THE WRITE CHOICE: EXPLORING HOW ENGLISH COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS CHOOSE THEIR TEACHING TECHNIQUES

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CHAPTER I

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In December of 1975, an anonymous author published an article in *Newsweek* about the inadequate writing abilities of college students. The author of the article stressed the need for college administrators and instructors to strongly evaluate students' reading and writing comprehension at the college level. This recommendation was prefaced with a statement offered to parents, stating that "if your children are attending college, the chances are that they will be unable to write ordinary expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity" (p. 58).

Further emphasizing the problem of college students' inadequate writing skills, the College Board commissioned the 2004 *National Commission on Writing* survey that found American corporations spend up to $3.1 billion annually to correct the deficient writing skills of new employees (Kerry, 2004). Kerry further proclaimed that "educational institutions interested in preparing students for rewarding and remunerative work should concentrate on developing [college] graduates' writing skills" (p. 21).

Although the 2004 *National Commission on Writing* survey highlights inadequate writing skills, most research about the writing abilities of college students focuses instead on remediation in freshman level reading and writing courses (Seldin, 1987; Van Ast, 1999; Zeitlin & Markus, 1996). Falk-Ross (2002) states that the percentage of entering

college students taking remedial writing and reading courses is largest at community colleges, reporting that 20% of community college students and 8% of four-year college students enter college without adequate reading and writing skills.

Information concerning how instructors address the issue of students' poor writing skills remains less explored. Specifically, information about how teachers' skills and attributes contribute to student learning how to write has not been adequately researched. For example, after reviewing the 2003 *U.S. Department of Education* report, Long and Coldren (2006) found that teachers ultimately do contribute to student learning, but "there is less information about the specific teacher attributes that lead to increased student achievement" (p. 237). Their study highlights a need to investigate teachers' experiences and how their experiences may become influential in the decisions made about how to teach students to write.

The problem of students' poor writing skills is a national issue. Higher education administrators are being held responsible for understanding the problem of graduating college students' inadequate writing skills (Kerry, 2004). Within each individual higher education institution, these administrators are encouraged to investigate the problem of students' poor writing skills to identify effective influences on student learning.

By investigating positive influences on student learners, administrators and teachers may identify how to best teach students how to write (Long & Coldren, 2006; Garrahy & Cothran, 2005; Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004). Some higher education institutions are already investigating correlations between teachers' teaching strategies in courses that teach students how to write. For example, the purpose of a national movement called *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* is to understand positive

teacher attributes to improve the quality of teaching students how to write (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Hutchings, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

It is important to explore the problem of college students' inadequate writing skills because American corporations spend up to $3.1 billion annually to rectify the deficient writing skills of new employees (Kerry, 2004). Also, investigating English composition courses is important because these are the courses where students are taught how to write. For example, at higher education institutions in the United States, there are over 300,000 English composition classes offered each year (Neal, 2000). To teach students the skill of writing, instructors often select an English composition theory and then select a teaching technique.

Teaching college students how to write effectively is an elusive task for English composition instructors because there are so many ways to teach writing. First, although English composition theory includes many branches, two specific theories include teaching the writing process versus teaching through example. These theories are also known as teaching *process* versus *product*. McComiskey (2000), Fraiberg (2002) and Hillocks (1987) have attempted to explain why instructors select one theory over another, but individual choice and subjectivity contribute to a lack of definitive answers.

Second, there are multiple perspectives about English composition pedagogy. With traditional and non-traditional teaching techniques available ranging from lecture to technology, English composition instructors face great variety related to lesson presentation. The dual-selection of theory and pedagogy, which is not always linear, raises questions about how to best teach writing. Therefore, the significance of theory and

pedagogy instigates questions about potential influences into instructors' choices regarding how to teach. Explanations regarding how instructors choose which teaching techniques to use in English composition classrooms remain unknown. Also, the instructors' personal connection to the choices made remain unanswered (Long & Coldren, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques. Specifically, this study explored potential factors that may influence how writing instructors in a community college and university in Oklahoma choose their teaching techniques.

Research Questions

To facilitate the investigation of this problem, several research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What decision-making processes do instructors use when choosing teaching techniques?
2. What factors influence the decision-making process?
3. How do these influencing factors contribute to the choice of teaching technique?

Conceptual Framework

Decision theory, which includes Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, was used as the conceptual framework through which to analyze the data. First, decision theory "makes sense of how individuals and groups make or should make decisions" (Resnik, 1987, p. 3). Second, this theory identifies activities within the decision making

process, which categorizes experiences in Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making (Nikitas-Spiros & Gautum, 2003).

Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making defines decision-making as a process comprised of three activities. These activities include (1) the Intelligence Activity, which identifies the occasion or reason for a decision, (2) the Design Activity, which includes factors that influence different choices, and (3) the Choice Activity, which is the final decision. Together these activities illustrate the systematic process of making choices (Nikitas-Spiros & Gautam, 2003).

Decision theory is further divided into two main categories, normative decision theory and descriptive decision theory. Resnik (1987) defines normative decision theory as how decisions *ought* to be made, whereas descriptive theory is defined as how decisions *are* made. Horvitz, Breese and Henrion (1988) also state that "…a decision-theoretic perspective distinguishes between a good decision (a choice made consistent with preferences and beliefs) and a good outcome (the result of a choice that turns out to be desirable)" (p. 7). Decision theory may ultimately be defined as a spectrum beginning with a choice and ending with a result.

The use of descriptive decision theory is beneficial for this study because this theory explores how decisions *are* made, rather than normative decision theory that explores how decisions *should* be made. Specifically, unlike normative decision theory, descriptive decision theory is flexible, which is necessary for the exploration of human experiences and factors that may influence how the instructors choose their teaching techniques.

Studies that use decision theory are present in existing literature; however, these studies primarily focus on the hard sciences, or these studies explore the topic of decision-making in primary education versus higher education. For example, Wu, Yu, Yang and Che (2005) explored how decision theory is used to aid women in their consideration of having hysterectomies. Though decision theory is the conceptual framework for this study, English as a discipline is not referenced.

In addition, Sturtevant and Linek (2003) also used decision theory in their study. They explored how middle and secondary teachers view their instructional beliefs and decisions regarding literacy and content in their classrooms. Though the Sturtevant and Linek study more closely resembles the investigation into how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques, it does not include teachers in higher education.

The concept of decision-making relates to an instructor's decision to use particular teaching techniques in the classroom. Although decision theory and more specifically Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making are rooted in research relating to probability theory, this theory is adaptable to qualitative research because it may be used to understand peoples' decision-making experiences.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study contribute to the existing knowledge base concerning how teaching techniques are selected, particularly those of instructors of English composition. In addition, this study offers a qualitative perspective on a subject using the traditionally quantitative lens of decision theory. Other qualitative studies have explored the subject of choice and decision-making (Wu, Yu, Yang, & Che, 2005; Sturtevant,

Linkek, 2003), but these studies do not focus on English composition instructors in higher education. In addition, other studies focus only on decision-making without the incorporation of decision theory (Caine & Caine, 2006; Nutt, 2007).

This study is unique, because it explores decision-making through the lens of decision theory. This study uses decision theory in conjunction with investigating how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques, which adds a new perspective on the subject of decision-making.

Results of this study may also assist university and college instructors in understanding what factors influence their decision-making process when choosing teaching techniques. Also, these results and conclusions may offer instructors insight into how they actually shape their decisions, by recognizing connections between internal and external factors related to their choices of teaching technique and the decisions made in areas outside of teaching.

Role of the Researcher

Before beginning this study, I worked as an English composition instructor in higher education for over four years. Each semester I taught approximately 75 students in multiple sections of English Composition. As an instructor, I facilitated class discussions, encouraged individual and group participation in the classroom, presented lessons about writing, evaluated written assignments, and assessed overall student writing skills.

Each semester I faced the challenge of teaching students how to write successfully. Part of this challenge was experimenting with different teaching techniques and incorporating different perspectives about writing strategies into my lessons. Sometimes my lesson experimentation occurred without careful planning, but, with or

without careful planning, there appeared to be no way to predict how students would respond to different lessons when paired with different teaching techniques. The unpredictability made questioning my chosen teaching techniques intriguing.

My position as an English composition instructor gave me extensive exposure to the different levels of student writing, and this exposure helped me direct my research. I presented at national conferences in North Texas and Southern Oklahoma about how different teaching techniques encourage different levels of student participation in the classroom. From conversations with colleagues and conference attendees about the problem of college students' inadequate writing skills, questions about the instructors' role in addressing students' poor writing skills became more evident. Listening to other English composition instructors' experiences and influences that shaped their teaching techniques highlighted a need to explore how English composition instructors choose teaching techniques.

I believe when English composition instructors identify the potential factors that influence their decision-making, they have a greater chance of avoiding ineffective teaching techniques. Existing literature offers advantages and disadvantages to many types of teaching techniques, including lecture, small group work, and class discussion (Demant & Yates, 2003; Keim & Biletzky, 1999; Morgan, Whorton & Gunsalus, 2000; Scott & Baker, 2003; Finch, 2003; Bonwell & Eison, 1991). The literature also states how teaching students about writing is an enormous task for instructors because of the many choices they face in choosing an English composition theory and teaching technique (Fraiberg, 2002; McComiskey, 2000). It was my belief that by placing the abstract concept of decision-making into categories, specifically the Simon's (1977)

Taxonomy for decision-making, unidentified factors that influence and shape instructors' choices would make the choice of teaching techniques clearer.

I was further encouraged to explore the concept of making sense of abstract entities like decision-making and exploring how humans make decisions that affect others from my doctoral studies at Oklahoma State University. Exploring human experiences is the foundation of social research (Crotty, 1998), and the idea of exploring the human experience from a subjective perspective interested me greatly. I chose a qualitative case study design to explore human experiences as factors that may influence decision-making. This design helped me explore the process of how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques through the use of interviews, observations and analysis of collected documents.

Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of this study. First, the statement of the problem and purpose of the study was established. The research questions, conceptual framework, and the significance of the study were then presented. In Chapter Two, a review of the existing literature is presented concerning effective teaching, English composition theories and influences into instructors' decisions to use certain teaching techniques.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The charge of instructors of English composition is to teach students how to write by sharing their knowledge about effective writing, and by assessing the writing skills of their students through written assignments. However, in order to teach these skills, instructors must acquire a foundation of knowledge about the discipline of English composition. The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing literature concerning effective teaching, English composition theories, teaching techniques, factors that may influence how instructors choose the techniques they use to teach the skills of writing, and decision theory.

Effective Teaching

Regardless of academic discipline, effective teaching is difficult to define because of the subjective nature of the term "effective" (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). To explore the concept of effective teaching, some researchers believe "effective teaching" is best defined through deconstruction. By separating the phrase into its parts, and then by analyzing what the phrase does not constitute, exploring "effective teaching" is more beneficial (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; Trigwell, 2001).

First, teaching is more than just instruction for the benefit of learning. Teaching is separated into two main senses, (1) what teachers actually do, called the task sense, and (2) what teachers foster in their students learning, called the achievement sense

(Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). Trigwell (2001) disagrees, claiming that effective teaching is more than the act of instruction; it is a combination of different factors including (1) a focus on the teaching perspective of the teacher and (2) a focus on the learning perspective of the students. This combination of factors contributes to a third element, the model of teaching, which includes strategies, planning, thinking, and teaching/learning.

To further analyze "effective teaching" the misconception of student outcomes as a success factor has been questioned. For example, Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) state that the improvement of teaching does not equal improved student learning. The belief that effective teaching does not correlate to successful students is grounded in what is called "limits" (p. 194). These limits include policies, the number of persons involved in teaching and learning, social systems and training. All these limits contribute to the challenge of trying to define effective teaching.

Qualities of Effective Teachers

Though an objective definition for "effective teaching" is elusive, other researchers have defined the phrase by identifying characteristics of what may be called instead, an "effective teacher" rather than "effective teaching" (Buskist 2002; Sikorski, Buckley & Saville, 2002). Effective teachers possess characteristics attributable to effective teaching, such as teachers' attitude toward students, teachers' expertise in the subject matter and in the field of teaching, and teachers' behavior toward students and others (Buskist, 2002; Baiocco & DeWaters, 1998; Roth, 1997).

Teachers' attitude both toward the students and toward others is a factor in identifying effective teaching. Teachers who are pleasant and friendly are characterized

as being effective instructors (Barr, 1960; Ryans, 1960). In addition, instructors who combine a warm attitude with a firm attitude, and those who have realistic expectations of student learning are more effective teachers (Hamacheck, 1985).

Students perceive effective teachers as those who are friendly toward their students, just as warmth and friendliness accompany teachers who are enthusiastic about teaching and their students (Hamacheck, 1985; Lefrancois, 1985; Check, 2001.) This enthusiasm is categorized as having a nonjudgmental attitude and positively influencing others (Wright & Carrese, 2002).

Teachers' expertise is another prominent characteristic, both in specific disciplines and in the teaching field, and knowledge about teaching is an important factor in identifying effective teaching. For example, understanding effective teaching means exploring the knowledge bases of teachers (Schempp, 1993). Also, effective and expert teachers are those who have specific knowledge about teaching techniques, curriculum and their students' needs (Shulman, 1987).

The enthusiasm teachers display toward their specific discipline and the field of teaching is also characteristic of effective teaching. First, Wright and Carrese (2002) find that "commitment to excellence and growth… [and] a strong dedication to one's work" (p. 640) contribute to excitement. These factors then enhance job enjoyment. This commitment to excellence helps teachers become more effective teachers (Buskist, 2002). Second, when teachers make changes in their teaching strategies, they become more effective in the classroom and display more enthusiasm toward creative approaches to teaching (Granello & Plank, 2002).

Teachers' behavior towards students and other people is another prominent characteristic. Associated closely with teachers' attitude about teaching, certain behaviors have been identified as more effective for teaching (Hansen, 1998; Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004; Check, 2001). For example, being effective teachers means knowing how to adapt to any condition (Hansen, 1998). This ability to tailor behavior toward any condition is also rooted in the assumption that effective teachers respond based on interventionist beliefs. These interventionist beliefs allow teachers to work closely with their students, intervening often while the students are learning (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004).

Teachers who behave positively toward their students with the goal of intervening to help their students are more effective teachers because teachers interpret students' learning success based on the interaction between (1) the students' learning process, (2) the context of learning and (3) the teacher (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004). Check (2001) also found that behavior plays a significant role in determining effective teaching. Four of the seven positive teacher traits identified relate to a teacher's behavior toward the students and toward the subject matter. Three of these behaviors include the teachers' communication skills, evidence of preparedness, and use of humor. As Hansen (1998) states, ultimately "it is the person in the role, not the role itself, who brings education to life in the classroom" (p. 404).

English Composition Theory and Practice

Like unraveling a web of theory and practice, English composition as a discipline has been split into the entwined categories of theory and practice. Though increased attention to teaching theories and innovative teaching practices help to blur the categorical lines, great interest remains about how writing teachers should teach. Nicknamed "composition studies," English composition educators have recognized what Gary A. Olsen, Professor of English at the University of South Florida, now calls "the new theory wars" (McLemee, 2003, par. 3), where writing instructors not only identify their preferred theory but also their preferred teaching technique.

Sim (2004) believes that "it is often the teacher's personal practical theories that determine the [teaching] approach chosen" (p. 353). Though the dual-selection of theory and practice is present, it is not always a smooth transition. Identifying what is the best theory and which is the best teaching technique is what Olsen argues consumes the English composition discipline discussion.

Fraiberg (2002), in her analysis of composition theory and pedagogy, states that historically the two sides of composition theory consist of "compositionists who focus …on the rhetorical contexts of writing [and] expressivists who… work within an isolated nexus of language and readers to express their ideas" (p. 171). She finds that teachers usually favor one English composition teaching theory, either the *writing from modeling other literary texts* or the *writing from process* approach. The question of why instructors seem drawn to one or the other approach of teaching writing has not been specifically answered. Furthermore, no definitive answer related to the teaching technique selection process has been identified in existing literature.

