for his P&T document... I would never ever have interfaced with anyone [from another discipline] in that way.

Seven of the participants worked with learning communities that have a linked course connected to their learning community. A linked course model is one where two courses are planned to be complementary in content (i.e., what is taught in one course is reinforced through content or activities in another course, most often English). Some cross-disciplinary relationships developed as a result of having these course links, and many described cross-disciplinary appreciation and/or knowledge as a positive outcome. For example, Nancy said,

> I do a lot of writing so I have picked up tips from the English linkage on how to improve those tasks in my class. But I think what I have developed more of [is] an appreciation of what a tough job that instructor has for English 104 and 105... they are trying to develop good writers with, you know, correct grammar, creative thought, you know all the things that go with it and I know they did by having a lot of assignments but I think they have a very difficult job.

Jack described the connection he has developed between his course and a linked English course as an experience unlike other teaching and professional experiences he has had. He

gained an appreciation for the value of the English course and the cross-disciplinary learning that takes place. Jack shared,

> The connection with another subject, English, is completely new for me, and I realize its value now. I have had no other professional experiences in education [like this]… I've learned a lot, and I think it's a good idea. To connect disciplines is a great idea because, you know, it puts your mind in two places at once and you connect two things and I think it's not only more interesting, but educational and very beneficial.

Kent discussed how the learning community course linkages and clustering have challenged his own teaching. Specifically, having his course linked with an English course stimulated him to think about how his class connects to all the courses his students are taking, and how he can effectively promote cross-disciplinary learning. According to Kent,

> The learning communities and the linkage of classes together made me think outside my box because I want those students that are sitting there to have some more things to talk about in their English paper or because they're also in a [science] lab… it's because the learning communities that are in there [my class] are doing things [in other classes] that cause me to think outside the box. They are writing about what I'm telling them… about how it impacts English. They are in classes that teach some of the same things that I do from a different angle like biology, basic biology, basic animal science overlap a little bit, so I think about that when I teach.

Overall, relationships with colleagues have been a positive outcome of learning community involvement for participants of this study. Relationships have developed with colleagues in the faculty member's own department and college as well as across disciplines. Faculty placed value on the opportunities to connect with other "like-minded" faculty on

campus who are interested in undergraduate teaching and student learning. The infrastructure of the learning communities program has provided opportunities for collegial relationships and networking through the Learning Communities Institute, Advisory Committee, and subcommittees. For those faculty whose learning community includes linked courses, appreciation and knowledge of the other discipline (in this case, English) was fostered through the connections that were afforded through the learning community. Connections with colleagues afforded through learning communities may help combat isolation that Gooler (1991) discussed as a factor that can contribute to the loss of vitality. In other words, when faculty are able to build and maintain relationships with colleagues as they are able to do through learning communities, they are less prone to becoming isolated.

Other researchers also have identified relationships with colleagues as a major benefit of learning community participation (Brown, 2004; Evenbeck et al., 1999; Hellenberg et al., 2000; Smith, 1988; Stassen, 1999; Strommer, 1999). Moreover, establishing positive colleague relationships through collaborations and networks are important to mid-career faculty development (Frost & Taylor, 1996; Kalivoda et al., 1994; Lawrence, 1985). Therefore, learning communities faculty in this study appear to be realizing an outcome that is consistent with mid-career faculty development needs; this suggests that learning communities do provide a faculty development opportunity for mid-career faculty.

Scholarship of learning communities. A fifth positive outcome of learning community participation identified by participants was the development of opportunities for scholarship based on learning community work. Learning communities have provided a venue in which the scholarship of teaching and learning is promoted and fostered for the faculty in this study. In some cases, faculty in this study have undertaken scholarship efforts

related to their learning community work whereas in other cases, the learning community has simply sparked an interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning that was not there before. Faculty who are not pursuing learning community scholarship cited lack of time and expertise as potential roadblocks to doing so. Inherent in discussions about the scholarship of teaching and learning and its connection to learning communities was a concern (even skepticism) of whether it is valued by the institution. Each of these items will be discussed in this section.

Learning communities have provided an opportunity for merging disciplinary interests and teaching interests. For some, like Joseph, this has led to scholarship opportunities that he believed may benefit his career. He said,

I've actually been to a [professional] meeting already, or a couple meetings, where I've presented something about the service-learning component of [the learning community]. So, you know, yeah, there's the possibility that there may be some sort of career development kind of things that come out of learning communities.

Similarly, Byron saw benefits stemming from learning community scholarship that he had not previously recognized as valuable. In a sense, engaging in learning community scholarship helped him to appreciate its value. He said,

I've learned actually through publications… that actually becoming involved in this pedagogy and publishing on it has value certainly to me as a professor, something I don't think I would have realized even when I was at [a previous institution]. And having had a heavier teaching load [there], I would have seen my responsibilities as ethical and actually getting involved in the educational literature there was going to

be a cost with minimal benefits. In fact I found it to be a cost with valuable benefits,
so just it's broadened me in ways I wouldn't have guessed that it would.

Nancy also has presented her learning community scholarship in the context of her
disciplinary associations. She indicated an interest in further developing this scholarship by
writing and publishing on education in her discipline. She shared,

> I would like to write articles that way [on pedagogical research] but all of my articles
> are science-based… And I've given papers and I've been surprised when I've given
> papers because I can read the audience and they…they've [my papers] always been
> really well accepted even at the national [disciplinary] meetings because we do have
> people in education obviously and the rooms are packed, which has always been
> interesting to me. There was one year it was a night talk I had to give, like right
> before dinner and I thought no one will be there – it's like in the basement of the
> building – and they had to bring in more chairs. So I've always been pleasantly
> surprised and it's [pedagogical scholarship] something I want to do. I have it as a
> goal and I probably will force myself to not retire until I've done it, but I have a
> whole series of articles that I know I need to publish.

Learning communities have sparked an interest in scholarship of teaching and
learning for some faculty even though they may not yet have realized it as an outcome.
Thus, there is potential for scholarship to be developed through learning communities;
however, some faculty cited a lack of time or expertise in this type of research as roadblocks
to realizing it. Kent provided one example of how he is interested in scholarship of teaching
but does not feel that he has the time for it.

> I have the interest [in LC scholarship] and I would have to admit that I have not taken
> the time. One of the challenges I think has been... that there needs to be a lot of
> study of learning communities and I've always felt like that's something I should be
> involved in but I really haven't been because of the time factor. And so I have hoped
> that, like you and others, there will be a lot of really good information coming out
> from people who take this on as their responsibility to do the research... what we're
> finding out [in my discipline], I think, is that our traditional responsibilities are so big;
> this is a whole change in mind-set so it's not like taking a little bit of time out to teach
> a little something different in class. This is becoming an education, pedagogical
> researcher and we have interest in that but it's really a challenge.

For some faculty, expertise in educational research was a factor in whether or not the
scholarship was attempted and completed. Byron, for example, cited a colleague with an
education background as a key to their team being able to produce learning community
scholarship. He said,

> I don't think we could have successfully published what we did on learning
> communities and stuff without having [our P&S staff member]... someone who
> understands education as education and not just what we're teaching in class and 'you
> know we have this learning community.' Rather, we publish in an educational theme;
> we really need people with more of an educational background than certainly I would
> have brought in. So, it's been very rewarding.

In contrast, Sharon recognized the possible benefits of such scholarship, but she has not yet
pursued it. She also cited having a colleague with whom to consult as a key to whether she
would be able to complete such scholarship. According to Sharon,

All my scholarship has been in that [disciplinary] area and there's plenty of stuff to do there and it's been really daunting to think about trying to do something [in the scholarship of teaching and learning]....it's clear it would require a different kind of thinking. And, I do have colleagues that I can network with and really help me develop it into something that, in theory, would be publishable. I mean that's still sort of in the back of my mind that I could do that, that there would be something that would be [of] "value" to other people in some of the things I've been doing.

Although learning communities have provided a venue for pursuing scholarship interests, the value of such scholarship was called into question by a number of participants. Some expressed a desire to prove the "worthiness" of such scholarship whereas others simply questioned whether the institution places value on it. Mark, for example, described his experience with trying to mentor new assistant professors in the scholarship of teaching. He shared,

> I take it on almost as a personal goal to ensure that our new assistant professors can succeed at least with some component with scholarship in teaching and learning and just be able to prove to them [people in the college] that it can be done. And maybe there's in the back of my mind or maybe hidden somewhere is the irritation that, by golly, they don't seem to appreciate it, but to be able to prove that it can be done or that it is worthy scholarship... there is value in it besides just academic or the disciplinary research.

Thus, for Mark, he expressed a desire to prove the worth of the scholarship of teaching that can stem from learning communities. He has been successful in producing learning community scholarship himself and he wants to help assistant professors with it too, for their

benefit as well as for advancing the cause of scholarship of teaching and learning within his college.

Kent also was supportive of junior faculty getting involved with the scholarship of teaching and learning through learning communities. He saw it as a way that he could mentor junior faculty members, saying,

What I look forward to is the fact that a younger professor like that would get started [with scholarship of teaching and learning] and then maybe I can join with him as opposed to me trying to create the time to start from scratch and that maybe two or three of us here can form a team that starts to talk about research in the teaching and learning of [my discipline].

However, Kent expressed reservation with whether such scholarship would be valued and recognized by the institution. He was optimistic, however, and said that evidence of its value would be needed to be fully convincing. Kent shared,

And to be very honest, we're literally told that this kind of research will have value for the university, but we also know that the expectations of the average faculty member in [my discipline] or wherever is that we will be doing research in [the discipline] and they will kind of scratch their head when they see somebody beginning to publish in a journal that's more about pedagogical research and learning... I have to believe when they say that it will be [valued] and they've said that that it will be... all professors are a little bit skeptical until we see somebody who has been recognized for that or promoted for that. I think we'll all scratch our heads a little bit and say, you know, put your money where your mouth is. But I hear it being

valued by people all the way to the top so I'm willing to say I think so; let's now see

some people get rewarded for it.

Thus, although learning communities provide potential opportunities for scholarship of

teaching and learning, the value associated with such scholarship was questioned. Whether

the scholarship is valued ultimately is connected to issues of reward. Rewards (in various

forms) were raised as a potential negative outcome of learning communities and I will further

discuss this issue later in this chapter.

Overall, learning communities have provided faculty a venue in which scholarship

can occur in addition to the teaching aspects of learning communities. Thus, participating in

a learning community can be a boundary-spanning activity in one's work as was suggested

previously in this chapter. However, in order for the scholarship potential of learning

communities to be realized, faculty appear to need help overcoming issues related to lack of

time and expertise. Relationships and collaborations appear to be key components of

combating the time and expertise issues. Therefore, this finding has implications for faculty

development related to the scholarship of learning communities, which will be discussed in

Chapter 5. The persistent questions of the value of teaching- and learning-related

scholarship, and ultimately the rewards of such scholarship, were raised and will be

discussed later in this chapter.

Opportunity to educate for democracy/citizenship. A sixth positive outcome of

learning community involvement identified by participants of this study was the opportunity

to utilize the learning community to educate students for democratic citizenship. Learning

communities provided access to students that allowed faculty members to pursue their

educational interests that connect to developing strong citizens, a desire that was expressed

by a number of participants. For example, learning communities faculty can educate students about disciplinary-specific issues (such as the environment) that students presumably will have an opportunity to impact throughout their lives as citizens/community servants, voters, or policy makers. This education can take place through formal classroom instruction or through other opportunities, such as service-learning. Joseph, for instance, saw the learning community as a chance to help students understand the "bigger picture" of issues facing his discipline that affect humanity. He said,

[I'm] trying to provide a large number of people with enough background to be able to understand some of these [disciplinary] issues. In my own mind, I often say it like this, I say that most of the students I teach will never be [experts in this discipline], but they'll all be able to vote.

Jack shared a similar sentiment about why he is passionate about teaching his learning community students. He, too, hoped students would better understand his discipline and its issues as they will be in positions to affect public policy. Jack stated,

Sometimes I joke with my research friends. I joke that the students in my [learning community] class are more likely to become congressmen and senators than anyone of our [discipline's] majors. They're far more likely to be setting our budget in congress someday than the [disciplinary] majors we teach... so, in some sense it [teaching this learning community] is almost... convincing people to say looking upon science as a good thing, as a fun thing, as something that is actually even interesting.

