Grounding Assessment in Authentic Pedagogy: A Case Study of General Education Assessment

Kevin Hall
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

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Grounding Assessment in Authentic Pedagogy:
A Case Study of General Education Assessment

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By
Kevin Hall

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

March 8, 2012
Grounding Assessment in Authentic Pedagogy:
A Case Study of General Education Assessment

We certify we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

__________________________
Kathleen M. Boyle, PhD, Committee Chair

__________________________
Thomas Fish, EdD, Committee Member

__________________________
Sarah Noonan, EdD, Committee Member

Final Approval Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A study of this nature is certainly a collaborative work. Thank you to the research participants for sharing their thoughts and experiences about their teaching. Their honest reflections served as the core of this project and stand as testament to their passion for teaching and their students.

Thank you to my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Kathleen Boyle, for her insights, encouragement, and expert guidance. Her support sharpened my research, analysis, and writing. In addition, thank you to Dr. Thomas Fish and Dr. Sarah Noonan for serving on my dissertation committee.

Thank you to Dr. Renee Kumpula and Dr. Jolene Erlacher for serving as readers for this study. Their thoughtful feedback improved my analysis and writing.

My wife, Janean, and our four children, deserve special thanks for their words of encouragement and patience. Brianna, Charity, Christian, and Erica – your father is no longer missing amongst the stacks or sequestered at a local coffee shop.

Finally, upon my completion of each assigned doctoral paper, Janean, my wife, would ask, “Did you remember to include in the paper that you love your wife?” My typical reply noted this truism never quite fit the paper’s thesis. But this time it is different. Indeed, I do love you Janean. Thank you for your ongoing encouragement and gracious support.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to understand how instructors of general education courses, seeking to improve student learning, integrate assessment into their pedagogy. These assessment approaches, embedded within rich pedagogical understandings and experiences, reside at the core of the teaching and learning process. The study explored how experienced general education instructors authentically assess student learning in their classrooms. Pragmatic philosophy and symbolic interactionism served as theoretical grounding for method selection and data analysis.

A qualitative single-case study approach, incorporating interviews and document analysis, resulted in findings about how instructors at a small university incorporated assessment within their classroom teaching. Nine instructors of general education courses at a small university participated in open-ended and iterative interviews. Document analysis provided a framework for understanding institutional and general education purposes. An intentional process of memo writing, data collection, critical reflection, grounded coding, and peer review resulted in analyzed and verified findings.

Participants reported a number of pedagogical factors at work within the assessment of student learning. The five identified factors are examining assumptions, teaching through the aims, centering on student learning, opening assessment windows, and teaching forward. These pedagogical factors work together to provide a framework for authentic assessment. An authentic assessment of student learning, grounded in student and instructor experiences, empowers students to learn, serve, and work for a productive and democratic future.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

At its core, higher education is about students and learning. Bringing students and learning together in meaningful ways continues to be a pedagogical goal motivating educators at all levels. Yet, questions continue to swirl around the meaning and purpose of higher education. Do students really learn in college? Is college worth the expense? What can faculty do to increase the educative value of higher education? Answers to these deceptively simple questions are complex. Faculty, higher education administrators, parents, the public, and policymakers all have different reasons for questioning the depth of student learning. Unstated expectations of higher education, submerged within contentious discourse, often drive curricular and accountability reform initiatives.

Today, the question of student learning burns hot throughout all levels of education (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000; Shavelson, 2010). The current calls for higher education accountability and assessment flow in large part from popular sentiment and policy initiatives in the K-12 arena (Ewell & Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), 2004). These initiatives typically place a premium on visible standards and outcomes. At the higher education level, this attention to outcomes finds expression in both internally and externally motivated assessment programs. For instance, with the increase in the federal government’s funding of higher education through financial aid, federal policymakers are calling for increased accountability for student learning from the nation’s higher education institutions (Shavelson, 2010). As universities and colleges work to respond to expectations of both
internal and external stakeholders, faculty often find themselves immersed in the messy task of assessing university-wide student learning.

Unfortunately, in the rush to answer immediate questions about whether students are learning, society often does not fully explore underlying goals and purposes of higher education. These goals and purposes, however, find their expression, often implicitly, within general education programs of higher education institutions. General education, a common element of the nation’s colleges and universities, serves as the curriculum shared by all students within a higher education institution (Allen, 2006). Typically, general education curriculum, in all its many iterations, provides the foundation for important intellectual and civic capacities (AAC&U, 2011). As such, general education provides a logical curricular platform for the assessment of student learning across an institution. These assessment initiatives, outgrowths of internal and external socioeconomic expectations unique within each institution, take on different meanings for faculty, administrators, and external stakeholders.

**Statement of the Problem**

Today, higher education leaders utilize university-wide assessment programs for a number of reasons: meeting accreditation requirements, deflecting federal and state governmental oversight, increasing market competitiveness, improving student learning, and providing accountability to other stakeholders (Shavelson, 2010). These diverse, and often conflicting, reasons challenge educators to meet stakeholder expectations with meaningful assessments. Faculty and administrators each construct assessment narratives supporting their particular experiences and perspectives. Seeking to improve student learning, faculty members place a high value on learning assessment initiatives (Dove,
Administrators, on the other hand, often look to assessment programs as a means to demonstrate institutional competence to external stakeholders (Shavelson, 2010).

Despite more than two decades of concerted effort, the higher education sector continues to wrestle with how to assess student learning in ways to improve student learning and meet growing expectations of external stakeholders (Shavelson, 2010). Faculty, primarily valuing student learning within their classrooms, often voice frustration at university-wide attempts to assess student learning (Becher & Trowler, 1989; Dove, 2008; Duderstadt, 2000). From my observations as a faculty member, these concerns often center on the validity of aggregating assessment data, the challenge of assessing abstract learning outcomes, and developing meaningful and actionable insights to improve student learning. Yet, experienced faculty value and utilize a broad range of assessment approaches and techniques within their own teaching. These assessment approaches, embedded within rich pedagogical understandings and experiences, reside at the core of the teaching and learning process. In this study, I explored how experienced general education instructors authentically assess student learning in their classrooms.

**Significance of the Problem**

How instructors assess student learning is relevant for higher education professionals and stakeholders because dialogue about student learning, both nationally and locally, traces its origins to instructors living out their assessment pedagogy within their classrooms. Themes of assessment and accountability run throughout the history of higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). However, the call for increased accountability of student learning at higher education institutions continues to rise from policymakers, accreditors, the public, and parents. A major reason for this increased attention on
accountability is a similar call from local and federal governing bodies for accountability of K-12 education (Shavelson, 2010). In part to avoid increased accountability mandates from regional or federal stakeholders, higher education institutions continue to increase their own internal efforts to address accountability concerns. On the other hand, faculty, long accustomed to autonomy within their classrooms, often resist imposition of external influences on their teaching practices (Duderstadt, 2000). Striving to meet accountability expectations of external stakeholders and to improve students learning, colleges and universities continue to grapple with how to implement institution-wide assessment programs (Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). By studying how faculty at one university assesses student learning within its general education courses, I hope to provide insight into how to advances student learning through authentic assessment. These insights may assist higher education communities in construction of assessment processes that improve student learning through a grounded and holistic understanding of pedagogy.

Currently, related literature concerns itself primarily with how to implement institutional assessment programs (Allen, 2006; Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Huba & Freed, 2000; Shavelson, 2010). Within this literature, case studies are a common methodological approach used to highlight perceived best practices within higher education assessment (Banta et al., 1996; Wehlburg, 2010a). Not surprisingly, this research typically narrates success stories within the present context of the call for increased accountability. Scholarship of teaching and learning literature seeking to address classroom assessment mainly discusses implementation of specific components of formative assessment (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bailey, 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hessler & Taggart, 2011; Khandelwal, 2009). While these studies provide valuable
insight into specific pedagogical practices, they do not, due to their scope, situate classroom assessment and the improvement of student learning into a broader pedagogical context. Grounding assessment in an understanding of how faculty experience assessment as an element of their pedagogy provides higher education stakeholders with insight into an authentic assessment that advances student learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

Many question the quality of instruction and learning students experience in today’s higher education institutions (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000). As a result, higher education stakeholders require increased accountability from colleges and universities. The creation of institution-wide assessment programs is one response of higher education institutions to meet these calls for accountability. At the classroom level, instructors increasingly use formative assessment to gauge student learning. The goal for this assessment is to improve their teaching and their students’ learning. Responding to concerns about student learning proves to be important for students, instructors, administrators, and other stakeholders. A qualitative case study approach provided a methodology to explore both the contextual factors shaping classroom assessment and individual perspectives and experiences.

This study involved uncovering how experienced faculty who teach general education classes experience classroom assessment within their teaching practice. The study researched classroom experiences of instructors who teach general education courses at one university. The purpose of the study was to understand how instructors of general education courses, seeking to improve student learning, integrate assessment into their pedagogy.
Research Question

Research questions for this study explored instructors’ contextualized understandings and experiences of assessing to improve student learning. A grounded approach to understanding assessment within the classroom required an exploration of more than the narrow act of assessing student learning. Education, according to Dewey (1985), is an organic and ongoing process. Just as an organism lives within an ecosystem, assessment of learning resides within larger pedagogical processes. The larger pedagogical processes and influences explored in this study were participants’ aims for higher education and general education, understandings of effective teaching, and assumptions about student learning.

The central research question for this study was: How do experienced general education faculty, within their own teaching, authentically assess student learning?

Secondary research questions used to explore the central research question included:

- What are the motivations and expectations of faculty as they assess student learning?
- How do instructors use assessment in their classrooms to improve student learning?
- How does assessment fit into the instructors’ understanding of effective pedagogy?

Researcher Positionality

Education runs deep within my family. The majority of my immediate family members work as teachers. Some of my earliest memories include visiting my father’s classroom where he taught junior high science. Graduating with a degree in education, I worked as an educator at a camp for 22 years. During these years, I rarely taught in a formal classroom. Instead, the natural environment and life together within the camp community functioned as an informal classroom. Students learned through shared
experiences, guided discovery, and personal reflection. I considered life together at camp as a living lab.

As director of the camp, I recognized the need to expand my leadership and management skills. While earning a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, I incorporated the writings of John Dewey in my leadership studies. This exposure to Dewey’s writings provided a framework for my developing philosophy of education and pedagogy. After earning my MBA, I began teaching undergraduate and graduate leadership courses as an adjunct instructor at a small university. In 2006, I began teaching full-time at this same university. Approaching my courses from a wide range of academic disciplines, I enjoy challenging my students and myself with different teaching methods and strategies. I believe an educative experience needs space for critical reflection—a truly democratic endeavor.

At my philosophical core, I am an American pragmatist—a proponent of John Dewey’s (1966/1930) belief that education is at its best a democratizing endeavor. From Dewey’s perspective, democracy has to do with agency and voice. Within his construct, society’s role is to create environments where people have the capacity and agency to share who they are and their understanding of meaning. More than a political system, democracy includes the intentional efforts of educators and leaders to honor all voices, not just those from the dominant group. My own desire is to live and work in settings committed to advancing the democratic ideal of valuing and affirming space for open dialogue, critical reflection, and equitable and just treatment of all participants.

This desire, I believe, is at the heart of what it means to be a student of the liberal arts. Despite teaching in a professional program, I continue to view myself as a student
and teacher of the liberal arts. This desire to learn and teach broadly, along with my relative newness to the university, made me a fine candidate to serve on the university’s General Education Committee. The purpose of this committee is to provide oversight of the general education curriculum. This oversight included the assessment of student learning within this university-wide curriculum.

As a relatively new faculty member, I approached the assessment responsibilities with a wary eye. Many of my experienced colleagues shared tales of past university-wide assessment efforts gone wanting or awry. However, with my developing understanding of pragmatic philosophy and my experience in the classroom, I knew classroom assessment was a critical component of every teacher’s pedagogy. The yawning gap between faculty’s value perceptions of institution-wide assessment versus their own classroom assessment practices intrigued me. Why do instructors often find institution-wide assessment so problematic? What are the differences between institution-wide assessment initiatives and the assessment practices of classroom instructors? These questions and my own education experiences, both formal and informal, prompted me to initiate this study.

### Definition of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>An ongoing process designed to monitor and improve student learning (Allen, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative Assessment</td>
<td>A type of assessment instructors use while they teach to help them to know how to change and adapt their teaching to increase student learning (Suskie, 2009; Wehlburg, 2011). Formative assessment is a part of an ongoing instructional process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>The curriculum which serves traditionally as the liberal arts core of the undergraduate academic experience, regardless of major.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Institutional Assessment: An institutional program that aggregates student learning data across an institution for the purposes of demonstrating student learning for accountability purposes and to provide data to help the institution improve student learning.

Pedagogy: The art, occupation, or practice of teaching (Pedagogy, 2011).

Students: Traditional college-aged (18-22 years old) young adults enrolled in a higher education institution.

Summative Assessment: A type of assessment instructors utilize, typically at the conclusion of a learning experience, to determine the level of student learning relative to planned instructional outcomes.

Overview of the Dissertation

Through this chapter, I situated the research question for this study within the wider context of American higher education and, specifically, within higher education accountability and assessment discourse and initiatives. Amidst this national discourse, classroom instructors continue to use a broad range of assessment approaches to improve student learning. In addition, I described the significance of this study to higher education. The purpose of the study was to understand how instructors of general education courses, seeking to improve student learning, integrate assessment into their pedagogy. The resultant central research question for this study was, “How do experienced general education faculty, within their own teaching, authentically assess student learning?” I concluded with a discussion of my own philosophical orientation, discussion of my background, and my interest in the topic of higher education assessment.

In Chapter Two, I examine foundational literature for a holistic understanding of higher education assessment. Through this broad review, I demonstrate how assessment
and accountability are woven themes throughout the history of higher education. Additionally, I explore relevant current issues in higher education, including a topical review of contemporary assessment issues. Since study participants all teach general education courses, I provide an overview of general education history, purposes, and issues. The broad scope of this review provides an appropriate context for exploration of a pedagogically sound understanding of assessment.

In Chapter Three, I examine literature which situates assessment within the scholarship of teaching and learning. Through this review, I explore historical and current issues within this growing field of scholarship. I end this chapter with a discussion of literature used in analysis of the study’s findings. Chapter Four includes a discussion of study methods. Symbolic interactionism and pragmatism provide analytical and philosophical grounding for this qualitative study’s methodology. Building on this philosophical grounding, I discuss study data collection, data analysis, study design, and ethical considerations.

In Chapters Five and Six, I report data findings and analysis. In this discussion, I also provide demographic information about the case study’s site and study participants. The analysis results in findings about how study participants authentically assess student learning within their general education courses. In Chapter Seven, I summarize the research and discuss conclusions, study limitations, and implications for theory, research, and practice.

In conclusion, examining how higher education instructors assess student learning within their classrooms is significant for higher education stakeholders. A problem exists when higher education stakeholders do not situate assessment within grounded
pedagogical practice. The purpose of the study was to understand how instructors of general education courses, seeking to improve student learning, integrate assessment into their pedagogy. To begin to meet this purpose, I review literature exploring the context for how instructors assess student learning. The following two chapters review foundational, scholarly, and analytical literature.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF FOUNDATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review foundational literature about American higher education. Within this literature review, I explore higher education history, current issues, assessment topics, stakeholder expectations, liberal education, and general education. Each of these topics contributes to a foundational and contextual understanding of assessment within higher education.

College and universities are a ubiquitous part of the American landscape and culture. Whether it is sports, academics, or the collegiate culture, Americans look to higher education institutions to meet a wide array of cultural needs. Flocking to these institutions at unprecedented levels, students seek undergraduate degrees to advance their own goals for the future. In 2009, the nation’s 5000 higher education institutions enrolled over 19 million students (Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue 2010, 2011). However, these academic endeavors come at a rising financial cost to students. The average cumulative debt for 2008 graduates of private nonprofit four-year colleges was $27,349 (Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue 2010, 2011, p. 13). Is college really worth it? Are students really learning anything? Students, skeptics, and researchers alike continue to direct these and other uncomfortable questions toward the academic community (Arum & Roska, 2011; Shavelson, 2010). Higher education institutions increasingly find themselves under scrutiny from parents, policymakers, media, students, and the public (Aloi, Gardner, & Lusher, 2003).

This scrutiny, so apparent in today’s higher education community, does not occur in a vacuum. Assessment and accountability are themes threaded throughout the history of higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Through this literature review, I explore
how the history of higher education, K-12 assessment initiatives, higher education assessment, and the goals of higher education come together to set the stage for current assessment initiatives and discourse. Concerns about student learning now extend beyond the classroom and into legislative chambers, office boardrooms, and public discourse (Aloi et al., 2003; Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001; Shavelson, 2010). Today, as possibly never quite before, assessment of student learning serves as a major challenge for the nation’s higher education institutions (Ewell, 1991).

**History of Higher Education**

**Colleges in the Colonial Era: 1636-1789**

The debate around student learning, from the earliest days of our nation, revolved around the interaction between higher education institutions and their surrounding communities and culture (Shavelson, 2010). As Aloi et al. (2003) noted, “Higher education’s purpose and its role in society have been a matter of scholarly and public debate since the founding of Harvard in 1636” (p. 238). Although dialogue about accountability and assessment may appear new, debate about student learning and accountability has its roots in the earliest days of our nation’s history (Wehlburg, 2010a).