Writing Process Theory

The debate continues about how to best use English composition theory to teach students how to write. An abundance of literature exists, highlighting the theory of writing as a process approach to teaching. Using this approach, instead of modeling texts for writing practice, students should use a process of critical analysis to improve their work (Fraiberg, 2002; McComiskey, 2000).

McComiskey (2000) insists that "[student writers] must address rather than ignore, critique rather than dodge the very social forces that pressure them to behave in certain institutionally advantageous ways" (p. 175). This advice for teaching English composition focuses on three levels of composing text: textual, discursive and rhetorical. He argues that it is the best way to identify "linguistic aspects of writing…generative and restrictive exigencies…[and] institutional forces that condition our very identities as writers" (p. 176).

Fueling the discussion of *teaching the writing process* versus *teaching the modeling from text* approach, Walker (1992) emphasizes the need to teach the process of writing. Like Fraiberg (2002) and McComiskey (2000), Walker agrees that students need process to guide their composition studies, and that too much emphasis on their final assignment leads to inadequate understanding of the writing steps. The product approach to teaching expects students to simply choose topics and make corrections. This approach specifically focuses on the final assignment. Therefore, knowledge of each writing step from planning to proofreading is only assumed. Walker further contends that students learn best when they receive direct feedback during every step of the writing process.

Written Product Theory

Currently, most students write to report what they have retained, which supports a need for the *modeling text approach to writing* (Hillocks, 1987). To caution against rigidity in teaching the writing process, she identifies instructional foci that are used in teaching the writing process versus modeling approach. Instead of essay methods and process, these foci introduce more reflective, expressive ways of writing.

Some researchers also believe that knowing grammar is not necessary to produce good writing (Hillocks, 1987; Braddock, Lloyd-Jones & Schoer, 1963). Vassallo (2004) agrees and states that students' experiences rather than grammar rules contribute to good writing habits.

Instead of simply teaching students the writing process, Hillocks (1987) uses the focus of inquiry to guide her teaching, claiming that the focus of inquiry approach to teaching, which is one part of the product approach to teaching, encourages students to alter information used in writing. She explains that this approach is not a stepped process, but about students learning how to freely express their experiences through writing without the rigidity of writing rules.

Knowing which writing theories English composition instructors prefer bridges the gap of exploration into how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques. The following section introduces several teaching techniques used to teach the skill of writing and reasons for their popularity in the classroom.

English Composition Teaching Techniques

Though English composition instructors may enter the teaching profession with a preferred English composition theory, choosing an effective teaching technique requires further investigation. According to Richards and Rodgers (1982) the word *techniques* refers to procedures used in the classroom. Specifically, techniques include practices that derive from particular teaching designs and lesson applications. They further justify *techniques* as having three uses in the classroom, including: (1) using tactics to present content, (2) using activities that offer suggestions for teachers to follow, and (3) recognizing resources such as time, space, and equipment in educational settings. Though the word *techniques* refer to teachers' chosen teaching procedures, *techniques* is different from teaching methods. The term *method* is considered the umbrella category, meaning theory and practice. Therefore, techniques are defined as the subset of methods.

For English composition instructors, teaching involves either one favorite delivery technique or perhaps a multitude of delivery techniques (Finch, 2003). In addition, traditional teaching techniques, such as lecture, dominate mathematics and science courses, but teaching techniques used in language arts classes, specifically English composition, remain less explored. Also, there is an abundance of quantitative data related to teaching pedagogy, but qualitative studies exploring attitudes and the decision-making process about teaching techniques are not as prevalent in existing literature (Beegle & Coffee, 1991; Page, 1992).

The following sections identify main categories of instructional techniques, which include lecture, small group work and class discussion. A review of the literature about

online is not included because online is categorized as a teaching method versus an instructional technique (Sullivan & Czigler, 2002).

Lecture

Lecture has been defined as a stereotypical teaching technique, labeled "chalk and talk" and "drill and kill" (Demant & Yates, 2003). However, despite its negative stereotype, lecture is the most preferred teaching technique in college classrooms today (Keim & Biletzky, 1999). Researchers believe lecture-centered instruction is embedded in universities because of the historical environment of campuses, and the belief that students are accustomed to lecture as a teaching technique (Jamieson, 2003; Check, 2001).

Lecture is popular because it is economically more appealing; it is simply more cost-effective to lecture (Keim & Biletzky, 1999). Another advantage to using lecture includes the ease of preparing lectures (Morgan, Whorton & Gunsalus, 2000).

Despite the advantages, however, lecture does have disadvantages. For example, the speaker can bias the information and listeners may become bored (Morgan, Whorton & Gunsalus, 2000). MacKlem (2006) believes lecture is a poor technique of instruction and has become outdated. Also, Check (2001) found students ranked lectures as a negative teaching technique, defining them as dull and slimy.

Small Group Work

Though lecture is the most popular teaching technique in college classrooms, Scott and Baker (2003) propose that small group work is mandatory for the acquisition of knowledge. This type of collaborative learning promotes a positive classroom environment (Finch, 2003).

Small group work also helps students acquire the self confidence necessary for self-teaching. Also, through peer feedback, students have an increased desire to participate, and a greater commitment to learning (Finch, 2003). Students prefer small group work because it is a way to motivate them to finish a task (Willis et al., 2002; MacKlem, 2006).

Small group work, though beneficial for some students, is not a universally ideal teaching technique. Some instances exist where motivation is not enough to keep all students working together. For example, when students are not accountable for their participation in small groups, they may become lazy. Also, small group work discourages a student's individual opinion by encouraging group consensus (Willis et al., 2002).

Group members do not always work coherently when tasks are either too difficult or too simple (Kutnick et al., 2005). In addition, the diversity of personalities within a small group may hinder a group's productivity. Groups with similar gender, age and interests may prohibit effective outcomes. Furthermore groups with varied characteristics may make group members uncomfortable and therefore less productive (Webb, 1989).

Class Discussion

Small group work is beneficial to students, and the use of class discussion is also important. Class discussion motivates students to pay attention, it develops communication and collaboration skills, and it makes classrooms more interactive (Morgan, Whorton & Gunsalus, 2000; Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Classroom instruction is intended to encourage long-term retention through critical thinking. Also, class discussion promotes learning in new settings (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

Class discussion does have its limitations. Instructors should choose class discussion based on the personality of each new group of students each semester. It is unrealistic to assume that discussion will benefit new students when compared to students from a previous semester (Morgan, Whorton & Gunsalus, 2000; Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

English composition instructors face great variety related to lesson presentation. With so many choices ranging from lecture to class discussion, it makes exploring English composition instructors' decision-making process of how to teach the skill of writing even more interesting.

Factors Influencing Choice of Teaching Technique

Recent literature suggests a myriad of influences on a teacher's decision to use particular teaching techniques. Some of these influences include personal learning strategies, duplicating a teaching technique learned, and modeling a mentor. The following section introduces literature concerning reflective practices and professional development, which may serve as potential factors related to the selection of teaching techniques.

Reflective Practices

Instead of simply evaluating teaching, reflective practice means instructors analyze the process of teaching by asking *why* versus *how* they teach (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005). In addition, reflective practice relates to instructors' various experiences that shape their style of teaching.

Most experiences generally occur when teachers are students (Long & Coldren, 2006). For example, in a study of pedagogy, accounting instructors were more likely to

teach according to how they were taught. For these students, lecture and problem/solution teaching techniques dominated their classroom instruction by sixty percent. Consequently, teachers who are routinely exposed to particular teaching techniques will emulate those teaching techniques in their own classrooms (Beegle & Coffee, 1991).

Previous instructors' enthusiasm about the skill of writing is another influence on students who become teachers. For example, instructors possess a positive perspective about the skill of writing when as students they were exposed to interested instructors. Based on their experiences in the classroom as students, these instructors transfer their positive perceptions of the discipline to their students (Page, 1992).

To keep students from embarking upon an unproductive path, instructors should overcome the internal and sometimes negative barriers that influence their thinking (Vassallo, 2004). Instructors share their inner voice with students, and this helps students express their thoughts. The sharing of thoughts helps instructors teach students how to think for themselves (Vassallo, 2004). Instructors should also become active in investigating their own learning journeys to improve their effectiveness in the classroom (McIntyre, 1997).

Self-reflection on their chosen teaching techniques helps instructors define their multiple roles in the classroom (McIntyre, 1997). Instructors who reflect on potential internal influences relating to pedagogy may discover good teaching ideas. Reflecting on internal influences helps instructors make more effective modifications to their teaching techniques, and these modifications may enhance student success (Woolfolk, 2004; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005).

Professional Development

As professional educators, instructors also have professional influences in their lives. Both satisfaction with teaching as a profession and the various teaching experiences within the profession contribute to the selection of teaching techniques. Also, experiences with continuing professional development are influential to instructors (Buskist, 2002; Sim, 2004). Through formal training, communication with colleagues, subject-centered conferences and professional reading, instructors learn to adapt to new situations. For example, these forms of professional development encourage instructors to recognize changes in student learning. When instructors recognize changes in how their students learn, they teach their students differently (Sim, 2004).

Professional development opportunities influence instructors to teach effectively. For example, when instructors work together in small groups, they discuss teaching ideas. Small group work encourages a shared sense of responsibility to learn from each other. Instructors share stories about creative teaching ideas, teaching advice and teaching pitfalls. From this type of professional development, instructors then share their new knowledge with other colleagues (Rivero, 2006).

Mentoring is another influence of professional development. When veteran instructors mentor new instructors, knowledge is shared (Rivero, 2006). In addition, mentoring encourages effective professional dispositions, including (1) analyzing assumptions and values, (2) taking control of classroom dilemmas, and (3) adapting to institutional changes. In addition, professional development opportunities that feature mentoring result in increased new instructor retention (Campbell & Brummett, 2007).

Through professional development, instructors are also influenced by a sense of culture and community. As a community, instructors strive to maintain successful professional development outcomes (VanTassel-Baska, Quek & Feng, 2007). One important outcome is the shift in their roles as instructors. For example, a community of instructors encourages each other to alter their roles, including altering from students to teachers and from teachers to mentors. When instructors recognize shifts in their roles, they examine their beliefs about teaching (Campbell & Brummett, 2007).

Ultimately, professional development is important to help instructors stay current in their subject areas, and professional influences can encourage instructors to be enthusiastic about learning and teaching (Trigwell, 2001).

Decision Theory

Simon (1965) believes that decision theory is rooted in pragmatic thinking. In its inception it was an extension of the theory of rational choice because it provided clarification for the analysis of *rationalization*. As decision theory became more popular, it split into separate categories that apply to various topics.

Decision theory attempts to make sense of how people either should make or do make decisions (Resnik, 1987). Decision theory is further defined by the choices that are available and by the decision maker. First, decisions are conscious choices upon where action is taken when someone is presented with alternatives. Second, the decision maker can attach values to the outcome of any decision because the decision maker is motivated by positive outcomes (Shubik, 1958). Based in its original context, this theory is still used to represent statistical data in conjunction with probability theories when investigating

topics in the mathematics, science and engineering fields (Bell, Raiffa & Tversky, 1988; Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981).

Decision theory is further divided into two main categories, normative decision theory and descriptive decision theory. Resnik (1987) defines normative decision theory as how decisions *ought* to be made. Normative decision theory is concerned with rationality. This branch of decision theory is characterized by precisely specified data, which is categorized or formulated using algebraic equations. From the decision theory definition, when someone makes a decision using normative decision theory, that person "believes so and so…[and] should do such and such" (Bell, Raiffa & Tversky, 1988, p. 16). These decisions are calculated and universally made through a sequence of predetermined steps in the decision-making process.

Descriptive theory is defined as how decisions *are* made. Descriptive decision theory is more abstract. This branch of decision theory focuses on a decision maker's ability to alter choices and be inconsistent with decision-making in the future (Rios, 1994).

Though descriptive decision theory is more useful for exploring the interpretive nature of how humans make decisions, the inconsistency is a hidden threat (Rios, 1994). Rios believes that inconsistent decision-making produces some of the best decisions, but those decisions are not grounded in absolute rationality as found with normative decision theory. Horvitz, Breese and Henrion (1988) also state that "…a decision-theoretic perspective distinguishes between a good decision (a choice made consistent with preferences and beliefs) and a good outcome (the result of a choice that turns out to be desirable)" (p. 7).

Summary

In this chapter, literature concerning effective teaching, English composition theories and influences that contribute to instructors' decisions about teaching techniques was reviewed. The review emphasized that English composition instructors face many choices when selecting teaching techniques, but by identifying factors that influence decision-making, instructors may become more aware of teaching techniques that will benefit themselves and their students. Though literature exists concerning English composition theory, practice and teaching influences, research exploring how instructors choose teaching techniques were not found. Chapter Three presents the chosen methodology and the research design used in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques. Specifically, this study explored potential factors that may influence how writing instructors in a community college and university in Oklahoma choose their teaching techniques. To facilitate investigation of this topic, several research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What decision-making processes do instructors use when choosing teaching techniques?
2. What factors influence the decision-making process?
3. How do these influencing factors contribute to the choice of teaching technique?

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was chosen for this study because case studies "explore a process" (Creswell, 2003, p. 106). In order to explore the process of how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques, I interviewed and observed English composition instructors, and collected documents from the English composition instructors.

Research Setting

To explore how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques, I invited English composition instructors to participate in the study from two higher education institutions in the state of Oklahoma. English composition instructors were chosen for this study because English composition courses are among the most frequently offered at all higher education institutions in the United States, and the majority of students are required to take English composition (Neal, 2000). Also, English composition as a subject is less represented in existing research regarding how instructors choose how they teach their students (Fraiberg, 2002; McLemee, 2003).

According to the Oklahoma Department of Education *Student Data Report* (2004), Oklahoma has 25 public higher education institutions with 20 branch campuses. The Oklahoma Department of Education *Student Data Report* also states that in 2004, approximately 235,000 students enrolled in these institutions. Within the Oklahoma Department of Education *Student Data Report* (2004), all states are ranked according to public higher education enrollment and state population. At the time this report was published, Oklahoma ranked 15th in the nation for public higher education enrollment and state population, placing it near the middle of the rankings.

I chose a community college in Oklahoma as one of the two research settings. Selecting a community college was significant for this study for two reasons. First, Hankin (2003) states that over "45% of all undergraduates in America study at a community college" (p. 121). Second, enrollment in Oklahoma's community colleges increased 9.8 percent between 1994 and 2003 (Oklahoma Department of Education, 2004).

The particular community college for this study was chosen based on its size, student enrollment and number of English instructors employed at the institution. The community college selected for this study is the largest community college in Oklahoma, enrolling approximately 30,000 students a semester. Also, an estimated 65 percent of the local area residents begin their educational careers at one of the college's multiple branch campuses (Oklahoma Department of Education, 2004).

The college has five primary branch campuses. No one campus claims to be the main branch, though the downtown campus, which was first established in 1970, assumes this recognition. Each of the five campuses, placed strategically in the downtown, north, south and west locations of a major population center in Oklahoma, serve a large number of students. Among the multiple classroom buildings and administrative offices, each campus has its own library, cafeteria and student union. The college offers both degree and non-degree seeking programs of study and certificates of completion for students. Though the student enrollment is approximately 17,000 per year, the slight majority of students are non-traditional, defined as students over the age of 25 (NCES, 2005).

Of the over 1,000 faculty members working for the community college, approximately 12 percent are English instructors (U.S. College Search, 2006). According to the Director of Evening Operations at one of the campuses, approximately 30 full time English composition instructors and over 80 adjunct English composition instructors teach multiple sections of English composition each semester at multiple branch campuses.

