ABSTRACT

CHEW, KRISTEN RAE. A Descriptive Case Study of Full-Time Community College Curriculum Faculty Members' Professional Development Needs. (Under the direction of Dr. Susan J. Barcinas).

This descriptive case study investigates how full-time community college curriculum faculty members perceive and navigate professional development in their community college. Community college faculty teach nearly two-thirds of all undergraduate students in the United States and have a significant impact on the success of their students. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is the theoretical framework for this study, analyzing faculty professional development as an activity within a system. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their activities for professional development in support of their teaching roles? 2) How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their needs for professional development in support of their teaching roles? 3) How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their context as it shapes, supports, or impedes professional development in support of their teaching roles? Data collection strategies included 12 semi-structured interviews with full-time community college curriculum faculty members and document and landscape analysis. Two key findings emerged from the data. First, community college faculty define and contextualize excellent teaching through their experience, which in many cases differs from how they think their institutions define it. Second, community college faculty professional development is focused primarily on systemwide priorities as a response to external federal, state, and accreditation pressures. This study's findings suggest that organizational structure and dynamic impacts how community college faculty professionally develop their teaching practice,

highlighting tensions in the community college that leaves faculty feeling like their needs are secondary to institutional effectiveness.

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A Descriptive Case Study on Full-Time Community College Curriculum Faculty Members' Needs for Professional Development.

by
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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this work to Avery. She won’t remember the late nights and the skipped vacations of her first two years. To her, I’ll always be Dr. Mommy. This is for you Avery. You can do anything.

BIOGRAPHY

My career started when I was working on my master's degree at North Carolina State University and had the privilege of being invited to guest lecture a course on one of my favorite topics, forensic anthropology. It was in that 50-minute course, that I realized the deep passion I had for sharing what I know with anyone who will listen. After graduating with my master's in anthropology in 2014, I began my career teaching in the community college. I was drawn to the community college because like my students, my education began there. As a faculty member, I remember often feeling like I needed and wanted more out of professional development. In 2017 I began my doctoral studies in the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program in Adult and Community College Education where I focused on faculty needs regarding professional development for their teaching role.

In 2019, I switched gears and began my professional journey in corporate education where I led a team of instructional designers for a global tech company. In that time, I worked with my team to develop an industry recognized professional certification program.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The community college is a uniquely American institution built on the principle that everyone deserves equal access to education (Beach, 2012). Because community colleges are open admissions, meaning anyone with a high school diploma or equivalent is eligible to attend, they are continually tasked with the challenge of meeting the needs of a diverse student body where many of their students are often ill-prepared for college level work (Burns, 2017). With this type of institution arises the need for instructors that are unquestionably content experts as well as highly skilled at working with incredibly diverse populations and vastly different learning goals (Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Latz & Mulivhill, 2011).

Community colleges serve a high percentage of academically underprepared, first-generation, and traditionally underserved populations, including an audience of early-college high school students in some states. Thus, in order to be successful, faculty must be dedicated to teaching and learning, and prepared to develop and maintain a diverse learning environment that supports the varying needs of all their students, regardless of academic readiness (Elliot & Oliver, 2016; Hyland, 2014; Murray, 1999; Murray, 2002; Rutz et al., 2012; Wood, 2015). There is a growing expectation of community college faculty to serve a variety of students while being both accountable and transparent; leaders of colleges are also being pressured to define student learning outcomes and providing evidence that they are meeting those outcomes (Swanger, 2016).

Exceptional community college faculty are dedicated scholars who are current in their respective fields and the art and scholarship of teaching and learning. When faculty, primarily trained in their disciplines, enter classrooms to teach students with varying levels of preparation, whose students are diverse in terms of age, race, and socioeconomic status, and have multiple and wide-ranging goals for their education, it is expected that the faculty reflect upon their environment and respond to the various student needs in ways that drive them toward success (Burns, 2016). This environmental context is critical in how faculty prepare themselves to teach. In diverse community college classrooms, curriculum faculty need strategies that help reimagine how learning experiences are designed and how students engage with them (Burns, 2017). Achieving and sustaining excellence in teaching and learning requires a shared resource investment among colleges, their leaders and staff, faculty, and students.

Statement of the Problem

Community college faculty comprise 18% of all postsecondary faculty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), yet substantive research focused on community college faculty continues to be a significant gap in the literature. One key element of the missing literature is how faculty prepare and sustain themselves to teach such a diverse student body. Eddy's previous research (Eddy, 2005; Eddy, 2007; Eddy & Garza, 2012; Eddy et al., 2022) establishes a broad basis for faculty professional development and its future, but little research emphasizes the faculty experience specifically.

Although many institutions require faculty to attend mandatory orientations and professional development activities, little support is provided for the ongoing development in teaching practice that is grounded in academic research (Kyndt et al., 2016). Adult learning theory recognizes that because adults are fundamentally self-directed learners, they benefit from recognizing how their new learning helps address the immediate issues they face (Macdonald et al., 2019). A common goal of faculty development in the community college is providing opportunities for faculty to acquire the knowledge, skills, and efficacy required for student success (Strickland-Davis et al., 2020). Some faculty members may choose to re-enter school to formally study adult education, but most faculty learn to teach through trial and error and through self-directed efforts and collaboration with colleagues outside of formal professional development activities (Sorcinelli, 2007). This is especially important to consider when examining community college faculty members' teaching practices. Most often, these efforts to learn from colleagues and mentors are effective yet informal and ad hoc; very few empirical studies have been conducted on what works or doesn't in the community college classroom (Kyndt et al., 2016). Even fewer empirical studies have focused on faculty perspectives regarding professional development needs and practices in the context of their teaching roles.

In most professions, the expectation of lifelong learning is both implicit and explicit. For instance, health professionals are expected to keep up with current practices for their career advancement in order to benefit their clients and patients. Yet, by distinction, professional development within higher education is enigmatic. Most literature on professional development resides in teaching journals and is not prominent in the daily practice settings in which community college faculty operate. All the while, "meaningful faculty professional development occurs in situ: in the classroom, on campus(es), and with professional affiliations and organizations" (Haras, 2018). Some recent efforts have been made to bridge this gap by offering resources by organizations like Achieving the Dream (ATD), discussed in more detail below, and other national and local resources, but generally, the two contexts continue to remain siloed.

In more recent years, professional development efforts have gained momentum in higher education through scaffolded faculty development. Scaffolded professional development is continuous and offers opportunities for regular reflective practice and demonstration of skills in situ (Haras, 2018). There are some excellent examples of universities that have implemented a scaffolded approach. Duke University and North Carolina State University both offer certificates in teaching for graduate students that provide opportunities to learn new skills, reflect on those practices in workshop settings, and practice the new skills in the classroom (Duke University, n.d.; NCSU, n.d.). Duke University's certificate in College Teaching offers the opportunity for instructors to observe and be observed by other instructors and reflect on those observations in "Teaching Triangles." Other opportunities that are directed specifically at faculty include Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) where faculty mentor and observe each other in the classroom and reflect on their practices together. The University of Florida Center for Teaching Excellence utilizes FLCs as a collaborative, year-long program in which faculty can participate. This program includes collaborative workshops and offers faculty the opportunity to develop a "Big Idea Project" that can focus on course improvements, teaching resources, and research that can contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning (University of Florida, n.d.). The Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) is a network of 21 universities across the United States that utilizes FLCs to professionally develop future STEM faculty in the use and assessment of evidence-based instruction (Michigan State University, n.d.).

The National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) offers faculty development sessions for purchase that are geared specifically toward faculty professional development programs (NISOD, 2023). Some of these sessions include faculty development and student success, an introduction to Faculty Learning Communities, and implementing a faculty onboarding program to increase student success. These programs appear to be geared more toward planning and executing an effective faculty professional development program but can help provide a structure.

Formal opportunities to discuss teaching and learning can be few and far between on community college campuses. Department meeting agendas are often filled with action items that address the business and organizational side of the department and offer very little organized opportunity for faculty to collaborate and critically reflect on the development of their teaching practice. Typical professional development activities provided by community colleges for faculty tend to be assigned from the top-down, webinar or on-line, passive, disjointed, and not grounded in adult learning literature (Burns, 2016; Cranton & King, 2003; Joyce & Chen, 2022). More than 35 years ago, Allen (1988) stated that faculty professional development without opportunities for practice and critical reflection will be ineffective for change and improvement, yet this remains the primary model of faculty professional development in many community colleges. Ideally, faculty professional development offers collaborative support and an underlying structure to implement and critically reflect upon new techniques. However, in current practices, faculty professional development activities have become mandated and institutionalized, which has turned the focus to box-checking rather than actual meaningful learning (Beavers, 2009).

Given this context, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the needs of community college faculty examining how they prepare themselves to teach a diverse group of students, to include the self-directed opportunities they are engaging in to develop their teaching practice and meet the diverse needs of their students, what barriers they perceive in the faculty professional development programs offered through their institutions, and how they describe their ideal faculty development activities. An effective faculty is critical to student success, and ideally, faculty development programs help sustain that effectiveness (Bendickson & Griffin, 2011).

The unique aspects of the community college environment require a multifaceted professional development program that allows faculty to grow not only as content experts but also as educators who approach teaching as a process, a commitment, and a way of thinking and being that takes time, thought, and work (Webster-Wright, 2009). While there is research on professional development in higher education, little focus is placed on the community college faculty member and their needs for pedagogical growth. To better inform the body of empirical literature focused on the community college faculty member role, this study concentrates on community college faculty and their perspective on professional development activities that support teaching and learning and how they see those needs potentially shaped, supported, or impeded by their organizational dynamic, through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

Purpose and Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this case study is to describe and analyze community college curriculum faculty members' professional development needs relative to teaching and learning within their organizational context. A review of the literature led to the following research questions:

1. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their activities for professional development in support of their teaching roles?
2. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their needs for professional development in support of their teaching roles?
3. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their context as it shapes, supports, or impedes professional development in support of their teaching roles?

Theoretical Framework

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is an ideal framework for this study because it offers a structural and conceptual lens for exploring the complexities of community college faculty professional development contextualized by their teaching roles and the expectations, resources, and challenges that exist when navigating a complex environment. CHAT conceives learning as a human activity that is predominately socially seated and shaped by artifacts and interactions among actors, tensions, and conditions within a given activity system (Elmberger, et al., 2018; Rizzo, 2003). CHAT pays particular attention to the interactions between the individual and the system (Elmberger et al., 2018). CHAT also assumes that humans engaged in activities are influenced by their culture and history and that they in turn, as participants, influence the culture and how their surroundings have developed, that history impacts culture, and that actors' interactions with their work is influenced by both their collective life history, known as culture, in this case organizational context, as well as the individual life histories that each participant embodies. Taken further, CHAT suggests that together we form shared histories that drive our daily choices, practices, interactions and ultimately, our learning and learning outcomes.

CHAT is based on three significant core facets: 1) humans learn by doing (activity), 2) humans use tools and make artifacts as they learn, and 3) community is central to learning and communication and the shaping of knowledge (Foot, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). CHAT serves as a vehicle for understanding a system holistically, rather than focusing only on the individual aspects of a system. Activity centers more on humans as a collective dynamic rather than as individuals; in this study, the focus is on the perspective of community college faculty members within the activity system of professional development in community college environments. Activity is best defined as a series or set of actions that take individuals collectively toward a specific outcome (Martin, 2019). However, activity is not solely a set of predetermined actions or responses to the natural environment, rather the common way in which a group of people navigate that environment, adapt to it, and influence its evolving way of being. The instruments and tools can be tangible or conceptual, and the individual utilizes the tools as part of the actions taken, in order to reach the desired outcome.

Based on Vygotsky's (1978) work, CHAT conceptualizes learning as a systems activity, shown in Figure 1.1 below. Therefore, an organizational process and culture can be studied from the differing aspects of the system as the subject navigates through the nodes of CHAT: instruments/tools, rules, community, and division of labor to enact the object or outcome (Martin, 2019). Instructors and learners are bound by the tools and resources available or desired, rules (both implicit and explicit), the division of labor among actors, and the community or environment in which professional development is situated.

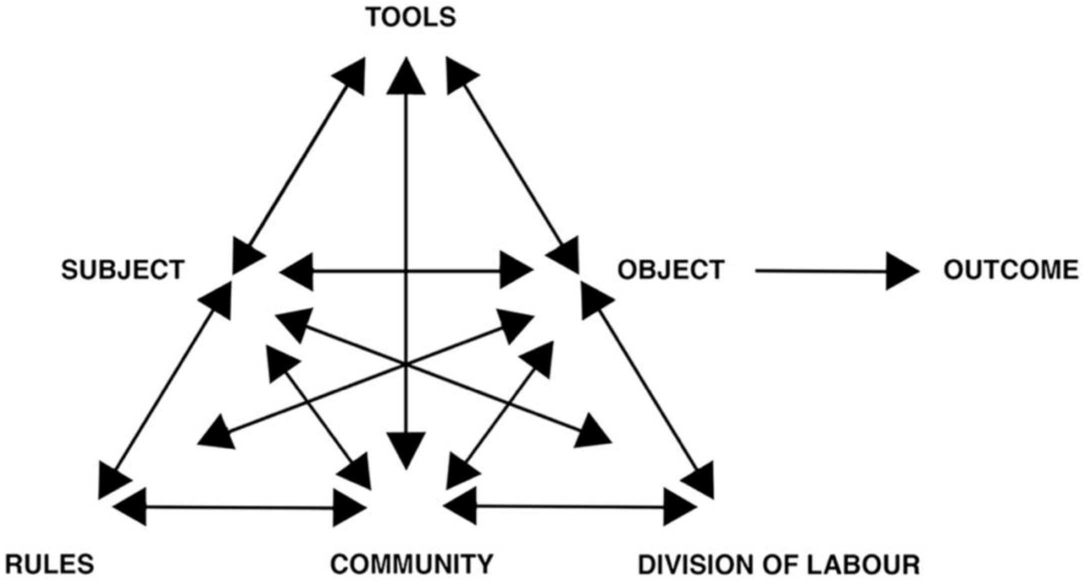


Figure 1.1 General Model of an activity system (Engestrom & Sannino, 2010).

In this study, shown in Figure 1.2 below, the activity system is professional development within the community college and the subject is the full-time community college curriculum faculty members. The tools and instruments in the study are the professional development activities provided by the subject's institution, the professional development activities that the subject seeks on their own, and other tangible or conceptual artifacts that influence the dynamic of professional development within the system. The rules are the implicit and explicit norms that the subject uses daily to interact with and navigate the activity system. These might include institutional policies and procedures, state and federal requirements, expectations among colleagues or faculty and students, as well as fundamental requirements placed on oneself as a professional both in their respective fields of expertise as well as the field of education. The community, or the individuals and groups who share the same general objective, is more tightly comprised of community college faculty members, community college administrators and leaders, and community college students; more distantly the community is comprised of the general population the community college serves, the industry landscape local to the community college, community college stakeholders, and the larger federal, state, and accreditation agencies that place bounds on the community college. Division of labor is the way in which work is split; typically reflected by horizontal division of tasks and vertical division of power. Among individuals, division of labor can be described as who feels responsible for what and why; in this framework, this might include how faculty perceive their responsibilities regarding teaching roles, any professional development that is assigned or sought out by faculty as well as how faculty share the responsibility of completing or sharing outcomes from their professional development. The object is what is produced when the subject moves through the activity system; in this case, it is faculty professional development that leads to excellent teaching. While the object of the activity is the motive directing it, e.g., faculty professional development grounded in adult learning literature, the outcome is the product of the activity, e.g., excellent, pedagogically sound teaching. The object can be present on an individual level where it is connected to personal motivation, or at the system level where it is collected to societal meaning (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). All elements intersect and together facilitate, or obstruct, the subject's ability to achieve the object (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

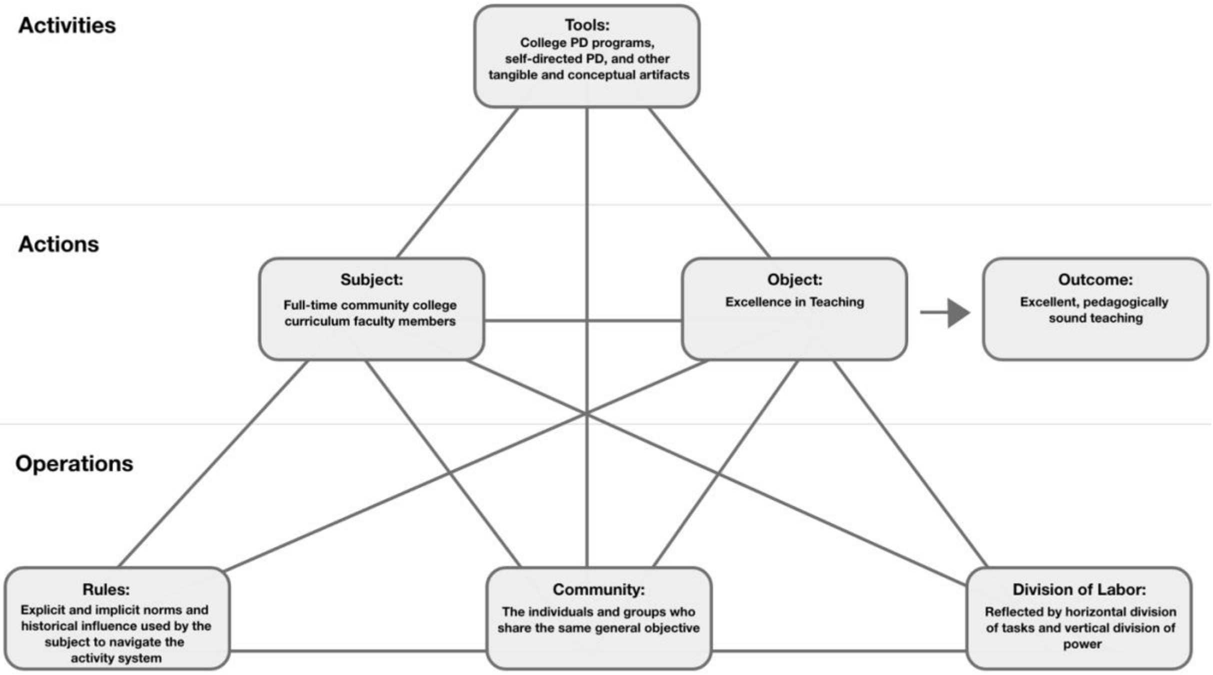

Activities
Tools:
College PD programs, self-directed PD, and other tangible and conceptual artifacts
Actions
Subject:
Full-time community college curriculum faculty members
Object:
Excellence in Teaching
Outcome:
Excellent, pedagogically sound teaching
Operations
Rules:
Explicit and implicit norms and historical influence used by the subject to navigate the activity system
Community:
The individuals and groups who share the same general objective
Division of Labor:
Reflected by horizontal division of tasks and vertical division of power

Figure 1.2 CHAT activity system as adapted to this study.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research, by nature, assumes that meaning is socially constructed by individuals and their interaction with the world around them, that reality is not a fixed, or empirically measurable phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Instead, there are many interpretations of reality that can and do change over time. Qualitative research provides an opportunity for human experiences to be studied and explored (Tellis, 1997). This case study specifically focuses on the perspective of full-time community college curriculum faculty members and how they describe their needs regarding professional development in their roles, as well as their self-directed efforts.

The study utilizes a descriptive case study approach, defined by Yin (2002) as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context” (p. 13). The descriptive case study approach is ideal for this study because it describes the natural phenomena that occur within the community college professional development landscape and how community college curriculum faculty members navigate the activity system. A more in-depth understanding of how faculty frame and contextualize their needs for professional development can offer opportunities to construct relevant and high-quality professional development for community college faculty members based on their needs.

Significance of the Study

Faculty are a fundamental aspect of the success of students at the community college, and this study can provide meaningful information for community college faculty and administration to construct a teaching and learning focused professional development program that enhances and promotes excellence in teaching. In recent years, there has been more emphasis placed on the need for faculty professional development centered on teaching and learning. Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a partner of more than 300 community colleges nationwide with the goal of building a culture of excellent teaching and learning (Achieving the Dream, n.d.). In September 2020, ATD released its “Teaching & Learning Toolkit”, a guide to help community colleges in building a teaching and learning focused professional development culture that introduces topics like evidence-based pedagogy and practice, supporting student success, building a community of learners and teachers, teaching and learning in times of upheaval, and a guide to implementing a teaching and learning professional development infrastructure (ATD Teaching & Learning Toolkit, 2020).

In one Southeastern state, a local university has partnered with national resources such as ATD to develop hubs for teaching and learning as a resource for local community colleges. This is not a unique occurrence, ATD has partnered with over 300 community colleges nationwide to support teaching and learning initiatives. A few examples include 30 colleges in California, 34 colleges in Texas, 40 colleges in Tennessee, 20 colleges in Michigan, 13 colleges in North Carolina, and 11 colleges in Florida (ATD Our Network, 2023). While ATD is making new strides in general, more attention should be paid to the faculty perspective and further, aim to develop a program inclusive of the needs of faculty as they navigate a complex system, like the community college as an organization, just as student perspectives are often at the nexus of student-centered approaches to teaching and learning. This study aims to close the gap between what is currently practiced as professional development and what faculty members may need, from their perspective, to be better prepared and supported in their teaching roles.

Summary

Community college teaching is a complex undertaking requiring content mastery as well as the pedagogical skills required to teach a diverse population of students. While many community college faculty members are hired with advanced academic degrees, professional experience, or both, most have not had formal teaching professional development that is grounded in adult learning literature. Continuing faculty require ongoing professional development and an environment that supports their efforts to develop a teaching practice grounded in excellence. Thus, the challenge for institutions is determining how best to support faculty in their teaching roles, in ways that go beyond ad hoc or trial and error (Beaumont, 2020), as well as providing an underlying structure that supports the faculty in the collaboration and critical reflection of new skills and techniques. By providing evidence and empirical data to inform development of professional development opportunities aligned with faculty and student needs, community colleges can refresh, retain, and motivate faculty in support of their commitment to engaged, innovative teaching and learning practices.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study responds to a gap in the literature that demonstrates a slender focus on community college faculty professional development and how they prepare and sustain themselves as teaching professionals. This chapter's literature review provides a brief historical context of the community college that sets the tone for the organizational dynamic of the community college as it functions today; a synopsis of the growth of faculty development in higher education; what we currently know about faculty professional development in the community college; the dynamic role of the community college faculty member; and a discussion of how the study framework, CHAT, contributes to explaining faculty professional development within the context of the community college as an activity system.

The Community College: An Historical Context

The community college's origins lie in an idea for a two-year university preparatory institution, allowing universities to better focus on research and theory rather than "lower-division preparatory work" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 6). Notable educators in the 19th and early 20th centuries suggested that universities discontinue teaching freshman and sophomore courses and consign the job of teaching adolescents to a new variety of institutions called the junior college – later termed community college (Cohen et al., 2013; Koos, 1947; Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, was a driving force behind the creation of the community college. He and other college presidents began to recognize that the first two years of college "are not necessarily part of university-level education" (Drury, 2003, p. 1). He established the first public junior college in 1902 by extending the Joliet Township High School by two years (Koos, 1947). The rapid expansion of junior colleges through the 1920s came with not only a development of students and institutions but also an extension of curriculum and courses that were offered. With the popularity of the two-year college increasing and more students not continuing to higher levels, the need to broaden the terminal curriculum became a concern; new courses were initially designed to prepare students for an occupation, but general education received much encouragement and became a staple curriculum (Koos, 1947). This expansion also led to university presidents, university professors, and two-year college administrators to initiate the "national junior college movement" (Beach, 2012). During this movement, junior colleges were agents of "preparedness and progress," and would celebrate both the transition from high school to a four-year university as well as the need for vocational training and upward economic mobility.

In 1920, the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) was founded. Today, this organization is the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). Prior to 1930 the junior college's purpose was mainly academic, and the primary purpose of public and private two-year colleges was generally seen as providing the first two years of the baccalaureate degree, but by the 1930s, occupational-technical education had also become a permanent and significant component of the community college curriculum (Vaughan, 1985).

The first phase of the expansion of the community college began as a response to the GI Bill (Greenberg, 2004). After World War II, millions of former military personnel were given vouchers to attend college. Between 1944 and 1947, enrollments in then two-year colleges nearly doubled; the end of the Korean War brought another similar burst in college enrollments (Kane and Rouse, 1999). The final major phase of the expansion of the two-year college came when the Baby Boomer generation reached college age, Vietnam War veterans began to return home, and Americans began to enroll in college to avoid being drafted (Witt, 1994).

The 1950s through the 1960s was a time when the legitimacy of the two-year college was increasing due to the Truman Commission's Report, Higher Education for American Democracy. This report argued that half of the population of the United States could benefit from two years of education at a postsecondary school; it also endorsed a new, more broad-reaching mission for these institutions by suggesting a new name: the community college (Beach, 2012). Throughout the 1960's the number of community colleges nearly doubled, and their enrollment quadrupled (Kane and Rouse, 1999).