Citizens during colonial years placed a high importance on their colleges (Thelin, 2004). Influenced by their European roots, leaders of the nine colleges organized during the colonial period modeled their institutions on educational forms long in place in Europe (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). One significant difference, however, was the shifting of control of colonial colleges from faculty to external boards (Thelin, 2004). This change provided a mechanism for continual accountability.
Colleges, even in these early days, recognized the importance of responding to their constituents. To attract additional students, college leadership bent admission standards and provided preparatory studies to prospective students (Thelin, 2004). Whether the college defined curriculum as a set of courses or as the entire collegiate experience, rationalization for the endeavor was always practical (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). However, this practical and market-based approach did not mean colleges were a part of the everyday life of the community. Colleges, serving primarily the elite, increasingly distanced themselves from the daily life of the American family (Thelin, 2004).

The curricular intent at these institutions was not to discover new knowledge, but to pass on known knowledge (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). As a result, the curriculum did not rely on a vast mix of courses. As Cohen and Kisker (2010) explained,

> Several forces acted to keep the colonial curriculum restricted; there were few students, as most young people entered society through learning outside the colleges: study was not for the purpose of advancing knowledge but for preserving what was already known, few occupations demanded specific preparation; and the colleges were dominated by religious organizations with a limited view of the scope of knowledge. (p. 33)

Historical records show students and faculty studied topics outside of published plans of study (Thelin, 2004). For example, Thomas Jefferson wrote in his diary about lessons, such as medicine and law, which were not an official part of the curriculum. Yet, even in these early years, colleges augmented academics with other education-related activities (Cremin, 1970). The influence of ceremony, informal discussion, and social interaction grew in importance on campuses across the colonies.

The changing role of colleges during colonial times is also evidence of the influence of outside forces. Cohen and Kisker (2010) suggested a review of college
curriculums during this period showed a continuing struggle to break away from influence of the church. For instance, students first studied logic to understand better the Christian Scriptures. Soon, this study of logic evolved into a study of more humanly affairs and then became its own discipline. Tension between the church and the secular state over governance and curriculum grew throughout the late 17th and early 18th century (Cremin, 1970).

The collegiate experience, in all its many forms, acculturated students, passed on the classics, and prepared people for service as leaders within church and society (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Along with shaping and refining wealthy male elites of the period, colleges made a significant impact on future leaders of the American Revolution (Thelin, 2004). As for young men like John Adams, the value of higher education derived from belief that a course of learning endowed graduates with a superior cultural status (Handlin, Handlin, Joint Author, & Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1970). As colonial colleges continued to demonstrate their value to the larger community, they prepared learned men, through their liberal arts curriculum, to take their places in society in a wide array of prestigious vocations (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

**Colleges in the New Nation: 1790-1869**

As the nation took root, colleges became a source of community pride (Thelin, 2004). Communities across the country sought to have a college of their own. With the absence of regulations providing oversight over the colleges, any group that could raise enough funds, write a declaration of principle, hire a few instructors, and obtain a business license could open a college (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Contributing to this lack of oversight, the federal government, unlike many European countries, resisted efforts to
develop a national university or comprehensive guidelines for the formation of colleges. Additionally, the Supreme Court limited states’ control over private colleges. These decisions reduced barriers for individuals and groups to open colleges (Trow, 1988). As a result, the number of colleges, often located in small communities, increased during this period.

Nevertheless, curricular reform straddled the tension between preserving old and incorporating new ways of thinking (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Curricular reform centered around whether curriculum should focus on historic understandings of the liberal arts or whether it should expand to meet needs of a growing nation. The Yale Report of 1828, emphasizing the importance of mental discipline, argued for a return to a historic curriculum within a reshaped structure to address society’s entrepreneurial needs (Lane, 2007). This report served as a rational model, as opposed to one centered on religious faith, for many colleges seeking to reform their curriculums along traditional lines (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Other institutions sought to expand their curriculums to address more modern concerns. Cohen and Kisker (2010) noted, “The inauguration of Josiah Quincy as president of Harvard in 1829 was the occasion for an address suggesting that a curriculum modeled on the past was not sufficient for a modern institution” (p. 86). Despite these lofty words from its new president, Harvard, after much debate, remained grounded in the traditional liberal arts. Demonstrating curricular change often comes in small increments, Harvard did add a separate program in the sciences. Interestingly, classical curriculum discovered a patron in religion. Due to the rise of a national religious awakening, the classical curriculum, with its emphasis on values and discipline,
continued to survive. Students, on the other hand, increasingly looked past curricular debates and reveled in their collegiate lifestyle (Thelin, 2004). Thelin (2004) reported, “For many undergraduates, compliance with the formal curriculum was merely the price of admission into ‘college life’” (p. 64).

Because of new cultural and socioeconomic demands growing out of the emerging nation, colleges responded with curriculum containing more vocational and professional coursework (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Increasingly, a college education became a requirement in a number of different professions. Throughout this period of increasing enrollment, fewer graduates entered into public service and more entered into professional careers. However, most academies, despite their statements to the contrary, stayed rooted in the classics (Church & Sedlak, 2007). The main reason for staying with the traditional approach was teaching the practical was too capital intensive for most institutions.

Over the course of this period, the nation formed over 500 different colleges. Unlike during the colonial time period, community leaders built these institutions in small towns far from major cities (Church & Sedlak, 2007). At the close of this era between 210 and 250 colleges of the over 500 formed were still in operation (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Reasons for this growth included growing religious diversity within the country, distances between the various communities, and desire for each community to have their own college. Interestingly, this growth in colleges occurred prior to community investment in necessary preparatory schools (Thelin, 2004). Contributing to social change, growth of higher education promoted development of a middle class (Church & Sedlak, 2007). Another change during this period was the growing influence
of the German university on American higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These influences included scholarship as a profession, states’ right to instigate higher education reform, and professors as civil servants.

**Colleges in the Era of Industrialization: 1870-1944**

After the Civil War, the nation’s colleges moved toward forming universities (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Before this was possible, a number of changes begun in the last era required resolution. These issues included secularization, growing collaboration with professional groups, service to the community, rising up of the sciences, and a pedagogical reorientation toward an understanding of knowledge as ever growing and constructed. Following John Hopkins University in 1876, university leaders increasingly incorporated professional schools into their structure (Thelin, 2004). With graduate school came recognition higher education studies should extend past the traditional four years (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Yet, with institutional survival always an issue, higher education leaders struggled to maintain a coherent curricular philosophy.

Instead of producing freethinking individuals, universities replicated existing values amongst its students (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). “The ostensible mission of the universities—the quest for knowledge and academic excellence—was always subordinate to the institutions’ adherence to popular values” (p. 117). Bias and discrimination, supported through university policies, is evidence popular values found reinforcement through the university. On a more positive note, the expansion of courses of study into business, dentistry, journalism, education, sociology, and many other profession-related offerings provides proof of higher education’s connections to their surrounding
communities. Many institutions continued to offer theology and the classics (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2004).

Due to expanding industry, the nation built a number of large research universities (Thelin, 2004). Philanthropists, enriched through industry, gave heartily to their institutions of choice. By 1900, Gruber (2007) explained,

New university centers had been built across the country – Cornell in 1869, Johns Hopkins in 1876, Clark in 1889, Chicago in 1890, and Stanford in 1891; established institutions like California, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had been turned into modern universities; and the character of the undergraduate college had been transformed. (p. 204)

Toward the later end of this period, universities played an important role in the nation’s war efforts (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). This connection between research, government, and universities would grow in coming decades.

On the curricular front, higher education institutions continued to expand their offerings. With Harvard making the move in the 1870s, curricular reform included the offering of a number of elective studies. Yale now included coursework in the sciences, literature, and other more modern studies (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). With the growing influence of business and the vocations, higher education programs expanded into a wide array of offerings. Critics, however, charged students who graduated with these degrees were not able to compete with students from classically oriented institutions. For example, Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago argued for a return to a classical education while rejecting education for the purpose of job preparation and vocationalism. The biggest curricular disappointment was the inability of institutions to reconcile tensions between the liberal arts and the need for professional education (Thelin, 2004). Nevertheless, the increase in preparing students for professions and
professionalization of a growing number of occupational groups continued through this period (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

**The Era of Mass Education: 1945-1970**

Thelin (2004) considered the era from 1945-1970 the “Golden Age” of American higher education. “Following World War II, American higher education enjoyed a quarter-century of support marked by the ‘three P’s’ of prosperity, prestige, and popularity” (p. 260). The growth in the student population was astounding. In the fall of 1949, the student population was nearly 2.7 million (Trow, 1988). By 1970, in just 20 years, the student population increased to 7.9 million. The public university sector experienced the greatest percentage of growth during this expansion.

Cooperation between higher education and government fueled this growth (Thelin, 2004). Coming out of World War II, the American economy boomed and need for new workers expanded (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). To fill this need, training of professionals and professionalization of more occupational groups accelerated. During the era from 1945-1975 professionalization of higher education came into its own.

The GI Bill, officially known as the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, provided funds for millions of servicemen to attend college (Thelin, 2004). Wildly exceeding expectations, the GI Bill, between 1943 and 1946, helped many colleges double their enrollments. Two lasting effects of the program, directly linked to government’s role in funding education, were establishment of accrediting agencies and adoption of standardized tests. Accreditation agencies grew from the need for higher education institutions to demonstrate their credibility to the government. The federal government required accreditation before institutions could receive tuition payments from students
through the GI Bill. Standardized tests, a harbinger of things to come, resulted from the 
need to process quickly an increasingly large number of college applicants.

Expansion of the public university continued throughout this period. In the 
eastern part of the country, states, building campuses of their own, hurried to catch up 
with the fast growing West (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Many western states expanded their 
public university systems through addition of branch campuses. Both private and state 
universities, funded through governmental research, grew large and prestigious.
Conversely, liberal arts colleges struggled to maintain their student populations. Federal 
and state governments expanded their role in higher education through public funding 
and student financial aid (Trow, 1988). Instead of broad institutional backing, this 
funding primarily supported individual researchers and students.

With the explosion in attendance at the nation’s colleges, curricular innovation 
moved toward job training, remediation, and expansion of academic specialties (Cohen & 
Kisker, 2010). Public funds continued to support higher education to a greater and 
greater degree. Increasingly, the question of whether college was worth the cost arose in 
public discourse. Competition for the education dollar continued to increase. Cohen and 
Kisker (2010) stated, “Any consideration of the proportion of a state’s resources that 
should be devoted to higher education brings an implicit comparison of the social 
benefits that might be derived if those funds were allocated to other agencies” (p. 296). 
Yet, largely, students moved through the system collecting their credits while looking 
forward to graduation. It was not uncommon for students to transfer to different 
institutions, drop out for a semester or two, and return to complete their degree at a 
different institution.
Contemporary Challenges: 1970-present

While the nation’s universities and colleges continued to expand, a quiet crisis was in the works. Increasingly, confidence in higher education declined from both inside and outside of the industry (Thelin, 2004). While colleges and universities continued to maintain their independence from external oversight, a call for greater accountability began to rise. With little direct evidence in hand, higher education institutions often cited indirect educational outcomes, such as graduation rates and employment statistics, to demonstrate their value to society (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These indirect measurements did not mollify the growing chorus of higher education critics. Stakeholders raised concerns about increasing expenses, tuition, student performance, and overexpansion. Cohen and Kisker (2010) maintained, “Since federal and state tuition subsidies and state support of publicly funded institutions now approximate half of all operating revenues, governmental demands for accountability have grown even more persistent” (p. 521).

During this period, demographics of the student population began to shift. In response to falling enrollment during the mid-1970s, colleges increased their marketing efforts to students and parents (Thelin, 2004). Higher education institutions also began to look beyond the traditional college-aged demographic and began marketing to older students. Intent on expanding their service to older adults, many colleges instituted degree completion and enrichment programs.

Curricular debates, despite the best efforts of some academicians, ended up following students’ tuition dollars (Thelin, 2004). While some leaders wished to return higher education to its classical roots, institutions increasingly offered students what they wanted – degree programs to prepare them with skills to advance themselves within
society (Labaree, 1997). Business, computer science, engineering, and other professional disciplines grew in popularity. To meet growing vocational demands of the student marketplace, education institutions escalated the number and variety of offered degrees (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The clear trend was toward job promising degrees. Noting this trend in the 2005-2006 statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics, Cohen and Kisker noted, “Degrees in business accounted for 21 percent of bachelor’s awards and business and education together comprised 54 percent of all master’s” (p. 498).

The rise of online education also came about during this period (Bok, 2006; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Gumport & Chun, 2005). This new delivery method provided higher education institutions with opportunities to expand their services to students who previously were unable to attend on-campus courses. Contrary to early hopes of higher education leaders, online learning is not less expensive than face-to-face instruction (Keller, 2008). “Perhaps the most fatuous and delusional expectation of information technology enthusiasts is that substituting IT for traditional teaching arrangements will enable colleges and universities to reduce their costs appreciably. Precisely the opposite has occurred” (p. 76). Nevertheless, non-profit, public, and for-profit institutions moved, in varying degrees, to offer online courses (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

The for-profit higher educational institutions, in their many forms, became the newest major player in the industry (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Growth of the University of Phoenix, founded in 1976 (University of Phoenix, 2011), offers testimony to the growth of the for-profit sector. In 2008, the online campus of the University of Phoenix announced a full-time equivalent enrollment of 301,323 students (Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issues 2010, 2011). Though for-profit institutions date back to the
earliest days in higher education, this sector exploded in growth over the last three decades (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Between 1998 and 2008, undergraduate enrollment at for-profit institutions grew 329% (Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issues 2010, 2011). Serving as the key to this recent growth, the 1972 Higher Education Act granted students at for-profit institutions full access to federal financial aid (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). While the majority of students still attend nonprofit institutions, 2.5 million of the 9.3 million attending a four-year institution attend a for-profit institution.

**Current Issues in Higher Education**

The literature directed significant attention on current issues and challenges in higher education (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bok, 2006; Chun, 2002; Duderstadt, 2000; Holyer, 2002; Labaree, 1997). Due to a number of economic factors and high expectations placed on higher education, stakeholders increasingly look with concern at the direction of higher education (Duderstadt, 2000). Many critics now see the contemporary university as a self-centered institution concerned only with its economic future. These same critics believe higher education is gouging parents with high tuition and inappropriately charging the government for research costs. “There has been a clear trend in recent decades to shift the costs of public higher education from general tax revenues to the tuition charged to students and their parents” (p. 29).

**Accreditation**

Accreditation grew out of the federal government’s need to determine the viability of higher education institutions seeking to accept students paying tuition with funds from the GI Bill (Thelin, 2004). Evolving over the years, accreditation is now a complex and collaborative process involving state and federal governments, accrediting
agencies, and higher education institutions (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Six regional accrediting associations, eight national associations, and approximately 75 specialized accrediting agencies offer oversight over the nation’s higher education institutions. As chronicled by Lubinescu, Ratcliff, and Gaffney (2001), accreditation provides the following purposes:

- Fostering excellence through the development of criteria and guidelines for assessing effectiveness
- Encouraging improvement through ongoing self-study and planning
- Ensuring external constituents that a program has clearly defined goals and appropriate objectives, maintains faculty and facilities to attain them
- Demonstrates it is accomplishing them, and has the prospect for continuing to do so
- Provides advice and counsel to new and established programs in the accrediting process
- Ensures that programs receive sufficient support and are free from external influence that may impede their effectiveness and their freedom of inquiry (p. 6)

Despite higher education’s desire for autonomy, colleges and universities do sacrifice their autonomy, in many cases, to meet accreditation expectations (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Money is at the core of their willingness to give up some of this autonomy.

If colleges do not receive accreditation they run the risk federal and state governments will deny access to financial aid funds for their students (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Lubinescu et al. (2001) contended accrediting agencies institutionalize accountability through its linkages to governmental agencies. Since financial aid and subsidies now provide roughly half of the operating funding of public universities, lawmakers now wield more influence over higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Increasingly, accrediting agency standards use mandatory language instead of the language of recommendations. These agencies will continue to grow in importance as stakeholders increase their calls for transparent measurement of student outcomes.
Credentialing and the Commodification of Higher Education

Capitalism, the dominant economic system throughout the nation’s history, continues to leave its imprint on American higher education (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Dorn, 2007; Labaree, 1997). Labaree (1997) connected the continued rise of the view of education as a commodity to the linkage between higher education and professional certification. This consumerist approach to education plays a significant role in devaluing higher education. “The consumer perspective on schools asks the question, ‘What can school do for me, regardless of what it does for others?’ The benefits of education are understood to be selective and differential rather than collective and equal” (Labaree 1997, p. 27).

From the start, American colleges linked their instruction with the granting of degrees and certification (Thelin, 2004). While this may seem obvious now, the English system, the model for American colonial institutions, provided instruction through colleges and granted degrees through testing at the university level. Since early American colleges only had one “college”, instruction and certification occurred within the same institution. This development kept colleges linked and accountable to communities and businesses with needs for qualified graduates. While offering benefits to society, certification, through granting of degrees and certificates, creates unanticipated and harmful implications for higher education (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Labaree, 1997). Students, rather than seeking understanding and knowledge, seek credentials with little regard for learning (Labaree, 1997). Education institutions, as a result, emphasize compliance over content. To many students and families, the true value
of higher education institutions is the granting of degrees – not necessarily the learning occurring through this process (Duderstadt, 2000).