I also chose a comprehensive university as the other research setting in this study. Similar to the community college described above, the university was selected based on

its size, student enrollment and the number of English instructors employed at the institution. Selecting a university is significant because 65 percent of all students who begin their studies in universities complete their education at the university level (NCES, 2004). Also, enrollments in Oklahoma's research universities increased 23.5 percent between 1994 and 2003 (Oklahoma Department of Education, 2004).

The university system chosen for this study is one of the two research universities in the state of Oklahoma. It has four branch campuses. The main campus is the largest with historical, academic and administrative buildings, a two million volume library with state of the art research facilities and sports complexes (Common Data Set, 2006). The branch campuses supplement the main campus with some offering more specialized programs in the technical or medical fields. These branch campuses also have their own facilities including research facilities, administrative offices and student-related centers.

Aside from some differences among branch campuses, the university offers advanced, four-year baccalaureate degrees, graduate degrees and professional certifications. The majority of the more than 23,000 students who enroll each year are considered traditional, defined as under 25 years of age (NCES, 2005).

The university employs over 1,230 instructional faculty of which approximately 13 percent are English instructors (Common Data Set, 2006). Also, according to an interview with the main campus Director of First-Year Composition, there are approximately 14 English lecturers, 11 visiting English instructors, two program directors and 64 English teaching assistants who work at the university's three campuses.

Selection Process of Participants

The population for this study was defined as all current English composition instructors who work full-time, part-time or adjunct at either the community college or the university selected for this study. Participants selected from that population must have taught at either the community college or university for at least two years, teaching no less than six hours of English Composition-related courses a semester.

From the approximately 220 possible participants from both research settings, nine participants agreed to participate in the study. With various backgrounds and teaching experiences, the instructors in this study have a combined total of approximately 110 years college teaching experience with an average of seven years. Four were female and five were male, with four community college instructors and five university instructors participating in the study. A complete listing of the instructors' education and experience is presented in Appendix A.

Community College

In August 2005, I obtained contact information for each of the English Department directors at each of the community college campuses via the community college website. I contacted, via telephone, each English director at all of the branch campuses at the community college. The English directors provided me with a list of full-time English faculty members' names, email addresses and telephone numbers.

In addition, I contacted, via telephone, each Evening Operations director at all the community college branch campuses. The Evening Operations department maintains adjunct instructors' office mailboxes. Only one Evening Operations Director refused to release the adjunct instructors' names or office mailbox numbers to me.

Between August 31, 2005 and September 7, 2005 I personally delivered the *Participant Invitation Letter* to each English faculty member's campus mailbox. I also either delivered the invitation letters to the adjunct faculty mailboxes or allowed the Evening Operations directors at certain campuses to deliver the letters. A total of 106 invitation letters were delivered to potential participants at the community college branch campuses. These letters invited the instructors to participate by defining the study's purpose, methodology and participant requirements. See Appendix F.

After receiving the invitation letters, English composition instructors who were interested in participating in the study contacted me by email to agree to participation in the study. Out of the 106 invited instructors, only four participants agreed to participate in the study. On September 30, 2005 I sent the remaining 102 invited instructors a *Participant Invitation Reminder* postcard. No positive responses were obtained.

University

On November 9, 2005 I contacted the Director of Composition at the main campus of the university system by email. I informed the Director of my study's topic, purpose, and participant criteria. I also included the *Participant Invitation Letter* in the email. On November 11, 2005, after granting me permission to conduct research at the university, the Director of Composition posted the *Participant Invitation Letter* to the English list serve. This list serve services three of the four university campus branches, allowing me to contact approximately 109 instructors.

On November 19, 2005, I contacted the Director of Arts and Sciences at one of the university campuses via telephone. I emailed the Director the same information and *Participant Invitation Letter* that I had given to the university's main campus Director of

Composition. The Arts and Sciences Director accepted my request to conduct research at this particular branch campus of the university. I obtained email addresses for each of the English Instructors, and by December 2005, each of the nine instructors at this campus was invited to participate in the study.

Through the university system, I invited over 100 English Instructors to participate in the study, and five participants agreed to participate in the study. The exact number of part-time and adjunct English instructors is unknown; however, it is estimated by the Director of Composition that 25 percent of the university instructors I contacted teach part-time or serve as adjuncts for the university.

For all the instructors who agreed to participate in this study, I used email to confirm each instructor's scheduled interview and observation dates. One week prior to each appointment, I sent each instructor another confirmation email message. On each day of my first interview with each instructor, each instructor read and signed the *Research Consent Form* (see Appendix B). Out of the nine community college and university participants, only six agreed to be observed. These observations occurred between October 2005 and December 2005.

Data Collection

To explore how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques, I interviewed and observed English composition instructors. I also collected documents from the English composition instructors. Interviews were scheduled for up to one hour each, and the observations were scheduled to fit each instructor's class meeting times. All interviews, observations and document collections, with the community college instructors occurred between September 2005 and October 2005. All document

collections, interviews and observations with the university instructors occurred between November 2005 and May 2006.

Interviews, observations and documents are the most common data sources used in qualitative research. Also, because qualitative research is interpretive, descriptive and analytical, researchers should use multiple data sources to encourage greater understanding of acquired information (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This triangulation of multiple sources allows for the examination of evidence to create a justification for identified themes (Creswell, 2003).

Interview Data

Interviews were the primary means of gathering data for this study. The interview protocol constructed for this study is included as Appendix D. Using an outline format, my first question category was "Interviewee Background," which inquired about each instructor's history of studying and teaching English composition. My next question category related directly to each research question introduced in this study. The categories include "Teaching Technique Preference" and "Decision-Making Process." I then included focused questions according to the appropriate research question category. These focused questions included inquiries into (1) what decision-making process the English composition use to select their teaching techniques, and (2) what, if any, influences contribute to the teaching techniques the English composition instructors choose.

Observational Data

Teaching observations were used as an additional means of gathering data. This data source is important because using observations along with document collection and interviews provided additional data sources to examine thereby allowing for triangulation of data. This type of triangulation encourages researchers to use multiple data sources for information "by examining evidence…and using it to build a coherent justification for themes," (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Because the purpose of my study was to explore English composition instructors' perceived decision-making process of choosing teaching techniques, and in order to witness the outcomes of these chosen techniques, I needed to observe the instructors in their natural, real-world settings. The observations were scheduled at the convenience of the participants during the data collection process.

Using advice from Creswell (2003), I constructed an *Observation Protocol* form (see Appendix E). During each observation, I took careful descriptive notes. Also, for each observation protocol form, I included demographic information, and labeled each protocol with the scheduled time, date and location of each observation.

Each form was separated into two columns. The first column was titled "Descriptive Notes," which included detailed descriptions of what I observed, the participants, the setting, other individuals, activities, and communication between the participants and other individuals. The second column was titled "Reflective Notes." These notes included more interpretive descriptions of my personal perceptions of the observations, including personal thoughts, questions, impressions and concerns.

Document Data

Prior to any collection of documents, I constructed a *Document Collection and Analysis Checklist* for both institutional documents and for instructor's documents (see Appendix C). This checklist helped me keep careful record of which documents I obtained and analyzed. Also, the checklist helped me identify additional documents that may be needed to be collected to supplement my understanding of the institution and of the participants.

During the interview and observation process, I collected a variety of documents for my study. I collected two main categories of documents. The first category of documents related to the research institution. These documents included historical records such as newspaper clippings and mission statements. In addition, I collected demographic reports, assessment reports and institution evaluation reports relating to both the research institution's student and faculty population.

The second category of documents related directly to each instructor who participated in this study. I received a variety of documents from each instructor, including syllabi, lesson plans, lesson handouts, assignment handouts, and published articles. The information provided me with insight about the research setting, the research population and especially how English composition instructors place their ideas for teaching into written form.

Data Managements

Directly prior to each interview, I took descriptive notes about the setting and instructor. These notes included specific details about the sights, sounds, and temperature of the setting and a physical description of each instructor. Next, with each instructor's

consent, I audio taped each interview, which provided a verbatim account of our conversation.

Following each interview and before I left the instructor's office, I informed each instructor about my use of member checking. To ensure my study's validity, I encouraged each instructor to check the data I had gathered from them and transcribed in order to verify its accuracy. To ensure proper management of the data from each interview, I labeled each interview transcription with the instructor's pseudonym and interview number. Pseudonyms were randomly assigned, and the numbers represented each interview, whether initial or follow-up.

I treated each interview as a conversation (Rubin & Rubin 1995), seeking to "listen so as to hear the meaning of what [was] being said" (p. 7). Using my interview protocol, I asked main questions that directed the conversation. These main questions related to my research questions in focused areas including (1) how composition instructors choose their teaching techniques, and (2) what, if any, influences contribute to the teaching techniques composition instructors choose.

In addition to the main, directive questions, I also asked probe questions, prompting the instructors to clarify, complete or expand on the answer to a question. This allowed each instructor to more fully discuss ideas or offer examples that placed more relevance on their answers.

Aside from the main question and their resulting probes, I also periodically returned to earlier parts of the interview and asked follow-up questions. These questions asked the instructors to further explain their answers as they directly related to main questions and emerging themes. The follow-up questions further helped me understand

the context of their answers, allowing further examination of the implications of what they said.

Data Analysis Procedures

I began the analysis of the interview, observation and document data by reading inductively (Patton, 2002). This inductive reading uncovered unanticipated information. The observations reinforced information from the interviews, but some of the document information was contradicted by the interviews and observations. The inductive reading balanced the deductive reading, which is done to find expected or anticipated information. Also, while reading the data, I discovered several recurring patterns. These recurring patterns were statements made during interviews with the instructors, actions observed during my observations of the instructors in their classrooms and information from the collected documents.

Next, from the recurring patterns found in the collected data, I then categorized the recurring data chunks into themes. After identifying recurring patterns and categorizing those patterns into manageable forms, I began to answer my research question about how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques. Using Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, I then categorized information from each data source relating to any potential factors influencing how the instructors chose their teaching techniques.

Validity and Reliability

Because qualitative research findings are more varied than quantitative findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), qualitative data must be carefully examined to ensure trustworthiness. The variance occurs because of the use of less standardized research instruments, such as interviews and observations, and also the use nonrandom sampling procedures used in qualitative studies. However, despite the varied nature of qualitative data, criteria exist to ensure that the interpretation of qualitative data is valid and consistent (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The criteria include trustworthiness, dependability and transferability

Trustworthiness

To ensure the data I interpreted was credible or valid, I used the five criterion suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003). First, to prolong the study and gather more data, the study took place over a ten month period, the fall 2005 and spring 2006 college semesters. Second, to share my interpretations with the study's participants, I encouraged each participant to check the information. The participants were given copies of their interview transcriptions and observation field notes. Thirdly, to remain active in the research, I stayed in constant contact with the participants by encouraging them to offer any additional information at any time.

Fourth, in order to triangulate the study data, I used multiple data sources to broaden my interpretation of the information by interviewing participants, observing participants in their natural settings and collecting documents. Finally, to verify the study was implemented consistently, I kept detailed notes of each stage of the study, organizing them chronologically.

Dependability

I used two separate processes to ensure that my interpretation of the data was accurate. First, to limit researcher bias, I made a chronological checklist of the study (see Appendix G). This helped me answer questions concerning each stage of the study. Also, each question allowed me a way to review the material in order to identify any researcher bias.

Second, I used peer debriefing to enhance the reliability of the study's information. Peer debriefing is defined as allowing someone not connected with the study to review the information and ask critical questions about the study's content (Creswell, 2003). This provided an alternate perspective of the information to reveal problems with accuracy. During the course of my study, I asked two colleagues to peer debrief drafts of the study. Their critical questioning helped me to redefine and revise areas of confusion within my analysis and also to identify possible researcher bias that resulted from my connection to teaching English composition and my familiarity with the research settings.

Transferability

I used rich description in all of my field notes. Whether I was describing information from collected documents, interviews or observations, I used clear and detailed language to reproduce descriptive images in my notes (Creswell & Denzin, 1994). Though first I wrote raw notes, which are defined as note-taking while immersed in the setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), I later revised those notes by clarifying any interpretations or subjective descriptions. In addition, the peer debriefing described above ensured confirmability, and also verified that my descriptions were clear and transferable to readers' perspectives.

Also, because this study analyzed data from two research settings, a community college and university, the results may be transferable to other two year and four year higher education institutions. Roth (2005) defines transferability as "…the extent to which research results … are also useful to understand new situations. Transferability is the qualitative inquirer's equivalent to external validity and geralizability" (p. 361). Ultimately, the results are only transferable if knowledge gained from this study is applicable to other, similar environments.

Limitation

Researcher bias is a limitation identified for this study. As an English composition instructor, I related to the instructors' perspectives about the teaching of writing skills, and my connection to the college teaching profession may have influenced my interpretation of the data. I was also familiar with the research settings, which made me comfortable talking and observing the instructors, and I recognize that this comfort level may have caused occasional shifting between the roles of researcher and colleague.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in this study. First, the research design was defined. The data collection procedures and data analysis procedures were then presented, and a limitation was discussed last. In Chapter Four the participants are introduced and data is presented in categorized themes.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to understand how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques. First, descriptions of each of the participants are presented. Next, data from collected documents, interviews and observations are presented in relation to primary and secondary themes. Finally, in order to present a comparative analysis of data from the two research settings of the community college system and the university system, data are presented within the identified themes according to those two settings.

Participants

To help facilitate an understanding of the data as it is presented in this chapter, the instructors are introduced below according to the two research settings. Using pseudonyms to identify each participant, the community college instructors include Pat, Vie, Dan, and Matt. The university instructors include Jake, Beth, Charles, Chris and Shay. Using "thick description" (Geertz 1973; Denzin 2001), each of the nine participants is introduced individually, below.

Community College Instructors (cc)

Pat. Standing approximately five foot four inches tall, Pat works for the community college system. She is a Caucasian in her mid 40's with short, wavy sandy blonde hair. Originally from a southern state, she accentuates the pronunciation of "o"

and “u” vowels and admits to having a “loud voice.” Pat uses her hands to gesture, often indicating length and height by moving her hands horizontally or above her head. During our interview, in her brightly lit office with a window facing a children’s playground, Pat returned repeatedly to her file cabinet looking for articles, papers and assignments. She only sat down momentarily before moving around her office again.

Thinking she would become a full-time writer, Pat’s first career choice was not college teaching English. She stated, “I was an idiot. I thought I would be a writer. I would make my living as a writer.” However, while writing short stories, novels and working on her degree, she became a teaching assistant. She later worked for a different college in the state teaching part time as an adjunct instructor.

Pat has worked for the community college system used in this study for over ten years. She moved into her first floor office when this fourth campus of the community college opened in late 1996. With her bachelor degree and master’s degree in Creative Writing, she has taught Composition I, Composition II, Philosophy, Honors Composition, Creative Writing, Humanities and some developmental writing courses. Pat admitted to moving around quickly in the classroom and said, “We go fast. They [students] talk about having headaches in my class; they need Advil.” Pat said she enjoys teaching. She stated, “I fell in love with it [teaching].”

Vie. Only several years from retirement, Vie is a Caucasian in her early 60’s. She has short, graying blonde hair, which she wears in a bun near the crown of her head. Adept at using nonverbal communication to express herself, she used hand gestures to emphasize points in the conversation. She also used facial expressions such as widening her eyes indicating surprise and smiling to indicate fondness for what she said during our

conversation. The volume of her voice was low, and she spoke rather slowly. During our interview in Vie's dimly lit office, which was neatly organized with books and pictures of her family on her desk, she sat behind her desk, slowly rocking back and forth in her swivel, office chair.

Like Pat, Vie never intended to become a college instructor of English. After attending college in the 1960's, she got married and raised her children. When she was in her mid 30's, she returned to college with the purpose of finishing her education, but she had no intention on working. She stated, "I went to college to get an education, not to get a job or a career because I was a homemaker." Vie first got a job as a writing center attendant and adjunct English instructor for the community college used in this study. She eventually became a full time English Instructor.

