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WHY USE STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

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TODD CLINTON PARKER
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WHY USE STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION?:
A STUDY OF ONE TEACHER'S CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

_____
Dr. Neil Houser, Chair

_____
Dr. Lawrence Baines

_____
Dr. Kristy Brugar

_____
Dr. Jeffrey Maiden

_____
Dr. Stacy Reeder

_____
Dr. Courtney Vaughn

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Abstract

Modern educational practices have fostered relationships that place instructors and teachers as the experts or central authorities regarding academic knowledge, academic disciplines, and teacher-student relationships, relegating students to the relatively inferior or disempowered position of novices while placing teachers, particularly college and university instructors, in more institutionally powerful positions as "scholar academics." Alternatives to top-down objectivist and scholar academic approaches such as student-centered and subject-centered learning have been shown to facilitate engaged, critical, and comprehensive learning. However, despite data that support using student-centered learning in higher education, many teachers are still disposed to using scholar academic or objectivist approaches commonly observed in higher education. Why do some teachers in higher education choose to use student-centered teaching approaches while others do not? The aim of this study was to better understand the perspectives of a university professor who chose to employ student-centered learning approaches in her college classroom. A qualitative case study methodology with an interpretivist or constructivist/social constructivist epistemological orientation was used for this study. Methods of data collection included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the college professor, and analysis of curricular documents.

Based on the data gathered in this study, it appears that the college teacher experienced at least three major challenges to using student-centered learning approaches. These included her higher education learning environment, student views about higher education, and personal factors such as the amount of time and energy

needed to successfully facilitate student-centered learning teaching approaches. However, three major groups of benefits were also identified, including benefits for her students, benefits for herself as a teacher, and benefits for society. In light of these findings, it is suggested that college teachers should consider orienting their courses to more student-centered learning approaches. However, since many obstacles remain, it is essential for those who wish to utilize student-centered teaching approaches to develop communities from which support can manifest and actively seek others who are already using such approaches.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I am an assistant professor at a regional university in western Oklahoma, where I have taught art history and studio art classes since 2006. I am a teacher and learner. My experience as a teacher and learner has shaped how I understand learning. As a learner, spanning my experiences in elementary school, I appreciated certain subjects more than others. My favorite topics included the arts and humanities: music, band, drawing and painting, literature, and history. Subjects like these inspired something in me. The arts encouraged means of personal expression that I did not encounter with other academic disciplines, a sense of the best of what it means to be human.

I attended a small rural school during elementary and middle school. The few classes I enjoyed during that time included music, band, and history. When the band program was closed, my parents enrolled my siblings and me in a larger city school with art, band, and theatre classes. It was during my secondary school years that I involved myself even deeper in the arts. I auditioned and was accepted to a two-week arts program through the Oklahoma Arts Institute. It was the most focused work in art that I had experienced up to that point, almost like a college course. This experience further contributed to my desire to pursue a career in the field of art.

Throughout the latter part of my undergraduate years and my entire graduate college experience, I began to better appreciate the role of the teacher. I was interested in teaching during graduate school and began preparing for a vocation in art education at the college level.

Years later, upon attaining a position as an assistant professor, my inexperience as a teacher prompted me to teach using my previous instructors' methods. For

example, as a graduate student in art history courses I respected the way professors lectured about topics of art history. Attending class, taking notes, looking at images of artworks, reading textbooks or journal articles, and discussing the material were all part of the experience. Since this was the way I was taught, I naturally assumed this was how the substance of art history should be taught and learned. I thought that if I continued to use the same methods I experienced, I would be a successful instructor.

Of course, the idea of teaching the way we were taught has long been discussed in the literature. Although some teachers feel compelled to further develop as teachers even when they succeed using traditional top-down approaches (Capps, 2016), more often, it seems, teachers continue to teach the way they were taught. In his book *Schoolteacher* (1975), Dan Lortie describes misconceptions about practices important in teaching. Education is unique in that it exposes students to experiences of being taught but not understanding core processes of teaching. Lortie explains that "[t]eaching is unusual in that those who decide to enter it have had exceptional opportunity to observe members of the occupation at work" (1975, p. 65). However, observation does not equal critical cognizance of education processes. Teachers are not required to complete long periods of apprenticeship as practitioners of other professions are. Lortie (1975) further explains:

> The student's learning about teaching, gained from a limited vantage point and relying heavily on imagination, is not like that of an apprentice and does not represent acquisition of the occupation's technical knowledge. It is more a matter of imitation, which, being generalized across individuals, becomes tradition. It is a potentially powerful influence which transcends generations, but the conditions of transfer do not favor informed criticism, attention to specifics, or explicit rules of assessment. (p. 63)

Because I had observed teachers for a greater part of my life, I thought I understood the processes of teaching. I believe the tradition that Lortie describes is common in the experience of most people, including myself. This began to change with my growing awareness through coursework in theory and practice in education. However, at the time of my entry into the college teaching profession, these were new ideas for me, as they are for many others as they begin teaching in higher education (Walton, 2008).

Teaching full-time provided many opportunities to reflect on my pedagogy and my students' learning. During my first few semesters as a full-time college instructor, I nervously planned for lecturing in the classroom in order to feel prepared. I noticed that, although I had attempted to replicate the same learning atmosphere I had experienced as an undergraduate and graduate student, I was not experiencing what I expected. The students were not responding as enthusiastically as I thought they should. I felt a sense of frustration that they did not or were not attempting to engage in the ways I expected. I felt as though my own teaching style was not adequate to engage students, and I wondered whether the method I had chosen was working as well as I had hoped. I also reflected on my students' learning. Just as I had done, my students attended classes and engaged by taking notes or asking questions. But were they learning? Was I achieving the outcomes I desired?

For me, a typical day of teaching at that time involved "delivering" lectures about art history to art majors in a traditional manner. I had collected excellent notes from art history professors' lectures during my undergraduate and graduate courses. I had all the great information to share that had inspired me. I crafted lectures using notes

taken at the feet of experts. Every important fact or anecdote was used to illustrate the topic. I tried "giving" information to students that would help them understand the issue, ultimately to be assessed with an examination. A typical examination consisted of students identifying works of art by title, artist, and date, multiple-choice questions, and a few essay questions.

I noticed that students were sufficiently engaged to understand what topics might be on the examinations, but they did not appear willing to explore the matter much deeper. Methods of attending class, taking notes, and completing an examination or research paper were not quite as successful for my students as I had initially believed they would be. I increasingly wondered whether the traditional methods that I had experienced would be adequate to use as a teacher. Would I need to engage the students in a different way from how I had been taught?

My reflection was enhanced and focused as I began taking doctoral courses in a curriculum and instruction program in a college of education. I remember feeling disoriented with the first few doctoral courses. I had never taken an education course before, and the terms and concepts were novel to me. Throughout my undergraduate and graduate careers, very little instruction or consideration was given on *how* to teach. The graduate school I attended for my Master of Fine Arts degree in painting and Master of Art degree in art history was primarily interested in educating capable artists rather than competent educators. My doctoral program in education required me to examine my curriculum and instruction.

I remember that one of the first courses in the curriculum and instruction program made me think about where knowledge came from and challenged me to

consider how that thinking influenced my teaching. Although I had been interested in learning new ways to teach, nothing challenged my notions about teaching until I began taking educational doctoral courses. It was an entirely new way of thinking about teaching that had presented itself. I began to consider that *how* I was teaching was just as important as *what* I was teaching.

Understanding my previous experiences as a student and thinking about how I was teaching empowered me to consider environments of higher education. I began to view these environments as a sort of culture that contained and perpetuated inherent habits, practices, relationships and viewpoints that permeated college classrooms. Cultures exist within multiple areas of human activity. I began to suspect that a culture that perpetuates top-down scholar academic approaches to teaching exists within higher education (Johnson, Kimball, Melendez, Myers, Rhea & Travis, 2009; Schiro, 2013). I may have been able to recognize the preference for scholar academic approaches in higher education before taking educational doctoral courses, but my explicit understanding was further enhanced by critical examinations of college teaching.

My understanding of teaching and learning has further developed through using what I have learned about educational theory and instructional practice. Learning about theories of education and curriculum ideologies has led me to implement changes to my own instruction. For example, shortly after entering the doctoral program, I began to revise the practice of instruction in my classroom to incorporate new ideas about how knowledge is formed. I sought to implement new methods that would foster more inclusive and participatory learning atmospheres in the classroom.

In both my art history and studio art classes, I found that many of the students responded positively to my incorporation of instructional methods that challenged them to learn through examining material, talking among themselves, and working together rather than looking to me for all the answers. During an Art Survey course—an introductory general education art history course that reviews the entire scope of Western art history—a number of students responded positively to the incorporation of teaching methods that fostered interaction and deep consideration of the topics in question. These students particularly appreciated being expected to examine their own thinking about various focuses of art history.

In a similar fashion, the incorporation of reflective processes and collaborative group work yielded powerful results in a lower-level two-dimensional design course required for all art majors. During a project exploring the design element of line to produce tone, I required students to collaborate in groups to represent an image that would be integrated with designs by other groups into one final image. Student groups were required to work together, virtually guiding one another in the search for the best possible design. With very little direction from myself, the groups implemented the necessary steps for ideation, creation, and critical analysis of designs. The students were essentially driving the project toward its destination. They expressed appreciation for the group aspect of the project and were amazed at the outcome.

These experiences have led to my current research over what is referred to as student-centered learning (Dewey, 1902; Schiro, 2013). Basically, student-centered learning is an instructional method that recognizes that students are the primary agents of learning and that therefore seeks to more fully integrate students into the fundamental

aspects of teaching, including examinations of academic disciplines and applications to their lives. Student-centered learning involves a shift away from teachers delivering or transmitting information unidirectionally toward more reciprocal or even autonomous creation and application of knowledge by students. Student-centered learning shifts students to more central positions in the production of knowledge (Dewey, 1902; Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Walker & Soltis, 2009).

Theorists like Jean Piaget (1950) and Carl Rogers (1969) began to shift the focus of teaching from the actions of the teacher to those of the student. Others, such as John Dewey (1902) and Paulo Freire (2000), wrote about the necessity of seeing learners with capabilities to critically regard new information, which contests the pervasive view of the teacher as the expert and final authority on every academic discipline.

Problem

Because of my past experiences as a learner and teacher, as well as my more current examination of theories and practices of education, I have identified what I consider a significant problem in higher education. Modern educational practices have fostered relationships that place instructors or teachers as the experts or central authorities over academic disciplines (Feden, 2012; Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009). These relationships have been described as relegating students to the position of novices while placing teachers in the positions of "scholar academics" (Schiro, 2013). In these learning environments, it is assumed that the experts (teachers) actively teach the novices (students or learners) while the novices passively learn from the experts. It is believed that teachers, as supposed experts in their respective disciplines,

have mastered these academic disciplines and are therefore able to transmit this information to learners. In this way, teachers mediate learning experiences by placing themselves as conduits between the academic disciplines and learners. The assumption is that scholar academics have mastered the academic topics and achieved status as experts, and thus are prepared to regulate the flow of information from academic disciplines to students.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer (2007) describes these modes of teaching as extending from an epistemological view known as "objectivism." In this view of knowledge, a pristine object to be known exists independent of the knower. Palmer describes objectivism as one possible extreme within a spectrum of modes in education. From the perspective of objectivism, "any way of knowing that requires subjective involvement between the knower and the known is regarded as primitive, unreliable, and even dangerous" (Palmer, 2007, p. 53).

According to Palmer, objectivism thrives in education because it is safe. For this reason, Palmer calls objectivism a "fearful way of knowing" (p. 53). Objectivism seemingly operates on assumptions that close relationships with academic disciplines and students are detrimental to effective scholarship because subjective relationships taint objective "truth." An apparently top-down approach, objectivism places academic disciplines at the top of a pyramid to be accessed by experts (what Schiro, 2013, calls "scholar academics"). Expert teachers mediate knowledge of these academic disciplines, and learners individually access their teachers' knowledge. This approach perpetuates distant, cold and hierarchical understandings of and access to academic information. To maintain control, it minimizes messiness and complexity by rejecting

subjective knowing. In an effort to ensure and control objective information, personal meaning is lost.

An alternative to objectivist modes of teaching is to form what Palmer (2007) call "communities of learning" or "communities of truth".[1] Communities of learning recognize the existence of complexity, ambiguity, and context-specificity in meaning while seeking to create collaborative learning environments in which students can come closer to grasping more comprehensive, multifaceted, and socially constructed (versus objectivist) understandings of various "truths." Seeking these truths is an extended, perhaps lifelong, process of engagements with important issues from a variety of perspectives.

According to Palmer, a community of learning involves complex engagements that position each person in the community with personal vantage points that contribute to dynamic understandings. Learners are positioned in specific vantage points in relation to their academic disciplines depending on their life experiences, able to share their views and listen to others. Learning in community "embraces both the great web of being on which all things depend and the fact that our knowing of those is helped, not hindered, by our being enmeshed in that web" (Palmer, 2007, p. 101).

In addition to reinforcing hierarchical power relationships, objectivist or scholar academic approaches are problematic because they fail to utilize students' previously acquired experiences or to engage them in learning from each other. Students' previous

[1] Note that communities of learning, etc. are not new concepts ((McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6–23. http://www.wright-house.com/psychology/ sense-of-community.html.
Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Philips, Susan U. (1972). Participation Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom. In Cazden, C. B., John, V. P., & Hymes, D. (Eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom*. Columbia University: Teachers College Press.)

experiences are crucial for learning. John Dewey described the importance of using curricula that draw upon previous experiences and knowledge as means of developing new understandings (Dewey, 1902, p. 7). By using scholar academic approaches, teachers disregard the previous experiences and knowledge of learners, perpetuating the top-down delivery of new information.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire addressed issues of teacher-centered approaches in education. He described top-down delivery of information as problematic because of the dehumanizing effects it has on students. Freire described traditional educational practices as the "banking method" (2000). In the banking method, teachers regulate flow of information to students, effectively "an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Freire, 2000, p. 72). Students are objectified as passive entities receiving information from the world as "deposits"—in the world, but not with the world.

The banking method of education reifies teachers as experts who regulate the flow of information. With banking education, experts, who have already presumably considered the most important thoughts about academic disciplines, transmit this information to students. Freire saw this as having traumatic effects on students, essentially dehumanizing learners, treating them as passive objects rather than active subjects who help name and shape the world in which they live.

Freire argued for eliminating the banking method by bringing students alongside teachers as co-learners. He described this process as "problem-posing" education. In an attempt to encourage dialogue between students and teachers, Freire proposed the co-exploration of academic questions. However, for Freire the information of greatest

importance was existential in nature, involving the exploration of mechanisms of oppression that perpetuate dehumanization. Freire believed new roles and relationships involving teacher-students and student-teachers would help break down traditional hierarchical barriers and enable richer learning possibilities while addressing unequal power relationships in education and society.

Related problems associated with objectivist or scholar academic approaches involve specific curricula that are unconsciously determined by and help perpetuate social class distinctions. For example, a classic study conducted by Jean Anyon (1981) presents comparative analyses of curriculum implementation in working-class, middle-class, affluence professional, and executive elite schools. Results of this study revealed pronounced differences among the curricula and teacher-student relationships in each kind of school. School curricula and teacher-student relationships were used to emphasize and reproduce existing social class structures through rote memorization and strict obedience in working-class schools, commodification of knowledge as a means of social/economic advancements in middle-class schools, reification of knowledge in affluent professional schools, and emphasis on the importance of negotiating knowledge and control in executive elite schools. This study helped reveal veiled means by which objectivist approaches control knowledge. Anyon labeled these processes and relationships that unconsciously reproduce the existing social class structure the "hidden curriculum." The fact that these processes are hidden helps explain why they persist in society, including higher education.

Research Problem

Alternatives to top-down objectivist and scholar academic approaches such as student-centered and subject-centered learning have been shown to facilitate engaged, critical, and comprehensive learning (Belenky et al., 1984; Bishop, Caston, and King, 2014; Lightweis, 2013; Salinas, Kane-Johnson, & Vasil-Miller, 2008; Wright, 2011). Student-centered learning approaches have been shown to effectively place students at the center of the educational process in ways that facilitate motivation and understanding.

Contrary to the concerns of some, student-centered learning in education does not entail free-form curricula in which students have complete control. Dewey (1902) suggests that the child (or student) and the studies (or curriculum) need not be placed in opposition to one another; in fact, they are two sides of the same coin. As Palmer suggests, balanced approaches are needed which place teachers and learners in webs of learning surrounding academic disciplines that occupy the center of everyone's attention (Palmer, 2007). Positioning teachers and learners in proximity both to the objects of inquiry and to each other's thoughts provides opportunities for transformative learning experiences.

Despite data that support using student-centered learning in higher education, many college teachers are still disposed to using scholar academic or objectivist approaches commonly observed in higher education (Feden, 2012; Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009; Palmer, 2007; Schiro, 2013). This is highly problematic because it limits productive learning in higher education, risks discouraging college

students to continue learning and growing throughout their lives, and perpetuates inequitable social hierarchies in education and society.

Research Questions

Although many college and university teachers persist in using objectivist, scholar academic teaching approaches such as banking education, this is not the case for all who work in higher education. This raises important questions. Why do some teachers in higher education choose to use student-centered teaching approaches while other do not? How do teachers in higher education who choose to utilize student-centered learning approaches cope with the challenges of using these approaches? What insights can be gained by observing teachers who choose to use student-centered learning approaches in higher education? Based on these questions, I decided to utilize a case study approach to see what could be learned from the thoughts and experiences of one such teacher. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study were as follows:

(1) How did one college teacher cope with the challenges of using a student-centered learning approach in higher education?

(2) What were this teacher's perceptions of the benefits of using a student-centered learning approach in spite of the challenges?

To address these questions, I studied the perspectives of a teacher who employed student-centered learning approaches in her college classroom. I reasoned that a better understanding of the experiences of a teacher who had weathered the storm of implementing student-centered learning methods in higher education would render valuable insight for others who might wish to adopt similar approaches. More thorough understandings were built by considering and seeking to understand the participant's

construction of meaning as she conceptualized and implemented her curriculum and instruction, navigated her students' responses, and coped with broader institutional responses.

These research questions required an understanding of the perspectives both of the teacher and the learners. To better understand the perspectives of the teacher an examination was conducted and yielded significant insight into this matter. A concurrent examination of student perspectives further developed rich and elaborate considerations. Instruction does not take place in a vacuum. An examination of student perspectives yielded a multifaceted view that rendered this topic in a clearer light.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perspectives of a teacher in higher education who used student-centered learning in her classroom. In this chapter, I employ a literature review to contextualize my findings about two major themes that emerged during the study—the challenges and benefits for teachers using student-centered learning approaches in higher education.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on an issue with which I am deeply concerned—effective student learning in higher education. I am specifically interested in developing much more in-depth teaching processes. My focus is to help facilitate more in-depth collaborative episodes in classrooms for the purpose of greater student learning. One of the benefits of in-depth student learning may be an increase in student empowerment and, therefore, albeit indirectly, a possible erosion of unjust social hierarchies in general (Baldwin, 1963; Freire, 2000). This literature review notes current theory and research regarding curriculum and instruction in higher education with secondary emphasis placed on student empowerment for structural change in education and society.

Traditional Higher Education Teaching Approaches

Teaching methods in higher education are often slow to change. Instruction in college classrooms has traditionally featured teachers distributing or transmitting information to students. Sometimes described as "instructor-centered" or "teacher-centered," these approaches appear to be default settings for many teachers in higher education, and they are seemingly ubiquitous within college settings (Feden, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009; Schiro, 2013). Traditional higher education practices that favor

teacher-centered approaches are deemed "scholar academic" approaches (Schiro, 2013). While it may seem natural for practices of instruction in higher education to focus attention upon a single expert, the literature suggests that teacher-centered or scholar academic approaches are not beneficial for student learning (Dewey, 1902; Lasry, Charles, & Whittaker, 2014; Palmer, 2007; Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012; Stoerger & Krieger, 2016; Wright, 2011). Freire's description of the banking method of education is an appropriate analogy for college classrooms (2000). Freire essentially argues that depositing information into passive students using what Shiro (2013) terms scholar academic instructional methods positions students as passive objects of others' activities rather than as active agents of their own learning. The active teacher-passive student dynamic prevalent in many educational relationships helps perpetuate larger hierarchical power dynamics throughout society. Therefore, scholar academic instruction methods, embedded within many higher education learning environments, remain problematic.

Although traditional higher education practices favor scholar academic approaches, some college teachers have begun to realize the possibility of using different teaching methods. Unsatisfied with the banking method of depositing information into the minds of passive students, some teachers search for more interactive, student-centered methods of instruction. However, implementing new methods of instruction is not necessarily stress-free.

One source of stress in implementing new teaching methods is that faculty may be reluctant to change instructional methods due to perceived difficulties in diverging from the status quo. Reluctance to change what they have been doing is one condition

of faculty who favor teacher-centered or scholar academic approaches (Johnson et al., 2009; Hains & Smith, 2012).

In some cases, innovative practices, including student-centered learning approaches, are used in primary and secondary education. Although many students' exposure to both scholar academic and teacher-centered methods may begin before attending college, many practices used in primary and secondary education do not continue in higher education.

Although numerous studies support the effectiveness of student-centered learning strategies, many higher education faculty continue to employ teacher-centered methods of instruction (Feden, 2012). Teaching methods used in primary and secondary schools seem to have been drastically influenced by international models of education during the nineteenth century (Smith, 1998).