Currently, two rapidly growing innovations further extend the diversity of community colleges: early college high schools and community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees. The dream of a seamless transition through primary education, secondary education, community college, and a bachelor's degree-granting institution is a hefty one. The change between institutions is often unpredictable and unreliable. Many community colleges have worked to minimize the barriers by reorganizing and expanding to the early college high school, which offer accelerated programs that lead to high school diplomas and associate degrees. Other colleges have developed in the other direction by collaborating with four-year institutions to offer bachelor's degrees or to confer their own. These community colleges often drop the "community" from their title and replace it with "state" (Cohen et al., 2013).

Community colleges are now as prominent as ever. There are systems with branches in inner cities and rural districts and with programs in prisons and on military bases; there are classes offered through online instruction where students always have access to their courses and materials. Community colleges play a key role in increasing employability by providing their students with education, training, and skills they need to enter the labor market. In 2019-2020, alumni of community colleges generated $898.5 billion in added income for the national economy; this equals approximately 4.1% of the total gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States (AACC, 2021). One out of every four jobs in the United States are supported by the activities of former community college students (AACC, 2021).

With the increase in positive labor market outcomes, new pushes from legislation to focus on “achievement indicators” such as graduation, transfer, equity, and labor market outcomes became more prominent (Cohen et al., 2013). In 2015, the Obama administration introduced “America’s College Promise” (America’s College Promise: A Progress Report on Free Community College, 2015), a legislative initiative focused on increasing access to higher education, building the economy, and in support of his 2009, “American Graduation Initiative”, which invested roughly $12 billion into community colleges over a 10-year period, with the goal of increasing degree attainment for community college students (Brandon, 2009). While the mission and focus of the community college has shifted and adapted to a changing society over its more than 100-year lifespan, it’s primary purpose today is access and economic development (Palmadessa, 2017). In 2014, the Obama administration put further pressure on America’s higher education system with the nation’s first gainful employment (GE) rule to protect students from education credits that led to unaffordable debts and no prospects for employment (Delisle & Cohn, 2022). This rule was abolished by the Trump administration and now, a new GE rule is being proposed by the Biden administration. With the Biden administration’s proposal, one in five certificate programs at public institutions could fail the new requirements, leading to a loss in eligibility for federal aid (Kelderman, 2022).

With all the new pressures from federal and state regulations, came increased pressures from federal, state, and accreditation bodies to demonstrate institutional effectiveness. The term institutional effectiveness first gained attention in 1984 when the Commission on Colleges

(COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), now known as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), adopted it in its revision of institutional accreditation requirements (Head, 2011). Now, institutional effectiveness is deeply embedded in the language, accreditation, and strategic efforts of community colleges. Currently, all six regional accreditation agencies strongly advocate the importance of institutional effectiveness. Though there is no clear definition of institutional effectiveness, it can be broadly thought of as an umbrella term that encompasses student assessment, program evaluation, and institutional research, shown in Figure 2.1 below.

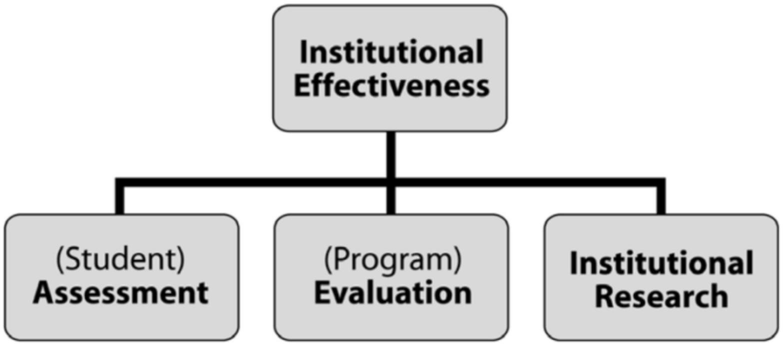


Figure 2.1: The components of institutional effectiveness (Head, 2011).

Using this broad approach, Head (2011) defines institutional effectiveness as, “the process and structure used by a college to determine the quality of its students, academic programs, administrative functions, and support services” (p. 10). Using the broad definition, institutional effectiveness drives many of the decisions, programs, and functions of the community college today.

The Community College Curriculum Faculty Member

Approximately 18% of American higher education faculty teach at community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Community college faculty members teach about 33% of undergraduates in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). According to a Community College Research Center (CCRC) study, community colleges enrolled 8.9 million students in the 2020-21 academic year, representing 41% of undergraduates. In fall 2021, the CCRC analysis found that about 5.7 million students were enrolled in community colleges, representing 36% of fall undergraduate enrollment (CCRC, n.d.).

Historically, not much research on community college faculty had been conducted. Most higher education literature tends to combine community college and university faculty, often to the detriment of community college faculty. As a result, less is known about the community college faculty member as a subset of the overall higher education faculty. Community college faculty members are likely to have held positions in their industry prior to entering their teaching role, and teacher preparation is not a requirement to enter the profession (Baker, 2021). Community college faculty are considered to be subject matter experts (SME) and traditional academic credential of either an earned master’s degree or 18 graduate credit hours in the respective field of which the faculty member will teach is the primary requirement for their role (Twombly and Townsend, 2008). Community college faculty, then, while trained to be content experts, have not necessarily been trained to instruct others in these disciplines (Eddy, 2010).

Nearly two-thirds of community college faculty members are employed on a part-time basis at their institutions, and this number has remained relatively stable over the last decade (Martin, 2019). Even with a large number of part-time faculty members, full-time faculty members do at least two-thirds of the teaching at community colleges. Data consistently shows that demographics for community college faculty members remain consistent overall with about 80% of faculty being white and a nearly even split between men and women.

Full-time faculty salaries vary by the type of institution as well as by faculty rank, for those institutions that participate. The average salary for an instructor at a public institution that primarily teaches undergraduate associate degrees and has a rank system was reported as $54,547; salaries for Associate's granting institutions without rank systems in place was reported as $74,784 (The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession 2020-2021, 2021.).

Faculty work in the community college varies by college mission and vision. Each institution comes with its advantages and limitations, and some of those include academic ability, English-language ability, and economic resources. Because community college faculty teach courses that are lower-level, and their primary role is teaching, most faculty members teach five courses per academic semester, excluding summer semesters. Few community colleges support academic research and therefore, few faculty members do it (Twombly and Townsend, 2008).

For community college faculty, navigating their environment relies heavily on conformity to peer expectations and abiding by the norms of the institution for faculty work, with emphasis upon what is valued in the institution. Full-time faculty members often share similar attributes, like career pathways, strong interests in student-faculty interactions, and constrained-autonomous conditions. In turn, the institutional discourse, like institutional policies, expectations, and mission, highlights these shared personal attributes, and further socializes faculty as "relational-supportive" professionals. "Relational-supportive" refers to a professional orientation built around fostering meaningful interpersonal relationships through hands-on pedagogy to support both student and local community development (Levin & Kater, 2018).

To look beyond the simple characterization of community college faculty as teaching faculty reveals a rich and complex identity carefully negotiated and developed within the context of the community college (Levin & Kater, 2018). In her 2022 study on faculty teaching in multigenerational classrooms, McClanahan attempted to do just this. She explored how faculty experience the now six generations that are together inside of the classroom for the first time. Her study explored the experience that faculty had inside of the classrooms, how that experience helped shape what faculty learn as educators, and how they respond to generational differences with care and empathy (McClanahan, 2022).

Faculty Development in Higher Education

Faculty development in higher education traces its roots back to the Project in Medical Education in 1955 as a collaborative venture funded by the Commonwealth Foundation at the University of Buffalo as an effort to improve teaching in the United States (Hodgson & Wilkerson, 2014). This project focused on bringing the findings of research in education to the design and delivery of teaching in the medical school. At this same time in higher education in the United States, the increasing use of student evaluations of teachers led to the emergence of programs to improve the teaching of college and university faculty members.

Faculty members experience a wide range of activities and interactions that can increase their knowledge and build their skillsets for teaching, as well as those that contribute to their personal growth as teaching professionals (Desimone, 2009). These experiences range from formal content specific seminars and retreats to hallway discussions and informal collaborations with other educators. So, the question for many studies becomes, “what counts as professional development?”. Professional development is widely defined. Little (1987) described it as “any activity that is intended partly or primarily to prepare paid staff members for improved performance in present or future roles in the school districts” (p. 491). This includes both formal and informal activities that contribute to the development of the faculty member. Because of the nature of defining professional development, it poses challenges to the measurement of professional development and its impacts at the individual and community levels.

Faculty development is a way in which institutions ensure ongoing training in areas such as policy and procedure, safety, teaching and learning, assessment, and some focus on content areas. Faculty development is a widely used term that encompasses a range of activities designed to improve and support faculty teaching with the intent to ultimately improve student learning (Wood, 2015). Since there is no concise agreement to the meaning of the term “faculty development”, it is unsurprising that the field of higher education has been criticized for the lack of a comprehensive theoretical base on which faculty development lies (Allen, 1988). Rather than one underlying definition with a unifying theoretical base, faculty development has instead, many interpretations. Some define faculty development as “almost anything a faculty member does outside of the classroom”, while others include activities done both inside and outside of the classroom (Allen, 1988).

Many colleges pride themselves in the ability to provide new and innovative technologies for use in and out of the classrooms and can often result in failure of the latest technologies due to lack of motivation of the faculty to learn the technology, as well as the perception that the new technologies are a threat to their role in higher education (Berquist & Phillips, 1975). Though, there continues to be a scarcity of guidelines for applications in faculty development even though these programs seem to be essential to the success of the college and its students.

Because of the heterogeneity of the student body beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, leaders in the community colleges recognized the importance of developing faculty in both pedagogy as well as the mission and philosophy of the community college (Murray, 2002).

With the ever-changing student enrollments and hiring of part-time faculty, community college leaders began to consider faculty development programs as an economically sustainable way to improve institutional outcomes (Alfano, 1993; Wood, 2015). In the 1980s, the purpose of faculty development grew to reflect the importance of faculty members' knowledge of learning theory and pedagogical practices. Organizations such as the National Council for Staff, Program, and Organizational Development (NCSPOD) and the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) were established during this time and increased the prominence of conferences that focused on the improvement of teaching proficiencies. However, the economic decline of the 1980s forced many community colleges to terminate faculty development programs (Wood, 2015).

Contemporarily, faculty development expanded to reflect the concerns of increased remediation, the rapid evolution of teaching technologies, and professional renewal (Murray, 2002). In the 1990s, the classroom shifted from a teaching centered environment to a learner centered environment, and faculty development changed to reflect that. This change resulted in the shift of faculty roles from a dispenser of information to a manager of student learning outcomes. Once again, the changing diversity of the student makeup forced faculty to adapt to a new assemblage of students with varying needs that required a greater range of teaching abilities (Amey, 1999; Maxwell & Kazlauskas, 1992; Sorcinelli, 2007). While the trend of a learner-centered environment was becoming the standard at community colleges, it wasn't clear how they were going to prepare current and future faculty for their changing roles as designers of the learning environment and directors of student learning outcomes (Wood, 2015).

Amey (1999) mentions faculty as the "designers of a learning environment, rather than transmitters of knowledge." While community college faculty are expected to teach the most diverse of student populations, many faculty members are primarily trained in their disciplines but not in the art and science of teaching and learning (Bayar, 2014). Studies suggest that faculty members are not often aware of their students' learning needs and use outdated, ineffective instructional methods that adversely affect student outcomes (Elliot and Oliver, 2016). Ever-changing technology will continue to evolve how faculty teach and learn, which is affected by faculty experiences in professional development to attain the skills required for an active, learner-centered, technology inclusive classroom.

Evolving technology will continue to evolve how faculty teach and learn, which is affected by faculty experiences in professional development to attain the skills required for an active, learner-centered, technology inclusive classroom. With the emergence of new technologies such as the online college and distance learning offerings, a new area of faculty development needs occurred. Faculty members needed to expand their skills to include expertise in online instruction and technology, as well as improvement in their technological competencies (Amey, 1999; Cohen et al., 2013).

Faculty development programs began to focus on the issue of “faculty burnout” (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Community colleges offer little opportunity for faculty to teach courses in their specialized interest areas which can contribute to intellectual stagnation, which can lead to diminished motivation to participate in opportunities to improve their teaching abilities (Wood, 2015). Increases in student enrollment, larger class sizes, student diversity and lack of academic preparedness combined with decreasing budgets and added responsibilities all create pressures on the faculty members which can have a negative effect on the attitudes and motivation of community college faculty members (Alfano, 1993; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Wood, 2015). Though the justification for the use of faculty development has been discussed in much of the literature in the field of higher education, there is a lack of research conducted on faculty development at community colleges.

Faculty development is how new and seasoned faculty reach their individual goals for their teaching careers. Faculty development varies depending on the institution but generally consists of a blend of self-directed, departmental, and institutional activities. In a study by Steinert et al. (2009), faculty members participated in focus groups to discuss their perceptions of offered faculty development programs offered at their institutions. Many of the participants in this study perceived a need for professional development and acknowledged that in their education, they had never been taught how to teach. This was also evident in studies done by Smith and Hardinger (2012), which reported that faculty stated that they had received little to no training in teaching or learning before their first faculty appointment. In their survey, faculty said that they needed the most help with creating practical test items (Smith & Hardinger, 2012). Smith and Hardinger's (2012) study focused on the evaluation of faculty characteristics in the development of faculty development programs and activities, specifically focusing on pharmacy faculty.

Applying the concept of self-directed learning to mandatory professional development is, by definition, a contradiction. The contradiction can be overcome by allowing faculty to have a voice in the planning and development of their professional development (Beavers, 2009; Murray, 2002). This aligns with Murray (2002) whose study suggests that faculty ownership is a crucial component to effective faculty professional development. Effective professional development requires faculty ownership as well as time for personal and professional reflection, active participation, and willingness to explore and challenge other perspectives (King & Lawler, 2004). King & Lawler (2004) mentions the importance of instructors being able to reflect on their practices and ideas critically. The best teachers are always reflecting and trying new methods to create the best learning environment in their classrooms. Professional development must allow faculty to collaborate with their colleagues to learn and share the experience.

Many colleges and universities have at least a portion of a full-time employee (FTE) dedicated to faculty development. Recently, Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL) have risen to the forefront in faculty professional development efforts, at least at universities. Although intended purposes of CTLs are diverse, most aim to advance teaching and learning in their campus contexts (Wright et al., 2018). Providing faculty with teaching skills can result in inspiring students in the acquisition of knowledge and in the development of competencies and values. The size and allocated resources, composition, and initiatives developed by today's centers for teaching and learning (CTL) are diverse, and there seems to be an increasing number of success stories and positive contributions to institutions that could help colleges and universities make their faculty stronger and better prepared for the ultimate goal of helping students grow academically and professionally (Benito-Capa et al., 2017).

One primary model of professional development that has taken hold in higher education is the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). SoTL emerged as an inquiry-based practice that supports assessment of teaching in higher education. SoTL is an interdisciplinary approach that fosters collaboration both within and between college departments and was defined by Poole and Simons (2013, p. 39) as "the systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, performance, or publications." Shared results are expected to be applicable across content disciplines, a tenet of SoTL that further supports its collaborative nature.

A second primary model of professional development well established in higher education is the use of Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs). FLCs go hand-in-hand with SoTL and Cox (2004) established a widely accepted definition of FLCs within the context of SoTL. Cox (2004, p. 8) defines FLCs as:

> a cross-disciplinary faculty and staff group of six to fifteen members (eight to twelve members is the recommended size) who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building

SoTL and FLCs work together to create opportunities for faculty learning through collaboration.

Faculty Professional Development in the Community College

There is significantly less research on professional learning and faculty development within the context of the community college. Often, community college faculty are paralleled with studies that took place among university faculty, while recognizing that there may be distinct differences in university faculty professional contexts, yet there remains limited focused research on community college faculty development. The limited research that does exist primarily took place in the early 2000's and is focused on critical aspects of these programs for lacking structural support from the institution (Murray, 2002). Even fewer recent studies focus on community college faculty perspectives regarding their professional development.

In a 2005 study by Wallin and Smith, Georgia's technical colleges were analyzed in an effort to understand faculty perceptions of about 50 different professional development activities, as well as faculty self-assessment of their level of competence for each activity. They received survey responses from 714 full-time faculty members to help leaders develop a faculty development program which is participant-driven and will have maximum impact in the classroom. Faculty members ranked the 50 professional development activities based on perceived importance for successful teaching. From this study, eleven activities were identified as important with a mean score of 3.41 or higher and are listed in order of importance: 1) prepare effective current instructional materials, 2) utilize ‘‘hands-on’’ learning strategies, 3) provide individual and group instruction, 4) create and modify curriculum, 5) provide academic advising, 6) utilize instructional techniques that develop higher-order thinking skills, 7) use e-mail, 8) work with advisory committees and employers to modify the curriculum to meet the changing needs of the program and industry, 9.5) modify instructional materials based on student and industry assessment and feedback, 9.5) identify and implement current industry standards and trends into the curriculum, and 11) participate in professional development activities that result in professional growth. Note that items 9 and 10, indicated by 9.5 rankings, were tied in importance (Wallin & Smith, 2005).

Not surprisingly, instructional activities comprised the activities that were considered by faculty to be of most significant importance for teaching success. Ranked number one, faculty recognized their greatest responsibility the preparation of ‘‘effective current instructional materials.’’ Closely following were ‘‘utilizing hands-on strategies’’ and ‘‘providing individual and group instruction.” Further, ranked sixth was the utilization of ‘‘instructional techniques that develop higher-order skills in students.’’ Finally, tied with a curriculum item, faculty were sensitive to needing the ability ‘‘to modify instructional materials based on student and industry assessment and feedback.’’ These results show that faculty see their curriculum and student-support activities as their highest priority when it comes to faculty development. Promotional and administrative activities ranked relatively low as faculty did not see them as essential to student success.

Often, faculty development programs at community colleges rely on a single coordinator to provide programmatic support to all faculty (Jenab & Hallman, 2021). These coordinators often serve as liaisons between faculty and administration, aligning faculty professional development to new initiatives. With the heavy focus on institutional effectiveness in community colleges, much of the current faculty development also focuses on measures of accountability, rather than on teaching and learning.

Jenab and Hallman (2021) dedicate Chapter 2 of their book, *Collaboration Through Faculty Development*, considering the faculty professional development activities that best support community college faculty. They focus specifically on two primary structures: the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and faculty learning communities (FLCs); they also consider how the Covid-19 global pandemic has changed and will continue to affect collaborative faculty professional development. They reiterate points made by Darling-Hammond (2009), Beach et al. (2016), Elliot and Oliver (2016), and Condon et al. (2016) that effective professional development must be cohesive and sustained, as these are the key characteristics that lead faculty to prioritize improved student outcomes. Cohesive and sustained faculty professional development lays the foundation for a cycle where faculty invest in their teaching and collaborate with their colleagues.

As part of their exploration of SoTL and FLCs in the context of the community college, Jenab and Hallman (2021) conducted case study research on three community colleges that have implemented FLCs and SoTL as professional development and found that SoTL did encourage collaboration and fostered enthusiasm from faculty, giving them an opportunity to view change as positive. In all three institutions, all participants felt that a collaborative community college made for a better culture; this included collaboration between faculty and administration.

While faculty professional development based on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and faculty learning communities (FLCs) have increased momentum at universities, the adoption of these structures at community colleges has been significantly slower. SoTL is a framework that supports the needs of the community college faculty member because many identify feeling siloed within their departments, and by nature SoTL is collaborative. Very little is researched regarding SoTL and FLCs at the community college and there are few models to guide community colleges on the implementation of these models within their context (Ford & Peaslee, 2018).

Study Framework: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is a learning theory that conceptualizes an activity system with the outcome being learning. There are three generations of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, each building on Vygotsky's (1978) original work which was associated with children's learning in the areas of play, cognition, and development of language abilities (Martin, 2019). A.N. Leont'ev and Y. Engestrom built on the original work with the premise that subjects in the activity system are all working toward a shared outcome, yet they are impacted individually by sociocultural aspects of individual culture and history as well as organizational culture and history. Vygotsky's (1978) work was heavily influenced by Karl Marx's work on human cognition and is directly related to social action and activity. Vygotsky argued that the relationship between a subject and an object is not a direct relationship; instead, it is one that is embedded in society and culture as they change through time. He asserted that consciousness emerges through human activity, which is mediated by instruments, tools, and rules (norms). Vygotsky's (1978) original activity theory was represented by an action triangle, shown in Figure 2.2, below.

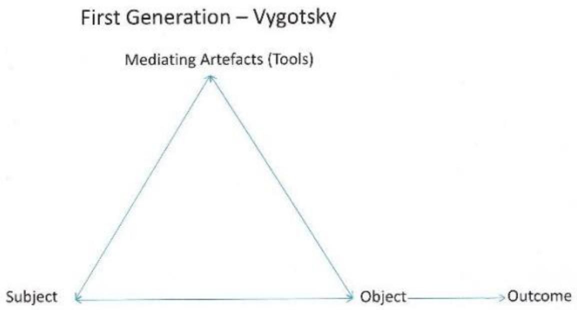


Figure 2.2: Vygotsky’s first-generation action triangle.

In first-generation CHAT, the unit of analysis primarily remains the individual and has been used to understand individual behavior by examining the ways in which a person's objective actions are culturally mediated. Another vital aspect of first-generation activity theory is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), referring to what a learner can do without help and what they can learn and achieve with guidance from someone skilled in the subject at hand. Vygotsky believed that when someone is in the zone of proximal development for a particular task or skill, providing the appropriate amount of assistance will give the learner what they need to achieve the task or learn the skill.

Second-generation CHAT relies on A.N. Leont’ev’s collective model rather than Vygotsky’s reliance on the individual in the activity system. Leont’ev continued the work of Vygotsky by expanding the subject of learning from an individual to a collective group (Engeström, 2018; Leont’ev, 1978), with the underlying assumption that collective action by social groups mediates activity. He was the first to introduce division of labor into activity theory in which he focused on Marx’s description of work being split between actors in a system. One significant contribution of Leont’ev to CHAT theory was the separation of action from activity. Actions may or may not directly impact the outcome, but they are part of the larger activity. Leont’ev (1978) described the activity as the object-oriented broader contexts in which actions occur; he described actions as the goal-driven activities that comprise the larger activity which is just one step in the direction of reaching the desired outcome (Martin, 2019). Engestrom expanded the original action triangle to encompass rules (norms) and community; this can be seen above in Figure 2.2.

Although Leont'ev developed the theory further, he never created a graphic to display the changes in the model (Engeström, 2018). To address this need, Engeström (1987) later updated the model to display collective action. Figure 2.3 shows the human activity system associated with the second generation of CHAT and is adapted from Engeström's original model (1987, p. 78).

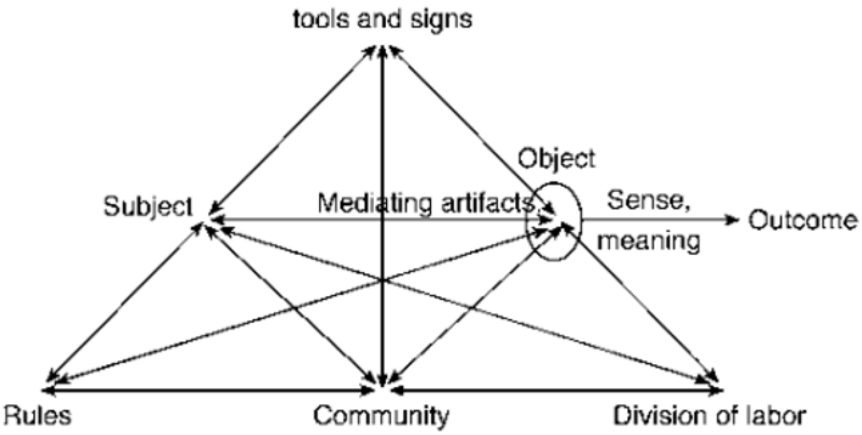


Figure 2.3: Second-generation CHAT (Engeström, 2001, p. 135).

Engestrom's now widely well-known model of CHAT added rules (norms), community relations, division of labor, and multiple activity systems working together toward a shared object. According to CHAT, actions are both conscious, cultural-historical and subconscious, substantially expressed structures of human cognition. On the one hand, activities and actions mutually inform each other (Roth and Lee, 2007). This is not to say that activity theory can be reduced entirely to the sociocultural landscape of individuals. CHAT is at its core, a systems analysis and suggests that organisms exist as part of a dynamic system that connects them with their environment as well as other organisms within and outside of their system (Stetsenko and Arievitch, 2004).

An activity system is comprised of six core components that each hold essential cultural and historical scopes which influence the system as a whole, shown in Figure 2.4, below. The first three are a subject, an object, and tools. The subject is the people or group of people in the system, the object is the focal point, and the desired outcomes, and the tools can be tangible or conceptual; cultural artifacts are essential tools for understanding the activity system. In CHAT, these tools are both historical and cultural and are shaped and reshaped by the current and changing needs of both the organization itself and the people who come and go within the organization. The fourth component is community. This is the group of people of which the subject interacts within the organization. The subject and the community are related via two more elements, the rules that regulate the actions of the subject and the division of labor which measures power relations, access to resources, rewards, and delegation of tasks and by whom they are completed (Foot, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). It is crucial to keep in mind that there are no direct English translations for the concepts of “activity” or “object” as they are used in Russian, which is the language in which Vygotsky (1978) had initially written the theory.