Instead of viewing education as a process for exploring academic meaning and shaping moral character, market-based approaches encouraged students to look only for practical applicability in the job market (Arum & Roksa, 2011). By defining education as a commodity, students look for the easiest way to get the greatest possible individual benefit (Labaree, 1997). As a direct result, higher education leaders then work to reframe their academic programs to deliver individual benefits – rather than programs to advance the social good.

The market-based approach results in leaders adopting a managerialism approach to fulfilling their organizations’ missions and mandates (Becher & Trowler, 1989). Higher education institutions trend toward managerialism as they view students as customers at play within the higher education marketplace. Adoption of top-down leadership and actions is additional evidence of this mentality. Referencing the growing trend of managerialism in higher education, Becher and Trowler (1989) posited, “In education a conceptualization of knowledge and learning is adopted which is atomistic, mechanistic and explicit” (p. 10). Noting similar trends, Dorn (2007) posited higher education leaders were adopting practices similar to those promoted by Frederick Taylor in the early 20th century. His time-and-motion studies provided data to support regimenting worker tasks and movements to increase productivity.

This emphasis on efficiency had supporters within education. Education leaders sought to routinize and standardize, in the name of increased productivity, educational instruction and administration practices (Callahan, 1962). However, Taylor and his
adherents exaggerated their claims of increased efficiency (Dorn, 2007). These market-based approaches do not result in improved learning in the classroom (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Instead, market-based incentives shape attitudes of parents and students in ways that do not promote student learning (Labaree, 1997). If parents and students knew the fallacies inherent within market-based approaches, they would demand access to outcomes data (Arum & Roska, 2011). Stakeholders could then use this data to make informed and, presumably, better educational decisions.

**Future Needs in Higher Education**

Research also offered advice and encouragement concerning the future of higher education. Authors of these articles and books tended to assume higher education is a singular entity (Bok, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000). The resultant analysis often overlooked the multiple stakeholders involved in organizational decision-making. In reality, shared governance models in educational organizations often result in non-linear decision-making between loosely connected organizational entities (Weick, 1976).

Recognizing students now have instant access to a wide array of information, higher education needs to shift its view of knowledge and instruction (Duderstadt, 2000). Duderstadt, a former university president, believed intellectual capital was replacing financial and physical capital as the cornerstone for the future success of our society. Instead of attempting to master a discipline, he called for students and universities to be creative in confronting aging paradigms. Sounding a postmodern chord, Duderstadt (2000) added,

> We have ceased to accept that there is any coherent or unique form of wisdom that serves as the basis for new knowledge. We have simply seen too many instances in which a new concept has radically changed our traditional views of a field. (p. 32)
He later called on higher education to shake off its resistance to change and increase its flexibility to serve a changing society. Yet, before they can change, educational organizations need to know why they are doing what they are doing (Bok, 2006).

Colleges and universities benefit from a change in organizational culture focusing less on credentialing and more on critical reflection on curricular offerings and student learning (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Echoing this concern, Bok (2006) called for foundations and funding agencies to support promising efforts to assess student learning. To advance assessment initiatives, governmental agencies may consider funding of exemplary assessment models.

As higher education leaders look into the future, part of their challenge is to discern where they should place their leadership and organizational energies. While public opinion polls may not be reliable in identifying key issues for the future, Cohen and Kisker (2010) suggested these surveys may do better to direct future action than the work of paid lobbyists. Policymakers pay attention to what issues are popular with voters. A survey of American attitudes about higher education found the public distrusted priorities of university presidents, affirmative action, and tenure policies (Selingo, 2003).

Respondents also urged universities to focus less on economic-development and research missions, which their presidents often emphasize, and more on the basics: general education, adult education, leadership and responsibility, and teacher training. According to the poll, the most important role for a college is preparing undergraduates for a career. (Selingo, 2003, p. A10)

Nevertheless, respondents placed high confidence in both private and public higher education institutions. Confidence in private colleges was second only to trust in the military. Interestingly, priorities of college and university presidents did not track with
the public’s priorities (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). A survey of presidents found the three main priorities for the future were cost, quality, and access. The presidents believed addressing these three issues would result in positive change.

The future also offers more competition for students as community colleges and for-profit institutions increase their marketing efforts (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Students, seeking immediate employment after graduation, will continue to enroll in certificate and professional programs. However, Cohen and Kisker asserted the public, out of tradition, would continue to look to traditional higher education institutions. This reliance on tradition will wear thin if these institutions do not provide relevant and practical programs.

The importance of quality leadership, during these times of transition, continues to be a priority. Speaking as a former university president, Bok (2006) called on academic leadership not to underestimate the influence they have to bring about change.

Although professors must agree to any curricular reform, presidents and deans have more leverage than they may think by virtue of their power to speak out and command attention, their role raising money and allocating resources, and their ability to marshal information that will persuade faculty members to take their proposals seriously. (p. 335)

Becher and Trowler (1989), using a dramaturgy perspective based on Goffman (1959), stressed for an educational leader to be successful they must know how to utilize front stage and backstage discourse. Successful leaders know which type of discourse to use in each situation they face. Faculty members, on the other hand, do not have the platform for these same levels of discourse. What are they to do?

Faculty members are often unwilling to debate and discuss difficult issues (Becher & Trowler, 1989). This contrasts with faculty members’ oft-stated valuing of
openness and free discourse. “A career-minded academic must become familiar with the more Machiavellian rules of conduct that exist de facto within any academic community” (p. 50). Faculty members utilize emotional intelligence as they navigate conflicting priorities and rules. However, for change to occur in higher education institutions, strong leadership must come from presidents and other administrators (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

**Accountability and K-12 Education**

Increased calls by stakeholders and the general public for accountability at higher education institutions do not occur in a vacuum (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Shavelson, 2010). Much of the discourse today surrounding accountability flows from the K-12 education arena (Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). Despite the appearance K-12 and post-secondary education sectors are separate, these sectors inform and learn from each other. Calls for increased accountability and resultant policy directions are evidence of connections between the two sectors. Heeding calls for accountability, higher education institutions adopted policies and practices aimed at collecting and providing evidence of student learning (Dorn, 2007). Leaders within higher education can learn from the experiences of K-12 educators.

Today, K-12 students in the United States take more standardized tests than any time in our history (Dorn, 2007). Results of these tests do matter in the lives of students, educators, and their schools. Printed in newspapers and trumpeted in other media, test scores help determine property value of homes within school districts. In some states, test scores determine the funding each school receives. Schools with higher scores received greater funding and lower scoring schools received less funding. In 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) made certain accountability sanctions uniform
across the country (Ravitch, 2010). If schools do not meet certain scoring thresholds, a specific sequence of consequences begins for each of the years the schools do not meet federal standards (Dorn, 2007). In response, school districts work hard to meet standards through an array of administrative changes and mandates. However, Ravitch (2010), a former proponent of high-stakes testing and high level staff member of the Department of Education, declared,

Our schools will not improve if we continually reorganize their structure and management without regard for their essential purpose. Our educational problems are a function of our lack of educational vision, not a management problem that requires the enlistment of an army of business consultants. (p. 225)

The roots of accountability in the K-12 system go back to the 1950s and the reduction of prestige and authority granted K-12 administrators (Dorn, 2007). Prior to this time, administrators were successful in resisting external influence on their schools. Increasingly, policymakers viewed education as an investment. In the 1970s, legislators rallied around education as a human capital argument. While standardized testing and graduation tests became common, they targeted individual assessment and not institutional evaluation. The growing argument was that since states are investing in its children’s education they should watch over their investment.

Dorn (2007) recognized the call to accountability was not solely a human-capital argument. He posited a minority of testing proponents based their stance on concern for a broad-based quality education for all. The school accountability movement, according to Dorn, was the result of four historical developments. The first development was the rise of respect for professional education administrators. The next development was societal acceptance of testing by professional psychologists. School administrators transferred this acceptance into their own testing practices. As a result of the third
development, administrators took advantage of cultural trust in tests to provide a neutral indicator of school performance. Finally, policymakers utilized testing to fill the political need for an objective method of determining facts.

In the 1990s, accountability was a frequent issue in national educational discourse (Ravitch, 2010). Governors, business leaders, and presidential administrations all agreed education needed measurable results. Discourse centered on the need to make sure their investment in education was producing measurable results. Politicians needed to improve schools to attract new industries to their localities. Similarly, business leaders called for better schools to help them compete in the globalized economy.

The 2002 NCLB act, based on programs in place in Florida and Texas, empowered the federal government to require all states to implement an accountability system (Dorn, 2007). As opposed to past accountability efforts, the high stakes environment affected schools and not individual students. The act required states to judge each school’s performance based on annual testing of students in grades 3-8. Ravitch (2010) said, “In this new era (NCLB) school reform was characterized as accountability, high-stakes testing, data-driven decision making, choice, charter schools, privatization, deregulation, merit pay, and competition among schools. Whatever could not be measured did not count” (p. 21).

NCLB’s accountability plan expected all schools to make adequate yearly progress for every subgroup (Ravitch, 2010). The stated goal is 100% proficiency in all areas by 2013-14. Additionally, the act required all states to participate in the federal National Assessment of Educational Progress. This assessment program tests reading and mathematics skills of students in grades four and eight every other year. The purpose
of this testing is to audit the states progress in meeting its goals. Test scores do not have consequences for individual students.

NCLB accountability measures did not make for better schools or improved student learning (Ravitch, 2010). The accountability measures did not account for the professional judgment of educators. This professional judgment includes, along with testing, teacher evaluations of student work, attendance, grades, and graduation rates. Based on her analysis and experience with NCLB, Ravitch believed an accountability system based on testing alone was too narrow and imprecise. “Missing from NCLB was any reference to what students should learn; this was left to each state to determine” (p. 15).

Since testing is often a component of higher education assessment programs, it is helpful to look more closely at the role of testing within the K-12 sector (Dorn, 2007). Due to the debated nature of what facts are important in our society and the public’s unwillingness to rely on the expertise of educators, high-stakes testing does not provide the supposed objective measurement of student learning demanded by stakeholders. “The use and nature of statistics and expertise is shaped by the contested nature of facts and how we determine what facts are” (Dorn, 2007, p. 55). The public and most policymakers do not recognize, despite their reliance on numbers, standardized test are not precise instruments (Ravitch, 2010). Any testing cut score or threshold is arbitrary – with no inherent meaning (Dorn, 2007).

Not surprisingly, due to the high-stakes nature of the NCLB required tests, school officials worked to improve their test scores by gaming the system (Dorn, 2007). Gaming exists, for example, when schools target remedial efforts on only a segment of
their student population they know will count more in test results. A similar strategy to raise test scores is to refer poor performing students to special education testing. This strategy ensures referred student’ scores will not count in referring teachers’ or school’s accountability statistics (Dorn, 2007). With so much riding on testing outcomes, it is not surprising teachers and schools work to raise their scores through testing tricks and shortcuts (Ravitch, 2010). These gaming efforts do not improve student learning.

Nichols and Berliner (2007) observed this tendency in other societal contexts and called it Campbell’s law. This social science law, based on the work of sociologist Donald Campbell, maintained “The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor” (p. 27). Nichols and Berliner went on to use Campbell’s law to demonstrate the fallacy of the benefits of high-stakes testing and the damage it does to educational systems.

Dorn (2007) recognized within K-12 education there was value in accountability. He was not a proponent of doing away with accountability efforts. Quite to the contrary, educators should use accountability as a tool to equalize education. However, there are, Dorn contended, other ways to hold schools and communities accountable for their children’s education. Despite their prevalence, high stakes testing damages both students and schools (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

Assessment in Higher Education

Definitions and Historical Overview

Definitions of assessment, within the higher education context, center on improvement of student learning (Allen, 2006; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Huba &Freed,
Allen (2006) offered the most basic of definitions, “Assessment is an ongoing process designed to monitor and improve student learning” (p. 1). Palomba and Banta (1999) defined assessment as a “systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development” (p. 4). Huba and Freed (2000) added to this definition a call for wide gathering of student data.

Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge as a result of their education experience; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improved subsequent learning. (p. 8)

Within a discussion of accreditation expectations, Wehlburg (2010b) claimed, “That the term assessment has been understood as a method of identifying student learning goals and outcomes, gathering data to demonstrate learning, and then using the result to make improvements so that students’ learning increases” (p. 89). Importantly, none of these definitions address accountability issues.

Shavelson (2010), on the other hand, intentionally separated assessment and accountability. He defined assessment as use of direct measures of achievement and ability and use of more traditional indirect measures (graduation rates, student surveys of engagement, etc.).

By accountability I mean the collection, provision, and interpretation of information on higher education quality sought by educators and policymakers who have the responsibility for assuring the public and “clients” – students, parents, businesses, and government – that invest in education, training, or research. (p. x)

He envisioned colleges and universities becoming learning organizations through evidence collection, experimentation, action, and reflection. Ewell and AAC&U (2004),
recognizing the accountability demands placed on the assessment process, argued assessment programs must have clear goals, advocates, and an institution with an organizational culture with a long view. In general, the literature does not follow Shavelson's (2010) lead in separating assessment and accountability initiatives into two different categories (Allen, 2006; Ewell & AAC&U, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Huba & Freed, 2000). Lubinescu et al. (2001) noted assessment of learning was important for the internal need to improve student learning and for the external need to respond to concerns about the value and quality of a student’s education.

Assessment and accountability themes run throughout the history of higher education (Shavelson, 2010). Historically, calls for accountability came from both external and internal audiences (Lubinescu et al., 2001). A review of over 100 years of higher education history revealed an ongoing effort to assess student learning. Shavelson (2010) explained,

Four periods of assessment can be distinguished: 1) origins of standardized testing in higher education (1900-33), 2) assessment of learning for general and graduate education (1933-47), 3) the rise of the test providers (1948-78), and 4) era of external accountability (1979- present). (p. 21)

During the first period (1900-33), assessment originated in the military. Following the lead of the military’s usage of standardized mental testing during World War I, universities found acceptance in using standardized testing on campus to assess student capabilities. Using recognized testing procedures, campuses developed tests to measure arithmetic, spelling, reading, and writing.

During the second period (1933-47), general education and graduate programs began to surface (Shavelson, 2010). With these new programs came the need for assessment. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) grew out of this period.
Universities increasingly utilized testing data to expedite the application process.

Shavelson pointed to the rise of national test providers, starting around 1950, as a key development during the third period of assessment (1948-78). Previously, faculty relied on extensive multiple-choice tests to assess the learning of students in a number of content areas. However, faculty felt these tests were not truly measuring students’ abilities to think critically, effectively communicate, and solve problems. What resulted was ACT’s rise as a provider of open-ended assessments. Shavelson (2010) was critical of much of this assessment because it measured student skills and achievement – not necessarily learning. Using a behaviorist view of learning, Shavelson stated a need for long-term change in behavior for learning to occur. The fourth assessment period (1979-present) brought external pressure for accountability to the assessment movement.

Lubinescu et al. (2001) found a close linkage between the rise of accreditation and assessment. “Federal and state governments are interested in both assessment and regional accreditation because they have a vested interest in knowing how funding is spent” (p. 14). With adoption of the GI Bill, policymakers wanted to know if government was getting its money’s worth (Shavelson, 2010). Through the Veteran’s Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952, the government looked to accreditation agencies to answer that question. Accreditation agencies then took responsibility for requiring higher education institutions to assess student learning. It was not until the late 1960s that the federal government formally linked itself to the accreditation process. Every five years the government, through the Department of Education, reviews the work of accreditation agencies.
By the beginning of the 1980s, political pressure increased for greater accountability of colleges and universities for student learning (Shavelson, 2010). For instance, during the early 1980s, few states required standardized testing. Now, with ever-increasing calls for accountability, states provide incentives for colleges to assess student learning. Rather than relying on an accreditation agency’s listing of a school as meeting accreditation standards, stakeholders now demand more transparent evidence of student learning. The two parallel tracks of assessment and accreditation, according to Lubinescu et al. (2001), work together to respond to stakeholder needs.

Other interpretations of root causes of the assessment and accountability movements look to larger cultural forces at work during these periods. Dorn (2007), for example, looked to the rise of Taylorism over the past century to explain the rise of positivism and calls for efficiency. Fredrick Taylor, a business manager, is famous for his time-and-motion studies. These studies resulted in advocacy for training workers on how to reduce wasted motion to increase worker productivity. Other disciplines and organizations adopted Taylor’s positivistic and mechanistic approach to improvement. Callahan (1962) asserted educators adopted these approaches to the detriment of schools and children. Dorn (2007) suggested today’s accountability initiatives have some of their roots in Taylorism.

Becher and Trowler (1989) looked to other socioeconomic influences to explain today’s assessment climate. They claimed the adoption of managerialism by universities and colleges creates a climate of distrust and a lack of respect for the expertise of instructors. As a result, faculty members find themselves increasingly overextended and
underfunded. This de-professionalization results in a growing distrust of faculty and an increased demand for oversight and accountability.