During the nineteenth century, common education, as well as higher education, was influenced by European models of education, specifically German models. Modernization, a component of industrialization, affected European and American education. One European institution in particular—the Prussian army—developed efficient methods of training which had an interesting effect on U.S. education (Smith, 1998, p. 46).

Through rigorous training methods and strict guidelines for segregation of soldiers according to skill, size, and experience, the Prussian army attained a level of professionalism and effectiveness that came to be seen as the epitome of military prowess during much of the nineteenth century. The same methods of organization used for a standardized army would eventually be applied to factories, agriculture, and

schools (Smith, 1998, p. 47). Strategies for efficiency were applied to all areas, including education, whether or not a remedy was needed. The transition from one-room schoolhouses to a separation of students into grades and skill levels was one of the consequences of this new efficiency orientation, irrevocably changing modern American education. As Smith explains:

> There was a profound and enduring change in the social structure of schools. What is still called "grouping students by age and ability" really means segregating them according to inexperience and inability, as if the aim were to make it impossible for students to help or to learn from each other. This put an enormous new burden on the teacher, who became totally responsible for teaching 20, 30, or more relatively helpless pupils, unable to depend on any of them to help the others. (1998, p. 47)

In this passage, Smith argues that a change was made to American school organization for the sake of efficiency. Previous models of education that featured congregation of different ages, skills, and experience in one-room schoolhouses were looked upon as inefficient, and school days were divided into different periods of instruction for the sake of efficiency. Ironically, Prussian education favored child-centered education, proposed by Swiss theorist and educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. In the end, the highly mechanized and rigid standardization of Prussia's military rather than the child-centered models used in Prussian education appears to have had the greater influence on American educators (Smith, 1998, pp. 110–111). Thus implementation of an efficiency-obsessed model displaced more progressive alternatives in U.S. schools.

German institutions continued to affect change on American education during the nineteenth century. After the Civil War, American universities perceived a need to change from liberal and classical education models to more research-oriented models.

German universities provided modern alternatives in education with expanded faculty hired solely on the basis of research specialization and an elective system of courses (Neili, 2007).

German universities had shifted from traditional liberal-based models to more humanistic education models during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which tended to promote student-centered learning approaches. However, this was before positivist tendencies in research—also emerging largely from Germany—subsequently altered higher education. Before positivist tendencies set in, German faculty and students were free to explore self-realization through self-design. Over the last century, positivism had restricted self-realization to more tightly controlled disciplines in German higher education. Research-based institutions presented opportunities for students to experience greater flexibility in choosing individual paths of learning through an elective system of courses in various disciplines, and professors and students were free to explore issues not previously available in more liberal arts-based institutions (Aviram, 1992).

As a result of German influence, American teaching methods used in common and higher education shifted to a greater emphasis on efficiency during the nineteenth century. Paradigms of efficiency conceivably affected students' expectations for common and higher education that continue today.

Having experienced teacher-centered instruction in primary and secondary education, it is reasonable to expect that students might expect similar approaches in college classrooms. Thus, as Walton (2008) found, college students may exhibit rigorous opposition to engage in learning styles other than the teacher-centered learning

approaches with which they are familiar. The basis for Walton's research was an investigation into the response from students relating to his teaching of a college communications course in a critical and relational manner.

Why is there hesitancy on the part of college students when experiencing student-centered methods of instruction? Students may exhibit reluctance to student-centered methods of instruction because they are not familiar. Student-centered learning may also provoke resistance because it requires students to take greater responsibility for their learning (Hains & Smith, 2012). However, there may be an even greater fear that lies at the root of student reluctance to engage in student-centered learning, a fear that permeates the atmosphere of higher education for many teachers and students alike.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer describes a fear that derives from dominant modes of knowing that ultimately affects teaching and learning. Palmer explains that teaching and learning are affected by the implicit ways in which knowledge is conceptualized. He writes:

> If we regard truth as something handed down form authorities on high, the classroom will look like a dictatorship. If we regard truth as a fiction determined by personal whim, the classroom will look like anarchy. If we regard truth as emerging from a complex process of mutual inquiry, the classroom will look like a resourceful and interdependent community. Our assumptions about knowing can open up, or shut down, the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends. (2007, pp. 51–52)

Palmer argues that dominant modes of teaching, along with learning, rely upon ideas that teacher-centered approaches manifest as default methods in many college classrooms. He contends that these top-down approaches will not facilitate authentic learning. Traditional methods of teaching in higher education rely upon objectivism. Palmer describes objectivism as a fearful way of knowing. He explains that:

> subjectivity is feared not only because it contaminates things but because it creates relationships between those things and us—and relationships are contaminating as well. When a thing ceases to be an object and becomes a vital, interactive part of our lives—whether it is a work of art, an indigenous people, or an ecosystem—it might get a grip on us, biasing us toward it, thus threatening the purity of our knowledge once again. (2007, p. 52)

Objectivism strives to promote the accumulation and transmission of knowledge separate from the tangible and messy realms of physical or psychological human domains. Palmer views objectivism as a fearful way of knowing because it seeks to separate learners from the world in which we live. This culture of fear inhibits faculty, students, and administrators alike.

While students may exhibit reluctance to participate in student-centered learning methods out of fear or due to resistance to taking on greater responsibility for their learning, teachers also deal with fear. College teachers often experience fear because they have become the focus of the classroom (Palmer, 2007). Although learning academic subjects may be the ostensible focus of teaching, scholar academic approaches concentrate student attention upon teachers with an intense focus. From this perspective, teachers are looked to as academic experts on academic disciplines. Because students fear never becoming the experts themselves, they are encouraged to transfer responsibility for their learning to their teachers. At the same time, teachers can fear not having the answers to all possible questions. Thus continually focusing attention upon teachers as experts in academic disciplines. This can create a sense of power for instructors, who can begin to gather power in their classrooms and utilize that power to control student participation. This power reestablishes hierarchical relationships between teachers and students as experts and novices, simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical structures of power in society at large (Freire, 2000). The

literature suggests that more beneficial approaches incorporate student-centered learning.

Student-Centered Learning

Traditional instructional methods seem to privilege teacher-centered or scholar academic practices in higher education. Fearful ways of knowing via objectivism appear to restrict student possibilities for growth. If both conditions are plausible, student-centered learning approaches can provide alternative ways for educators to more effectively teach. Student-centered learning approaches could provide a way for students to more fully engage in the production of knowledge. In this way, teachers and learners can consider the meanings associated with academic subjects more equitably.

The following three sections will review several theorists who have contributed to the development of student-centered learning approaches, and therefore also indirectly or directly to the deconstruction of hierarchical relationships in education and society. These theorists include John Dewey and Progressivism, Jean Piaget and Constructivism, and Paulo Freire and Critical Pedagogy. Next, an examination of critical trends in higher education will be provided. A survey of teaching approaches in art education will follow with specific sections that describe analyses of pedagogy in art and design curricula and critical theory in art and design curricula.

John Dewey and Progressivism

One of the most prolific American philosophers of education to have emerged in the twentieth century, Dewey is most often associated with the learner-centered ideologies. Dewey's *The Child and the Curriculum* and, by extension, *Art as Experience*, has been influential in the development of ideologies used for curriculum.

He consistently argued for placing learners at the center of curriculum foundation. Throughout his career, Dewey focused on the way experience played an important role in education, democracy, and life. He argued that education must be based upon lived experience.

Even before the introduction of constructivism by scholars like Piaget, Dewey's work represented a progressive direction for education at the turn of the century. Dewey became the chair of the Department of Philosophy at the newly established University of Chicago. Under his direction, researchers and teachers worked alongside one another in what became known as the "Chicago School of Philosophy" to understand best practices for teaching (Lagemann, 1989). As Lagemann writes:

> Dewey hoped through educational experimentation to work out means to overcome the divisions that had emerged between families and schools, nature and daily life, and, most important, different classes of people, especially those classified as "cultured" and as "workers." (1989, p. 199)

As Dewey sought to break down barriers between researchers and teachers, he also broke down barriers between academic lessons and life experiences. Dewey's concept of teacher education contrasted sharply with that of Charles Hubbard Judd, the next chair of the department of education after Dewey. Judd's conception regarding classroom instruction focused on researchers in psychology disseminating information to teachers via lecture as opposed to Dewey's concept of dialogical collaboration between researchers and teachers, a distinction that has impacted education standards for research from that point forward (Lagemann, 1989, p. 205).

Dewey's general philosophy and aesthetic philosophy both hinge on his concepts of "experience." Experiences are learning encounters whereby individuals act and respond to their environments in continuous and developing patterns. The

individual as part of a community uses symbols, expression, and communication to direct experience toward intrinsically fulfilling ends that give human existence value and meaning (Barrett, 2008, p. 63).

Because experience is central to learners' abilities to make sense of the information they encounter, it is essential to understand students' experiences or the "world of persons with their personal interests, rather than facts or laws," rather than focus on subject matter alone. Thus, the students' thoughts and experiences are essential to learner-centered ideologies (Dewey, 1902, p. 3). It is experiences of life that produce knowledge worth knowing. Schiro (2013) notes that learner-centered ideologies are "in contrast to viewing knowledge from a perspective of learner's receiving information from academic disciplines" (pp. 142–143).

Dewey's argument that daily experiences, or the interaction of learners with the world and the necessary reflection and re-interaction therein, signal what is important as a foundation for knowledge (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 7). Information that is separated from the experiences of learners will have little bearing in the process of learning. As beings within environments, learners must be able to connect past experiences to present situations of inquiry to ascertain and understand new information (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 5).

The interests of learners as experienced, reflective, and inquisitive organisms are important to the philosophy of Dewey and to learner-centered ideologies. From this perspective, curricula should embrace the ideas of democracy and diversity. Curricula should prepare students for life in participative democracies, and learners should be prepared to engage with democratic societies. The futures of students should enable

participation. In this way, Dewey's emphasis on ideas of democracy and diversity is a characteristic of both learner-centered and social reconstruction ideologies. As we shall see, and as Freire (2000) clearly understood, this is one of the places where constructivism and critical theories begin to converge. Dewey would argue that learners should be located in a "free but cooperative environment that mirrored an ideal democratic society," one that allows freedom and experience (Walker & Soltis, 2009, p. 17). He believed the interests of learners are best served in democratic societies that enable members the freedom to explore and reflect upon their experiences in order to create more engaging environments. Societies would be a balance of individuals' freedom to explore their environments while being immersed in truly democratic societies (Walker & Soltis, 2009, p. 17).

From this perspective, the relationships between knowledges embedded in curricula and those enacting curricula should be centered or focused on learners. Curricula should serve the interests of learners and not the subject matter. Learners should be at the center of curricula with any focus beginning where learners' personal experiences start (Dewey, 1902, p. 3). It is the starting of inquiry, which begins with learners' experiences, that provides kernels of truth in learner-centered ideologies and Dewey's theories about curriculum. Although the beginning of curricula begins with learners' experiences, the journey of learning progresses from that point with the help of teachers. Teachers are people who help create the conditions and enact the curricula in ways that bring the experiences of learners to the center in making sense of the subject matter. Teachers assist students in reading maps of experiences and learning to navigate new territories of information (Dewey, 1902, p. 7). The analogy of a teacher as a

Sherpa, a guide leading learners into new topics, is a useful way of thinking about introducing academic ideas to learners. This approach is in contrast to scholar academic ideologies, which embrace teachers as the final authorities on academic information; learner-centered ideologies have teachers and learners as partners in discovering new information.

The learner-centered orientation of John Dewey's theories has definite implications for education. Putting learners' experiences at the center of the curriculum contrasts distinctly with scholar academic ideologies, which focus on learners' absorption and mastery of academic disciplines, or social efficiency ideologies, which seek to teach students to model and master ideal behaviors.

Learners are independent but connected entities within larger educational environments. Learners are independent in that they are separate individuals processing experiences into comprehensive webs of connection. Yet individual learners are also connected to larger bodies of learners against whose experiences of the world their own experiences are checked, compared, and rechecked. Each learner is responsible for engaging with other members of the learning community as well as the content to be learned so that effective learning is enacted.

According to Schiro (2013), teaching involves "careful observation of students and diagnosis of their individual needs and interests, …setting up the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual environment in which people learn, [and] facilitating student's growth by intervening between them and their environment to assist them as they learn" (p. 137). As learners engage in processes of learning by encountering new

experiences, teachers continue to see new and ever-deeper ways to facilitate their engagement.

Schiro (2013) notes that "in all cases, assessment is primarily for the benefit of students and for the purpose of facilitating their growth, development, and learning" (p. 145). An emphasis on teachers' constant assessment of student learning and guidance is essential for this rationale.

Broader social conditions influence the shape of curriculum and instruction by overlaying the most pertinent issues onto classroom experiences, whether or not those conditions are valid qualities. A society's perceived needs are what tend to be shifted into the requirements of education. If societies deem compartmentalized, rigid, noncritical curricula to serve the needs of nonresponsive governments or ubiquitous corporate entities, then education systems will be configured to serve those approaches. However, if societies deem that what is necessary are critical, empathetic, and caring individuals who are willing to work collectively in democratic societies to address how to live better lives, educational systems will be configured in that manner. Dewey would argue for the benefits of the latter and the detriments of the former as these factors are applied to education.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey argued for dismissing high and low art as well as a widening what the aesthetic could mean to democratic societies. The aesthetic is a sustained comprehension of experiences through emotional and cognitive sensorial analyses. In his book, Dewey explores connections between art and everyday experiences. He claims that art contains powerful experiences that are created and understood aesthetically. The author states that a "conception of fine art that sets out

from its connection with discovered qualities of ordinary experience will be able to indicate the factors and forces that favor the normal development of common human activities into matters of artistic value" (Dewey, 1934, p. 10). For Dewey, art is expressions of emotion that are evidenced in material and connected to experience. As Dewey (1934) states, for art to "be truly artistic, a work must also be aesthetic—that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception" (p. 49).

A number of scholars see the potential for incorporating Dewey's ideas about art, experience, and democracy together to create engaging and life-changing curricula (Uhurmacher, 2009; Granger, 2006). The possibilities for student engagement with course content by calling upon past experiences are nearly limitless. Any subject matter can be examined through truly cooperative exploration between teachers and learners. The experiences of learners with the guiding company of teachers can provide healthy and rewarding considerations of cultures and environments.

Jean Piaget and Constructivism

Jean Piaget was an educational theorist who was concerned with learning theories that focused on cognitively active learners constructing personal knowledge through interaction with the world prior to formal instruction. He theorized that children create knowledge and skills used to interact with the world. Piaget termed the created structures of knowledge and skills "schemas" or "schemata" (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p. 170).

Schemata, or knowledge constructs, essentially the results of perceiving, understanding, and thinking about the world, are constructed by learners through previous and current experiences (Marlowe and Page, 1998). Piaget explained how

schemas are organized by learners through processes of organization known as accommodation and assimilation which cope with disequilibrium in order to regain and achieve equilibrium. When learners encounter external stimuli that cause disequilibrium, they construct and reconstruct knowledge through assimilation and accommodation to reestablish equilibrium. In a book explaining Piaget's theories about cognitive growth, the authors write: "The process of maintaining equilibrium—construction and reconstruction of knowledge—in relation to the environment is what creates cognitive growth" (Marlowe & Page, 1998, p. 18).

Constructivist-based curriculum and instruction inspired by Piaget's theories are evident in many student-centered learning ideologies. For the purpose of understanding effective instruction in higher education, it is necessary to examine curriculum theory specifically as it relates to learner-centered ideologies. As characterized by Schiro's (2013) curriculum theory, learner-centered approaches are described as teaching methods that take into account learners' experiences, which provides the basis from which learning begins (p. 104). Learners' past and present experiences inform how they interact with new stimuli (new information, people, or the world) and integrate new experiences into their overall understanding. It is this process of engaging with stimuli, processing that engagement, and using it in future engagements that provides underlying supports for learning and the creation of knowledge.

Paulo Freire and Critical Pedagogy

Historically, top-down approaches to teaching seem to have been employed in higher education. Top-down or teacher-centered learning approaches place teachers as

experts and students as novices, perpetuating relationships in which students passively receive expert knowledge about academic disciplines (Freire, 2000).

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire described this traditional means of delivering information described as the "banking method" (2000). The banking method is one in which teachers essentially treat students as passive objects to be filled with information. Freire writes:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. . . . In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. (Freire, p. 72)

Freire explains that these dichotomous roles of teachers and students objectify students as passive entities that receive "deposits" of information from the world. In this relationship, students are in the world but not with the world. Within this relationship, teachers' roles are to regulate the flow of information to students with deposits of information.

The banking method of education suggests that only experts can think about academic information in terms of new scholarship. Thus, experts have already thought about the academic disciplines and seem to pass their wisdom down to teachers and students. Freire claimed that this educational relationship is dehumanizing because it freezes students into the role of passive recipients of expert knowledge while reinforcing the assumptions of intellectually superiority among scholars.

Freire proposed rejecting the "banking" concept of education by treating students as conscious beings capable of learning *with* rather than *from* teachers. He advocated rethinking traditional roles of teachers and students so that teachers are seen

as teacher-students and students are seen as student-teachers. This shift not only emphasized more constructivist views of learning, but it also helped disrupt traditional power hierarchies between teachers and students, thereby also helping disrupt broader expert-novice hierarchies in education in general. By deconstructing the traditional dichotomous and hierarchical roles of teachers and students, Freire provided an important bridge between constructivist beliefs (emphasizing the fact that learners, not teachers, are the primary agents in the educational process) and and the social reconstructionist aims of critical theory.

Freire's alternative to banking education was a method of instruction he called "problem-posing" education. Banking practices hold teachers as experts, as those who have successfully thought about academic disciplines and are prepared to transfer their knowledge to students. Freire recognized that this simple linear transfer of academic information from teacher to student undermines students' capacity to examine ideas and think for themselves, relegating them to positions of perpetual subordination in society. Thus, Freire advocating not only the teacher-student role and relationship but also the essential content or curriculum of education for those who have been historically oppressed. The primary curriculum of the "pedagogy of the oppressed" was essentially to focus on the existential situation of oppression, and the primary problems to be posed were those involving the origins, mechanisms, and solutions to systemic oppression.

In problem-posing education, authentic dialogue is created between teachers and students; consequently, the banking concept is replaced by new relationships in which teachers are learning along with students, creating teacher-students with student-teachers. Teachers and students collaborate on an equal basis to explore essential

questions of life and oppression and justice. Problem-posing education presents academic issues, especially issues of power and justice and social reconstruction, as fluid and fluctuating, rather than static and rigid. According to Freire:

> In problem-posting education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (2000)

In problem-posing education, true dialogue takes place between teacher-students and student-teachers, encouraging co-exploration not only of academic information but also of fundamental issues of life, equality, oppression, and justice. From this perspective, beneficial and lasting education can have teachers and students engaged in collective and collaborative analyses and examination of topics.

Critical Theory in Higher Education

Analyses of how knowledge is accumulated have experienced a radical turn in the last two centuries. Theorists have pursued the theory that information is neither wholly separate from human subjects nor commodities attainable by human minds. Instead, knowledge, it has been argued, is a constant exchange of experiences between people and the world. The reframing of this view of accumulations of knowledge is perhaps one of the most exciting and fertile areas of inquiry available to theorists and educators. Critical theory provides a means to reframe the search for knowledge (Leonardo, 2004, p. 11).

This section will explain and describe critical theory with a review of major theorists who have contributed to its development. Next, an examination of the evolution of critical theory will be provided. Following that, critiques of critical theory

and the underlying research base will be given. Then, a survey of how critical theory has impacted practice in educational settings will be possible.

Some of the earliest theorists contributing to the idea of critical theory include philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Karl Marx (Cary, 1998, p. 29). The philosophy of Immanuel Kant helped modify ideas of how human beings create knowledge. He argued that reason helps determine how people perceive the world. Information is received through our senses but is interpreted rationally, a process that influences our perceptions and conclusions. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel theorized that dialectical relationships exist between humanity and nature. In ongoing relationships, humanity alters nature and is therefore altered, repeating the process continually. Dialectical processes proposed by Hegel reveal the ongoing processes of engagement and change, processes that humanity cannot escape. Karl Marx elaborated upon Hegel's dialectic processes but argued that matter rather than thoughts or ideas inaugurated these processes. Humankind's collective consciousness was shaped initially by material factors, Marx argued, specifically economic factors. Following this initial theoretical framework, a number of philosophers and researchers have since engaged in critical social analysis.

Many of the theoretical frameworks for critical theory came from focuses upon Marxist criticism by theorists known as the Frankfurt School. Early critical theorists sought to establish critical analyses as necessary precursors to emancipative action.

Critical theory was informed primarily by regarding and applications of Marxist theory. Tenets of Marxist theory have been seen to influence critical theory, which include the observation of capitalist societies organizing themselves around the

exchange of commodities, a tendency of capitalist socioeconomic systems toward reification, and the observation that capitalism fosters social inequities and therefore, social disharmony (Cary, 1998, pp. 31–32).

Histories of the early twentieth century provide a backdrop against which theoretical developments of critical theory can be understood. This tumultuous period involved horrific consequences of the First World War; the economically depressed climate of Europe; the rise of communism, fascism, and socialism, all of which were used to brutally subjugate respective populations; and an eventual encompassing Second World War, which prompted the exodus of the Frankfurt School to other parts of Europe and eventually to the United States.