Another way in which participants viewed learning communities as a venue for educating for democratic citizenship was through the various activities they could create

through the learning community, like service-learning. For Nancy, the service-learning

activity she created through her learning community helps to serve the purpose of educating

students for citizenship, a personal goal of hers for the students she teaches. In talking about

the service-learning project, Nancy shared,

> All I want is better citizens... okay, they're learning [to apply disciplinary concepts],
>
> they're learning [that] in service learning... But I, out of [the service-learning]
>
> project, I would like them to be good citizens and maybe it isn't where they're [doing
>
> this exact same activity] but perhaps later they're teaching children how to read or
>
> you know having other examples of where they do in fact give back to the community
>
> and society, [recognizing] that they're part of society, that it's not 'me, me, me.'

The idea of utilizing learning communities as a venue to educate for democratic citizenship

resonated with Sharon as well. She felt a pull to further connect the principles of citizenship

practiced through her learning community to the institution as a whole. She postulated,

> It's about serving the phenomenal purpose of the institution and actually, you know
>
> the thing that I would really like to see?... I've kind of come around to the point of
>
> view that the one thing that I would really like to see us focus on, would like to try to
>
> accomplish at the level [of] the whole institution is that I would like to adopt a sort of
>
> core learning outcome that we want to help everyone be democratic. I think that
>
> would really blow some peoples minds around here. I think it would resonate with a
>
> lot of people but I also think a lot of people would go DUH!

Thus, she sees the work she has done with her learning community as having potential

implications beyond the learning community. While Sharon's desire to emphasize

democratic citizenship was not separate from what she considers the purpose of her life's

work, the learning community provided her a venue for connecting her passion with a larger purpose of the institution.

Overall, learning communities seem to provide faculty with opportunities to access students and infuse a sense of democratic education. Faculty viewed the learning community as doing this by helping students develop an understanding of disciplinary-related issues that students may affect or be affected by as citizens, voters, and policy makers. Faculty, thus, can expose students to these issues through classroom instruction or through other learning community activities, such as service-learning.

The idea of educating for democracy is not new to learning communities; rather, it stretches back to the roots of early learning communities, such as Meiklejohn's Experimental College which sought "to promote an education environment that prepared students for their roles as citizens" (Shapiro & Levine, 1999, p. 17). Having the opportunity to do something that is important to them (i.e., educate for democracy) fits well with freedom and control issues which Lamber et al. (1993) identified as overriding themes for mid-career faculty. In other words, mid-career faculty have the freedom to do and control the things they wish to accomplish in their work. Although democratic education may not be a result of the learning community alone, the opportunity to infuse it into their learning community was identified as a positive outcome of their learning community involvement. Thus, learning communities provide a venue for faculty that appears to be unique from other opportunities.

Personal insights and reaffirmation of one's work. A final positive outcome stemming from learning community involvement identified by participants was the opportunity to gain personal insights through reflection and to reaffirm their work.

Additionally, several participants remarked on the benefits of reflecting on their learning community experiences through their participation in this study.

Personal insights gained by participants from their learning community involvement often related to their teaching. For example, Sharon stated that being involved with the learning community "has really enriched the way... that I think about what I would have happen with my students and courses." She further said the learning community has affected "how I teach, just what kinds of things I pay attention to, how I approach how I help students gain a real understanding of what it is they are trying." Sharon said that learning about learning affected her teaching and being able to help students connect to the learning experience as well.

> I think I have a much deeper understanding [of] the importance of having an
>
> emotional connection with whatever it is and if you can't really figure out a way to
>
> have some kind of emotional connection to what it is you are learning, and then you
>
> know you might as well forget it.

Kent cited his learning community experience as giving him insights related to his teaching as well. His learning community work made him aware of the issues facing women in his classes, which affected how he teaches. Often, the women in his class are part of an underrepresented population of students in their respective majors. Kent, therefore, has modified his teaching in order to better engage female students and provide an inclusive environment. He shared a story of how interacting with women in the learning community gave him insights that led to changes in his teaching. Kent said,

> If I go back to when I started with the WiSE team, it was when we were making our
>
> huge shift from two men for every woman in this curriculum to two women for every

man in this curriculum, which is where we are now. And so those young women helped me to understand how to teach a little differently, and they did it because they were in a group and we met as a group and did different things together on a regular basis so I began to learn how we needed to do things. I've been teaching women since I came here but I have to do things maybe a little differently and how to, maybe more importantly, how to continue to encourage them and how to change some of my other faculty or encourage them to change by the examples they used or by the way they did things in class with female students. So, I think it [the learning community] reengaged me and it reengaged me with 18-year-old minds again; that was helpful.... [For example], I go in there [to class] and I say now when you call your [doctor] — there's 350 students sitting in my class; most of the other curricula are dominated by men... — about this problem we're talking about, tell *her* [italics added], and just by saying 'tell her' as opposed to everyone saying 'tell him' all the time or whatever, I think I see or feel, sometimes I almost hear the ripple the first time I do it and it's a positive ripple especially with women; they're engaged now.... And working with the WiSE communities helped me discover some of these things.

For Kent, his experience working with the Women in Science and Engineering learning communities was transformative. He not only learned about the issues facing women in underrepresented majors; he used that knowledge to change his teaching in a way that engaged the women in his courses.

For other faculty, the learning community experience has given them a chance to reaffirm their work interests. Sharon described the learning community as "confirming [my] basic approach to my whole career... which was like just finding the things that I was really

drawn to and emotionally connected to myself and then just going with that." Joseph said his learning community involvement also helped him to clarify his work interests. He shared,

> Participating in learning communities has… amplified in my mind, clarified in my mind, 'yes, what I find valuable, what I find interesting, what I find important is to make connections with students and help them learn about, in my case, [my discipline].' But, you know, I'm sure if you were interested in something else – why you'd be interested in something else I don't know – but if you were, you could help students learn that too.

Not only did faculty benefit from learning communities by reaffirming their work interests, they also gained reassurance that what they are doing instinctively within their learning community is right. Nancy said she gained "the satisfaction of providing an excellent opportunity for the students, you know, the ability for me to reaffirm I'm doing some things right."

Finally, several participants remarked on the insights they gained through the reflection opportunity afforded by their participation in this study. According to Kent,

> It's [the interview] been an interesting discussion. I appreciate you helping me think about some of these things that I haven't really sat down and thought about. I just have to set aside time and you had some questions that made me think about it too, so maybe something will change, or maybe there's something we'll do differently in the upcoming semesters.

Thus, learning community faculty can benefit from reflection opportunities, and they seem to appreciate such opportunities as well. Implications of this and suggestions for systematic reflection opportunities for faculty will be provided in Chapter 5.

Overall, involvement with learning communities has provided faculty with opportunities to gain personal insights, often related to their teaching, and to reaffirm their work interests and approach. Evenbeck et al. (1999) described these kinds of outcomes as transformative possibilities of faculty development in learning communities. They said "Certainly, it is possible that the experience may lead to new perspectives on the self, on other faculty... on staff, on students, and on pedagogy" (p. 55-56). Participants in this study cited just such insights as arising from their learning community participation. Their insights have a potential for being transformative in that the understanding gained can lead to new knowledge and application in their everyday practice.

Additionally, faculty can benefit from simple opportunities to reflect on their learning community work, such as that afforded through their participation in this study. Smith and MacGregor (1991) advocated reflective dialogues as ways of providing reflection opportunities for participating faculty as well as an assessment strategy. They described their reflective dialogues as "generative" in that faculty gain insights and new perspectives on their teaching, their learning, their students, and their colleagues.

Opportunities to gain insights into oneself and reaffirm one's work have potential connections to mid-career faculty development. Mid-career faculty have been described engaging in reassessment of their goals, priorities, skills, and so forth (Baldwin, 1990a; Cytrynbaum et al., 1982). Thus, if learning communities provide an opportunity or venue in which faculty can gain insights into themselves and their work, then learning communities appear to be addressing another faculty development need of mid-career faculty.

Summary of positive outcomes and connection to research questions and literature.
Seven positive outcomes of learning community participation were identified by the faculty

in this study. These outcomes help address, in part, the first research question of this study. The positive outcomes included:

- satisfaction and pride in their work from the benefits that students gain from the learning community experience and knowing they are providing good opportunities for students

- opportunities to experiment/take risks with content and pedagogies, including active learning strategies (such as teamwork), service-learning, and alternative forms of content delivery

- relationships with students, including getting to know more students, developing deepened relationships with students, and learning about student growth

- relationships with colleagues, including colleagues in their own departments as well as networking with colleagues across campus, interdisciplinary collegiality, and cross-disciplinary appreciation

- opportunities for and interest in learning community scholarship often involving collaboration and relationships with colleagues

- opportunities to educate for democracy/citizenship with learning community students in order to prepare students for roles as citizens, voters, and policy makers

- personal insights, often related to teaching, and reaffirmation of one's work with the ultimate potential for the learning community experience to be transformative (i.e., to gain new insights and knowledge that affect their practice)

These outcomes are consistent with many outcomes identified by other researchers as well as mid-career faculty development needs as identified in the literature. Thus, learning

communities appear to provide a developmentally appropriate opportunity for mid-career

faculty. In addition, a number of connections to the construct of faculty vitality were noted,

suggesting that learning communities faculty experience positive outcomes through their

involvement that are consistent with characterizations of vital faculty members. As this

study was aimed at exploring the construct of vitality and not to determine a causal or

predictive relationship between it and learning communities, I cannot say whether learning

communities cause vitality. However, the findings suggest that learning communities may

provide an environment for such vitality to be maintained or fostered. Faculty vitality will be

further discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Negative Outcomes or Disadvantages

Unlike the positive outcomes of learning community involvement, it was difficult to

get participants of this study to identify negative outcomes, or disadvantages, they have

experienced as a result of their learning community participation. Overwhelmingly, they

cited the positive benefits for students as outweighing any negative outcomes or

disadvantages for themselves. Although few dominant issues or themes were shared by

participants as being negative, five negative outcomes or disadvantages of learning

community participation emerged and warrant discussion. The five negative outcomes, or

disadvantages, included: time demands; cliques of students; failure of certain aspects of the

learning community; departmental indifference/resistance; and lack of rewards.

Time demands. Time required to do learning community work was most frequently

cited negative outcome by participants in this study. Faculty viewed the time they devote to

learning communities as the major negative consequence for them; however, they often

followed their statement of time as a negative consequence with a positive rationale for spending that time with learning community students. For example, Nancy said

> Just the time, that's it, there's nothing negative [for me]. It's great for me to see students who have no interest in something find it really exciting. It may be a field trip we took the learning community students on, it may be the service learning project, whatever it is but that's really kind of fun to see.

Joseph cited the opportunity cost associated with learning community participation as a negative. In other words, working with a learning community means that the faculty member is choosing to not do something else instead. He described it as follows:

> You've only got so much time and you choose to spend your time here or spend your time there. Certainly, learning communities have occupied a considerable amount of my time over the course of the past few years and when you add everything together in, the times I've contributed to the university-level committees and that sort of stuff, coordinating [the learning] community, participating in [another learning community], it certainly is a considerable part of my work life... [the] learning community activities. So, the drawback is whatever time I'm spending on that – and it's considerable – is time I'm not spending on something else... But, I think that's the down side, you know. So, I guess basically what that says is that if you're gonna be involved in learning communities, you better really want to do that because doing that means that you're not gonna do other things.

Joseph's experience is consistent with Strommer's (1999) finding that time was a disadvantage of learning community involvement for faculty. Faculty in Strommer's survey

also identified opportunity cost as a factor since learning communities did not leave enough time for "research and tenure-granting activities" (p. 44).

Some faculty mentioned the additional time required to handle learning community administrative details, such as paperwork for registration, as a negative aspect of learning community participation. However, once again, faculty minimized the negative consequence for themselves because of the larger benefits that students gain as a result of the learning community. Kent said, "The only downside(s) are maybe sometimes when we're really, really busy and we get that request to build the teams and slot the things and do the paperwork. That's pretty small."

Thus, although time demands were identified as the predominant negative outcome of learning community involvement, faculty in this study rationalized their use of time with the learning community because students benefited from it. They also minimize any negative experiences with administrative details, such as paperwork, for the same reason. In a campus-wide survey of faculty at Iowa State University, Brooke and Ellertson (2004) found that faculty who do not participate in learning communities identified time as the number one influence on their decision not to participate in learning communities. Thus, time is a concern shared by faculty at Iowa State University whether they do or do not participate in learning communities. However, participants mitigate the negative outcome of time with the positive outcomes that students experience. Participants' willingness to sacrifice their time and deal with the "busy work" (as described by Kent) associated with learning communities demonstrates their core commitment to undergraduate students and their learning that was discussed previously in this chapter.