Second-generation CHAT was missing a major component that Engestrom built upon in third-generation CHAT. Second-generation CHAT focused on only one activity system influencing the object. Third-generation CHAT suggests that multiple activity systems can be working toward a shared, desired outcome and as a result, a new activity system has the potential to emerge. This indicates that activity systems are connected. A shared activity system is displayed in Figure 2.4, below.

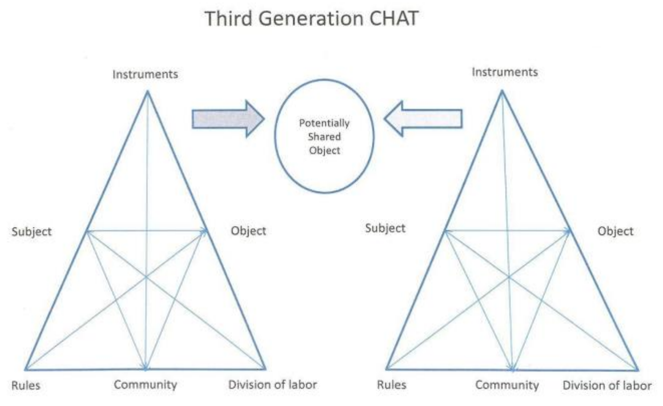

Third Generation CHAT
Instruments
Potentially Shared Object
Instruments
Subject
Object
Subject
Object
Rules
Community
Division of labor
Rules
Community
Division of labor

Figure 2.4: A representation of third-generation CHAT.

The five central tenets of third-generation CHAT are:

1. Activity systems are the units of analysis and activity is mediated by cultural artifacts.
2. Activity must be analyzed at various levels.
3. Change in thinking occurs in the social realm over a long period of time.
4. Conflict is the driving force of change and development.
5. Expansive cycles are a possible form of transformation in activity.

Engstrom's concept of the "expansive cycle" begins when individuals start to question the accepted practice which forms a sequence of learning actions in an expansive cycle of historical analysis and empirical analysis of what is being asked, modelling the new solution, examining the new model, which then leads to implementation of the new model, reflecting on the process, and finally consolidating the new practice (Rizzo, 2003).

CHAT has made theoretical contributions to adult learning theory, specifically in the context of applied learning (Anderson, 2023). In adult education, it provides a scaffolding to study learning in context, and because learning almost always involves other people, this makes CHAT an appropriate choice for understanding learning that occurs within a group that is part of a larger organization, like faculty in the community college. CHAT has been used to previously study teacher education for its ability to consider numerous perspectives simultaneously (Andrews et al., 2021; Lupu, 2011; Solano-Campos et al., 2020; Wilson, 2014; Wirch, 2021) CHAT, as a framework, is strong in its ability to center on the idea that people's activities, their cultural and historical perspective, their culture, and how they contextualize themselves in an environment will always inform each other; no actor or action within an activity system can be understood without understanding the environment and goals of the actors in that system. CHAT, in this study, provides a framework to understand how adults interact with the various nodes of the activity system as they work together within the community college to achieve a shared goal.

When considering faculty professional development activities or programs, attention is primarily paid to instruction, often instructional methods and technology, curriculum development, and student evaluation of instructors; these are useful activities for faculty professional development but do not comprise a comprehensive, practical program (Berquist & Phillips, 1975). That said, there are some underlying assumptions one can make about community college faculty professional development and support in teaching and learning. One, community college faculty members who receive regular professional development become better and arguably, more engaged teachers. Two, faculty will be better prepared to respond to the continually changing needs of their classrooms if they are current on educational and learning research and best practices; they determine what is and isn't working in other classes, and have opportunities to learn, exercise, and reflect on various teaching strategies (Rutz et al., 2012).

CHAT provides the framework for a multi-faceted investigation into the activity system that is faculty professional development at the community college.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This descriptive case study explores how full-time community college curriculum faculty members contextualize and navigate professional development in their community college. This chapter presents qualitative research and the use of the descriptive case study for this study and discusses the research design, sampling method, data collection, data analysis, and how cultural-historical activity theory, as the framework, guides the study. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their activities for professional development in support of their teaching roles?
2. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their needs for professional development in support of their teaching roles?
3. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their context as it shapes, supports or impedes professional development in support of their teaching roles?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods provide the researcher with mechanisms to explore and understand a specific issue and the context in which a problem is situated (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study utilizes the descriptive case study approach. Case study methods are typically employed to gain insight and understanding of phenomena that are new, not understood, or unexamined (Shaban, 2009). This research follows a descriptive approach as it guides the researcher through exploration of how community college curriculum faculty members describe their experiences with professional development activities and how their needs, in their teaching role, frame their idealizations through the characteristics of the second-generation Cultural-Historical Activity

Theory framework of the subject, object, division of labor, community, rules, and tools. This research, using qualitative methods allows the researcher to analyze the underlying meaning of participants' experiences and how they navigate, perceive, and engage in professional development in their environment.

Yin (2002) defines a case as "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (p. 13). The assumption is that other research strategies are not capable of inquiring into the case that interests researchers. Therefore, they need an utterly novel comprehensive research strategy named case study (Yazan, 2015). Case study is ideal for this research because it "copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide collection and analysis" (Yin, 2013, p. 17). In other words, a case study offers the ability to dive deeply into a complex issue in which much cannot be controlled for, yet provides a way to analyze the data, connecting the data points through their multiple relationships with each other and their contextual environment. The case study approach paired with CHAT as a study framework offers a structurally sound scaffolding on which to explore a complex phenomenon such as faculty professional development in the community college.

For Merriam (1998), the crucial characteristic of case study research is the definition of the case; she sees the case 'as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). Merriam (1998) defines qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. xiii). According to Merriam (1998), a descriptive case study yields a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation (Yazan, 2015). Stake (1995) claims that the "first obligation" (p. 4) in case study research is to develop and understand the case at hand. In this study, the faculty professional development is regarded as the case delimiter being explored through the community college as a bounded system. Yin defines design essentially as "the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2002).

Yin (2002) also asserts that systems can be studied with one of three kinds of case studies, depending on the purpose: exploratory case studies, explanatory case studies, and descriptive case studies. Exploratory case studies are typically chosen to define the framework of a future study. Explanatory case studies aim to explain how and why something took place. Descriptive case studies are chosen to highlight the details of an experience (Stake, 1995). In this case, a descriptive case study is an appropriate choice because the data lies within the context of the community college and paired with CHAT as a framework covers the depth and scope of the complex nature of community college faculty experience. The value of a case study approach is its ability to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and instead explain the conditions through the experience of the actors within the system (Tellis, 1997).

Merriam's definition of case study best articulates the goals of the proposed research. While Yin (2002), Merriam (1998), and Stake (1995) all agree that it is the responsibility of the case study researcher to draw their data from multiple sources, Merriam and Stake both contend that data should be drawn exclusively from qualitative data. Yin, on the other hand, advocates for the combination of qualitative and quantitative sources and views them as equally instrumental. This study is a holistic description and analysis of the bounded system of faculty professional development within the context of the community college and uses exclusively qualitative data to draw conclusions. Therefore, Merriam’s approach to case study best articulates the goals of the proposed research.

Descriptive case study was chosen for this study for three main reasons. First, one goal of all case studies is to develop an understanding of the bounded system. The primary purpose of this research is to develop an understanding of faculty professional development within the bounded context of the community college. Second, descriptive case studies answer questions situated within a framework. The descriptions of professional development throughout the research process will help to define the theoretical constructs under which community college curriculum faculty operate. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) examines the specific bounded contexts in which subjects interact with the various nodes of CHAT that navigate the landscape of professional development. Third, research is insufficient considering this particular activity system – colleges and universities across the United States have created special initiatives to promote faculty development, but to date, there has been little research to evaluate faculty needs from their own perspective specifically.

With the growth of community college enrollment and the increase in focus on student success, research in this area is vital to the success of faculty members. The use of descriptive case study allows the research findings to contribute to an applied environment, benefitting future researchers as well as community college faculty and administration as practitioners, given that the data was collected and analyzed in the context of the dynamic environments in which the study participants learn and work. As such, faculty, administrators and professional development experts, may find the results of the study useful for future design of professional development programs that meet the needs of community college faculty, as well as the college in which they work.

Study Framework

The framework for this study is second-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). CHAT is one of several approaches that provide a robust framework for analyzing professional work practices and system dynamics of learning and working, including professional development activity systems. By offering a multi-dimensional lens, CHAT enables researchers to analyze evolving professional practices, the tensions and contradictions between the various aspects of the activity system, and how practitioners engage with the history of the activity system (Elmberger et al., 2019; Foot, 2014). The CHAT framework provides a structure to flow from the subject to the object across a system by placing an emphasis on the following: instruments/tools, rules (both implicit and explicit), community, and division of labor (Martin, 2019). The subject for the study is comprised of full-time community college curriculum faculty – in other words, the full-time faculty that teach in degree programs at a community college. These are the faculty most likely to regularly participate in professional development activities – both self-directed and through requirements at their respective institutions. As subjects, their context and perceptions can and do influence their environment as much as the environment influences their context and perceptions. Through the CHAT lens, the object of the study includes the professional development activities with which the subjects engage, and in the case of the research, the object could include potential professional development activities, as well as the ideal professional development activities that faculty wish were available. The assumed outcome relies on the professional development activities for the development of an excellent, pedagogically sound teaching practice. The tools include but are not limited to mandatory faculty professional development, self-directed professional development activities, and professional development requirements as a few examples.

Rules in an activity system include both implicit – rules that are presumed or perceived – and explicit – those that are communicated formally. Examples of implicit rules for this study include but are not limited to participation in formal and informal professional development activities either through mandatory requirements or assumed requirement, creation of professional development goals and requirements, and use of professional development to enhance teaching practice. Examples of explicit rules for this study include but are not limited to, institutional mandates on professional development, attendance and participation in institution-provided formal professional development activities and demonstrated use of new and innovative teaching practice through observation and teacher evaluation. Examples of implicit rules might include the informal attitudes, history, and culture that sets the tone for what faculty select for professional development, or what they choose to implement into their teaching practice based on their environmental context. The CHAT framework explores the division of labor such as who controls professional development activities and participation as well as the organizational structure of the college and how the various rules are implemented. These entities include the various Southeastern community college systems, the community colleges being studied, the individual departments, and the faculty professional development committees in the community college.

One major aspect of the CHAT framework is historical context. Actions are both conscious cultural-historical and nonconscious, materially embodied features of human cognition. On the one hand, activities and actions mutually assume each other (Roth, 2007). Tools, as human creations, include norms of cognition and imply ways of action (Miettinen, 2001, p. 299). Each node of CHAT is influenced by the culture, history, and context of those operating within it and is taken into consideration.

Validity and Reliability of Data

Drawing on the research literature Yilamz (2013) broadly defined qualitative research as, "an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world" (p. 312). A qualitative approach aims to produce research where phenomena are situated within real-world settings that unfold naturally (Golafshani, 2003). Researchers strive to design studies that provide a multifaceted perspective of a given phenomenon with a secondary goal to provide rich, unbiased data that can be interpreted with some degree of assurance (Thurmond, 2001).

When researchers use the terms validity and reliability in qualitative research, they are usually referring to a study that produces results that are credible. These terms are typically not viewed separately in qualitative research; Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that there can be no validity without reliability and that demonstration of validity can then assume reliability. Patton (2002) agrees with this notion. Further, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest validity is affected by the researcher's choice of paradigm and therefore, their perception of validity in their research. The triangulation of data strengthened the findings by increasing the validity and reliability of the data.

Triangulation is often used as a method for improving the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Data triangulation was used in this study because the nature of the inquiry and the activity system being explored is complex. The idea is based on the practice of using two known points to locate the position of an unknown third point, by forming a triangle (Thurmond, 2001). The document analysis for this study falls into two categories of Engeström's (2001) CHAT model: rules and tools. Data source triangulation provides evidence of credibility for this study, as data were collected from institutional websites, public forums, interviews, participant-submitted documents, and the research literature. This triangulation shows the convergence and non-convergence of evidence in this study. Effectively this convergent evidence illustrates validity and reliability in that "multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 48). The goal was to make an effort to demonstrate that what was observed carries the same meaning when found in various circumstances (Stake, 1995). Flick (1992), as referenced in Stake (1995), emphasized that "protocols of triangulation have come to be the search for additional interpretations more than the confirmation of a single meaning" (Flick, 1992, as cited in Stake, 1995, p.115). Comparing what is being shared by full-time community college curriculum faculty to the written rules and demonstrated activities helps to strengthen findings related to contradictions between the interactions of the various nodes of the system.

Site Selection and Data Collection

Site Selection

This study is situated in three rural community colleges located in the Southeastern United States. These colleges offer a variety of curricular programs and about 62% of faculty are full-time and therefore will provide ample opportunity for data collection ("Institute of Education Sciences (IES)," n.d.). They are part of a centralized system of community colleges who primarily operate as independent entities. The colleges serve communities of comparable demographics and were considered to be similar enough in demographics and operation to serve as a single unit for the purpose of this study. This offered the opportunity to hear voices and faculty experiences from several similar community colleges to reduce the bias of hearing only from faculty in one environment. Considering that faculty professional development is the case delimiter for this study, this was an appropriate approach.

Sample Size

There were 27 responses to the initial Qualtrics form, detailed below. Seven respondents were not eligible to participate in the study. Five of the eligible respondents did not provide contact information, two respondents were unable to make it to their scheduled interviews, and one respondent was unreachable after initial contact. From the three colleges that were included in the study, a total of 12 participants were interviewed. Interviews with the participants provided a total of 22 contact hours.

This is within the goal of twelve to fifteen participants, shown in Table 3.1 below. Decisions regarding sample size are often met with hesitation as there is no defined set of rules for appropriate sample size in qualitative research (Marshall et al., 2013). Estimating an adequate sample size is directly related to the concept of saturation. The redundancy of data, also known as saturation, is the gold standard by which sample sizes are determined in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006). Fusch and Ness (2015) discuss how data saturation is different for every study and dependent on methodology. Rather than focusing on sample size for data saturation, the focus should be on richness and thickness of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Further, Guest et al. (2006) set out to develop evidence-based recommendations on sample size and data saturation. In their findings, they reported that 73% of codes were identified within the first six interviews, 92% of codes were identified within twelve interviews, and 100% of codes were identified within thirteen interviews (Guest et al., 2006). From that data, they calculated a Cronbach’s alpha to measure the reliability of their code distribution. With

Cronbach’s alpha, a .70 is generally considered a reliable measure (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). Guest et al. (2006) showed that within twelve interviews, the Cronbach’s alpha was .70 and continued to increase with more interviews. From this data, they concluded that most of the data saturation had occurred within twelve interviews.

Sampling Strategy

“When we sample, we select some cases to examine in detail, and then we use what we learn from them to understand a much larger set of cases” (Neuman, 2003, p. 246). With that in mind, nonprobability purposive sampling was chosen for this study.

Stake’s (1995) recommendations, with regard to the general selection of cases, are multifaceted as case study research is “not a sampling research” (p. 4). Broadly speaking, Emmel (2013) maintains that sampling for quantitative studies consists of two activities, “defining a population from which a sample will be drawn and of which the sample will be representative” and “ensuring that every person or thing from this predefined population has the chance of inclusion that is greater than zero and can be measured.” In other words, the researcher is attempting to obtain a representative sample of randomly selected participants (Staller, 2021).

Abrams (2010) positions that qualitative “researchers usually have no basis to suppose a ‘normal distribution of the experiences, interactions, or settings that are of interest to them.” (p.531). Comparably, Holland and Shaw (2014) contend, “there is little logic in attempting random or probability sampling with qualitative research studies. The people, settings, or text we choose to include in new studies will be chosen purposively, often because they constitute typical cases or extreme cases or a range of cases to achieve as much variation as possible.” (p. 86-87).

This study utilized typical case sampling with a criterion component method. Because the study population is not large, criterion sampling played an important role. As stated above, nonprobability purposive sampling method was chosen for this study. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002); it is often used in exploratory research or in field research (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003).

In this study, the criteria for participants were full-time curriculum faculty members with at least two years of experience in their faculty role. Participant selection criteria are shown in Table 3.1 below. Only full-time faculty members were eligible for this study because the professional development of part-time faculty is often vastly different between institutions and the intention of this study is to better understand faculty development, generally. Curriculum faculty were selected because non-curriculum and trades faculty often have very different needs for maintaining their credentials through professional development and the focus of this study was to explore professional development in the context of the teaching role. The two-year experience limit was set because these faculty members will have had sufficient teaching experience and enough time in their roles to have been required to participate in some form of faculty professional development at their institution. Faculty from all disciplines were eligible for participation in this study. Discipline was not considered because the focus is on pedagogical professional development and not discipline-specific professional development or credential maintaining continuing education units (CEUs). No other criteria were used to select from faculty members that met the criteria of being full-time curriculum faculty with at least two years of experience at their institution.

Table 3.1: Process for Participant Selection.

Selection Element	Criteria
Inclusion Criteria	• Full-time faculty member • Teach curriculum courses • Been in their position for at least two years
Target Sample Size	• Ten to fifteen faculty members
Recruitment	• Email through campus listservs

Participant Recruitment

To begin, Institutional Review (IR) applications were submitted to each participating community college. Once approval was granted, a single recruitment email was sent to all faculty from their respective office of institutional effectiveness. The email briefly described the study, what the faculty could expect if they chose to participate, the expected time commitment, and finally, asked them to complete a Qualtrics form, created and stored inside the protected Google drive provided by North Carolina State University (NCSU) and in keeping with recommended IRB protocols. The form asked respondents if they met the required screening criteria and to provide their preferred method of contact.

Once preferred contact methods were provided, each potential participant was contacted individually to ensure that there was no possibility that participant information was visible to any other participant. In the email to each potential participant, they were thanked for completing the initial Qualtrics survey. For each participant, their first choice for scheduled interview date and time were able to be accommodated and scheduled.

Once each participant confirmed their desire to continue with participation in the study, and that they were still available on the interview date and time they selected as their first choice, an NCSU Zoom invite was sent detailing all of the relevant information to meet and participate in the interview.

Data Collection

Interview Process

The first phase of the research was audio-video interviews via Zoom using a semi-structured interview approach. Zoom was used to adhere to restrictions put in place during the Covid-19 Global Pandemic. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they "rely on a certain set of questions and try to guide the conversation to remain, more loosely, on those questions. However, semi-structured interviews also allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest of importance to them" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 102; Martin, 2019). Semi-structured interviews are defined as a "qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions" (Ayres, 2008 as cited in Given (2008), p. 811). The interviews followed an interview protocol and were conversational in nature. The interview protocol is available in the Appendix. According to Bernard (2017), semi-structured interviews are flexible because the interviewer can modify the order and details of how topics are covered and that because participants are asked more or less the same questions, data is comparable across interviews.

The protocol was developed with questions aligned with the research questions. In particular, the interviews gathered information on how the participants perceive professional development with a systematic and holistic view of their organization, their individual perspectives, and how they perceive the strengths and constraints of the system relative to their individual perceived professional development needs and the needs of the system.

Each participant received an individual link to the meeting and each meeting was password protected. Only the recipient of each individual link and password combination was able to access the virtual meeting. This was to ensure their comfort as well as confidentiality. The sessions were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed by the researcher.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was also used as a data collection and triangulation method for this study. First, records and data in the public domain were used to develop a contextual map or picture of the community colleges, the system within which they operate, and the publicly available professional development policies, offerings, and materials or resources. Some of these resources included nationwide resources and professional development organizations, centralized professional development resources that operated regionally and aligned with initiatives in the participating community colleges, sources that faculty described during their interviews, and sources that faculty submitted as part of their participation in this study.

In addition, participants were asked to upload documents associated with professional development to a dedicated, password-protected folder. These documents could be examples of professional development they considered ideal, or those they considered not ideal, documents outlining their professional development requirements at their respective institutions, documents from professional development either at their institution or outside of their institution that they were offered, or activities and syllabi that have either been developed or changed after a professional development activity. The purpose of the document analysis was to guide the research in providing a deeper understanding of the professional development offerings and environment in which the activities exist.

Data Handling

The information gathered through this process was handled in keeping with research standards. All data collected was kept in a locked space within my home and the transcripts were maintained on a Google Drive that is password protected. Any uploads and downloads of data were done via VPN.

To preserve anonymity, all participants were referred to as "they." To ensure confidentiality, findings are presented in such a manner that participant data is not readily associated with gender, college, department, or discipline.

Data Analysis

NVivo was used to organize the interview transcripts for the coding and analysis process. Once the interview transcripts were completed, each was read and initial notes and impressions were made, and areas of interest were highlighted. Data analysis is described as a seemingly natural process that does not or should not have a guide or rules attached to it: "We do not have adequate guides for transforming observations into assertions – yet people regularly do it" (Stake, 1995, p. 9). Stake does not provide specific steps to follow; he believes his writings to be "persuasions" and not "recipes" (p. 77).

Coding Strategies

Prior to starting the coding process, the first step of analysis consisted of reading through the data for tagging and labeling. Following this step, data was analyzed using framework coding. Framework coding is based on the theoretical framework of CHAT using a priori codes that align with the six categories of CHAT: community, division of labor, subject, object, rules, and tools. Coding was done this way to capture the complexities, nuances, and interconnectedness of the activity system. Layers of framework coding were conducted to ensure that all data was coded. Initially, line-by-line coding was done to help build and organize the concepts and categories within the data. Once line-by-line coding was complete, a broader set of coding took place where data was coded based on sentences, topics, and generally, per participant.

Once concepts and categories began to emerge, they were then placed into the various nodes of CHAT in which they best fit. Because CHAT is complex and the nodes often interact and overlap with each other, concepts and categories that spanned multiple nodes were placed between the two interacting nodes. This was then used as a visual tool that represents the activity system as a whole, and was used as a basis for organizing, presenting, and discussing the findings.

Subjectivity

Merriam (1998) states that "our analysis and interpretation – our study's findings – will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place" (p. 48). Sipe and Ghiso (2004) state that, "all coding is a judgment call" since we bring "our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, and our quirks" to the process (p. 482-483).

As a researcher, I am also an educator, a people leader, an athlete, a mother, and a student. I have taught all levels of students from informal museum workshops geared toward the public all the way to 300-level courses at a research university. Much of my teaching career was in the community college and focused specifically on mostly non-traditional and underserved populations of adult learners. It is important to note that as a former community college faculty member, I was employed within the system in which this study took places. During this research, I was no longer working within the system and had no direct connection to any of the participants in this study. During my experience as a community college instructor, I participated in various professional development activities. My interest in studying professional development stemmed from my participation in these various activities. I often found myself wondering who developed the policies surrounding professional development, who developed the professional development activities, and why specific activities were offered and not others.

I always believed that professional development was an important aspect of what made me a good instructor, but I often found myself dissatisfied with what was offered to me as professional development. After talking with my colleagues, I found that many of them were often disappointed as well, and many were searching for opportunities outside of the college's offerings. These discussions and interactions with professional development really drew me to this research.

Positionality

As a researcher and a design thinker, I feel obligated to discuss my positionality in this project. My study explores the system in which faculty professional development exists and its intersectionality with the aspects of what it means to be an excellent teacher. My interest in this area is multifaceted.

I am a design thinker. Design Thinking is a term that represents a set of processes by which design concepts are developed. It really is a holistic, innovative problem-solving process. The steps involved in the Design Thinking process really influence how I conduct research. I aim to define and understand a problem, explore a wide range of possible solutions through an iterative process, and then implement a solution. Though this process is iterative, meaning when new information is gathered, the design process must be reconsidered and reimplemented based on the new information.

In addition, I absolutely love to participate in professional and personal development. I recognize that not everyone is as enthusiastic about professional development, and many see it as a burden and barrier to their work-life balance. For many, professional development checks a box or satisfies a requirement to secure a contract for the following academic year. With the expectations placed, especially on community college faculty, I understand why.

My subjectivity and positionality statements describe how I see myself and how I understand the systems in which my research exists. I must remain aware of how my experience, intersectionality, bias, and worldview may impact my participants as well as the outcome of my study. Because of my experience within the activity system being studied, I must work recognized any preconceived notions I have regarding the faculty perspective with professional development and not allow that to cloud interpretation of the data. Secondly, Design Thinking can really position one to hyperfocus on creating a solution to a problem rather than simply exploring it. With that in mind, I must work to both explore and describe the findings in this study in a way that is both useful to future researchers and current practitioners, while avoiding a heavy focus on trying to solve this complex problem with a single study.

Ethics

Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000) state that, “the research process creates tension between the aims of research to make generalizations for the good of others, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy” (p. 93). Ethics pertains to doing good and avoiding harm and according to Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000), harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles. Thus, informed consent and the protection of human participants in any study become the utmost priority. In this study, confidentiality is the cornerstone of the protection of the research participants. Maintaining a strict ethical protocol while still gaining information to help the greater good is a main priority.