Critical theory has been defined as movements within poststructuralist thought, emanating from theoretical frameworks and interpretive studies from the nineteenth century (Davis, 2004, pp. 125–126). The alignment of critical theory with poststructuralism, an elaboration of structuralism, provides a discursive practice that can be understood by studying constructivism and constructionism (Davis & Sumara, 2006, pp. 121–122). However, Lev S. Vygotsky's work theorized the incorporation of an individual into webs of connection. Constructivism and constructionism provided ways of thinking about the accumulation of knowledge, whether strictly internal or reconciliations between internal conceptualization of the world and an external incorporation into that world. Critical theory is most often aligned with the practice of poststructuralism. Poststructuralism seeks to explore accumulations of knowledge via an analysis of discourse, which frames the validity or invalidity of given information.

The analysis of the power system that determines the validity of knowledge lies at the heart of poststructuralism.

However, critical theory provided later theorists within poststructuralist spheres an ability to explore social discourses. What is evident in critical theory as a poststructuralist movement is skepticism toward modern methods of analysis and theories of knowledge.

Michel Foucault, one of the most important thinkers of critical theory in the twentieth century, sought to use models of critical analysis to examine the use of power. Foucault's work draws upon various theories of critical inquiry, using them as necessary tools to critically analyze any given situation or issue (Mills, 2003, pp. 14–15). Foucault's own conception of critical theory changed throughout his career, moving from structuralism to poststructuralism. This turn was from analyses of "anonymous productions of knowledge and discourses" to analyses of the production of "internal structures of knowledge and discourse" through "inter-relations of power and the effects of those power relations on individuals" (Mills, 2003, p. 23).

This examination of power as experienced by individuals and used by cultures to form knowledge and pedagogical practices of theorist/activists like Paulo Freire coincides with the activism of Foucault. Like Freire, Foucault sought to enable the subjects of domination with opportunities to speak for themselves from the area of oppression. As we have seen in the case of Freire, critical examinations of the uses and abuses of power can be applied to discourses of education.

Such examinations of power, discourse, and oppression can have important consequences for education. The theorizing of acquisitions of knowledge via the

application/circulation of power is one of the most fascinating of Foucault's theoretical works. An application of the theory of power/knowledge provides educators with, among other critical analysis tools, abilities to analyze how educational systems exercise power, decide upon curricula, organize student bodies, frame knowledge, and facilitate learning. The issue of discourse and discursive actions calls into question what educators decide is important.

Teaching Approaches in Art Education

Analysis of Pedagogy in Art and Design Curricula

In an article by Tavin, Kushins, and Elinski (2007), criticism is leveled at the current states of foundations courses in higher education. The authors argue that focus upon traditional formalist approaches to learning the principles and elements of art close students off from cultural and historical meanings germane to contemporary art practices. In their article, the historical beginnings of foundation art are surveyed, focusing on incorporations of specific cultural experiences into the creation of practices that hold considerable influences on art instruction today.

The authors argue that traditional focuses on form strip any contextual, technological, or pedagogical considerations needed to successfully prepare first-year art students. In essence, Tavin, Kushins, and Elinski provide a solution by incorporating postmodern principles of instruction. They argue that students may learn postmodern principles "by addressing concepts of hybridity, appropriation, intertextuality, popular culture, cultural criticism, and cultural theory, through both art production and seminar discussions" (p. 15).

An example from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago is given to describe radical reconfigurations of foundation courses. Students in this program "make art and talk about art through a negotiation of multiple viewpoints, research of historical, cultural, political, and social contexts, and investigation of a theme informed by contemporary visual culture" (Tavin, Kushins, & Elinski, 2007, p. 18).

In another article, Grierson (2010) begins by establishing shifts in uses of disciplinary knowledge that challenged traditional scholarly research, including poststructuralist critiques of uses of power within the academy. Postmodernity, the author argues, had begun to change disciplines of art history in the 1980s and 1990s, enacting a sense of the possibilities of interdisciplinary inquiry. The changes brought about in curricula were intended to "provide opportunities for questioning historical lineages and testing the assumptions or knowledge formation in both art history and art practice" (p. 113). The retooling and integration of various disciplines for purposes of scholarly inquiry supports the supra-level learning system that can be advocated in higher education. The interconnectedness of disciplines can be used to enact a shift away from thinking of knowledge as forms of "logocentricism in which the Western educational disciplines were founded and bounded" (p. 115). Issues of authorship and the stronghold of formalism a la Greenberg are issues that Grierson found to be the greatest obstacle. However, art educators must, he agues, be willing to "engage with a contestatory public toward epistemological and ontological terrains accepting little at face value in institutional framing of art and its practices and putting dominant narratives to rest" (p. 121). Grierson's article addresses the importance with which art education requires adaptation to more postmodern and critically minded approaches for

the twenty-first century (2010). By shifting away from more logocentric (or verbal analytical) orientations, the arts have fallen into specific constrained fields, essentially becoming disciples in higher education.

The stagnation of art education is addressed in an article by Steers. More flexible and perhaps more general approaches to art education could render disciplines more adaptable when addressing issues of creativity, originality, and applicability (Steers, 2014). Fern Lerner recounts histories of foundations courses in her article "Liberating Foundations of Art and Design" (2012). By looking at the earliest manifestations of such courses, she examines how traditional curriculum approaches could inspire young designers to collaborate in the fields of mathematics and science. Lerner acknowledges possible complications with the use of formalist approaches to design education as education encounters more humanistic emphases in contemporary education milieu.

Critical Theory in Art and Design Curricula

Higher education art curricula seem to have experienced a shift in use of critical theory. An article by the art historian Jules David Prown (1984) most excellently lays out some of the recent changes in higher education art curricula while explaining the development of American art history within the larger disciplines of art history. At one point, Prown describes earlier formal (modern) tendencies in evaluating artwork, which have since been altered by greater use of critical theory to examine social, political, religious, economic, gendered, and discursive layers of meaning. Although written thirty years ago, this article accurately states the continuing and accelerated pace with which scholarship and curriculum and instruction have changed in higher education.

The ability to analyze accumulations of knowledge and ways in which that knowledge is determined has potentially lucrative possibilities for art education. Practices of thinking about relationships of power, authorships of truth, critical analyses of cultural truths, examinations of what authority constructs truths in culture, and abilities to strategize changes in cultural truth open new possibilities for critical theory and pedagogy in education.

What separates critical theory from modernist paradigms is a rejection of value-free inquiry, including the idea that such inquiry is even possible. Observers of culture will be necessarily influenced by discourses that have been erected, including their own lived experiences and perceptions. Acknowledgements of prejudicial qualities of one's values in culture, and specifically in art, will allow more thorough and richly elaborated views of art (Cary, 1998, p. 19).

New possibilities appear to be possible for the application of critical theory to art instruction. In his book *Critical Art Pedagogy*, Richard Cary describes possibilities of critical theories applied to art instruction:

> When art education adopts the goal of providing all students authentic art experiences through the means of a critical art pedagogy, art instruction can begin to promote empowerment and emancipation. That is to say, it can become "critically instrumental" in revealing oppressive structures and promoting the means to resist them. (p. 65)

Several authors, writing about possible uses of critical theory in art education, comment upon tremendous amounts of visual imagery presented in contemporary life. Art education has focused primarily upon aesthetic experiences, or formal qualities of works of art. However, some theorists have called into question the limiting of examinations of art to its aesthetic or formal qualities. Due to ubiquitous roles of

imagery in contemporary culture, more deliberate analyses are necessary to benefit students (Yokley, 1999, p. 20). Critical analyses of art in the classroom have only been discussed in the last decade or so.

Critical analyses of art in contemporary society seem possible. Brent Davis (2004) describes the reality of discourses of art in contemporary society "as wholly complicit in the maintenance of an economically stratified culture" (p. 141). Recreating or reconstructing dominant cultures in schools can prove to be overwhelmingly difficult endeavors. However, critical theory-based practices can provide methods of analyses that facilitate focused looks at one's culture.

According to Darts (2004), the "everyday aesthetic experience" has the capacity to provide rich fields from which students are able to critique ideological relationships in contemporary society (p. 315). An application of critical theory to education can create means by which teachers and students could analyze and deconstruct means of power. In other words, according to Dart, the ultimate aims of critical pedagogy in art education are not simply heightened senses of discursive systems that control sociocultural experiences, but also a means to counter such discourses:

> By encouraging students to interpret, evaluate, and 'rewrite' the shared symbols and meanings of everyday visual experiences, visual culture educators can begin to move young people beyond modes of passive spectatorship and towards more active and expressive forms of communication with and in the world around them. (p. 325)

In conclusion, this chapter has identified and critiqued current trends in higher education curriculum and instruction, particularly in areas of art education. Both holistic and critical trends have been explained using numerous topics, including learning theories of constructivism, learner-centered theories, explanations of critical theory with

theorists such as Paulo Freire and Michel Foucault, and uses of critical theory with other disciplines like art history.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Setting and Participants

Setting

This study was conducted at a medium-sized regional university. The university was founded in the early twentieth century as a teaching normal school; an institution charged with educating high school students in pedagogy and curriculum for the purpose of teaching in primary and secondary schools. The university currently offers 38 bachelor's degrees, seven associate degrees, six master's degrees and one doctorate. On average, the school registers an enrollment of almost 5,000 students each semester. The state became open for settlement and, eventually, achieved statehood in the early twentieth century.

The state in which Leslie's institution is located is in the South Central part of the United States, a region including Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. It entered the union in the early twentieth century; having been earlier declared a government-sanctioned territory for American Indian peoples removed from their historic lands. It is near the top one-third of states in terms of geographical size and near the middle in terms of U.S. state populations. Its population is predominantly European American with smaller populations of Hispanic, African American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander inhabitants, and a significantly larger American-Indian population than most other states. The state is a top producer of natural gas, oil, and agricultural products, but it also relies upon aviation, energy, telecommunications, and biotechnology as an economic base. The state features geographic regions that include the Great Plains, Cross Timbers, and U.S. Interior Highlands. Three major U.S.

interstate highways run through the state at north-south, east-west, and northeast-southwest directions.

Leslie's institution is located in the western half of the state. The region has a higher elevation than the rest of the state, is more arid, and contains gentle sloping hills, agricultural crops, and wind turbines. Agriculture, wind energy, gas, and oil are primary occupations. This region's population is markedly lower than the other half of the state, being located away from major metropolitan areas. The landscape in this region rises and falls gently from valley to hill but never to extreme elevations. Trees can be found in areas where water gathers or in cities and towns, but they have difficulty lasting due to high winds. A mainstay of the region, the wind blows more profusely here than it does in many other parts of the United States. Wind turbines constantly turn, harnessing the fleeting energy blowing over the land. The landscape, by virtue of its flatness, produces beautiful sunsets. The soil is a raw sienna color, and open canyons or mesas jut from the ground revealing the reddish color of the earth. As one farmer described, the land seems to be a sponge that soaks up water quickly before drying out and leaving little evidence of any former trace of saturation.

The city in which Leslie's institution is located is located in the center of the western half of the state. The city's population numbers around 12,000, while the metropolitan statistical area numbers around 41,000. Aside from the university, the oil and gas industry and agriculture are responsible for the largest number of employers. The city, like the region in general, has gently sloping hills, and the university is located on one of the highest points of town, atop one such hill. The city sits north of the east-west interstate that forms it southern border. Most businesses still center around the

main street of town with a few larger national chain stores located on the edges of city limits. The city features three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The public-school system is regarded for excellence in academics and extracurricular activities, such as athletics and band.

The campus merges rather unremarkably into the neighborhoods surrounding it. Students are able to park almost anywhere on campus yet can sometime be heard complaining when having to walk the 100 to 200 yards to attend class. Most campus buildings have been built within the last 50 years or so, although a few of the buildings are nearly 100 years old. Although not all faculty who teach at Leslie's institution live in the same city as the university, many live in the neighborhoods surrounding the school.

Participants

The primary participant for this study was "Leslie," an associate professor at the university, where she had taught since 2010. I first met Leslie about six years before conducting the study, working together at a non-profit arts organization where we both volunteered. I have also served on a committee that provides oversight for online courses taught at our institution. Serving with Leslie on that committee enabled me to become better acquainted with her views on education and her work as a teacher. I was particularly impressed with her keen perception of the importance of progressive ideas concerning education. Getting to know her philosophy of teaching compelled me to approach her for this study. Leslie stood out to me as an excellent participant for this study because she professes a student-centered theoretical position about teaching. She is one of the few professors at my institution with which I have found a kindred spirit.

Leslie graduated in 2010 with a PhD degree in Composition and Rhetoric from a "public ivy" university—an institution which provides an Ivy League collegiate experience at public school cost—located in the Midwest, an MA degree in English in 2005 from a large southern state university with a graduate certificate in Woman's Studies, and a BA degree in English and a BA degree in French in 2001 from the same university. In our institution, she teaches English courses in the language and literature department and coordinates a writing center—a student-run writing consultation service—in the campus library. Leslie's teaching and scholarly interests include composition theories, histories, and pedagogies, creative nonfiction and essay writing, history of the essay, genre theory, invention studies, writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines, writing center theory and administration, digital composition, feminist theories and pedagogies, and film studies.

Leslie's early experiences in education shaped many of her teaching practices. According to Leslie, because of her shyness and withdrawn participation in class as a young student, her kindergarten teacher at a Catholic school thought she was mentally challenged. Her parents explained that her hesitancy to speak disappeared once she engaged with a subject that interested her. After the initial challenge of being cast as a slow learner, Leslie surpassed all other classmates in reading.

During her early middle school and high school years, Leslie explains, she experienced physical symptoms that were initially identified as an upset stomach but were later diagnosed as IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome). In a morality class during her sophomore year in high school, an episode caused her stomach to gurgle loudly. She explained, "The teacher stopped class, looked at me, and said to everyone in the room,

'Oh, it looks like somebody needs to excuse herself.'" This episode convinced Leslie of the need to allow students freedom to come and go in class without fear of criticism by the teacher. Entering college with physical awkwardness continued to present challenges for Leslie. She felt compelled to arrive early to class in order to find the seat closest to the exit. This continued from undergraduate to graduate school. Leslie excelled in school, but she experienced constant anxiety about her physical state. She explained that experiences like these made her keenly aware of her own students' situations that may affect their learning.

While in college, Leslie developed an awareness of the importance of student-centered learning. Her graduate program in composition and rhetoric (or comp/rhet) included pedagogical exploration. Comp/rhet centered on composition theory, which focuses almost exclusively on higher education. As a field of teaching, comp/rhet was developed in the nineteenth century to address perceived lack of writing abilities on the part of incoming students. It is a field that has been historically taught by women and that gained a surge in the 1970s. Within the field of comprehension and rhetoric, pedagogy has always been seen as a necessity, particularly in first-year writing courses. Comp/rhet has typically been given a less privileged status than other areas of English, such as the study of literature. Leslie stated, "Comp/rhet professors teach composition, literally in the trenches." According to Leslie, being in the "trenches," in close proximity to students during the processes of writing, is sometimes seen as being beneath what other English professors would consider important or meaningful.

Leslie's philosophy of teaching and experience in the college classroom were personally enlightening. They enabled me, as a researcher and teacher, to better

understand the challenges and benefits of using student-centered learning approaches in higher education. Observing and interacting with Leslie throughout this study, I was able to reflect on my own current understanding of the benefits and challenges of using student-centered learning and to compare this understanding with another instructor's experience.

As I met with Leslie, my research question kept returning. If student-centered learning approaches are beneficial, why are teachers in higher education often so hesitant to implement them? From the literature presented earlier, it is evident that student-centered learning approaches can engage students and create educational environments conducive to learning. If the literature supports these approaches, then an examination of the continued hesitation on the part of teachers may be needed. A necessary step in this examination was to name some of the issues that counter the implementation of student-centered learning. In the *Dialectic of Freedom*, Maxine Greene (1988) describes the importance and process of naming factors that are counter to one's growth and improvement. Like Freire's call for the emancipation of humans from their status as objects to their status as subjects, Greene encourages a proactive stance on action for humanity: "To be something other than an object, a cipher, a thing, such a person must reach out to create an opening; he/she must engage directly with what stands against him/her, no matter what the risk" (Greene, 1988, p. 11). She encourages the actions we must take to fully address these problems:

> To be aware of authorship is to be aware of situationality and of the relation between the ways in which one interprets one's situation and the possibilities of action and choice. This means that one's "reality," rather than being fixed and predefined, is a perpetual emergent, becoming increasingly multiplex, as more perspectives are taken, more texts are opened, more friendships are made. (Greene, 1988, p. 23)

Greene's point is that individuals make sense of their reality through learning, which empowers thought, enables agency, and provides bridges of understanding between oneself and others. She argues that understandings between and among learners recurrently create new meaning and, ultimately, new possibilities.

As illustrated earlier, the benefits of student-centered learning approaches are abundant (Belenky et al., 1984; Bishop et al., 2014; Dewey, 1902; Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Lightweis, 2013; Salinas et al., 2008; Walker & Soltis, 2009; Wright, 2011). Distinct benefits are acquired by the implementation of student-centered teaching approaches, including shifting students to more central positions in the production of knowledge and facilitating engaged, critical, and comprehensive learning. But if this is true, if the data indicate that student-centered learning is an effective means of promoting student growth, why is the reluctance to implementing it so prevalent in higher education? The literature suggests a number of reasons, but how are these ideas reflected, supported, or refuted by Leslie's experiences?

Although Leslie was the primary participant in this study, she was not the only participant. There were thirteen students in the Writing in the Disciplines class I observed, including two men and 11 women. Although I was limited in my ability to interview the students, it is important to provide a sense of who they were in terms of their positions as learners. I was able to perceive a sense of the students' activities and personalities during the hours spent observing Leslie's class sessions, reviewing my observational notes, and examining recorded video footage.

Most of the female students and both male students in Leslie's class appeared to be European American. Like most of the students on campus, they came from the

region and choose the university due to its proximity to their homes and its relatively inexpensive tuition. A few of Leslie's students were from farming families and appreciated the ability to stay close to home. Several other students came from moderately populated cities in the region. When I first observed them, a small handful of the female students coolly surveyed the class, speaking to each other with an air of confidence. One female student wore yoga pants or sweatpants with her hair pulled back in a ponytail and also exuded quiet confidence during the class sessions. A few convivial female students wearing t-shirts and jeans with shorter haircuts interacted merrily during class session. The only student of color, a young woman of perhaps American Indian or Hispanic descent, attended class intermittently and sat in the back, mostly remaining quiet during class sessions. Both of the male students were casually dressed and made jokes with obscure cultural references. One of these men sat alone most class sessions, while the other sat by a female student who was engaged in the lessons. A married female student talked consistently about her home life. An animated, highly energetic science-oriented female student complained frequently about the work due in other classes. A quiet, casually dressed female student sat in the front row and spoke very softly if at all.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

I used a qualitative case study methodology for this research (Merriam, 2009). The underlying philosophical basis for the research methods incorporated in this study stems from interpretivist or constructivist/social constructivist philosophy. Constructivism is a theory of learning that asserts that knowledge is constructed by cognitively active learners through experience with the world, experience that is fluid

and changing. Piaget explains that construction of meaning involves the processes of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration (Houser, 2006, p. 16). Assimilation is the process by which a person incorporates new information into existing schemas. Accommodation is the method by which a person adapts his or her schemas to make room for new information. Equilibration is a process of striving for balance which continually reconciles the cognitive disequilibrium that necessitates assimilation and accommodation.

Merriam describes several basic characteristics of qualitative research, including a primary focus on the participants' constructed, context-specific meanings and understandings, the idea that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the use of both inductive and deductive processes to gather and interpret the data, and the use of rich description in the report so readers can participate in determining the meaning and validity of findings (2009, pp. 13–16). A focus on meaning and understanding requires the researcher to attempt to perceive the viewpoints of the participants within the study.

Interpreting others' perspectives can be challenging because the researcher is always, to a certain extent, an outsider. Perspectives have been described as emic and etic. An emic perspective is that of an insider to a culture. An etic perspective is that of outsider to a culture (Merriam, 2009, p. 29). By definition, one person is inevitably outside the culture of another.

The idea that the researcher is the primary instrument means that data for case studies are gathered and interpreted by the researcher, accomplished by the active collection of information through the intentional development and implementation of

interviews, the conducting of observations, and the gathering and analysis of documents. In this study, I gathered the material for analysis through interviews, observations, and documents while also using my own experiences as a teacher in higher education to better understand the information collected.

Qualitative case studies are built initially by means of inductive processes as opposed to deductive processes typically associated with positivist research. Inductive processes involve gathering data through interviews and observations, which are accumulated into distinct categories of information over time. As the study proceeds, both inductive and deductive processes are used. This differs from rigid deductive processes that test incoming data against an established category.

Rich description is another component of qualitative case studies. This element refers to the property of presenting the overall work being created; a property that can be described through words and images rather than through numbers only. The purpose of rich description is to provide the necessary context for readers to understand what is going on and to determine for themselves whether the researcher's assertions make sense in light of their own ideas and experiences.

The specific form of qualitative research that I used was a case study. Qualitative case studies focus on particular bounded systems to be analyzed in order to better understand the perspectives of the participants. Merriam states that qualitative case study research is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (2009, p. 43). "Particularistic" refers to the uniqueness of a specific case. A case will exhibit specific characteristics that represent context-specific facets of a phenomenon.

When Merriam says case studies are "descriptive," she is referring to the idea that the researcher needs to provide a "thick" description of the participants, setting, relationships, meanings, and other phenomena in question. According to Merriam, "Thick description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated" (2009, p. 43). The complexity of case studies provides the researcher with a multitude of venues with which to describe a phenomenon.

Merriam also describes case studies as "heuristic," referring to the ability of a case study to expand the scope of understanding of the phenomenon. Heuristic devices are a means of building upon or utilizing what is already known in order to seek further information. This can add depth and complexity to a study, and a more complex viewpoint can yield rich understanding.