**Current Rationale for Assessment**

As previously discussed, there is a rising call for accountability and assessment within national discourse. Ewell and AAC&U (2004) looked at this rising discourse and found three themes at play. First, they saw insistence on accountability will drive the assessment conversation well into the future. Essentially, they encouraged educators to recognize this reality and move forward to achieve the best possible assessment outcomes. Second, they believed assessment, for fiduciary reasons, would intertwine itself within institutional cultures. Third, they warned as the federal government increased its involvement in higher education assessment it would make the same missteps apparent in the K-12 arena.

Academic leaders also look to assessment to meet different educational concerns (Bok, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000; Shavelson, 2010). Although Bok (2006) saw little systematic assessment attempts by higher education to determine which students are underperforming, Duderstadt (2000) declared, “Higher education today faces greater pressure than ever to establish its relevance to its various constituencies in our society” (p. 63). While at first these two former university presidents may appear to contradict each other, Bok’s (2006) concern centered more on the need for universities to intervene on behalf of individual underperforming students. Duderstadt (2000), on the other hand, analyzed and reported on institutional effectiveness. These two comments illustrate the tensions and, at times, cross-purposes of assessment and accountability.
While assessing student learning is an integral aspect of higher education, instructors often view assessment with derision (Wehlburg, 2011). When institutions use assessment for accountability purposes, faculty members recognize there is an institutional shift from improving teaching and learning to meeting external expectations (Wehlburg, 2010b). Accreditors and other outside organizations or groups are the audience for assessing for accountability. With so much riding on these assessments, there is a tendency for an institution to disregard what they can learn and change within their own institution (Schilling, 2006). Often institutional assessment efforts become an end to themselves. Is it possible for the two assessment purposes, student learning and accountability, to exist together (Banta, 2007)? “Or will an accountability tidal wave roll across the fields, crushing the fragile green sprouts of assessment for improvement that have begun to appear?” (p. 9). Wehlburg (2010b) advocated for a transformative assessment, situated in an academic culture valuing results, to provide meaningful data for improvement and substantive change. “Although both accountability and enhancement of student learning are important effects of assessment, it is crucial to come to an agreement about the core purpose of assessing learning” (p. 47).

**Student Performance**

Concerns about student performance fuel the accountability debate. Bok (2006) rejected critics who argued the quality of higher education was in decline. He argued people with this misplaced understanding founded their beliefs on a myth of some prior golden age of American higher education. However, Arum and Roksa's (2011) findings ran counter to Bok's (2006) rather defensive statements. During the first two years of college, almost half of studied students demonstrated no appreciable gain in their ability
to think critically or to write (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Business leaders claimed college graduates were not ready to compete in the global economy (Aloi et al., 2003).

Arum and Roksa (2011) also found students report an average of only 12 hours per week of study. Thirty-seven percent of students recounted spending less than five hours per week in study. Yet, researchers discovered these disappointing amounts of study appeared to have little impact on grades. Arum and Roksa (2011) maintained students “have developed and acquired the art of college management in which success is achieved primarily not through hard work but through controlling college by shaping schedules, taming professors, and limiting workload” (p. 4).

Arum and Roksa (2011) placed some of the blame for this underwhelming effort on lax expectations of professors.

That 50 percent of students in our sample reported that they had not taken a single course during the prior semester that required more than 20 pages of writing and one third had not taken one that required even 40 pages of reading per week. (p. 71)

They discovered faculty members with demanding reading and writing requirements in their courses had students with improved critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills.

However, current cultural norms support the prevalent student view of academics as only a part-time activity (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Arum and Roksa (2011) called for higher education leaders to compel students to demonstrate significant academic growth. Bok (2006) also reported higher education leaders’ frequent error of overestimating the importance students place on their studies. In fact, studies of undergraduates show they consider extracurricular activities to be just as important in their overall college experience as coursework. Arum and Roksa (2011) called for higher education to stop
living off its past reputation and work diligently to ensure undergraduate students participated in growth-focused educational activities.

**Role of Federal and State Policymakers**

Influence of federal and state governments continues to grow in shaping higher education policy and practices. In the 1980s, policymakers viewed higher education as a public utility for individual advancement (Aloi et al., 2003). Legislators now tend to view education as a strategic investment in the nation’s efforts to remain competitive in a global economy. Policymakers view accountability as a means of guarding their investment. With their high investment in individual student loans and research grants, government now has authority and influence to bring about changes in higher education (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Arum and Roksa (2011) suggested the federal government link funding to school adoption of assessment of student learning initiatives.

The federal government took a step toward an increased level of involvement in higher education with publication of findings of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (Spellings, United States Department of Education. Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education., 2006). This commission, sponsored by the federal Department of Education and commonly called the Spellings Commission, reviewed the status of higher education across the nation (Shavelson, 2010). The report (Spellings et al., 2006), entitled *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, made a number of accountability recommendations. Casting aside past reputation as a guide to quality, the report declared,

> We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education. Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved if
higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability measures. (p. 20)

The commission also called for accreditation agencies to rely less on inputs and focus their accreditation standards on measurable performance outcomes. Somewhat Orwellian in nature, the commission called for a national information system that would collect and analyze student-level data for purposes of accountability, policy development, and consumer choice (Spellings et al, 2006).

The call for creation of a “culture of evidence” resounds in halls of state governments as well as in the United States Capitol (Shavelson, 2010). State legislatures demand evidence of outcomes before opening their coffers (Aloi et al., 2003). Aloi et al. (2003) maintained, “As legislators are pressured by constituents for more responsibility in spending public funds they are looking for demonstrable evidence to reinforce their appropriations to higher education institutions” (p. 250). Ewell and AAC&U (2004) struck a pragmatic chord when they recognized, though they may not appreciate the influence of NCLB on higher education assessment, leaders in higher education must take the lessons to heart. They called for standards equally transparent about expectations and conveyed how students and educators were doing in meeting the standards. However, to avoid externally imposed standards, many higher education institutions are moving ahead with initiatives to assess and improve undergraduate education (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

The question of whether the public gets its money’s worth moves inevitably into an implicit comparison of the social benefits that result from various state agencies (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In the 1980s, commissions in every state formed to explore the value of higher education and seek ways to reduce costs. By 1989, two-thirds of states
had mandatory assessment programs for public higher education institutions linking compliance with incentives. Bok (2006) stated, “By now more than 40 states have imposed some sort of program to measure the performance of public colleges and universities” (p. 326). Connecting this call to accountability to funding, Cohen and Kisker (2010) posited, “In the never ending effort to balance fund agency priorities with institutional outcomes, accountability has become the concept of choice” (p. 544).

In Minnesota, all postsecondary institutions implement some form of learning outcome assessment (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2009). Currently, the State’s postsecondary schools limitedly use three standardized tests. While the State’s report does not detail how these schools are assessing outcomes, it is clear the State does not mandate a specific tool or process for this assessment. The State reports 68.4% of high school graduates enroll in a postsecondary program within the year following their graduation (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2009). Minnesota also reported (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2009), “On measures of student learning, many public and private institutions are implementing learning assessments and surveys to gauge the value added by higher education” (p. 4). The report, echoing the Spellings Commission’s (Spellings et al., 2006) called for a national database, then added, “These may someday lead to the availability of widespread learning and engagement outcomes for Minnesota institutions that can be compared nationally and internationally” (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2009, p. 4).

**Learning Assessment Approaches**

Higher education stakeholders employ a number of different approaches to assess student learning. Chun (2002) provided four approaches traditionally used by institutions
to measure higher education quality. These four approaches included actuarial data, ratios of institutional quality, student surveys, and direct measures of student learning. The majority of formalized assessments of student learning incorporate some element of Chun’s last approach. Chun (2002), however, was ambivalent about assessing student learning when she declared,

> When it comes to understanding what students have actually learned in college (and linking learning to assessments of institutional quality), the literature suggests that we are faced with a conundrum. While the importance and value of student learning are generally accepted, few agree on how best to assess it. (p. 25)

Shavelson's (2010) delineation between indirect and direct measures of learning may be helpful at this point. Up until recently, most assessment looked at indirect measures such as graduation rates, reputation rankings, retention rates, and related measures. These measures are indirect because there is a gap between the measure and any actual student learning – the learning, whether it happens at all, is indirect. Indirect evidence provides signs students are probably learning. This evidence is less indicative of actual student learning than direct measures (Suskie, 2009). Direct measures, on the other hand, emphasize student learning (Shavelson, 2010).

Ewell and AAC&U (2004) offered an additional perspective with an “ekoskeletal” vs. “endoskeletal” analogy to explain the two assessment approaches. In the ekoskeletal approach, educators assess learning students experience outside of the regular curriculum. These assessments typically occur infrequently and offer opportunities to aggregate data. Standardized tests are examples of ekoskeletal assessments. Endoskeletal assessments, on the other hand, embed assessment within students’ regular learning experiences. However, according to Shavelson (2010), it is important to assess a student’s learning at two or more points so analysis can show where
and how learning occurred. Shipman, Alo, and Jones (2003), on the other hand, took a
deeper view of assessment when they maintained, “A comprehensive assessment
program should contain measures that are formative as well as summative, direct as well as indirect, course-focused as well as longitudinal, authentic and course embedded” (p. 342).

Not surprisingly, researchers also discussed in the literature what is important for
educators to assess (Allen, 2010; Banta & Pike, 2007; Shavelson, 2010). Shavelson
(2010) suggested metaphorically, “On assessing learning in American higher education, the pendulum has swung between a focus on domain knowledge and broad abilities. Although today the pendulum has shifted to the broad abilities” (p. 18). Banta and Pike (2007), on the other hand, were proponents of blending assessment of both specific and broad skills. The researchers declared, “We support a focus on major field assessment, with an emphasis on using student electronic portfolios as the most authentic instrument for demonstrating growth over time” (p. 15).

One form of standardized test common in this country and used on a limited basis
in Minnesota is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). Data from the CLA
provided the basis for the Arum and Roksa (2011) study and their book Academically Adrift. Since the CLA uses sampling technology, it is helpful for institutional and program improvements (Shavelson, 2010). The CLA, in a return to past assessment practices, does not provide multiple-choice questions and other selected response methods. Rather, the assessment utilizes realistic, complex, open-ended tasks. Yet, not all support these standardized tests. Kurz and Banta (2004) recounted their experience
with standardized assessments, “By far the most common concern we had in these assessments, however, was the small size of the effects” (p. 92).

**Challenges to Assessment**

The literature does offer some specific recommendations to higher education leaders on how to address key challenges in assessment (Allen, 2006; Banta & Kuh, 1998; Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Shipman et al., 2003). Since assessment requires cross-institutional leadership, it is critical to have leaders in place who can effectively resource assessment programs (Shipman et al., 2003). Shipman et al. provided this list of qualities essential for higher education assessment leadership:

> Effective leaders are: directly involved in the assessment process, meet regularly with assessment personnel, maximize honest, open, two-way communication, establish an environment based on trust, treat faculty staff, and administrators as collaborators in a team effort, demonstrate a commitment to assessment by providing real incentives, encourage assessment personnel to use a deliberate planning process, make slow, incremental changes, approve the integration of assessment and budgets. (p. 336)

Banta and Kuh (1998) took a different course with a call for collaboration between faculty members and student affairs professionals. They stressed these two groups, due to their interactions with students, are in the best position to meet student-learning outcomes. Recognizing time is short, due to stakeholder demands for accountability, Ewell and AAC&U (2004) called for higher education institutions to take collective action to demonstrate their ability to meet student achievement expectations.

**Faculty culture and resistance.** Although media and faculty often blame undergraduate student culture as the cause of poor academic performance, faculty cultures also deserve equal examination (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Resistance by faculty to assessment may be because faculty members view it outside of normal instructional
responsibilities – an “above load” activity (Stone & Friedman, 2002). Holyer (2002) argued one reason general education reform and assessment meets resistance is it is, by nature, counter to long-standing faculty culture.

Traditional autonomy of professors and departments is a persistent challenge to collaborative assessment and curricular review (Bok, 2006). There is an attitude administration cannot force tenured faculty to do anything. Barnett (1988) observed internal rivalries within the academy, due to faculty’s tendency to locate their identity within their own discipline, often distract them from recognizing greater threats to academic freedom. This tendency, according to Duderstadt (2000), was a result of fragmenting faculty into academic disciplines and professional schools. This resulted in faculty having little interaction with each other. Becher and Trowler (1989) argued senior faculty members are particularly prone to resisting change to protect the status quo.

Dove (2008) reported faculty’s attitude about assessment shifted depending upon the perceived purpose of the assessment. Assessments for the purpose of improving teaching resulted in the best faculty attitudes. Faculty attitudes were less positive with assessments framed as accountability measures. “Those with a holistic view of learning believe that it is difficult to measure what we are teaching. They believe what they are teaching cannot be quantified” (Dove, 2008, p. 186). The view that higher education learning is not quantifiable is common within the higher education community (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In a related concern, Bok (2006) asserted,

Finally, professors may fear that, once a process of assessment takes hold, colleges will become preoccupied with those forms of learning that can be measured and neglect the subtler yet equally important educational goals that do not lend themselves to testing and evaluation. (p. 322)
In a study of faculty acceptance of an assessment initiative, faculty beliefs about teaching and learning influenced acceptance of assessment of outcomes (Dove, 2008). When faculty viewed the initiative as similar to the K-12 accountability model embodied by the NCLB Act resistance increased. While increases in external oversight are a reality, external accountability has a long tradition within higher education (Becher & Trowler, 1989).

To improve faculty acceptance of assessment programs, Dove (2008) recommended a close examination of academic culture, recognition the process is time consuming, expansion of faculty professional development opportunities, and allowing flexibility within the classroom. Faculty who collaborated and communicated with other faculty made the most progress. Kurz and Banta (2004) suggested providing faculty with assessment strategies and logistical support, being available to assist faculty with different levels of experience, utilizing assessment techniques in faculty seminars, and demonstrating expertise in assessment is helpful. Additionally, faculty members have the highest acceptance of an institution’s assessment approach when the institution uses it for internal academic purposes (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Dodeen (2004) found simplifying assessment led to more positive attitudes about the assessment process.

Recognizing change in higher education can take time, Stone and Friedman (2002) declared, “Finally, it has been concluded that when it comes to implementing change with complex and far-reaching initiatives like general education, it is prudent to think of ‘academic time’ in terms of ‘geologic time’” (p. 209).

Planning and implementation of general education assessment programs occur within the context of a larger governance structure. Shared governance is a hallmark of
American higher education (Duderstadt, 2000). This shared model includes oversight by trustees, faculty governance, and administrative leadership. This model, while collaborative with stakeholders, does not enhance institutional responsiveness or innovation. Bok (2006) maintained, “The existing methods of governance, for all their frustrations, may resemble Winston Churchill’s democracy – the worst possible system… except for all the known alternatives” (p. 40). Missed opportunities and poor performance are not uncommon results from this governance model.

Duderstadt (2000) divided faculty governance into two different categories. The real heart of academic governance resides at the departmental or school level. The second level of faculty governance resides at the university level with the faculty senate or other representative group. Unlike department level governance, the faculty representative group is typically advisory in nature. “The history of higher education in America suggests that, in reality, the faculty has had relatively little influence over the evolution of the university” (p. 247). More recently, American university governance reflects a corporate strategy of centralized standards, strong central management teams, and cross-institutional units concerned with issues formerly the responsibility of academic units (Becher & Trowler, 1989).

**Stakeholder Expectations of Higher Education**

Any exploration of assessment of student learning must first engage in an exploration of expected roles of higher education within our nation. What do we expect of our universities and colleges? What should students be learning? What do they need to succeed? And, possibly more intriguing – what does it mean to succeed in life? These questions surface increasingly in national dialogue (Taylor et al., 2011). Posed in a
variety of different ways, these questions eventually trail back to the question, “Is college really worth it?” The answer to this question requires an exploration of higher education’s roles and purposes.

Duderstadt (2000) stressed scholarship, in its many forms, was the traditional role of colleges and universities. However, others posited even colonial colleges were vocational schools for the clergy (Trow, 1988). Bok (2006) brought the practical and the more epistemological roles together when he contended faculty and student came to the classroom with two different educational expectations. Faculty, from his perspective, believe education is a worthy end goal. However, most students look upon education not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to accomplishing other life goals and achieving success in their careers.

Bok (2006) suggested recent growth in the number of students pursuing degrees was a result of companies demanding a higher level of skill from its workforce. He went on to build the case a large number of students, who now feel compelled to attend college, would have, in the past, entered a trade. These students now view college as a means to making money and career success. Yet, Duderstadt (2000) countered, “Higher education in the United States has been expected to provide leadership for society” (p. 40). Attempting to answer the question about what students should gain from higher education, Bok (2006) emphasized students need the ability to communicate, think critically, live successfully in a global society, thrive in a diverse world, and succeed in the workplace.

In his discussion of his expectations for higher education institutions, Duderstadt (2000) provided a utilitarian lens when he claimed the many roles higher education plays
in society form our higher education expectations. These roles include providing an education for the nation’s citizens, forming needed societal leaders, passing on cultural norms, and providing services to society. Bok (2006) went a step further by advising colleges and universities not to abdicate the responsibility to shape student ethics and values – especially in the areas of racial tolerance and honesty. Bok and Duderstadt (2000) noted a universally accepted definition of the role of higher education is unobtainable. Bok (2006) posited, “In short, anyone seeking a common purpose must go all the way back to a time before the Civil War when colleges united around a classical curriculum aimed at mental discipline and character building” (p. 24).