Cliques of students. A second negative outcome identified by some faculty was the development of cliques of students who are participants in the learning community. When probed as to how cliques of students were a negative outcome for faculty, faculty indicated that when cliques developed, they caused faculty to be stretched for time in having to deal with the issues such as conflicts among students and disruptions in class that arise as a result. Kent shared a story of how a clique of students caused negative consequences for him as a participating faculty member.

> There were some problems that maybe created some [conflict] with the [learning] community, um, the 24-7 situation. There were three courses that their course hours were together, their dorm was together, their rooms were together, therefore their study time and their social time was together. After about 10 weeks they were ready to kill each other and I spent time in the dormitories counseling, I spent time with RAs and so on and it became a very intense situation. So it did cause me to do something different and that is I no longer have [them] living, learning together as intensely.... And so I had to solve that and that was a disadvantage for a couple of semesters until I decided I needed to do something different. It took a lot of time.

He not only indicated that his time was spent dealing with the situation, but he also modified the learning community as a result of the negative experience.

Nancy also experienced negative consequences as a result of cliques of students forming in the learning community. For her, the clique posed challenges to her teaching, particularly because her learning community class is mixed with students who are not members of the learning community. She said,

I have only ever seen one negative outcome from the learning community and that was three years ago. The learning community in the course I taught was such little cliques that it was like having a high school class which I have never had at a university. So I had to meet with them and talk to them and try to split them up. It was just a mess and so [I try to] avoid cliques talking, etc. by some of the rules that I have the first day of class.

The issue of cliques was not an overwhelming issue shared by all participants of the study. However, when cliques form among the learning community students, there have been negative consequences for the participating faculty member both in and out of class.

A related concern that surfaced with some faculty is the issue of whether learning communities shelter students from having a diverse college experience because of the homogeneity that exists in many majors. Harry shared his concern with this, saying,

I thought that in a way we were kind of sheltering the kids from being... exposed abruptly to culture, religion, politics, these challenges to their, should I say comfort level. And I thought that was part of the maturation process that was necessary for college, and so I was concerned that learning communities might protect students from this that I thought was important development.... Some of that [concern] has been, I guess, alleviated because of the fact that at least on the floor... only half the residents in that house are [this major], the others are something else, so I think that's good.

In Harry's case, he was able to address a concern that he had about providing students with a diverse college experience by using that concern to structure his learning community (i.e.,

not placing his learning community students in the residence hall with only other students of the same major).

Cliques of students as a negative outcome for faculty is similar to Gabelnick et al.'s (1990) assertion that a particular mix of students can have various effects (positive or negative) on the learning community. Jaffee (2004) concluded that internal dynamics of students can be divisive among the group of students or with their professors. Overall, the issue of cliques that arose with some faculty members in this study provided them with challenges both in and out of the classroom, which is not unlike Jaffee's assertion that student dynamics cause the faculty member to have to confront group conflicts or even bad behavior in the classroom. In each of the cases of student cliques identified in this study, the faculty members were able to use the negative experience as information that allowed them to modify their practices with the learning community. They did this in various ways by changing the living environment for students or establishing certain rules and expectations in class.

Occasional failure of certain aspects of the learning community. A third negative outcome identified by several participants of this study was the "failure" of certain aspects of the learning community they experienced while trying to develop and sustain it. Certain "failures" occurred in the development phase of the learning community as the faculty member tried to figure out the most effective way to structure and run the learning community whereas other perceived failures as resulting from students occasionally not "getting it." Examples of failure include instances when students did not benefit from the learning community as was intended through the learning community structure or the failures of certain teaching/learning activities. Both of these issues will be discussed in this section.

Some faculty experienced failures during the development phase of their learning community, which was perceived as a negative outcome of their involvement. When the learning community was not working for students and helping students in the way they had intended, the faculty member considered that to be a failure. Also, the faculty member did not gain pleasure from something they perceived to be a failure. For example, according to Harry,

> My department said 'oh, we should have a learning community' so I wrote the proposal to set one up and then I assigned somebody else to handle it. And we did this for two years and it was, I would say, completely unsuccessful because all that was done was with a faculty member who was assigned [was that s/he] met with the students at the beginning and said 'we've reserved a room for you, you can do what you want with it' and that was it. There was no clear mentor.... Then, the third year that I decided 'well I'll take it over' and so I met with the students a few times we set up a regular meeting time and I insisted that they meet and then we had a few sessions where... we had a couple of departmental tours... we brought in undergraduates in upper division [courses], graduate students to talk to the students, [to] find out what the curriculum's really like.

Thus, when Harry determined that the learning community was not successful, he took action to remedy the situation. His experience was similar to one described by Mark. Mark said that he started the learning community because of recruitment and retention needs in his department, but he soon discovered that simply putting students in classes together would not necessarily mean that community would develop and help them reach their recruitment and retention goals. He stated,

First we did a cluster of math, chemistry and we tried to put [together] all the classes our students would take, but it was mainly.... it was just a cluster thing, and since all of our students start in a different mathematical sequence, they were so small, the little segments or groups were so small they really didn't even realize they were in a learning community. And I don't know if in my mind I really understood what it was either.... We [the department] were no better off than we were [before].

However, Mark said that when he reworked the learning community based on this perceived failure and put students' needs at the center of their efforts (rather than departmental recruitment and retention), it succeeded. Once again, Mark's story illustrated that faculty in this study encountered setbacks in the development of their learning communities but they were not defeated by such setbacks.

Another perceived failure by some faculty in this study was on the occasions when they perceived that students were not "getting it." In other words, it was frustrating for faculty when students did not achieve a particular outcome that was intended. Two faculty described experiences that both related to their intentions with particular teaching/learning activities. According to Sharon, she has received negative feedback from students that has been difficult, yet provided her with opportunities to understand students' points of view. She said,

I think that just the whole experience of getting feedback from students has been very traumatic for me because... I'm living up here in my intellectual realm and developing all these great theories about things and 'how do I do this' but the students experience of that is not necessarily what I intend.

She continued by saying that "Plenty of the time it is and I've had some really positive responses." However, the impact of the negative feedback by students was such that Sharon identified this as a negative consequence of her learning community involvement. Joseph discussed the ups and downs of his work with the learning community. He also experienced frustration during times when some students do not realize the benefits of certain activities. According to Joseph,

> I find my LC work to be exhausting and annoying at times and at other times very rewarding. The [service-learning aspect of the learning community] takes a tremendous amount of energy, but some students, at least, seem to find it a very significant experience. [It] can be great seeing students begin to get a clearer picture of what being [a professional] will be like, but it can also be very frustrating when they just 'don't get it.'

As with some of the other negative outcomes experienced by faculty in this study, the fact that students (or the majority of them) seemed to benefit from the learning community offset the negative outcome experienced by the faculty member. In this case, Joseph felt frustrated when students "don't' get it;" however, he was not deterred from the learning community because he felt rewarded and satisfied by seeing other students who do benefit. Thus, he minimized his frustration with the satisfaction that he gained from its successes.

Overall, perceived failure in certain aspects of the learning community was identified as a negative outcome for some faculty in this study. The "failures" resulted when students did not benefit from the learning community as was intended through the learning community structure (as in the cases of Harry and Mark) or teaching/learning activities (as in the cases of Sharon and Joseph). However, such perceived failures did not deter the faculty

members from the learning community. Rather, they used the setbacks to make changes to their learning community. Furthermore, faculty were able to offset the negative outcome for themselves by recognizing that many positive outcomes (both for themselves and students) were realized.

The issue of perceived failure may be especially important for mid-career faculty development. According to Kalivoda et al. (1994), "mid-career faculty perceive themselves to be at the peak of concern about reputation and recognition" (p. 268) and consider themselves to be at a "cross-roads professionally" (p. 268). Therefore, it may be even more important to assist mid-career faculty when perceived failures occur so that they are not adversely affected in their development. In other words, a perceived failure could serve as a stumbling block to the developmental issues of reputation and recognition. As faculty in this study were able to transform failures into improvement opportunities for their learning community, it does not appear that their development was stifled as a result of the perceived failure. However, it may be worthwhile to attend to these occasional failures in learning communities more systematically so that faculty can continue to use them as growth opportunities.

Departmental indifference/resistance. A fourth negative outcome experienced by some faculty in this study was the departmental indifference or resistance they experienced. In other words, some departments were oblivious to, indifferent about, or resistant to the work the faculty member was doing with the learning community. For example, Joseph said,

> I could get out of learning communities like that. I could just say I'm not doing it
>
> anymore… And, you know, I don't think that anyone in my department would bat an
>
> eye because I don't think they've batted an eye that I am involved.

Joseph indicated that if he stopped doing the learning community, it would cease to exist because his department is indifferent toward it. In other words, Joseph perceived himself to be alone in pursuit of the learning community in his department.

Mark shared an experience he had with his learning community during its development and his department's resistance to it. He stated,

It wasn't supportive, actually, in our department and this is a little story that I'll throw in there. When I went to do the living community a year after we got started, I went to our faculty and said 'here's what I'm thinking of doing, I want to start this living community where students can go across the hall and get help, they won't take up the whole floor,' on and on and on and I just got shot out of the water... It was probably the second worst day of my career that my faculty don't care if these students succeed or not. I thought 'here I'm helping to create an environment where they [students] can be more successful, they'll have a mentor and help' and they're [the faculty] worried about 'oh, they'll just be in their pajamas just going to English class and we're pampering the students, we're hand-holding....' But I really felt like our faculty didn't care. It didn't stop me... Really, I mean I knew it was a good thing to do and I thought 'I'm going to do it anyhow.'

However, the department's support of the learning community has changed since the initial struggles Mark had with his department. With the subsequent success of his learning community, Mark's experience with his department has been considerably different from Joseph's. Mark suggesetd that faculty in his department had to see the results first-hand before they would support it. According to Mark,

I think since we were able to prove through assessment that we had a successful

program, that we were getting recognition, I think the faculty here has really started

[to believe in it]. And they saw the engagement of the students, how they come to

class, ask a lot of questions, and would come to class on time. We just saw

phenomenal changes in the department.... Oh it changed the whole environment.

Thus, some faculty have felt indifference or resistance to their learning community from

within their departments. In some cases (such as Joseph's), the faculty member alone has

carried the torch of the learning community without necessarily having the support of his or

her department. In other cases (such as Mark's), the departmental indifference/resistance has

diminished as the learning community has proven to be successful. Departmental support

may be an important factor for mid-career faculty development since recognition is of prime

concern in this stage of the faculty member's career (Lamber et al., 1993; Kalivoda et al.,

1994). Lamber et al. posited that mid-career faculty have a desire for others to acknowledge

the amount of time and effort it takes for them to handle all the things they do. Thus, if a

department is indifferent about or resistant to a faculty member's involvement with a

learning community, the faculty member may be inhibited from fully realizing this aspect of

mid-career development. Whether the departmental indifference/resistance adversely

affected faculty development in this study is not known. However, these findings have

implications for sustainability of learning communities at both a faculty and departmental

level. These implications will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Lack of rewards. A final negative outcome identified by participants in this study

was the perceived lack of rewards, such as promotion/tenure and resources, associated with

learning community participation. The issue of rewards was raised most predominantly by

participants who were at the rank of Associate Professor. As they have not attained the academic rank of Full Professor, it is not surprising that Associate Professors would be more closely attuned to the issues related to rewards.

As was stated previously in this chapter, faculty do not appear to get involved in learning community work because of external rewards; rather, they are drawn to the learning community experience because of their commitment to undergraduate students and their learning and their belief that the learning community is the right thing to do for students. However, faculty shared a general agreement that participating in learning communities was an "add-on" to their other responsibilities. According to Joseph, "Basically, all the learning community stuff that I've ever done is over and above what I'm assigned to do. Right? I'm not assigned to do any of this."

Regarding the connection of learning communities to promotion and tenure issues, Byron shared his concerns most vehemently. While he believed that learning communities positively impact students, he was not convinced that participation in them ultimately will benefit the faculty member's career. He said,

> If you want to impact people's lives, my experience is [that] it's time consuming. Professionally-wise, I would suggest that maybe being involved in a learning community is not very smart because I think here at Iowa State we lack undergraduate teaching. I think we pay lip service to the value of this, but that's not the same as we see it rewarded.