Qualitative case study methodologies were appropriate for my study since I focused on the perspectives of a teacher who engaged in student-centered learning approaches in higher education. The bounded system, an upper-level English course, provided the specific case to be analyzed. This form of research was appropriate for my study because I looked at how student-centered learning approaches are conducted and perceived by a college instructor in a higher education classroom.

The sample chosen for the purposes of studying the specific problem reflects particular issues that surround implementing student-centered learning approaches in higher education classrooms. I employed a nonprobabilistic approach for the sample selection process for this study. Nonprobabilistic sampling, also known as "purposeful sampling," is used to facilitate a rich focus on the perspectives of the participants, not a

generalized overview of a large group of randomly selected participants. As Merriam explains, “Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, probabilistic sampling is not necessary or even justifiable in qualitative research” (2009, p. 77).

A unique or atypical sample was the focus of this study. Atypical samples contain unique characteristics about the topics of the study. The unique characteristics of this sample involved the implementation of student-centered learning approaches in a college-level English course. The sample that I chose for this study was an upper-level English undergraduate interdisciplinary research course, taught by Leslie, an associate professor in the English department of the college described above. The course catalog described the course objectives as follows: “students learn to analyze the discourse of various disciplines and discern how the needs of the discourse communities shape their writing.” Since this study was concerned with better understanding the perspectives of a teacher in higher education who used student-centered learning in her classroom, the criteria used to determine the sample prompted a focus on higher education arts or humanities courses. This course sufficiently addressed the unique issues of using student-centered learning approaches in higher education classrooms.

Rather than concentrating on generalizations across multiple cases or participants, this study focused on the unique perspectives of a single participant in one specific course. Leslie, the instructor teaching the course, was the primary participant who was observed and interviewed. However, to a lesser degree, I also observed the students in the course.

Data Collection

Methods of data collection included observations of the English course, interviews with the instructor, and a review of documents used in the course. The data for this study were gathered through interviews, observations, documents, and online materials. A succession of interviews, class observations spanning nine weeks, and analyses of documents produced sufficient material for a thick description necessary for qualitative research.

An interview is a "person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another" (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Different categories of interviews include highly structured/standardized, semistructured, and unstructured/informal person-to-person encounters. Highly structured or standardized interview questions were not as applicable as semistructured and informal person-to-person encounters were to the highly subjective nature of gathering information during the interviewing process due to the philosophical orientation and context-specific nature of this study.

Although standardized questions were not the primary tool for my data collection, they were used to gather demographic information at the beginning of the interviewing process with semistructured or unstructured questions making up a majority of my interview questions. Therefore, I tended to use more standardized questions at the beginning of the study as a means of gathering specific information about the experiences of the participants. Preliminary analyses based on these questions assisted with the development of additional interview questions designed to elicit more complex and context-specific views of Leslie's background and teaching experiences. All of my interviews were conducted in person and recorded via cellphone and, at

times, a compact action camera. Follow-up interviews were conducted throughout the semester.

I interviewed Leslie on four separate occasions: January 14, 2016; June 16, 2016; April 11, 2017; and December 13, 2017. The interview questions (summarized in Appendix A) were typed, and descriptions of each interview were transcribed using modified or full transcriptions of the interviews. Each of the interviews were audio-recorded with a cellphone. The third interview, conducted on April 11, 2017, was audio-recorded with a cellphone and also videotaped. The four interviews were conducted at various locations on the university campus where Leslie and I taught. The first interview was conducted in a lounge in the main student center on campus. The second, third, and fourth interviews were conducted in the campus library.

The first interview contained basic questions selected to understand Leslie's experiences as a learner and teacher. In order to understand her perspectives, I felt it was important to learn as much as possible about her own experiences in school, from the primary to secondary grades as well as undergraduate and graduate school. The second interview was conducted to better understand Leslie's perspectives on the benefits and challenges of using student-centered learning approaches in higher education. Because her views on the use of student-centered learning as a teaching method in higher education was part of the research, I believed it was important to fully explore her perceptions of the approaches she used. The third interview was conducted to more fully explore Leslie's thoughts and perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using student-centered learning approaches in higher education. The fourth and last interview was conducted to more fully comprehend Leslie's experiences and thoughts

regarding the ways she coped with the challenges of using student-centered learning approaches in higher education. All four interviews yielded important information that allowed me to better understand Leslie's experiences and perspectives on teaching and learning through the use of student-centered learning approaches.

Observations differ from interviews in that observations ensue where phenomena naturally occur and data gathered from observations represent firsthand encounters rather than secondhand accounts (Merriam, 2009). The observations conducted for this study were systematic, addressed the research question, and were rendered more trustworthy by numerous surveils at the class site.

Observations were conducted in the classroom during meeting times for the course during the semester. I observed Leslie's class a total of eight times. The class sessions lasted an hour and fifteen minutes. Observation times began usually just before class, about five minutes, and ended a few minutes after class. The total amount of time I spent observing Leslie's class was ten hours. I began the observation process by visiting the classroom to ascertain the physical layout of the site, making notes and producing a visual plan of the classroom space (see Figure 1). My initial observations were informal visits to familiarize myself with the context of the classroom and its use by the instructor and learners.

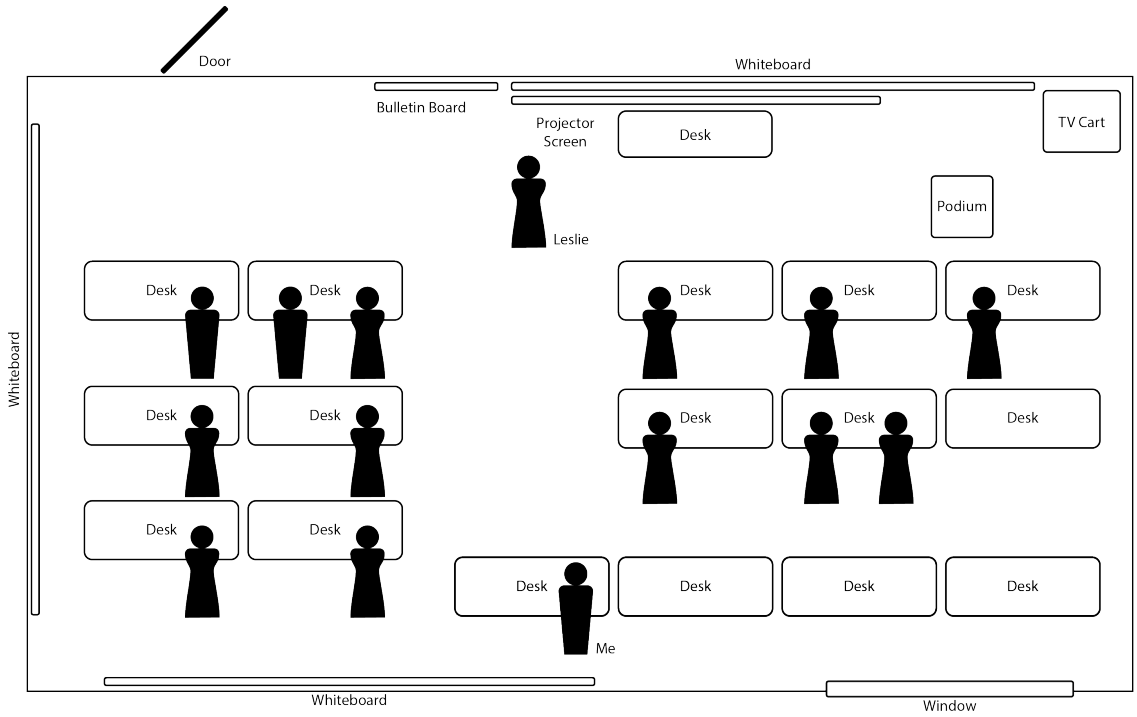


Figure 1. Visual Plan of Classroom

The focus of the observations was to understand the learning environment and relationships created by Leslie through her student-centered learning approaches. It was critical to observe her methods of instruction, the interactions between Leslie and her students, and the interactions between and among the students during my observations.

A more intense series of observations followed my initial visits to the classroom. After gaining access to the class with the instructor's approval, I observed class interactions between the instructor and the students with regard to Leslie's instructional methods centered on student learning. My role during these encounters ranged between "observer as participant" to "complete observer" since I had little interaction with members of the class during my observations (Merriam, 2009, pp. 124–125).

I took observational notes during each class session. The notes were coded, and they were later reviewed to inform my future observations. Each class session was videotaped with two cameras. The cameras were placed at the two corners at the front of the classroom. The cameras were positioned to record Leslie's interactions with her students, the students' interactions with Leslie, and the students' interactions with each other. After each class observation was completed, the videos and notes were reviewed, summarized, and analyzed. Here again, these notes helped guide and inform my subsequent observations. In this way, following the constant comparative and theoretical sampling or heuristic approaches often used in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009), the observations built on one another, informed findings from previous observations, and suggested where to focus in my future observations.

Documents were another source of data used for this study. Merriam (2009) prefers to use the term "documents" instead of the more commonly used term "artifacts" to refer to physical traces that can also serve as important sources of qualitative data. According to Merriam, in addition to traditional forms of material culture commonly analyzed by anthropologists, documents also include "official records, letters, newspapers, accounts, poems, songs, corporate records, government documents, historical accounts, diaries, [and] autobiographies," and "[p]hotographs, film and video can be used as data sources" (2009, p. 140). I selected specific documents to supplement my interviews and observations, including student-generated and instructor-generated materials produced for the course.

Although documents can include various artifacts created by participants, such as letters, poems, diaries, photographs, and video, the primary documents I analyzed

were handouts provided by the students, course description, and course materials for students on Canvas, the university's learning management system. The purpose for the examination of documents generated by the participants was to learn specific information about my topic of study, which involved the participants' perceptions, including the challenges and benefits, of student-centered learning approaches. Basic notations were initially established for coding as part of the recursive process of analysis and interpretation.

The meaning and applicability of information gathered from the documents were analyzed for their relevance to the research questions. This relevancy was determined by constantly comparing information from the documents to information gathered through the interviews and observations and by verifying the usefulness of each document as a means of helping answer the research questions. I found that my proximity to the topic of study increased or decreased each document's usefulness. For example, this included handouts generated for student-led presentations over grammatical concepts.

In addition to physical documents, online data sources were made available to me through access to a learning management system used by Leslie and her students for the duration of the course. These sources included items such as course description and objectives, assignments, and writing guidelines. The inclusion of these online data sources further broadened the depth and breadth of information that was available for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study employed the typical methods developed for qualitative case study research. As Merriam explains, "The timing of analysis and the integration of analysis with other tasks distinguish a qualitative design from traditional, positivistic research" (2009, p. 169). As others have noted, the processes of qualitative research are dynamic and emergent. I found that the analyses intensified as the study continued and as the data collection drew to a conclusion. The findings became much clearer and more distinct during the analysis process. However, this required careful organization. To organize and manage my data, a system was implemented at the initial stages of my study. I established a coding system so that retrieval of specific components of the data could be easily obtained. For example, I noted specific instances of student-centered learning approaches observed during class sessions. Whether behaviors or actions by Leslie or students were observed, notations were made that were possibly relevant for answering my research questions. I also incorporated a system to record and track my thoughts, ideas, and musings about the research during my analysis. For example, I wrote a few notes regarding comments made by students in the hallway outside the classroom before they realized I was the observer. These early observations served as an additional source of information beyond what I was able to gather through my observations during the official class sessions.

The process of analyzing data consists of condensing or encoding, grouping and comparing, and interpreting the information gathered by the researcher. In order to answer my research questions, I encoded my observational and interview notes and constructed categories that eventually became themes, which I used to effectively

organize and interpret the significance of my data. Here again, I found that comparing quantities of information to be logically categorized and further analyzed and interpreted required consistent organizational processes.

As I began analyzing my observations, interviews, and documents, I engaged in a process described as "open coding" (Merriam, 2009). During open coding, the researcher goes through all interview and observational notes, scrutinizing chunks of data such as the participants' utterances, actions, and interactions, class events and encounters, and contextual information, in a search for partial or potential answers to the research questions. These partial and potential answers are recorded as "codes." This initial or open coding process was expansive, continuing throughout the study as new interviews and observations were conducted and additional documents were gathered, adding depth and complexity to the preliminary analyses.

While data collection and open coding continued, I began the emergent and recursive process of axial coding (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). Axial coding is the process by which open codes are grouped together in order to better understand themes that emerge as data was analyzed. During successive inspection of the gathered information, certain notes and comments emerged and were classified together. Relevant data identified during the open coding process was used to refine and relate information pertinent to the study. Axial coding facilitated my interpretations and reflections on the meanings further refined the analytical process. It provided a means to continue the refinement of identifying themes using inductive processes of data analysis to create rich descriptions used to answer research questions.

As the recursive process of open and axial coding continued, I prepared a preliminary outline or classification system that encompassed the patterns into themes. This continual process of refining my categories, looking back into the data, and eventually finalizing my categories created a logical structure with which to present the robust body of information suitable for qualitative research.

Ensuring Confidence and Trustworthiness

In order to address issues of confidence and trustworthiness throughout the study, I engaged in a constant, critical evaluation of my interpretation of the participants' words and actions as well as my own assumptions and positionality. My own observations, including my position related to the study, were scrutinized for the entirety of the study. In order to ensure that the research was trustworthy, I conducted specific measures to ensure that the study was valid and reliable from the standpoint of qualitative research.

Qualitative research has specific strategies for establishing authenticity and trustworthiness consistent with its philosophical underpinnings. Although varying terms are used to conceptualize the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, I referred to the terms outlined by Merriam: "internal validity," "reliability," and "external validity" (2009, p. 213). "Internal validity" refers to the extent to which the information presented in the research matches the "reality" of the situation. Merriam explains that internal validity is a strong point of qualitative research. She describes internal validity as a component of research that seeks to "understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is

happening" (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). Because philosophical starting points of qualitative research emphasize the fact that people construct their own reality, methods are needed to check the participants' views of the situation against the researcher's interpretations. The most common method for ensuring internal validity is known as "triangulation." I employed triangulation by analyzing and comparing field notes from my observations, transcripts from the interviews, and the information provided in the documents.

Internal validity was also ensured through the strategy known as "reflexivity." Identifying and explaining my own biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding my findings and interpretations helped explain how I arrived at the conclusions I drew regarding the study. Rather than presuming that it is possible to be "objective," I acknowledged my own subjective position and strived to practice what Erickson (1973) calls "disciplined subjectivity." Part of this process involved continually recognizing and acknowledging my own positionality.

The way that I saw things in the study, including Leslie and the students during my class observations, was influenced by my own positionality. Based on my life and educational experiences as a white, middle-aged, heterosexual male teacher, my view of study was colored with certain biases and viewpoints that included a disparaging inclination toward the students. It was important that I recognize my own subjectivity while gathering and analyzing data. Keeping more open-minded approaches helped me better appreciate experiences or viewpoints other than my own.

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educational experiences as a white, middle-aged, heterosexual male teacher, my view of study was colored with certain biases and viewpoints that sometimes included a disparaging inclination toward the students. It was important that I recognize my own subjectivity while gathering and analyzing data. Keeping more open-minded approaches helped me better appreciate experiences or viewpoints other than my own. For example, I try to listen and think about the difficult situations students describe to me in their own life. I constantly fight cynical reactions when students explain why they may have missed classes or assignments.

Recognizing and acknowledging my own positionality helped explain how I saw Leslie and her students. Although I am well educated with a bachelor and two masters degrees, I still retain some of the biases or viewpoints as a result of my experience growing up in a rural area of Oklahoma. The class observations provided me an opportunity to evaluate individual members without a chance to really get to know them well. This can be risky because passing judgment without fully understanding other peoples' experiences or challenges does not fully consider them as capable and whole persons. For example, I can never know exactly what students have experienced before coming to my class. Any positive or difficult life experiences are unknown to me and keep me at a distance from them as known human beings. And even Leslie, who I know fairly well, experiences a different reality as a white, female faculty member that I can never fully understand. I cannot fully appreciate Leslie's experience as a teacher because I am not a female. Female teachers seem to have a different experience than male teachers. On more than one occasion, female teachers have told me that they do not receive the same respect as male teachers from students. Although I sympathize

with Leslie, I have not personally experienced that situation, thus I am not able to fully empathize with her.

"Reliability" refers to the extent to which the results and methods of a study are performed consistently. According to Merriam (2009), reliability is concerned with whether the methods of data collection and analysis are performed consistently as well as whether the results from a study are consistent with the data (p. 221). Not that an exact replica of results would be obtained but a general idea that if another researcher conducted observations, conducted interviews, and analyzed documents, similar conclusions might be ascertained. Strategies such as triangulation and reflexivity used to ensure internal validity can also help ensure reliability. Repeated observations along with analyses of documents and interviews in the same study can better secure reliability. Repeated observations ensure that recurrent patterns observed during class sessions could be witnessed, noted, and analyzed over an extended period of time. In addition to these, another strategy that can be employed is an audit trail. As Merriam explains, an "audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made through the inquiry" (2009, p. 223).

Finally, "external validity" refers to how generalizable the results of a study are or the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. A strategy known as "thick description" can help ensure that readers will have the information they need to determine how applicable a study may be to their own situations. In qualitative research, these processes are related to the external validity of the study. A thick description is a meticulous description of the context and results of a

study. In my case, the meticulous description was achieved through the information gathered from the observations, interviews, and documents.

Merriam (2009) describes several strategies employed to enhance validity and reliability of research, which include internal validity, reliability, and external validity; however, these terms are borrowed from and address specific concerns in quantitative research. She references other terms, developed by Lincoln and Guba, which are used to focus on concerns specific to qualitative studies, include credibility (internal validity), consistency/dependability (reliability), and transferability (external validity).

Credibility is used to describe internal validity, which is ensured when research findings measure up to reality. This addresses concerns regarding how findings in studies match reality, or how people understand the world (Merriam, 2009). And it focuses on a researcher's re-presentation of the participant's life ways or reality (Schwandt, 2007). Dependability is used to describe reliability, which is confirmed when research could be followed along a consistent path. This addresses concerns regarding how research can be replicated in studies, or how other researchers understand how the study progressed. Transferability is used to describe external validity, which enables researchers to understand how findings from the study could apply to others in a similar situation.

Chapter 4: Findings

This dissertation was based on a study of student-centered learning in higher education. Specifically, I wanted to study the experiences and perspectives of a teacher who used using student-centered learning in her college classroom in spite of the challenges that prevent others from doing so. Over the years I have become increasingly concerned about my role as a teacher in creating passive learners in higher education. Although I had completed undergraduate and graduate courses that were taught using scholar academic approaches, I was unsatisfied in my own teaching using these same approaches. I felt as though my classes were perpetuating passive learners, dominating my students by using a top-down approach.

The literature suggests that learning environments in higher education foster scholar academic teaching approaches, part of a larger systemic problem continued from primary and secondary education (Feden, 2012; Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009; Palmer, 2007; Schiro, 2013). Student-centered learning approaches have been shown to facilitate classroom environments that encourage students to take agency over their own learning (Dewey, 1902; Belenky et al., 1984; Bishop et al., 2014; Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Walker & Soltis, 2009; Lightweis, 2013; Salinas et al., 2008; Wright, 2011). Still, relatively few teachers in higher education use student-centered learning in their classrooms.

In order to gain further insights about the reluctance of teachers to use student-centered learning in higher education classrooms, I studied one college English professor's efforts to facilitate classroom environments aligned with student-centered learning. Leslie's course in multidisciplinary writing provided an opportunity to better

understand how at least one teacher applies student-centered learning in her college course. My research methodology incorporated a case study design, and my investigation was conducted in a college English class. The larger case was the class, including the teacher and students, although my primary focus was on the perspectives of the teacher.

The questions guiding the study were: (1) How did one college teacher cope with the challenges of using a student-centered learning approach in higher education? and (2) What were this teacher's perceptions of the benefits of using a student-centered learning approach in spite of the challenges?

Based on the data gathered in this study, it appears that Leslie experienced at least three major challenges to using student-centered learning approaches. These included her higher education learning environment, student views about higher education, and personal factors such as the amount of time and energy needed to successfully facilitate student-centered learning teaching approaches. However, three major groups of benefits were also identified, including benefits for her students, benefits for herself as a teacher, and benefits for society.

Through this study I sought to better understand one college teacher's views on the challenges and benefits of student-centered learning. I thought it was important to understand the full range of perspectives of a teacher who employed student-centered learning approaches because addressing both the challenges and benefits of such approaches can allow other teachers in higher education opportunities to see these issues through the eyes of the those who actually experience them in the classroom.

The classroom in which Leslie taught was a modern example of an up-to-date college environment. The room was twice as wide as deep and contained sixteen long tables used as desks for pairs of students and one table for the teacher. The tops of the desks were coated with a light gray surface. The desks were arranged so that an aisle was made closer to the entrance of the room. Three rows of desks allowed suitable placement of students facing the front of the class. A large whiteboard was attached to the front wall and another smaller whiteboard attached along the shorter wall. A bulletin board was located between the door and the larger whiteboard, and a retractable project screen could be lowered over the larger whiteboard.

Besides a desk for the teacher, a podium and TV cart were also placed at the front of the class by the larger whiteboard. A pencil sharpener was located near the door, and a clock was located above the smaller whiteboard. Posters of various literary figures were hung on the shorter wall opposite the wall with the smaller whiteboard. Each poster contained a quote by the figure. The room had a white tile floor, white walls, and white ceiling tiles. A white digital projector was hung from the ceiling pointed toward the larger whiteboard and projector screen.