Limitations

The scope of this research is limited by several factors, namely participant recruitment and participation in the interview process, access to participants through the gatekeepers at their respective institutions, the impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic, and time. While the researcher did everything possible to gain a holistic picture of the activity system in place around faculty professional development, Covid-19 and access to faculty through their institutions hindered the ability to gather a more comprehensive understanding. Faculty were required to adapt very quickly to a change in the delivery of education due to the global pandemic and restrictions that were put in place by the local government as well as their respective institutions. Many faculty expressed their desire to participate in a study like this at a time when they were less stressed.

Additionally, the gatekeepers at the institutions were hesitant to send out another survey in fear of “survey fatigue” as an effort to protect the mental health of their faculty during such a stressful time. Due to these limitations, the study may not be generalizable to community college faculty professional development outside the context of a global pandemic and the rapid switch to a fully remote teaching experience. Additionally, this study is likely not generalizable to faculty outside of the community college because of its specific focus on the processes and systems within the community college as a system.

This study does not attempt to measure the effectiveness of professional development activities. As discussed in the significance of the study, it is important to understand how faculty professional development prepares faculty to teach, and to take it one step further, is also important to understand and measure how effective various professional development activities are. Using the findings from this research and others like it will help inform what professional development is most desired, but future studies should attempt to measure how effective they are.

Finally, while there were selection criteria set, all participants that volunteered for the study and met the selection criteria were accepted. There is a risk with this approach that only certain faculty (i.e., those most motivated to participate in professional development) will have their voices heard. This should be considered in future studies, because hearing from a more diverse group of faculty is important for the future application of study findings.

Strengths

The strengths of this study include the framework and the ability to capture the faculty voice and experience. The study framework, CHAT, provides a systematic, multidimensional way to explore faculty professional development and the various aspects that act on the system. The findings will provide administrators and faculty a starting point for discussions on how to implement a faculty professional development program that meets the needs of the faculty and the institution. Additionally, the study can offer insight into the current policies and practices that are working well, as well as those that present barriers to faculty growth as teachers.

Summary

Understanding how full-time curriculum faculty perceive and circumnavigate the intricate system of professional development in the community college is befitting of a qualitative case study. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is the lens through which this research was conducted because it delineates the boundaries of the activity system and allows for connections to be made within the system.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This study explored faculty professional development in teaching at three rural community colleges using second-generation CHAT. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) offers a systems approach to understanding organizational culture and its norms. It explores actors within a system and how their actions are mediated by cultural norms, tools, division of labor, and the community in which they sit. In this research, CHAT followed twelve full-time community college curriculum faculty – the subjects – through their journey toward excellence in teaching – the object within a system, the community college. Figure 4.1 below shows how full-time community college curriculum faculty navigate the organizational culture while engaging with professional development, as well as the connections between the various aspects of the activity system, how they are interconnected, and how they interact.

The unit of analysis includes collective-motivated activity toward excellence in teaching. Figure 4.1 below also includes the three hierarchical levels of human functioning according to second-generation CHAT: object-related motives drive the collective *activities* (top-level), goals drive group *actions* (middle-level), and *conditions and tools* drive automated *operations* (lower-level). As can be seen from Figure 4.1, the subject, object, and outcome in the activity triangle are here represented as multi-dimensional, interconnected processes at the faculty level of the community college. Complex, socially situated, relational acts of faculty development intersect with and have their counterparts in learning and – in overall practice terms – are assumed to lead to excellence in teaching. Of course, it would be possible to view faculty development and excellence in teaching in other ways or to select a more atomistic level of analysis of faculty development, but these would arguably lend themselves to a similar analytical discussion as is presented here. What CHAT particularly enables in a discussion about the enactment of professional development related to teaching here is engagement with the intersecting explicit and tacit contexts of the base of the triangle, or the operations: rules, community, and division of labor.

Of particular interest in this argument is the base of the triangle. This is where the rules that undergird activity systems, the communities which form the social and material contexts in which these activity systems conform, and the division of labor systems in which roles and power can be expected to be played out, all lie.

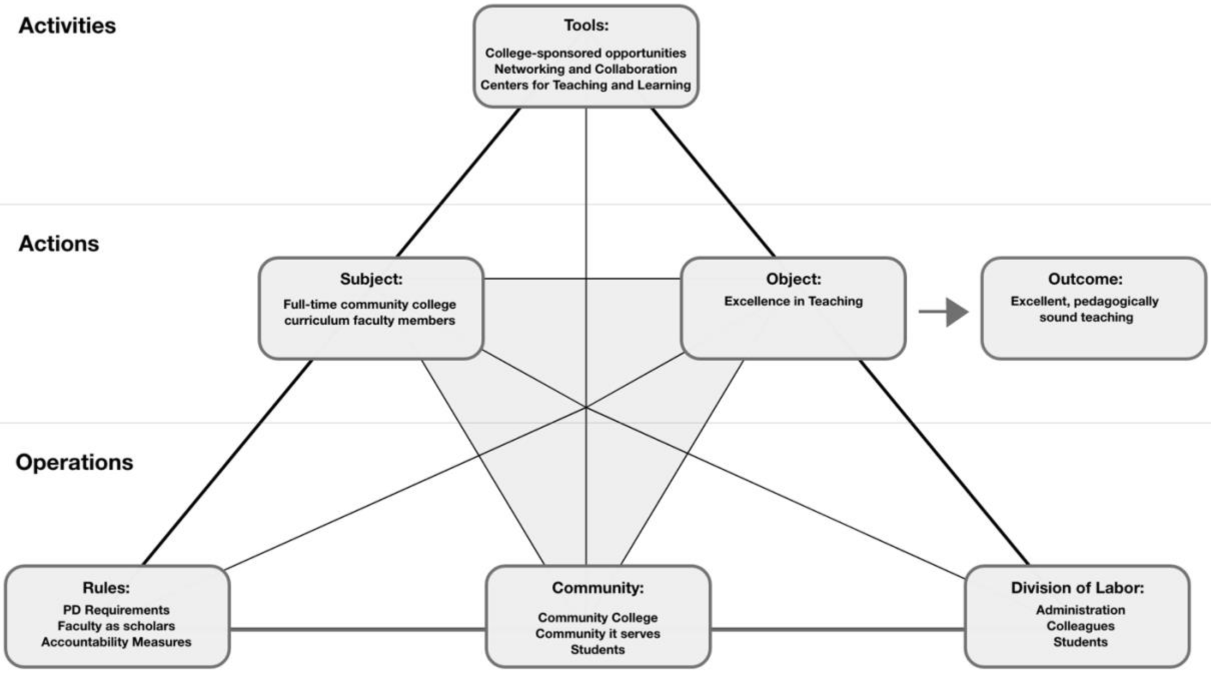

Activities
Tools:
College-sponsored opportunities
Networking and Collaboration
Centers for Teaching and Learning
Actions
Subject:
Full-time community college curriculum faculty members
Object:
Excellence in Teaching
Outcome:
Excellent, pedagogically sound teaching
Operations
Rules:
PD Requirements
Faculty as scholars
Accountability Measures
Community:
Community College
Community it serves
Students
Division of Labor:
Administration
Colleagues
Students

Figure 4.1: The CHAT Activity System.

Participants

There were twelve full-time curriculum faculty members among three rural community colleges in the Southeastern United States as study participants. The participants included eight females and four males, all with at least two years of experience teaching full-time in the community college.

The faculty members had different backgrounds prior to community college teaching – which is reflective of the current national community college environment. In this case, three participants taught in healthcare fields, and each practiced in their respective healthcare discipline before teaching. Two of the participants had military backgrounds before teaching. Five of the twelve participants had held many different roles in the community college; some served in administrative positions, others taught in multiple departments, and others held business operations positions before moving to teach.

Interestingly, a noteworthy participant commonality was that eleven participants identified having little to no teaching experience before accepting their teaching roles. One participant had a teaching fellowship in graduate school and entered their teaching role with experience in adult learning theory and teaching methodology. One of the participants talked about attempting to gain teaching experience through coursework and teaching mentorships in graduate school but was shut out of those opportunities because they were "reserved for students in the education program."

Thematic Analysis

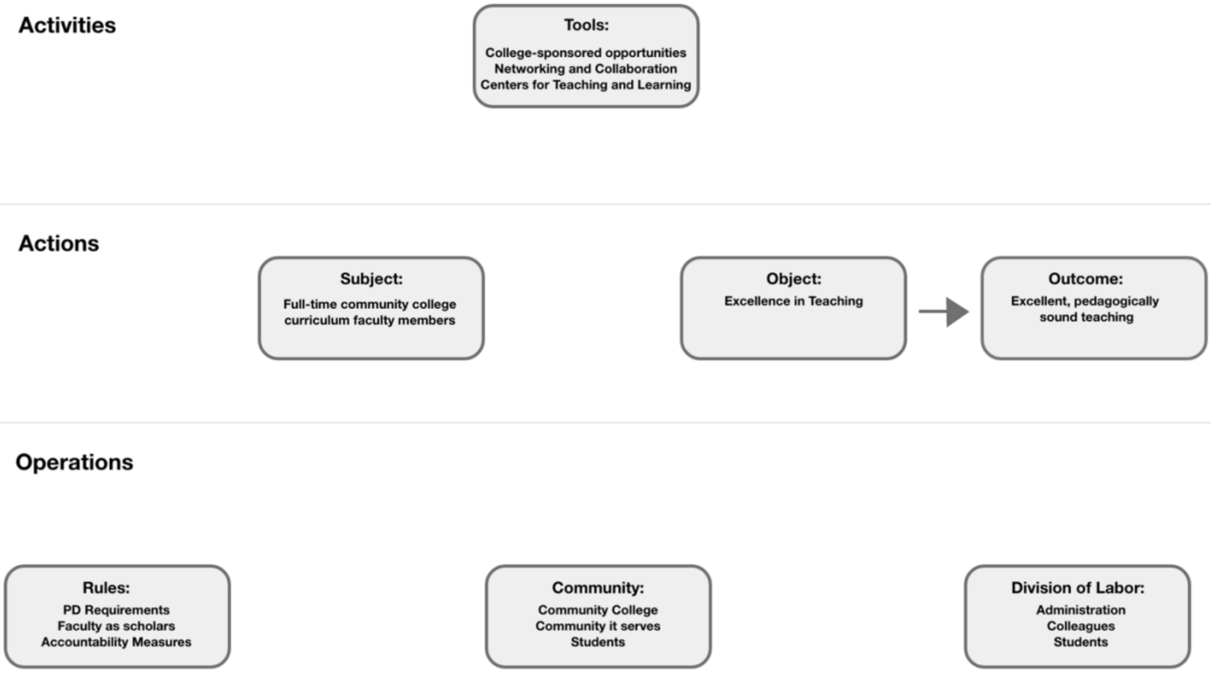
CHAT explores the interconnectedness of the subject, implicit and explicit rules by which they are bound, tools and instruments utilized in the system, the larger community in which the system is situated, the division of labor for the various actors in the system, and the object or outcome. As introduced above, the activity system in CHAT is represented by a triangle where the tools and instruments lie at the apex and represent the mediators of action between the subject and object. These lie in the center and represent the conscious and goaloriented actions that move the subject toward the object, or outcome, of the activities. The bottom third of the triangle represents the operations or the routine, automatic components of the activity system. The rules, community, and division of labor are determined by the conditions under which the activity is undertaken.

CHAT is typically presented by introducing the subject and object and then moves into exploring how they interact with the tools, rules, community, and division of labor in the system. This study presents tools and instruments first as they are the mediating activity between the subject and the object. The apex of the triangle is worth presenting first, as it represents significant tensions in the activity system that place increased pressure on faculty regarding student success outcomes.

Tools and Instruments

Tools and instruments are mediating artifacts for the delivery of professional development and share the pedagogical, socio-cultural, and material rules, communities, and divisions of labor histories, practices, and belief systems that are represented in professional development in the community college, and the ‘actors’ that contest this space, their agency, differential forms of power, and abilities to act on the system and affect the outcome. Figure 4.2 shows an unconnected framework with tools and instruments as the apex.

The tools and instruments in this system include both technologies used to complete professional development activities and social tools like networking and collaboration. The tools can be obligatory for the subject, utilized by the subject by choice, or developed by the subject to engage with professional development. As the apex of the triangle that represents the activity system, the tools and instruments represent the purposeful interaction between the subject and the object, in this case, the full-time community college curriculum faculty member and their movement toward excellence in teaching. While the tools sit at the apex of the triangle that represents the system, the use of tools, how they are selected for use, what tools are selected, and their perceived value are affected by the rules, community, and division of labor by with the subject is bound within the system. For example, faculty may see value in a particular program or course but cannot get approval to take the time off to attend, or they may not receive funding from their college and are unable to afford to attend the program on their own. More realistically, there would be some combination of the examples above at play.


Activities
Tools:
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Operations
Rules:
PD Requirements
Faculty as scholars
Accountability Measures
Community:
Community College
Community it serves
Students
Division of Labor:
Administration
Colleagues
Students

Figure 4.2: CHAT: Tools and Instruments.

Collaboration and Networking

Participants overwhelmingly utilized collaboration and networking to learn about professional development opportunities and as a route to making connections with other faculty outside of their department and even outside of their institution. Faculty believe they learn best from each other and actively work to develop their network. Eleven of the twelve participants identified collaboration as their clear preferred method of professional development.

Observing good teaching, attending faculty-led seminars, networking at conferences and presentations, and informal tip exchanges were identified as some of the most sought-after collaborative opportunities. In talking about collaboration and networking as professional development, participants said:

> Some of my favorite professional developments are basically structured tip exchanges. Like where they say, “hey come to this session with your best idea, come to the session with your best practice.” Those are where I've gotten a lot of my best ideas.
>
> I think every community college would be well served to have some sort of mentor-mentee kind of situation where you go in and observe someone teaching.
>
> Through collaboration with other instructors. We were actually just talking about this last week. We, you know, we grab all of our best ideas from each other or through a conversation with each other.

Faculty expressed the desire to collaborate more with other faculty members, both inside and outside of their respective departments and disciplines. Participants identified feeling siloed in their own departments and disciplines and expressed that collaboration with faculty outside of their department or discipline was just as, or more effective than collaboration only within. Much of the interdisciplinary collaboration was done via faculty development retreats in an offsite setting versus on their own campuses. One participant said:

> Connecting with, one of my favorite things to do is like, share materials with other people for like, I'm struggling with this, what do you guys think, have you encountered this in the past? I think that kind of collaboration is super important, especially because so much of what we do is kind of in a vacuum.

Several faculty participants discussed participating in a professional development retreat-style activity, where they had the opportunity to spend two full days with facilitators and faculty outside their departments, disciplines, and even colleges. Three of the twelve participants had participated in this type of professional development activity, and all three noted it as their favorite. When asked why they chose this activity as their favorite, they noted that they were able to network with other faculty members that taught different classes and had varying years of experience. In addition, learning from various faculty experiences gave them ideas, activities, and reflective practices that they were excited to implement in their classes. It was noted that although some of the faculty disciplines were very different, one using English and Economics as a comparison, they found parallels in how they could implement the various techniques and activities that they learned. One participant said, “that’s how I’ve gotten some really great ideas and have cultivated some great relationships.”

Study participants also noted the lack of opportunity from their institutions for faculty to learn from each other. Because the opportunity was not provided as a formal tool for professional development, faculty at their respective institutions were informally holding sessions to network and collaborate. One participant described how they created the opportunity for this style of professional development. They said:

> I do a faculty collaboration event each Friday. I say, “I only want one hour of your time on Friday.” We have gone over time, every single time, and I look at the time, say, “Okay, in the interest of time, we're at your hour mark”, but then they keep going.

Participants identified the lack of opportunities to collaborate as a barrier to their development as excellent teachers. They noted that there is often little or no opportunity or encouragement to formally collaborate with other faculty members. One participant said:

> We don't really even have time to go sit in on each other's classes, because we're in class at the same time, or we're doing so many things… we’re advising, we're going to meetings, we’re prepping, more grading...

Participants were very motivated by the opportunity to learn from other faculty members. They sought out these types of professional development activities on their own and were consistently identified as the most significant support to their development as teachers.

Professional Organization Listservs

When participants were asked how they find professional development activities outside of what is offered at their institutions, most identified having taken a previous course through a professional organization like the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) or The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) and then receiving subsequent communications after having been added to a Listserv.

Through these professional organizations and listservs, participants were able to learn about new professional development offerings and enroll in on-demand courses that fit their needs. These courses also served as a way for faculty to learn from each other. This is what the faculty said about their experiences with NISOD and ACUE professional development:

> I was really appreciative when they brought in, like ACUE and NISOD, and it was like faculty teaching faculty, and it was really beneficial. Because we were able to see what other people did, and maybe try it out for ourselves or adapted to what we needed to do.
>
> I do look at the mailers that we get through NISOD and ACUE you know, since I’ve had a course with them and I get their emails now. Prior to that you know, the college really didn't seem to have a lot of information and I didn't really know where to look.
>
> Well, I’m so busy, so like I try to be a part of all kinds of organizations. Like ACUE, they send me a lot. A lot of the CPEDs [Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate] are good, NISOD sends a lot of workshops out too.

In their discussions regarding the use of these tools, the interconnected nature of the activity system was evident. Faculty relied heavily on both their community of colleagues as well as the rules and division of labor to access these particular tools. The three statements presented above each highlight how faculty rely on various aspects of the activity system.

Faculty stated that they were not sure where to look for professional development opportunities at their college; they were appreciative of the administration making the decision to partner with the professional organizations because it gave them a better sense of agency in their development as an educator and provided a larger set of opportunities to learn from their colleagues both within and outside of their institution. One participant said, "So they just send out a thing with brief descriptions. And they're supposed to be posted on our website, but our website needs a serious redesign. So, one of the downsides of that is that it's difficult to find."

From their interviews, it was clear that faculty were relying very heavily on their colleges to provide these opportunities to them. This phenomenon stemmed from a few things. Many faculty did not know where to look for professional development outside of what was offered. Other faculty were idly using search engines and keywords and hoping for a result. Overwhelmingly, faculty expressed that they were busy and passively receiving the emails via a listserv made it easier to enroll because they did not have to spend their time and energy searching for the opportunities.

Faculty Development Programs at their Institutions

All twelve participants completed most of their professional development through the programs offered at their respective institutions. However, participants had mixed reactions to the quality of these programs. Participants said they offered "a lot" of professional development activities that are administered primarily online and on-demand. While this was convenient, several participants noted that they used their offerings to "check a box" rather than an opportunity to develop themselves as teachers.

Several faculty participants described professional development activities offered to them by their college as a waste of time. Some examples of these types of activities included "PD

Days", yoga, essential oils classes, cooking, and meditation. Of these types of professional development activities, participants said:

> I just, if I have to waste my day, or use my time, I want to learn something. If you're just going to have a party, and we're going to eat, let's just call it a party. If you're going to have speakers, and we're going to have food, and that's going to be called our training, let us know, you know, I won't bring my thinking cap.
>
> We have at the end of every semester, we have what they call PD Day. I think initially, it was more workshops and things like that, but now it's basically all of the faculty and staff in a giant room getting lunch and listening to accolades for all of the services. The only ones who ever get any recognition or credited are people who don't actually, you know, teach. And that's considered PD hours, and it's like three or four hours. So, I don't learn anything new in those situations.

All the institutions held some form of professional development that the participants called a "PD Day." These were usually meetings held before the semester begins, 1 or 2 days throughout the semesters where classes were not held but faculty were attending meetings, or after finals. Of the "PD Days" this is what participants said:

> We have at the end of every semester we have what they call PD Day. I think initially, it was more workshops and things like that. But now it's basically all of the faculty and staff in a giant room getting lunch and listening to accolades for all of the services. And it's like three or four hours. So, I don't learn anything new in those situations.
>
> And I can say, for me, professional development works. But I think all that they offer at the college, sometimes I would ask, "why are we doing this?" and only because professional development was tied into, like the convocation. They do convocation in the morning and then professional development in the afternoon, and everybody was supposed to attend but the information was not for everybody on the campus. And so, I told them, you know, one of the things I said is, we need to really truly think about the professional development that we offer, because what it says to me… now I am thankful and I'm appreciative that they they're doing it, but what it says to me if I were, on the other side of the fence is that you don't respect that I'm here. And I'm speaking for my groundsmen; I'm speaking for the people who keep these buildings clean, and the lights fixed and all that stuff. There's, they don't, with all due respect, they do not care about a data professional development. [focused on data]

In the statement above, this participant could look more deeply into their appreciation for the professional development opportunity being offered in that instance and recognize that this opportunity was likely just “checking a box” for some. Generally, these “PD Days” were not celebrated as great opportunities to network, collaborate, learn, and develop; they were discussed more as an inconvenience because the colleges used them to discuss college initiatives, present data, and brag about their services.

Another topic that came up around professional development activities being perceived as a waste of time was the lack of experience and training of the facilitators. Participants said:

> So, I was excited going into it thinking that I was going to get some strategies, some actionable tips. And the entire presentation was some woman who worked in [administration], who had never actually taught a class. She'd only been a student. And the best thing she had to say was you have to develop relationships with students. That's it. Like the whole, we were in there for an hour and several other people in my department were part of it too…but as we were leaving, we're like, that was a complete waste of time.
>
> So, we're going through it and then we have a project. And they sent us the project, and it was for us to develop a student leadership program. …they have all three groups doing the same damn thing. This is a bunch of leaders, already people in directors’ positions, at a community college. To me, it seemed freaking useless.
>
> I mean it's just frustrating because it doesn't feel like the people that are running the distance education program are very… I mean I don't know their backgrounds; I don't know if they've ever taught.

In my discussion with them, participants were passionate about professional development that was facilitated by those with ample classroom experience, provided an opportunity for growth, and focused on topics that the faculty identified as important.

Interestingly, when asked about professional development at their institutions that focused specifically on teaching practice, participants began to describe activities focused on topics like Learning Management System (LMS) training, sexual harassment, Title IX, diversity and equity, and accessibility. These are arguably important topics, with some being a federal requirement, but should represent aspects of professional development that are backed by adult learning literature rather than ad hoc offerings focused on technology and compliance. Participants said:

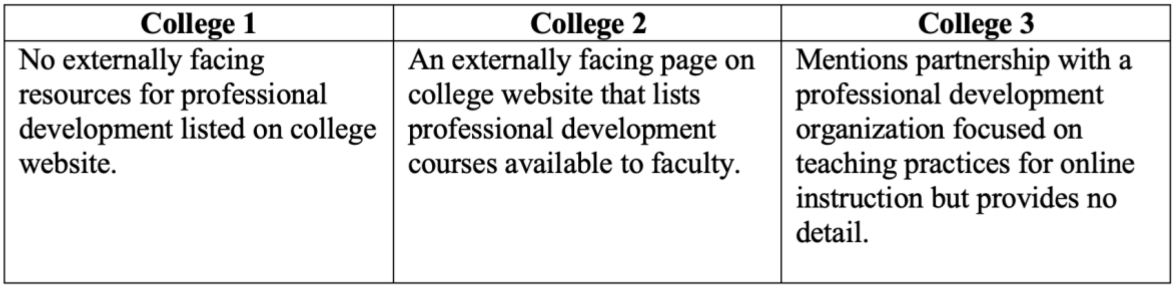
> We get all these trainings for [LMS]. How to create an assignment, how to create a test how to put a video in there. But that's not telling us how to get the objectives.
>
> We had accessibility training that we were all required to complete last year. We have to complete the Title IX or Sexual Harassment training, or what have you every year.
>
> I did have some training in, in like how to set up our [LMS], how to set up our online courses, and they were there it's just really, really like counterintuitive and clunky and messy. And it's constantly changing so we're constantly having to redesign our [LMS], which is just insanely time-consuming, and like seems really, really pointless. And as far as I can tell they're just like almost getting worse and worse and more time-consuming. There are some things that are beneficial, but in general, that's been really challenging because when I’m being asked to spend a whole lot of my precious time changing something for the worse, in my opinion, that's not super effective, I guess.

In the discussions about pedagogy and teaching practice, the lack of exposure to these subjects became evident. It wasn’t clear in their answers if the faculty recognized that they discussed compliance rather than pedagogy. It was as if they believed accessibility, universal design for learning, Title IX, and other compliance requirements were synonymous with adult learning theory and effective teaching practice.

Participants discussed the professional development programs offered by their institutions as both a support and a barrier to their development. Because so many professional development opportunities were offered, faculty could always meet their minimum requirement without needing to look outside of their institutions. On the other hand, many participants did not feel these programs met their needs for development as educators.

Document analysis further supported participants’ indication that there is a lack of teaching practice-focused professional development. Table 4.1 below, demonstrates the findings from the document analysis. It is worth noting that though College 2 listed a majority of their faculty professional development opportunities on their site, none were focused on teaching practice. Most of the resources available focused on technical skills and LMS training rather than adult learning theory and teaching practice. This deficit was identified by multiple participants during their interviews.

Table 4.1: Professional Development on College Websites.