Although Vie has worked at several of the college's branch campuses, she has spent the majority of her teaching career working at the downtown campus location. She has taught developmental English courses, American Literature, Composition I, Composition II and several honors courses. Although she did not intend to enter the college teaching profession, she admits to enjoying English and teaching. She stated, "English is easy for me…it's inherent and I have a talent for teaching."

Dan. Also working for the community college, Dan is an African American in his early 30's. He has a slender build and stands approximately six foot three inches tall. He has a very short, almost buzz-like haircut, and he speaks softly and slowly. During our interview in his hallway office, which was decorated with cultural posters and gray file cabinets, he sat quietly in his black office chair.

Unlike Pat and Vie, Dan always knew he would teach. However, he did not know which discipline he would choose. Throughout his life he tutored others, and he said he knew that "Teaching is what I do." After changing teaching disciplines from math to English, Dan began teaching as an adjunct English instructor at the community college used in this study. After finishing his graduate degree, he became a full time English instructor, and he has worked for the same downtown branch campus as a full time instructor for four years.

Dan began his career teaching developmental reading and writing courses, and now he teaches a variety of classes including Strategies for Academic Success, Composition I, Composition II, and an African American Literature course. Discussing his justification for teaching, Dan said, "I really wanted to talk to people about their values and have an opportunity to push them to understand who they are."

Matt. Like Dan, Matt also works for the community college. He is a Caucasian in his early 50's and has short, sandy blonde hair. He is tall, and he used jokes and humor during our conversation. During our interview in his office, which is in the center of the hallway with windows on the opposite side of the hallway, he sat quietly, leaning back in his office chair.

Instead of choosing college teaching as a career, Matt began his education as a Pre-med major. Not being able to visualize himself as a doctor, he focused on his ability to teach others. After receiving his graduate degree, Matt immediately took a full time college teaching position in English at the community college in 1971.

Though Matt taught briefly at the southern college branch campus, he has spent the majority of his college teaching career at the downtown branch campus. He enjoys

literature and teaches British Literature, Composition I, Composition II and Creative Writing Poetry. Reflecting on his career choice, Matt stated, "I like to read…and once you major in English…teaching is one of the more obvious routes. I enjoyed that."

University Instructors (uf)

Jake. Jake is a Caucasian in his early 20's. He has dark hair, which is cut short. He also has a heavy, dark goatee and moustache. Jake admitted to talking very fast, and during our interview, which occurred outside between two historic academic buildings on the university's main campus, he fidgeted with his watch often.

Regarding his career choice, Jake quickly stated how he always wanted to teach. He stated, "I always loved education…both my parents were teachers, so that may have something to do with it." With his employment background at a southern university teaching Composition I and II, Jake followed the path of several of his favorite instructors and began working on his graduate degree at the university used in this study. As incentive to complete his degree at the university, Jake accepted a teaching assistantship. He first worked as a teaching assistant for three years, and now he works as an Assistant Director of Composition.

As a teaching assistant, Jake has only taught at the university's main campus where he teaches Composition I, Composition II, and Introduction to Film. He also assists the Composition Director on a daily basis. Clarifying his teaching career choice, Jake stated, "I love school; I like being in charge…It's the one field I feel really good at."

Beth. Also working for the university, Beth is a Caucasian in her 40's. She is tall with shoulder-length blonde hair. During our interview, she spoke softly and slowly and used her fingers often to reposition her hair behind her ears. Our interview was conducted

in her brightly lit office that had been modified from a classroom. It was decorated with papers, books and students' poster collages.

Similar to Pat and Vie, Beth did not intend on becoming a college teacher. As a journalism major, she and her husband traveled oversees. Eventually, as journalism positions remained unavailable, she focused on her teaching assistantship position while finishing her graduate degree. After obtaining her doctorate degree in 1997, Beth began teaching at the university used in this study as a Visiting Assistant and member of the Writing Project.

Though Beth alternates between the university's main campus and the northern campus in the summers to participate in graduate seminars, she teaches all academic semesters at the university's main campus. She enjoys teaching introduction courses and primarily teaches Honors Composition, Creative Writing, Introduction to Literature, Introduction to Composition Theory, and Poetry. When asked about her educational experience, Beth stated, "I was one of those lucky kids who knew since she was a little bitty kid that she was going to write."

Charles. Charles also works for a branch campus of the university. He is a Caucasian, German in his mid 40's. He has short, sandy blonde hair and a small moustache that is trimmed closely. He is of medium build, standing approximately six feet tall. Born and raised in Germany, he speaks with a German accent. During our interview in the university's tutoring center, Charles leaned back on the chocolate-colored couch while he spoke. He used his hands often to gesture and also laughed often at his responses.

Like Dan and Jake, Charles always knew he would teach. Before moving to the United States in the late 1980's, he taught English as a foreign language in several German high schools. When he arrived in Oklahoma, he taught both English as a Second Language and English at various private and business schools and a community college in the state. In 1994, he was hired by the university to teach English Fundamentals. He currently works full time as an English instructor at one of the university's branch campuses.

Charles teaches a variety of English classes, such as Technical Writing I and Technical Writing II, Composition I, Composition II and occasionally teaches a section of English Fundamentals. In addition to English classes, he also often teaches a Small Group Communications class and Introduction to Speech, and has developed and now teaches a Native American Humanities course. When asked about his decision to teach, Charles stated, "The only thing I know is for some reason that's the only thing I wanted to do; I wanted to be a teacher." Laughing, Charles also justified his fondness for teaching saying, "I couldn't imagine doing anything else. Let's say in a cube farm looking through reams of papers. [In teaching] I know I am making a difference."

Chris. Standing over six feet tall with a slender build, Chris is Caucasian with short brown hair. He is in his early 30's, wears thinly-trimmed glasses, is clean shaven and laughs often. During our interview, which was conducted in his office, he relaxed on his leather couch, removed his shoes and ate potato chips from a half-empty bag. He used a variety of nonverbal gestures, especially facial expressions, to accompany what he said.

Similar to Charles, Dan and Jake, Chris has always wanted to teach. Though he did not intend to teach at the college level, he always knew he loved helping others learn.

As a middle school teacher, he taught World History, Social Studies, English and American history and Government. He also taught Language Arts, which he defined as English. In addition, he taught English briefly at the high school level.

In 2000, Chris originally applied for a position as a Recruiter for the branch campus of the university. However, he was hired as a Lead Communications Instructor. Today, Chris is the Director of The Tutorial Learning Center, Innovation and Performance.

Chris has worked for only one branch campus of the university, and though his title has altered over the past six years, he still teaches English courses. He primarily teaches English Fundamentals courses, but he also teaches Composition I and Composition II. Regarding his decision to enter the teaching profession, Chris talked about his childhood. He stated, "I mean when I was little I would always play, whether I was playing with hot wheel cars or whether I was playing with dinosaurs, I was teaching them something…it is probably one of those things where it was the only thing I know."

Shay. Shay is Caucasian in her early 30's. She has long, auburn hair, which is heavily curled and just rests past her shoulders. During our interview, conducted in Shay's office in the university's Tutorial Learning Center, she leaned back in her chair, which faced one cubical wall, and turned her head to converse with me. She used hand gestures often and made jokes during the interview.

Shay works at the same university branch campus as Chris and Charles, though she has only worked for the university for three years. Similar to some other instructors in this study, Shay always knew she wanted to teach. Her undergraduate studies included English and Literature, and she is currently completing her graduate degree in Teaching,

Leadership and Curriculum. She is a full-time English Instructor with the university, and she has always worked for the English Fundamentals area of the university.

Though Shay does not have as much English teaching experience as some of the other instructors in this study, she principally enjoys teaching Reading and Writing Fundamentals, but she also teaches Composition I and Composition II. Explaining her decision to teach college students, Shay stated how she enjoys working with students. She stated, "[I] enjoy working with students… [teaching English] came natural to me."

Emergent Themes

Though many themes emerged from reading the data, evidence for the themes of "Teaching Techniques Used," Teaching Techniques Justified" and "Personal Experiences" were most prominent. These three themes offer the greatest insight into exploring the instructors' perceptions about how they choose their teaching techniques.

Teaching Techniques Used

The first theme of "Teaching Techniques Used" emerged in every interview conducted, and was also prominent in every observation. From the data three teaching techniques emerged most often. These techniques include small group work, lecture and class discussion. During the interviews, the instructors used repetitive statements such as "I do…," "I try….," "I always…, "we do…" and "we use…". Descriptive field notes from the observations also revealed what techniques the instructors used; however, these techniques were enacted versus spoken. The following sections present data related to the teaching techniques of small group work, lecture and class discussion.

Small Group Work. Six of the instructors interviewed stated they use this teaching technique. Dan identified his use of this technique when he said, "I tend to use a lot of group work," and "I do a lot of small group work." Beth (uf) also said, "We do small group." Charles (uf), while discussing his teaching techniques, repeated this teaching technique saying, "primarily small group" and "we use small group." However, both Jake (uf) and Vie (cc) did not discuss small group work as a technique they use repeatedly. For example, Jake stated, "Some days [I] use entirely group work," and Vie stated, "I probably only do maybe four small groups a semester."

Also, not all of the instructors labeled this teaching technique as small group work. For example, Chris (uf) stated, "I use little group games," and both Beth (uf) and Dan (cc) also identified small group work as "collaborative learning."

During my observation of classes, only Dan used this teaching technique. First, he asked his students to get into "small groups." Next, he handed each student a grammar worksheet. Speaking to the entire class, Dan told the groups to complete the worksheet and to discuss their findings among themselves upon completion. The students in the small groups, which consisted of three or four students per group, whispered to each other as they completed both the grammar worksheet and the peer review task.

As the students worked in their small groups, Dan talked to students in each group about their answers. For students who incorrectly completed the worksheet, he reviewed certain grammar rules with them. Dan continued to discuss grammar rules with each group of students until they said they understood their mistakes.

Lecture. Jake (uf) labeled lecture as the "Alex Trebek Complex." This unique definition created an interesting visualization for lecture as a teaching technique. All nine of the instructors interviewed stated they use lecture as a teaching technique. Jake discussed his primary use of lecture saying, "Most days I'll do mainly lecture and PowerPoint presentations" and "I will do lecture or I have a list of things like tips, so [they] remember." Matt (cc) also admitted to using lecture saying, "I end up lecturing some," while Pat (cc) stated, "I have to lecture about the assignments."

Beth (uf), and Dan (cc) also stated their use of lecture, but they reiterated that it is not their primary teaching technique. Beth stated, "We do lecture; there's a time when it's necessary." Dan (cc), also emphasizing the technique's secondary use said, "I try to avoid lecture although it happens when they ask me a question."

Both Chris (uf) and Shay (uf) also stated their use of lecture, but hedged their responses with how lecture is connected to the students' different learning styles. Chris stated, "I don't do very long lectures…I try to lecture for audio [learners]." Shay stated, "I use short lecture only."

Several of the instructors identified using lecture, but they identified this teaching technique differently. For example, Charles (uf) stated he does a lot of review, but he defined "review" as a form of lecture. He said, "I end up talking a lot during that [review] but I still ask them lots of questions." Vie (cc) did not identify lecture specifically. Instead, she spoke about talking to the class and using the chalkboard simultaneously. Vie stated, "I'm on the board; I'm on the board all the time…I'm standing up there [talking]."

Some instructors spoke about their use of lecture in the classroom, and during the observations they also used lecture. Both Vie (cc) and Dan (cc) used the chalkboard to present lessons to their Composition I classes. Jake (uf) did not use the chalkboard during my observation of his class, but he did talk to the class for the entire class period. Both Matt (cc) and Pat (cc) also spoke to their respective Composition I and Honors Composition I classes for almost the entire class period. They both used lecture as they referred to pages in the textbook and talked to the class about the lesson and assignments.

Discussion. In addition to lecture, Pat's (cc) definition of class discussion being a "community of people" emerged often among the five instructors who identified using class discussion as a teaching technique. Jake (uf) identified class discussion as one of his teaching techniques, but he also stressed how it is only effective when the class participates. Jake stated, "Class discussion is another [teaching technique], when I can get them to talk, and the class will talk." Shay (uf) emphasized her use of class discussion as a teaching technique saying more than once that "I use class discussion." Dan (cc) combined his statements about small group work and class discussion together, saying, "I do a lot of small group work and class sharing."

Matt (cc) also identified class discussion as a teaching technique; however, he further described it more as lecture. Matt stated, "I call them class discussion, though sometimes I do like 95% of the talking." Also, both Beth (uf) and Dan (cc) talked about class discussion, but they each identified it as think pair share. Think pair share is defined as a discussion cycle where students have time to think about a question, discuss the question in small groups, and then share their thoughts with the class (McTighe &

Lyman, 2002). Beth stated, “We do think pair share,” and Dan said, “I think it’s the think pair share type [of] teaching method.”

Despite the instructors’ statements about class discussion, the observations revealed only slight uses of this teaching technique. For example, while observing Vie (cc) and her Composition I class, she used a piece of toilet paper to introduce an illustrative essay assignment. The toilet paper was a visual aid to remind the students about the newly remodeled restrooms in the building. She then told the students about her visit to the new restrooms. Her experience was an example of an illustrative essay topic.

The assignment required the students to write an illustrative essay where they focused on an object as an illustration of something in their lives. After asking the students if they had visited the newly remodeled restrooms, Vie used question and answer to supplement a class discussion about the assignment.

Pat (cc) also used class discussion to introduce a new assignment to her Honors Composition I students. She individually called on students to discuss their interpretations of the assigned readings, and then other students contributed to the class conversation. Specifically, Pat asked questions related to the readings, and students answered with detailed responses. Some students asked Pat to clarify information from the readings, and Pat asked the class for the answer. Several students responded to Pat, and then they discussed the answer with each other.

Aside from the instructors’ perspectives about the three prominent teaching techniques, small group work, lecture and discussion, two instructors did mention an additional technique called “personal stories.” Closely related to lecture, both Beth (uf) and Vie (cc) focused on their use of personal stories in the classroom. During my

interview with Beth, she discussed using personal stories, stating "I use them [because] it personalizes it and demystifies it [the lesson]." During my observation of Vie, she too used personal stories to introduce a new lesson. In conjunction with discussion as described above, Vie spoke about her own experiences in the newly remodeled restroom to initiate classroom discussion about the Illustrative Essay lesson.

Teaching Techniques Justified

The second theme of "Teaching Techniques Justified" emerged concurrently as the instructors discussed why they use particular teaching techniques such as small group work, lecture and class discussion. The data for this theme emerged from only the instructors' interviews. The instructors' justifications for their teaching techniques were discussed according to two areas, as benefiting the students and benefiting themselves as instructors. A categorization of the instructors' justifications for their chosen teaching techniques is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Reported Benefits of Various Teaching Techniques

Teaching Technique	Beneficial to Students	Beneficial to Instructors
lecture	helps students learn	enjoyable
small group	helps students learn	relaxing
	students help each other	
	fun for students	

Beneficial to Students. The majority of instructors justified their choice of teaching techniques by identifying how the techniques help their students learn. Regarding his use of lecture, Jake (uf) stated, "Especially for lectures, there is feedback from them; they're learning." Vie (cc) focused on her use of un-graded papers benefiting the students best by saying, "[It] frees them from that aspect of 'am I going to be evaluated?'"

In relation to helping their students learn, several instructors also justified their choice of teaching techniques by emphasizing how the students help each other. Defending her minimal use of small group work, Vie (cc) said, "It lets them interact and teach one another." Also justifying small group work and the students' ability to help each other, Dan (cc) said, "The group tends to help them a little bit stay on track…I think member accountability is great."