A major concern related to promotion and tenure was how learning community involvement will fit into the faculty member's portfolio since some the impact of the work is harder to demonstrate. One potential way that learning communities can fit into a portfolio is through

learning community scholarship; however, as discussed in a previous section, how such scholarship will be evaluated and rewarded by the institution has been called into question by participants in this study. For example, although Byron has met with some success in producing learning community scholarship, he shared concerns about the ease of producing such scholarship and how it will be evaluated. According to Byron,

> [The way] I've seen learning communities largely evaluated is by the publications we get out, the research publications, which is certainly good and reasonable except most of the things they do with 18-year-old freshmen are not publishable... Sometimes a successful leaning community is keeping an 18-year-old freshmen in college, [where] this is where they want to be, as opposed to them becoming a 19-year-old private in the Army. And a lot of that, you know, that's not research. I have published with [colleagues] on learning communities so I'm not [against it]; it's just not going to pay off the same way from a publication point of view that say my graduate students who are defending theses this week are gonna pay off [for me].... All administrative levels say it's a good idea but when I look at rates of promotion and I look at resource allocation or I look at time commitments I don't see any rewards coming of it.

Byron's concern, therefore, not only dealt with how learning community work is evaluated, but also with his perception that few resources (such as faculty release time to work on the learning community) were allocated to participating faculty to help them be successful. Kent shared a similar skepticism about whether the scholarship of teaching and learning would be rewarded by the institution. He said,

> I have to believe when they [administrators] say that it will be [valued] and they've said that that it will be... all professors are a little bit skeptical until we see somebody

who has been recognized for that or promoted for that. I think we'll all scratch our heads a little bit and say, you know, put your money where your mouth is. But I hear it being valued by people all the way to the top so I'm willing to say I think so; let's now see some people get rewarded for it.

As with other negative outcomes (or disadvantages) identified in this study, faculty were seemingly able to mitigate them through the other more intrinsic rewards (such as satisfaction) they experienced from their learning community involvement. In other words, the extremely positive outcomes experienced by themselves and students outweighed any perceived negative consequences for the faculty member. This is not to say that the issue of rewards (or lack thereof) stemming from learning community involvement is one that ought to be ignored or overlooked. Rather, it simply suggests that some faculty are prepared to accept potential professional consequences that may arise from their participation in something they believe in, namely learning communities. For example, Joseph's comments help illustrate this matter. He said, "What I decided I cared about [in my work] was doing something that I believed in and that I thought was important. And, you know, if that leads to being promoted to full professor, great, and if it doesn't, that's great too." Meredith shared sentiments similar to Joseph's, saying,

> And you know what? I can retire as an associate professor because it's not about my titles; it's about what I do when I was at work. And some of the things I do at work, you know hugging a student whose mom just had a nervous breakdown, you don't get tenured, or you don't get promoted for those things.

For Meredith, the satisfaction of knowing she is doing important work related to her life's purpose was most important to her. Finally, Byron, who expressed the greatest amount of

discontent with the lack of rewards, also mitigated his dissatisfaction by saying "I'm comfortable that by being involved with learning communities I'm doing the right thing. On one level I find it enjoyable because I'm doing the right thing, and on another level I realize that there's no payoff for me, professionally."

Overall, some participants in this study, primarily those at the rank of Associate Professor, identified a lack of rewards associated with learning community participation as a negative outcome or disadvantage experienced by them. This is consistent with a perception held by non-participating faculty at Iowa State University that there is a lack of rewards associated with learning community involvement (Brooke & Ellertson, 2004). This finding is further connected to other studies that have identified issues of recognition as being of great importance to mid-career faculty development (Lamber et al., 1993; Kalivoda et al., 1994).

The chief concerns regarding rewards identified in this study dealt with the issue of promotion and whether and how learning community work would be rewarded in cases of promotion. However, although lack of reward (through promotion) was described as a potential negative outcome of learning community participation, faculty members seemed to mitigate this by focusing on the intrinsic rewards gained from their involvement. As with other negative outcomes identified in this study, the positive outcomes experienced by faculty members, and moreover students, seemed to drive their continued participation in the learning community and outweighed the impact of the negative. Kalivoda et al. (1994) found that "Faculty at all career stages cited intrinsically rewarding aspects of the academic career as most important" to their work satisfaction (p. 260). Therefore, it is not surprising that faculty in this study mitigated the negative outcome of rewards by emphasizing the positive,

intrinsic rewards they gained. However, the issue of rewards should not be overlooked as it has potential faculty development implications. Given that issues of recognition and promotion are at peak concern for mid-career faculty (Kalivoda et al.), it seems important for faculty development purposes that learning communities do not rely on intrinsic rewards to displace the perceived negative outcome of a lack of rewards. Implications of this finding will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Summary of negative outcomes and connection to research questions and literature. Five negative outcomes or disadvantages of learning community involvement were identified by faculty in this study and discussed above. These outcomes help address, in part, the first research question of this study. The five negative outcomes included:

- amount of time required to work with the learning community and potential opportunity costs associated with choosing the learning community in lieu of another possible activity

- cliques of students which pose challenges for the faculty member both in and out of the classroom

- occasional failure associated with various aspects of the learning community experienced while trying to develop or sustain the learning community

- departmental indifference about or resistance to the learning community

- lack of rewards (including issues of promotion and resources allocation) most often expressed by participants at the rank of Associate Professor

The first two outcomes are consistent with negative outcomes/disadvantages of learning community participation identified by other researchers (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Jaffee, 2004;

Strommer, 1999). Thus, participating faculty at this site experienced concerns that are similar to those expressed by learning community faculty at other institutions.

The latter three outcomes have potential connections to the mid-career faculty development needs of reputation and recognition as identified in the literature, making them of particular concern. Although faculty in this study mitigated the effects of such negative outcomes by focusing on the positive, it is possible that these negative outcomes could have negative faculty development implications. In other words, because reputation and recognition are of peak concern to mid-career faculty members, the faculty members may be negatively affected by the occasional failure, departmental indifference/resistance, and lack of rewards identified in this study. Thus, it seems crucial for faculty development to address these outcomes, even if faculty in this study were able to reconcile with such negative outcomes.

Overall, faculty in this study showed resilience when faced with negative outcomes; they confronted the negative and utilized the "lessons learned' as ways to improve their learning community. Furthermore, they diminished the impact of the negative outcomes by instead focusing on the positive outcomes realized by themselves and students.

Conclusions about Outcomes

The first research question of this study was concerned with understanding the ways in which faculty describe their experiences with learning communities, including the positive and negative outcomes they experience as a result. Seven positive outcomes/advantages of learning community participation were discovered. They included: satisfaction/pride in work; opportunity to experiment/take risks; relationships with students; relationships with colleagues; scholarship of learning communities; opportunity to educate for

democracy/citizenship; and personal insights and reaffirmation of one's work. Five negative outcomes/disadvantages were identified, including: time demands; cliques of students; failure of certain aspects of the learning community; departmental indifference/resistance; and lack of rewards.

Overall, the positive outcomes experienced by faculty seemed to diminish the impact of the negative outcomes on them. Both the positive and negative outcomes are consistent with developmental needs and concerns of mid-career faculty as identified in the literature. Thus, learning communities seem to provide an environment in which faculty can experience outcomes that meet their developmental needs. The exception to this is with several of the negative outcomes that potentially could work against the realization of some faculty development needs. Therefore, it is essential that negative outcomes are addressed so that they do not stifle mid-career faculty development. In addition, connections to the construct of vitality were noted in that several of the positive outcomes experienced by faculty are consistent with characterizations of vital faculty members.

In addition, the outcomes identified through this study provide some measure of progress toward the achievement of intended outcomes as set forth in the Iowa State University Learning Communities Vision (2003). In that vision, 10 outcomes for faculty/staff were identified:

- increased collaborations with students, faculty, and staff

- increased implementation of active and collaborative teaching and learning strategies

- connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences

- increased knowledge about students and their development

- improved reflective practice

- disciplinary and interdisciplinary collegiality

- increased knowledge about university resources

- increased involvement in professional development activities

- increased connections between their learning community work and their scholarship

- increased recognition and reward

Participants in this study experienced, at least in part, six of the intended outcomes. These included: increased collaborations with students, faculty, and staff; increased implementation of active and collaborative teaching and learning strategies; increased knowledge about students and their development; improved reflective practice; disciplinary and interdisciplinary collegiality; and increased connections between their learning community work and their scholarship. However, participants in this study perceived lack of rewards as a negative outcome of their participation rather than a positive outcome of their experience as intended in the Iowa State University Learning Communities Vision. Thus, this outcome is not being realized by participants of this study. As the participants of this study were limited to mid-career faculty members, the generalizability of their experiences to the experiences of other participating faculty members is unknown and is not a goal of this study. However, the findings provide a measure of progress of the outcomes outlined in the Iowa State University Learning Communities Vision for at least some participating faculty who are classified as mid-career.

In the next section, insights on vitality gleaned from this study will be discussed. These insights and findings will help further address the research questions of this study.

Insights on Vitality

In this study, I sought to explore the degree to which the construct of vitality could appropriately describe and illuminate mid-career faculty experiences in learning communities. Moreover, I asked questions about whether mid-career learning communities faculty exhibited characteristics of vitality and whether learning communities provided an environment that fosters faculty vitality. Data collected from in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis helped to address these questions.

In this section, I will discuss the insights on vitality gained from this study. To learn about vitality from participants' perspectives, I asked faculty to describe the experiences in their career that make them feel the most active, alive, or engaged (i.e., vital). Three main themes emerged around the experiences of vitality, including energy, excitement, and engagement; merging of work interests; and purposeful production. First, I will briefly revisit the construct of vitality. Then, I will discuss each of the three themes relative to vitality and learning communities participation. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of how these findings relate to the research questions and literature.

Vitality Revisited

Vitality was selected as a lens through which to examine faculty participation in learning communities because it seems to address faculty careers more holistically than simply looking at productivity as measured by the number of research publications a faculty member has produced. At its essence, vitality represents a stimulation in and engagement with one's work. However, vitality as a construct is primitive in that it is ambiguous so as to allow for complexities of the phenomenon to emerge (Clark et al., 1985). Baldwin's (1990b) characterization of vitality was used as the primary description for this study. He said,

Vital professors typically are individuals who challenge students academically and contribute to their overall development. . . . participate in governance and intellectual life of their institution and are involved in the debates of their discipline or professional field. . . . are curious and intellectually engaged. . . . enjoy the respect of their colleagues and are effective in the multiple roles of members of their academic profession. . . . grow personally and professionally throughout the academic career, continually pursuing expanded interests and acquiring new skills and knowledge. Adjectives that would apply to vital professors include: enthusiastic, caring, dedicated, vigorous, creative, flexible, risk-taking, and regenerative. . . . Vital professors may be campus leaders, inspiring teachers, prolific scholars, excellent advisors, but they do not necessarily perform all faculty roles with equal zest or skill. (p. 180)

A more complete examination of characterizations of vitality and related studies was provided in Chapter 2.

Energy, Excitement, and Engagement

One aspect of vitality that faculty in this study discussed was the feeling of energy, excitement, and overall engagement with their work they feel when interacting with students. Although the energy, excitement, and engagement seem characteristic of their work with students in general (see the discussion on commitment to undergraduate students and their learning presented earlier in this chapter), learning communities do provide opportunities for interacting with students, which appears to serve as a stimulus for vitality. In other words, learning communities seem to provide an environment that can foster vitality as expressed by energy, excitement, and engagement. According to Joseph,

Anytime I'm interacting with students, I find it to be... exciting and revitalizing...
This is such an important time in their lives when they're making this transition
between what their parents told them to do and what they're actually going to do in
their lives. I just think I'm fortunate to have a career where that's my job, to help
people, at least in some aspects, make that transition. So, virtually, every time I
interact with students I find it to be a revitalizing experience.... And the advantage to
learning communities is it provides more opportunities.

Likewise, Meredith demonstrated an obvious excitement and energy when meeting
with students in her learning community for an informal event (i.e., a picnic). While sitting
on the ground in a circle with students and eating hamburgers, Meredith conversed
informally with various students about everything from their summer living arrangements to
the latest campus news (i.e., the Veisha riots). She was clearly comfortable with students in
this informal setting, and they appeared comfortable with her as well. For the more "formal"
portion of the picnic, Meredith asked students to take turns sharing their summer work plans
as well as what they planned to do for fun. As we debriefed after the event, Meredith
commented that it was a good opportunity for her to re-connect with the learning community,
say goodbye for the summer, and have some closure with the group. She viewed the
"formal" portion of the picnic as a way to integrate an academic topic (i.e., their summer
work plans) into the conversation as well as to show them that she cared about them as
people by asking about their plans for fun. Meredith characterized the learning community
as fostering one of her goals, which is to "make an impact in people's lives, to help students
develop into professionals and good citizens." Thus, the learning community provided an

environment where Meredith could interact with students in a way that was energizing and exciting for her.