Although the overall white hues of the floor, walls, ceiling tiles, and whiteboard of the room, with very little color besides the posters, made the room feel clinical or antiseptic, a warm and inviting atmosphere was present when the students entered the room. Small clusters of conversation bloomed between them. Discussing schoolwork, family, or social situations, students conversed before class started. Invariably, however, the students chatted very little during class other than to make comments or small jokes to one another.

It was clear that Leslie's course was engaging for her students. In class, her students focused on the topics of discussion and convened in groups when necessary. This typically happened at Leslie's prompting. She encouraged students to work together in groups to discuss topics or to work together on writing ideas, and then she opened up small group discussion to the entire class. Although hesitantly talking in groups at first, her students eventually became more active in discussing topics together. A few of the students, mostly the two men, seemed willing to joke even during times designated to work quietly on personal assignments. However, once class began, most of the students focused on engaging with the official course of study for that day. Based on my observations, Leslie's class seemed genuinely interested in what was being taught.

Prior to the beginning of each class, the students continued to talk with one another as they entered the room, suggesting that most of them knew one another from other courses. At the beginning of each period, Leslie wrote an agenda on a whiteboard. The students typically glanced at the objectives and chatted or asked questions in the few minutes before she started. The first item on the agenda during class was to set a time aside to clear one's mind, focus on what was going to be happening in the class, and set a goal for the upcoming class period. The goal or goals that Leslie had students set at the beginning of class sessions were intended to help students focus on an achievable objective for that period, whether large or small. Next, for five or ten minutes, Leslie made announcements about campus or department activities, discussed general topics, or reviewed projects to be completed with the students. Next, class time generally involved Leslie discussing components of students' writing projects or

students working on their projects. If Leslie lectured, it was brief, usually just a few minutes to introduce a topic, after which she switched to a whole class discussion. Although Leslie stood behind the lectern for part of each class, using it to organize her notes, beyond this she typically moved around the room, engaging students individually and in groups.

During class discussions, Leslie encouraged her students to voice their opinions, ideas, and experiences. In my observations, the students worked individually, composing thoughts and ideas for larger class discussions as well as meeting in small groups and having conversations as a whole class to discuss items important to the designated topic for the day. Leslie's students also sometimes presented information they had learned regarding grammatical concepts. For example, during one of my observations, Leslie began by welcoming the students, then had them focus for on the topic of that day's class, then held a class discussion for approximately 25 minutes. For the remainder of the time, approximately 40 minutes, the students worked independently on their writing while Leslie made herself available by walking around and answering questions.

During each of my observations, Leslie frequently asked her students what they thought about the various topics they were covering in class rather than asserting herself as the sole authority in the room. On my first observation, for example, she used the topic of literature reviews to engage students in the consideration of the subject for the day. Toward the latter part of class, Leslie projected an example of a literature review on the projector screen. Standing in front of the class, she asked if any students had experience writing literature review. Turning to a student who indicated that she had

written a literature review, Leslie asked her to describe the experience. The student, a young woman in her early 20s, casually but smartly dressed in a black t-shirt and jeans, described her experience while her peers turned to listen. Seated at a table located at the center of the room, the student spoke softly but with confidence about the writing process. Leslie's posture was one of ease as she slipped back, unnoticed, standing beside the wall, so the student could receive the full attention of the class. Listening attentively, Leslie waited patiently until the student finished speaking. Leslie acknowledged the students' contribution by smiling and nodding as she spoke. The student, reassured by her teacher's support, describe her experience in detail.

Although Leslie's support was given to this student as a means of prompting class participation, I believe this particular student was confident enough to have continued speaking even if her teacher had not given her encouragement. However, this was not the case with all of Leslie's students. Other students looked to Leslie for encouragement when talking aloud in class. During my eight observations, most of the students were tentative in offering their comments and remarks, but each was continually encouraged by Leslie, who welcomed their involvement in the class discussions.

In fact, Leslie's continual encouragement, quiet prompting, and genuine interest in her students' thoughts and ideas was typical throughout all eight of the class sessions I observed. All of her students, from the most confident and well-spoken to the quietest and least vocal, were encouraged to engage in class discussions and activities by offering their thoughts on the subjects at hand. Normally, a third to a half of the students in class appeared to willingly speak up and offer their thoughts. The rest of the students

seemed to need reassurance that their thoughts were perceived as valid and worthy of consideration. This type of encouragement toward students was consistent with Leslie's stated desire for her students to be actively engaged with the class. She stated in our interviews that she believed students needed to become engaged in learning for their own benefit. She insisted that students benefit from engaging in their own learning by becoming life-long learners and active contributors in their disciplines or careers after college. What some might label a personal "philosophy of teaching" was enacted by Leslie in class every day. Leslie encouraged her students to contribute, to engage, and to constantly question in order to increase their learning.

After the young woman finished describing her personal experience writing a literature review, Leslie continued the class discussion by asking if anyone else had an experience to share. Looking at each member of the class, she asked her students to expand their previously discussed definitions of a literature review. Hearing no further responses, Leslie returned to another female student who had earlier contributed a term used to define a literature review. Leslie asked her to continue explaining the term, and the class proceeded from there.

As Leslie explored class topics with her students, she maintained eye contact to encourage discussion. Rather than focusing on written materials or lists of items to be completed, Leslie focused her attention on what each student was saying in order to help connect the students to the topics being discussed at that moment. From my perspective, Leslie practiced the ability to be "in the moment" with her students, not worrying about what had already passed or what she needed to do next, about how to move the class forward to a pre-determined point, or about how to cover a number of

topics that students the may or may not have been ready to engage. Leslie explained that she wanted to use more holistic approaches to teaching, approaches that took her students' needs into consideration. This is not to say that Leslie avoided having her students engage with difficult concepts. It is merely to suggest that she was aware of what her students needed in the moment in order to more fully engage in the exploration of challenging skills and concepts.

Continuing with her exploration of the term "literature review" mentioned by her student, Leslie turned to the largest whiteboard and wrote the formal components of a literature review. From time to time she paused, explaining each term and component to her students as they wrote them down in their notebooks or typed them into their laptop computers. Although this may seem standard behavior for most college classes, the way Leslie engaged with her students, having them discuss the terms and explore their meanings, debating and connecting the ideas to their past experiences to fully consider each academic topic, was markedly different than a scholar academic lecture.

Leslie continued to discuss the subject of a literature review, providing her own expert knowledge as needed. After discussing the purpose and components of a literature review, she encouraged her students to consider different ways of organizing them. At this point, she prompted the class to share their thoughts and opinions on the possible advantages of various ways to organize the review. In so doing, she engaged her class in thoughtful consideration and critical and creative discernment. This type of consideration engaged students in a manner that encouraged them to learn for themselves about the topic.

After this discussion, Leslie asked her students to quietly read an example of a literature review to encourage further consideration of the topic. The room grew quiet for several minutes as her class read the section of the review projected on the screen near the door. As they read, Leslie scanned the room, attentive to see if her students had any questions. Her involvement with students was kept to a minimum during this time to encourage them to read the section. After a few minutes, Leslie prompted her students to talk about the example with their fellow class members. The students discussed the section together for several minutes. This act of students checking with other class members about what was read and comparing their thoughts was yet another example of Leslie's use of student-centered learning approaches to teach in her college classroom.

After they discussed this initial literature review, the students were asked to read another section projected on the screen. As the students silently read, Leslie continued to watch, anticipating questions. When a female student asked a question about the layout of the literature review, Leslie responded with a direct answer explaining the overall layout of this example. After making sure the student understood her answer, Leslie continued to ask if anyone else in class had questions. As class continued, she checked on how her students were grappling with the new information. Throughout the day, rather than telling her students what she thought they needed to know, Leslie continually encouraged her students to explain what they understood to be happening in the text of the literature review.

Toward the end of the class, Leslie asked her students to think about how they would choose to organize a literature review and whether they believed a literature

review was necessary or not. She prompted them to write a response in their personal notes, nothing to be turned in. Here again she encouraged her students to reflect on their thinking. Reflecting her belief (disclosed in an interview) that if students are writing they are thinking, Leslie used the term "writing/thinking" with her class to indicate that they were writing about the topic in order to think about it. As they wrote, one student stated that a similar experience occurred in another class with literature reviews, demonstrating recognition that related learning was taking place across classes and disciplines.

As Leslie prepared to conclude the class, she asked for volunteers to share whether they planned to write a literature review for their project. In this way, she was able to gauge her students' thinking on the use of literature reviews, and her other students were able to hear what their classmates were thinking. Here again the class as a whole was encouraged to share their thoughts and learn from each other. Just before the class session ended, Leslie explained to the students that this day was abnormally weighted toward lecture, more than would be typical for most of their meetings. Although from my perspective there was a high level of student interaction, she insisted that her future class sessions would involve much greater dialogue.

Again, the purpose of this study was to better understand what challenges a teacher in higher education faced using student-centered learning approaches and what the same instructor's perceived benefits were in using this approach. In order to better understand what occurred, I gathered data through interviews and observations, eventually weighing these experiences against the literature and considering them in light of my own experience as a college educator. I assumed that a better understanding

of the experiences and perspectives of a teacher who actually implemented and reflected upon her student-centered learning approaches could provide valuable information for other college educators wanting to adopt similar teaching strategies.

What I found was that many of the challenges expressed in the literature and experienced by me also existed for Leslie, including challenges associated with established expectations within the higher education environment, student reluctance to engage in student-centered learning, and personal factors for faculty such as the expenditure of considerable time and energy. However, I also found that Leslie had developed many effective ways of coping with these challenges and that, in addition to the difficulties, there were also significant benefits that motivated her to continue using student-centered teaching approaches in her composition and rhetoric courses.

What Challenges Existed for Leslie Using Student-Centered Learning Approaches in Higher Education?

As stated earlier, modern higher education learning environments have fostered relationships that place instructors as the central authorities over academic disciplines (Dewey, 1902; Lasry, Charles, & Whittaker, 2014; Freire, 2000; Palmer et al., 2007; Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012; Stoerger & Krieger, 2016; Wright, 2011). The term "scholar academic" has been used to describe these practices that permeate higher education learning environments (Schiro, 2013). One of the problems with these approaches is that teachers are perceived as experienced expert thinkers who teach inexperienced thinkers (Freire, 2000). These relationships are a problem because they perpetuate distant and cold understandings of academic information (Palmer et al., 2007), fail to utilize students' previously acquired experiences (Dewey, 1902), have dehumanizing effects on students (Freire, 2000), and involve specific curricula that are

unconsciously determined by and help perpetuate institutionalized hierarchies and social class distinctions (Anyon, 1981).

Coping with Traditional Higher Education Learning Environments

According to the literature, one of the challenges many college teachers experience is that they work within educational environments that promote scholar academic approaches as default methods of instruction over student-centered approaches. Such approaches to education abound in higher education learning environments (Lasry, Charles, & Whittaker, 2014; Schiro, 2013; Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012; Stoerger & Krieger, 2016; Wright, 2011), including both research-based and teaching oriented institutions. This was also the case for Leslie, who noted that there is what Shiro would call a scholar academic complicit mode of operation among many faculty at her institution. Leslie stated that although her administration emphasized the importance of teaching and provided workshops that focus on pedagogical theories such as active learning, the general attitudes of many professors on campus are those of reluctance or opposition to changing top-down pedagogical approaches in their classrooms.

Like other college instructors throughout the nation, many professors within Leslie's institution seemed to prefer top-down pedagogical approaches in their classrooms despite research showing the effectiveness of more student-centered learning approaches. According to Leslie, even when presented with new information about the benefits of pedagogical theories such as student-centered learning, faculty at her institution are sometimes hesitant or even antagonistic to it. She stated that many

professors seem to resist appeals to examine their teaching methods, seeing it as simply another burden placed upon faculty.

According to Leslie, top-down teacher-centered approaches were reflected in her institution's departments and faculty. She noted that among individual departments, traditional experimental evidence-based disciplines (e.g. biology vs. history) often carry more prestige. Within her own English and Literature department, Leslie found that a hierarchy applied to English courses. From Leslie's perspective, creative writing, literature, and contemporary fiction courses are bestowed greater respect than English composition courses. Composition courses and other foundation-level English courses may be viewed as necessary for the university, but they are relegated to adjuncts and junior faculty, the "foot soldiers" of higher education.

According to Leslie, top-down teacher-centered approaches seemed to create cyclical repetitions of dominant methods of instruction in the higher education environments in which she had studied and taught. Leslie explained the cyclical nature of such systems at her current institution, wherein teachers who have succeeded within teacher-centered environments tended to propagate more students who succeed through traditional teacher-centered higher education instruction. Stating that teachers working at the college level knew how to successfully navigate higher education learning environments, Leslie indicated that succeeding in such environments seems to provide a sense of entitlement for some teachers who see themselves as rightful beneficiaries and who are disposed to perpetuate teacher-centered instructional methods.

Leslie confirmed the point made in the literature that teacher-centered approaches have been historically favored in higher education. According to Leslie,

higher education in the institutions she has experienced has often been organized to avoid student-centered learning. Again, she stated her belief that U.S. education models are derived, in part, from nineteenth- and twentieth-century German paradigms wherein efficiency and research are deemed paramount for teaching. Leslie asserted that these paradigms have become a model for U.S. education even within institutions such as her own, which are more teaching-oriented than research-oriented in their focus.

Drawing on ideas encountered in graduate school and affirmed by her experiences in her current institution, Leslie noted that higher education learning environments in the U.S. have been strongly affected by German models of education. For example, she observed that the drive to make American schools more efficient, a model based not upon Prussian *schools* but upon the Prussian *army* (Smith, 1998), saw the end of one-room schoolrooms and with this loss, a serious blow to formalized intergenerational education within the U.S. Leslie observed that although Prussian *education* tended to favor holistic, child-centered education (e.g., Pestalozzi), the Prussian *military* emphasized efficiency and the compartmentalization of people into separate categories based on age, skills, and experiences. This was what ultimately impacted education in America. Leslie asserted that top-down approaches begun in common education continue in numerous colleges and universities throughout the United States, including her own current institution.

Leslie observed that, in her experience, higher education learning environments do little to assist graduate students in preparing for teaching careers. In her experience, although graduate students, including herself, often need and request training in instructional theory and methodology, they can seldom depend on their masters or

doctorate programs for this type of training. In this regard, Leslie's observations echoed those of Rosensitto (1999), who found that only one third of the faculty surveyed in her study received instructional training in their own graduate programs. Consequently, according to Rosensitto, a high percentage of college faculty perceive the need for graduate students to receive training in instructional theory and methodology. Thus, in Leslie's experience, graduate students are not prepared for teaching at most institutions, a fact which could help explain why the scholar academic approach persists at her institution.

Although Leslie, like many other U.S. scholars, studied and taught in institutions of higher education in which top-down, hierarchical cultures and scholar academic approaches appeared to be the norm, Leslie somehow learned to recognize and effectively address many of the problems associated with these conditions. How did this happen? According to Leslie, she began to learn about how to cope with higher education learning environments during her graduate work in comp/rhet. She prepared herself to teach in institutions that favor scholar academic methods by arming herself with pedagogical theories to counter teacher-centered approaches. Leslie found a niche within comprehension and rhetoric, an English program that actually *considered* pedagogical practices in higher education. According to Leslie, this emphasis on pedagogy enabled her to see how important it was to really *think* about the processes of learning and teaching, including mutually beneficial teacher-student relationships, rather than merely "delivering" or transmitting information to students via top-down lectures. Leslie described her introduction to learning about pedagogy:

> The training I had [. . .] as a masters student, we had … three, no it was two weeks, we had a two-week intensive pedagogical course … in the English

> department for new TAs coming in, at the masters and the PhD level, that we did before the semester. So we did the two weeks, and then, after that there was a three-day session that the university did, university wide, that was supposed to also include information about teaching, which was actually very useful. Because at the university-wide one they had us go into classrooms in groups, and we were in all of these different disciplines. They videoed us, recorded us, and then came back and talked to us about how we lectured. Umm, so we had the two-week training, three days from the university.

What Leslie described was an approach called microteaching, in which prospective or practicing teachers are videotaped while they are teaching and then encouraged to observe and analyze their actions and to reflect and adapt their practices accordingly. Teacher preparation has come a long way since the early 1960s when microteaching was first introduced by Dwight Allen and his colleagues at the Stanford Teacher Education Program (Politzer, 1969), but what is significant is that Leslie was encouraged to focus on her teaching practice at all. Nor was a two-week crash course and a single microteaching session the end of her training, which continued in her English program:

> and then, as I was teaching the first year [as a graduate teaching assistant], we had semester-long pedagogy classes each semester. The first semester was writing pedagogy and the second semester was literature pedagogy, because I was in the literature program at the time. So that was the first year of my masters.

Thus, as Leslie recounted, during her graduate education, she was exposed to pedagogical instruction with emphases on college teaching. The program Leslie attended seems to have emphasized pedagogical theories and approaches as a means of promoting readiness for teachers in higher education classrooms, an emphasis not often applied to students preparing to teach college courses.

Leslie continued to describe her exposure to pedagogical theories and processes as a natural extension of her masters and doctorate education:

> [I] went on with my masters, then when I got to the PhD level, it was a similar thing. Except it was a composition and rhetoric program, so the emphasis was completely on writing studies. So for the PhD, I taught for two years and actually took a third year in my masters and was in the writing center. They did a three-week program before the semester started, then we had another composition pedagogy class the first semester. And then the second semester was actually a professional development class that also dealt with pedagogy. But at that point in my PhD, most of my graduate seminars, at least at some point, dealt with writing pedagogy because that was the focus of the program. So, it was kind of constantly ongoing.

Graduate students who understand the importance of contesting scholar academic approaches and who have experienced meaningful alternatives may continue to seek training that supports student-centered learning approaches. When I asked Leslie if training in pedagogy was something that she had intentionally looked for in a masters or doctorate program, she affirmed that impression. Searching for a graduate-level program that emphasized pedagogical theories and practices was important to Leslie, although pursuing a career in teaching was not engaging to her at first. She recounted the situation that led to her understanding that she wanted to teach:

> I was adamantly sure that I was never going to teach as an undergrad. I was prelaw. I knew I couldn't teach because I was afraid I would end up slapping somebody silly because I had no patience. That's also why I could never bartend, because I had no patience with drunk people, so I just assumed I couldn't teach. And then I got to a certain point that I was ready to take the LSAT, and I knew that I didn't want to do that anymore. So my parents were like, "Well, you gotta do something." So I was like, "OK. I'll get my masters in English and I'll go into editing and publishing." Well, to pay for the masters, I had to teach. So I taught. And at the end of my first semester of my masters program, I went in and talked to the professor who was teaching the composition pedagogy class I had to take. And I said, "You know, the thing that I love is the teaching. I love being in the classroom. I love teaching, but I really don't like these literature classes that I'm in right now. They are not my thing." And he looked at me […] and he said, "That's because you are in composition and rhetoric. That is what you are. That is who you are. You are a comp/rhet person. You enjoy writing. You enjoy teaching writing. And you enjoy talking about teaching writing. Finish your masters here, then find a comp/rhet PhD program. That's what you are supposed to do." And so I did.

This was significant. As a result of positive alternative teaching and learning experiences, combined with the support and encouragement of significant people such as her parents and a faculty mentor within her program, Leslie began to see herself differently, to consider the fact that in spite of negative perceptions, she is a teacher. In this way, as she began to grapple with her professional identity, Leslie was beginning to develop what Parker Palmer (2007) has termed "the courage to teach" (p. 190). Leslie discovered that she wanted to move toward a program that would enable her, as a PhD candidate, to prepare for a career in teaching composition and rhetoric courses in higher education. This was an important step not only for her career but also her identity.

For graduate students who understand the importance of pedagogical training, completing graduate programs that support student-centered learning approaches in order to effectively teach in higher education can be important. Leslie realized that, at her core, she wanted to *teach*. The courses she eventually taught are considered foundational courses in English studies in higher education. Leslie's discovery of her passion for teaching enabled her to focus on finding a program that included pedagogical theories that would prepare her for teaching comp/rhet in higher education. So, whereas most teachers in higher education are never required to attend workshops, seminars, or courses that address pedagogical theories and practices, Leslie found that her involvement in pedagogy studies enhanced her drive to teach.

Leslie explained her experiences in entering a graduate program that explicitly focused on pedagogical theories and practices highlighting students' needs, including some of the condescending hierarchical perceptions that existed within the culture, as well as how her decision led to her subsequent employment:

> [Comp/rhet is] a whole field within English studies that has actually historically kind of been denigrated. We're not considered as important to some people as literature because literature is that elite discussion. But we're the pragmatic people who have to teach the first-year writing courses, so we happen to enjoy it. So I did seek that out at the PhD level. Absolutely, I did. Yeah. And that is why they hired me here, because they were looking for a comp/rhet specialist.

As Leslie stated, comp/rhet professors are typically viewed as willing to work with subjects that are necessary for students but that are not considered as prestigious as subjects like literary studies. Yet composition courses are general education courses that most people apparently agree that students need. Students need them, and universities could not function without them.

My own experiences, first as a graduate student and then as college teacher, support Leslie's assertions that most graduate students are not prepared for college teaching. I received very little instruction in pedagogy or guidance about the practice of teaching. Although responsibility to expertly teach a design or drawing course to undergraduate students rested on my shoulders, a few short meetings with faculty members directing the graduate assistants was all I received to prepare for the semester. There were no classes on instruction to equip me to teach students in my future career, so I returned by default to the old scholar-academic ways I had been taught in order to teach my students (Lortie, 1975).