Shavelson (2010) offered an interesting philosophical perspective on the purpose of education when he compared a Progressive perspective against the Carnegie vision of education. The Carnegie perspective, according to Shavelson, is one of knowledge accumulation. This positivistic approach views the amount of knowledge as relatively stable and known. Shavelson (2010) posited this viewpoint resulted in a valuation within higher education of rational positivistic knowledge. The resulting assessment gave preference to knowledge accumulation and prescribed answers.

The progressive approach, on the other hand, values education as the construction of knowledge (Shavelson, 2010). This construction occurs as the student engages with the subject matter. This perspective resulted in different expectations for the role of education and assessment. Rather than concentrating on assessment of content alone, the progressive approach valued creative problem solving and critical thinking. The Carnegie Foundation, with its content emphasis, takes a different approach to assessment (Shavelson, 2010). Labaree (1997) criticized the Carnegie Foundation for promoting a
hierarchical and unjust system. According to Labaree, this system seeks to standardize a meritocracy through standardized testing and rational planning.

Labaree (1997) argued the American habit of blaming schools for societal ills was essentially political in nature. Instead of blaming schools for abandonment of academic standards, lack of civility in the classroom, and the nation’s economic woes, Labaree declared, “That the problem is not that we do not know how to make schools better but that we are fighting among ourselves about what goals schools should pursue” (p. 16).

Labaree (1997), similar to Shavelson (2010), found two competing perspectives when he analyzed the role of American higher education. According to Labaree (1997), supporters of the democratic approach contend a democratic society cannot survive unless it prepares people to live as ethical and productive citizens. The second perspective, what he called the social deficiency model, proposes the economic well-being of the nation depends on the education system to prepare the young to carry the country through its economic woes. Reinforcing biases and injustices by limiting social mobility to the elite who have access to higher education, the social deficiency model reduces education to a commodity. By obtaining an education, students possess a competitive advantage in their struggle for a desirable social position (Labaree, 1997). In this discussion, he demonstrated how policymakers created land-grant universities and community colleges to provide vocational training. However, in each case, students successfully converted these institutions into broader degree granting institutions to increase their social mobility.

Labaree (1997) passionately posited the social mobility philosophy of education gives education over to private interests. Public interest, such as the development of
competent citizens, is lost when we hand over education to those only interested in profiteering and social mobility. According to Labaree, pursuit of social mobility requires tempering with an emphasis on democratic equality. Duderstadt (2000) summarized this duality when he remarked,

In a sense, the university is caught between the contradictory forces of responding to more pragmatic goals of students and employers while providing the liberal education that equips a student with the broader skills important for good citizenship and a meaningful life. (p. 78)

**Liberal Education**

The concept of a liberal education, especially within the nation’s four-year liberal-arts colleges, serves as a rallying educational approach for much of higher education (Katz, 2005). Yet, despite this centralizing concept, the nation does not have a clear understanding of what colleges are trying to accomplish (Bok, 2006). This confusion extends to misunderstandings of the concept of a liberal education (Duderstadt, 2000; Katz, 2005). Duderstadt (2000) posited, “Today educators and others use the term to refer to everything from an education based on the Great Books to a broad but superficial survey of all of the liberal arts” (p. 77). Since the term “liberal” is often a politicized term, the AAC&U defines liberal, in this sense, as liberation of an individual for ethical action (AAC&U, 2002). The AAC&U (2011) more recently posted the following about liberal education:

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. (Liberal Education section, para. 5)
Similarly, the Greater Expectations National Panel (AAC&U, 2002) posited,

To thrive in a complex world these intentional learners should also become empowered through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills, informed by knowledge about the natural and social worlds and about forms of inquiry basic to these studies; and responsible for their personal actions and for civic values. (pp. xi-xii)

Despite these efforts by the AAC&U, no real consensus exists within the higher education community on how to define liberal education (Katz, 2005). While four-year liberal-arts colleges remain connected to the liberal education approach, the nation’s research universities institutions continue to take different, and contested, approaches to liberal education of undergraduates. Katz (2005) stated, “It seems we have not traveled very far in defining a liberal education at research universities. Not in the last year. Not, perhaps, in the last 100 years” (B6). Largely, major research universities set the agenda for higher education today.

The AAC&U (2006), through a major initiative called Liberal Education America's Promise (LEAP), found business leaders “are calling for graduates versed in communication skills, adept at quantitative reasoning, oriented to innovation, sophisticated with diversity, and grounded in intercultural and global learning” (p. 1). These proficiencies best find their fulfillment, according to the AAC&U, through a liberal education. However, prospective and current students are not aware of the importance of these proficiencies. To expand understanding of liberal education and establish a common language surrounding this approach, the AAC&U (2006) developed the following set of liberal education outcomes:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World
• grounded in study of the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
focused through engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills
- inquiry, critical and creative thinking
- written and oral communication
- quantitative literacy
- information literacy
- teamwork and problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibilities
- civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- intercultural knowledge and competence
- ethical reasoning and action
- foundation and skills for lifelong learning

Integrative Learning
- synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
- the demonstrated capacity to adapt knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and questions (p. 3)

**General Education**

**Definitions of General Education**

General education, in tension with disciplinary specialization, is the academic program designed to ensure all students receive instruction in history, culture, science, and mathematics (Marinara, Vajravelu, & Young, 2004). Banta (1996) contended the development of general education skills should be of interest to faculty of all disciplines. The AAC&U (2011) stated general education is, “The part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities” (General Education section, para. 7).

Some institutions use terms such as "the core curriculum" or "liberal studies" as designations for their general education programs (AAC&U, 2002). Allen (2006) noted, “General education is the core of the undergraduate curriculum for all students, regardless of major. It contributes to the distinctiveness of college-educated adults and
guarantees that all college graduates have a broad, balanced education” (p. 1). Ewell and AAC&U (2004) posited the purposes of general education are to: 1) develop skills needed for later work, 2) develop cross-disciplinary skills, 3) develop general knowledge and experience with different modes of inquiry, and 4) collegiate socialization.

Smith (1993), based on an open-ended survey of over 1200 colleges and universities, identified six different purposes for general education. *Heritage*, the first purpose, endeavors to pass on a common understanding of western heritage through study of a common core of great ideas or great books. *Counterpoint*, the second category, was the most common purpose identified by surveyed institutions. This approach provides a broad exposure to subjects – essentially a foundation for the major. A criticism of this approach is it often lacks coherence. In the *Instrumental* approach, the objective identified as second in prevalence, students develop specific skills, typically in the areas of communication and reasoning. *Development or Empowerment*, the fourth category, centers on developing the whole person as a lifelong learner. The fifth category, *Social Agenda*, threads a social purpose throughout the coursework. The final category, *Valuing*, seeks to explore the role and importance of values within social settings. The majority of colleges and universities utilize two or more of these purposes within their own particular general education context.

**General Education Structure**

General education coursework often consumes over 30% of undergraduate curriculum (Brint, Proctor, Murphy, Turk-Bicakci, & Hanneman, 2009). Yet, since general education on most campuses does not have an assigned academic officer with oversight responsibilities, budget, or faculty hired trained specifically to teach general
education courses, it is questionable to call general education a program (Smith, 1993). Smith noted, “On many campuses general education is nothing more than a catalog construct: a construct sometimes made up of designated courses but more frequently made up of directions to take courses in certain designated departments” (p. 248).

Institutions tend to structure their general education around three models: a distribution model providing a broad undergraduate curriculum, a set of core courses integrating the liberal arts, or a set of courses emphasizing process and individual student growth (Allen, 2006). A survey of chief academic officers of colleges and universities sponsored by the AAC&U (2009) found,

The large majority (80%) of member institutions employ a distribution model in their general education program, but only 15 percent use this model alone. Many institutions also incorporate common intellectual experiences (41%), thematic required courses (36%), upper-level requirements (33%), core curriculums (30%), and/or learning communities (24%) into their general education curricula. (pp. 1-2)

Using quantitative statistical techniques to analyze university catalogs over 25 years, Brint et al. (2009) identified four models of general education: core distribution areas, traditional liberal arts, cultures and ethics, and civic/utilitarian. The core distribution area model, with its roots in Yale’s 1901 curricular structure of concentration and distribution, distributes general education commonly in natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The traditional liberal arts model does not distribute coursework, but rather concentrates on literature, history, philosophy, and foreign languages. The cultures and ethics model explores cultures beyond the western emphasis of most other models. The fourth model, civic/utilitarian, works to prepare students for business and civic life.
History of General Education

Higher education in American often follows the lead of its elite and earliest institutions. This trend is evident in the development of general education throughout the nation’s higher education history. Harvard, founded in 1636, initially required college students to take a single curriculum fashioned on classical studies (Wehlburg, 2010a). Students did not have the option to study a specific major or concentration of courses. Eventually colleges, responding to needs of its students and the surrounding culture, began to offer courses to prepare students for a variety of vocations.

Two significant events in the 1860s provided impetus for a curricular shift from an emphasis on classics to one centered on the individual (Boning, 2007). The first event was adoption of the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. This act provided federal funds for a college in each state to develop educational institutions centered on teaching agricultural and mechanical arts. The intent of this act was to promote both the liberal arts and a practical education for industrial classes (Levine & Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1978). One result of the creation of land-grant universities was legitimization of practical courses of study.

The second major event of the 1860s was the 1869 election of Charles Eliot as president of Harvard (Boning, 2007). Eliot instituted an elective system so students could take classes to meet their individual goals (Wehlburg, 2010a). As Boning (2007) stated, “Other institutions followed Harvard’s lead by adopting Eliot’s vision” (p. 4). Over time, the elective model combined with the creation of land-grant universities resulted in a student and faculty emphasis on specialization and individualism. These
trends planted seeds for the eventual development of the modern understanding of general education.

However, concern grew that the elective system was nothing more than a way for students to take whatever courses they wanted – without coherence or intent (Boning, 2007). In the early 1900s, Abbot Lawrence Lowell, Eliot’s successor as Harvard’s president, put an end to his institution’s elective system and increased curricular coherence. In his 1909 inaugural address Lowell (1934) argued, “It is absurd to suppose that a list of electives alone will furnish him with the required knowledge, or that sense of responsibility which always sits lightly upon the undergraduate will inspire him with wisdom in arranging his course of study” (p. 4). The resulting curricular change distributed general education courses within four subject fields: the biological sciences, the physical sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities (Thomas, 1962). The intent of this approach, with us still, was to allow students choices and to create a course of study grounded on educational foundations.

Coherence within the higher education curriculum continued to challenge education leaders. The 1945 Harvard report, General Education in a Free Society, took curriculum reform in a new direction (Wehlburg, 2010a). This report proposed the need for both a coherent general education curriculum and a specialized curriculum. Wehlburg observed, “This report suggested that general education should be one-third of the overall baccalaureate program so that students did not overspecialize in a single content area” (p. 6). Even though Harvard did not adopt the report, it did influence development of undergraduate programs at many institutions for years to come (Boning, 2007).
Cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s also brought changes to the nation’s higher education intuitions (Boning, 2007; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The demise of *in loco parentis*, the result of judicial action, provided students with a voice to question and at times demand changes from higher education institutions (Boning, 2007). Passage of the Higher Education Act 1965, meant to increase access to higher education for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, resulted in a growing and more diverse student body. Resisting curriculums requiring conformity, students demanded a more accessible and vocationally oriented general education program. Boning (2007) stated, “In response to these objections, nearly three-fourths of colleges and universities reduced their general education requirements between 1967 and 1974 while increasing student freedom in choosing courses” (p. 10). Additionally, the increase of degrees designed for adult learners further decreased general education coherence. To this day, reform efforts to increase general education coherence find limited success (Wehlburg, 2010a).

**General Education Reform and Current Issues**

Current interest in general education reform began in the late 1970s with a scathing report, called *Missions of the College Curriculum*, from the Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching (Marinara et al., 2004). The report labeled general education a disaster area. Additionally, it blamed the lack of common student experiences for devaluation of the baccalaureate degree (Boning, 2007). While Harvard soon adopted a revised curriculum with a more coherent approach to general education, typical universities continued to offer a fragmented general education experience (Gardiner, 1998). Future reform efforts would work to address the choice versus coherence tension prevalent throughout higher education (Boning, 2007). Over the last
decade, three reasons for change in general education programs stand out: 1) lack of coherence across the curriculum, 2) changes in student or faculty, and 3) updating the program (Ratcliff, 2004). Incremental change is a hallmark of recent reform in general education programs.

According to the *Great Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation* Goes to College report (AAC&U, 2002),

The fragmentation of the curriculum into a collection of independently owned courses is itself an impediment to student accomplishment because the different courses students take, even on the same campus, are not expected to engage or build on one another. (p. x)

Higher education leaders sought to increase coherence through reduction of student elected courses and an increase in the number of prescribed sequences of courses. Additionally, leaders grouped courses into themes to convey the coherence of general education programs – along with their connection to institutional mission.

Assessment of student learning outcomes did not play a major role in recent changes to general education programs (Johnson, Ratcliff, & Gaff, 2004). During 2000, only 15% of universities that changed their general education programs used current assessment data to inform their planning. Additionally, 25% of universities made changes without considering any student assessment data. However, Bok (2006) struck a cautionary note when he maintained, “The making of general education the focus of curricula debates does not serve it well” (p. 46). He contended, universities, through reform efforts, load curriculums with so many expectations that meeting them all becomes impossible. Boning (2007) recounted, “Although coherence has been an enduring issue in general education, interest in maintaining curricular coherence has
fluctuated over the past 200 years. Despite current interest in curricular reform, coherence continues to be regarded as an unfinished agenda” (p. 13).

Along with coherence concerns and resultant reforms, the AAC&U advocated redefining the whole idea of general education (Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). Instead of viewing general education as a specific set of courses, academics should view general education as a set of outcomes across the entire curriculum. “The assessment of general education is about examining the consequences not of any particular body of coursework that may be labeled as ‘general education’ but of the undergraduate experience as a whole” (p. 6). This view of general education also results in reframing of the assessment agenda. Successful assessment of student learning across the undergraduate experience requires identification of overarching outcomes for all general education students and mapping of outcomes into the larger curriculum (Marinara et al., 2004). “Viewing general education as a set of interactive and iterative relationships requires us to see the reform process holistically” (Ratcliff, 2004, p. 112). Wehlburg (2010b) argued for integration of the general education experience within a student’s major course work.

Assessing General Education Outcomes

Since it belongs to everyone, and to no one, assessing general education curriculum is a major challenge (Stone & Friedman, 2002). While departments work hard to include courses in general education programs, they are not often open to curricular oversight or assessment of these same courses. Additionally, although general education may be the single largest academic program within a college or university, these programs often do not have anyone in charge of the overall program or financial resources dedicated for its advancement (Gaff & Ratcliff, 1997). The broad nature of
general education outcomes also proves challenging for educators. Attempting to measure such things as critical thinking and problem solving across an entire curriculum is a challenge (Wehlburg, 2010b).

Alverno College, in Wisconsin, uniquely integrates general education, assessment, and pedagogy (Smith, 1993). With their curriculum, centered around eight abilities (communication, analysis, problem solving, valuing, social interaction, developing a global perspective, effective citizenship, and aesthetic engagement), students demonstrate their mastery of these abilities (Alverno College: Our ability-based curriculum, 2011). Traditional grading is not a part of Alverno College. Rather, students must demonstrate mastery of the eight abilities and outcomes required in their major and minor course of study. Students assess themselves and receive collaborative assessment from faculty, classmates, and professionals. Alverno students report they learn more from this assessment process than through a traditional grading approach (Smith, 1993). Students gain insights into how to improve and grow in their learning through assessments from faculty and fellow classmates.

While many universities and colleges implemented general education assessment programs, these programs often did not meet the hope of creating a culture of ongoing institutional learning (Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). One reason for poor results was assessment programs required a high level of emphasis on assessment techniques and procedures far removed from the day-to-day work of teaching. As a result, faculty members withdrew their support and time from assessment processes. Faculty also resisted oversight of their classroom practices by accreditation and governmental agencies.
To address these challenges, colleges and universities need to involve all faculty members at all stages of the assessment process (Shipman et al., 2003). Through this experience, faculty will learn more about the wider curriculum and gain an appreciation about how their teaching contributes to student learning. Jones (2002) encouraged institutions to identify what incentives motivate faculty. Administrators could then use these incentives to promote involvement in the assessment process.

A significant challenge now facing the assessment community is the reality of the accountability movement (Shavelson, 2010). Accreditation agencies now require all universities to assess education outcomes (Wehlburg, 2010b). Increasingly, policymakers are linking assessment with accountability (Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). While campus leaders have growing confidence in their assessment programs, they now must retool these programs to meet external needs of the accountability movement. Since this is a rather recent development, the literature does not fully address implications of the accountability movement on faculty, student learning, and institutional process.

Challenges today with assessment parallel challenges facing higher education in general. With 75% of American students receiving some postsecondary course work within two years of graduating from high school, demands on general education assessment will only increase (AAC&U, 2002). Faculty, rather than paying attention solely to course-specific outcomes, will need to take a broader look at assessing student learning in both courses and programs. Unfortunately, all too often course outcomes do not connect with the reality of what instructors teach in the classroom (Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). “In fact, on many campuses, statements of intended outcomes for general education were invented primarily to guide assessment, not to teach and learn practice.
This curious condition, of course, is in part a result of assessment being done at the behest of others” (p. 9).