Several of the instructors also justified not choosing certain teaching techniques because they are ineffective for the students' learning. Regarding his use of lecture, Matt (cc) stated, "I don't think it's the most effective way to give most of the information." Also discussing lecture, Chris (uf) stated, "I feel like it loses them."

Though the instructors' primary justification for using particular teaching techniques focused on the students learning, several of the instructors emphasized how the techniques were fun for the students. Both Charles (uf) and Shay (uf) repeatedly used the words "enjoy" and "fun" as they justified their teaching techniques. Discussing his use of small group work, Charles said, "I've noticed the students enjoy it [small groups]." While discussing her use of hands-on activities in small groups, Shay stated, "I prefer hands-on because it is fun and students tend to like it better."

Beneficial to Instructors. Though the majority of instructors defended their teaching techniques according to how those chosen techniques benefit the students, several instructors focused on how the techniques benefit themselves. Charles (uf) repeated how using group activities and work shops makes him happy. He stated, "I enjoy it…because I can work with the groups and see how their thinking process works," and "I really love working one on one with the students." Vie (cc) also identified how her minimal use of small group work benefits her. She stated, "It releases me; I can come to my office and get away from them."

Several instructors justified why some teaching techniques are not beneficial to them personally. While discussing his use of lecture, Matt (cc) stated, "I discovered it's rather dry just talking about a chapter," and Charles (uf), also discussing lecture, said, "In Composition, [it's bad] just having a talking head…"

Personal Experiences

The third theme of "Personal Experiences" interconnected with the previous two themes by providing evidence of potential influences of the choice of instructors' teaching techniques. All data related to this theme emerged from the instructors' interviews; nothing was apparent in the analysis of observations or documents. Also, the instructors' defined personal experiences were further categorized in the two sub-areas of experiences as students and experiences as teachers. Table 2 below presents the instructors' statements related to their experiences as students and as teachers.

Table 2

Reported Personal Experiences as Students and as Instructors

Personal Experience Statements	
Experiences as Students	Experiences as Instructors
being a "student"	working with colleagues
good teachers	teaching Sunday school
lousy teachers	professional development
different teaching techniques	

Experiences as Students. Almost all of the instructors identified their individual experiences as students as influencing how and why they teach. In general, Chris (uf) focused on the experience of simply being a student. He stated, "Ever since I was here as

a student…I wanted to come back here and teach; that was one of my goals." However, for most of the instructors, they identified their teachers as a primary influence on their experiences as students. The instructors' statements about their teachers were both positive and negative.

Jake (uf), Matt (cc) and Dan (cc) all spoke positively about the influence of their teachers. Regarding why he uses particular teaching techniques, Jake stated, "Some of them [techniques] depend on how I was taught and how I've seen it done." Matt also spoke about his teachers as helping him improve as a person and as a teacher. He stated, "I think teachers I've had that I've enjoyed, admired and learned from would certainly be an influence." Speaking about how one particular teacher shaped his life, Dan stated, "One teacher helped me decide what I want to do with my life…she helped me; it wasn't her goal."

Though Jake, Matt and Dan focused on the positive influence of their teachers, several other instructors discussed their negative experiences with their teachers. Charles (uf) simply stated, "My teachers were really lousy" and "some of what has driven me as a teacher is not to do the things that were done [that] I noticed weren't effective." Discussing memories of her teachers, Vie (cc) said, "I had the old traditional teachers in the universities…you never talked to them…they were not student friendly."

In addition to their teachers as personal influences in their lives, the instructors also talked about the influence of how they were taught. For example, several of the instructors discussed the negative influence of small group work on their lives. While discussing his personal use of small group work in his classroom, Charles (uf) noted the irony when he said, "I hated [small group work]…in most of the small groups I've

had…there's been tension; there's been friction; there's been people who didn't do their work." Jake (uf) and Chris (uf) also reiterated Charles' disapproval with the small group work experience. Jake stated, "[Group work] didn't excite me much as a student," and Chris said, "I know with my experience, every time a teacher puts me in a group, I'm the only one who does the work."

Small group work as a teaching technique was not the only teaching technique that influenced the instructors' lives. Jake (uf), for example, emphasized how lecture interested him. He stated, "Some of the methods I think as a student I loved [were] class discussion, asking questions…if they were lecturing, I totally took notes all the way through; that didn't bother me at all." Shay (uf) also discussed how the use of a combination of different teaching techniques influenced her. She said, "I learn best when lessons are presented in multiple formats."

Experiences as Teachers. Though the majority of instructors were influenced by their experiences as students, several of the instructors focused on how their lives were shaped by being teachers. Beth (uf) discussed working with friends who are elementary teachers, and how she "steal[s] freely from them." Also, during a story of her Sunday school teaching experience, Vie (cc) stated, "I learned how to do that [teach] in Sunday school."

Both Dan (cc) and Pat (cc) also discussed being teachers and the positive influence of professional development opportunities. Regarding a university writing project, Dan stated, "A major influence [was the] writing project…just writing, the exercising and writing, thinking, reflecting, that was important to my learning about myself." Pat attributed her knowledge about teaching to the influence of an out-of-state

workshop for college teachers. Pat said, "It was a critical thinking workshop in Sonoma, CA…I listened to the concepts and I listened to the philosophy and I was completely engaged."

Secondary Themes

Although the primary themes were repeated more consistently and appear more relevant to the purpose of this study, several secondary themes seemed important to the instructors' and therefore are presented as additional information in this study. First, only after reviewing the instructors' syllabi were the instructors' intentions of using particular teaching techniques revealed. Second, within the data, instructors' opinions on various academic-related topics were revealed.

All of the instructors who participated in this study submitted copies of their syllabi to me for either their Composition I or Composition II courses. Some instructors also submitted a syllabus for each individual course and provided documents relating to specific assignments, classroom rules and student guidelines.

Seven of the nine instructors included either a Teaching Techniques, Methods of Instruction or Course Activities section on their syllabi, indicating their intended use of particular teaching techniques. The topic of intended use of teaching techniques is different from the theme of "Teaching Techniques Used," because it speaks to the instructors' written intention to use particular teaching techniques versus their spoken affirmation of using those teaching techniques.

Four community college instructors all listed lecture as an intended teaching technique, though Dan (cc) labeled this teaching technique as direct teaching, stating that "[the] course is primarily a discussion… [and] direct teaching." Discussion was another

intended teaching technique listed in the syllabi of Vie (cc), Matt (cc), Dan (cc), and Charles (uf). In addition, though the word "discussion" was not written on the syllabi, two other instructors, Pat (cc) and Chris (uf) wrote "classroom activities" as an intended teaching technique on their syllabi. In follow-up interviews with Chris and Pat, these instructors each defined "classroom activities" as discussion.

Another common intended teaching technique involved class exercises. However, through additional follow up interviews, "class exercises" was defined by all the instructors slightly differently. Both Pat (cc) and Vie (cc) identified "class exercises" as in-class writing activities and group exercise work. Matt (cc) identified "class exercises" as grammar activities students complete during class time. Dan (cc) defined "class exercises" as group activities using primarily grammar and essay technique worksheets. Both Chris (uf) and Shay (uf) defined "class exercises" as hands-on activities for the students. These hands-on activities included individual and group work involving manipulatives such as food, Play-Dough and building blocks.

Unlike the other instructors who identified "class exercises" as an intended teaching technique, neither Chris nor Shay specifically identified "hands-on" as relating to one particular lesson, such as grammar, punctuation, or essay formatting.

Aside from the instructors' written intentions to use particular teaching techniques, their opinions regarding students, education in America, and other instructors were repeated in the data.

For example, while discussing her fondness for sharing teaching ideas with elementary teachers, Beth (uf) commented on student learning at the college level. She stated,

> If anything our learners are more jaded and need more stimulation than younger kids who are eager to learn, and they will learn [only] within limits. My nineteen year olds are pretty hard core, especially the honors kids. They've had a lot of their creativity drummed out of them.

Charles (uf) also discussed his experience with college students after talking with his wife, who is an elementary teacher. Regarding his students, he said, "They become confused… [and] they no longer focus on what they were actually trying to say." Matt (cc) joked about his students' responses to graded assignments. Believing his students have mediocre expectations from college, he stated, "They just look at the grade and say 'Hey, I can live with that.'"

In addition to revealing their opinions about students, one instructor focused her comments on the status of higher education in the United States. While discussing college students' multiple learning styles and her experience with their poor performance in the college classroom, Pat (cc) stated, "Now I know some people will say, 'well they're oral learners,' I call bullshit on that. It's an illiteracy of a certain kind…I think we are failing abysmally as far as education in this country…the focus is on numbers."

Evidence of the instructors' opinions about other instructors was also revealed. Though none of the participating instructors commented on their own colleagues, several instructors offered their opinions about college instructors in general. For example, Beth (uf) discussed how she does not want to become a stereotypical, lecture-based instructor.

She stated, “I actually tend to think that our college teachers tend to be our worst teachers.” Creativity, according to Beth, is necessary in all levels of education.

Charles (uf) also stated how too often instructors teach without thinking about their teaching philosophies. He stated, “They see what’s successful and they see what works, and they don’t really think about it.” Dan (cc) focused on the educational level of different instructors and simplistically stated, “The common thread is that they’re [PhD students] just transferring what they like to their classrooms, whether it’s high school, elementary or college.”

Research Setting Data

I also separated the data according to the two research setting, which allowed for comparative analysis. To more clearly present this comparative data, a summary of the data is presented in Table 3 by theme and by type of institution.

Table 3

Presentation of Evidence by Theme and by Research Setting

Teaching Techniques Used	Teaching Techniques Justified	Personal Experiences
	Community College Instructors	
• small group work • lecture • discussion	• lecture helps students learn • chosen techniques benefit instructors • chosen techniques make instructor "feel" better • lecture does not "entertain" instructor	• exposure to good teachers as students • "traditional" teachers as students • "lousy" teachers as students • professional development • teaching Sunday school
	University Instructors	
• small group work • lecture • discussion	• discussion helps students learn from • each other • lecture "loses" students • discussion is "fun" for students • instructor "enjoys" working with students	• instructor did not learn from teachers • "bad" small group experiences as a student • exposure to teaching technique variety as a student • professional development • working with friends who are elementary teachers • being a graduate student • returning to alma mater

Community College

Three teaching techniques were commonly identified by the instructors who participated in the study. These teaching techniques were small group, lecture and discussion. In the community college system, all four instructors stated they used lecture as a teaching technique. Though Vie and Matt discussed their use of lecture more frequently, Dan and Pat expressed using lecture only when it was absolutely necessary.

The use of discussion was mentioned by Pat, Dan and Matt; however, their use of this teaching technique was usually dependent upon specific lessons or assignments. For the community college system, small group was the least used teaching technique. Only Dan and Vie identified small group as a teaching technique, though Vie expressed using small group sparingly, saying, "I don't do them often [small groups]; I probably do maybe four groups a semester."

Aside from "Teaching Techniques Used," each of the community college instructors justified their teaching technique choices. Based on the instructors' teaching technique justification statements, two reasons for using certain techniques emerged. Three community college instructors justified their teaching techniques according to how those techniques benefited the students. Vie, for example, explained how her use of lecture helps the students learn. Dan also saw a learning benefit for the students; however, he emphasized learning in groups. Though Matt also saw his teaching techniques as beneficial to student learning, he focused on how certain techniques, especially lecture, do not benefit student learning when compared to other techniques such as discussion.

Vie and Matt also justified their teaching techniques by reflecting on how their chosen techniques benefit themselves as instructors. Though Vie focused on how her teaching techniques make her feel better, Matt focused on how certain techniques, especially lecture, do not "entertain" him.

Evidence for the last theme, "Personal Experiences," was identified by all community college instructors who participated in this study. Three of the instructors focused on their experiences as students. Matt, Dan and Vie all commented on their teachers, teaching techniques and their overall classroom experiences. Though Dan was complimentary toward his teachers and not complimentary about his teachers' constant use of small group work, Vie only reflected negatively about her "traditional" teachers who she called "lousy." Unlike Dan, Matt did not focus on any particular teaching technique as an influence. However, Matt did praise his teachers' quality teaching for his success as a student.

Aside from their experiences as students, both Dan and Vie also commented on their experiences as being teachers. Pat also spoke about being a teacher, though she did not comment on her experiences as a student. Both Dan and Pat spoke highly about professional development opportunities for the college teaching profession as being memorable experiences. Vie, however, focused on her past teaching experience as a Sunday school teacher, and she did not discuss any professional development experiences.

University

In addition to evidence relating to the community college instructors, all three themes, "Teaching Techniques Used," "Teaching Techniques Justified," and "Personal Experiences" are also present among the university instructors. Regarding "Teaching Techniques Used," all three common teaching techniques, small group, lecture and discussion, were used by at least one of the instructors. All five of the university instructors stated they use lecture; though not all of the instructors claimed lecture as their primary means of instruction. Only Jake identified lecture as his primary teaching technique, and while Charles identified using lecture often, he labeled lecture as "review."

The second most used teaching technique among the university instructors was small group. This is a change from the community college instructors. Beth, Charles, Jake and Chris all identified using small group work in the classroom. Though small group work was used often, each instructor identified a different lesson associated with the small group teaching technique. Beth and Chris, however, both identified small group work as "collaborative learning."

The use of discussion among the university instructors was mentioned by three of the instructors. Jake, Shay and Beth all discussed their use of discussion. Both Shay and Beth focused heavily on the use of discussion helping students learn; however, Jake related the success of discussion to the attentiveness of the class. Jake's opinion of discussion is different from the community college instructors' opinions about discussion. His comments about this teaching technique did not stray from its effectiveness when either the class personality or class alertness warranted the teaching

technique. Beth further explained her use of discussion as related to think pair share activities in the classroom.

Aside from "Teaching Techniques Used," each of the university instructors justified their choice of teaching techniques. Four of the instructors justified their teaching techniques as being beneficial for the students. Jake emphasized how using discussion helps student learn from each other; Chris justified not using lecture as a technique because "it loses them." Both Charles and Shay justified their teaching techniques according to what they perceive as student enjoyment. Both used the words "enjoy" and "fun" repeatedly while justifying their preference for discussion in the classroom.

Charles was the only instructor to justify his teaching technique choices based on how the techniques benefited him as an instructor. Charles' comments about personally benefiting from his teaching techniques included statements such as "I enjoy it" and "I love working with them [students]."

In addition to "Teaching Techniques Justified" evidence for the last theme, "Personal Experiences," was identified by all the university instructors who participated in this study. Focusing on their experiences as students, Chris, Jake, Charles and Shay all commented on their teachers, classroom experiences and sometimes teaching techniques used. Charles reminisced about his negative experiences as a student. He stated he did not learn from his teachers, and he disapproved of his teachers' use of small group work because, in his opinion, he did all the work for the entire group. Chris also reflected about his negative experience when teachers used small group work as a teaching technique, but he also evaluated his teachers.

Both Jake and Shay commented on how their learning was emphasized by the teaching techniques used. For example, Jake enjoyed lecture and class discussion, and Shay complimented her teachers for teaching to her visual learning style.

Beth was the only university instructor who did not reminisce about her experiences as a student. Instead, Beth focused on her experiences as a teacher, focusing on professional development and influences by other colleagues at both the college and elementary school levels. Regarding her interactions with colleagues who teach elementary school, Beth said, "I work with a lot of elementary teachers who are still teaching learning not content, so I can steal freely from them."

Summary

This chapter presented data collected from documents, interviews and observations. Data were presented around the three primary themes of (1) what teaching techniques instructors use, (2) how the instructors justify their teaching technique choices and (3) personal experiences in education. In addition, data were also presented for the two secondary themes identified. This chapter also provided a summary of the data by theme and by type of institution. Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data using the conceptual framework of decision theory.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to explore how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques. Specifically, the process that English composition instructors use to choose their teaching techniques was investigated by exploring the reasons they choose certain techniques and analyzing their responses using Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making.