Another aspect of the higher education learning environment that can present challenges to teachers and affect their teaching methods is peer pressure. Pressure to conform to what is perceived as the general climate of teaching in the department or college can reinforce the perpetuation of conservative instructional methods (Hains & Smith, 2012). However, Leslie observed that peer pressure can actually work in both directions, either reinforcing traditional top-down practices and relationships or

encouraging experimentation with newer student-centered practices. Leslie acknowledged that pressures to conform for the purposes of tenure, research, and other aspects of academic career advancement can prompt more conservative or traditional scholar academic instructional methods. Compelled by their peers, non-tenured faculty can feel considerable pressure to adjust their teaching styles to fit the dominant norms of instruction in the departments and colleges they join. This peer pressure can have a powerful effect on new faculty members' methods of teaching. However, Leslie stated that peer influence can also work in the opposite direction, as it did for her in her graduate programs, helping convince new faculty to think differently about their teaching methods. If a new faculty member with a scholar academic orientation worked in a department or college that encouraged student-centered learning approaches, this could provide an impetus to engage in experimentation.

Teachers who understand the challenges associated with student-centered learning but who have also given extensive thought to its effectiveness in their respective academic disciplines may be better prepared to continue despite whatever peer pressure they encounter. Leslie acknowledged that peer pressure exists for teachers in higher education learning environments, but she stated that she did not feel as much pressure as others may feel due to the training she received in her graduate programs as well as the general understanding of the roles and perceptions of comp/rhet teachers in college and university English programs. Leslie observed that the comp/rhet discipline was developed to address an acknowledged problem in higher education: lack of writing skills. Based on this acknowledged need, Harvard developed the first comp/rhet program to improve their students' writing skills. Leslie stated that she has been given a

certain amount of autonomy at her current institution because she is considered the expert in her field—a field that focuses on improving students' writing. At a regional teaching university, even if others do not share her pedagogical ideas about student learning, they allow her to teach as she chooses because she has earned institutional authority with her doctoral degree.

Leslie's claims about peer pressure parallel my experience as an art instructor at the same institution. Although I have been seen as an expert in art history, a desire to legitimize my instructional methods to my peers and administrators has compelled me to examine why I teach the curriculum the way I do. For purposes of advancement, I felt pressure to conform to traditional methods of instruction, a claim that is supported by the literature (Hains & Smith, 2012). As a result, for a number of years, I facilitated teacher-centered methods of instruction consisting of lectures, tests with multiple-choice and essay questions, lists of artists' names, titles of artworks, and specific dates to be memorized. These practices continued until I became dissatisfied with my teaching methods.

As has been shown, teachers in higher education experience significant challenges when they choose to use student-centered learning approaches in their college classrooms. This was demonstrated in the literature (Feden, 2012; Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al, 2009; Rosensitto, 1999); it was recognized by Leslie in her assertions that higher education learning environments promote top-down, teacher-centered instructional methods and that peer pressure often compels teachers to use scholar academic approaches; and I also observed this to be true in my teaching of art.

Coping with Student Reluctance to Engage in Student-Centered Learning

Another challenge teachers may experience when they choose to use student-centered learning approaches in college classrooms is student reluctance. Students can exhibit reluctance toward student-centered learning because it is not familiar (Felder & Brent, 1996), because it requires that students take greater responsibility (Hains & Smith, 2012), and because it deviates from the norm of objectivism, what Palmer defines as a "fearful way of knowing" (1998/2007). However, objectivism not only affects students, but teachers as well. Scholar academic approaches have affected students' ability to see other teaching methods like student-centered learning as valid or trustworthy (Hains & Smith, 2012).

Leslie was well aware of student criticisms of teaching methods that stray from top-down scholar academic approaches. Based on experiences and observations at her own institution, she understood that students can resent casting aside traditional scholar academic learning methods accumulated through previously mastered learning (Felder & Brent, 1996; Johnson et al., 2009). Leslie explained that some of the questions students ask, such as "What do I need to do to pass?", indicate that teacher-centered approaches are seen as methods of accumulating knowledge only to be discarded after examinations. She stated that questions such as "Will I need to know this for the test?" display students' desires to get whatever information will be used for assessment. Ultimately, to some students, college courses are simply perceived as hurdles to be passed to obtain a degree, as nothing more than a means to an end. For many students, learning is apparently not seen as worthy in and of itself.

Student reluctance to student-centered teaching was another factor contributing to the perpetuation of scholar academic approaches in higher education, including

Leslie's institution. As Leslie understood, and as I had observed on numerous occasions in my own classes, student reluctance to participate in student-centered learning can challenge the resolve of teachers who want to implement such approaches in higher education (Johnson et al., 2009; Hains & Smith, 2012).

One cause of student reluctance to student-centered learning could be lack of interest or unwillingness by students to invest in the work that is required. It is possible that some students could be unwilling to take greater responsibility for their own learning (Hains & Smith, 2012). Leslie agreed with this assessment, describing students' unwillingness to engage in classroom discussions and activities as one factor that upsets the balance of participation needed for learning to proceed. Leslie acknowledged that students who are unwilling to participate are most likely "not going to get as much" out of her classes.

Another cause of student reluctance could be that student-centered learning approaches can make students nervous or fearful. Students' cumulative experiences with top-down teacher-centered approaches and authoritative scholar-academic expert-novice relationships can generate fear and anxiety (Palmer, 2007) and make students feel unprepared for self-directed learning methods (Johnson et al., 2009). Leslie stated that it takes time, flexibility, and encouragement for students to shift from teacher-centered approaches to student-centered learning approaches. She affirmed that this is typical and understandable. Leslie explained:

> Part of that is not necessarily the student's fault. I think sometimes it's a matter of how the students have been taught to learn. So especially in lower-level GE classes, when you try to employ this approach taking smaller steps is more important than throwing them in full force because they don't know how to do it.… They don't want to be in charge. They've gotten to this point not doing that. So why should they do it now? In that respect, you have to be flexible,

> which I think is actually another benefit of student-centered learning. I think that it allows for a flexibility, if you understand that dynamic.

Leslie's point was that students who have experienced teacher-centered approaches up until this point in their educational careers can have a difficult time adjusting to alternative learning approaches that involve active scholarship. It is important to understand that students may resist student-centered learning methods due to previous experiences with scholar academic instruction.

Another cause of student reluctance to student-centered learning can be a need for control. One way this can be manifested is that students may feel a need or desire to know all the readings that are required for their courses ahead of time. Leslie stated that in student-centered learning, when she plans and implements coursework during the semester, changes and adjustments are usually required, which necessitates modifications in the readings that are assigned. According to Leslie, students can be quite uncomfortable with changes that occur once they have seen the entire workload for the course. Leslie stated:

> If they're one of the students that like to plan out the semester in their planners, I give them the due dates of major projects. I give them a sense of things; I tell them it's subject to change, as do we all…. And I understand that can also be an inconvenience for a student who is busy. They need to know in advance because they have to schedule. I understand that. And I try to give them a little more foresight in that I try to have some consistency and how I approach every assignment. So, for example, it might be more heavy reading at the beginning of the assignment. So they should expect, like that first week, maybe we're going to have more reading to do. Second week it might be more example genres that we're gonna be looking at. And then, third, fourth, however long, it's all them. And then, even as the semester goes on, they should learn to expect the beginning of the semester is more heavy reading so that at the end of the semester they're doing all their own work. And then it's up to them to plan as they need.

Leslie recognized that student-centered learning can be require adjustments to the curriculum, which requires flexibility not only by the teacher but also the students. She acknowledged that this can be difficult and frustrating, particularly for students who are conscientiously trying to organize the tasks that are required for the semester. Acknowledging student reluctance to some of the changes inherent in student-centered learning approaches, Leslie explained that, to assuage apprehensions, she works to lead students through assignments and projects throughout the semester. She guides and supports them with a consistent but flexible workload in order to alleviate misgivings they may have about her approaches. Leslie's guidance in the classroom speaks to the need for teachers to thoughtfully and sensitively lead and support students through the processes of student-centered learning.

While students may be reluctant toward student-centered learning, Leslie encouraged her students to invest in their learning and she helped alleviate their worries as they experienced unfamiliar methods of instruction. For Leslie, coping with reluctance meant engaging her students in the learning processes by having them actively participate in finding the answers to their questions. Rather than giving answers to her students, Leslie helped and encouraged them to find the answers to the problems that arose in their writing or that were posed in class. By helping her students become active learners, seeking solutions to the problems they encountered, Leslie was freeing them to become critical thinkers, capable of examining ideas from multiple viewpoints attained through interactions with their peers.

I observed Leslie coping with student reluctance during one of my visits. A general stillness lay over the room as the students meandered into the room to sit at their

desks and unpack items for class. The students spoke very little to one another as they checked phones, drank beverages, or opened their purses to find pens for the day's work. The room was cold because of the air conditioning blowing out the vents as if to challenge the warmth of a sunny spring day.

As Leslie walked in to the classroom, she pulled the lectern to adjust its position and jokingly stated, "You can tell we're getting closer to May. That slightly stunned look that we all have, myself included." After registering diminutive laughter from the eight students in the room, Leslie continued to unpack her belongings from a bag. She placed a laptop computer on the TV tray for later use. Another teacher, a male professor, could be heard in the classroom adjacent to her doorway. Leslie walked over to the whiteboard to write a few comments with a green dry-erase ink marker and then walked back to the lectern to make a few notes, possibly taking attendance. One student read the writing on the whiteboard and then checked her phone again before class began. As more students entered the room, some took note of the writing but looked to see what Leslie was preparing on the presentation screen down. Leslie pulled a chair over from one of the tables closest to the front of the class, stood on the chair, and pushed the start button on the projector. Checking to see if the projector was turning on by looking at the screen, Leslie stepped down and returned the chair to its original location. Turning to face the class, she asked, "How're we doing?"

Registering the students' silent stares, she smiled and said, "Yeah, that tells me. Oh goodness." There were light chuckles. "We are rapidly approaching the end of the semester, y'all," she told them. Judging by the tired nature of their countenances, her students seemed resigned to the fact that the semester was rapidly approaching an end.

Leslie continued, informing the class of the remaining schedule of assignments. She explained that a discussion about what components go into the final project for the course would take place during the first part of class, after which the reminder of the session would be used for students to work on their own.

Next, Leslie recounted what projects would be due at the end of the semester and the schedule for the final examination. A student sitting in the front row asked if she could turn in an upcoming assignment the day after it was due. She explained that she would be arriving late on the due date from a school-sponsored trip and didn't know if she would be able to complete it by the deadline. Leslie pointed out that the class would not meet due to the university's research and scholarly activity fair, an annual presentation by faculty and students held each spring. After emphasizing that the class needed to take stock of their grades and submit any outstanding assignments for evaluation, she asked her students to breathe. With a smile on her face, she cheered them up by encouraging them to continue to do good work. Empathizing with students about the toll the semester had taken and the weariness setting in, Leslie sought to communicate that she understood the mental and emotional fatigue they were experiencing at the end of the semester.

Spontaneously shifting the focus of the class to acknowledge how her students were feeling, Leslie stated, "No, really, I want you to take a minute. You have a minute. Get out some paper and jot down whatever is going on in your mind right now, even if that is 'Oh, dear God, I'm going to die'. Write it down. This is just writing as catharsis. Let's just clear our minds a little bit. Clear our minds, get some stuff out there." Leslie's acknowledgement that her students were feeling the stress of the

semester and need to express this stress with writing was an example of her focus on the holistic nature of student life and learning. The students silently wrote while Leslie walked around, occasionally chatting with students about their assignments. Some students seemed more engaged with the exercise than others. One of the male students, seated in front of the door, was texting on his phone rather than "breathing and writing." After coaxing this student to use his time to vent some stress, Leslie continued to walk around the class, visiting other tables and students. Finally, Leslie told the students that thirty seconds remained for writing.

Next, Leslie asked if the students wanted to share any of the questions or concerns that "popped up for you as you were jotting things down. And now you're freaked out even more". The young woman sitting at the table in front of the door stated, "I think I stress myself out by writing down what I need to get done." Leaning on her elbows at the table, she turned pages in her notebook as though looking through her upcoming work. At this admission, another student laughed, and Leslie dropped her head in a nod indicating understanding. The woman by the door asked, "That's everything? No?" Leslie chimed in, "Sometimes ignorance is bliss, I understand. Okay. But hey, it's written down now. It's a starting point. Okay." Leslie opened her palms in hand gestures that punctuated her words for emphasis: "As I always say, 'crap on a page is better than a blank page,' and that is true even of a to-do list. Okay. Even if it is a lot of crap." In this way, Leslie dealt with student resistance, acknowledging the palpable stress her students were experiencing at the end of the semester.

Returning to her original intentions for the day, Leslie directed her students to look on the whiteboard to see what components needed to be completed for the

upcoming assignments: memo and abstract. Stating that they would work in groups for the remainder of the period, Leslie asked her students to gather in groups and check with each other to make sure they understood what was expected. “I just want you to make sure we are all on the same page with the last little bits of this research portfolio.” She continued writing on the whiteboard, looking at the students to gauge their attention. “And we’re gonna’ focus specifically on the memo and the abstract parts today. You’ve been working on the text for a little while, moving on that research.”

After stating that last sentence, she turned from the whiteboard to face the students and gestured with her hands in a circular motion indicating movement or gathering, indicating completion of some sort. She turned back to the whiteboard, began writing, and stated, “But there are these other two little components here.” As Leslie finished that statement, she continued writing on the whiteboard. Students continued to watch her write on the whiteboard, primarily staring toward the front of the classroom, watching the teacher write and talk. Only occasionally did a student turn to check on a phone or type or click on a laptop. Most students were focused on what Leslie was saying and writing.

As Leslie finished writing, she stated, “M’kay. So the first thing that I want you to do in groups is just to take a few minutes, get together, and make sure you understand what I’m asking you to do for this in this project.” As she finished that last sentence, emphasizing with her fingers extended like a fan, her other hand grasping the green dry-erase marker, Leslie gestured toward the projector screen to point out an assignment that had been projected. Moving toward the projector screen, she looked out toward the class, the color of her face changing as it shifted from being illuminated by the dull

fluorescent light to being bathed in the white light of the projector. She continued, "So you can look at the directions up here for that. So what do you need to do to write your memo at this stage?" Leslie moved from behind the lectern to the TV cart, checking her instructions for the assignments projected from her laptop via the projector. She continued to describe the assignments, referencing previous projects to clarify the instructions.

After describing the instructions, Leslie directed her students to form groups to work on the project together. She stated, "Turn around. Pretend you like people. Which is really difficult to do at this time in the semester, I know. Start by talking about the memo, then move into the abstract." At this prompting, students begin talking to each other, mostly those sitting at or next to their table. Leslie checked the whiteboard and projector to make sure the correct information was visible. She then moved to the back of the classroom, behind all the students, to make herself available without being intrusive.

Leslie's purpose for having her students work together was to encourage them to invest in their own work and to support, advise, and cheer each other on to completion. Instead of the teacher being the only invested member of the class, the entire class was involved. The students did begin talking to one another, conferring about what was happening with their projects. This interaction was just one of many examples of the way Leslie encouraged her students to engage in student-centered learning even when they were reluctant to do so.

In Leslie's writing class, I also witnessed students' perceptions of the effectiveness of student-centered learning. Students were frequently prompted to voice

their opinions and thoughts. As a result, engagement increased and wider understanding occurred. Student engagement with the assignments occurred both in the whole class and in smaller groups. During my observations, examples of the students' perceptions of Leslie's teaching approach were brought to my attention. For example, one student described her group experiences as helpful. She indicated that talking with older students gave her insight into other learners' experiences. She stated that working together was more helpful than simply writing down a teacher's instructions or listening to a lecture. For this student, the experience of drawing on her peers' knowledge, participating in a classroom as a community of learners, provided powerful learning opportunities. Similar appreciation was expressed by a student who received one-on-one help from Leslie after asking her about the use of a quotation mark. After explaining the use of quotation marks to the student and going to a whiteboard to demonstrate, the student later related to me that her one-on-one experiences were very helpful.

At one point, I observed a student languidly looking at his notebook, although I had seen this student previously engaged in class discussions. When I asked Leslie about students who do not engage in class activities, she said she was willing to let students take agency over their own learning, even if they choose not to do what was required at that time. She stated that students cannot "be on all the time." In other words, for Leslie, student agency meant that they can use their time as they see fit. Students have freedom in their agency to produce or not as long as their actions do not interfere with the other students' work.

The literature appears to support Leslie's thoughts on student reluctance. Students may feel uncomfortable participating in new instructional methods, exhibiting reluctance because they are not familiar. Students may also fear what they have not previously experienced or do not understand. Student-centered learning may also provoke resistance because it requires students to take greater responsibility for learning (Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009; Felder & Brent, 1996). Students may have become accustomed to the levels of thinking required in traditional top-down teaching methods and may be unwilling to invest in additional work that was not previously seen as necessary to pass a class or earn a degree.

Drawing upon my own experience, I have also witnessed varying degrees of student engagement. Students comment that my classes are different than typical higher education courses they have experienced. One student from an Art Survey course perceived that I put "twice as much work" into class engagement as many other teachers. In my own experience, students are sometimes reluctant to participate in activities associated with student-centered learning. it seems that students who are acclimated into systems of education that require little critical thought will naturally protest when more is asked. It would be one thing to say scholar academic approaches end after secondary school, but the reality is that higher education courses still rely on the top-down approach. Scholar academic approaches appear to be perpetuated in college courses.

Every semester, a number of students actively exhibit reluctance to the student-centered learning approach used in the courses I teach. Their reluctance is manifested in their classroom actions and comments left in my instructor evaluation forms. A few

remarks comment on the varieties of learning methods used in class. However, remarks also indicate the perception that there is a lack of instruction due, I believe, to the absence of scholar academic teaching methods. These comments remind me that my students are not always on board with student-centered learning approaches. One of my student's remarks focused on the use of articles read during class to supplement the topic under examination.

> I prefer more of a lecture class. I felt like we were on our phones reading the material for ourselves most of the class period. I think we would learn more if the professor taught us rather than an article on the internet.

This student perceived that his college coursework should consist of standard lectures, expressing the wish that my instruction included more lectures and less independent reading (and presumably, thinking) during class. The role of the student as passive receiver rather than active learner seems to have been securely fixed in this student's mind as the optimum learning method, a method challenged and countered by the student-centered learning activities created for my courses.

As has been shown, teachers in higher education can experience challenges when they choose to use student-centered learning approaches. This was demonstrated in the literature (Felder & Brent, 1996; Hains & Smith, 2012; Palmer, 1998); it was recognized by Leslie in her assertions that students sometimes exhibit reluctance and fear when teachers use student-centered learning methods of instruction; and I also observed this to be true in my teaching.

Coping with Personal Factors (Time and Energy)

Another challenge teachers may experience when they choose to use student-centered learning approaches in college classrooms is the amount of time it takes to

create curriculum and instruction that will more fully engage students. Making adjustments to courses using student-centered learning presents challenges for teachers (Felder & Brent, 1996; Hains & Smith, 2012). Teaching academic disciplines using student-centered learning approaches can require thinking about each class session as a new encounter, one that builds upon previous experiences both in and out of the class.

Leslie strongly agreed with this point. She related her own experiences when using set approaches and emphasized the flexibility that is needed for student-centered teaching. She stated:

> I was trained in composition and rhetoric, especially during my PhD program, and this is very common in English because we do so much reading in an English class. The lesson plan should be done for the entire semester before it starts. I mean that's what a "real teacher" does. I tend to have a general sense of what I want them to do based on the assignments we're working on. But I don't do lesson plans; I do my lesson plans the day before the next class. Sometimes I'll know if we have a week where we have to get a certain thing done, I'll kind of plan that out, but I actually wait until I know where we're at. And this is scary, because inevitably I'll realize that there is something I forgot to include, but I think it's important because it also allows, based on a conversation we might have had last week, I can assign something this week or we can change it this week. So I have to have more flexibility in my daily schedule and the reading schedule.

What Leslie is describing is the emergent, indeed mutually constructed, nature of student-centered learning. As related above, Leslie recognized the need for flexibility to change activities in order to address and respond to ideas and issues arising in class. These cannot be known ahead of time because we do not know our students prior to meeting them, yet our students are an essentially part of the teacher-student relationship (Freire, 2000). As Leslie explained, this creates more work during the semester, but a sense of flexibility and relatability is achieved which results in more dynamic class sessions.

Leslie stated that she is constantly modifying her courses. She explained her use of a method that allows her to see an entire semester's work displayed on a board covered with Post-it notes. Seeing a course on the wall as an entire semester enables her to view the big picture while allowing the flexibility she needs to arrange and alter her courses throughout the semester. Leslie reasoned that flexibility is an important part of her methods to create active and impactful learning environments, "I can't not change something because I know that it could always be better."

The literature supports Leslie's claims about the time and energy necessary to evaluate and revise courses using student-centered learning. Teachers who want to use student-centered learning approaches should consider the adjustment time that students need for engaging with new instructional methods. In an article about navigating the pitfalls and obstacles of implementing student-centered learning, Felder and Brent (1996) advise teachers to revise their courses gradually and consistently in order to yield rewarding teaching and classroom experiences. The authors write: "The key is to understand how the process works, take some precautionary steps to smooth out the bumps, and wait out the inevitable setbacks until the payoffs start emerging" (p. 43). Flexibility and patience are necessary when implementing student-centered learning in college classrooms (Johnson et al., 2009). Student-centered learning approaches can require flexibility because instructional strategies can and should change with the needs of students. Student-centered learning requires patience, but greater student interaction and confidence will emerge in classrooms that focus on engaged students.