**Summary**

American colleges and universities, as evidenced by literature presented in this review, continue to redefine their role and purpose within the broader culture (Bok, 2006; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Ewell & AAC&U, 2004). Throughout the nation’s history, higher education institutions sought to meet needs of its most prominent stakeholders (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Grounded within this historical context, the nation’s colleges and universities continue to reframe their understanding of liberal education through their curricular, pedagogical, and assessment choices (Smith, 1993). General education, the common course of study taken by all undergraduates (Smith, 1993) and target of ongoing reform, signals an institution’s mission and values (McInally, 2004). While assessment and accountability are themes present from the earliest days of American higher education, national discourse today calls for higher education to demonstrate evidence of student learning in a transparent and quantifiable manner (Shavelson, 2010). These demands, though deep in historical origin, flow largely from concern about the skyrocketing cost of higher education and the perceived lack of student preparedness (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

Local response to this refocusing on ends, instead of means, of education results in implementation or expansion of campus-wide programs to assess student learning (Allen, 2006). These programs typically attempt to meet both a pedagogical role, by providing faculty with feedback about student learning within their classrooms, and an accountability role, by providing stakeholders with evidence of student learning (Allen,
2006; Shavelson, 2010). Quite often, faculty, due to their academic culture and their classroom responsibilities, do not embrace implementation of campus-wide assessment programs (Becher & Trowler, 1989; Dove, 2008; Duderstadt, 2000). Nevertheless, calls for accountability will only increase (Shavelson, 2010).

This review of historical and foundational higher educational literature provided a contextual and nuanced exploration of higher education. An understanding of higher education history, current issues, assessment topics, stakeholder expectations, liberal education, and general education provided a foundation for exploration of classroom assessment. To use an environmental metaphor, classroom assessment resides in a rich and growing higher education ecosystem. Each aspect of this ecosystem influences the others. To understand what happens in the classroom, it is important to understand this larger higher education ecosystem. As evident through this chapter’s review of foundational higher education literature, the question of how instructors incorporate assessment to advance student learning within their pedagogy flows out of this fertile higher education history. With my interest in the classroom experience in mind, this literature review raised a number of related questions. What might an authentic assessment program look like? What might an assessment process look like which meets both faculty and stakeholders expectations? What is the role of pedagogy within the assessment process? Does the student have an active role in an authentic assessment process? The next chapter reviews literature explores these and related teaching and learning questions.
CHAPTER THREE
SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING LITERATURE
AND ANALYTICAL THEORIES

In this chapter, I report on my review of literature of the scholarship of teaching and learning, scholarship of assessment, and relevant analytical theories. Both the scholarship of teaching and learning and the scholarship of assessment are newer and vibrant scholarly fields (Banta, 2002; Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Assessment research appeared in both of these related literatures. Within the scholarship of teaching and learning, I explored literature addressing history, definitions and features, and the literature’s taxonomy. This taxonomy categorized the research into advocacy, methodology, theory, and pedagogical research literature. I conclude the review of scholarship of teaching and learning literature with an exploration of relevant assessment literature. The chapter then concludes with review of theoretical work of John Dewey, Erving Goffman, and Erich Fromm. This theoretical work served as the analytical lens for analysis of study findings.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

History

The question of whether students are learning is not new within higher education (Wehlburg, 2011). For example, in the 1800s college students needed to demonstrate their learning publicly. "A candidate for the bachelor's, therefore, faced a final hurdle of the senior declamation, a requirement that he or she publicly demonstrate a full possession of knowledge and high skills of intellect and speech " (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990, p. 27). Deemphasizing attainment of a set number of credits, educators required students to demonstrate their learning (Wehlburg, 2011). As the college
population swelled in the early 19th century emphasis shifted to fulfillment of a set number of courses.

Cultural upheavals of the 1960s challenged higher education leaders to re-examine its pedagogical assumptions (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Many scholarly issues facing educators today have roots in this time period. For instance, Wehlburg (2011) recounted:

In the mid-20th century, the concept of mastery learning was brought back, but in a newer form called "program instruction", and because of newer technology, was often able to provide students with the educational materials they needed to move at their own pace. (p. 46).

This mastery approach to education is evident today in Alverno College and other outcome-based institutions.

With the changing student population, it became apparent educators needed to learn more about their students (Wehlburg, 2011). In 1969, Arthur Chickering published his landmark book *Education and Identity*. Building on Erickson’s (Erikson, 1959) work on personal identity, Chickering developed a theory of the psychosocial development of students during their college years (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). According to Wehlburg (2011), landmark works by Astin (1977) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) also prepared the foundation for expansion of research into students, teaching, and learning.

Boyer’s (1990) publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* served as a turning point in development of the scholarship of teaching (McKinney, 2007). Seeking to reframe the definition of academic scholarship, Boyer worked to place teaching research and its applications into this broadened view of scholarship (Huba & Freed, 2000). Boyer (1990) argued for four areas of scholarship:
scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of application, and scholarship of teaching. Good teaching required faculty to concentrate energy and scholarship on improving teaching. Boyer argued:

The work of the professor becomes consequential only as it is understood by others. Yet, today, teaching is often viewed as a routine function, tacked on, something almost anyone can do. When defined as scholarship, however, teaching both educates and entices future scholars. Indeed, as Aristotle said, “teaching is the highest form of understanding.” (p 23)

As higher education scholars gathered around Boyer’s (1990) newly minted term, scholarship of teaching, educators continued to work to define and shape the scholarship of teaching and learning (McKinney, 2007). McKinney cited the following as early examples of writings that contributed to development of the field: Braxton and Toombs (1982) for their view of course content as scholarship; Shulman (1987) for exploring the concept of pedagogical content knowledge; and Pellino, Blackburn, and Boberg (1984) for their discussion of the scholarship of pedagogy.

In 1998, the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Carnegie Foundation established the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) (Huba & Freed, 2000). The multi-million dollar program sought to improve student learning by encouraging conversations and programs centered on the scholarship of teaching and learning across higher education. As posted on the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching website (Carnegie academy for the scholarship of teaching and learning (CASTL), 2011):

The CASTL Program sought to support the development of a scholarship of teaching and learning that: fosters significant, long-lasting learning for all students; enhances the practice and profession of teaching, and; brings to faculty members' work as teachers the recognition and reward afforded to other forms of scholarly work. (2nd paragraph)
The CASTL program worked to fulfill this outcome through establishment of a national fellowship program for scholars to explore teaching and learning, a program for higher education institutions willing to commit significant resources toward the scholarship of teaching, and an initiative to work with scholarly societies (Huba & Freed, 2000). One outgrowth of this last task was the 2002 launching of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (McKinney, 2007). Over the program’s nearly 12-year history, ending in 2009, 158 faculty members participated in its fellowship program, over 250 campuses participated in its campus programs, and 24 scholarly societies participated in efforts to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings, Huber, Ciccone, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, & MyiLibrary, 2011).

Definitions and Features

A common feature of the scholarship of teaching and learning literature over the past 10 years is to discuss the lack of a consensus on a definition of the field (Hoessler, Britnell, & Stockley, 2010; Huber & Morreale, 2002; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Hutchings et al., 2011; Kreber, 2007; Kreber, 2003; McKinney, 2007; Richlin, 2001; Starr-Glass, 2011; Willox & Lackeyram, 2009). The authors often offer definitions providing different perspectives or emphases to the scholarship of teaching and learning (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Nevertheless, there does seem to be a growing understanding, if not consensus, about the boundaries and distinctiveness of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Huber & Morreale, 2002).

McKinney (2007) began her discussion of definitions by sharing an early Carnegie foundation definition, “Problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning,
studying of the problem through methods appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies, application of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review” (p.6). Kreber (2003) reported the provided definition changed with composition of the question’s target audience. While regular faculty connected the scholarship of teaching and learning to effective teaching, scholarship of teaching and learning experts, connected the work with peer review and scholarship.

McKinney’s (2007) definition of the field is unambiguous, “The scholarship of teaching and learning goes beyond scholarly teaching and involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications, or performances” (p. 10). While most scholars incorporate components of this definition, they typically emphasize one component over another. Huber and Hutchings (2005), for example, placed more of an emphasis on the scholar’s classroom when they stated, “It means viewing the work of the classroom as a site for inquiry, asking and answering questions about student learning ways that can improve one’s classroom and also advance the larger profession of teaching” (p. 1). Encouraging scholars to shun a casual approach to their methodology, they advocated for systematic and disciplined inquiry. Scholars also emphasized the importance of sharing scholarship to the wider academic community through academic conferences and journal publications (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Richlin, 2001; Shulman, 1999). Countering with a concern scholars were pursuing extrinsic rewards of publication and tenure at the expense of student learning, Cross (2006) advocated for a scholarly emphasis on improving student learning within the classroom. Hutchings (2010) noted research universities, with their emphasis on traditional research, typically look for teaching and learning scholarship to
include publication of peer-reviewed scholarship. On the other hand, institutions centered more on teaching typically study classroom innovations with the intent to improve student learning.

While the majority of definitions discussed to this point view the scholarship of teaching and learning through the lens of academic disciplines, other scholars view it more as a movement within the academic community (Hutchings, 2010; Starr-Glass, 2011). Hutchings (2010), argued the scholarship of teaching and learning is not a specific approach or activity, but rather, “A vision in which faculty habits and values of scholars are brought to bear on their interaction with students” (p. 69). Similarly, Starr-Glass (2011) posited the scholarship of teaching and learning “provides a locus for faculty to research the dynamics of the practice of effective teaching” (p. 1). Hoessler et al. (2010) reworked the definition on student learning by stating, “Scholarship of teaching and learning is the litmus test for identifying and sharing the educational development practices that have an impact on teaching and student learning” (p. 81).

Recent scholars appear more open to ongoing conversation about definitions (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings, 2010). Working with a big tent metaphor, Huber and Hutchings (2005) viewed different definitions and viewpoints as a positive sign for the vitality of the field. Hutchings (2010) echoed this thought by arguing the diversity of definitions provided scholars from different contexts and disciplines access to the emergent field. This diversity creates opportunities for cross-fertilization throughout the higher education teaching commons.

Along with defining the scholarship of teaching and learning, scholars work to provide rationale for a commitment to serious scholarship within the field – on both the
personal and institutional levels (Hutchings et al., 2011; Hutchings et al., 2011; McKinney, 2007; Shulman, 2000). Shulman (2000) organized his rationale around professionalism, pragmatism, and policy. Professionalism referred to the obligation educators have to advance their discipline and teaching through academic research. This is what scholars do. Shulman saw the concept of pragmatism embodied in the educator’s practical desire to increase student learning through improved teaching. With higher education increasingly accountable to external audiences for their student’s learning, he advocated for higher education policies to reflect this reality. Shulman also made the case there is a connection between the scholarship of teaching and learning and institutional accountability initiatives like accreditation and institution-wide assessment. However, McKinney (2007) argued assessment, at the program level, is distinct from the scholarship of teaching and learning. The main distinction is one of its usages beyond the institution. McKinney argued assessment is primarily an internal initiative for a local audience. The scholarship of teaching and learning, on the other hand, is by definition, public.

Working to define the scholarship of teaching and learning, Hutchings et al. (2011) analyzed eight exemplary case studies of teaching and learning scholarship to determine common characteristics. First, the scholarship of teaching and learning has its foundation in individual academic disciplines. Work of Huber and Morreale (2002) supported this recognition of the importance and distinctive contribution of disciplinary styles to this scholarship. Secondly, Hutchings et al. (2011) noted the scholarship of teaching and learning researches the personal practice of the scholar – rather than from a third-party perspective. Thirdly, the scholarship of teaching and learning seeks to
transform and advance student learning. This characteristic was at the heart of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) initiative (CASTL, 2011).

The scholarship of teaching and learning can serve a number of different functions, beyond its core function of improving student learning, for instructors, students, administrators, departments, and disciplines (McKinney, 2007). These functions include, amongst many others, assisting with faculty retention, faculty development, program review, institutional assessment, accreditation, cross-disciplinary conversations, and external funding. On a more individual level, Weston and McAlpine (2001) offered a three-stage developmental process scholars go through as they engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The first phase in the continuum centers on the scholar’s growth in their own teaching. The second phase sees the scholar exchanging knowledge about their learning with others in their discipline. Finally, in the third stage the scholar creates scholarly knowledge about teaching and learning. Weston and McAlpine (2001) posited, “We must move beyond helping individual professors to grow in their own teaching and facilitating dialogue with colleagues about teaching and learning; we must do more to support professors’ transition into phase three, growth as scholars” (pg. 97).

**Taxonomy Overview**

The published literature on the scholarship of teaching and learning comes from across the academic disciplines and covers a wide variety of topics (Hutchings, 2002). Weimer (2006) noted a number of features of the published literature on the scholarship of teaching and learning. With an applied emphasis on teaching, the literature is a
mixture of both research and experience-based work. While this diverse body of work
discusses teaching methodologies, it also covers historical facts, development of the field,
and advancement of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Weimer, after reviewing
the literature, advocated for categorization of this literature into wisdom-of-practice
scholarship and research scholarship. She concluded that while each category contains
research of variable quality, neither type of research is inherently better than the other.

Hutchings (2010), noting the diverse backgrounds of the scholars, organized the
scholarship of teaching and learning literature into a taxonomy. This classification
included works on defining features of the field, its relationship to other pedagogical
work, methodology, and the field’s theoretical basis. In an earlier work, Hutchings
and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2000) offered a slightly different
taxonomy organized around questions asked within each group of literature. The first
grouping explored the question about “what works?” The second question asked the
descriptive research question – “what is?” This literature explored what teaching and
learning looked like – instead of serving a prescriptive function. The third question
centered on literature seeking to answer the question “what might be possible?” While
Hutchings did not frame the final grouping in the form of a question, this literature, while
underrepresented, reports on development of conceptual frameworks. After reviewing
the literature and these taxonomies (Hutchings & Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching, 2000; Hutchings, 2010), I synthesized the literature into four
groupings: defining and advocacy, methodology, theory, and pedagogical research.
Defining and Advocacy Literature

The defining and advocacy literature, within the scholarship of teaching and learning, sought to better clarify and advance the scholarship of teaching and learning. Representative literature included Huber and Hutchings' (2005) work arguing for an expanded understanding of the teaching commons and Starr-Glass' (2011) article advocating for inclusion of student voices into a reconsidered understanding of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Hutchings et al.'s (2011) offering, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered: Institutional Integration and Impact represented a thread of literature that explored the need for wider adoption of the scholarship of teaching and learning within institutions and across academia.

Collegial collaboration is an ongoing theme within the defining and advocacy literature (Brookfield, 1995; Geertz, 2000; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Shulman, 1993). As early as 1993, Shulman (1993) described the isolation experienced by many scholars. He credited the lack of value for teaching on many campuses to this isolation. Palmer (1993) argued this privatization of teaching creates institutional incompetence. Palmer stated, “By privatizing teaching we make it next to impossible for the academy to become more adept at its teaching mission” (p.8). He also argued this privatization resulted in disillusioned scholars working in a vacuum. Brookfield struck a similar chord, “Silence surrounds us as teachers . . . many of us spend the greater part of our lives as teachers bound in chains of silence. This is a silence about the process and the meaning of our teaching” (p. 247). Both Palmer (1993) and Brookfield (1995) built strong cases for collegial conversation about teaching.
Instead of allowing great teaching to vanish like dry ice, teachers should view their teaching as community property (Shulman, 1993). Status of teaching will only improve when educators move their teaching from private to community property. This sharing of one’s work in a public way is an essential element to the concept of scholarship (Shulman, 1999). “Learning flourishes when we take what we think and know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalize it” (p. 12).

**Collaborative voices.** For Huber and Hutchings (2005), the concept of a “teaching commons” conveyed the need for collegial collaboration within the scholarship of teaching and learning. This commons provides an essential metaphorical space for the education community to exchange ideas and to interact. Geertz (2000), in his analysis of the American intellectual climate declared, “We need to set ourselves free to make such connections and disconnections between fields of enquiry as seem appropriate and productive, not to prejudge what may be learned from what.” (p. 150). The teaching commons is the place for diverse concepts and methods to come together and find connections with each other (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). A place of sanctuary, friendly feedback, conference information, and other networking are additional benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration (Huber & Morreale, 2002). Starr-Glass (2011) noted the field needs to include more voices than just those of experts. The voices of neophytes as well as the experts should have a place in the teaching commons.