College 1	College 2	College 3
No externally facing resources for professional development listed on college website.	An externally facing page on college website that lists professional development courses available to faculty.	Mentions partnership with a professional development organization focused on teaching practices for online instruction but provides no detail.

Center for Teaching and Learning

Some, five of the twelve participants, had access to a center for teaching and learning. This center offered specialized courses dedicated to the art and science of teaching, as well as resources like instructional designers to help faculty structure their courses and learning materials based on instructional design theory and best practices. All five mentioned it as a tool and had positive things to say about its available resources. Participants said:

> They have developed a Center for Teaching and Learning, which they do a marvelous job of promoting staff development that's geared more towards teaching and learning.
>
> We have the Center for Teaching and Learning. And the Center for Teaching Learning was really, to me it was Quality Matters before Quality Matters existed, so it was like faculty helping faculty…even to this day, the way that it's been communicated to the faculty, or broadcasted out is, if you're somebody who really cares about the quality of your instruction, we have people who can visit your class and kind of give, you know, just sit in the back and kind of watch you teach and take note…and the feedback goes directly to you, it does not go to your supervisor, it's not a part of your faculty evaluation, it is purely voluntary, and it is purely for self-improvement.
>
> The Center for Teaching and Learning. They've tried to get some stuff off the ground, and it hasn't necessarily been successful. But yeah, the whole concept of like, teaching communities or PLC, professional learning communities. I think that kind of

> collaboration is super important, especially because so much of what we do is kind of in a vacuum.

The five faculty participants that had access to the Center for Teaching and Learning communicated that it was a support to their development as teachers. Looking into what faculty said was optimistic about their experiences with the Center for Teaching and Learning, collaboration with other faculty on teaching practice was the underlying commonality with their enthusiasm and positive experiences.

Self-directed learning

Faculty participants identified Google as their primary tool for finding professional development opportunities outside of what is offered by their institution. Participants said:

> Basically, Google search. And rewording what I'm searching for multiple different ways, just to see what's out there. So that's primarily what I rely on.
>
> Like I might have been, I might have been googling something to look up. You know, to just looking for materials or looking for course materials or ideas for a class and found them and then got on their mailing list or something.
>
> And then, sometimes I just might do a search. Like I type in the search engine, and something may pop up, and you know, once you type everything in there, their brother starts sending you stuff.

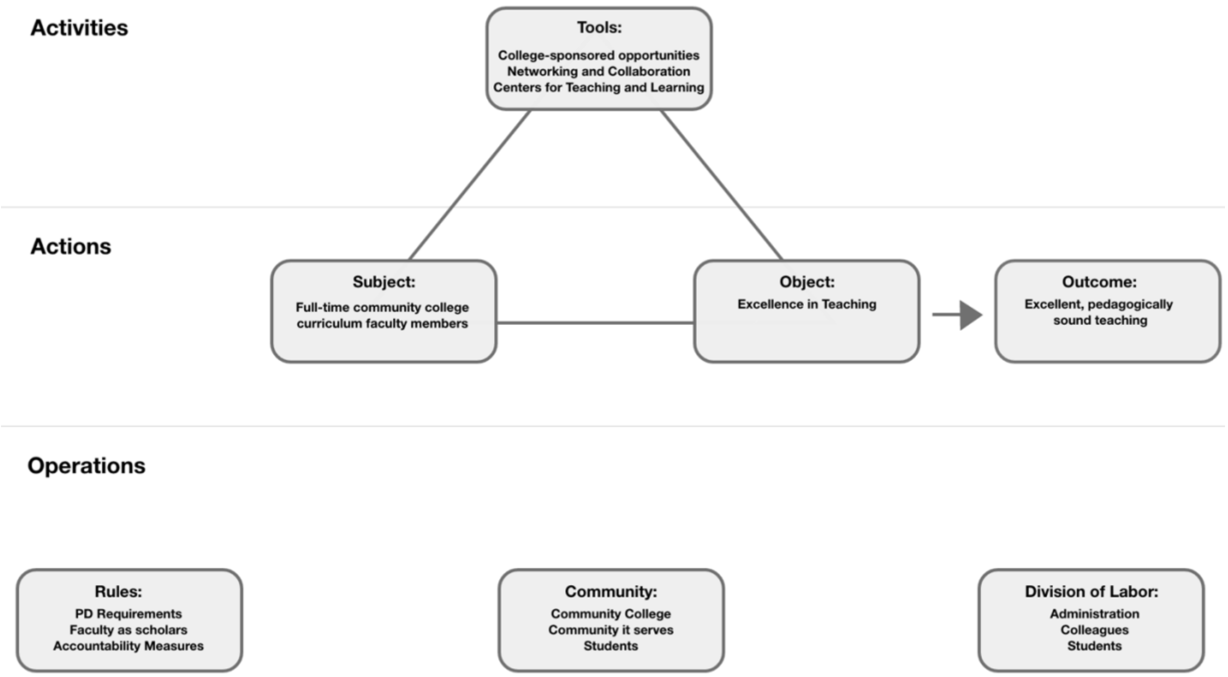
Faculty often did not first turn to their professional development programs or the adult learning literature, instead they overwhelmingly relied on their Google search results to meet their needs for professional development regarding teaching. The activity system at the center of this study appears to be a system that does not allow faculty to utilize their professional judgment to determine their own professional development needs or make decisions regarding what professional growth activities are relevant in their classroom.

The Subject

The subject in the CHAT framework is full-time community college curriculum faculty members. The subject and object are represented as the active agents or drivers of the actions and comprise the center of the activity system triangle. Figure 4.3 below, shows the connections between the tools, subject, and object.

To better understand how faculty participants contextualize their role as teachers, they were asked to identify the characteristics of an “excellent teacher.” This was to help understand how the various aspects of the activity system, as well as the historical context, interact to inform their perspective. This, in turn, informs the activities they select and the tensions that arise along the way. This is what they said:

> An excellent community college instructor is, we care about our people that are in this course, and we want them to succeed. It's not one of those situations where it's like you come to class or not, we don't care, you know. It's not like that; it's more like we want you to be here, and if you don't show up for class, we're going to call you and ask you if you're okay, where have you been, what is going on, can I help you, can I give you some resources to help you. So that's what it really means to me so it's more, more than just teaching.
>
> If you come from a place of care and kindness, you win, every single time. And I think that's what happens with us like when I say, “I’ll never forget being a student.”
>
> I think it means making a connection with each and every one of them and never forgetting what it feels like to be a student.


Activities
Tools:
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Faculty as scholars
Accountability Measures
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Community College
Community it serves
Students
Division of Labor:
Administration
Colleagues
Students

Figure 4.3: CHAT: The Subject.

Overwhelmingly, participants felt that to be excellent teachers, they need to care about their students as people. They felt if they could make personal connections with the students, they would be excellent teachers and in turn, create and support an environment of student success. For the participants in this study, teaching goes much deeper than retention, graduation and transfer rates, and grades. Faculty also recognized that caring about their students and forming relationships with them was not all that was needed to be an excellent teacher. They wanted ways that blended evidence-based teaching practice with an authentic teaching practice, and often these were the activities that they attempted to find on their own.

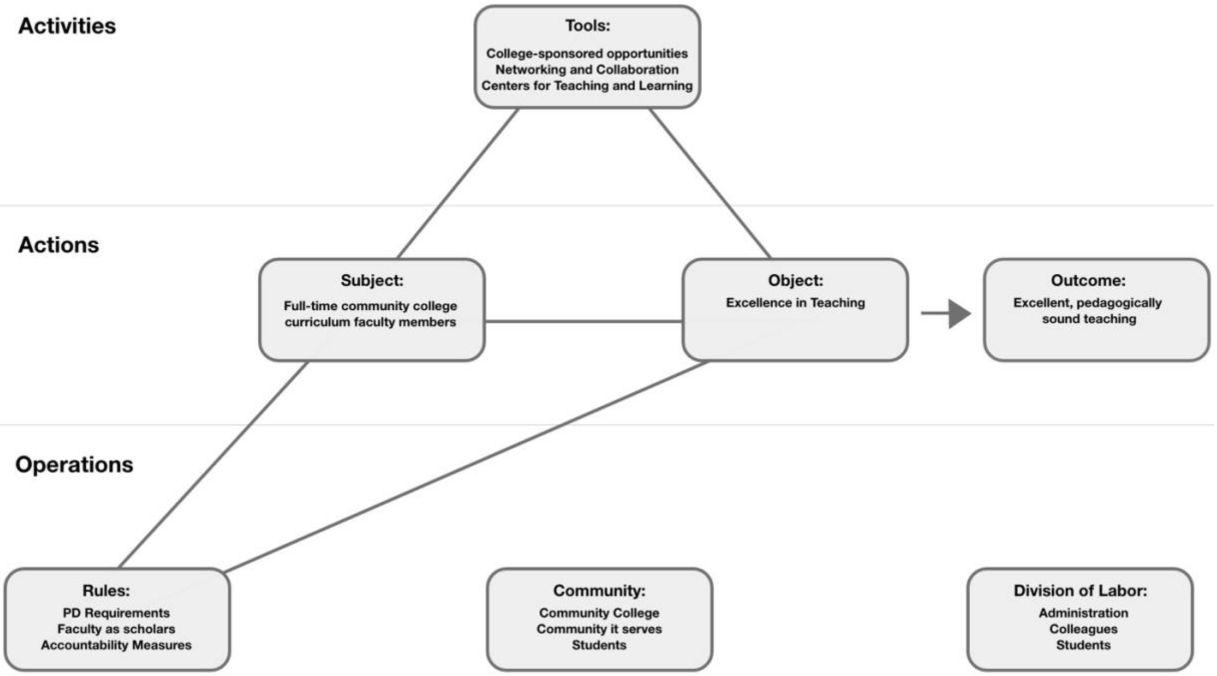
Faculty did not feel their desire to be excellent, as they defined it, was supported in the professional development activities offered by their respective institutions. In their discussions about what it means to be an excellent teacher, they often brought up their lack of training in teaching practice and informally learning from each other. One participant said:

> So, one of my colleagues mentioned that the way she gets better is you know she'll say, “oh this didn't work, I’m thinking about doing blah”, and one of us will say, “Oh, I did blah, and here's what you need to look out for” or “I did blah, and it didn't work really well, but instead I did this.”

Understanding the context of how faculty define and contextualize their role is important for understanding the tools they select and how they employ those tools to move toward the object and outcome. Because each node of CHAT is influenced by the culture, history, and context of the individuals operating within it, it was important to understand the context of how faculty define their role, what they are striving toward, how they define excellent teaching, which can be assumed to inform their choices regarding professional development, and how they believe their actions mediated by the tools they select, guide their path toward the object and outcome.

Rules

In CHAT, rules are the implicit and explicit norms that guide the subject through the activity system. Rules, community, and division of labor lie in the bottom third of the triangle and represent the operations, or routine, unconscious automatic components that drive actions. Figure 4.4 below, illustrates how rules are an underlying factor in the tools that are utilized by the subject and the way the subject navigates through the system toward the object. In this study, it represents the implicit and explicit cultural norms and documented policies that drive faculty to rely on certain tools to reach excellence in teaching.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Colleagues
Students

Figure 4.4: CHAT: Rules.

Professional Development Guidelines and Requirements

Professional development guidelines and requirements represent an explicit rule in the activity system. Specific requirements for the type of professional development activities and hours that are mandated by the college often flow from the top down and faculty have very little say in those requirements. Some examples of these requirements included compliance training focused on federal laws like Title IX, diversity and equity training, ADA compliance and accessibility training, and universal design for learning.

When asked about professional development opportunities they are offered, how they decide what to take, how they meet their respective college’s professional development requirements, and how they log and track their professional development, participants said:

> As far as the school is concerned, we don't have any strict parameters in place for professional development.

> There is no requirement that I know of, but we do report. We have lots of, increasing numbers of professional development opportunities. But I do not think that most, hardly any of them are mandatory. I don't think we have any requirement.

> No, we're required, we're required to complete so many hours of training, but there's no definition on which training or what's required.

Some faculty believed there was a requirement, but they could not recall what that requirement was; some were confident that there was no requirement, and others were confident that there was a requirement. The mix of answers came from faculty teaching at the same college, as well as a mix between the colleges which suggests that this is a systemic issue within the community college system at large.

Most of the faculty participants were keeping a record of what professional development activities they had completed, even in the instances where they were not sure if there was any requirement. When asked about accountability for completing professional development requirements, participants said:

> We keep a log of it, and it comes up during our annual review. And then, our supervisor will ask us for our log and that goes in with our, with our paperwork basically back to HR. We get a contract, the next year. No there's no reward for it. Not specifically I mean other than just personal gain.

> Something that we used to have, I think a 30-hour requirement for professional development a year and I truly don't know how that's being tracked anymore, it was a thing. No idea [how it’s recorded]. I keep, I used to keep a Google Doc.

> Not there's no restriction on it. We are required to do five hours per semester, per year? I'm not entirely sure. And some of the things that they consider to be PD, are not PD, but it still counts.

Faculty were also fairly confident that there were no specific requirements regarding the types of professional development activities they were expected to complete outside of their mandatory compliance training. Regarding the rules around professional development requirements, the participants said:

> So, they had professional development, last Friday, Friday before last, and it was, from 9-3. And they didn't mandate it, however, if you do not attend, they did it on a registration form, but you have to register for these. And they took attendance. Now you don't have to attend, but if you do not attend, you take a day, that’s your leave. So, either you pay with eight hours, or you come to the professional development.
>
> So, we will have required professional development days here. Um, so when we do the Welcome Week thing, we’ll have sessions that are not required but are encouraged.
>
> They hesitate to make things mandatory. Because I guess, several years before I started there, there had been a mandatory event that was a gay guy talking about supporting LGBT. Because it was mandatory, there were a lot of people who pitched a fit about it.

When faculty participants discussed their guidelines and professional development requirements, they expressed that there were mandatory hours they were required to complete, but very few of the professional development opportunities were mandated by the college administration. The participants also stated that there was little requirement around the content of the professional development hours they completed, or where that professional development came from. This did not seem problematic to the faculty and appears to be a common occurrence. After document and landscape analysis, no clear guidelines were discovered.

In their responses, there was no pressure from the administration for faculty to engage with professional development that focused on the art of teaching and learning despite community colleges being primarily focused on teaching. Most faculty were relying on their colleagues for techniques related to teaching and learning rather than actively pursuing the latest research within the field. So, while the faculty participants expressed that there were guidelines on what constitutes professional development and how much of it is required, those guidelines were not clear.

The exception to the lack of agency in professional development is the faculty that taught in the healthcare field. These faculty were very clear on the continuing education and professional development that was required by their fields and generally took responsibility for ensuring that they were completing that professional development and going above and beyond. This is what one of those faculty had to say regarding their professional development as a healthcare faculty member:

> I don't know if my approach is different. I think the motivation to do it might be different. The motivation, it seems like in the general ed sector, in parts of the gen ed sector… I don't want to put them all in the same bucket. In parts of the gen ed sector is very low, the motivation is [low], to actually do these extra things because they do have a pretty good course load. And I, but I think in mind, specifically for a healthcare person, you know we, we have to continuously do professional development in our own profession, so the outlook on, it is a little more motivation to do it in a different sector of life than it is, if you didn't ever have to do, professional development, before. Because we have to get like 20-24 hours every two years, or something like that, just to maintain our credential.

In their statement above, this faculty member recognizes that the requirements for their specific field may drive a different approach to the culture of professional development because they are already required to complete strict continuing education credits each year to maintain their credential. Another healthcare faculty member said:

> Well, I can, I can tell you what happens in my area, because I don't, I don't know what they do in the other areas…I tell my team, you know I expect they're going to do their own professional development, for their skill set because it's mandated to keep your credential. So, I don't need you to be going to [healthcare] things on the college dime. I need you to do things that are related to the college. And so, I know their professional development, their skill set, is going to with the goals of the college, so when they submit a requisition to do something, it has to, they have to include it, one of the goals, how it aligns, what are you going to get, and then what are you going to bring back to the college.

One of the major differences that surfaced in this study regarding guidelines around teaching and learning was that healthcare faculty members are very aware of how they are evaluated on their ability to teach and the impact it has on their students overall. In stark contrast to non-healthcare curriculum faculty, healthcare faculty are directly responsible for and evaluated on pass rates for students who take nationally recognized certification exams at the end of their program to earn their licensure. General education curriculum faculty are not under the same pressure, as there are typically no certification or third-party exams on which they are evaluated. One of the healthcare faculty members discussed the impact that the [certification exam] pass rates have on their program:

> My [healthcare] program is about to be on probation for the [exam] pass rate. So, when they [faculty] presented their proposal to me, I heard, "the student didn't do…. they didn't do this… the student" … and then they said, "and we were short staffed" and then the next thing was Covid. So, what did I do? I found a whole program. It's what we do in the healthcare profession because these numbers have to come up.

Healthcare faculty were very much aware that they are evaluated on their ability to transfer their course materials to their students in a way that translated to success on their healthcare board exams. There was more emphasis placed on healthcare faculty to develop the art of teaching because their success was directly reflected by those student pass rates. In these instances, like the example above, when they were not meeting the pass rate threshold for the certification exam, they were directed by their dean to complete a professional development program focused specifically on best practices of teaching and learning.

This was further evidenced by faculty teaching in healthcare that recognized that general education and transfer curriculum faculty members are not motivated by the same external rules and policies governing their credentials. Regarding motivation to seek out teaching-focused professional development, one participant said:

> I don't know if my approach is different, but I think the motivation to do it might be different. The motivation, it seems like in the general ed sector, in parts of the gen ed sector, I don't want to put them all in the same bucket. In parts of the gen ed sector is very low, the motivation is, to actually do these extra things because they do have a pretty good course load. But um, you know, for somebody who never had to do professional development, because it didn't have a bearing on anything, would be different. I would think that person had less motivation to even do professional development. Unless it was something very interesting, you know and I'm a big proponent of if I'm not interested, I'm probably not going to listen so…

This participant openly recognized that the rules by which they are bound have a direct impact on their motivation to develop in certain areas, like teaching and learning. It is unclear from participant responses if this is evident to the faculty whose credentials are not tied to mandated professional development.

Faculty as Lifelong Learners

This rule is best represented as an intrinsic, idealistic cultural norm in the culture of higher education faculty. Ideally, faculty are the epitome of lifelong learners who utilize reflective practice and the newest research findings to constantly improve their craft. For most faculty, there is no external, formally written rule that says faculty are required to be lifelong learners, but there is an intrinsic expectation of it that places pressure on the faculty. This desire to improve is not mandated in any way by the college, but there are faculty that feel the intrinsic pressure to be the best for their students.

In fact, most faculty participants discussed their desire to continually learn new ways to manage their classrooms and actively engage with their students. They not only had an intrinsic desire to improve and become excellent teachers, but they also had a desire to improve because they recognized their role in the long-term success of their students. One faculty participant said, “You know, we can learn, we can know our skill set all day long, but if we're saying we're educators and the students aren't learning, then we're not teaching.” This was a particularly impactful statement regarding the cultural expectation of what an educator is. This participant recognized that there is a deeper connection to being an educator than just communicating new information to their students; it also displays an underlying desire to be excellent.

Student Success

Every faculty participant had the desire to play an active role in the success of their students. While this norm was externally mandated to some degree, the faculty participants felt a deep connection to student success. Regarding their role in student success, faculty said:

> In my courses, I always think of it as "okay, what makes the most sense for them?" I design things from a student-centered experience rather than what's easier for me. One of my favorite things to do is like, share materials with other people in my department like, "I'm struggling with this. What do you guys think? Have you encountered this in the past?" I think that kind of collaboration is super important, especially because so much of what we do is kind of in a vacuum.

> There is one shining light on the faculty role that I don't feel like it's really emphasized in any role that I've held in student affairs. And that's the fact that the faculty feel more responsible for the finished product that we send off than any student affairs professional. And I think that if I was to, if somebody was to ask me, "Well, how do you know that?" I would speak to that experience about how I stand my ground with students. And I recognize the fact that I have to teach basic skills, yet I am teaching and developing professionals. But if the if someone was to say, "Well, what's your proof?" I would simply say, "Well, why don't you attend graduation and see how many student affairs professionals show up? Now, look at how many faculty are there. And who did the students flock to?"

> When they're with me, I want them to feel like a person. I want them to feel respected.

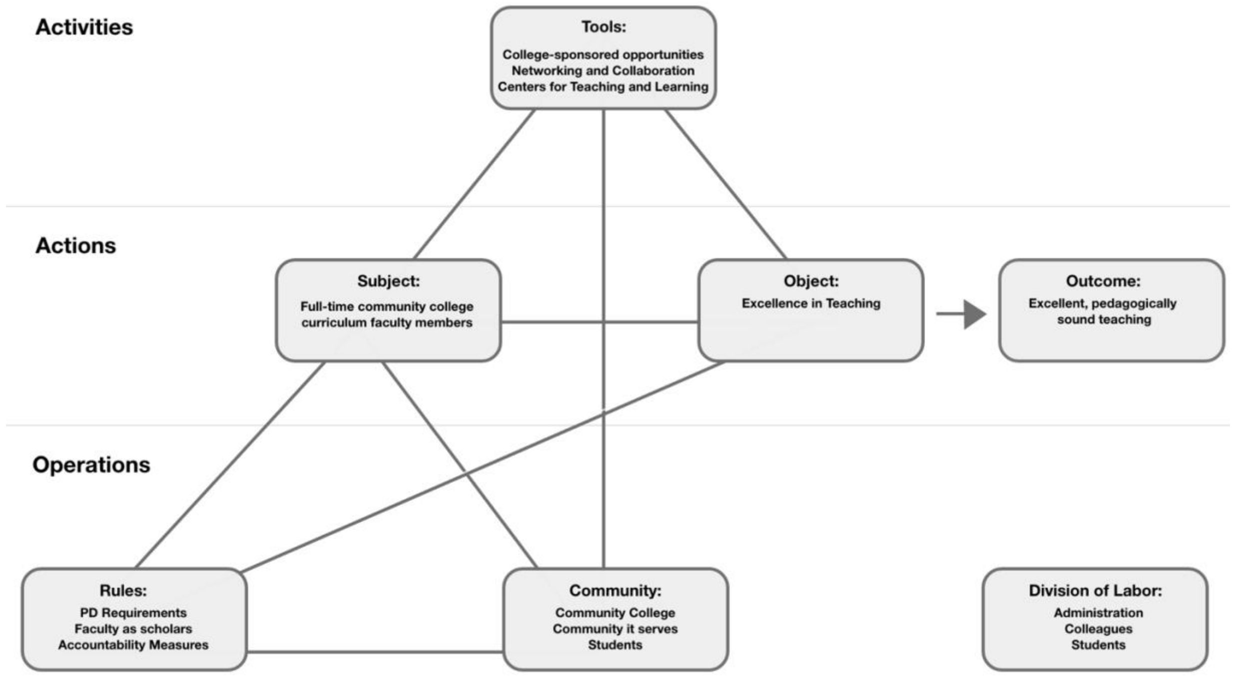
In their responses, the faculty recognized the role they play in student success, even if they didn't explicitly state it. At the forefront of their desire to be excellent was their recognition that their students must be cared for at their most basic needs before they can focus on their duties as a student. Faculty participants expressed this as concern around food security, stability in the students' home and family life, and through recognition that many of their students are working or are parents. Their desire to ensure that their students were fed, safe, and had their basic needs met was not in any way mandated by the college; it was an implicit desire to care for their students in the ways they can as an educator.

Community

Community in CHAT represents the environment in which the activity system is situated. In this study, the community is the community college at large, undergirded by the higher education system as a whole, as well as the various roles within the community college as a workplace. The community also includes the students and the larger geographic community that the community college serves as stakeholders. Figure 4.5 below shows how community is interacting with the nodes of the activity system discussed above.

In this case, community can be framed as an institutional logic. Institutional logics are defined as the "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Organizational logics provide a basis for understanding individual and organizational goals, strategies, and practices, as well as, how learning is shaped (Georgiou & Arenas, 2023; Lounsbury et al., 2021; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

How the subject interacts with the community in CHAT can further be considered through the institutional logics' lenses of Communities of Place and Communities of Practice. Communities of place are formed in geographic locations, which permit, and in some cases, impose interaction among members and exemplify "elements of local culture, norms, identity, and laws" (Marquis & Battilana, 2009, p. 286). Communities of practice, in the terms of organizational logics, are comprised of members who share lexica, understandings, assumptions, and practices (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Wenger, 1998), and typically pursue learning, innovation, and exchange of knowledge (Georgiou & Arenas, 2023).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Division of Labor:
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Colleagues
Students

Figure 4.5: CHAT: Community.

The Covid-19 Global Pandemic

The Covid-19 Global Pandemic affected the entire world, so it is no surprise that it affected higher education at large, and as a result, the community college faculty. Each participant discussed how their role, their expectations, their students, their courses, their responsibilities, and their professional development activities were affected by Covid-19. Covid-19 was mentioned by every participant in their interview; it spanned the nodes of the activity system in varying ways and by various degrees.