This chapter is organized according to the study's purpose and objectives. First, from prominent themes identified in the data, data related to the instructors as a group are presented using the conceptual framework of Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making. Then, using comparative analysis, a comparison of the results between the community college instructors and university instructors is presented. After comparing data related to the research settings, contradictions in the data are presented and analyzed. Lastly, in order to further establish this study's credibility, researcher reflexivity is discussed.

Conceptual Framework and Data Analysis

I analyzed the data through the lens of decision theory, which includes Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making. The use of descriptive decision theory is beneficial because this theory explores how decisions are made, rather than normative decision theory which explores how decisions should be made. The concept of decision-

making relates to an instructor's decision to use particular teaching techniques in the classroom. First, this theory focuses on the process involved with making choices, specifically, "mak[ing] sense of how individuals and groups make or should make decisions" (Resnik, 1987, p. 3). Second, this theory identifies activities within the decision making process, which categorizes experiences in Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making (Nikitas-Spiros & Gautam, 2003).

Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making activities include the Intelligence Activity, which states an occasion or reason for the decision; the Design Activity, which shows an individual analysis of influences and factors into the decision-making process; and the Choice Activity, which is the final teaching technique choice. Together these activities illustrate the systematic process of making choices (Nikitas-Spiros & Gautam, 2003).

By recognizing my perspective of understanding how the instructors construct their realities about teaching technique choices, I also considered how the instructors perceive their teaching technique decisions. Using decision theory, I argue that most of the instructors' decision-making processes about teaching techniques relates to specific personal and professional influences in their lives. These influences are further interpreted using decision-making "activities" offered in Simon's (1977) Taxonomy. Table 4 shows the results of the data analysis from the instructors' statements, using Simon's (1977) "activities" for decision-making.

Table 4

Data Categorization by Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for Decision-making

Instructor	Intelligence Activity (occasion)	Design Activity (influences)	Choice Activity (technique choice)
Beth (uf)	lesson and assignment	working with friends who are elementary teachers	small group work, lecture, discussion
Charles (uf)	lesson	having "lousy" teachers and "bad" small group work experiences as a student	small group work, lecture
Chris (uf)	lesson and assignment	returning to alma mater and having "ineffective" small group work experiences as a student	small group work, lecture
Dan (cc)	lesson and assignment	having "inspirational" teachers as a student and engaging in professional development as a teacher	small group work, lecture, discussion
Jake (uf)	lesson	enjoying teaching techniques that interest him and having "little" excitement" with small group work as a student	small group work, lecture, discussion
Matt (cc)	lesson	having "good" teachers as a student	lecture, discussion
Pat (cc)	lesson and assignment	engaging in professional development as a teacher	lecture, discussion
Shay (uf)	lesson and assignment	receiving teaching technique variety as a student and being a graduate student	lecture, discussion
Vie (cc)	lesson and assignment	having "old, traditional" and non-student friendly teachers as a student and teaching Sunday school	small group work, lecture

All of the instructors discussed their experiences with education, whether the experiences related to them as students or as instructors. Seven of the instructors discussed only their experiences as students, while two of the instructors spoke only about their experiences as instructors. Two of the instructors shared stories relating to both types of experiences. Categorizing the instructors' responses using Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making offered a separate perspective about each instructor's decision-making process.

All of the instructors shared the same Intelligence Activity, that of using the lesson or assignment as an occasion for making the decision concerning teaching technique decision. However, the Design Activity and the Choice Activity was more personalized for each instructor.

Analysis Related to Design Activity

Discussing the influence of their teachers while they were students, Charles, Dan, Matt and Vie all spoke both positively and negatively about their instructors. The Design Activity for Charles and Vie proved similar. Both instructors were influenced by either "lousy" (Charles) or "old, traditional…not student friendly" (Vie) teachers. Dan and Matt also had a similar Design Activity, but they described their teachers as "inspirational" (Dan) and "good" (Matt).

Reminiscing about their experiences as students, Charles, Chris, and Jake commented negatively about the influence of small group work. The Design Activity for all three instructors was similar, as each instructor identified a negative aspect about small group work as students. Charles stated, "In most of the small groups I've had…there's been tension…there's been people who didn't do their work…all of my

experiences have been negative [in small groups].” Chris also reiterated Charles’ comment about “ineffectiveness” in small groups and stated, “I know with my experience, every time a teacher put me in a group, I’m the only one who does the work.” Jake’s comment about small group work did not directly relate to “ineffectiveness,” but he did speak about small group work offering “little excitement.” Jake stated, “In the groups you can definitely do something different…which didn’t always excite me much as a student.”

Regarding being influenced by teaching techniques as students, only Jake and Shay shared a similar Design Activity, expressing an interest in learning via different teaching techniques. Jake stated how he enjoyed teaching techniques that interested him, while Shay commented on teaching technique variety to “liven up” a lesson.

Other instructors shared very different results with the Design Activity. For example, Chris also spoke about wanting to return to his alma mater upon graduation. Also, Shay expressed how “being a graduate student” was influential to her teaching career.

Only two instructors spoke solely about their experiences as teachers. Beth expressed how working with friends who are elementary teachers offered her “fresh” ideas for her own classroom, stating, “I work with a lot of elementary teachers who are still teaching learning not content, so I can steal freely from them…if you take advice and lessons from elementary teachers, then perhaps we will continue to insert some of the more creative aspects into Composition.” Instead of being influenced by other teachers, Pat spoke primarily about engaging in professional development opportunities offered to

instructors by discussing a particular workshop, stating, “I listed to the concepts and I listed to the philosophy and I was completely engaged.”

Two instructors discussed the influences of their decision-making processes relating to their experiences both as students and as teachers. Both Dan and Vie shared the same Design Activity involving experiences with their instructors while they were students. However, their experiences as teachers varied. Dan discussed the influence of professional development opportunities, and Vie discussed her experience teaching Sunday school lessons to children, stating “I taught Sunday School, bible school and my children…so you learn with young children what’s the best way to teach.”

Analysis Related to Choice Activity

Regarding the Choice Activity, only Dan, Beth and Jake expressed their use of all three teaching techniques, which includes small group, lecture and discussion. Both Beth and Dan specifically referenced the use of small group work and lecture, but unlike the other instructors, they also identified discussion as think pair share. This was the only instructional strategy identified in recent pedagogical literature. Jake also spoke about small group work and discussion, but he identified lecture differently, saying “I have a list of things like tips.”

Charles, Vie and Chris discussed their use of only two teaching techniques in the classroom, small group work and lecture. Charles expressed more interest in using small group work, and he spoke about lecture as being “a review.” Similar to Charles, Vie identified small group work, but she defined lecture differently, stating that “I’m on the board; I’m on the board all the time…I’m standing up there [talking].” Chris also

specifically referenced his use of lecture, but he defined small group work differently, saying, “I use little group games.”

Matt, Pat and Shay also stated their use of two teaching techniques, lecture and discussion. All three instructors referenced their use of lecture in the classroom, and Matt and Shay specifically referenced their preference for discussion. Only Pat defined discussion differently. She said, “[It’s] a community of people wrestling with ideas.”

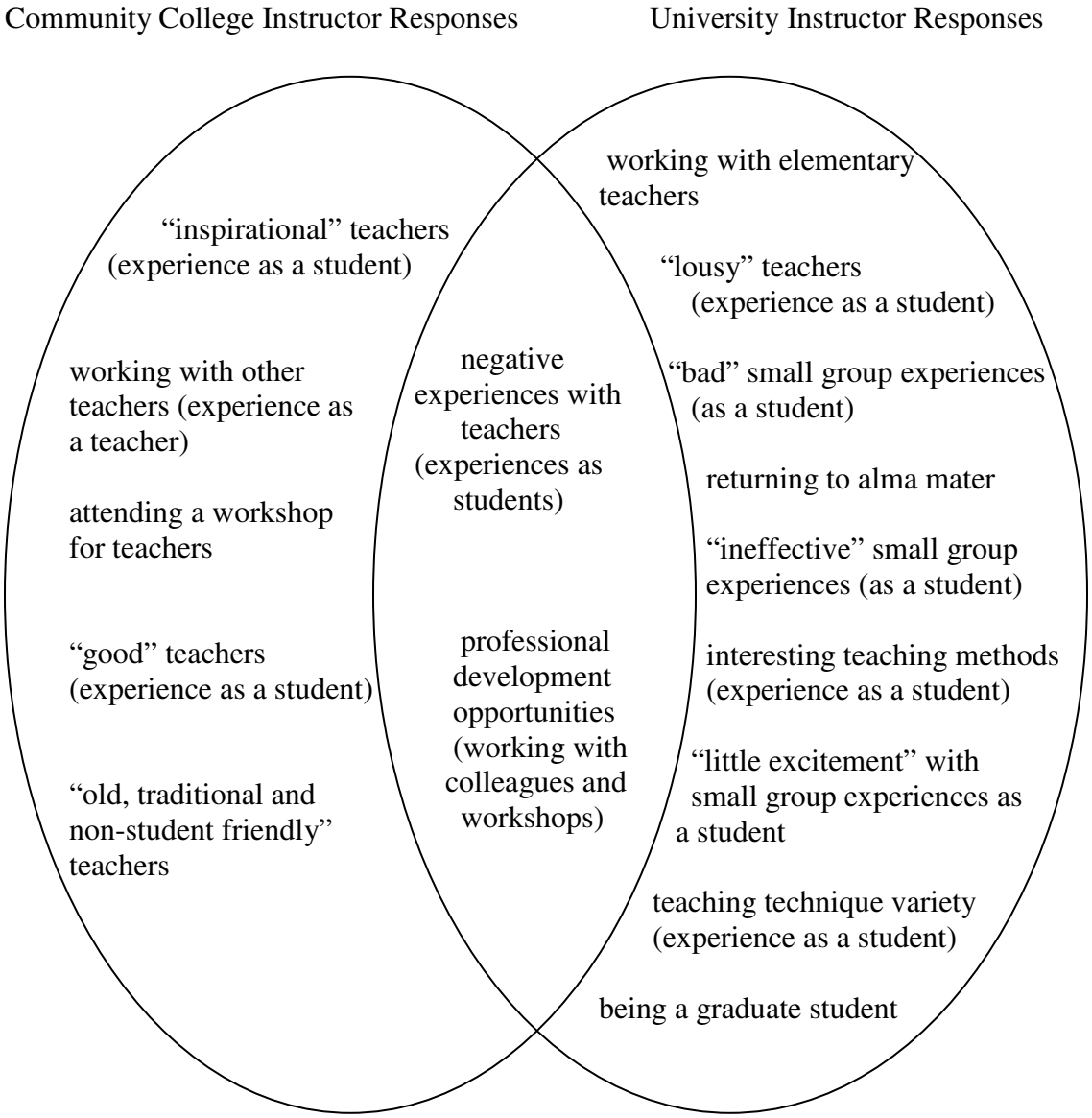
All of the instructors’ experiences appeared to be influential moments in their lives. These influences, whether personal or professional or based on their experiences as students or as teachers, shaped their choice of teaching techniques. Also, using Simon’s (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, these influences are shown as exclusive to each individual, producing unique decision-making constructs for each instructor.

Comparative Analysis

Using the three “activities” offered in Simon’s (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, I compared the data for each “activity” between the two groups of instructors, community college and university.

Regarding the Intelligence Activity, defined as the occasion or reason for a decision, all of the instructors, regardless of whether their institution was community college or university, chose their teaching techniques based on either a lesson or an assignment. However, regarding the Design Activity, which identifies influences into decision-making, there were both similarities and difference between the community college instructors and university instructors. Figure 1 shows the Design Activity comparison between the community college instructors and university instructors in the form of a Venn diagram.

Figure 1. *Combined Design Activity Responses for Community College Instructors and University Instructors*



Categorized by the Design Activity of Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, similarities and differences between the community college instructors' statements and university instructors' statements about potential influences on their chosen teaching techniques were revealed.

Statements about professional development and having negative experiences with teachers as students were common between the community college instructors and university instructors. One community college instructor and one university instructor stated negative experiences with teachers. Two community college instructors and one university instructor stated professional development as influential in their teaching technique choices.

The remaining responses applied to the Design Activity revealed more differences between the instructors. Two community college instructors stated positive experiences with their teachers when they were students, but none of the university instructors discussed having positive experiences with their teachers when they were students. Though two university instructors discussed their fondness for their teachers' teaching technique variety, none of the university instructors described their teachers in a positive way.

Also, though the topic of professional development as a potential influence was discussed by both groups of instructors, only one community college instructor commented on attending a workshop for teachers. The other statements about professional development focused on the instructors working with colleagues.

Another difference included categories for the instructors' statements about potential influences on their chosen teaching techniques. The community college

instructors' statements were categorized into three main areas, including (1) positive experiences with teachers (experiences as students), (2) negative experiences with teachers (experiences as students), and (3) professional development opportunities (working with colleagues and workshops).

Though some of the university instructors' statements were also placed in the same categories as the community college instructors' statements, there were two more categories for the university instructors. For example, in addition to statements about their negative experiences with teachers when they were students and professional development opportunities, there were several statements made about the university instructors' teachers' chosen teaching techniques. The statements about teaching techniques were both positive and negative. In addition, there were two statements that did not fit any category about influences into decision-making and chosen teaching techniques.

The instructors at both research settings had statements that were both similar and different regarding influences on their chosen teaching techniques. In addition, all the instructors, regardless of research setting, discussed experiences in their lives. Ultimately, these experiences are influential to their individual decision making.

Contradictions in the Data

In analyzing the data, I discovered several contradictory statements. In addition, these contradictory statements made analysis difficult, providing further evidence to define qualitative research as being messy (Wolcott, 2001).

First, after referencing the themes of "Teaching Techniques Used" and "Teaching Techniques Justified," I discovered an inconsistency between what teaching techniques

instructors say they use in the classroom and the justification for those techniques. For example, referencing his use of lecture, Jake said, “I did mainly lecture and PowerPoint presentations.” However, later Jake said, “I like lecturing, but I know that they don’t [like lecture].” Matt also said, “I end up lecturing some,” but then later he stated, “I don’t think [lecture] is the most effective way to give most of the information.” The question remains as to why these instructors would choose techniques they know do not benefit the students.

Further investigation into additional themes uncovered potential answers that may contribute to these contradictory statements. For example, two of the instructors discussed how sometimes they perceive themselves as being “tired” or “not being responsible” to the students. For example, while discussing her use of small group activities in the classroom, Vie stated, “It [small group work] releases me; I can come in my office and get away from them.” Also, Matt, while generalizing his use of different teaching techniques stated, “I don’t feel a lot of responsibility to them [the student]… [and] the longer I teach, the less I care.”

In addition, I discovered other contradictions when I compared the statements about personal influences and teaching techniques used. For example, regarding using small group activities in the classroom, Charles stated, “I love the small groups.” However, when Charles discussed his experience with small group activities as a student, he stated, “Maybe it was just coincidence, but all of my experiences [in small groups] have been negative.” Jake also spoke about his occasional use of small group work as a teaching technique and said, “I really like the [small] group interactions.” However, later Jake expressed how as a student he though small group activities were “less exciting.”

Why would these instructors choose teaching techniques they did not enjoy when they were students?

Again, after further data analysis into other themes, I found that Charles bases his teaching technique choices on what he believes benefits the students. Instead of selecting techniques he enjoyed, he focuses on the reactions of his students and incorporates their reactions into his teaching technique selection. Jake also stated that despite his dislike of small group activities as a student, he uses small group because he "can tell it works better for them [his students]."

Researcher Reflexivity

Though I am a researcher, I am also personally connected to my study's topic because I relate to the instructors' perspectives about teaching. First, my interpretation of the information my participants provide is guided by my bias as an insider to the college teaching profession. Ultimately, I am an English instructor just like all of the participants in this study. My understanding of the English discipline and the teaching profession shapes how I interpret the participants' statements.