The student’s voice is a perspective needing wider inclusion into the literature (Starr-Glass, 2011). The scholarship of teaching and learning provides an opportunity to build bridges between faculty and students. Boyer (1996), in his last published article,
reframed his previously named “scholarship of teaching” to the “scholarship of sharing knowledge”. Rather than publishing research for self-interest, educators should share their research with their students. Boyer stated, “And academics must continue to communicate not only with their peers but also with future scholars in the classroom in order to keep the flame of scholarship alive” (p. 16). Illustrative of the value of including students in the research process, instead of simply serving as subjects, Otis (2010) shared her personal transformation as a student through her involvement in a scholarship of teaching and learning initiative at Western Washington University—an initiative intentionally including the student voice. Otis recounted,

I was no longer going to college because I needed a degree to get a job. I was going to college to learn, to discover the breadth and depth of knowledge, to gain the skills necessary to be a contributing citizen of this country and this world. (p. 51)

Palmer (1993) encouraged educators to take a second look at how they view students. Instead of viewing them negatively, a typical response of educators, he called for a deep diagnosis that begins with the educator’s own examination of personal fears and assumptions. Palmer remarked, “Once we understand the fearful condition of teachers and learners, the classroom can become a place where fear is faced and overcome” (p. 11).

Advocacy. The literature included a grouping of work seeking to promote the spread of the field within higher education institutions and beyond (Hutchings & Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2000). This advocacy literature included books written by major scholars in the field (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings et al., 2011; McKinney, 2007). Often building a case for the scholarship of teaching and learning, this literature included research on benefits to the
scholar, students, and institutions (McKinney, 2007). In addition, this literature also included insights on how to promote a culture of scholarship within an institution (Hutchings et al., 2011).

According to McKinney (2007), the scholarship of learning and teaching and a supportive campus culture are complementary components. For scholarship to continue, it must find support from within departments, administration, and other academic units. Shapiro (2006) suggested, “Scholarly contributions to teaching and learning are considered add-ons. They are nice, and in some cases mandatory, but they do not mitigate demands for traditional disciplinary productivity” (p. 42). Increased scholarship in the area of teaching and learning will only occur when institutions shift their tenure criteria to value this kind of scholarship. In a survey of 130 higher education deans and directors, Green (2008) reported disciplinary scholarship received a heavier weight than teaching in tenure decisions. Green commented, “For the majority of respondents, scholarship was perceived as a tertiary work role or merely an ‘add-on’ to the prioritized teaching and service work load” (p. 126). In this study, Green used the term “scholarship” to refer to research in the discipline of social work – not to the scholarship of teaching and learning. McKinney (2007) reported support for the scholarship of teaching and learning on campuses varied based on local considerations. Additionally, Banta (2002) argued the scholarship of teaching and learning had not had the cultural impact on learning originally hoped for by proponents.

At the institutional level, scholarship of teaching and learning advocates can promote the field by encouraging use of scholarship data in program and institutional reviews (McKinney, 2007). Another way to advance the profession is to utilize
scholarship findings in disciplinary newsletters on best practices. On a national level, McKinney encouraged educators to become active in national initiatives advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning. Faculty development and professional growth are another important place for integration of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings et al., 2011). Institutional learning also benefits from integration of the scholarship of teaching and learning and faculty development (Felten, Kalish, Pingree, & Plank, 2007). McKinney (2007), while noting these factors require further research, suggested the following factors are important in the development of a supportive culture for the scholarship of teaching and learning: student involvement, support from all levels of the faculty and leadership, consensus on values and language, integration into the mission of the institution, and an adequate supply of resources – both time and money.

There is also a disciplinary aspect to the scholarship of teaching and learning (Huber & Morreale, 2002; McKinney, 2007). Each academic discipline brings its own history and richness into the teaching and learning conversation. Huber and Morreale (2002), for example, observed research literature in the humanities offers little in the way of pedagogical research. Conversely, composition faculty researched the teaching of composition through development of an extensive pedagogy literature. This research served to connect writing and research. These disciplinary styles bring richness to the field.

McKinney (2007) offered a number of challenges facing the field as it works to research learning – as opposed to teaching. First, literature needs to research less on teaching and more on learning. Secondly, additional research needs to concentrate on graduate student teaching and learning. Thirdly, scholarship needs to move beyond the
classroom and into course, departmental, and institutional research. Fourth, there is a need to expand the role of students in the research process. Hutchings et al. (2011) made a number of recommendations for the coming years to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning. These recommendations include developing an integrated vision for scholarship, cultivating and rewarding quality scholarship opportunities, encouraging connections between institutional assessment and the scholarship of teaching and learning, and developing a long-term plan for integration of the scholarship of teaching and learning into institutional culture.

Another approach to advocacy for the scholarship of teaching and learning is to recognize and address barriers and concerns raised by those who are critical of the field (Carr-Chellman, 2005; Hoessler et al., 2010; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings, 2010; Palmer, Zajonc, Scribner, & MyiLibrary, 2010). Questions about the value and status of the field continue to be a running subtext within the academic community (Hutchings, 2010). Such research goes against the academic culture of many higher education institutions – even at research institutions. McKinney (2007) offered an extensive list of concerns raised by those critical of the field. These concerns included lack of quality of research, generalizable results, campus resources for research, and scholarly expertise. The fragmentary nature of the disciplines also tends to isolate and fragment knowledge (Palmer et al., 2010). Huber and Morreale (2002) noted a number of complaints about the field’s scholarship. These concerns included lack of training in teaching instructors receive, a reward system, and inadequate tools to evaluate teaching.
Methodology Literature

Methodology literature explored the “how to” question of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings & Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2000). Hutchings and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2000) argued since contexts and disciplines are different there is no one right way to conduct the scholarship of teaching and learning. Entry into the field often comes through three pathways (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). First, educators get started with scholarship as their interest, time, and resources allow. Secondly, they enter through their conversations with their colleagues within their discipline. Finally, educators enter through inter-disciplinary gatherings and conversations promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning. McKinney (2007) encouraged first time researchers to take care in narrowing their research question, read and become comfortable with the role of relevant theory, further refine their question, and search the literature. Research design, ethics, the role of collaboration, and how to make work public are all topics covered within McKinney’s work. Kreber (2007) noted the following questions were critical to all scholarship of teaching and learning projects:

- What constitute significant and meaningful goals and purposes of teaching in my field and how do these interact with the wider purposes of university education?
- What do I know about student learning and development in relation to these goals?
- What do I know about designing teaching and learning environments that would help to bring about desired forms of academic learning and development? (p. 4)

One element in research design is to determine the roles of the educators and other participants. Students may be co-researchers along with their instructors (Otis, 2010). Morehead and Shedd (1996) posited interviewing students provides rich data for
studying teaching practice. Another underrepresented audience in the scholarship of teaching and learning are those who work in student affairs (Wilcox & Lackeyram, 2009). Recognizing students learn outside of the classroom as well as inside, Wilcox and Lackeyram (2009) made a case for incorporating student affairs and development programming into the field’s research design.

While recent literature from the field does not include a large amount of work about methodology, scholars as a whole take care to address methodological concerns within their individual studies. Recent examples of methodological literature include: Boughey's (2011) work on the importance of institutional mission and context as a consideration in research design and data analysis; Rust's (2011) essay on the unscholarly usage of numbers within the scholarship; and Salvatori and Donahue's (2010) essay expressing concern about the use of citations within the scholarship of teaching and learning literature.

**Theory Literature**

The theory literature, while sparse, sought to provide conceptual frameworks for the study of teaching and learning. As discussed earlier, the foundation for much of the theory in the literature flows from Boyer's (1990) work to redefine the meaning of scholarship for the professoriate. Boyer explained, “We conclude that for America's colleges and universities to remain vital a new vision of scholarship is required” (p. 14). Rather than a narrow construct for scholarship, Boyer widened the definition of scholarship to acknowledge the primary importance of learning and teaching within higher education. Inclusion of teaching within his definition of scholarship worked to unify the scholarship of teaching and learning movement (McKinney, 2007).
Willox and Lackeyram (2009) challenged this model of scholarship by encouraging the field to study learning realized through student affairs and development programs. While this is a methodological issue, it is also a theoretical question. Where does learning occur? Willox and Lackeyram argued a partnership between classroom and academic support services would result in a rich and synergistic learning environment. Disregarding learning occurring outside of the classroom is a mistake. Similarly, Morehead and Shedd (1996) and Otis (2010), as discussed earlier, believed theory needs to view students as both subjects and co-researchers.

Adjusting methodology is not enough to improve student learning (Palmer et al., 2010). “We need to draw on the deep and rich philosophical resources that are available to us” (Palmer, p. 24). Theory does matter in the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings, 2007). “And maybe that’s the critical point here: theory matters in the scholarship of teaching and learning because it is essential to a meaning-making, knowledge building process” (p. 3). Studying theory assists the educator with critical reflection by naming operative practice, disrupting normal teaching and thinking patterns, and preventing passive acceptance of popular practice (Brookfield, 1995).

Research questions flow out of theories researchers use (Gerhard & Mayer-Smith, 2008). Scholarship of teaching and learning scholars utilize learning theories to shape their research questions and practice. Gerhard and Mayer-Smith (2008) commented, “Changing theories allows us to ask new questions, deepening the nature of our scholarship and ultimately of our teaching practices” (p. 8). Constructivist, socio-cultural, and complexity learning theories offer scholars theoretical lenses to improve student learning. Hutchings (2007) maintained, due to the multi-disciplinary nature of
the scholarship of teaching and learning, there is a diverse understanding of the meaning and use of theory. Often, researchers do not discuss these theoretical differences.

**Pedagogical Research Literature**

Applied teaching research dominates the literature of scholarship and learning (Weimer, 2006). One thread of this pedagogical work focused on the inner landscape of the educator (Brookfield, 1995; Palmer, 1993; Palmer & NetLibrary, 1998; Palmer et al., 2010). This literature posited before a teacher can effectively help students learn they must first examine their own assumptions and beliefs. A second, and the largest, thread of literature explored classroom practices of educators (McKinney, 2007). A landmark work in this area is *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Classroom Assessment Techniques, as understood by Angelo and Cross (1993), provided educators with methods to gauge and research student learning within their classrooms.

Students need role models. If educators want students that practice critical, thinking they must practice it themselves (Berlak & Berlak, 1987). “Throughout our teaching careers we must participate in an ongoing, collaborative process of re-evaluation of, and liberation from, our taken-for-granted views” (Berlak & Berlak, 1987, p. 170). Brookfield (1995) called these taken for granted views assumptions. Through a process of critical reflection, an educator’s assumptions become evident. Yet, reflection alone is not enough. For reflection to be critical, it requires two purposes. The first is to understand how power weaves its way through the educational process. The second purpose is to reconsider assumptions and practices appearing to make teaching easier, but in the long-term work against good practice. Brookfield (1995) explained, “Hegemonic
assumptions are those that we think are in our own best interests but have actually been
designed by more powerful others to work against us in the long term” (p. 14-15).
Palmer and NetLibrary (1998) explained a similar process in terms of “oughts”. By
following the “oughts”, those expectations defined by others, educators may harm their
identity. “A vocation that is not mine, no matter how externally valued, does violence to
the self – in the precise sense that it violates my identity and integrity on behalf of some
abstract norm” (p. 31).

Brookfield (1995) maintained educators should involve themselves in critical
reflection because it provides a rationale for practice, avoids personally destructive
practices, grounds us emotionally, and creates an engaging and democratic classroom.
He declared, “To some extent, we are all prisoners trapped within the perceptual
frameworks that determine how we view experiences” (Brookfield, p. 28). To break out
of the prison of self-denial, educators need to engage colleagues and students in critical
reflection processes. As Palmer (1998) noted, while it is essential to explore inner
territories, it is possible to get lost. Palmer continued,

So I need the guidance that a community of collegial discourse provides – to say
nothing of the support such a community can offer to sustain me in the trials of
teaching and the cumulative and collective wisdom about this craft can be found
in every faculty worth its salt. (p. 146).

Being critically reflective is empty without action and change (Brookfield, 1995).
By involving students in their critical reflection, educators have opportunity to see their
practice from the perspective of their students. Brookfield argued, “Without an
appreciation of how students are experiencing learning, any methodological choices we
make risk being ill-informed, inappropriate, or harmful” (p. 35). Understanding how
students think and perceive the educative experience is one of the most crucial, but
challenging tasks, faced by educators. It is also not a precise science. Observing standardized modes of good teaching do not exist, Brookfield noted teaching practice needs to reflect a classroom’s context. “It dawns on us that becoming a skillful teacher will always be an unformed, unfinished project – a true example of lifelong learning” (p. 239).

Quite often educators lack confidence in their teaching and feel vulnerable in the classroom (Lieberman & Miller, 1991). As a result, teachers feel like imposters (Brookfield, 1995). Due to privacy within the classroom, teachers are not comfortable with sharing their fears and uncertainties with others. Faced with these private uncertainties, educators often fear students and colleagues will discover they are imposters.

Another result of these fears is an unwillingness to experiment pedagogically. This fear manifests itself in attempts to put on a good performance in front of students and colleagues (Tompkins, 1990). Tompkins confessed, “I had been putting on a performance whose true goal was not to help students learn but to perform before them in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me” (p. 654). Rather than attempting to cover up fears through performance, Brookfield (1995) encouraged educators to speak publically about their fears. This approach models reflective practice and critical thinking for both students and colleagues alike. Palmer (1993) added, “Once we understand the fearful conditions of teachers and learners, the classroom can become a place where fear is faced and overcome” (p. 11). Tompkins (1990) argued the classroom reflects the true values and beliefs of the instructor. “The kind of classroom situation one creates is the acid test of what it is one really stands for” (p. 656).
Scholarship of Assessment

One common goal across the nation’s colleges is, according to Suskie (2009), “To help students learn more effectively than they could on their own” (p. 6). Assessment of learning is what faculty members do in higher education (Wehlburg, 2011). “Assessment is most successful when it is part of a larger context of teaching and learning” (Banta, 2002, p. 216). As Banta noted, the definition and purposes of assessment find their shape through institutional context. Within assessment literature, a literature overlapping with the scholarship of teaching and learning, three different meanings of assessment rise to prominence. The traditional meaning of assessment refers to an individual’s mastery of a complex skill or ability. The emphasis is on the individual and his or her learning. The second meaning has a program or institutional emphasis. Rolling out of K-12 practice, large-scale assessment seeks to benchmark an institution’s performance for accountability purposes. The third tradition, also with a large-scale emphasis, evaluates programs to improve pedagogy or curricula. Banta (2002) explained, “All three definitions raise explicitly the dichotomy of purpose apparent from the outset: accountability versus improvement” (p. 9). Similarly, Miller, Leskes, and AAC&U (2005) argued for five levels of assessment: a single student, a single student’s learning across a course, the course, an entire program, and learning across the entire institution. While administrators drive large-scale assessment initiatives largely for accountability purposes, educators initiate classroom assessment to improve student learning. The result is associated literatures with contradictory purposes, disagreements on methodologies, and conceptual tensions (Banta, 2002).
Program evaluation as action research had its start in the 1960s (Banta, 2002). These studies were largely quantitative. Tinto's (1993) model on the role of social and academic integration of the student served as a powerful framework for understanding student learning (Banta, 2002). Pascarella’s research on the effects of college on students and student retention provided a significant foundation for development of a scholarly approach to assessment (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibel, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Pascarella, Duby, Terenzini, & Iverson, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to Banta (2002), “Scholarly assessment means that each educator is using the best knowledge and skills to create, validate, and continually improve instruments and assessment process toward improving and demonstrating student learning” (p. 83). The development of scholarly assessment into a scholarship of assessment will require the field to critically reflect upon and research assessment definitions, assumptions, methodology, and consequences.

Instead of another academic fad (Birnbaum, 2000), assessment continues to develop into a scholarly endeavor (Banta, 2002). The characteristics of this growing scholarship of assessment include a growing body of scholarly literature with its own prominent scholars, professional conferences, and, as previously discussed, a number of sub-disciplines. Since the scholarship of assessment addresses a number of critical issues important to a wide array of higher education stakeholders, the scholarship of assessment has potential to be an innovative force.

**Formative Assessment**

Using formative assessment within their teaching to collect learning data from their students, faculty change and adapt their teaching to increase student learning
Wehlburg (2011) declared, “Once we know what they know and what they don’t; we can more easily create an atmosphere of challenge that is appropriately rigorous” (p. 3). Instructors may also use formative assessment data for summative purposes – such as for grades at the close of a class. Summative assessment alone does not necessarily demonstrate student learning or provide an avenue for faculty to respond to students’ learning and adjust their teaching technique (Suskie, 2009). Assessment is formative when instructors use data as part of an ongoing process to improve their teaching to better meet students’ needs and provide feedback to students (Stull, Varnum, Ducette, Schiller, & Bernacki, 2011).

Formative assessment provides feedback to students so they can recognize problem areas and reinforce successful achievement in their learning (Stull, Varnum, Ducette, Schiller, & Bernacki, 2011). Instead of waiting until the end of a course, formative assessment works to provide information to students and faculty while there is time to make learning adjustments. As Shulman (2007) noted, “The later the assessment, the later the knowledge of results, and the less likely is it that the assessment will yield information that can guide instruction and learning” (p. 24). In addition, feedback from formative assessment provides instructors with information about how students learn and indications about the need to make changes in their instructional approach (Stull et al., 2011).

Black and Wiliam (1998), in a comprehensive review of formative assessment, explained feedback, when compared with other teaching techniques, resulted in strong positive results. The single most important factor in student achievement, according to a review of meta-analyses by Fraser, Walberg, Welch, and Hattie (1987) was feedback.
Carless (2007) argued higher education institutions often compromise assessment in efforts to reduce tensions between grading and student learning. Educators often overlook this double duty required of assessment (Boud, 2000). Carless (2007) argued for a learning-centered approach to assessment. This approach includes three strands. The first strand concentrates on developing assessment tasks requiring students to utilize sound learning practices. Secondly, faculty should involve students in development of the goals, outcomes, and peer-assessment activities. Thirdly, faculty should provide timely feedback that moves the student forward for future learning.