During the span of this study, the community node was the most affected by the Covid-19 Global Pandemic. This was obvious in participant responses. Very quickly faculty were shifted from face-to-face courses to online courses, conferences and in-person professional development events were canceled or moved to an online venue, the little collaboration and networking they were able to take advantage of when they were able to be present on campus disappeared, and they were no longer able to make the student connections that they feel drive student success.

The impact that the Covid-19 Global Pandemic had on how they navigate this activity system was evident in their responses:

> (referring to Covid) I mean, I feel I know that there are so many teachers that were just lost. But I've been teaching online classes, for like three or four years or, more than that, so I felt I was just you know, it was just a lot extra because you know, like I said is just a lot of extra grading and a lot of extra reading but it's um, but I didn't feel quite so, like I yeah I would have been a real hard if that was your first introduction.
>
> We will sometimes have a structured required professional development day, usually in spring. It's gotten goofed up a little bit the last couple years. Like Covid happened right before we were supposed to have it in '20 and then last year, I think we just couldn't get it all together. They did one for staff, and I think they were just like "faculty need a minute."
>
> Conferences, prior to COVID. We really took advantage of those things. But now it's like, yeah, we're down. Folks were burned out before 2020 happened, and folks are really burned out now. And you know, some breathing room, I think, is what people need.

Faculty felt unprepared for such a huge shift in such a large part of how they interact with and navigate their day-to-day life within the bounds of this system. Faculty had to replan their courses very quickly for an online format which meant changing the structure of lectures, discussions, active learning activities, exam prep, and exams. A major barrier for faculty was the lack of technology that many students were facing. One participant said, "we act sometimes like internet's running water at people's homes, and it's not." Again, faculty had to adapt overnight to the needs of their students in a way that many felt unprepared to handle.

Covid-19 had a significant effect on participant responses regarding their professional development as many of the opportunities that faculty stated they prefer, like observing good teaching, attending conferences, networking, and collaboration were no longer available as a means to navigate toward the object, excellence in teaching. Faculty expressed feeling more siloed than ever. One participant typically starts the academic year with a clean slate and uses that as an opportunity to try new things they learned from the previous professional development activities expressed that during Covid-19, they chose to simply course copy from the previous year. Faculty expressed doing the minimum that was required because the cognitive load of such a major shift in their day-to-day experience was causing burnout. Responses from participants were focused on survival rather than development.

Time and Energy

In this study, time was so deeply connected to the community because of the nature of the system itself. Although faculty expressed that they were completing their work in a vacuum or silo, their responses indicated how reliant they are on the community in which they are situated.

Time and energy spanned the rules and community nodes of the CHAT system in ways that cannot be viewed outside of their interconnectedness. While there is no explicit rule or expectation that faculty are always available to their students, one faculty member explicitly stated what other participants indirectly stated but were not willing to directly say, “Many people think teaching is a 9-5 and it just isn’t. You’re at home answering emails, and grading, and prepping, and everything else.” There is implicit pressure on the faculty to work long hours because they want to ensure they are upholding their responsibilities to their students, even in the wake of college mandates, professional development to maintain their credentials, and the pressure to always be trying the latest trends in their classroom. Faculty also receive pressure from their leadership, their colleagues, and their students to always be at the forefront of classroom and educational innovation when it comes to student success and teaching practice.

Time and energy, in various capacities, were recognized by each participant as the number one barrier to their development as teachers. Again, participant responses regarding time and energy spanned multiple nodes within the activity system but were deeply rooted in community. Here is what participants said about time and energy:

> I find myself sometimes you know, not signing up for things, partly because I don't have time to give all of my day to professional development.
>
> Time is definitely one of them. Teaching schedules make it very difficult to fit PD and especially when the PD is being run by other faculty with different schedules there, or student affairs professionals who are strictly on an eight to five schedule. I know that our institution, specifically teaching schedules for most faculty, not all, but for most seem to be narrowed in between eight to two.
>
> Only one person came and the person who was in, she was new, was in charge of it was like, “I don't understand why our attendance is so low.” I was like classes start in two days, we just got back, everybody's panicking. This is something cool to do a month after class starts.

Lack of time to complete professional development, as well as the timing of when in the semester it is held, played a role in whether faculty attended. Faculty identified professional development activities like PD Days, day-long courses, activities only being held Monday through Friday during standard business hours, and courses that require several day commitments during the semester, as sometimes desirable but difficult to attend because of the lack of flexibility in their teaching schedule. It was clear that time as a barrier in the context of the timing of professional development was also tightly bound with the division of labor in the activity system.

Faculty also identified the lack of time and energy to implement what they learned into their courses. Several faculty participants discussed how they would love to restructure parts of their courses to fit in these great activities that they learned about through professional development activities, but they don’t have the time and energy to make those kinds of changes on top of the mandatory changes that are required by administration. This played a role in whether or not those faculty saw excellence as an achievable outcome for them. That perception, in turn, affected the way they interacted with and navigated the activity system. Here is what participants said regarding this:

> You know, just being able to like take that time to sit down and like reconfigure like, you know, there's always stuff that I think like “Oh when I can really have time to work on that I’m going to fix this assignment, I’m going to make changes to this and make changes that” and just that's kind of… so being excellent you know, I don't know that that's something I’ve ever achieved.
>
> You know, not enough time. Like when you're teaching like I said seven courses this semester, um it makes it a little hard to like squeeze it in or feel okay doing it. You know, I mean, I’ll do it a lot of times, but sometimes I’m just like “Oh gosh I have 30 papers to grade and I’m two weeks behind” and yeah um, yeah, I mean time, is the number one barrier for sure.
>
> Um, and you know we say basically we need time, we need money, and you know, we need to be able to not have to teach an overload to make the salary better.

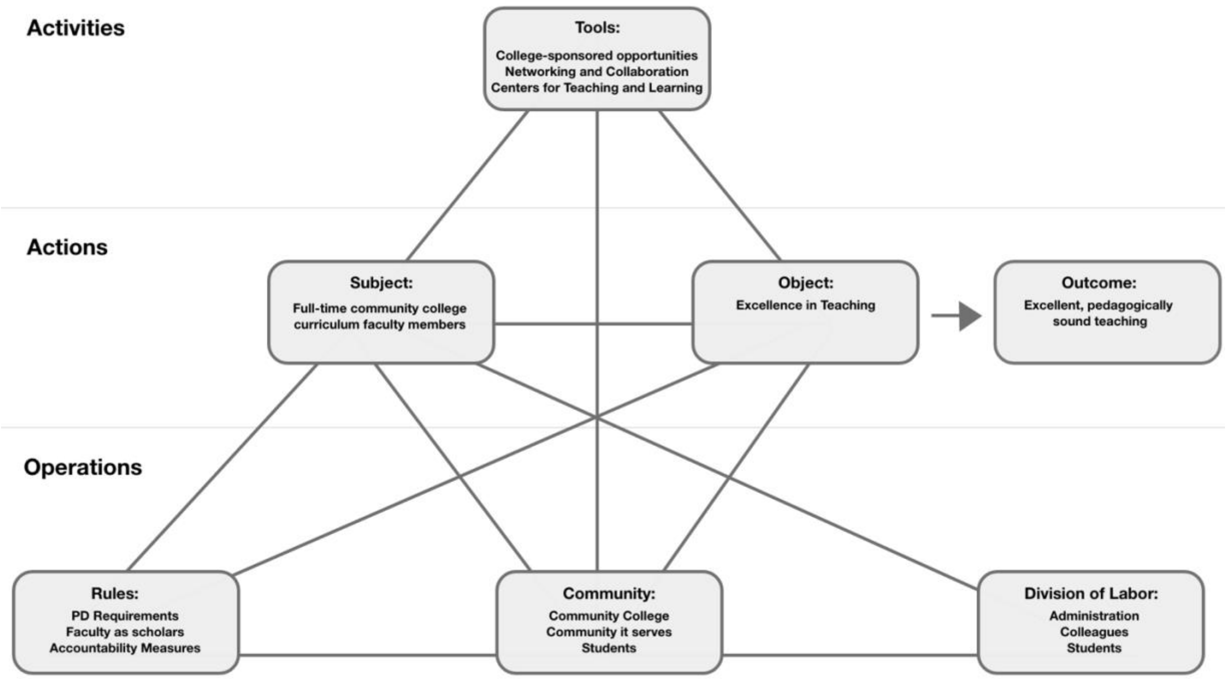
An unintentional finding in this study was a systemic issue within the higher education system at large. Faculty at the community college are not paid a wage that they feel allows them the ability to work a single job or take on a single course load. They are often adding to their course load, taking summer contract extensions, and working part-time jobs on top of their full-time teaching positions to bring their salary to a higher range. This leaves faculty with little time to recover during and between semesters, improve their courses, take part in professional development activities, and implement new techniques in their courses.

To further illustrate how deeply connected time and energy are to the community node, faculty did express that even when they are feeling some degree of burnout, when a professional development opportunity is collaborative, well organized, facilitated by faculty who exemplify excellent teaching, and is a topic of interest, they often come out of the professional development experience with a renewed energy and excitement to utilize what they learned and experienced. In many cases though, this excitement and energy fade as they return to their daily tasks and soon realize they don’t have the time or the support to make the changes.

Division of Labor

In CHAT, the division of labor is the way work is split amongst the various actors within an activity system. In this study, division of labor is influenced by the way the administration assigns course schedules, mandates and communicates professional development opportunities, how professional development programs are developed and administered to faculty, and how faculty split the work amongst themselves as they communally navigate the activity system toward excellence in teaching. Figure 4.6 below, displays the final mediating node in the CHAT framework.

Full-time faculty were feeling burnt out by the pressure to constantly take on more than their full-time requirements in order to increase their pay to a wage on which they could live. One faculty member said, “I did not make enough money to be able, I think I taught three classes at the most, and I never had you know I had to have other jobs to make a living.” Another faculty member spoke for the collective “we” when they said, “Basically we need time, we need money, and you know, we need to be able to not have to teach an overload to make the salary better.”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Students
Division of Labor:
Administration
Colleagues
Students

Figure 4.6: CHAT: Division of Labor.

One faculty member who had previously held roles within the college that they deemed as “supplementary to student success” identified an interesting topic within the division of labor node. They said:

> I think that we just pump so much support and funding into all of these supplemental roles. I don't want to speak against a role that I held. But sure, we just put so much time and effort into individuals who are supplemental to what we actually do. What we actually do in our job is create professionals or prepare students to transfer to an institution that will finish the job of creating the professional. And we still have to acknowledge our role in that first two years. And so if we would spend more time worrying about the quality of that product that we develop, which means that we have to be more concerned with the quality of our instruction, the quality of the instructors that we hire, whether or not they're actually not only doing their job, but doing all they can to provide the best experience possible, then we don't have to worry about retention, because we've been become in demand, right?

This was an interesting perspective because this participant had held supplemental roles that are adjacent to student success in the community college before they transitioned into a faculty role. This perspective is a direct reflection of how deep seeded division of labor is within the overall navigation toward excellence in teaching. While an individual faculty member may navigate and move toward excellence in teaching irrespective of the impact that other nodes may have, CHAT is a systems analysis, and the overall navigation of the system is reflective of the capabilities of moving toward the object that the subjects face as a whole.

Faculty also expressed concerns that they will make changes in their courses that are inspired by what they learned in their professional development activities but don't feel that there is enough support from the administration to try something new and not see immediate results. They expressed that they didn't feel there was support for failures as a learning experience rather than an opportunity to punish them for making a mistake. In this, faculty expressed that they were holding back and unwilling to engage with the active learning process because their institutions were not structured to support the inevitable failures that are built into the adult learning process.

Faculty viewing professional development activities as a waste of time came from one of two places: they were not confident in the ability of the facilitators to deliver information that was actually useful or interesting to them, or they were energized by what they learned in their professional development activities but did not feel supported in their current environment to spend the time and energy trying something new.

The Object

The object in the CHAT framework is what is produced or practiced when the subject moves through the activity system and represents the full interconnectedness of the nodes of the system and how they interact with each other. In this study, the object is faculty excellence in teaching. In CHAT, the object can be the same as or different than the outcome and can be intentional or unintentional. In the case of this study, the object and the outcome are the same and intentional.

The subject and object lie in the center of the triangle that represents the activity system and again, represent the active agents as drivers of the actions, which utilize tools to mediate the interactions between the subject and the object. The subject and object are acted on by both the apex and base of the triangle that represented the activity system. In this case, the full-time community college curriculum faculty are utilizing the tools and instruments to actively achieve excellence in teaching, but the use of the available tools is mediated by the underlying culture of the system.

In anthropology, culture can be broadly defined as “information capable of affecting individuals’ behavior that they acquire from other members of their species by teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission.” (Boyd & Richerson, 2005, p. 7). This definition is closely aligned with Schein’s (2010) work on organizational culture, in which organizational culture is conceptualized as the “evolving adaptation of a group”, referring to those learned solutions to the problems of internal integration and external adaptation. Schein (2010) sums up his definition of culture as “pretty much everything that a group has learned as it has evolved.” (p. 5).

Figure 4.7 illustrates how the division of labor impacts the manner in which the subject navigates the system, how the rules are applied, the effect on the community, the tools that are utilized, and the ultimate effect on the object.

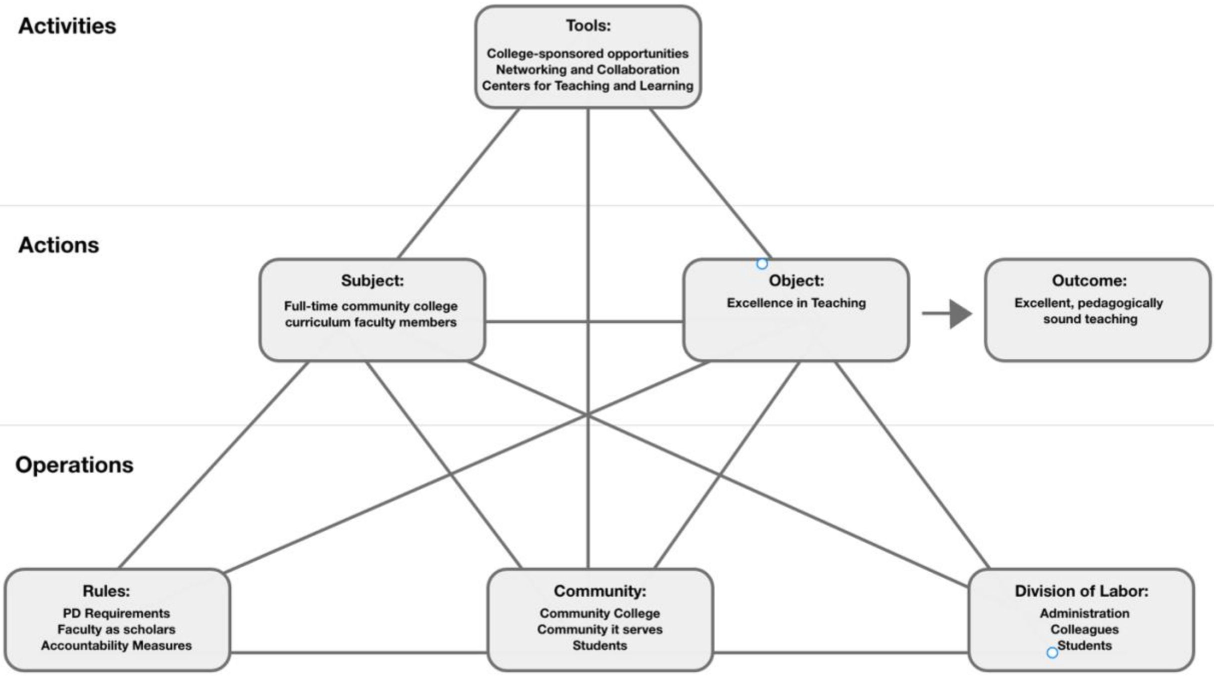
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Figure 4.7: CHAT: The Object.

Faculty participants were asked to describe an excellent teacher, as well as how they believe their institution describes an excellent teacher. The participants expressed the desire to be excellent but felt as though they still had work to do. Table 4.2 illustrates these descriptions. Participants generally felt that their description of an excellent teacher and their interpretation of how their institution would describe an excellent teacher were aligned. While participants felt as though their description of an excellent teacher aligned with their institution's, it is noteworthy to point out the difference in language used between the two. When asked how *they* describe an excellent teacher, the faculty used descriptors that represent maintaining relationships with the students. In comparison, the list of descriptors is notably shorter and used mostly educational jargon and college catchphrases when faculty were asked how their institutions would describe an excellent teacher. Contrastingly, the institution description is comprised of mostly measurable descriptors whereas the faculty description is comprised mostly of what are arguably personality or relational traits.

Table 4.2 Participant Descriptions of Excellent Teachers.

Participants described an excellent teacher as someone who:	Participants believe their institution would describe an excellent teacher as someone who:
• Cares about their students as a whole person • Communicates expectations with their students • Holds students accountable for their own success • Actively cares about the success and wellbeing of their students and communicates that sentiment to them • Provides students with feedback for improvement • Receives student feedback and uses it to improve as a teacher • Is compassionate toward students • Continuously learns and desires to be excellent • Encourages students when they struggle but knows when a student has reached their limit • Never forgets what it’s like to be a student and incorporates that into their student-teacher relationship	• Meets the students where they are • Has high retention rates • Values diversity, equity, and inclusion • Demonstrates “good customer service” • Is student-centered • Has high success rates

Notably, no participant noted expertise in pedagogy or teaching practice as an element that comprises excellence in teaching. However, it was implicit in some discussions regarding continuous learning, reflective practice, and using feedback to improve. Many of the participants recognized and identified their lack of formal training and exposure to adult learning theory as a significant barrier to their initial development as community college teaching professionals. Participants said:

> I came in from working in the field, you know I haven't taught anybody a day in my life, and then the college was like “oh for real? We didn’t know that some of you didn't actually know how to teach.”
>
> We don't receive any form of how you teach a class. We haven’t been taught to teach… we learn as we go, and I think that's a barrier.
>
> I had no experience with teaching, and I asked “what, I don't know how to teach” she said, “do what you know”, and that was good for me because I knew what I knew, but I just had to figure out how to get them to understand what I know.

The scarcity of formal training for incoming community college faculty is a well-documented phenomenon and was demonstrated in participant responses in this study. Several participants referenced how the lack of formal training and exposure to adult learning theory and teaching best practices encouraged their tendency to revert to the way they were taught. One participant said, “We're armed with the tools of subject matter expertise, but arguably not with teaching.”

Summary

This chapter discussed each node of the CHAT framework and how full-time community college faculty navigate the complex system of professional development at their community colleges. The discussion was presented in a linear fashion but using examples from participant interviews and diagrams of CHAT, every effort was made to show the interconnected nature of the framework. Because of the complex, multifaceted nature of the activity system, aspects often cross and span nodes within the CHAT framework. The CHAT framework exposes how the system impacts the subjects and their successful navigation toward the object.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study described and analyzed community college curriculum faculty members' professional development needs relative to teaching and learning within their organizational context. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provided the framework to explore how this activity system operates and the ways in which the subject navigates and interacts with the various aspects of the system. This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their activities for professional development in support of their teaching roles?
2. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their needs for professional development in support of their teaching roles?
3. How do community college curriculum faculty members frame and describe their context as it shapes, supports, or impedes professional development in support of their teaching roles?

Key Findings

Finding One: Community college faculty contextualize professional development through excellent teaching. The data indicate faculty and institutional definitions of excellent teaching differ, which has implications for professional development.

Faculty perspective: Excellent teachers prioritize relational and caring elements of teaching

To gain a deeper understanding of faculty members' roles and professional development choices, faculty were asked to describe what it means, from their perspective, to be an excellent teacher. As described from a participant perspective, an excellent teacher cares about their students, recognizes them as whole individuals who bring experience to each class, and values the faculty-learner relationship they develop. These humanistic elements were central rather than peripheral to successful learning experiences. Moreover, there was a high level of awareness among faculty participants regarding their students' struggles. As educators, participants were motivated to provide as many opportunities for success as possible, while also acknowledging that certain limitations may exist. A recent study on the experiences of community college faculty in multigenerational classrooms supports this general finding (McClanahan, 2022). McClanahan's findings suggested that faculty deeply care about their community college student's learning experiences, particularly adult students, and this caring ethos drives their attitudinal and behavioral response to student struggles. They demonstrated flexibility, empathy, and a recognition that their limited exposure to formal adult learning theory "may actually deflect them from being more finely attuned to the more academic adult learner literature framed in a formal sense – through the study and application of adult learning theories" (p. 157).

Returning to this study's participants, faculty members interview discussions brought to light an unconscious consistent alignment with adult learning and education research related to excellent teaching tenets, based upon accumulated experiential knowledge rather than explicitly developed from academic literature as a source of professional knowledge. Thus, to faculty, developing trusting relationships with their students was consistent with authentic, student-centered pedagogy (Knowlton, 2000) and excellence in teaching. Faculty instincts in this study were consistent with previous research suggests that student-faculty relationships are the single most significant factor in positive educational outcomes for students of color and first-generation students (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018; Felten & Lambert, 2020).

Within adult education, Knowles' theory of andragogy (Loeng, 2018) suggests that adult education not only includes tailored instructional strategies and practices conductive to adult learning, but it stems from a philosophy that adults, as learners, are fully empowered in their own thinking, feeling and shaping of their educational experiences (Nottingham Andragogy Group, 1981, p. 2. as cited in Loeng). Thus, teaching adults isn't just about technical, banking theories of knowledge acquisition, it includes the learner's full holistic involvement and meaning making that connects their learning to their lives (Neumann, 2014). Faculty also recognized that learning happens in more places than their classrooms; students are learning and engaging with their new knowledge in the various aspects of their educational, social, professional, and personal lives (Neumann & Bolitzer, 2014). Within the interviews, Knowles or other theories were not explicitly mentioned or discussed by participants. However, their descriptions and analysis of their professional practice regarding excellence in teaching and creating meaningful, successful learning environments were rooted in adult education core philosophical and practical constructs. This opens the door to consideration of how professional development for community college faculty might connect strong experiential 'best practices' to the adult education literature, allowing for deeper development, refinement, and sources of knowledge.

Given the strength of the finding that this underlying ethos informed and drove faculty interpretations of and interactions within the activity system, it was somewhat jarring to see the contrast with the institutional perspective, at least as perceived by the study participants. There was evidence that the institution's policies, rules, and overall culture served as a barrier to faculty's ability to leverage their teaching philosophy and connect with, assist, or advocate for students during difficult times. For instance, participants lamented a policy that required them to drop a student from their course after a certain number of absences. Besides negatively affecting the faculty-student relationship, this policy also hindered students' academic and financial progress. Their capacity to exercise flexibility and develop mechanisms for students to persist and engage in their learning was curtailed, and concomitantly served as a source of friction as professional development offered was focused upon mechanisms for documenting and efficiently exiting students who bumped into institutional level policies rather than on ways for faculty to create alternative spaces for students to continue learning.

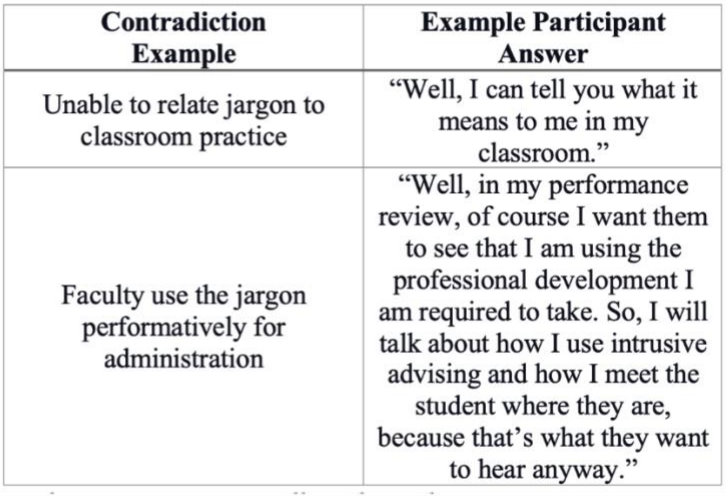
Participants observed a broad connection between the quality of relationships they built with their students and academic performance, a concept consistently researched, further demonstrating that faculty instincts align with the core adult and higher education literature (Ewing Goodman, 2021; McClanahan, 2022). Past empirical work suggests that we underestimate, in practice, the value of faculty presence regarding learner motivation, engagement and success (Choy, 2002; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Schreiner et al., 2011). Research shows that students highly value the interactions they have with faculty when they can see themselves in them, someone who makes them feel like they matter and belong, someone who encourages them to strive for their dreams, and someone who they want to emulate (Seeger, 2018), all characteristics that were referenced by faculty in this study through their own experience with students.

Viewing from the vantage point of a CHAT activity system – faculty were engaged in an ongoing series of contradictions – in seeking professional development that promoted caring, flexible approaches, they would be unable to implement suggested pedagogies due to perceived institutional expectations and policy conflicts. If faculty immersed themselves in professional development focused on the practice of dropping students based on number of absences, for example, they would in many ways, adopt and implement approaches to their professional practice that violate their experiential instincts and dedication to an authentic, student-centered approach to teaching.