Jack's energy, excitement, and engagement with his learning community were exhibited through a "sparkle in his eye" that surfaced while he taught his learning community course. Jack was presenting information to the class and a student challenged him, asking "What is the point of knowing this?" Jack responded with "That's a good question" and then provided a rationale for why it was important they learn about the topic at hand. After Jack finished talking, another student interjected a very concise and well-thought point of view on why they were learning about the topic. To this student, Jack responded "That's a better response than the one I gave." Rather than being defensive or feeling "upstaged" by the student, Jack delighted in it, saying in our debriefing session, "He [the student] connected two things and that's great!" He said the apparent sparkle in his eye in the learning community class derived from the pleasure he feels when students are making gains. The learning community class afforded him with the types of interactions with students where he can see student gains very quickly and immediately. Overall, students who "push the boundaries" in his learning community class (as Jack tries to do in his work) stimulate his overall energy, excitement, and engagement.

Finally, Kent said that he feels most active, alive, and engaged with his work every morning when he is teaching first-year students, some of whom are in the learning community. He shared,

> Here is where I would disagree with many of my counterparts in other programs that
> think that it's a waste of time to work with freshmen; that's when I'm engaged.
> That's when I'm really alive.... I love first term, new 18 year olds. I love exciting

> them about where they're going, the challenges in their career, the controversies in
> their career, and the basic sciences in their career so that when I get done I hope they
> know a lot more about [not only the subject] but also a lot more about what they're
> going to be and what they're going to do.

Kent contrasted this experience with a time in his career when he felt disengaged. In other words, he was able to talk about what makes him feel vital by recalling a story to illustrate an opposite experience. He said,

> And then you get into that mid-career thing where you're getting onto more
> committees and activities and you begin to feel a little bit disengaged. I know there
> was a time when I was on about five university committees, five or six college
> committees and seven or eight, nine at one time in my department and I felt like I
> wasn't being productive. I felt like I was spinning my wheels. I wasn't spending
> enough time on my classes. I was doing things that were important for students and
> committees, but boy it was all committee work and I... became somewhat, I thought,
> disengaged.... [I have felt I am] kind of refocusing again the last few years. And so I
> really feel, especially [in] my freshman class, I just feel like I'm 100% there again.

Kent's experience in talking about vitality is similar to Gooler's (1991) assertion that one can identify experiences and characteristics of vitality by identifying opposite experiences and characteristics. For Kent, as with other faculty in this study, the learning community served as a venue for helping students; through helping students, he felt energy, excitement, and engagement with his work. In short, the learning community appears to provide Kent and other faculty with opportunities in which they can experience vitality. However, this is not to say they are absent of or fail to exhibit characteristics of vitality in other settings. The

learning community, as stated by Joseph, seems to simply provide more opportunities for the kinds of activities that make them feel energy, excitement, and engagement with their work.

Energy, excitement, and engagement with one's work appear to be consistent with mid-career faculty development needs and vitality as presented in the literature. Cytrynbaum et al. (1982) proposed that mid-career faculty may experience "professional or personal withdrawal" (p. 16); therefore, feeling energy, excitement, or engagement from one's work seems to be opposite of some of the negative manifestations of mid-career faculty development such as what Cytrynbaum et al. proposed.

In relationship to vitality, Clark et al. (1986) found that highly active (i.e., vital) faculty had high self-ratings of energy. Although faculty in this study were not rating their energy levels, they described experiencing energy as an aspect of the times in their careers when they felt most vital.

Merging of Work Interests

A second manifestation of vitality described by faculty in this study was the merging of work interests that occurs for them. In essence, experiences in which their work interests come together provided faculty with feelings of being active and alive in their work (i.e., vital). One faculty member, Nancy, described this merging of interests as "being in the zone." According to Nancy, her experience of feeling the most active and alive in her work occurred when different aspects of her work came together. She said,

> I think when I was streamlined, when my research and my teaching and my outreach
> was [*sic*] in one subject area, where all I had to worry about was [my area of
> expertise]. I think that was when I was most alive. I think being focused.

Nancy's learning community involvement drew together various aspects of her work including teaching, service, and scholarship. Thus, her learning community provided her with the kind of opportunity that she describes as fostering her vitality.

Similarly, Byron and Joseph described their merging work interests as providing experiences in which they feel particularly vital. Byron experienced enjoyment at being able to share his expertise through teaching. He said, "The things that have most engaged me is where I can provide people with my technical knowledge and [do it through] teaching." It is not just the delivery of the content that made Byron feel active and alive, but it is the creativity of figuring out a way to share his knowledge that sparked his experience of "aliveness" (i.e., vitality). He shared, "giving them my perspective of [the topic] so they get the technical knowledge but I get to package that technical knowledge the way that I think will have the most meaning and impacting value to them." The creative challenge inherent in merging his work interests (in this case, his technical expertise and his teaching of it) stimulated Byron. Certainly, learning communities can provide a creative outlet that allows for the merging of expertise and teaching, particularly because of the course-based and teaching-intensive nature of them.

Joseph specifically discussed his learning community as an environment in which his various interests related to teaching and his passion for his discipline were merged. He said,

I would say in some ways the [learning community's service-learning project] really sort of weaves together all of the things I'm interested in…. [It] sort of brings all those pieces together into… one activity, one thing. I basically feel like I'm doing what I want to do, what I'm interested in, and what I think I'm good at. It's a

pleasure to do things that you feel like 'yeah, I can do that pretty well.' It's

frustrating to try and do things that you think 'really I'm not that great at it.'

Joseph, thus, derived pleasure and satisfaction from doing activities that weave together his

interests and areas of work.

As previously discussed in this chapter, learning communities can provide a

boundary-spanning experience in which various aspects of faculty work can be woven

together. Moreover, faculty in this study described the merging of work interests as

characteristic of times when they feel most vital. According to Lamber et al. (1993), "As

faculty careers progress past tenure review and into mid-career, the boundaries between the

professional roles of teaching, research, and service become less clear" (p. 24). While the

blurring of boundaries may be common among mid-career faculty in general, learning

communities seem to provide an environment in which merging of work interests can readily

occur.

Purposeful Production

Faculty in this study described their learning community involvement as fulfilling

larger overarching purposes than the outcomes realized by them or their students. They

viewed their learning community participation also as beneficial to the institution, their

disciplines/departments, and even professional societies. Faculty are doing something they

perceive to be important and beneficial to multiple constituencies; they are engaging in

"purposeful production." Clark and Corcoran (1985) described vitality as "those essential,

yet intangible, positive qualities of individuals and institutions that enable purposeful

production" (p. 3). Essentially, purposeful production is the positive interplay between

individuals and institutions. Faculty in this study viewed their involvement with a learning community as mutually beneficial work.

The learning community can provide experiences in which faculty feel that they are working with others toward a common purpose. According to Sharon, her "peak experiences" or experiences where she has felt the most active and alive included the following:

> Just really getting a chance to talk with people on some of those overarching ideas, on where do we want to go, how do we want to get there? Having just occasionally the sense that we are working together to do something important. I think that some of the team meetings I've been involved in- in terms of developing a learning community or developing [a related program] have been really great experiences along those lines.... I think it's just having all those points of view that you get to see and get to have a sense that with all these different points of view, you are working together for some common purpose. That you are working effectively for a common purpose.

Having a shared purpose, therefore, helped Sharon feel vital. For others, they hoped students would have positive feelings about and experiences within their departments. Harry shared,

> I guess I feel good about it [the learning community] if the students come away from it with a positive feeling about the department.... I don't want them to leave because they're misinformed, let's put it that way. The interesting thing is that so far we've had zero attrition rate; I mean, it may change. And also this year for the first time we have a waiting list to get on. Before... we couldn't fill up the learning community.

Likewise, Kent regarded the learning community as having benefits for his department as well as students. He said,

> The core of what I'm saying is that I love to work with these students and I want their freshmen experience to be the best possible. Learning communities make that happen, along with clubs and other things.... I push learning communities et cetera because I know they're [students are] going to be more successful. So, the game to me is working with these kids, and really enjoying them and getting them the best possible experience. But I am a realist and I know that if I have 100 less students next year or 50 less and 50 less the next year after that that I'm in trouble financially. So, I understand that what I'm doing is also keeping my numbers steady and strong so that my program gets the dollars it needs to run because those dollars are the things that also keep the students happy. I can do things for them in the classroom with those teaching dollars that satisfy their desires as students, so I know that there are two different games here.

In essence, the learning community experience for the student and the department is mutually beneficial and faculty viewed them as such.

Finally, some faculty discussed learning communities as having benefits that stretch beyond Iowa State, for example, to professional disciplinary associations. Mark said his learning community helps to do that as well as to help his department. He shared,

> I knew at least from working with constituents like industry that we weren't meeting their needs as far as the number of [majors] going out the door. So I thought if I can do something [the learning community] to increase our numbers, help our department

because we needed to have certain numbers, and also help our professional society to
meet their numbers, I feel like I'm really accomplishing something.

Overall, faculty members in this study regarded the learning community as a mutually
beneficial endeavor. Essentially, the learning community helps to meet purposes that are
larger than themselves or their students; it also helps the institution, their departments, and
professional associations.

Vitality can occur when there is positive interplay between the faculty experience and
broader interests, such as those of the institution (Bland & Schmitz, 1990; Clark & Corcoran,
1985). At Iowa State University, several institutional gains from learning communities, such
as increased retention and graduation rates and financial gains, have been reported
(Epperson, 2000; Huba et al., 2003). Because faculty in this study reported experiencing
positive outcomes (as discussed earlier in this chapter) and they also reported gaining
satisfaction from engaging in work that can be categorized as "purposefully productive," one
could suggest that a positive interplay exists between faculty experiences and the institution
for learning communities faculty.

Summary and Connection to Research Questions and Literature

The second and third research questions of this study focused on issues of vitality,
specifically whether mid-career learning communities faculty exhibit characteristics of
vitality and whether learning communities provide an environment that fosters faculty
vitality. Although I chose to identify with Baldwin's (1990b) characterization of vitality for
this study, it should be noted that no one "definition" is sufficient to describe this complex
and primitive construct. Clark et al. (1985) suggested that primitive constructs such as
vitality are best "conveyed by examples" (p. 6) rather than in strict operational terms. Thus,

in my discussion of vitality above, I sought to share participants' examples that might help to further explicate the construct and connect it to their learning community experiences.

When faculty in this study discussed work experiences that make them feel active, alive, and engaged (i.e., vital) with their work, they identified a sense of energy, excitement, and engagement they derive from working with students. Their learning community participation, because it is a student-intensive environment, stimulates their energy, excitement, and engagement. According to Clark and Lewis (1985), this dimension of vitality is one that should not be overlooked in its importance. They said, "Systematic consideration must be given to the dimension of vitality variously termed enthusiasm, energy, or esprit. The reference is to the embodiment of a set of value in the spirit of the organization that energizes people to work productively and creatively" (p. 249). Thus, because learning communities provide a venue that is rich in opportunities for student interaction, learning communities can provide an environment to foster vitality.

Another dimension of learning community participation described by faculty as consistent with making them feel active, alive, and engaged is the merging of work interests that can occur. In other words, faculty find it satisfying when they see a common thread among their various roles of work and are able to weave them together. Learning communities, as discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, can serve as a boundary-spanning experience for faculty that includes not only their teaching, but also service, scholarship, grants, and awards. Learning communities, therefore, can provide faculty with a way to merge their work interests. Because merging work interests helps faculty feel active, alive, and engaged with their work, it appears that learning communities can provide an environment in which vitality is fostered.

Finally, faculty cited experiences when they are engaging in purposefully productive work as fostering vitality; that is, they are satisfied and fulfilled when they are helping to achieve a larger purpose and doing work has benefits beyond themselves and their students. Faculty vitality is intertwined with the institutional context in which the faculty member works (Clark & Lewis, 1985). Therefore, because faculty view their learning community participation as having far-reaching impact on the institution, their departments, and even professional disciplinary associations, positive interplay between faculty experiences and the institution appears to exist. Thus, learning communities faculty appear to exhibit characteristics of vitality and learning communities seem to provide the kinds of opportunities that can foster vitality.

Chapter 4 Summary and Preview of Chapter 5

In Chapter 4, I addressed the findings of this study in four major sections. First, I described the participants of the study by providing information relative to demographic characteristics such as gender, academic rank, years of service to Iowa State University, and disciplinary affiliation.