Leslie stated that the time and energy invested in student-centered learning are part of being an effective teacher. She claimed that teachers must be willing to put the

necessary preparation into their courses while remaining flexible at the same time. Leslie stated:

> You can plan out a whole semester, but you have to be willing to be flexible. Now that's more difficult to do in classes that have very specific content. And I understand that. I am in a field where the focus is on writing, so like, I can change up the readings as needed. But I like that because it means I'm always looking for things I can incorporate into my classes. Because I never know when I might need it.

As Leslie explains, flexibility is a key to keeping courses vibrant and active. She recognized that it is not easy in all courses, but according to her, many more courses could use student-centered learning approaches despite the time and energy it takes. Leslie acknowledged the toll that can be taken on teachers who use student-centered learning:

> It's exhausting for an instructor, I will say that. I think it's exhausting and it can be emotionally draining if you have a tough set of students, but I think it is, when it works, it is rewarding beyond compare. It's tough, but I think that it keeps, kind of keeps, as an instructor, I think it keeps you active and always looking. And I think it elicits feedback from students in a different way, so you're actually gonna' genuinely, maybe not all the time, but occasionally at least get genuine feedback that you can incorporate more easily. Or they're looking for things, or they're seeing things in the world and they think "Oh, that could be useful in class". And they'll just bring it to you randomly. I think that's useful.

Leslie copes with the time and energy required for student-centered learning by remaining flexible and appreciating the opportunities that present themselves during the semester. She does not deny the amount of time and energy that is demanded for student-centered learning, but she certainly recognizes that it can be a consuming venture.

Part of who Leslie is as a teacher embraces the opportunity to change her courses in response to her students' needs. This flexibility is important to Leslie. She explains:

> I think one way is that I always try to maintain flexibility in the classroom. So I'm not married to a schedule for the semester. [I] have a sense of where things should go, but I don't lock myself in. So even within the semester there's room for change. But from semester to semester, I can't, and this is partly, probably just my, who I am as a teacher or as a person, I can't not fiddle with the syllabus. So for me, like, a class will never be completely done.

For Leslie, continuously tinkering is part of her approach. Indeed, it is part of her teaching identity. As Leslie says, she "can't leave courses unchanged." Part of Leslie's outlook on teaching, which is why student-centered learning approaches appeal to her, is that it provides an opportunity to introduce change during a course and from semester to semester. She sees the need for change at both the micro and macro levels of instruction. The need to change her teaching from week to week and semester to semester is part of a larger cycle of application and reflection.

> So, you know, [I'm] always trying to experiment and try things based on what I'm getting back. And when it doesn't work, I have to think about why it didn't work. Am I taking it out because I didn't put the effort into it? Or is it the students, or it might be a little bit of both? Always kind of shifting and reflecting and working things, and not feeling like it has to be completely set in one way.

The fluidity of her courses from week to week and semester to semester is part of Leslie's outlook on keeping her courses fresh and invigorating for herself and her students. The cycle of application and reflection mentioned by Leslie can be used to keep her approaches fresh and vivacious. But even more than this, Leslie's flexibility appears to be a response to her understanding that real learning is based in relationship and an investment on the part of students. Real learning is not something that can be done to students; rather, it must be done by them (Freire, 2000; Piaget, 1950).

In my personal experience, student-centered learning requires much more preparation than traditional teaching methods. Methods of delivering information by lecturing and assessment by examination reinforce the distinction between scholar academics and novice learners. This reinforcement excuses teachers from considering active ways of engaging with students and facilitating authentic learning. However, periods of adjustment are needed when transitioning from traditional teaching approaches to more student-centered learning methods.

During a doctoral course in education, I began to understand how student-centered learning could be used to facilitate more generative environments for learning. The instructor directed us, as graduate students, to develop strategies for incorporating student-centered learning methods into our classrooms, whether or not we were teaching at that point. The learning strategies I chose were implemented in two of my courses that semester, and I have been utilizing student-centered approaches ever since.

Based on my experiences, preparing class sessions using student-centered learning approaches can be far more involved than objectivist-oriented teaching methods. One teaching strategy I chose to implement for the Art Survey course was the use of "chain notes." I began planning for the implementation by writing guiding questions to ascertain specific learning targets for my students. The guiding goals I produced for this class were that "Students should be able to list the differences between art of the pre-modern era versus the modern era" and "Students will understand how modern art is different than previous periods and how it reflects the modern state of mind." I created a learning map for the class period that would specifically address the major points made about the focus of Realism, a modern art movement from the mid-

nineteenth century. Although I have continued to adapt my goals and the ways I implement my learning strategies, the results were positive and encouraged me to continue seeking new ways of engaging my students.

I do not want to gloss over the fact that it takes significant time to consider ways that students might best learn required information, to plan learning strategies, and to implement these strategies. However, like Leslie and many others, I believe the amount of meaningful student interaction with their peers and the depth of learning that can be achieved makes the process worthwhile.

As has been shown, challenges associated with student-centered learning in higher education may include considerable time and energy to prepare class activities. This was demonstrated in the literature (Felder & Brent, 1996; Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009); it was recognized by Leslie in her assertions that student-centered learning methods of instruction take a large amount of time to prepare class activities for the semester; and I also observed this to be true in my teaching.

What Were the Benefits of Using Student-Centered Learning Approaches in Higher Education?

In spite of the challenges that prevent many teachers from using student-centered approaches in higher education, some instructors persist in using these methods. Based on my observations and interviews with Leslie, one of the major reasons for using such approaches in spite of the difficulties involves an awareness of the significant benefits of student-centered teaching for students, for teachers, and for society.

Student-Centered Teaching Is Beneficial to Students

Some teachers in higher education choose to use student-centered learning approaches in spite of its challenges because they believe it is beneficial for students. They believe student-centered learning helps them develop a sense of agency, interpersonal communication skills, and abstract thinking. The idea that student-centered learning approaches are beneficial to students because they can encourage them to develop a sense of agency in their own learning is supported by the literature (Piaget, 1950). Students become more invested and engaged by using their experiences for the purposes of learning (Dewey, 1902). When students develop responsibility in their own learning, more invested, connected ways of learning take place (Feden, 2012).

Leslie also insisted that student-centered learning promotes greater student agency, a benefit to students that she observed in her own institution. She emphasized that this sense of agency facilitates different types of learning in classrooms than many students have previously experienced. Traditional top-down approaches typical to most college students' experiences create mindsets that habitually look for answers to be repeated back to teachers (Schiro, 2013). Student-centered learning encourages more thoughtful approaches to the study of academic disciplines (Belenky et al., 1984; Bishop et al., 2014; Lightweis, 2013; Salinas et al., 2008; Wright, 2011). However, changes like this can also create frustration for students who have internalized top-down approaches evident in common education and who anticipate similar experiences in higher education (Hains & Smith, 2012). Leslie stated, "Students who've never been uncomfortable, the more conventional students who've mastered the system, will be uncomfortable with the student-centered learning approach." This discomfort can

provide for new learning experiences and growth, but it also poses a problem for teachers striving to promote student development.

Another advantage of students developing a sense of agency through student-centered learning is a more direct focus on the content in academic disciplines. If students' earlier teachers emphasized strict *rules* of writing as being important, ultimately distracting students from the writing process, then students will better understand the *essence* of writing through student-centered learning approaches in higher education. Leslie described the benefits she believed students derive from these approaches. She argued that they learn the essence of writing if not all the specifics:

> Even if my students still don't understand how to use a comma at the end of the semester. If they better understand the process they take for writing and they feel like they can actually do it and know where to get help, I feel I've achieved what I should have achieved. To me that's student-centered learning.

Leslie stated that learning the essence of writing as an experience is more important than memorizing strict rules through top-down approaches.

According to Leslie, another benefit of shifting attention from instructors to students is that it prompts students to become accustomed to more flexible approaches: "They really get freaked out when they don't have tests. But you know, as you go along they kind of take a little bit and understand it." Leslie's point was that student-centered learning requires students to grapple with subjects in ways that encourage deep thinking. Grappling with new concepts encourages processes of cognitive growth, important components of learning. Construction and reconstruction of knowledge or cognitive growth is necessary to maintain equilibrium (Piaget, 1950).

This point leads back to the agency of students. Another benefit of student-centered learning is that students can unlearn what they received as passive recipients of

information in prior English courses during high school or early compositions courses in college. Leslie explained the shift that occurs when students realize personal agency over their learning. She previously taught a peer-tutoring seminar that prepared students to tutor fellow students. Leslie explained the realization students experience in shifting from objectivist-oriented approaches in previous English courses to her course.

> So from the get-go there, it throws them off because students who tend to take that peer-tutoring class tend to be, umm, they're the students that have always done well and they are the students that because they did well in Comp 1 and Comp 2. Somebody suggested that they take the class because they're good writers. So they must be good tutors, if they're good writers. Although, that doesn't work all the time. So for those students, a lot of the time, the peer-tutoring class is where they unlearn what it means to be a student, because they're used to being lectured to, whereas immediately peer-tutoring it's, "You tell me your experiences, let's talk about this, give me your opinion about this article, about grammar. Tell me what you think." And there is no right answer. I tend to give them an article that says all of those grammar rules you find, that you think you're going to pass on to somebody else, they're really not real rules. It's a style preference. There is no right or wrong answer with the grammar in this situation. And that really gets them . . . It's just a matter of understanding where they're at on that grey continuum. And that's how, where you are going to help them. And this is the students learning to help other students. So there's that extra level of "Obviously I can't do it for you because you're going to be the one in there doing it."

Leslie's account relates to the shift students experience when they become agents of their own learning. Students who change from receiver of information to seeker or explorer of information perceive learning in an entirely new way. According to Leslie, students benefit from an adaptation in thinking about agency over their learning.

I witnessed students develop responsibility over their learning during an observation in Leslie's class. Three students presented information about restrictive clauses during class. Each student was expected to work with one or two other students to present their understandings. During their presentation, the three students described the characteristics and uses of restrictive clauses using a PowerPoint slideshow format.

At the end of the presentation, the rest of the students were broken into smaller groups to answer questions about the information that had been presented. A handout over the topic of restrictive clauses allowed the class to consider how to answer the questions posed by presenters. Correct answers to the questions posed by the presenters were rewarded with candy. At the end of the presentation, the instructor asked the class to evaluate the presentation using a rubric. The class was reminded to be judicious in their assessment since the student evaluation by fellow peers would make up 50% of the presentation grade.

The idea of students presenting information to fellow class members can be seen as a means of helping them develop a sense of agency over their learning. Presenters were required to teach the class and involve their peers in recognizing characteristics and uses of the topics they presented. Individual and group presentations do not necessarily reflect student-centered learning approaches, but these student presentations indicated one occasion among many that required students to identify and present academic information to their peers and teacher.

The students' course evaluations also reflected their understanding of the value of Leslie's teaching approach. For example, students in her undergraduate interdisciplinary research course recognized its value for other college courses and for their careers after graduation. For instance, one student wrote, "This course has taught me so many skills that I will be able to apply to my other courses as well as when I am applying to graduate school. The best part is this course spans across all of the disciplines which is why I feel like it should be a requirement for all majors." Although students may not always be cognizant of the teaching approaches that allowed her

courses to be more student-centered, they certainly perceived the quality of instruction that permeates Leslie's teaching.

The literature supports Leslie's claims regarding the importance of student agency in learning. Students should be involved in developing ownership of their education. When students develop ownership over their learning, a positive increase is evident in student confidence, understanding of course content, and enhancement of emotional intelligence (Hains & Smith, 2012). I have also witnessed this effect in my own classroom. In my Art Survey course during the spring of 2016, the class was learning about the work of contemporary artist Kara Walker. Walker's work explores issues of racial inequality with the 19th-century artform of silhouette portraits known as limnist drawings. The lesson about Walker prompted my students to consider issues of racism about which they are aware or have personally witnessed.

Groups of students sitting at a table drew silhouetted figures similar to Walker's, using black markers on white butcher paper. A few students drew police officers and civilians interacting, and one drew Donald Trump facing off with immigrants. However, one group of predominantly Saudi Arabian students made an image that shed an entirely new perspective on what I knew about their culture. The students drew a bank building with people interacting outside. Using speech balloons to insert dialogue into their image, one figure asked another, "Where are you from?" The students explained to the class that sometimes a job is only open to an individual from a certain part of his or her country. This was a revelation to me and showed that all of my students were aware of racism in their own parts of the world.

Another way student-centered learning approaches benefit students is through the development of interpersonal communication skills. Learning to become communicators is crucial for student development as learners and for success in future careers (Hains & Smith, 2012). Leslie shared the belief that the development of interpersonal communication skills and relational means are vitally important and sought these benefits for the students in her own institution. She explained that although students develop communication skills throughout life, a more sustained and relational means of communicating is needed that requires listening and understanding as well as talking. Leslie emphasized this is especially important in higher education. Traditional top-down teaching approaches focus on one-way communication (speech) from teachers to students (Schiro, 2013). Leslie critiqued this idea stating that students should be developing as critical thinkers who will need to find ways to be in the world.

The literature supports Leslie's assertion about the need for students to develop interpersonal communication skills development. An article by Bishop, Caston, and King (2014) describes development of interpersonal communication skills among students. Insisting that communication skills are necessary for students to effectively collaborate with others, the authors argued that the "ability to speak well and participate in active listening is another skill set that is often overlooked" (Bishop et al, 2014, p. 50).

I witnessed support and encouragement in the development of interpersonal communication skills while observing Leslie's class. Students were frequently required to work together in groups. On one occasion, the students were required to gather in groups to explain their progress on an assignment. Leslie projected a slide on the screen

listing the projects that were due and the components necessary to complete each project. She asked for volunteers to explain how their projects were advancing. A few students related how their process was going and voiced how they were feeling about their progression. As students gathered in to groups to relate more specific information, each member explained their developments. This communication among peers facilitated practice in two-way and multi-directional communication and revealed a type of checking in among students that Leslie recalled developed into means of accountability between group members.

Yet another way student-centered learning approaches can be beneficial to students is in the development of abstract thinking skills needed to successfully navigate the world. Although students come to college with experience, they are still developing as thinkers. Dialogue among teachers and students via student-centered learning approaches can encourage the co-exploration of academic disciplines as well as existential life conditions (Freire, 2000). It can also help students gain confidence to continually explore new avenues of thinking (Hains & Smith, 2012). Student-centered approaches in higher education can help them transition into larger communities as responsible and thoughtful citizens. Leslie confirmed that many students in her institution recognize that they are better writers having completed courses with student-centered learning approaches. She stated that collaboration with others can help students gain perspectives that deepen their consideration and promote abstract thinking. This is much more difficult to achieve via scholar academic approaches focused almost solely on the instructor's view of the content (Schiro, 2013).

Leslie was also an advocate of lifelong learning, resisting the conventional idea of many that intellectual development essentially ceases with graduation. In her view, student-centered learning facilitates exploration. Leslie contended that human awareness leads to continual learning—if an individual is not learning from the environment around them, that person will experience difficulty navigating the world on a day-to-day basis. She affirmed that lifelong learning is more than simply responding to new stimuli. Rather, such learning enables people to consider why events in daily life, recent history, and historical periods have occurred. Ussing abstract thinking to consider other perspectives is a sign of deep learning (Ahn & Class, 2011). As Leslie stated, "If you're awake and alive and acting in the world, you're always learning."

A specific instance in which Leslie encouraged abstract thinking occurred during one of my earlier class observations. At the beginning of class, Leslie mentioned that she would be using music. She played a pop song while the students listened, then instructed students to name the genre. Students listed characteristics of the song that were used to classify it into specific music genres. Next, a piano version of the same song was played to illustrate differences. Leslie asked students to name similarities and differences in order to compare and contrast genres. This encouraged students to beging to think about the concept of genre as a subject of study.

Next, Leslie asked her students to define the term "genre" while writing their responses on the whiteboard. A number of students offered examples, such as music, theater, art, and politics. Leslie related that she had studied the question of genre in graduate school. This surprised one student who said she had never considered genre a separate object of study. After listing various topics that could be classified into genres

and subgenres, Leslie directed the class to name different genres of writing they previously used. The discussion moved to different types of writing that could be classified as genres. For example, one student mentioned e-mail as a form of writing, and Leslie identified Facebook posts as another genre of writing. Another student brought up examples of theatrical writing for performances, such as plays, monologues, dramatic duets, and parliament debates, each of which would have to be delivered differently. Leslie pointed out different types of plays written by William Shakespeare, including romance, comedy, and tragedy. This discussion about the definitions of genre encouraged students to pose and respond to questions that added to the complexity of their understandings of genre as a concept. It also deepened and expanded their ability to think abstractly.

The literature supports Leslie's position on the importance of abstract thinking. Abstract or higher order thinking is highly beneficial not only for students but also for society. Higher order thinking, as illustrated in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), reflects the increasingly complex levels of human cognition. Student-centered learning is an important means of promoting higher order thinking (Ahn & Class, 2011). Abstract thinking is also essential in the arts, including the courses I teach such as surveys of Western art history and specific periods in art history. The study of art requires abstract understanding of the themes depicted. What did artists mean to convey to audiences at the time of execution? What does this mean to contemporary audiences? The point here is that abstract thinking is almost universally recognized as an essential life skill.

Some teachers in higher education choose to implement student-centered learning in spite of the challenges because they believe they are beneficial for students.

This is demonstrated in the literature (Dewey, 1902; Piaget, 1950; Freire, 2000 Belenky et al., 1984; Salinas et al., 2008; Ahn & Class, 2011; Wright, 2011; Feden, 2012; Hains & Smith, 2012; Schiro, 2013; Lightweis, 2013; Bishop et al., 2014); it was recognized by Leslie in her assertions that students gained a sense of agency, interpersonal communication skills, and abstract thinking skills; and I have also observed it to be true in my teaching.

Student-Centered Teaching Is Beneficial to Teachers

In addition to benefitting students, student-centered learning can also benefit teachers by motivating our desire to continue learning, encouraging our desire to continue teaching, and providing validation in the role of teaching. Ultimately, all these benefits of student-centered learning help with the actualization of teachers as human beings, which contributes to our growth as teachers and learners.

One way student-centered learning benefits teachers is by motivating our desire to continue our learning. One benefit for teachers is that student-centered learning is stimulating to our growth as learners. Many teachers want to learn because they love learning, most having been drawn to the practice of teaching from their own experiences as students. Teachers appreciate student-centered learning because it helps them to continue to grow as learners. Teachers experience growth as learners when engaging with students about the subjects they appreciate in academic disciplines. Student-centered learning encourages teachers to continually reflect on themselves as learners in their own courses (Bishop et al., 2014).

Leslie recognized that student-centered environments help create communities of learners among students and teachers. Smart, Witt, and Scott recognized that “the

shift in focus to active and reflective learning helps students create a learning community where both students and the instructor are empowered to question and to make meaning, and all are invigorated in this phenomenon we call learning" (Smart et al., p. 402, 2012). However, this is also true for teachers. This assertion that active and reflective learning creates learning communities that benefit both students and teachers is a positive benefit of student-centered learning approaches.

Thus, when Leslie said she was an advocate of lifelong learning, she was not simply referring to her students' learning. She was also referring to her own continuing growth as a member of her student-centered classroom community. Observing Leslie's class provided opportunities to see how her uses of student-centered learning methods created dynamic learning environments for both her students and herself. She stated that the undergraduate interdisciplinary research course she teaches is geared toward a workshop environment rather than a lecture-style classroom. After having attended an Outstanding Professors retreat in 2014, exposure to Transformative Learning methods (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) further encouraged her to use student-centered learning in courses. She states:

> It's basically the idea that teaching is about more than content (or even skills)—that it is, in large part, about developing relationships with people and helping students understand how they fit into a larger ecosystem (for lack of a better way of putting it) as they learn discipline-specific knowledge. It a kind of ethical approach to learning, really, as far as acknowledging that students need to know how to use their knowledge and skills responsibly in addition to developing that knowledge and skillset to being with.

Thus, Leslie explained that transformative learning as a means of instruction has influenced her teaching style. It was apparent that Leslie relished the ability to continue to grow as a learner. She searched for ways to learn more from her colleagues, the

literature, and her students about the practices of English. Similarly, I am continually expanding my understanding of art. Many teachers appreciate teaching because it provides an opportunity to continue learning.

Student-centered learning also benefits teachers by stimulating a desire to continue teaching. Teachers get energy from teaching, and a great teaching session can promote a desire to continue instruction. This can be very satisfying for teachers who want to continue to grow and develop rather than simply remaining static, teaching the same information year after year. The positive aspects of student-centered learning facilitate positive teaching experiences for teachers, encouraging them to continue the vocation of teaching.

Although Leslie's primary focus as a teacher was on her students' learning, it was clear that she also enjoyed and benefited from the social interactions and relationships created in her classes. Deep and meaningful classroom interactions involving multiple perspectives sometimes required extra planning, but they were also stimulating and thought producing not only for Leslie's students but also for Leslie. This was another one of the reasons Leslie used a student-centered approach, including even meeting with her students in out-of-class feedback sessions.

Leslie described types of exchange that can result from students offering information for discussion in class as "Freirian," or student-teacher/teacher-student dichotomies that can encourage the consideration of topics together. True dialogue, according to Freire, is dialogue that somehow minimizes, eliminates, or otherwise acknowledges and addresses asymmetrical power relations between the participants. Addressing these relationships in education can be an important precursor to addressing

them in society. Although Leslie and I did not explicitly discuss issues of power in society, it is possible that she was trying to contribute not only to the personal growth and interpersonal communicative competence of her students but also to broader societal change. This would fit with her references to Paulo Freire and transformative education.