After reviewing the data, I deducted several statements that reveal my connection both to my study and to the teaching profession. For example, when I spoke with Charles, I made a comment about our shared interests in teaching English Composition. I stated, "I think we all have to do that [offer instructions] in composition. We have to say 'Here is your piece of paper; here are your margins; here's your header; here's the format…content is yours.'" This statement reveals how I think English instructors should teach their students how to write and format their assignments.

In addition to speaking with Charles, when I spoke with Beth, I stated, “We don’t want to completely separate ourselves from our students.” It was not until my deductive coding and analysis that I recognized my constant use of the first person pronoun “we” to associate myself with Beth. Again, our similar connection to teaching English composition was reflected in my statements about “we” versus all other instructors, characterized as “them.”

Secondly, I also relate to the four female participants in this study because I am a female. For example, after reviewing my field notes I noticed that at the beginning of each interview with each of the four women, Beth, Pat, Vie and Shay, I commented on the pictures of their families on their desks.

I interpret these comments as relating to my own placement in life. As a wife and new mother, I felt a connection to these women, not only by gender but by our connection to motherhood. I did not use this same conversation-starter with the male participants, despite seeing family pictures on their desks. At the moment of all participant interviews, I did not analyze this choice to talk or not to talk about their pictures. However, analyzing it now, I detect a distinct difference between my connection to the women and my connection to the men in this study.

Lastly, I also relate to one of the instructors because we work at the same university campus, and we are both pursuing the same doctoral degree. During my interview with Charles, I spoke often about our workplace, and again, I used “we” to indicate our connection to the profession and to the institution. In response to his statement about how instructors teach differently, I replied, “That is another thing that intrigues me, how we all do it so differently, I mean even at this school alone, amongst

our English faculty. We all have our own method." With this reply I assumed Charles agreed that our colleagues believe they have different teaching techniques. I also quickly associated myself as an employee at the same school.

Though I always knew my connection to Charles via our common workplace would be a source of researcher reflexivity, I had not considered our connection as classmates in the same doctoral program. For example, when Charles discussed his teaching philosophy he questioned behaviorism and social constructionism. Knowing his position in the doctoral program and his progress through classes we have taken together, I responded, "See, you're already exploring them all. They're all flying at you from different directions." Again, as his classmate, I associated his comments with my own interpretation of knowledge gained from our doctoral classes. Though my comment appeared almost egocentric, I was associating myself as being equal to him as a classmate.

After reviewing my biases, I recognize that all my researcher positions influence my data collection and analysis. However, I believe my connection to the college teaching profession influences my interpretation the most. My perspectives about teaching are directly shaped by my own experiences as a teacher. Furthermore, I believe the instructors in this study are also shaped by their experiences as teachers. Similar to the instructors in my study, I share certain perspectives with them because we are linked in this similar profession. Though this position had great potential to become problematic as I try to separate myself from the data, I remained conscious of not overly absorbing myself in the data and assuming I have all the answers based on similar teaching experiences.

Summary

This chapter was an analysis of data collected for this study. First, an analysis of the data for the instructors as a single group was presented using the conceptual framework of decision theory. Next, a comparative analysis of the data from the two research settings of the community college and the university was presented using activities from Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making. After analyzing both the data from the instructors as a group and categorizing the data from the instructors by research setting, contradictions from both the data and the analysis were examined. Lastly, researcher reflexivity was discussed in order to further establish the credibility of this study. In Chapter Six, the findings are presented, conclusions are made and recommendations for further research are offered.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

With over 300,000 English composition classes offered each year in colleges and universities across America (Neal, 2000), English instructors consistently face decisions of how they will teach their students how to write, or in other words, what teaching technique(s) they will select to use. Exploring how instructors select their teaching techniques and the identification of potential influences into the selection process is the purpose of this study. The following chapter offers the findings derived from the analysis of the data, followed by recommendations for future research. Lastly, commentary about how the topic was selected and its implications on further studies is provided.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how English composition instructors at both a community college and university in Oklahoma choose their teaching techniques. Also, using Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, this study explored potential influences of how these instructors make teaching technique choices.

Major findings for this study are presented as they relate to the following areas:

1. Findings related to research question one, including the process of decision-making according to Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making

2. Findings related to research question two, including potential factors influencing the instructors' choice of teaching technique
3. Findings related to research question three, including instructors' stated reasons for choosing particular teaching techniques
4. Reported types of teaching techniques chosen by the instructors
5. Findings resulting from the comparative analysis of the two research settings

Research Question One

What decision-making processes do instructors use when choosing teaching techniques?

When Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making was applied to the data from this study, findings indicated that all instructors experienced a decision-making process when choosing their teaching techniques. Findings also suggest that decision-making was not a linear process for these instructors, suggesting a contradiction with Resnik (1987) who believes decisions are made sequentially. However, this finding does corroborate the work of Nikitas-Spiros and Gautam (2003) who believe individuals move randomly through many activities in order to make decisions. By placing the instructors' responses into Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, more identifiable categories for the instructors' movements through the decision-making process become apparent.

Data indicate that instructors spent more time reflecting on experiences that potentially influenced their decisions than any other activity involved with decision-making. This finding suggests that according to Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-

making, there are multiple activities related to decision-making. In addition, the Design Activity is most emphasized because it offers an explanation for their final choices.

Also, every instructor identified similar reasons for choosing their teaching technique, but did not agree on the reasons for those choices. This finding suggests that instructors are not *programmed* to make the same teaching technique choices for each teachable opportunity, but instead suggests *flexibility* and *creativity* in the instructors' ability to adjust their choices. According to Simplicio (2000), an important factor of teaching is flexibility, including modifying, enhancing and refining teaching techniques according to both students' needs and instructors' teaching styles. Also, instructors are more successful in the classroom when they "utilize new and creative techniques of instruction" (p. 678).

After using Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making to analyze instructors' responses, the connection between teaching technique selection and influences fit decision-making. Though not always moving in a linear direction, the instructors' movement toward a final teaching technique decision corresponds to the activities defined by Simon (1977).

The use of Simon's (1977) Taxonomy was useful for this study because it categorized instructors' movement toward decision-making. The taxonomy identifies activities related to decision-making, and makes conceptualizing this abstract process more concrete. However, the Taxonomy is limited in that it does not fully track multiple choices that occur for a single decision. The Taxonomy also does not illustrate the progression backward through the categories.

Research Question Two

What factors influence the decision-making process?

All of the instructors in this study mentioned experiences which were perceived as influences in their lives as teachers. The finding concerning potential influences in their choice of teaching techniques related to two categories: (1) their experiences as students and (2) their experiences as teachers. This finding suggests that despite many potential influences that may guide their selection of teaching techniques, their personal experiences related to academia were most important.

This finding connects with existing literature about influences of academic-based decisions. In agreement with Page (1992), when instructors were students and their instructors possessed a positive perspective about what they were teaching, the instructors in this study were more likely to also have a positive perspective about the subject material when they began teaching.

Also, literature suggests that professional experiences including professional development are influential to instructors in several ways (Rivero, 2006; Campbell & Brummett, 2007). First, professional development experiences encourage instructors to teach effectively (Rivero, 2006). Second, professional development fosters mentoring, and mentoring helps instructors share their knowledge with colleagues. Lastly, literature suggests that instructors who engage in professional development are more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Campbell & Brummett, 2007).

When instructors select teaching techniques, these technique choices are influenced both by the reason for the technique and by the influence of the instructors' personal experiences. Though the instructors' reasons for selecting teaching techniques

vary, their reasons either directly or indirectly benefit the students. Whether the instructors choose a technique because the technique is "fun," the technique "helps students learn" or the technique is perceived to be beneficial, the end result was related to students' success.

According to Trigwell (2001), instructors' experiences, including experiences relating to being students and being teachers, directly influence how they teach. All instructors in this study experienced influential moments in their lives that contributed to how they teach. Whether these experiences were professional or personal, they were retained in their memories and used as "fuel" for selecting how they teach their students. This finding suggests that without these influential experiences, the instructors may not have had the ability to undertake a decision-making process related to teaching technique choices.

Research Question Three

How do these influencing factors contribute to the choice of teaching technique?

Though the instructors were not specifically asked to justify their teaching technique choices reasons for their choices emerged after inductive coding. This finding suggests that all instructors consciously think about why they choose teaching techniques. Existing literature connects to this finding, stating that it is important for instructors to analyze reasons for their choice of teaching techniques (Bunting & Reising, 2006; Vassallo, 2004). The analysis is important because when instructors continue to analyze their reasons, they will eventually evaluate the usefulness of different teaching techniques (Bunting & Reising, 2006). This does not suggest, however, that all instructors spend either sufficient or considerable time critically analyzing their reasons for that choice.

Also, all of the instructors commented on how their teaching technique choices either benefited the students and/or themselves as instructors. None of the instructors discussed choosing teaching techniques according to institutional policy or departmental and institutional assessment requirements. This finding contradicts some of the existing literature on assessment requirements in higher education. For example, Giroux (2006) suggests there is currently an "institutional" assault against professors, pedagogy, and assessment (p. 4). Strangely, the issue of assessment was never mentioned by the instructors in this study.

This finding does suggest, however, that the instructors had academic freedom to choose their techniques according to personal reasons and preferences, and they were not coerced to select particular teaching techniques. This supports existing literature that states that instructors have the freedom to teach subjects according to their individual teaching prerogatives (Manning-Walsh, 2004).

Teaching Techniques Used

Of the teaching techniques identified by instructors in this study, the most common were lecture, small group work, and discussion. Alternative teaching techniques such as "think pair share" "group games" and "personal stories" were also discussed, but upon further analysis, they fell into the existing teaching technique categories mentioned above. Lecture was the only teaching technique identified by all the instructors, suggesting that lecture is chosen regardless of personal preference or type of institution. Also, the prevalence of lecture used by the instructors reiterates findings by Keim and Biletzky (1999), where they identified lecture as the most preferred teaching technique used in college classrooms today.

Despite the prevalence of lecture as a teaching technique, some of the instructors offered contradictory statements for selecting this teaching technique. Three community college instructors and one university instructor, for example, discussed using lecture in the classroom; however, they also stated how this technique does not benefit the students, which suggests that instructors do not always select teaching techniques determined by a single influence, and that which influences their decision may not always be positive.

This finding relates to a similar finding of Morgan, Whorton and Gunsalus (2000), that during lectures, "[the] listeners' attention wanes after approximately fifteen minutes, and long term retention may be limited" (p. 56). Also, the finding suggests that since lectures are considered easier to prepare, two of the community college instructors admitting to occasionally selecting lecture based on their own "laziness" may relate again to multiple influences that may include time constraints or lack of dedication to teaching.

For all instructors, small group work and discussion were the least used teaching techniques. Despite their choice to use small group work, however, several instructors identified problems with the technique that they encountered as students, such as unequal distributions of work. This again suggests that the choice of technique may not always be influenced by positive prior experience. Literature concerning small group work corroborates the instructors' common complaint that they "did all the work" as students. For example, Willis et al. (2002) state that motivation is not always enough to keep small groups successful, and sometimes "[small group interaction] is kind of like a threat to the lazy people in the group" (p. 498).

For the instructors who stated their use of discussion, their statements involved using this technique based only on student participation. This finding suggests that

instructors who use discussion use it in place of other teaching techniques such as lecture because it involves students discussing and listening during class. Existing literature about discussion supports this finding since discussion is a preferred teaching technique to engage students to participate and become interactive in the classroom (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

Ultimately, findings from this study suggest the most common teaching technique in the English Composition classroom is lecture. In addition, justifying the use of lecture and all other teaching techniques is dependent upon the instructors' own professional and personal experiences with the teaching technique.

Comparison of Community College and University Data

All of the instructors participating in this study appear to recognize influences on their chosen teaching techniques. This suggests that the act of making decisions and recognizing influential experiences is a universal process for instructors. This finding also connects to existing literature about the decision-making process. For example, every human engages in the psychological process of decision-making; however, experiences that contribute to different beliefs and attitudes vary among individuals (Barbuto, 2006).

All instructors in this study reported using a variety of teaching techniques, suggesting that variety exists in teaching techniques chosen. This finding is corroborated in existing literature. For example, according to Simplicio (2000), good instructors use multiple teaching techniques because "by changing how they teach [and] what materials they use in their teaching, teachers infuse their classrooms with excitement, curiosity, and most of all creativity" (p. 679).

The instructors' reasons and influences on their teaching technique choices varied slightly, but not by type of institution. For example, regardless of institution, they identified certain experiences as students as being influential into their decision-making. Specifically, these experiences were related to their teaching technique choices, and the experiences overwhelmingly involved their instructors. This finding suggests that teachers *do* influence their students, whether that influence is positive or negative.

Only three university instructors identified their experiences as a teacher as influential on their teaching technique choices. These findings suggest that while teaching experiences are important influences on instructors' selection of teaching techniques, due to years of teaching experience and different exposure to professional development opportunities, these experiences are equally as important as the instructors' experiences as students.

All instructors then proceed through the same mental process for selecting teaching techniques, regardless of the type of institution. Teaching techniques and personal experiences vary for each instructor, but a comparison of the two groups of instructors offered no marked differences between the groups. Bonded by the same discipline, the instructors appear separated only by the institutions themselves.

Findings from this study suggest that the identification of influences and the instructors' connection to other activities related to decision-making that offer a better understanding of how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques. Also, while personal and professional experiences do influence how instructors choose their teaching techniques, not all experiences influence the decision-making process equally. Memories of experiences may be more profound or clearer for

some instructors, making some remembered experiences more influential than others in the process of selecting a teaching technique.

Conclusions

Theory

First, decision theory is useful for describing how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques. Using descriptive decision theory was beneficial because it explained how the instructors actually choose their techniques. The instructors were not programmed or coerced into using particular teaching techniques. It is concluded that normative decision theory, as a contrast to descriptive decision theory, would not be useful for this study because normative decision theory quantifies each choice and hinders flexibility in the decision-making process.

Second, Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, in particular descriptive decision theory, was useful because it categorized abstract data obtained from interviews, observations and collected documents into more manageable forms. Though the data were highly interpretative, when the data were inserted into the established activities defined by Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making, the steps of decision-making were clarified as relating to the instructors choice of teaching techniques.

Finally, from the categorization of data, it is concluded that though the instructors navigate through the decision-making process, their movement through the process was not linear. For example, the instructors do not rely solely on previous decisions to influence new decisions about teaching techniques. Instead the incorporation of a variety of experiences contributes to their decisions. Ironically, though rooted in science and

mathematics, decision theory and Simon's (1977) Taxonomy for decision-making provided an ideal framework to view data about human experiences.

Research

The use of interviews and observations provided the most useful data regarding influences into the English composition instructors' decision-making process. During each interview, all instructors in this study reflected on experiences that were influential to their decision-making. While personal and professional experiences did influence how instructors choose their teaching techniques, no one experience or category of experiences appeared more important. Often remembered experiences were more influential than others in the instructors' process of selecting a teaching technique.

Though the interview data provided evidence for the importance of the instructors' remembered experiences, no questions were asked relating to the instructors' teaching philosophy. If the instructors were asked to explain their teaching philosophy as related to their chosen teaching techniques, perhaps more reasons for their choices would have been revealed.

Observations of some of the instructors in their classrooms revealed how the instructors use their chosen teaching techniques. These observations were useful because they provided data supporting the instructors in their real-world environments. The observations served in conjunction with the interviews to both confirm and contradict data.

Though instructors may say they use particular teaching techniques, those chosen techniques were not reported as being used universally for every teaching opportunity. Also, the instructors adjust their teaching technique choices, but the adjustments were not

forced or made mandatory by an outside source. Instead, there was freedom in the process of selecting teaching techniques. The instructors' selection of teaching techniques was both flexible and creative, which helped define each instructor's individual style of presenting information to their students.