Second, I presented findings related to how learning community involvement fits into the academic career, including a discussion of common characteristics of participants and how learning community participation fits into the whole of faculty members' work. Common characteristics shared by participants primarily related to their commitment to undergraduate students, their propensity for teaching-related activities, and their continued connections to disciplinary activities through scholarship or other opportunities. These findings suggest that learning communities attract faculty members who are vital and engaged with their work overall. Moreover, learning communities faculty do exhibit

characteristics of vitality; however, the vitality is not necessarily a result of their learning community participation. In this section, I also discussed learning communities as a boundary-spanning activity that cross into many aspects of faculty members' work, such as service, grants, scholarship, awards, and, of course, teaching. Because boundary-spanning is a process that has been connected to mid-career faculty development, learning communities may be serving a developmental need of mid-career faculty, suggesting that learning communities are an appropriate faculty development strategy for mid-career faculty.

Third, I presented positive and negative outcomes of learning community participation that were discovered in this study. Taken together, the positive outcomes revealed that learning communities provide an environment that is rich in faculty development opportunities because learning communities provide a laboratory for experimentation in which faculty members experience high levels of satisfaction, enriched relationships with students and colleagues, opportunities for scholarship, opportunities to educate for democratic citizenship, and positive reaffirmation of their work and personal insights. Several negative outcomes also were identified in this study, including time demands, cliques of students, occasional failure, departmental indifference/resistance, and lack of rewards. However, a recurring theme related to negative outcomes is that faculty in this study were willing to overlook potential negative consequences because of the overwhelmingly positive outcomes that they and students experience through the learning community. Ultimately, they mitigated the negatives by concentrating instead on the positives. Both the positive and negative outcomes identified in this study are consistent with developmental needs and concerns of mid-career faculty as identified in the literature.

Thus, learning communities seem to provide an environment in which faculty can experience outcomes that meet their developmental needs.

Finally, I discussed the issue of vitality and insights gleaned through this study. Faculty identified three dimensions of experiences that contribute to their feeling active, alive, and engaged with their work (i.e., vital). They described energy, excitement, and engagement that they derive from interactions with students, the opportunities to merge work interests, and feelings of contributing to a purpose larger than themselves and their students (i.e., purposeful production). These lived experiences provide additional insights into vitality and suggest that how these faculty members experience vitality is consistent with their mid-career faculty development needs as identified in the literature. Thus, learning communities seem to provide an environment that fosters mid-career faculty development and faculty vitality.

In the next chapter, I will focus on three major topics. First, I will share the conclusions of this study based on the findings. Second, I will present and discuss implications of these findings for practice. Lastly, I will present recommendations for future research that might be undertaken related to this study and topic.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, I examined the participation of mid-career faculty members in learning communities to understand their experiences and the meanings they attach to their involvement with learning communities. Moreover, I sought to uncover the positive and negative outcomes of their participation as well as to explore the degree to which the construct of vitality can appropriately describe and illuminate faculty experiences in learning communities. In this section, I will share conclusions of this study, discuss recommendations for practice, present recommendations for future research, and share my concluding thoughts.

Overall Conclusions

This study was designed to address three questions:

1. In what ways do mid-career faculty members describe their learning community experiences?

    - What outcomes do mid-career faculty members identify from their involvement with learning communities?

    - What advantages and disadvantages of learning community involvement do mid-career faculty identify?

2. Do mid-career faculty who are involved with learning communities exhibit characteristics of vitality? If so, in what ways? If not, how are they different?

3. Do learning communities provide an environment that fosters faculty vitality?

Phenomenology (Crotty, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Schwandt, 1998) provided the appropriate methodological framework for the study because the aim of the study was to understand the lived experiences and realities of mid-career faculty members who are involved with learning communities and their interpretations of their experiences. Data were collected through

phenomenologically-based interviews, observations, and document analysis in an effort to address the three research questions. In this section, I will provide overall conclusions related to each of the research questions.

Research Question 1: Outcomes

Seven positive outcomes were identified by participants as resulting from their learning community participation. These outcomes help address, in part, the first research question posed in this study. The seven outcomes included: satisfaction/pride in work; opportunity to experiment/take risks; relationships with students; relationships with colleagues; scholarship of learning communities; opportunity to educate for democracy/citizenship; and personal insights and reaffirmation of one's work.

Not only are there many positive outcomes associated with learning community participation, the outcomes realized by participants of this study are consistent with other studies of learning communities faculty. For example, other studies have found that faculty improve their teaching (Strommer, 1999), utilize new pedagogical approaches (Barefoot, 1993; Smith & MacGregor, 1991), and develop "interactive, collaborative, and problem-solving teaching strategies in learning communities" (Brown, 2004, n.p.) as a result of their participation in a learning community or related activity. These findings are consistent with the present study where I found that faculty experiment/take risks (particularly with content and pedagogy) as a result of their learning community involvement. This study's findings also reflected the findings of other studies that found relationships formed with students (Stassen, 2000; Strommer, 1999) and colleagues (Brown, 2004; Evenbeck et al., 1999; Hellenberg et al., 2000; Smith, 1988; Stassen, 1999; Strommer, 1999) as major benefits of learning community participation. Finally, the personal insights and reaffirmation of one's

work that faculty described in this study are consistent with Evenbeck et al.'s (1999) finding that learning communities have transformative potential.

Aside from reflecting findings of other studies of learning communities faculty, the positive outcomes identified by faculty in this study connect to faculty development needs as presented in the literature. Baldwin (1984), for example, suggested that mid-career faculty have a need to "identify new professional endeavors, to experiment with new roles, and generally to expand their overall career horizons" (p. 48). The nature of learning community work provides opportunities to experiment and to get involved in new activities such as the scholarship of teaching and learning. Relationships with colleagues through collaborations and networks also are important to mid-career faculty development (Frost & Taylor, 1996; Kalivoda et al., 1994; Lawrence, 1985) and faculty in this study identified such relationships as a positive benefit of learning community participation. Further, faculty in this study cited the opportunity to utilize the learning community to educate for democracy as a benefit of participation because democratic education was important to them. Having this opportunity fits with assertions (for example, Lamber et al., 1993) that mid-career faculty have particular needs for freedom and control, that is, the ability to do the kinds of activities in their work that they really want to do. Finally, mid-career faculty have been described as engaging in a process of reassessment (Baldwin, 1990a; Cytrynbaum et al., 1982). Since faculty in this study gained benefits of personal insights and reaffirmation of their work from their learning community participation, it appears that learning communities can provide an environment in which reflection and reassessment can be fostered thus helping meet a mid-career faculty development need. Overall, faculty in this study experienced outcomes that are consistent with their developmental needs, suggesting that learning communities can serve as a

developmentally appropriate activity for mid-career faculty. This supports the assertion that mid-career faculty are viable candidates for learning community work, as proposed by Gabelnick et al. (1990), Smith (1988), and Strommer (1999).

However, participants also identified several negative outcomes, or disadvantages, associated with their learning community participation. The five negative outcomes/disadvantages included: time demands; cliques of students; failure of certain aspects of the learning community; departmental indifference/resistance; and lack of rewards. Time demands and cliques of students also have been identified by other researchers as negative outcomes/disadvantages of learning community participation for faculty (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Jaffee, 2004; Strommer, 1999). The latter three negative outcomes have potential connections to the mid-career faculty development needs of reputation and recognition as identified in the literature (Kalivoda et al., 1994; Lamber et al., 1993). Moreover, although faculty in this study mitigated the effects of such negative outcomes by focusing on the positive, it is possible that these negative outcomes could have negative faculty development implications. In other words, because reputation and recognition are of peak concern to mid-career faculty members, the faculty members may be negatively affected by the occasional failure, departmental indifference/resistance, and lack of rewards identified in this study. Therefore, the negative outcomes identified by faculty in this study connect to mid-career faculty needs and, thus, need to be addressed so that learning communities do not have an unintended consequence of stifling mid-career faculty development. Recommendations for practice will be discussed later in this chapter.

Overall, the positive and negative outcomes revealed through this study indicate that faculty experiences in learning communities are similar to those of faculty who participate in

learning communities at other institutions (as identified by other researchers). Furthermore, learning communities provide an environment and experiences that are rich in faculty development potential for mid-career faculty members. Later in this chapter, I will provide suggestions for more fully realizing positive outcomes and addressing negative outcomes that were identified through this study.

Research Question 2: Characteristics of Vitality

Vitality was selected as a lens through which to examine faculty participation in learning communities because it seems to address faculty careers more holistically than simply viewing productivity as the number of research publications a faculty member has produced. At its essence, vitality represents a stimulation in and engagement with one's work.

Participants shared a number of common characteristics that were revealed in this study. These characteristics include: a commitment to undergraduate students and their learning; empathy for students based on their own experiences; an early interest in teaching; participation in teaching enhancement activities; frequently being recipients of teaching awards; holding teaching roles and responsibilities; and maintaining connections to disciplinary activities. An overarching theme of the shared characteristics is that faculty in this study have a propensity for certain teaching-related activities; learning communities are an example of this type of activity. However, their involvement in learning community work has not diminished other aspects of their professional lives. For example, many faculty serve their disciplines through leadership roles (i.e., editorships, professional association leadership, etc.), produce scholarship appropriate to their discipline (i.e., articles, books, etc.), and conduct research that is funded by external granting agencies. In other words, by

embracing the work of learning communities, faculty have not rejected their other roles. Baldwin (1990b) found that vital faculty have "more complex, multidimensional careers" (p. 174). Because learning community faculty in this study have not abandoned their wide-ranging work interests in sole pursuit of learning community activities suggests they have maintained complex careers which is consistent with Baldwin's assertion.

According to Baldwin (1990b) and Gooler (1991), vital faculty members often are excited about their students and enjoy challenging students academically while contributing to their development. Faculty in this study shared a commitment to students and their learning, as well as empathy for students, which engaged them with their work. Faculty also have been active participants in teaching enhancement activities as a way to help improve their teaching and ultimately student learning. All of these are consistent with what might be expected of a faculty member who exhibits characteristics of vitality. Gooler further suggested that vital faculty "take a strong measure of satisfaction in what he or she does professionally" (p. 25). Faculty in this study overwhelmingly indicated a high level of satisfaction and pride in their work that stems from their learning community involvement; moreover, they enjoy the benefits that students gain from their learning community participation. Furthermore, faculty identified relationships with students and colleagues as additional positive outcomes of their participation in learning communities. According to Gooler, "These [vital] professors carry about them a certain excitement and enthusiasm for their work and for their colleagues and students" (p. 13). Because vitality is a complex construct that does not fit neatly within one classification scheme, it is difficult to "define" faculty as vital. However, characterizations of vitality discussed above and throughout this study seem to fit with the lived experiences of faculty in this study. Overall, participating

faculty shared a number of innate characteristics, suggesting that faculty members who already possess traits associated with vitality are attracted to learning community work.

Research Question 3: Fostering Vitality through Learning Communities

Whether learning communities provide an environment that fosters faculty vitality was the third major research question posed in this study. Experiences described by faculty as making them feel vital fit with the types of experiences that learning communities can provide, suggesting that learning communities, in fact, can promote faculty vitality.

One way in which learning communities can foster vitality is by serving as a boundary-spanning activity that can help faculty bring together various aspects of their work without abandoning any one aspect of their work. For example, learning communities cross categorical boundaries of work including teaching, grants, service, awards, and scholarship. Lamber et al. (1993) found that "the boundaries between the professional roles of teaching, research, and service become less clear" (p. 24) as faculty progress into their mid-career. Thus, learning communities may be serving a developmental need of mid-career faculty, suggesting that learning communities are an appropriate faculty development strategy for mid-career faculty as was postulated by Smith (1988) and Strommer (1999). Moreover, the boundary-spanning aspect of learning communities fosters the merging of work interests that faculty in this study described as characteristic of fostering their vitality. Therefore, learning communities have potential for fostering faculty vitality by providing an environment in which work interests can be merged (i.e., boundary spanning).

Another important aspect of vitality is that it is contextual to the particular institutional setting. Moreover, several researchers have suggested that vitality can occur when faculty and institutional interests intersect in a positive way (Bland & Schmitz; 1990;

Clark & Corcoran, 1985; and Gooler, 1991). Clark and Corcoran described the positive intersection of faculty and institutional interests as "purposeful production," another dimension of vitality. Faculty in this study described their learning community involvement as fulfilling larger, overarching purposes than the outcomes realized by them or their students; they also regarded their learning community work as beneficial to the institution, their disciplines/departments, and even professional societies. In essence, faculty in this study have found that purposefully productive activities, such as learning communities, foster their feelings of vitality.