To further examine the activity system dynamics, participants were also asked to describe an excellent teacher from the assumed perspective of their institution. At a surface level, responses centered on high retention and success rates, being “student-centered,” humanistic efforts of “meeting the student where they are,” and valuing diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, the faculty responses had a connotation and tone that was quite different in expressing the rhetoric of the colleges. There was an obvious struggle in their descriptions of an excellent teacher from the perspective of their institutions. After spending some time thinking about how they would answer this question, one faculty member requested we move on to the next topic. At the heart of this discomfort the data indicate that while faculty and their institutions use the same language, words, and phrases they do not necessarily mean the same thing.

There were two apparent activity system contradictions regarding institutionally delivered language, shown below in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Contradictions in Institutionally Delivered Language.



Contradiction Example	Example Participant Answer
Unable to relate jargon to classroom practice	“Well, I can tell you what it means to me in my classroom.”
Faculty use the jargon performatively for administration	“Well, in my performance review, of course I want them to see that I am using the professional development I am required to take. So, I will talk about how I use intrusive advising and how I meet the student where they are, because that’s what they want to hear anyway.”

First, in some cases, faculty members reported that they are unable to relate the jargon to their classroom practice. As a result, the faculty member usually deflected their answer with, “Well, I can tell you what it means to me.” Secondly, there were instances where faculty members made the choice to use the institutionally prescribed language that administration expects to hear from them. It is generally difficult then, to distinguish between the authentic use of jargon and the performative use of jargon in tools such as professional development catalogs, university-wide surveys, and annual performance reviews. Because it is understood by faculty members that the jargon should be used in a specific context, and they are aware of the cultural impact it has on how their teaching is perceived, they use the terminology performatively and appropriately. This was the most common way that faculty used institutionally delivered language in this study. Despite receiving the language explicitly, faculty practice and align with a definition that better reflects their vision of excellence. The phrase “customer service” regarding student success was a prime example of this resistance. Faculty expressed an explicit dislike for the phrase, some refused to acknowledge it all together, others recognized their institution’s definition then provided their own version of how they drive student success.

The use of this jargon reflects tension and contradictions in the activity system between how participants describe excellent teaching and how they think their institutions describe it. Despite knowing the words and phrases, faculty either found it difficult to incorporate them into their practice or chose not to. Taken a step further, when the interview discussions built and shifted towards a discussion of how excellent teaching influences professional development needs and delivery, the gap widened. Faculty appeared to be contemplating a realization of professional practice that is conventionally successful without reaching a student in ways that they believed created excellence in learning.

Interestingly, there is a plethora of discussion about the use of jargon in higher education. These discussions have been going on for at least two decades. In a 2000 interview for Black Issues in Higher Education, Dr. Talbert O. Shaw, president of Shaw University in Raleigh, NC, contends that many education-related expressions simply are fads that don’t carry much substance. He doesn’t much cotton to jargon. He also said, “I feel most are attention-getting, but I really don’t pay much attention to them. They can be catchy -- but unless you know their meaning, they don’t help much,” Shaw says, adding most originate with those promoting a particular education theory.” Shaw's contentions still hold true 23 years later. Given that excellent teachers want to build relationships with students and have the flexibility to be responsive, and similar, if not identical language is used to describe professional development that comes from differing philosophical standpoints, a focus on faculty professional development needs would have to include a) new or adapted mechanisms for implementation, experimentation, and flexibility in use of adult education learning theories.

Faculty perspective: Excellent teachers are authentic

In this study, faculty interpret and interact authentically with active, connected learning. Authenticity in teaching has long been a concern of researchers working on adult education and learning (Ashton, 2010; Brookfield, 2006; Cranton, 2001; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenbelt, 2007; Palmer, 1997; Rappel, 2015). According to Cranton and Carusetta (2004), faculty engaged in developmental and potentially transformative activities include those who reflect upon and cultivate their teaching skills, practices identified and desired by faculty in this study. Though there are scholars who define authenticity differently, authenticity in teaching is generally defined as ensuring that faculty’s teaching approach aligns with their practices, that actions match words, and being able and willing to acknowledge mistakes (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). To be able to express themselves authentically in the classroom, faculty must have opportunities to learn and examine who they are as educators. Scholars describe authenticity as a transformative process of self-awareness

(Mezirow, 2000; Grimmet & Neufeld, 1994; Palmer, 2017), a concept informally demonstrated by faculty in this study through their self-driven professional development efforts.

Participants in this study acknowledged that there are instructional practices and techniques that are congruent with student success outcomes, thus they could strengthen their relationships with their students, while simultaneously feeling that in other ways their institutional practices and policies lessen the effectiveness of those relationships. Faculty members in this study attempted to address this gap through collaborative efforts with their colleagues and critical examination of discipline-specific teaching and learning literature. In some ways, faculty felt as though their ability to be their authentic selves through their teaching was stifled by their institution's policies, reiterating points made by Hunt (2006) in his study on institutional constraints of authenticity in teaching.

An authentic, student-centered learning approach emphasizes the importance of mutuality and building strong social relationships with fellow students as well as opportunities for collaboration with instructors (McDavid et al., 2018). In this way, students are naturally held accountable for their progress and actively participate in supporting others with their learning process. This aspect of teaching authenticity could be better supported via professional development – in helping faculty to design mutual, collaborative learning mechanisms and environments.

Self-directed, collaborative scholarly reading groups help fill the needs gap for professional development

Participants in this study further expressed the desire to develop a consistent practice of evidence-based teaching and learning and critical reflection as a part of their professional growth development. To illustrate, participants valued leading or participating in research reading groups that blended their discipline with adult education teaching methods as evidence of their commitment and growth. Interestingly, the college did not sponsor or lead these reading groups. In fact, some faculty stated that they didn't report this activity on their professional development logs, so this activity is possibly more common than we think. Faculty independently created and participated in reading groups, with the goal of integrating research into teaching practice in their disciplines. Through collaborative practice, reading group members discussed their findings, brainstormed new teaching practices for their courses, reflected on their implementation and re-implementation experiences. This study's participants demonstrated what is currently called reflective teaching, developed from John's Dewey's (1933) original research on reflective thinking.

Schön (1991) recognized two types of reflective practice: reflection-in- action, where one engages in reflective thinking while still occupied by the situation, and reflection-on-action, where one engages in critical thought about a situation in a post hoc manner. Participants in this study were primarily engaged in reflection-in-action because the underlying structure of their environment does not allow for the time to reflect and make changes after. Faculty found themselves making constant changes, on the fly, throughout the semesters rather than having the time and space to reflect in a post hoc manner, turn to the research literature, and implement again. This left many faculty weary of attempting new teaching practices and skills in their classrooms because they didn't feel supported in the learning process which inevitably includes failure. Faculty didn't feel as though they had the support to learn from failure, which unavoidably undermines learning (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2019).

The importance of self-directed faculty learning is emphasized in the research literature (Landry et al., 2022; Neuman, 2014; Stockdale & Brockett, 2014). Faculty professional development implies faculty learning (Neumann, 2005). Encouraging and supporting faculty professional development activities in the form of scholarly reading groups provides an inexpensive means of diminishing educational silos, improving student success, and contributing to campus-wide networking (Landry et al., 2022). Research on this type of professional development activity at community colleges is scarce. Perhaps this is because faculty are not consistently reporting these types of activities in their professional development logs. Even in this study, there was inconsistent reporting among participants. Some participants reported this activity to their leadership on their professional development logs, others felt that because they met their institutional professional development hours through compliance training and mandatory professional development hours, that it was not worth the effort to report it on their logs. It is reasonable to assume that this activity, and others like it, is more widespread among community college faculty than documented.

Although faculty primarily participate in reading groups focused on teaching and learning within their discipline, participants in this study identified a desire to collaborate with colleagues both within and outside of their discipline. At first glance, one might assume that English and mathematics faculty would not have much in common in how they teach their courses and would therefore find it difficult to professionally develop together, Neumann's research (2005) suggests that what faculty learn is not static, lifeless knowledge. Rather, faculty learn ways of engaging with knowledge that transcend their discipline.

The community college has an opportunity to work alongside faculty to create space and time for faculty-led scholarly reading groups as self-directed professional development activities. Murray (2001) found that faculty-led professional development activities that combine discipline with teaching practice and are grounded in adult learning literature are the most effective and have the highest instances of positive student outcomes. Yet, 22 years later, faculty are still primarily conducting these as self-directed informal activities. While much of the literature that focuses on faculty professional development regarding their teaching role centers on individuals and skill development, more emphasis is currently being placed on the social aspects of faculty learning (Van Waes et al., 2015). Studies show that professional interactions impact teaching practice, which ultimately affects student learning and success (Moolenaar et al. 2012).

Faculty perspective: Professional development is essential to being prepared for a teaching role

It is generally accepted that faculty members prepared by traditional graduate programs are often unprepared for the pedagogical challenges of open-door institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2013). The majority of community college faculty complete their master's or doctoral degrees in their area of expertise, but they are rarely focused on what is needed to fully understand the art of teaching and learning, which is a “continuous journey to find the right combination of instructional methodologies and pedagogy” (Strickland-Davis, 2018). Few community college instructors have been prepared in programs specifically designed for teaching (Cohen & Brawer, 2013).

One participant in this study completed coursework in educator preparation as part of their graduate studies. As another faculty member recounts, their university denied their eligibility to take educator prep courses as part of their curriculum, as they were not pursuing a degree in education. Prior to meeting their students in the classroom for the first time, the remaining faculty members participated in little to no discussion of or exposure to adult learning research, evidence-based teaching and learning, or adult and higher education research literature during their onboarding and orientation to their colleges. While community colleges often have an onboarding and orientation program, these programs are primarily focused on integration of faculty into the college and ensuring faculty are aware of and have access to college resources (Cohen & Brawer, 2013).

In the past decade, more emphasis has been placed on what constitutes high-quality professional development that is focused on teaching. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive review of 35 studies that demonstrate a relationship between professional development, teaching practice, and student success. Their review yielded seven characteristics of high-quality professional development:

1. It is focused on course content and directly relevant to a participant’s classroom teaching.
2. It incorporates active learning that engages faculty in trying out new strategies with their students.
3. It is collaborative and offers opportunity for shared learning and reflection that lead to cultural change within groups or institutions.
4. It incorporates models of effective practice to guide the development of new teaching strategies.
5. It includes mentorship and expert support.
6. It includes structured opportunities for feedback and reflection.
7. It is sustained and allows sufficient time for learning, practice, experimentation, and reflection on teaching.

Each of these seven characteristics were identified by faculty, in some way, in this study. Once again, without deep familiarity of the research literature regarding effective teaching and professional development, participants hit on the characteristics of high-quality professional development and attempted to create these pockets of it within their silos.

Faculty in this study demonstrated a tacit rather than a specific understanding of how adult learning theory and pedagogy/andragogy contribute to the development of their teaching practice. Because they felt as though they were not adequately prepared to teach, they discussed their practice of developing their teaching approach based on their experiences as students, a theme common in research on faculty preparedness (Cohen & Brawer, 2013; Olsen, 2015). Moreover, participants indicated limited time and bandwidth to devote to preparing themselves to teach during their first few years, relying primarily on their past experiences and emulating their colleagues and past teachers. It is also noteworthy that this is in agreement with another widely accepted concept in higher education that faculty tend to teach as they were taught rather than consciously developing evidence-based teaching practices grounded in adult learning literature (Sperling, 2003; Van Ast, 1999; Wagner et al., 2021). Over the years, through trial and error and self-directed professional development, faculty members realized that their teaching methods did not reflect their ethos regarding excellent teaching. Consequently, some began exploring adult learning literature, pedagogy, and instructional techniques that better aligned with their philosophy.

Several participants brought up the concept of pedagogy, albeit with some confusion or differing understandings of what it is. In a sense, it was almost as though they felt obligated to discuss pedagogy because they were discussing teaching practice, although many participants stated that they were still not certain what pedagogy was, but they thought they had a general understanding of it. Participants recognized that pedagogy has something to do with learning, and they recognized that it has something to do with the way they teach, but generally demonstrated a vague rather than a clear understanding. As an example, one participant said:

> When I first started teaching, I didn't even know that pedagogy existed, what it was, or how to use it. And over time, I think I’ve kind of picked up here there and there a little bit of maybe what it might be or how to potentially kind of emulate it.

To further illustrate, another participant said:

> Our [discipline] instructors must attend professional development as a part of their fields so that they can remain [professionals]. But then they are allowed to use that professional development towards their minimum hours that they have to hit. And because there are so many hours specific to that field that they have to hold, they really don't have to do any other professional development outside of their pedagogy.

By the conclusion of the interviews, it became more apparent that faculty grappled with the significance and meaning of the term pedagogy. They knew and used the term but struggled with ways to describe what it is and how it applies to teaching. Some saw it more as a more distant theoretical approach to the way they teach, while others saw it as a more practical set of rules or guidelines that they should subscribe to in their teaching practice, or participants openly admitted that they had heard the term used and could make some general assumptions about what it means but could not describe it on their own. The problem with this confusion doesn’t necessarily lie in the inability to define pedagogy specifically but rather that faculty were making assumptions about it because they had such little exposure to the research literature that defines pedagogy and how it is utilized by scholars in higher education and adult education.

The data demonstrates a knowledge gap that would be easily filled by onboarding and professional development programs. Interestingly, in a 2019 faculty survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), nearly half of faculty respondents said that they did not participate in teaching related professional development because these kinds of programs were not available or they were ineligible for them at their institution (Stolzenburg et al., 2019). Professional development programs at most community colleges emphasize a broad, non-discipline-specific approach to pedagogy rather than a discipline-specific approach (Osorio et al., 2022). It was interesting to note that only Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was broadly recognized by faculty members in this study, though it was unclear whether faculty members associated UDL with pedagogy. Document analysis revealed that UDL was heavily utilized by faculty development programs at the colleges as well as by state-wide and national resources heavily relied upon by these colleges. There was no specific evidence observed in the interview data that faculty had been exposed to other specific teaching approaches or pedagogies vis-á-vis professional development.

As discussed above, the faculty participants in this study recognized that community college learners come to their classes with unique perspectives on learning and a unique set of expectations and learning needs, a concept congruent with Knowles' (1996) andragogy. Despite recognizing that adult learners have specific needs and expectations, McClanahan (2022) found that faculty at community colleges did not demonstrate explicit knowledge of or report intentional action that was based on adult learning literature; this was also demonstrated by the faculty in this study. This study and the McClanahan (2022) study further support a study by Gouthro (2019) which indicates that faculty in universities are increasingly relying less on theory as a basis for their teaching practices, primarily due to time constraints and professional pressures. Since time constraints were identified as the most significant obstacle to professional development by faculty members in this study, it is reasonable to assume that this trend appears to apply to faculty at community colleges as well.

Participants discussed primarily using their institutional professional development programs, discipline specific conferences, and Google to search for professional development activities that blended their discipline with evidence-based teaching practices. During document and landscape analysis, very little information regarding how faculty are professionally developed was publicly provided on the institutional websites. In fact, several participants noted that resources were difficult to find internally on their institution's professional development website. It is reasonable to assume that this leads to available professional development not being utilized by faculty because they are unaware of its existence. As a result, faculty may perceive that institutional professional development programs do not provide them with adequate resources and are unable to meet their needs. There were a few external resources that faculty identified with edX being a favorite. edX has several courses and bootcamps focused on teaching and learning, pedagogy, strategies for online teaching and learning, and interdisciplinary teaching, as a few examples (edX, n.d.).

Several notable resources that faculty generally did not seem to be aware of or failed to mention as resources included a local centralized student success center, local centers for teaching and learning, and several resources devoted to the scholarship of teaching and learning available to regional colleges and universities. Centers for teaching and learning exist primarily as a place for faculty to gain the skills they need to become better and stronger teachers at the college level (Lieberman, 2005). They typically operate under the assumption that a competent teacher possesses a wide range of skills to facilitate the delivery of content to students. The key benefit is a Center for Teaching and Learning is its ability to or connect distributed resources across the community college as campuses navigate a decentered educational landscape (Wright et al., 2018). The participants in this study that had access to a center or comparable resource for teaching and learning identified it as a highly valuable resource but not necessarily a collaborative one. The participants in this study described teaching centers as places that offered one-on-one help with course creation and consultations with instructional designers, rather than the opportunity to collaborate and participate in reflective practice.

The creation of a teaching and learning center at every community college could be costly, but using teaching and learning centers as sites where multiple colleges can participate and are actively invited to participate would create collaborative opportunities to work with their colleagues, which faculty have consistently identified as a need. While on the surface, this is an obvious valuable resource, the data indicated participants didn’t always access campus specific or regional centers. A more direct effort can be made by the colleges to encourage the use of the regional teaching and learning centers as resource for all faculty.

For instance, participants shared a range of tacit understandings of who was allowed to access or utilize resources in a way that avoided perception that they were reaching outside of a hierarchical or chain of command structure. Or, in the alternative, they assumed the resources were not intended for them as their use was not advertised or encouraged at the front-line level. Viewed through the lens of a CHAT activity system, the system’s culture and history indicated that faculty were very sensitive to staying in their lane, so to speak, and not violating unwritten or implicit rules, even if it meant missing out on potential professional development resources.

Building upon the idea of access, a thread of interview discussions also focused upon professional development available regarding teaching high school students. Faculty members taught blended courses where community college and high school students take the same coursework and expressed frustration in being unprepared to teach high school students. In addition to being aware that high school students have different needs than adults, the participant also needed professional development on how to address these differences. The topic of intergenerational community college classrooms is vastly understudied. McClanahan (2022) study demonstrated this as an inherently significant finding. McClanahan (2022) concluded her study by finding that community college faculty were aware of generational differences among their students, but overall were more tacitly aware of how that impacted their learning experiences and generally did not appear to be teaching in the multigenerational classroom from a foundation of adult learning theory.

Some of the professional development that faculty identified as a need were available through the resources discussed above. For example, the centralized student success center offers a workshop on teaching high school students. These resources were not listed on any college websites participating in this study. Some of the resources that faculty are asking for do exist, and often little to no cost is required for faculty to participate in the workshops. Better communication from faculty professional development offices at colleges concerning the resources available can help bridge the gap for struggling faculty. It would take little effort of the institution to actively refer all faculty to these resources.

Finding Two: Community college faculty professional development is responsive to national and state pressures that focus primarily on systemwide priorities and institutional effectiveness through accountability measures significantly more than on faculty-driven professional development priorities.

There was a feeling among the faculty participants in this study that they were overlooked by their administration, which places more emphasis on student completions and transfer data rather than student learning and faculty development programs focusing on developing evidence-based practices. In this activity system, faculty navigate the interconnected nodes of CHAT with excellence in teaching as the primary driver of their professional development decisions but are simultaneously obligated to operate within an organizational dynamic that does not center their development as educators and, in their opinion, also does not center the student as a learner. The various nodes of CHAT, shown in Figure 5.1 below, illustrate how the focus on accountability rather than teaching practice and student learning impacts how faculty develop a teaching practice that meets their standards of excellence.

This example, built from conversations with faculty participants in this study, portrays how the rules node centers on the systemwide and institutional priority for completion. The activity system's explicit rules encourage a faculty mindset of "do *whatever* it takes" to improve student completion and transfer, so long as the policies are not openly violated. The rules node then leads faculty to use tools like mandated professional development centered on accountability measures, compliance, and technology to demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards rather than student learning. This, in turn, impacts the division of labor node, where faculty perceived the absence of structure that encouraged the development of an evidence-based teaching practice grounded in adult learning theory. The interconnectedness all results in a faculty with little to no expertise in evidence-based teaching and learning, an organizational structure that does not support their self-directed efforts to develop a teaching practice grounded in excellence, and very little motivation to enact change at an organizational level to correct the imbalance. The faculty in this study described professional development programs which were primarily concerned with measures of accountability rather than excellent teaching. The community college sector operates under particularly strict mandates when compared to universities, which often results in conflation of professional development with “obligatory compliance-oriented tasks” (Osorio et al., 2022). The majority of sessions were focused on classroom management, the use of intrusive advising software, overhauling their courses to comply with accessibility policies, sexual harassment and other compliance training, Title IX training, as well as transfer and completion data.

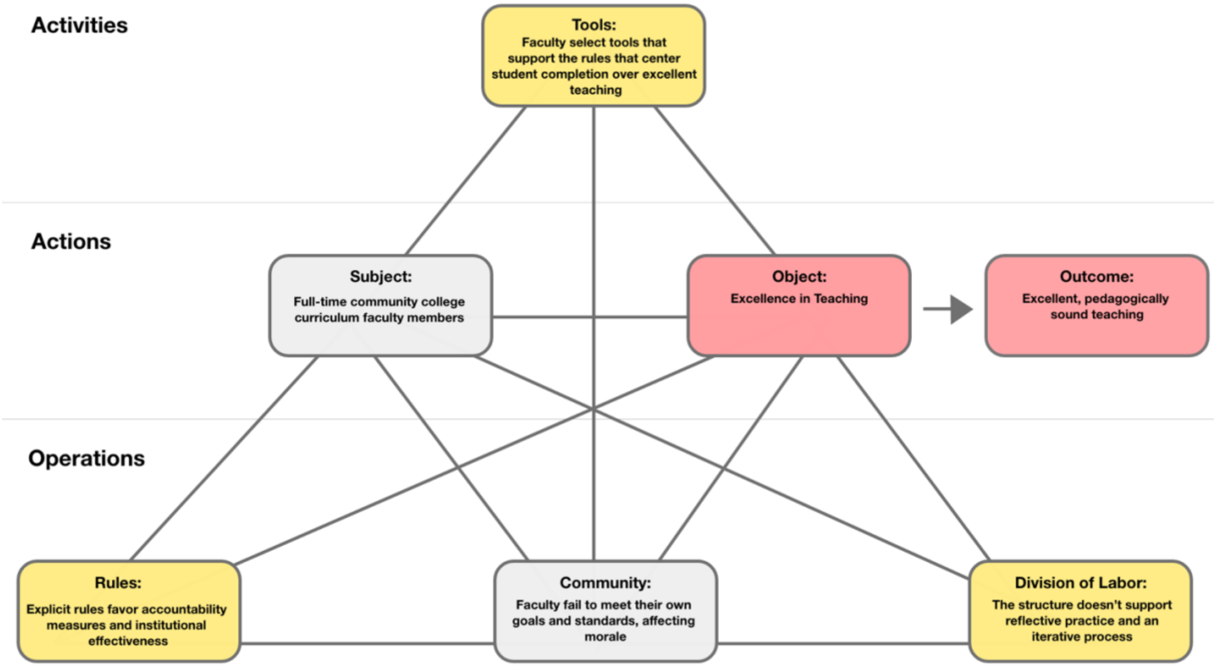

Activities
Tools:
Faculty select tools that support the rules that center student completion over excellent teaching
Actions
Subject:
Full-time community college curriculum faculty members
Object:
Excellence in Teaching
Outcome:
Excellent, pedagogically sound teaching
Operations
Rules:
Explicit rules favor accountability measures and institutional effectiveness
Community:
Faculty fail to meet their own goals and standards, affecting morale
Division of Labor:
The structure doesn't support reflective practice and an iterative process

Figure 5.1: The Interconnected Nature of CHAT in Community College Professional Development.

The focus on accountability measures is largely a result of demands placed upon community colleges by entities such as the federal government, state departments, and accreditors (Burton, 2021). As an example, the United States Department of Education has ordered higher education institutions to comply with requirements for Title IX, the Federal Student Aid program, and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), all of which place tremendous external pressure on the administration of community colleges to demonstrate competencies that overshadow the needs of their faculty members. Community college faculty development programs emphasize responding to the pressures exerted by these large agencies rather than the development of pedagogical experts who drive student success through their instructional practices.

An aspect of this study that has been overlooked in the literature is the influence of institutional effectiveness on student achievement. However, most professional development programs focus on demonstrating institutional effectiveness and accountability (Osorio et al., 2022). In most studies, researchers examine student characteristics such as demographics, which are beyond the institutions' control and influence, and institutional features such as resources available to students, which are largely influenced by these student demographics. Research on institutional effectiveness does not focus on college policies and practices that impact student success, including the role that professional development plays. Studies have examined the policies and practices of universities that perform better than expected based on the characteristics of their students (Carey, 2005; Kuh et al., 2005; Muraskin & Lee, 2004; Renn & Reason, 2021). Although these studies provide insights into institutional effectiveness at universities, it is uncertain whether their findings can be applied to community colleges (Jenkins, 2007).

It has become increasingly difficult for community colleges to demonstrate their effectiveness as expectations for institutional performance and accountability have increased over the past several decades. Considering the descriptions of how their institutions would describe an excellent teacher above, it was clear that institutional effectiveness culture significantly impacts the way faculty in this study interact with their students, teach their students, and how flexible they are able to be with them, despite the tagline most often quoted being, “meet them where they are.” Faculty know how to “meet the students where they are” but are often unable to do so because of their organizational dynamics; this was true for faculty from all three participating institutions in this study. Among the faculty participants in this study, most felt that policies and strategic plans intended to promote student success were negatively impacting their ability to develop trust-based relationships with their students through their instructional practices.