My own experience also confirms the value and satisfaction of this type of interaction. During my first few years as a teacher in higher education art courses, specifically art history, I became convinced that I was speaking too much and students too little. This became evident to me through a series of lessons I taught in Art Survey, a general education introduction course over Western art history, after taking a class with an instructor in doctoral course in education. The changes I implemented were focused on student-centered learning approaches rather than the traditional lecture methods I had previously used. I was encouraged when students brought personal experiences that related to our course topics. This confirmed that what I was teaching in the classroom had real-life application outside the classroom. In turn, this deeper exchange gave me a sense of confidence that what I was teaching them was understood beyond mere memorization of information and was applicable to their lives.

I recall that during one session, a student spoke with me before class to share information he had learned about one of the topics currently being discussed. He was excited to describe characteristics about medieval church architecture he had recently encountered. This student recognized key elements of a specific church structure and was enthusiastic about sharing his experience with the class. This student's enthusiasm was contagious, and it was incredibly satisfying to me. It validated my efforts as a

teacher and as someone who wants others to understand and appreciate the arts. This experience provided a glimpse into what teaching can be, an exciting, mutually beneficial social interaction leading to growth and learning relevant to life. Thus, although student-centered learning can certainly be beneficial to students, it can also be remarkably rewarding to teachers. Similar experiences have occurred on numerous occasions in my courses since that time, which helps explain why I, like Leslie and numerous others, continue to practice student-centered learning in higher education in spite of the difficulties.

Student-centered learning is also beneficial for teachers because it is validating for teachers. It validates teachers' calling as educators. Teachers appreciate student-centered learning not only because it is a more engaging way to teach but also because it affirms a teacher's work. This is important because teachers need to feel that their profession is worthwhile. For many teachers, the call to teach is a strong response to their own experiences as learners. It was apparent talking with Leslie and observing her teaching that she felt validated in her calling as a teacher. I am also validated in my teaching. Thus, student-centered learning can benefit teachers by motivating a desire to continue learning, encouraging a desire to continue teaching, and providing validation in the role of teaching. Ultimately, all these benefits of student-centered learning help promote the actualization of teachers as human beings, which contributes to their growth as teachers and learners.

Student-Centered Teaching Is Beneficial to Society

Finally, another reason teachers in higher education choose to use student-centered learning approaches is that they believe it is beneficial for society, indeed that it can

change society for the better. Student-centered learning approaches are beneficial to society because they can help facilitate the development of more responsive, deep-thinking, critical and complete citizens. Among other things, student-centered learning approaches can encourage students to develop social interaction skills, which ultimately benefits society. Social interaction skills are listed among a number of identified attributes that indicate academic success in college (Lightweis, 2013). Emotional intelligence is one form of growth students experience through social interaction skills (Palmer, 2007). Emotional intelligence is important because, through thoughtful communication, it can foster a more connected community.

Leslie also believed that student-centered learning promotes greater social interaction skills, a benefit to students and society that she observed in her own institution. She stated that this is one of the hidden factors of success in students' higher education experiences. Leslie explained:

> If learning is doing, we live in a world that is very difficult to do by yourself anyway. So part of doing is interacting and seeing how other people are taking in content. And part of it is just the act of socialization itself as learning, in some way…. In addition to the content they are supposed to be learning, writing is a content and a skill, that I should also be helping them learn how to be an adult in the world and that requires learning how to socialize with other people in respectful and productive ways.

Another beneficial product of student-centered learning for society can be the development of critical thinking skills. When teachers and students are engaged in collective and collaborative analyses and examination of topics, and when students are developing critical consciousness, students can become more critical, questioning, and productive citizens, thereby helping society (Freire, 2000).

Leslie supported the concept of critical thinking. She regarded Paulo Freire's work as fundamental to developing critical thinking. Leslie stated that this is important because students who develop as critical thinkers will benefit society. Society needs well-rounded critical thinkers as citizens. Citizens who are equipped with critical thinking or problem-solving abilities may help foster the development of more productive and thoughtful communities.

Critical social theory has been described as being concerned with critiquing and changing society as a whole. This seems to contrast with traditional descriptive analysis, which is generally concerned with understanding or explaining society. As Schiro writes, critical social theory, in its many forms: postmodernism, poststructuralism, radical feminism, and critical contstructivism:

> revolted against all traditional ways of viewing and conceptualizing our world; against powerful (oppressive, exploitative, and/or dominant) social groups [and] rationalist Euroceentric cultural traditions. They focused on subjective and social construction of knowledge rather than objective knowledge. Critical theory is concerned with emancipation through the questioning of political, economic, social, and psychological conventions that have been previously taken for granted (Schiro, 2013, 174–175).

Critical pedagogy, which draws from critical social theory, perceives teaching as a political act, denies the neutrality of knowledge, and seeks to affect critical consciousness in students. One of the most well known of critical pedagogy scholars, Paulo Freire, defines critical consciousness as the ability to reflect and act toward reconstructing society (Schiro, 2013, 182). Freire's (1970) concept of praxis required students to engage in reflection and action which resulted in engaged learners affecting social transformation.

Leslie thoughts about critical consciousness were revealed during interviews but were not explicitly evident in my classroom observations. It is possible that Leslie chose to subvert traditional scholar academic approaches by applying critical consciousness within her teaching methods. But even if this was not her intent, it is important to acknowledge that it was part of the way I viewed the situation in which her teaching occurred.

Within my own classroom, I strive to help students develop as critical thinkers engaged with ideas of history and art. More critical explorations of art and history help students expand their enquiries about life beyond the classroom. Learning within environments that require students to explore topics among peers is important. Thus, teachers in higher education who choose to employ student-centered learning approaches in spite of challenges believe that it is beneficial for society. This was demonstrated in the literature (Freire, 2000; Felder & Brent, 1996; Palmer, 2007; Lightweis, 2013; Bishop et al., 2014); and it was recognized by Leslie in her assertions that society benefits from students developing social interaction and critical thinking skills that that can prepare students to be more responsive, deep-thinking, critical and complete citizens. It is ultimately beneficial for society that students develop these skills through student-centered learning.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary

It is clear that modern education practices foster academic relationships that place teachers as experts in academic disciplines while designating students as novices (Dewey, 1902; Feden, 2012; Hains & Smith, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009; Lasry et al., 2014; Palmer, 2007; Schiro, 2013; Smart et al., 2012; Stoerger & Krieger, 2016; Wright, 2011). Philosophies of teaching known as "objectivism" place academic disciplines at the top of a pyramid to be accessed by expert teachers who mediate knowledge of these disciplines while learners individually access teachers' knowledge (Palmer, 2007). These methods fail to utilize the students' previously acquired experiences or to engage them in learning from each other (Dewey, 1902), they objectify students as passive receptacles that receive "deposits" of information from the world (Freire, 2000), and they utilize specific curricula that can be determined by and help perpetuate social class distinctions (Anyon, 1981).

Balanced alternatives such as student-centered and subject-centered learning have been shown to facilitate critical and comprehensive learning (Bishop et al., 2014; Lightweis, 2013; Palmer, 2007; Salinas et al., 2008; Wright, 2011). Student-centered learning has been shown to effectively place students and teachers at the center of learning; however, relatively few teachers in higher education use student-centered learning in classrooms (Feden, 2012).

This study supports existing claims about student-centered learning, but more information about the use of such approaches in higher education is needed. My research examined the practice of using student-centered learning in higher education

by revealing the perspectives of a teacher using student-centered learning approaches in the college classroom.

The questions guiding the study were: (1) How did one college teacher cope with the challenges of using a student-centered learning approach in higher education? and (2) What were this teacher's perceptions of the benefits of using a student-centered learning approach in spite of the challenges? My findings confirm existing information regarding student-centered learning in higher education. They also extend the literature. Data gathered for this study include observations in the classroom and interviews with the teacher. This information is informed by reflections on my own teaching as well as the relevant literature. Based on this information, it appears that there are at least three major challenges to using student-centered learning teaching approaches. These include traditional higher education environments or atmospheres, students' views about higher education, and personal factors. However, three major benefits also emerged—for students, teachers, and society.

My findings show that numerous challenges exist for teachers who want to implement student-centered learning approaches. Challenges associated with student-centered learning include common expectations in higher education learning environments, student reluctance to participate in student-centered learning, and personal factors for instructors such as significant demands on their time and energy. First, higher education learning environments tend to favor scholar academic approaches as default methods of instruction as opposed to the use of student-centered approaches. Scholar academic approaches abound in higher education (Lasry et al., 2014; Schiro, 2013; Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012; Stoerger & Krieger, 2016; Wright,

2011), and, according to Leslie, promote a never-ending cycle of producing teacher-centered (scholar academic) practitioners. My own experiences in higher education confirm her assertions.

Additionally, according to Leslie, peer pressure can also promote the perpetuation of conservative teaching methods by pressuring non-tenured faculty to conform to the general climate of teaching in a department or college. She indicated that pressures to conform for the purposes of tenure, research, and other aspects of academic career advancement often prompt scholar academic instructional methods.

Student reluctance is an additional challenge that many teachers experience. This requires an understanding of why student resist student-centered learning. Many students exhibit reluctance toward student-centered learning simply because it is not familiar (Felder, 1996). Others resist because it requires students to take greater responsibility for their learning than they have been accustomed to taking (Hains & Smith, 2012). Still others resist student-centered teaching because objectivism, a "fearful way of knowing," has become the dominant way of thinking within modern societies (Palmer, 2007).

Leslie recognized that many of her students' reluctance was largely due to habits developed through past experiences. She stated that students need time to shift from more objectivist, teacher-centered approaches to student-centered learning approaches due to their previous experiences with teacher-centered methods of instruction. In my own experience, students are also sometimes reluctant to participate in activities associated with student-centered learning. Many students acclimated into systems of

education that require little critical thought may naturally protest when more is asked of them.

Lastly, another aspect of student-centered learning that can be challenging for teachers is the amount of time it takes to prepare class activities for the semester in order to create curricula that will more fully engage students. The literature asserts that making adjustments using student-centered learning presents challenges for teachers (Felder & Brent, 1996; Hains & Smith, 2012). Leslie agreed with the literature and described her process of constantly modifying courses with methods that allow her to see macro views of the entire semester. Similarly, in my personal experience, student-centered learning approaches require more preparation than traditional teaching methods. All three challenges were shown in the findings of this study.

Although my findings revealed challenges using student-centered learning, numerous benefits also emerged for students, teachers, and society. First, some teachers in higher education select to use student-centered learning methods in spite of the challenges because they believe they are more beneficial for students, providing students a sense of agency in their own learning and providing more invested, connected types of learning (Dewey, 1902; Piaget, 1950). If students develop agency for their learning, more invested, connected types of learning can take place (Feden, 2012). Leslie confirmed what the literature suggests and emphasized that this sense of agency facilitates different kinds of learning than many students have previously experienced.

Student-centered learning can also benefit students by encouraging the development of interpersonal communication skills. The literature states that learning to

become communicators is crucial for student development as learners and for their success in their future careers (Hains & Smith, 2012). Leslie's views supported this claim by recognizing the importance of students developing such skills. Similarly, in my own classroom experience, it appears as if students must develop interpersonal communication skills in order to achieve their full potential.

It is important for students to develop abstract thinking skills to successfully navigate the world. Student-centered learning seems to facilitate more exploratory modes of education, which contribute to these skills. The literature indicates that learning by using abstract thinking to consider a variety of viewpoints and perspectives is a sign of deep learning (Ahn & Class, 2011). Leslie's perspective tended to support this assertion. As Leslie noted, "If you're awake and alive and acting in the world, you're always learning."

A second benefit revealed in the study is that some teachers in higher education elect to use student-centered learning methods in spite of the challenges because they believe it is more beneficial for teachers. In addition to benefitting students, student-centered learning can also benefit teachers by supporting our desire to continue our own learning, motivating us to continue teaching, and providing validation for the work we do. The benefits of student-centered learning help promote the actualization of teachers as human beings, contributing to our growth as both teachers and learners.

A third benefit revealed in the study is that teachers in higher education may select to use student-centered learning methods in spite of their challenges because they believe it is beneficial for society. The ability of student-centered learning to help promote the development of social interaction and critical thinking skills can help

prepare students to be more responsive, deep-thinking, critical and complete citizens. Students' development of critical consciousness can benefit society (Freire, 2000). Leslie supported these points provided by the literature, emphasizing that students who develop as critical thinkers will benefit society. I, too, have observed that students who develop as citizens able to consciously help improve our society.

Implications for Practice

What are the implications of these findings for teachers and others who wish to support student-centered learning in higher education? First, these finding suggest that teachers should orient their courses to more student-centered learning approaches. My findings indicate that the results are worth the effort. Student learning is too important to treat students as empty vessels waiting to be filled or as a bank account waiting for a deposit (Freire, 2000). We need to use student-centered approaches because they are better for our students, better for teachers, and, ultimately, better for society. Although such approaches may feel unusual or scary at first, they are worth the risk. As Leslie asserted, and as others have found, higher education courses should be taught using student-centered learning because it promotes greater student engagement and helps students see the bigger ideas.

Greater student engagement is important because it can facilitate deeper understandings of academic disciplines. Leslie asserted this when discussing her teaching. She stated that it did not matter if a student completed an English course not knowing grammar rules as long as they better understood the process of writing. According to Leslie, what was important is that students develop and internalize abilities to see writing in larger contexts and across the disciplines in higher education.

Whatever topics her students would study, better understandings of how writing can best address those topics were important.

Greater student engagement is important to me as well. When teaching art history courses, including both general education Art Survey and upper-level art history courses for art majors, I want my students to see the bigger pictures of Western art history and histories in general. I no longer demand memorization of dates, artists' names, or the titles of artworks. Having students memorize facts might seem to use methods of instruction that convey important information. It could also be easier to teach this way, filling students' minds with trivial information. In many ways, students expect to encounter these forms of low-impact learning in college courses. However, these methods of instruction, filling students' minds with trivial information, do not effectively address the academic subjects we teach. They do serve our students, ourselves, or society.

I now teach my courses in ways that emphasize larger cultural connections, interconnectedness, and relationships of artistic endeavors across millennia. In my experience, most students appreciate and embrace this larger view of art history without the focus on minute details. Bloom's taxonomy indicates that memorization is lower-order thinking, learning that requires shallow understanding. If students understand the larger views of art history, they can easily look up specific dates, artists' names, or the titles of artworks. But if students are not engaged and do not understand the context within which information can be framed, no amount of detail will help.

This study provides further support for the literature that suggests that higher education should be taught using student-centered learning (Bishop et al., 2014;

Lightweis, 2013; Palmer, 2007; Salinas et al., 2008; Wright, 2011). Higher education courses should be taught using student-centered learning because such learning can encourage students to take greater agency over their education and their lives in general. Creating environments in which teachers guide and support students' search for information rather than dictating the information to be learned encourages students to take agency over their learning and encourages them to take steps toward becoming more fully human, not simply objects who are acted upon but fully conscious subjects who can consciously, actively, and intentionally participate in determining their own lives and shaping the world (Freire, 2000). This counters traditional top-down approaches to teaching in which scholar-academics fill passive students with low-level information.

Helping students achieve agency can encourage greater interest in learning. Agency can help students develop their intrinsic drives to learn as opposed to extrinsic desires simply to earn course credits or to fulfill course requirements. Encouraging agency can stop passive learning. Although it may be easier to teach non-actualized or passive learners, actualized or active learners can be dynamic participants in classrooms, universities, and societies at large. Ultimately, actualized learners can be more critical and responsive citizens.

As has been shown in the findings, student-centered learning can produce more dynamic and active learning environments. Using student-centered learning approaches creates benefits for the students, teachers, and society. Leslie stated that if a teacher is truly invested in teaching students, a more student-centered learning approach is needed. She confirmed that, although it may be unusual or scary, it is worth the risk. My

own experience confirms this assertion as well. When students are engaged in exploring academic disciplines in class, there can be an energy that crackles through the classroom like electricity. That energy sometimes seems to be moving so fast that it is hardly containable.

Another implication of these findings for those interested in student-centered learning in higher education is to find or develop a community from which support can manifest. As important as it is to make the change to using student-centered learning, we need to understand that challenges often exist that prevent the easy application of these approaches. Since this is the case, we often need support. One important source of support can be like-minded faculty. In my experience, using student-centered learning approaches requires incremental steps and patience. Although a teacher might be eager to try new methods of instruction which support student-centered learning, incorporating small changes in instruction can allow thoughtful evaluations over class sessions, weeks, and semesters. Incremental steps allow students to adjust and eventually more fully engage with changes in instruction, and they give teachers the opportunity to make informed adjustments to their practices of instruction.

Another challenge that prevents easy application of student-centered teaching emerges from the culture of higher education, which has historically favored scholar academic approaches. Thus, teachers must be prepared for possible questions, resistance, and even pushback from different college and university faculty members and administrators. Challenges could arise from ourselves, as faculty, as well as our students, peers, or administrators. Therefore, before fully embracing student-centered

learning approaches, we must consider why we are putting in more time and energy for something our students may not fully appreciate.

Naturally, students may question teaching methods that counter what they have experienced for the majority of their schooling. Many fellow teachers and professors may also look askance at methods that seem to deviate from or even subvert the status quo. Administrators, too, might question why changes are being made in traditional instructional methods, particularly if students express dissatisfaction. Shifting to student-centered teaching will often take time and energy, more than what is typically required for traditional scholar academic approaches. Those who choose to use student-centered learning approaches should be aware that doing so often means swimming against the currents of higher education cultures.

Because student-centered teaching can be challenging, support from like-minded faculty is essential. Teachers can benefit greatly from finding like-minded faculty who are willing to honestly support each other as they implement student-centered learning or other new instructional approaches. In a chapter titled "Divided No More: Teaching from a Heart of Hope," Parker Palmer speaks to the issue of forming support groups called "communities of congruence" (2007, p. 178). Communities of congruence are made up of individuals who have personally committed themselves to effect change and who have found like-minded individuals to support one another. Like others have found, Palmer describes organizations like institutions of higher education as being resistant to change. He compares and contrasts institutions with movements, the former including monolithic organizations that can be highly resistant to change, the latter consisting of the fluid and dynamic forces of change:

> Organizations and movements both play creative roles, but to quite different ends. Organizations represent the principle of order and conservation: they are vessels in which a society holds hard-won treasures from the past. Movements represent the principle of flux and change: they are the processes through which a society channels its energies for renewal and transformation. A healthy society will encourage interplay between the two. (Palmer, 2007, pp. 170–171)

In this excerpt, Palmer is emphasizing the importance of both organizations and movements for the continual strength and renewal of society. Higher education institutions are organizations that need renewal to foster growth and relevancy, even when these may seem unwanted. Establishing or locating communities of congruence is important to teachers who want to develop new practices. New practices can yield beneficial results for higher education institutions. However, new practices can also threaten entrenched ideas within existing institutions. Therefore, it is important that teachers form communities of congruence to support each other and give voice to the need for renewal from within our institutions.

A final implication for those who may be interested in adopting student-centered learning in higher education is to actively seek others who are already using such approaches. Recognizing like-minded teachers who are willing to support one another is important; however, establishing connections between those who are also practicing student-centered learning and those who are open to changing their methods of instruction is needed as well. Supporting other faculty and administrators who are interested in using student-centered learning requires a willingness to engage in dialogue that addresses the importance of these methods of instruction. Dialogue about student-centered learning is essential because it can enable faculty and administrators to draw upon and learn from the successes and challenges experienced by others.

Seeking like-minded faculty and administrators interested in using student-centered learning requires a willingness to construct a language that addresses the importance of these methods of instruction. This requires conversations that are crafted to inform other teachers about student-centered learning. Leslie identified an important point in promoting student-centered learning when she stated that if another faculty member did not seem open to the idea, the subject would not be brought up. Conversely, if another instructor had questions, she would gladly discuss it. My own experience indicates that teachers who are willing to consider using student-centered learning need the understanding and support of other faculty members who have implemented it. This is exactly what Leslie did for me.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview questions for Leslie–January 14, 2016

1. Could you describe your experience as a student?
2. In your opinion, how does learning occur?
3. How long have you taught in higher education?
4. What drew you to teach in higher education?
5. Could you explain your teaching style or methods?
6. How has your own experience as a student affected the way you teach?
7. Can you give me an example of how your teaching style manifests in a typical class session?
8. What does student-centered learning mean to you?

Interview questions for Leslie–June 6, 2016

1. What are your perspectives of the benefits and drawbacks of a student-centered approach?
2. What challenges do you encounter setting up a course this way?
3. What are your students' perceptions of this approach? Do they change from beginning to end?

Interview questions for Leslie–April 4, 2017

1. If someone were deliberating whether or not to use student-centered learning approach, what would you say?
2. Some might say a more student-centered learning approach is beneficial. How is student-centered learning beneficial to students?
3. How is student-centered learning beneficial to instructors?
4. How is student-centered learning beneficial to society?
5. Some might say the higher education atmosphere is not conducive to student-centered learning. What would you say to that? Why do you think that?
6. How does peer pressure from peers/colleagues/administration affect use of student-centered learning?
7. What are typical student responses to the student-centered learning approach? Considering a student may have had previous experience in a more traditional education setting, how does this experience contribute to their response to student-centered learning?
8. How does time and energy put into using student-centered learning become a challenge?

Interview questions for Leslie–December 13, 2017

1. What are some of the ways that you cope with challenges using student-centered learning approaches?