Finally, faculty in this study experienced what Clark and Lewis (1985) called the "dimension of vitality variously termed enthusiasm, energy, or esprit" (p. 249). They indicated that when they participate in activities that give them energy, excitement, and engagement with their work, their overall feelings of vitality are fostered; learning communities are an example of this type of activity. The positive outcomes identified by faculty, such as experiencing satisfaction and pride in their work, having opportunities to experiment, and building relationships with students and colleagues describe a certain sense of excitement or enthusiasm that accompanies the benefits of learning community involvement. In other words, learning community faculty experience positive outcomes through their involvement, which are consistent with characteristics of vital faculty members.

Overall, the merging of faculty work interests as well as engaging in work that is fulfilling to themselves, the institution, and most importantly, students, helps to foster vitality among participating learning communities faculty. Therefore, learning communities can provide an environment where many positive outcomes are realized and where faculty vitality can be fostered.

A number of specific findings were discussed in Chapter 4 that have potential implications for practice. These recommendations are presented and discussed in the next section.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Practice</div>

Throughout Chapter 4, a number of specific findings were revealed that have potential implications for practice. In this section, I will recap these findings and present recommendations related to these specific findings in four areas: recruitment of faculty, faculty development, addressing negative outcomes, and programmatic recommendations. While the recommendations may be most applicable to the learning communities program at Iowa State University, including the Co-Directors, Advisory Committee, and Curriculum Committee, learning community administrators in other institutions may find the recommendations useful as well.

Recruitment of Faculty

Over time, there has been a continued interest in deepening and widening the scope of faculty involvement in learning communities at Iowa State University. Throughout my four years working with learning communities, many discussions were held as to the strategies that might be employed to widen and deepen the involvement of faculty; however, few systematic efforts to do so were undertaken. The findings of this study informed the two recommendations related to identifying and recruiting prospective learning community faculty that I will discuss here.

First, learning communities faculty in this study shared a certain propensity for engaging in teaching/learning-related activities. This is consistent with Brooke and Ellertson's (2004) survey findings about learning communities faculty at Iowa State

University. Therefore, faculty members who have an inclination for participating in teaching/learning enhancement activities ought to be recruited for learning community involvement. Such faculty may be identified through existing mechanisms, for example, faculty who participate in other on-campus teaching/learning initiatives, such as events through the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), Project LEA/RN, and Wakonse fellowships. Additionally, because most learning communities are geared toward first-year students, instructors of first year courses could be identified as prospective candidates for learning community involvement.

Second, learning communities faculty have realized many positive outcomes from their learning community participation. Therefore, the stories and experiences of current participating faculty could be used as a tool for promoting learning communities and recruiting new faculty. Again, events sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching might provide opportunities where such stories could be shared, such as the CELT newsletter and faculty forums. Because CELT already has an established faculty development program and their programs reach large numbers of faculty, more connections between CELT and learning communities ought to be explored.

Faculty Development Initiatives

As previously stated, learning communities appear to provide an environment rich with faculty development potential. However, one cannot assume that faculty will automatically reap the benefits of faculty development; therefore, additional intentional faculty development efforts should be undertaken. Several additional faculty development needs for learning communities faculty were revealed through this study and I will discuss them, along with ideas for new faculty development initiatives, in this section.

Among the most predominant outcomes for faculty was the opportunity to utilize the learning community as a living laboratory for experimentation. Thus, learning communities can serve as an outlet for expressing creativity which may have particular appeal to mid-career faculty members (Kalivoda et al., 1994). Creative aspects of learning community involvement, therefore, ought to be fostered and enhanced through additional faculty development activities. Such activities might include workshops, discussion groups, or perhaps a focus on creativity through the annual on-campus Learning Communities Institute. Faculty in this study reported experimenting with pedagogies (such as active learning, teamwork, and service-learning) and course content (i.e., alternative modes of content delivery). Therefore, topics such as these could be used as a starting point for additional faculty development opportunities.

Second, learning communities provide an environment in which the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) can occur. Some faculty in this study have engaged in such scholarship while others have simply developed an increased interest. Issues of time and expertise, however, were raised as potential barriers to faculty fully realizing the potential scholarship opportunities; therefore, more faculty development could occur in this area. The development of SOTL with learning communities faculty might be enhanced through additional education or assistance, such as discussion forums, workshops, work groups, individual consultations, small grants program, or a learning communities scholar position. Workshops and discussion forums could be useful for introducing the subject to a broader audience whereas individual consultations and work groups might be useful for faculty who are working on specific SOTL projects and needing feedback from peers. These methods potentially could provide faculty with the knowledge base about SOTL while also providing

them with networking opportunities, which may be a key to accomplishing learning communities scholarship for some faculty. Offering a small grants program for faculty who engage in learning community scholarship may be one way to alleviate issues of time associated with it. Perhaps faculty could submit proposals for learning community scholarship and then be given partial release time so that they could accomplish the work. A final idea is related to creating a learning communities scholar position, similar to the "Faculty Fellow/CTE Scholar" position that was previously offered through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. This person could be "bought out" for the academic year (or a part of it) with the sole purpose of conducting a project related to learning community scholarship and providing faculty development for other learning communities faculty. This idea is one that previously has been discussed in the Learning Community Advisory Committee; however, its viability and potential has not been fully explored.

Finally, the faculty in this study experienced many benefits from reflecting on their learning community involvement, such as gaining insights on their teaching, reaffirming their work interests, and gaining reassurance about their work. In addition, faculty seem to appreciate opportunities for reflection and some participants even thanked me for the opportunity to participate in the study and reflect on their learning community participation. Therefore, I recommend that systematic opportunities for reflection be incorporated into learning communities in order to maximize the faculty development potential. Several ideas presented in the literature, such as colleague groups (Lawrence, 1985) and reflective dialogues/interviews (Smith & MacGregor, 1991) could be explored for use with learning communities faculty. Colleague groups bring together faculty from various disciplines around a common interest or project; they are similar to the teaching/learning circles already

used by the Iowa State University Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. Reflective dialogues/interviews have been used by Smith and MacGregor to foster conversations among faculty at the end of the academic term. They used several open-ended questions to loosely structure the groups' conversations. Reflective dialogues/interviews also have the potential benefit of serving as a tool for programmatic assessment. Thus, faculty can gain reflection opportunities while the learning communities program could gain valuable assessment information. In addition, because faculty in this study identified occasional failure associated with learning communities as a negative outcome, reflection opportunities could serve as a mechanism for processing these failures and developing solutions. In this way, reflection could help ensure that occasional failure in a learning community does not become stifling to the faculty member's development.

Addressing Negative Outcomes

Several negative outcomes, or disadvantages, of learning community participation were identified and discussed in Chapter 4. Even though faculty seemed to mitigate the negative experiences by concentrating instead on positive experiences, learning communities cannot continue to rely on the goodwill of participating faculty members and overlook the negative aspects of the faculty experience. If the negative aspects are not addressed, the sustainability of learning communities may in jeopardy because involved faculty members could burn out and other faculty members may not be available to replace them. Also, involvement with learning communities may be perceived negatively rather than as a positive and exciting faculty development opportunity. Recommendations for addressing several of the negative aspects will be discussed in this section.

Because the time required to do learning community work was the most predominant and shared concern of faculty, some options for alleviating the time pressures should be considered. One idea is to provide buy-out of faculty time for learning community development work. For example, some learning communities have been in existence for a number of years and they have established a pattern of operation whereby they do things the same way every year. Because of time constraints, it is likely that little will change in the learning community unless systematic efforts are made to do so. Thus, a learning community development grant may assist both a faculty member and a learning community by providing time and resources to rejuvenate their practices. Another strategy that may assist with the issue of time is to help faculty members broaden the involvement with their learning community by identifying additional faculty and staff who could be recruited to assist.

Departmental indifference/resistance to the learning community was another area identified by some faculty members as a challenge. Some previous efforts have been undertaken to educate and gain the involvement of Associate Deans with learning communities; however, little has been done at the level of department chair. Therefore, in order to make progress toward departmental understanding and support, outreach efforts to department chairs should be considered. Meetings at the college level may be one potential venue for reaching out to department chairs.

Finally, the lack of rewards (predominantly connected to issues of promotion) identified by faculty in this study is consistent with a perception held by participating and non-participating faculty at Iowa State University that there is a lack of rewards associated with learning community involvement (Brooke & Ellertson, 2004). Chief concerns about rewards centered on how learning community work would be evaluated in promotion cases

and if/how scholarship of teaching and learning would be rewarded. This is an issue that has been raised previously in learning communities subcommittees and at Learning Communities Institutes; however, the issue has not been explored or discussed systematically. One modest strategy that could be employed is to help faculty see the boundary spanning potential of learning community work by helping faculty identify the ways in which their learning community participation can occur in different forms and merge their various work interests. This form of faculty development assists in addressing the career reassessment needs of mid-career faculty by helping them see their learning community work more holistically. A larger, more complex issue is dealing with the issue of rewards on an organizational level. Therefore, my primary recommendation is consistent with Brooke and Ellertson's recommendation that the issue of rewards must be addressed systematically by the Learning Communities Advisory Committee and an action plan developed. Learning communities faculty, of course, should be involved in this process. Further, because the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning emphasizes the scholarship of teaching and learning, more connections with CELT should be explored to address this issue and its significance for learning communities faculty. Addressing the issue of rewards in a proactive manner will send a message to participating learning communities faculty that their concerns are being heard and addressed.

Programmatic Recommendations

A final recommendation deals with the issue of intended outcomes for participating learning communities faculty. Iowa State University has established a culture of assessment in learning communities on both a programmatic level and individual learning community level that focuses on intended student outcomes, the strategies used to achieve the intended

outcomes, and the measures used to assess them (Huba et al., 2003). However, little

emphasis has been placed on intended outcomes for faculty and staff, even though such

intended outcomes have been articulated in the Learning Communities Vision (2003).

Therefore, on an overall programmatic level, I recommend that efforts to identify strategies

used to achieve faculty/staff outcomes be identified, along with a plan for assessing the

outcomes. On the level of individual learning communities, I recommend that each learning

community coordinator should be encouraged or perhaps required to identify and articulate

intended outcomes for their participating faculty members. This may help broaden the

understanding about the important role that each learning community plays in faculty and

staff development.

Recommendations for Future Research

Learning communities provide fertile grounds for additional research. According to

Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, and Lindblad (2003), "very little research and assessment on

learning communities has explored the effects of these programs on faculty, student affairs

staff, student, librarians, and other individuals who serve on learning community teaching

teams" (p. iv). Because this study focused on mid-career faculty members who are involved

with learning communities, I will present recommendations for future research specifically

aimed at issues related to faculty in learning communities.

It would instructive to understand more about the faculty development potential of

learning communities for faculty at different career stages, early-, middle-, and late-career.

In other words, do learning communities help meet faculty development needs for faculty at

different stages of their careers? Knowing the answer to this question potentially could help

shape various roles in learning communities for faculty during different stages of their

careers. For example, it is possible that late-career faculty members may be interested in mentoring type roles (which may meet their developmental needs) whereas early-career faculty members may be interested in the scholarship opportunities associated with learning communities. Knowing more about the faculty development potential of learning communities for faculty at various career stages makes sense not only for faculty development purposes but also for the purposes of identifying and recruiting faculty members for learning community participation.

As faculty in this study were all actively involved in learning communities, it perhaps is not surprising that they identified many positive outcomes of their participation. In other words, there is likely some level of self-selection of individuals who choose to engage in learning community work. However, what about faculty who previously have been involved with learning communities but who have discontinued their participation? This group may provide another avenue for further research and exploration as it may be useful to learn the reasons for their discontinued participation. Have they "outgrown" the learning community (i.e., did the learning community meet specific developmental needs that are no longer applicable)? Are they no longer experiencing benefits of participation? Did they realize any benefits at all from their participation (i.e., was their learning community participation a positive experience for them?)? Have they moved into other roles or found new opportunities in their work? Knowing more about faculty who have discontinued their learning community participation could be useful for further understanding the potential connections between learning community participation and faculty development.

Another question that often is raised relates to the motivations of faculty for participating in learning community work. In other words, why do faculty members get

involved with learning communities and what keeps them involved? Approaching this question through the lens of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could provide insights that may be useful for faculty development purposes. For example, if faculty are intrinsically motivated to get involved, then what role do extrinsic rewards play in sustaining their involvement? Although I did not examine motivation as part of this study, motivation-related issues occasionally emerged throughout discussions on faculty careers and would be useful to further explore.