Generally, there is much room to improve at the community college incorporating institutional effectiveness into a culture of student learning and success. For the faculty in this study, the primary barrier community colleges face regarding faculty professional development grounded in adult learning literature and a cultural shift to a focus on student learning is the obligation to continue operating under a premise to demonstrate specific outcomes based on accountability from their governing agencies. Efforts of organizational change that challenge the very fabric on which an organization operates require systemic, evidence-based approaches, which can take a long time and require significant financial investment, and in many cases, rely on factors outside of the organization's control (Lewis, 2019). In this case, the community colleges have very little control over the larger federal, state, and accrediting agencies under which they operate, and the culture of accountability and institutional effectiveness is a direct reflection of the external pressures exerted on them. It is essential to conduct future research on community colleges, whether local or individual, in order to determine what policies and processes positively impact student success and how faculty can be better integrated into institutional effectiveness through professional development. Additionally, consideration must be given to the way in which community colleges navigate the larger activity systems in which they are embedded.

Organizational structure and dynamic impacts how community college faculty professionally develop

To understand how faculty frame and describe their context as it shapes, supports, and impedes professional development in support of their teaching roles, faculty in this study were asked to describe their professional development guidelines and how they meet them. They were asked if faculty development was required, and follow-up questions typically consisted of how many hours were generally required and how many of those required hours were focused on teaching and learning. Participants provided a wide variety of responses when describing their professional development requirements, even among faculty employed by the same organization. It was believed by most faculty members that faculty development was required of them, but they were unable to recall how much or what kind of development was involved. A few were positive that faculty development is required but couldn't provide a breakdown of guidelines or requirements for faculty development. By the conclusion of all faculty interviews, no clear pattern emerged of how many hours and what kind of professional development was required of them. When describing their requirements, most of the faculty participants referred to the courses they were required to take that focused on accountability, discussed previously.

Faculty at community colleges are generally required to complete between ten and thirty hours of professional development each year, but there is little guidance regarding the content of this required professional development or its credibility. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Principles of Accreditation published in 2020 on the SACSCOC website (SACSCOC, 2022) was consulted to better understand where the ambiguous guidelines for professional development originated. In Section 3.7.3 of the Principles of Accreditation, it is stated that the institution provides ongoing professional development to its faculty. (Faculty development)." This statement is the only reference to faculty professional development made by SACSCOC, the accreditation agency through which the group of participating community colleges is accredited. A number of “considerations” were provided by SACSCOC regarding definitions of professional development, activities considered professional development, how the institution should provide faculty development support, and policies and procedures concerning faculty development. SACSCOC requires organizations to provide ongoing professional development yet does not provide guidance on what constitutes faculty development nor how much faculty should be required to complete.

Faculty in this study identified spending the majority of their time outside of teaching, tediously updating their courses to meet new standards based on Quality Matters, Universal Design for Learning, or whatever framework the institution's focus was adopted at that time. Faculty reported strong opinions that these courses were not conducive to excellent teaching and did not make them feel like they were developing the kind of teaching practice they desire. In the age of accountability, community college faculty not only need but want to participate in professional development that cultivates strategies and practices for dealing with the wide variety of educational attainment, technology skills, and age differences they will encounter with their students (McClanahan, 2022; McClure, 2011).

In a 2013 study, Van Note Chism et al. found five developmental factors to all theoretical foundations for faculty professional development, irrespective of concentration:

1. Faculty participate in professional development based typically on one of two needs, either an institutional mandate or an implicit motivation based on their experience.
2. Faculty both implicitly and explicitly reflect on their teaching practice and contemplate ways to improve it based on new information.
3. Faculty incorporate new skills and knowledge on a basis of trial-and-error rather than permanently adopting them based on familiarity with the research literature.
4. Faculty measure the impact of implementing new skills and knowledge into their teaching practice.

5. Based on observations and individual measurements of success, faculty reflect on the impact of the trial implementation and determine whether to adopt or reject the new skill from their teaching practice.

These five stages signify a chronology of technical and professional support before, during, and after employing their new knowledge and skills. These stages are consistent with the data in this study. However, in many cases, faculty were not reaching stages four and five because the structure and culture of their organization did not support this kind of experimentation.

Faculty in this study often found themselves divided between what they want to do and what they can do. Although several participants in this study said they partook in professional development they thought supported their goal of being an excellent teacher, the implicit and explicit rules at the community college, as well as the overall culture of accountability, did not create an environment where they could apply the practices. Thus, they would take professional development that focused on teaching practices grounded in adult learning theory, and refrain from implementing because the amount of work it would take to configure new educational practices with institutional requirements, in their opinion, outweighed the benefits.

As educators, faculty members see themselves as central to student success, which should be an integral part of the professional development opportunities they select and the skills and techniques they incorporate into their courses. Despite this, faculty spend a substantial amount of time engaging in professional development that meets system and institution needs, leaving little motivation to engage in opportunities that meet their goals rooted in excellence in teaching and learning. The system's structure prevents them from developing a teaching practice that aligns with that goal. Faculty in this study find themselves navigating an imbalanced activity system that favors institutional needs, leading them to further rely on professional development that doesn’t align with a student-centered practice.

There is no universal definition of faculty development (Allen, 1988; Beach et al., 2016), however faculty development should aim to “assist faculty members in becoming better teachers, competent professionals, or fully functioning individuals” (Allen, 1988, p. 92). Increasingly complex teaching and learning practices necessitate the development of evidence-based practices and research-based inquiry approaches to improve student learning (Beach et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this type of faculty development is largely unsupported by the community college. In all cases, faculty expressed a need for professional development that meets their needs as educators as well as the structure and support they needed to implement these changes in the classroom.

While some faculty members felt empowered to incorporate what they learned into their courses, there were other faculty members who stated that they had too much on their plate with the requirements of their institution to undertake the work required to revamp their courses and integrate their new skills and activities. There was a hesitancy among some faculty members to implement new evidence-based practices when they challenged the students in ways that made them uncomfortable. It was evident to these participants, either from their own experience or from watching their colleagues suffer backlash, that the majority of their annual performance reviews were determined by the opinions of their students and the grades they earned in their classes, further adding to the focus on accountability measures and institutional effectiveness rather than excellent teaching and learning.

So even in cases where faculty had dedicated the time to participate in professional development that is grounded in the academic research literature, the organizational dynamic did not allow for the exploration of those practices. As a result, faculty were fearful that they would not be able to demonstrate an immediate increase in the measures of accountability on which their annual performance evaluation is based. In the field of higher education teaching and learning, no issue has generated as much research, opinion, complaints, resistance, and hostility as the method by which faculty teaching is evaluated (Theall, 2017). The introduction of group activities and student-led discussions, which require students to consider perspectives other than their own and to think and learn in ways that require more effort or may be uncomfortable in their learning, was too risky for some faculty, even when adult learning literature supported the methods and practices.

Participants feared that even though these activities may fit into a pedagogy that better fit their personality, teaching style, and discipline, their students may rate those experiences poorly for satisfaction which could impact their performance review. As a result, some faculty continued to use practices such as individual work, lectures, and exam-based assessments, which are known to be less effective in measuring student learning outcomes and success. Theall (2017) points out that faculty are often evaluated solely based on the ratings their students give them; students are not evaluators, nor should the information they provide constitute a full assessment of their performance. Because of the way they are accredited and funded, the culture of the community college relies on these measures as an indicator of institutional effectiveness, and in the faculty's opinion, minimizes opportunities for professional development that align with epistemologies and learning theories associated with teaching adults.

The nuance of excellence in teaching, defined by the faculty themselves, is a significant component of excellent teaching that is seldom discussed openly. According to faculty, developing excellent and authentic teaching skills requires substantial effort, and their institutions do not structure or function in a manner that supports that effort. Data from the interviews indicated there was a wide variety of technical tools, instructional strategies, and professional development opportunities that might have met the institutional needs of the community college, but perhaps did not meet the professional development goals of the faculty members.

Conclusions

This study's findings illustrate an activity system where the rules and division of labor nodes overpower the other nodes of the activity system, shown in Figure 5.2 below. CHAT further highlights how the tools utilized by the faculty were bound by the imbalance of the activity system, demonstrated by the contrast where faculty identified collaborative professional development that blends their discipline with teaching practices grounded in adult learning literature as their preferred method of developing their teaching practice but relied little on it to meet the policies and rules set forth by their respective institutions.

In the bottom-most plane of the activity system lies the rules/norms, community, and division of labor nodes which comprise the operational base of the activity system. Because there is so much focus on and space taken up by the operational base, the robusticity of the actions and activities sections of the activity system, comprised of the subject, the object, the outcome, and tools suffer. The subject feels limited to using the tools and activities that are available to them based on the rules/norms, community, and division of labor in this system. So, in this case, faculty are either choosing to not utilize tools outside of what is institutionally offered to them, are unaware of other resources that exist, are completing self-directed professional development but do not report or implement new methods due to lack of supporting structure, or lack the time and bandwidth required to do more than the bare minimum.

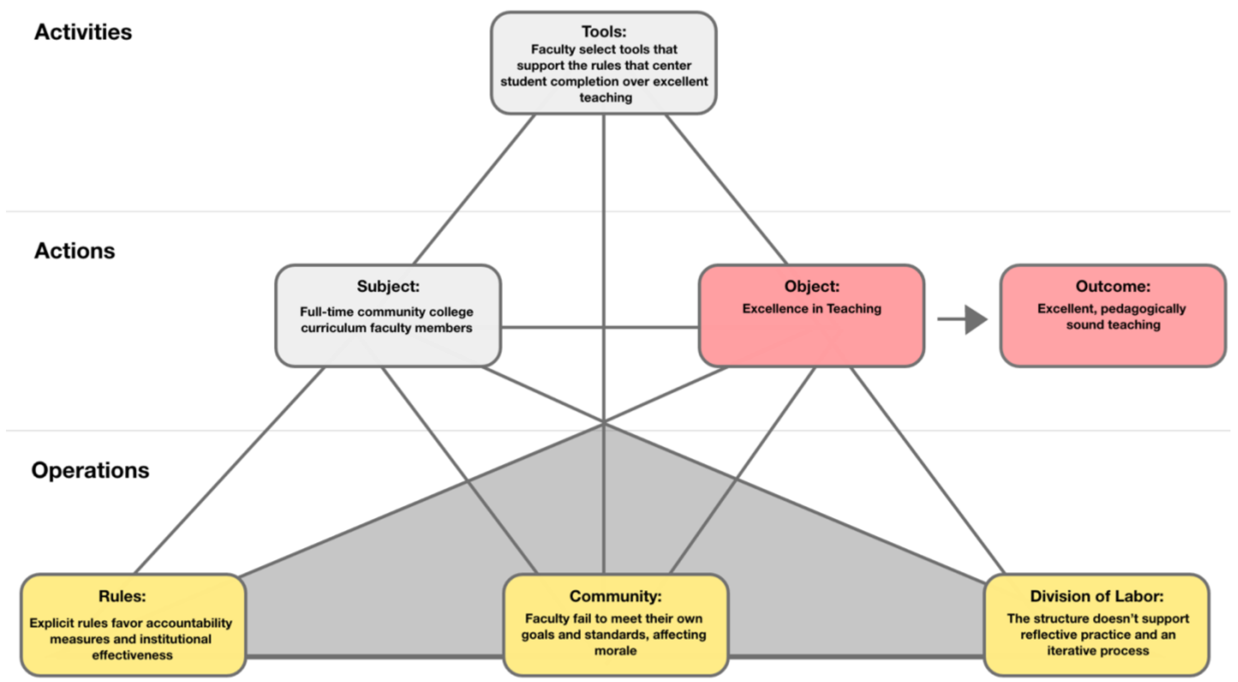

Activities
Actions
Operations
Tools:
Faculty select tools that support the rules that center student completion over excellent teaching
Subject:
Full-time community college curriculum faculty members
Object:
Excellence in Teaching
Outcome:
Excellent, pedagogically sound teaching
Rules:
Explicit rules favor accountability measures and institutional effectiveness
Community:
Faculty fail to meet their own goals and standards, affecting morale
Division of Labor:
The structure doesn't support reflective practice and an iterative process

Figure 5.2: CHAT: Operationally Imbalanced Activity System.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This descriptive case study explored professional development in the community college as an activity system from the faculty perspective. The findings of this study suggest there is an imbalance in the community college professional development activity system that leans more heavily on meeting the needs of the institution and on a larger scale, the needs of the accrediting, state, and federal agencies that oversee the community college, rather than the needs of faculty as teaching professionals. Because this imbalance impacts the entire activity system and therefore any outcomes associated with it, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into how full-time community college curriculum faculty perceive, interact with, and experience their institutional professional development programs through the context of how they define excellent teaching and their self-directed efforts in bridging the gap between what they are offered and what they perceive as needs.

The data in this study suggest that the imbalance is systemic and deeply rooted in the historical context of this activity system. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory explores the internal tensions and contradictions that intersect among the various elements of human activity that lead to such transition and transformation of knowledge. Because all elements of an activity interact with and influence each other, activity has motive and is complex, dynamic, historically driven, and transforming (Engestrom, 1987). While further research is needed to explore the tensions between activity systems and whether a new activity system could be emerging, faculty are not optimistic that change is coming that benefits them as educators or their students as learners.

Empowering and supporting faculty in their self-directed professional development efforts should be at the forefront of community college administration priorities. Faculty development, at its core, is synonymous with career development, career planning, human development, professional training, and growth as a professional. Odden and Archibald (2009) stated that faculty professional development should focus on building the knowledge and skillset of educators and if done well, would be reflected in the outcomes of their students.

It must go deeper than providing faculty the space, time, and access to research literature. The community college administration must find ways to support faculty efforts of the learning process, including initial failure, reevaluation, and reimplementation, into the fabric of community college culture of professional development. As is, the system allows for little to no mistakes or failure. While faculty are, in many ways, developing their teaching practices from a theoretical standpoint, they are not empirically demonstrating what they learn. Fenwick (2003) suggests that “knowledge is not received and later transferred to another situation, but part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation,” she goes to suggest that “the physical and social experiences in which learners find themselves and the tools they use in the experience are integral to the entire learning process" (p. 25). Faculty expressed the desire for an environment where they can socially and critically reflect on adult learning literature that is combined with their discipline of practice and more importantly to take what they learned and implement new skills and activities into their classes.

Although faculty members did not explicitly state their desire to participate in Communities of Practice (CoP), their aggregated responses regarding their needs, wants, and context for professional development are consistent with CoP. Among the participants, all expressed interest in collaborating with each other, observing one another's teaching, participating in scholarly reading groups, critically evaluating adult education literature, and generally being able to interact with one another frequently. Communities of Practice (CoP) are defined by Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2014) as a group of individuals who have a common concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular interactions. Empowering faculty with the opportunity to facilitate professional development that is meaningful to them can result in change and positively affect student outcomes.

Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that three components are required to be a Community of Practice: 1) the domain, 2) the community, and 3) the practice (p. 98). Domain, in this context, refers to the commitment to a set of practices or a shared competence (Eddy et al., 2022). The CoP model supports what faculty in this study are already making an effort to do. Kezar et al. (2017) suggested a set of principles that community colleges can use to build an effective professional development activity system based on CoP:

1. A dynamic community that evolves naturally

2. Opportunity for open dialogue that encourages both internal and external perspectives
3. Encourage various levels of participation
4. The use of public and private community spaces
5. Generate value in the community where participants can openly discuss the value of participating in the community
6. Syndicate structure and support of expected learning opportunities with brainstorming sessions that provide the chance to blend the conventional with the radical
7. Coordinate a regular pace that sustains consistency but isn't overwhelming

Community colleges can use these seven principles to develop faculty-led Communities of Practice that reflect the diversity of faculty background and experience, where faculty value the experience, and a structure where faculty are able to behave in ways that reflect the norms of the community, like trying new methods in their classrooms without the fear of repercussions when success is not immediately reflected. Eddy et al. (2022), in a study focused on community college STEM faculty CoP, found that faculty working with others in their discipline felt a shared sense of focus and help in applying the new evidence-based teaching strategies they learned. In this study, the faculty would learn and practice the new skills in their CoP workshops and then test them in their classrooms. Faculty noted how their CoP helped them get the most out of collaborative efforts with their colleagues and to solidify a community where faculty could go for help with resources and problems.

Implications for Theory

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory explores the internal tensions and contradictions that intersect among the various elements of human activity that lead to transition and transformation of knowledge. Because all elements of an activity interact with and influence each other, activity has motive and is complex, dynamic, historically driven, and transforming (Engestrom, 1987). Because CHAT suggests that learning is a process of constant interactions with the environment and others, outcomes are constructed by interactions between the various nodes of the activity system. Using CHAT as a theoretical framework in this study was ideal because it considers the complexities in capturing and analyzing qualitative data. By diagraming the findings through the use of the CHAT framework, tensions within the activity system surfaced and highlighted an imbalanced activity system that relies heavily on the operational base, shown in Figure 5.2.

CHAT has been used in previous literature primarily as a framework to study the integration of technology into educational settings (Cawood, 2021; Marquez, 2011). CHAT is typically chosen as a framework in studies for its ability to highlight how historical context influences activity. This study utilized second-generation CHAT which considers how collective actions toward an object mediates activity (Leont'ev, 1978). Second-generation CHAT focuses on one activity system influencing the object/outcome. However, the data in this study suggest that third-generation CHAT would be an excellent framework for future studies. Third-generation CHAT suggests that multiple activity systems can be working toward a shared, desired outcome, indicating that activity systems are connected. It became apparent in this study that at least one other, but likely multiple, activity systems were heavily influencing the collective actions in this system. Future research should consider the activity system or systems comprised of the accreditation, state, and federal agencies that govern the function of the community college as an activity system in regard to professional development. CHAT is at its core, suggests that actors exist as part of a dynamic system that connects them with their environment as well as other actors within and outside of their activity system (Stetsenko and Arievitch, 2004). Future research using third-generation CHAT should also consider whether a new activity system is on the verge of emerging based on the interactions of the multiple activity systems. Third-generation CHAT's key principles allow for the emergence of a new activity system because of resolving tensions when two activity systems interact (Engeström, 2018).

This research adds valuable insight into the culture of community college professional development. The current research literature primarily focuses on university faculty (Servey et al., 2020; Shelton et al., 2022; Wargo, 2022) and comparisons are typically made to community college faculty. Because the community colleges operate within larger complex system and various activity systems operate within the community college itself, CHAT is an excellent framework to consider for future studies. The use of CHAT brings forth nuanced complexities that are often deep seeded in culture and history of an activity system and can help inform strategies for improvement.

With the COVID-19 global pandemic and the emergency shift to remote online learning, community colleges were disrupted and many faculty were left scrambling to shift their courses and instruction to an online format and develop new ways of engaging with students on the fly (Crespín-Trujillo & Hora, 2021). Many faculty were not prepared for the shift, and some had never taught in an online remote environment before (Walsh et al, 2021). CHAT is an excellent framework to guide future studies regarding how COVID-19 changed the landscape of community college and higher education.

Implications for Research

This study focused on the context and perspectives of full-time community college curriculum faculty and their experiences with mandated and self-directed professional development for their teaching role. Other perspectives and experiences were not considered in this study, but would provide valuable insight into the function, tensions, and interactions of the various nodes of the activity system. Administrator and community college leadership perspectives would provider deeper insight into the system imbalance and the pressures placed on the community colleges by the larger state, federal, and accreditation agencies. Because part-time faculty make up a significant part of the faculty at community colleges, their perspectives should be considered. Career and technical faculty also play an important role in the landscape of the community college and because many of them are mandated by their professional organizations to complete professional development in the form of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) their experience navigating the professional development activity system may be vastly different than the curriculum faculty perspectives explored in this study.

One framework that could be layered with CHAT in future studies is Rogers’ (2010) Diffusion of Innovation theory. This theory offers organizational researchers and practitioners the opportunity to explore how new ideas, processes, and products diffuse and spread within and across organizations. In Rogers' theory (2010), he identified four main elements that come together to form the theory of diffusion of innovation: the innovation, communication, time, and the social system. He defined an innovation as an idea, thing, procedure, or system that is perceived to be new by whomever is adopting it. He defined communication as the process by which people develop and share information with each other to achieve common understanding. Time is the third aspect of Rogers’ (2010) theory and is broken up into three categories: the innovation-decision process, adopter categories, and the rate of adoption. The fourth aspect of Rogers' (2010) theory is the social system. All diffusion occurs within a social system, whose members may be individuals, groups, organizations, or subsystems, but who share a common goal or objective that links them together as a social system. The various aspects of Rogers' (2010) theory layered with the various nodes of CHAT would offer deeper insight into how an activity system adopts change over time and in the specific case of third-generation CHAT, could offer better insight into how the aspects of a new, emerging activity system develops from the tensions and contradictions between the two initial activity systems.

Summary

Faculty professional development in the community college is a complex, multifaceted, collectively mediated activity. The use of the CHAT framework directed data collection and analysis so that the intricacies and nuances related to faculty needs for professional development regarding their teaching role were present in the findings. As more focus and attention is placed on higher education generally and community colleges specifically, professional development will continue to serve as an important tool for faculty, administration, and the students they serve. Programs should be collaborative, self-directed, and use adult education research literature to guide the implementation and reflective practice of faculty as they engage with and develop their teaching practice. This study's finding also support the need for additional research that focuses specifically on community college faculty professional development and the various experiences of faculty themselves, inclusions of additional perspectives within the community college system regarding professional development, and how we can better prepare community college faculty to teach.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Note: *This is a semi-structured interview with a conversational tone. I will be asking questions about professional development of faculty loosely organized around understanding: their individual views/activities, what participants believe is required of them in terms of professional development and how they choose to share their PD activities with others, and whether/how they believe their professional development activities influence their teaching practice.*

Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today; my name is Kristen Chew and I am an Ed.D. student at North Carolina State University. I currently work as a corporate trainer at a software company in Cary, NC and was a community college anthropology instructor for five years previously. My doctoral research is focused on faculty professional development, specifically in the community colleges.

I am interested in learning about community college faculty members' professional development, especially related to their teaching roles.

Our conversation should take approximately an hour to an hour and a half. I will ask you to reflect on your experiences with professional development. My goal is to learn about your experience with professional development that is offered internally by your institution as well as any external professional development you have had or even that you wish you could take. I am just as interested in professional development that you take from others as I am in any self-directed learning that you seek out on your own. I'm interested in what feels important to you in learning and sustaining yourself as a good teacher.

Anything that you do or would like to be able to learn to improve and develop your community college teaching is relevant to this study. There are no right answers – any response you share is helpful in my learning about community college curriculum faculty professional development needs and experiences related to their teaching.

My research goal is to develop a thorough understanding of your professional development activities, opinions, and needs related to community college faculty members' roles as teachers.

This conversation will be recorded. I will handle our conversation in confidence. I will be the only one that will listen to the recording in order to transcribe it and after I check it for accuracy, I will delete the recording. I will only share the interview transcript with my dissertation chair in a de-identified format. Any conference presentations, reports, or articles will present data in a de-identified form, so there will not be any directly identifying information included where others would be able to identify you as a participant in this study. I do plan to keep your interview transcript for future research.

Because our conversation will be recorded, please speak from your own experience and do not use the names of others. If you want to refer to someone else, please mention them by the role they have in your life, such as "colleague," "department chair," "advisee," "student," etc.

You don’t have to share anything that you do not want to volunteer as a part of our interview conversation, and you can stop at any time. You may ask me questions.

Do you have any questions for me before we start? Are you willing to continue with the interview?

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and how you became a community college faculty member?
2. What is your academic and teaching background?
3. Can you please share what you think of, of what it means to be an excellent community college faculty teacher? In your opinion, is good teaching in your field different than in others?
4. Can you share how you believe your institution would define good community college teaching?
5. How do you believe people actually learn to be excellent community college teachers? How do faculty sustain or grow in their roles as teachers?
6. Are you required to participate in professional development related to your teaching? If so, could you please explain how it works (for example, how many hours per year, topics, etc.)?
7. What happens if you want to take professional development that is outside of what is offered?
8. Are you rewarded for completing extra professional development? If so, how?
9. What kinds of professional development activities have you participated in? Can you please describe how you learned about them, what they were like, and how they influenced your teaching practice (if at all)?
10. Could you please share a story or example about your favorite professional development related to teaching? What made it special?
11. Could you please share a story of example of a professional development experience that didn’t work well for you? Why?
12. Please describe the ways in which you think your institution meets your professional development needs
13. Please share and describe the ways in which you seek out your own resources, knowledge, support in becoming a better teacher.
14. Can you describe in as much detail as possible, how your PD needs and activities have changed over time? Why/how do you think they have changed?
15. Do you believe your approach to PD is similar/different than your peers? Why/how? (no need for names)
16. Please describe any barriers you’ve experienced regarding professional development?
17. Please describe any supports/encouragement you’ve received regarding professional development?
18. Do you share details about your PD with your peers? How? Why or why not?

19. If you could tell your administration anything about your experience with professional development, what would you tell them?
20. Is there anything that I didn’t ask that you would like to add.

I want to thank you for participating in this study.