Collected documents were useful to this study by supplying written documentation of the instructors' teaching plans, assignments and teaching techniques they intended to use in the classroom. However, the collected documents did not provide the personal data the interviews provided. It was through personal data obtained from interviews and observations that conclusions about factors that influence the instructors' decision-making were made.

Practice

English composition instructors can learn from knowing what influences their choice of teaching techniques. When instructors understand the influences behind their decisions, they are more likely to recognize why their chosen techniques are either effective or ineffective. Understanding why they choose particular teaching techniques encourages them to either continue making similar teaching technique decisions or to substitute influences that may change their decision-making process.

The most common teaching technique in the English Composition classroom is lecture. Recognizing their own decision-making process then helped these instructors to justify the use of lecture and all other teaching techniques. Their justifications were dependent upon the instructors' own professional and personal experiences related to academia.

Limitations

Four limitations were identified for this study. As stated in Chapter 3, researcher bias is a limitation identified for this study. As an English composition instructor, I related to the instructors' perspectives about the teaching of writing skills, and my connection to the college teaching profession may have influenced my interpretation of the data. I was also familiar with the research settings, which made me comfortable talking and observing the instructors, and I recognize that this comfort level may have caused occasional shifting between the roles of researcher and colleague.

The second limitation was the number of instructors included in the study. The number that participated was too small to represent the population of English composition instructors. Based on this small number of instructors in the study, results of this study are not generalizable to the identified population.

A third limitation concerns methodology constraints, especially factors from using interviews and observations. Due to unintentional subjectivity, some information and the analysis of that information may be guided by the techniques chosen for the study. Information obtained from interviews was dependent on interpersonal exchanges between the research and the instructors. It is unknown whether the instructors censored their comments to accommodate the study.

Finally, it is unknown whether the instructors altered their behavior or performance during observations to not present themselves negatively in my presence. Also, my interpretation of information from the observations was again potentially biased by my connection to the discipline of English and to the research settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the conclusions above, several areas emerged that require further study. First, the study of how instructors choose their teaching techniques is not only applicable to the English discipline. Further investigation into other disciplines may potentially generate more insight into how all instructors choose their teaching techniques. Also, a comparative analysis of different disciplines may produce interesting results between instructors in various fields of study.

Second, this study focused only on English instructors at a community college and university in Oklahoma. Case studies completed at other institutions in the United States may add to the transferability of findings from this study. Also, by selecting different types of educational institutions, (e.g. private colleges and universities, career centers and technology centers) other teaching techniques and additional influences related to instructors at those institutions might be identified.

Third, conducting a longitudinal study with a particular subset of instructors may produce additional results relating to decision-making and teaching technique selection. A longer study comparing instructors' teaching technique decisions to each class taught may produce insight into if and how instructors' teaching technique selections vary according to each group of students.

Lastly, though this study's topic, which explored how English composition instructors choose their teaching techniques, is exploratory, action research is possible. By identifying connections between instructors' personal influences and their teaching technique choices, instructors and administrators could focus on what they perceive as

positive influences. By making positive influences more prevalent as factors in decision-making, more effective teaching choices may be made.

Summary

Decision-making is a personal process. For instructors used in this study, when they select teaching techniques, they are influenced by their unique, individual experiences. Though the instructors may share experiences, all experiences are interpreted differently and hold different meaning for each instructor. Ultimately, whether personal or professional, remembered experiences serve as fuel for guiding decision-making.

Commentary

As a full-time English instructor at a university in Oklahoma, I select teaching techniques for my classes. Ironically, it was on a rainy afternoon when I had my inspiration for this study. I was faced with a decision. I could walk in the rain to the library in order to retrieve a video for my Freshman Composition I class, or I could readjust my lesson plan and lecture – avoiding getting rain-soaked outside. It was at that decision-making moment I recognized the internal struggle of making a choice. Was I making my choice based on my reluctance to go outside while it was raining? Was I making my choice for the benefit of the students' learning? I never fully answered these questions. I did, however, return to my office, and readjusted my lesson plan to accommodate lecture as my teaching technique for that class.

It was after further reflection on how I make my decisions that I also began questioning other instructors about experiences related to their own teaching technique choices. These informal conversations created lively discussions about my colleagues'

personal experiences. Soon I wanted to explore how people perceive their own mental processes and learn about their experiences in order to better explore my own mental process.

Selecting the two research settings was simple; they are both large institutions with excellent reputations in the state of Oklahoma. I have had various experiences at both institutions, making my investigation of these schools more intriguing. As I followed my research questions through gathering data at both research settings, I reminisced about my own experiences, and then used my own reflections as inspiration to learn more about my topic.

I had initially expected to identify clear, specific answers to how instructors choose their teaching techniques. However, what I discovered is that instructors love to talk about how they teach, but they do not always connect pieces of their lives into a linear process of decision-making. I had also assumed to identify a few key factors in how instructors select their teaching techniques, but again, with the uniqueness of each instructor, I learned that many factors have the potential of being influences in instructors' lives.

Through this research process, I learned that categorizing abstract ideas into concrete boxes is difficult. I also know that perceptions vary, and everybody has a personal story to tell. In my attempt to explore this study's topic, I paid great caution in capturing the tone of each data chunk collected and reveled in the variance of personal perspective.

Ultimately, this study, along with my own teaching experiences and other studies, conclude that personal experiences do influence how we, as instructors, make decisions.

It is the exploration of each unique experience and its connection to selecting teaching techniques that are effective that requires further investigation. This research experience has forever changed my interpretation of individualism. Our memories are unique; they become the foundation from which we base our decisions.

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APPENDIX A

CATEGORIZATION OF PARTICIPANTS' EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Appendix A

Categorization of Participants' Education and Experience

Name	Research Setting	Degrees Earned	Teaching Experience
Beth	university	BA-Rhetoric; MA-English Literature; PhD-Creative Writing and Rhetoric	Honors Composition, Creative Writing; Introduction to Literature; Introduction to Composition Theory; Poetry
Charles	university	German State Examination, MA–Foreign Languages	Technical Writing I; Technical Writing II; Composition I; Composition II; English Fundamental; Small Group Communication; Speech; Native American Humanities
Chris	university	BS-Education; MA-Educational Leadership	Remedial English; Remedial Writing; Speech; Composition I
Dan	community college	AA-English; BA-English; MS-Curriculum and Instruction	Reading; Developmental Reading; Writing I; Writing II; Strategies for Academic Success; Composition I; Composition II; African American Literature
Jake	university	BA-English and History; MA-English	Composition I; Composition II; Introduction to Film

Matt	community college	BA-Language Arts Education; MA-British Literature	British Literature; Composition I; Composition II; Creative Writing; Poetry; Introduction to Literature
Pat	community college	BA-English; MFA-Creative Writing	Composition I; Composition II; Honors Composition; Philosophy; Humanities; Creative Writing; Developmental Reading and Writing
Shay	university	BA-English; MA-Teaching, Learning Leadership	Reading Fundamentals; English Fundamentals; Technical Writing; Composition
Vie	community college	AA-English; BA-Liberal Arts; MA-Liberal Arts	Composition I; Composition II; American Literature I; American Literature II; Honors Literature; British Literature; Developmental Studies

APPENDIX B

IRB RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Appendix B

IRB Research Consent Form

Exploring How English Composition Instructors Choose their Teaching Techniques
CONSENT LETTER FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS
Oklahoma State University

You are invited to participate in a research study on the exploration of how English Composition instructors choose their teaching techniques. As a graduate student from Oklahoma State University, I will be conducting the study. I am interested in influencers related to the decision-making process and teaching techniques.

I am conducing individual interviews and classroom observations with English Composition instructors. Estimated time required for participation is approximately 2-3 hours distributed over one semester. Individual interviews take less than one hour.

During the interviews, I will take notes for later analysis. With your permission, the interview will also be audio-taped to help in the note-taking process. At the conclusion of the study, the tapes will be erased. In order to protect your identity, I will assign pseudonyms for you and your community college campus. All information collected will be kept confidential, and the list indicating your actual name will be kept in a secure place. Other than myself, no other participants in the study will be made aware of your identity. The study may result in published articles, dissertations, and/or presentations at professional conferences. Any reporting that arises from this research project will not identify individuals, place names, or events.

If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time. You may also decline to participate. You will not be penalized for withdrawing or declining.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me using the information below. Please keep the attached copy of this letter for future reference. If at any time during this study you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Sue C. Jacobs, IRB Chair, 415 Whitehurst, 405.744.1676, sue.c.jacobs@okstate.edu.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Maria Christian, (918) 293-4802
OSU Doctoral Student of Higher Education Administration
Oklahoma State University
1801 East 4th Street
Okmulgee, OK 74447-3901
maria.christian@okstate.edu

Dr. Judith Mathers
Dissertation Advisor
Educational Leadership-School of Education Studies
Oklahoma State University
314 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078
405.744.1480
judith.mathers@okstate.edu

Please indicate whether or not you wish to participate in this project by checking a statement below and signing your name. Please sign both copies of this consent form.

_____ I wish to participate in the study, *Exploring How English Composition Instructors Choose their Teaching Techniques*, have read this consent form, and agree to be audio-taped.

____ I wish to participate in the study, *Exploring How English Composition Instructors Choose Their Teaching Techniques*, and have read this consent form, but I do <u>not</u> agree to be audio-taped.

I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

_____ _____

(SIGNATURE) (DATE)

APPENDIX C

DOCUMENT CHECKLIST AND ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

Appendix C

Document Checklist and Analysis Checklist

Materials

Institution _____
Instructor Pseudonym_____

Date Obtained: _____ Location: _____

Type of Document: _____

Purpose of Document:
_____
_____
_____

Date Obtained: _____ Location: _____

Type of Document: _____

Purpose of Document:
_____
_____
_____

Date Obtained: _____ Location: _____

Type of Document: _____

Purpose of Document:
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

English Composition Instructors

I. Interviewee Background

1. What influenced your decision to teach?
    a. What influenced your decision to teach English?
2. What is your teaching experience? What courses have you taught?
3. How long have you been teaching at [this institution]?
4. What degrees do you have? From where?
5. At which campuses do you teach?
6. Are you employed full-time, part-time or adjunct?
    a. If adjunct – were you ever full-time or part-time?
    b. If full-time – were you ever part-time or adjunct?
7. How did you start working at [this institution]
8. What classes do you teach at [this institution]?
    a. How long have you been teaching these classes?

II. Teaching Technique Preference

1. What teaching techniques do you use in your English Composition classes? (for example: lecture, small group discussion, class discussion)
2. Which teaching technique do you prefer most?
3. Do you have an example or story about using your favorite teaching technique?
    a. If yes – what is the story?

4. Aside from your favorite teaching technique, what other teaching techniques do you use?
    a. Are these in random order or order of preference?
    b. What influences you to use these teaching techniques instead of other teaching techniques?

III. Influences into the Decision-Making Process

1. How do you match the teaching technique for the lessons?
2. Is matching the lesson and teaching technique hard for you? Why or why not?
3. Do you have an example or story of when you had to choose a teaching technique?
    a. If yes – what is the example/story?
4. Is choosing a teaching technique related to any type of influence or experience? (for example: something learned at a workshop or when you were in school)
    a. If yes – what are some of the influences or experiences that relate to you choosing your teaching techniques?
    b. How are these influences related to you personally? (for example: personal learning style, a mentor's advice)

IV. Teaching Technique Evaluation

1. How do you evaluate your teaching techniques?
2. How do you know if your teaching techniques are effective?
3. Can you recognize when your teaching techniques are not effective?

    a. If yes – what do you recognize that makes the teaching techniques ineffective?

4. If you see your teaching technique is not effective, do you change it?
    a. If yes – how do you change it?
5. Do you have an example of when you had to change your teaching technique?
    a. If yes – what is the story?
    b. Was changing this teaching technique effective?
        i. If yes – how do you know it was effective?

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Appendix E

Observation Protocol

Participant: _____

Observation Date:_____ , Time: _____, Location: _____

Descriptive Field notes	**Reflective Field notes**

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

Appendix F

Participant Invitation Letter

1801 East 4th Street
Okmulgee, OK 74447

May 6, 2005

Dear _____:

My name is Maria Christian, a Doctoral Student in Higher Education Administration at Oklahoma State University and Communications Instructor at Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee.

I am in the process of conducting a study that explores the question of how English Composition instructors choose their preferred teaching techniques in order to promote effective teaching in composition classrooms.

You are invited to participate in the study. Participants must be:

- Current English Composition instructors;
- Instructors that have taught in higher education for at least two years;
- Instructors that currently teach no less than six hours a semester.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me via e-mail at mariaec@osu-okmulgee.edu or telephone at either 918-355-2513 or 918-293-4802. Also, feel free to recommend others who might be interested in participating in the study. Please note that I will request your contact information (e.g., address, telephone number, and e-mail address) and your availability for the interview and observations (e.g., times and days). Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Maria Christian
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration
Communications Instructor

APPENDIX G

STUDY PROGRESS CHECKLIST

Appendix G

Study Progress Checklist

Activity	Date	Complete
Obtain IRB approval		
Obtain permission to conduct research at community college		
Obtain permission to conduct research at university		
Mail (or email) participant invitation letters		
Schedule interviews with instructors		
Schedule observations with instructors		
Documents from community college instructors obtained		
Documents from university instructors obtained		
Conduct interviews with instructors		
Transcribe interview data		
Observe instructor		
Format observation field notes		
Schedule follow-up interviews		
Submit interview transcriptions to instructors for member checking		
Conduct follow-up interviews with instructors		

APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Monday, July 11, 2005

IRB Application No ED05133

Proposal Title:

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 7/10/2006

Principal Investigator(s

Maria Christian
2016 N. 10th Street
Broken Arrow, OK 74012

Judith Mathers
314 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☑ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Maria Elaine Christian

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE WRITE CHOICE: EXPLORING HOW ENGLISH COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS CHOOSE THEIR TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Major Field: Higher Education Administration

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Bixby High School, Bixby, Oklahoma in May of 1995; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in June 1999; received Master of Science degree in College Teaching with a language arts specialization from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in May 2001; completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Higher Education Administration from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in May, 2007.

Experience: Worked for United States Investigations Services, Tulsa, Oklahoma, from 1997-2003. Held positions of reference verifier and independent contractor. Employed by Tulsa Community College, Tulsa, Oklahoma, from 2001-2005. Held position of adjunct instructor of English. Currently employed by Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee, communications instructor.

Professional Memberships: Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW); College English Association (CEA); National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE); Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT).

ABSTRACT

Name: Maria Elaine Christian Date of Degree: May 2007

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, OK

Title of Study: THE WRITE CHOICE: EXPLORING HOW ENGLISH COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS CHOOSE THEIR TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Pages in Study: 130 Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Higher Education Administration

Scope and Method of Study:

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative techniques to explore how instructors of English composition choose their teaching techniques. Participants in this study were nine English composition instructors from both a university and community college in the state of Oklahoma. Decision theory was used to analyze possible connections between internal and external factors related to the instructors' chosen teaching techniques. Analysis included the instructors as a group and a comparative analysis of the instructors from both research settings.

Findings and Conclusion:

Personal experiences related to academia were most influential to the instructors' chosen teaching techniques. These experiences included experiences as students and experiences as teachers. Some remembered experiences were more influential than others in the instructors' process of selecting a teaching technique. All of the instructors defined their chosen teaching techniques by how the techniques either benefit themselves and/or benefit their students. The instructors' influences on their chosen teaching techniques varied slightly, but not by type of institution. Bonded by the same discipline, the instructors appeared separated only by the institution themselves. While personal and professional experiences do influence how instructors choose their teaching techniques, no one experience or category of experiences is more important.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: Dr. Judith Mathers