Additional studies on faculty vitality would help to further illuminate the multiple meanings of this complex phenomenon. Examining what vitality means to faculty members within Iowa State University would extend the understanding of the construct in the specific context of this institution. Further exploration about the meaning of vitality in specific sub-cultures of the university, such as learning communities, could help illuminate how various pockets of the same institution view vitality. This understanding could be useful, particularly in discussions about how learning community work is valued and rewarded in the institution. On a larger scale, understanding more about the meanings of vitality could contribute to the body of knowledge about the phenomenon as a whole.

Although I recommended several new strategies for further faculty development, several current approaches to faculty development are being utilized within learning communities at Iowa State University. These strategies include brown-bag lunch discussions, workshops, and the annual on-campus Learning Communities Institute. These strategies ought to be examined to determine how faculty members do or do not benefit from them and what faculty development outcomes are achieved as a result of these approaches. This would be instructive as further faculty development strategies are considered and

implemented as it would provide insights as to what current practices ought to be continued or abandoned.

Finally, intended outcomes have been articulated in the Learning Communities Vision (ISU Learning Communities, 2003) for faculty and staff participating in learning communities at Iowa State University, but they have not been measured systematically. It is one thing to articulate outcomes on paper, but another altogether to measure them. Therefore, as previously suggested, systematic efforts to understand the experiences of participating learning communities faculty should be undertaken for the purposes of outcomes assessment of the overall learning communities program. Engaging in such assessment would allow learning communities administrators and other stakeholders to understand which outcomes are being achieved and which are not. This understanding would undoubtedly contribute to overall program improvement and advancement.

Concluding Thoughts

According to Gablenick et al. (1990), learning communities provide an approach to dealing with multiple institutional issues. They said,

> The learning community reform effort is distinctive in its focus on *structural* barriers to educational excellence, pointing to the structural characteristics of many colleges and universities as major impediments to effective teaching and learning..... Learning communities are a structural response to this fragmentation. They try to establish conditions that promote coherence, community, and a sense of common purpose in an institutional environment otherwise characterized by social and intellectual atomism and fragmentation.... Learning communities are attractive because they address, in a myriad of ways, issues of curricular coherence, civic leadership, student retention,

active learning, educational reform, and faculty development. They are attractive

because they chip away at many of these problems all at once without requiring a

massive infusion of new money or large-scale institutional reorganization. (p. 10)

Learning communities at Iowa State University provide an environment in which many

positive outcomes occur for participating faculty. Coupled with the positive outcomes that

have been documented for students at Iowa State (Epperson, 2000; Huba et al., 2001; Huba et

al., 2003), learning communities appear to be addressing a number of institutional needs.

However, the faculty development potential and related outcomes of learning communities

should not be left to chance. Intentional and systematic efforts should be undertaken to

ensure that faculty are realizing the greatest possible potential from their learning community

participation. Perhaps Joseph said it best when he described how learning communities can

create opportunities and experiences that otherwise would not be naturally occurring. He

said,

> You've got to sort of create an environment where they [unique experiences] can
>
> happen. And learning communities, when they're done well, when they're done
>
> properly, or correctly or whatever, create those kind of environments. They create
>
> opportunities for those kinds of things to happen... it's like bird-watching or
>
> something. I mean, you have to be out there. You're not going to see a Cooper's
>
> hawk every day, but you know, sometimes you do, and you know, it's cool when it
>
> happens.

Likewise, environments and opportunities must continually be created and refined for faculty

in learning communities so they can reap the greatest possible benefits from their

involvement.

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APPENDIX A. LIST OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES AT IOWA STATE

UNIVERSITY BY COLLEGE (2003-04)

College of Agriculture

Agricultural Business Learning Community
Agricultural Education and Studies Learning Community
Agricultural Minorities Empowered for Success (AMES)
Agricultural Systems Technology Freshman Learning Community
Agricultural Systems Technology Sophomore Learning Community
Agriculture Community Encourages Success (ACES)
Agronomy 356/English 309 Learning Community (Upper-level)
Agronomy Freshman Learning Community
Animal & Dairy Science/Pre-Vet Med Learning Community
Natural Resource Ecology & Management Freshman Learning Community
Natural Resource Ecology & Management Sophomore Learning Community
Horticulture Learning Community
Microbiology Freshman Learning Community
Microbiology Sophomore Learning Community

College of Business

Business Learning Team (BLT)
Business Learning Team (BLT) - Residential
Business-ESL (English Second Language) Learning Community

College of Design

Design Exchange Learning Community
Savanna Studio - Sophomore Learning Community

College of Education

Beginnings Learning Community
Health & Human Performance Freshman Learning Community
Health & Human Performance Transfer Learning Community
Technology Learning Community (TLC)

College of Engineering

Agricultural Engineering Freshman Learning Community
Agricultural Engineering Sophomore Learning Community
Chemical Engineering Learning Community
Computer Engineering Learning Teams (CELTS)
Electrical Engineering Learning Community
InDustrial Engineers Are Leaders (IDEAL)
Leadership Through Engineering Academic Diversity (LEAD)
Mechanical Engineering Learning Community
Mechanical Engineering International Learning Community
Undeclared Engineering Learning Community
Women in Engineering Learning Community

College of Family and Consumer Sciences

College of Family & Consumer Sciences Learning Community
Common Threads Learning Community
Food Science & Human Nutrition Learning Community
Human Development and Family Studies Transport Learning Community

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Biological Education Success Teams (BEST)
BETAL Learning Team
Computer Science Learning Community
Esprit de Corps Learning Community
First Class Communication Learning Community
First Class Humanities Learning Community
First Class Social Sciences Learning Community
Newspaper Physics Learning Community
Sparks Learning Community

Cross-Disciplinary Learning Communities

Advancing Citizenship Together (ACT)
Freshman Honors Program
Multicultural Learning Community
Women in Science & Engineering (WiSE)
Women in Science & Engineering (WiSE) Living Option

APPENDIX B. EMAIL LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Dr. [name],

As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. For the past three years, I also have worked with learning communities administration here at Iowa State.

For my dissertation, I am studying the experiences of faculty (Associate or Full Professors with tenure) who are involved as learning community coordinators or course instructors. The goal of my study is to understand the experiences and meanings that faculty members attach to their involvement with learning communities.

You have been identified as a potential participant for my study based on your involvement with [name of] learning community. Thus, I would like to invite you to participate in a 90-minute interview. In the interview, I'll ask you to reflect on your career as a faculty member and your involvement with learning communities, specifically what the advantages and disadvantages of learning community involvement have been for you.

Are you interested and available? If so, I am interested in meeting within the next month. I am available [date/time option], [date/time option], or [date/time option]. Would any of these times work for you? If not please suggest an alternative time and I will try to make that fit my schedule.

Thank you for considering this – I look forward to hearing from you.

Shari

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me the story of your academic life. What's the purpose of your work?

- Describe times you felt most active, alive, engaged in your career. What were the particulars that led to you feeling that way?

- What drew you to becoming involved with a learning community? When and why did you decide to become involved?

- What have been the outcomes for you (advantages and disadvantages) as a result of your learning community work?

  - Areas to explore include: interests, activities, satisfactions, goals, working conditions, faculty development opportunities, achievements, & colleague relationships (Baldwin, 1990).

  - Additional areas to explore: relationships with students, teaching strategies/philosophy, research interests, interdisciplinary opportunities.

- What is something about yourself and/or your work that you think somewhat differently about as a result of your LC participation?

- If you weren't involved in LC, what do you think your teaching and research would be focused on now?

- Contrast your experiences with a LC with other professional experiences you've had.

- Any other insights or parting thoughts for me?

APPENDIX D. FOLLOW UP EMAIL QUESTIONS

Dear Dr. [name],

Thank you so much for participating in the interview with me for my dissertation last semester! I have enjoyed going back through the transcripts and "hearing" your words again.

As a second phase of my study, I would like to conduct an observation of you in an LC class, LC seminar, or LC informal event (such as a meeting or social gathering). Do you have anything meeting this description that I could observe in the next few weeks? After the observation, I would need a few minutes of your time to de-brief the observation and process the interpretations.

Also, I'm interested in your responses to the following two questions that I don't think I had a chance to ask in the interview:

1. In what way(s), if any, has your learning community work affected your vitality? Use an example, if possible.
2. Contrast your learning community work to other professional experiences you've had. What, if anything, about your learning community work is different or new?

Thanks again for your continued help! I look forward to sharing my initial findings with you and getting your reaction in the coming month.

Shari

APPENDIX E. CONTACT SUMMARY FORM (INTERVIEW LOG)

Interviewee Name:_____   Contact Date:_____

Site: _____   Today's Date:_____

1.   What were the main issues or themes that struck you from this interview?

2.   Summarize the information you got or failed to get during this interview.

LC benefits	
LC drawbacks	
Insights on vitality	
LC impact on faculty	

3.   Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important in this contact?

4.   What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this person or the next phase of interviews?

APPENDIX F. INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. The purpose of this study is to explore the construct of faculty vitality as experienced by mid-career faculty members who are involved with learning communities (LCs). The goal is to understand the experiences of and meanings that mid-career faculty members attach to their involvement with learning communities. Using qualitative inquiry, this study aims to illuminate the experiences of mid-career faculty who are involved with learning communities and examine outcomes, advantages, and disadvantages of their involvement.

PROCEDURES

You were selected as a participant in this study because of your involvement with LCs at Iowa State University and because you hold the rank of at least Associate Professor with tenure. For the purposes of data collection, you will be asked to participate in an interview and respond to questions pertaining to your experiences as a faculty member involved with LCs at Iowa State University. The interview session will be documented through audiotape and should take no longer than 90 minutes to complete. Any follow up information will be gathered via e-mail or telephone call. You may be invited to participate in a second one-hour interview in order to engage in a more focused exploration of the research topic.

You also will be asked to help ensure the trustworthiness (i.e., validity, authenticity) of this study. You will be given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and to provide feedback, clarification, or corrections, as necessary. In addition, a summary of findings will be shared with you and you will be given the opportunity to share your reactions and feedback. This is an important role that participants will share with the researcher.

RISKS, COMPENSATION, AND BENEFITS

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a participant in this research. You will not have any costs nor will you be compensated for participating in this study. However, the benefits of participation include opportunities to: (a) reflect on your experiences with learning communities, (b) gain deeper understandings about yourself and your work, and (c) gain insights that could be used to benefit yourself, other faculty, the learning communities program, and Iowa State University

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS AND CONFIDENTIALITY

You have the right to decline answering any question with which you may feel uncomfortable. In addition, you may discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences. If you choose to discontinue participation, the data pertaining to your participation will be destroyed or returned to you.

Records will be kept confidential in that audiotapes and notes will be stored in a secure location. Your anonymity will be protected in that your name will not be used in the write-

up of this study; instead, pseudonyms will be used and changes to other identifying information will be made, as necessary. The researcher will work directly with you to assure that your anonymity and confidentiality are protected to the greatest possible extent.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

If you have any questions about this research or about your rights as a participant, you may contact me at sellert@iastate.edu or 515-268-0319. If further clarification is desired, contact my major professor, Dr. John Schuh at 515-294-6393 and he would be happy to address any questions or concerns that you have.

****

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you have read the information presented above, had your questions answered, and have decided voluntarily to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form for your reference.

_____   _____/_____/_____
Participant's Name (printed) & Signature   Date

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT
I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of his/her questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits, and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Shari Ellertson_____   _____/_____/_____
Name & Signature of Investigator   Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like first to thank my major professor, Dr. John Schuh, for his guidance and assistance during my dissertation process and throughout my years in the doctoral program. You are an incredible scholar and I am so grateful that you agreed to work with me. I also would like to thank my committee members for sharing their time and expertise with me. Drs. Corly Brooke, Flo Hamrick, Mary Huba, and Mack Shelley – you were all wonderful to work with and I thank you for your contributions to my work and my growth.

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I also would like to thank the faculty and staff who work with learning communities at Iowa State. I feel so fortunate to have gotten to know so many wonderfully committed people in so many different disciplines. I especially want to thank the faculty who participated in my study for sharing part of themselves with me. I sincerely hope that this dissertation does justice to your words and to your individual stories, and that it captured the essence of who you are.

I am pretty sure I would not have had as enjoyable or rewarding experience in the doctoral program were it not for the wonderful people with whom I had the good fortune of sharing the journey. To my colleagues and friends in my doctoral cohort and dissertation

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I also am appreciative of the support given to me by my family and friends, near and far, throughout the process of getting this degree. Your words of encouragement and positive vibes were a source of strength especially through the most challenging times. I am blessed to have so many wonderful people in my life.

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