Instructors may use formative assessment in a wide variety of ways to improve student learning (Stull et al., 2011). Stull et al. (2011), in a study of four different uses of formative assessment within different courses, reported instructor use of formative assessment, in its different applications, resulted in positive achievement gains. In addition, they reported improved student achievement was not dependent on high levels of faculty commitment, specific class sizes, nature of subject matter, or usage of technology. Use of formative assessment was the key factor in improved achievement. In addition, faculty may use formative assessment to determine students’ perceptions of quality teaching. Khandelwal (2009) utilized a formative assessment instrument, Critical Incident Technique, to research student perceptions of effective teaching behaviors. The researcher sorted, through a coding process, students’ qualitative responses into six categories: rapport with students, course preparation and delivery, encouragement, fairness, time spent with students outside of class, and control. One surprise was the high value students placed on positive rapport between students and faculty.
Suskie (2009) maintained integrated learning goals, curricular alignment to these goals, collaboration with colleagues and students, and embedded assessments are critical components to a learner-centered and integrated educational experience. Effective learning outcomes are student-centered, reflective of the institution’s mission, central to the discipline in question, in alignment with all academic levels, and aimed at learning resulting from the activity (Huba & Freed, 2000). Information on these learning outcomes offers rich information about student learning (Suskie, 2009). Effective teachers use a variety of strategies and tools within their classrooms to determine how and whether students are learning intended outcomes (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

Classroom assessments seek to answer the question: What are students learning (Huba & Freed, 2000)? Angelo and Cross (1993), in their landmark book, *Classroom Assessment Techniques*, drew a distinction between classroom assessment and classroom assessment techniques. Classroom assessment is the larger process of assessing intentionally and systematically for formative purposes. Classroom assessment techniques, Angelo and Cross’ scholarly emphasis, are specific education activities used to collect data about student learning. According to Cross and Steadman (1996), “The purpose of classroom assessment is to make both teachers and students more aware of the learning that is taking place – or perhaps not taking place – in the classroom” (p. xvii). The end goal of classroom assessment, as a form of formative assessment, is to provide feedback to the instructor for use to improve student learning before the course is complete (Angelo & Cross, 1993). “Classroom assessment helps individual college teachers obtain useful feedback on what, how much, and how well their students are learning” (p. 3).
To improve in any activity, people require feedback (Wiggins, 1998). Traditional teacher-centered approaches to learning do not readily incorporate feedback into the classroom (Huba & Freed, 2000). In teacher-centered classrooms, instructors, not students, often learn more than students because instructors experience the conditions promoting deep learning. These conditions include seeking new information, integrating it into known information, and sharing it with others. Conversely, in learner-centered environments students learn course material in ways that promote their own deep understanding. With the change to a learner-centered approach, instructors need to change their teaching practice. Gathering feedback, on both student performance and teacher practice, is an essential component to these changes (Huba & Freed, 2000; Wiggins, 1998). Yet, educators, need to know what strategies and approaches will help students learn (Walvoord, 2003). Research indicates student involvement and interaction with teachers and peers promotes learning and retention (Astin, 1977; Astin, 2001; Chickering, Gamson, & American Association for Higher Education, Washington, DC, 1987; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The recent shift to a learner-centered approach to teaching grew out of concerns expressed in the 1980s that students were falling behind (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Pedagogical conversations looked to reform curriculum and courses to include both content and cross-disciplinary dispositions. As a result, long held teaching practices, typically with an emphasis on lecture, came under increasing scrutiny. “Large lecture classes with little opportunity for students to interact with professors became a popular emblem for whatever people deemed wrong with higher education” (Huber & Hutchings,
Engaging students, by involving them in their own learning and listening to them, instead of talking at them, became a mark of the learner-centered approach (Finkel, 2000; Huber & Hutchings, 2005).

The shift to a learner-centered class results in continuous feedback (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). This feedback prompts meaningful adjustments to the learning experience. “In a learner-centered environment, however, teaching and assessing are not separate, episodic events, but rather, they are ongoing, interrelated activities focused on providing guidance for improvement” (p. 54). Recognizing they have new roles in this environment, teachers call for involvement of students in their learning. These approaches allow for instructors to meaningfully direct and pace learning. Learning-centered professors view themselves as supportive partners as part of an education that includes their teachers, community, and students (Bonstingl, 1992).

Research shows students do not expand learned knowledge, theories, facts, and skills unless they are able to use and apply them out of their learned context (Bransford & Vye, 1989). Authentic assessment, assessment initiatives requiring students to address ill-defined problems, engages students in applying their knowledge and skills (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Attributes of learner-centered assessments include an assessment promoting high expectations, respects diverse learning styles and backgrounds, synthesizes experiences, provides prompt feedback, fosters collaboration, and depends on student and faculty contact.

Steps for development of an assessment process are similar for both classroom assessments and larger scale projects (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Huba & Freed, 2000; Suskie, 2009; Walvoord et al., 1998; Walvoord, Bades, & Denton, 1998). Walvoord et
al. (1998) advocated for a three-step assessment process. The steps include determining statements of intended learning outcomes, gathering evidence of how students are meeting outcomes, and using the data for improvement. Steps within an assessment process include formulating outcomes, developing assessment measures, assessing learning experiences that allow students to demonstrate their competency, and discussing results to improve learning (Huba & Freed, 2000; Suskie, 2009). Unlike classroom learning outcomes, large-scale assessment efforts have learning outcomes agreed upon by faculty for all students. According to Angelo and Cross (1993), faculty must clearly define what they want students to learn, prioritize these goals, assess how well students are learning, and determine any actions to improve student learning.

Determining intended learning outcomes benefits student learning by serving as the basis for course, program, and assessment levels; provides direction for pedagogical decisions; and informs students about faculty experiences (Huba & Freed, 2000). Guidelines for gathering and sharing feedback with students include teaching students the difference between feedback and criticism, allowing students to provide feedback anonymously, using feedback for improvement, practicing active listening skills, informing students of changes to a course as a result feedback, and thanking students for their feedback.

Huba and Freed (2000) posited exemplary assessment tasks are valid, coherent, authentic, rigorous, challenging, respectful, and responsive. “An exemplary assessment task is one that involves college students in addressing enduring and emerging issues and problems that are ill-defined and of current relevance in the disciplines” (p. 224). An assessment task from this perspective attends to advancing and demonstrating learning.
Ill-defined assessment tasks challenge students to move past getting the right answer and on to demonstrating deeper learning through critical thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.

The emphasis of classroom assessment is on the process of learning rather than on learning course content (Angelo & Cross, 1993). “The essential purpose of classroom assessment is to empower both teachers and their students to improve the quality of learning in the classroom” (p. 4). Classroom assessment techniques are specific activities used by instructors to receive feedback about how students learn and the quality of student learning occurring within their classrooms. To make best use of classroom assessment techniques, instructors should follow three steps: decide which technique to use to provide them with the best information they need, implement the technique, and respond to collected data prior to the next class meeting (Huba & Freed, 2000). Angelo and Cross (1993) also defined a process for using classroom techniques to develop a research project around an assessable classroom question.

Benefits of classroom assessment techniques, beyond the primary purpose of providing feedback for improving the process of learning, include sharpening the informal evaluation of instructor teaching and providing a record of student feedback (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Classroom effects of using classroom assessment techniques include increasing student involvement in their learning, promoting metacognitive development, improving student satisfaction, and developing a collaborative learning environment. Suggestions for successful usage of the techniques include instructors being comfortable using the techniques, taking care not to make techniques tiresome for students, and closing the feedback loop by sharing with students how the information will
help the instructor improve the learning experience. Effective feedback provides educators and students with information to use to take actions to improve learning (Wiggins, 1998). With increases in faculty workload and classes sizes in higher education, however, Gibbs and Simpson (2004) argued there is a decrease in individual feedback to students.

Providing feedback to students does not necessarily mean students will utilize feedback or student learning will increase (Sendziuk, 2010). Students and faculty often have different perceptions about the feedback process (Carless, 2006). In a mixed methods study of student and faculty perceptions of feedback at eight different universities, Carless found instructors believed they were providing more detailed feedback than perceived by students. Similarly, students and instructors did not agree on the usefulness of instructor feedback. Instructor perception of the usefulness of their feedback was higher than student perception of the same feedback. Two elements of agreement between students and instructors were that assessment does have an emotional component and students often found it hard to understand assessment criteria. Open dialogue between instructors and students about the assessment process will assist in eliminating unspoken assumptions by both parties (Carless, 2006; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001).

Instructors, according to students, often use vague and confusing language in their written feedback (Bailey, 2009). Students look for instructor feedback to take them beyond stating what is wrong with their work and lead them toward knowing how to improve. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) related the importance students place on receiving feedback that allows time to retool their learning or seek further assistance. Rubrics and
other structured feedback tools limit the amount of specific feedback provided by instructors, use language that does not translate equally across disciplines, and suffer from inconsistent use by faculty (Bailey, 2009). Faculty should work at departmental levels to reduce inconsistencies in the understandings of assessment language (Chanock, 2000). Higgins et al. (2001) suggested a dialogical approach that equips students to meet faculty expectations. “Perhaps we need to shift the emphasis to ‘feeding forward’ into a piece of work, instead of simply ‘feeding back’” (p. 274). This approach would also challenge instructors to consider their own assumptions about feedback, knowledge, and conventions.

Formative assessment helps instructors gain a better understanding of how students perceive their teaching practices (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Brookfield, 1995; Khandelwal, 2009; Stull et al., 2011). Hessler and Taggart (2011) conducted a longitudinal cross-institutional study of the use of Brookfield’s (1995) “Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)”. The study researched the instructors’ modification of the CIQ and identification of insights into the student learning process. Hessler (2011) concluded rote use of the tool often resulted in student boredom and wording of the form had a tendency to result in student responses relating more to feelings than on issues or concepts. The study did support Brookfield’s (1995) contention the tool’s primary benefits included encouragement to students to be reflective, warns faculty of potential problems in the learning community, promotes a diversity of teaching methods, and builds trust. Hessler (2011) reported the CIQ offered several layers of pedagogical understanding for instructors. These layers included a record of student self-reflection; instructors’ weekly reflections and responses; insight into week-to-week, course, and cross-course patterns.
Analytical Theory

John Dewey on Education

The assessment of student learning, in all of its different forms, is just one part of the larger educational process. Taking assessment out of this larger process, by studying or applying it in an isolated manner, reduces its potential for increasing student learning. Situating assessment within a larger pedagogical context, one offering purpose and direction for education and society, enables instructors, students, and other higher education stakeholders the foundation necessary to advance learning to new levels. John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator, wrote extensively about educational philosophy and practice. Dewey’s work, informed by American pragmatism, provided a pedagogical framework for studying and applying the assessment of student learning.

Much of John Dewey’s educational writings were in response to educational approaches and beliefs popular in his time. Dewey was critical of a traditional approach to education centered on the transmittal of information and skills developed by others in the past (Dewey, 1938). Separation of education from society and rigid application of rules and standards were also problematic for Dewey. “When the implied criticism is made explicit it reads somewhat as follows: The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside” (Dewey, 1938 , p. 18). While Dewey was a supporter of the sciences, he did not see education as being a prescriptive science, “Nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching” (Dewey, Boydston, Baysinger, & Levine, 1985, p. 177). Rather, his response was advocacy for an organic education with the hallmarks of freedom, celebrating the lived
experience, democracy, and growth. Much more than impartation of knowledge, education for Dewey was the central component of his expansive philosophical system and critical for society. “Education is a mode of life, of action. As an act it is wider than science” (Dewey, Boydston, Poulos, & Kurtz, 2008, p. 39). Instead of a static event, education, from Dewey’s perspective was a social process involving people throughout society.

Dewey, as a pragmatist, sought educational and philosophical explanations by looking at objects and events observable through the visible senses (Noddings, 2007). Dewey believed there was a strong connection between experience and education (Dewey, 1938). Rather than viewing the educational process as an isolated cognitive experience, he believed personal experiences of students within society were central to quality education. For Dewey, the mind does not function in isolation. Instead, he saw the lived experience as shaping and defining the mind. “It never denotes anything self-contained, isolated from the world of persons and things, but is always used with respect to situations, events, objects, persons, and groups” (Dewey, Boydston, Simon, & Kaplan, 1989, p. 268).

But not all experiences are educative (Dewey, 1938). Educative experiences offer students the opportunity to extend the learning into the future. He used the term “continuity” to define this concept. Dewey (1938) wrote, “The principle of continuity in its educational application means, nevertheless, that the future has to be taken into account at every stage of the educational process” (p. 47). This concern about students’ past, present, and implications for the future requires teachers to design experiences honoring this contextual understanding. Secondly, a quality experience provides an
opportunity for students to interact on a personal level with the subject matter. Today, educators commonly use the term “engagement” to describe this process (Noddings, 2007).

Growth was an essential educational aim for Dewey (1938). Rather than viewing education through an either/or perspective, Dewey saw education as an ongoing process of growth. This concept of growth offers a transformational quality to equip students to resist the oppressive aspects of society. Connected with growth is the power of education to create freedom. Dewey believed the greatest freedom was the ability to use one’s intelligence to observe and then act on worthwhile purposes. He explained,

Such freedom is in turn identical with self-control; for the formation of purposes and the organization of means to execute them are the work of intelligence. Plato once defined slave as a person who executes the purposes of another, and, as has just been said, a person who is also a slave who is enslaved to his own blind desires. (Dewey, 1938, p. 67)

While Dewey (1938) opposed authoritarian and teacher-centered models of education, he did not believe teachers should allow students to control the classroom agenda. Rather, it was the teacher’s responsibility to provide education experiences designed to meet the needs of students and to assist them to grow through the present and into the future. Dewey maintained, “Since freedom resides in the operations of intelligent observation and judgment by which a purpose is developed, guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon” (p. 71). The teacher’s role is to create an educational environment where students postpone action on issues “until there is foresight of the consequences of carrying the impulse into execution – a foresight that is impossible without observation, information, and judgment” (p. 69). Recognizing the importance of surrounding context, both socially
and environmentally, Dewey expected much of teachers. More than transmitters of knowledge, teachers needed to have a skill set enabling them to work with a dynamic and shifting teaching environment. Dewey added, “Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile” (p. 40). Teachers provide structure and control through intentional design of experiences. These experiences kindle students’ natural capacities and interests.

Students, from Dewey’s perspective, need to take an active part in their education (Dewey, 1938). While Dewey did not support a total student-centered classroom, he did advocate for direct student involvement in construction of purposes for the learning process. According to Dewey, “The open mind is the mark of those who have . . . learned the eagerness to go on learning and the ability to make this desire a reality” (Dewey, Boydston, Levine, Field, & Hook, 2008, p. 463). The open mind actively engages, interacts, and absorbs experiences – both inside and outside of the classroom. The pedagogy of Dewey is inherently critical and promotes development of an open mind (Hildebrand, 2008).

Dewey believed this open thinking was critical to a healthy democracy. While he did use the term “democracy” in its political form, Dewey had a broader understanding of the concept. “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey et al., 1985, p. 93). He viewed the idea of democracy as a critical element of society and education. This linkage between education and society is an essential element for a healthy democracy. He declared, “There cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for the life in the school,
and the other for life outside of school. As conduct is one, so also the principles of conduct are one” (Dewey, Boydston, Levine, B. & Hahn, 2008, p. 269). For Dewey, the classroom should be a microcosm of the values and beliefs students will experience throughout their lives (Hildebrand, 2008). Without this connection between school and society, the school does not have a moral aim. Dewey maintained, “Only as we interpret school activities with reference to the larger circle of social activities to which they relate do we find any standard for judging their moral significance” (Dewey, Boydston, Levine, B. & Hahn, 2008, p. 271).

To keep democracy healthy, both inside and outside the classroom, teachers and students must work on developing a collaborative and communicative association (Dewey, 1938). The fostering of an open mind is essential to a learning community. Rather than viewing society through an either/or lens, Dewey argued for a more nuanced and open approach to maintaining community. He explained, “The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection make up difference in practice” (Dewey et al., 1985, p. 337). Instead of retreating into factional camps when differing points of view arise, students and instructors, through dialogue and reflection, develop more comprehensive insights to guide them into an enhanced understanding of community.

**Dramaturgy and Erving Goffman**

The higher education classroom is ripe with daily social interactions. These interactions between and amongst students and instructor occur in both informal and formal ways. These daily interactions do not occur in a vacuum. Rituals and tradition,
often revered in higher education institutions, influence the education endeavor in ways easily overlooked. Consideration of these rituals, especially as they shape daily interactions (Goffman, 1959), provides a useful analytical lens for understanding daily classroom interactions. These daily interactions help shape the meaning and direction of the larger pedagogical process. Extending the work of Emile Durkheim, Irving Goffman developed a sociological theory examining how people present themselves in everyday life (Kivisto, 2004).

Emile Durkheim, considered the founder of sociology, saw rituals and myths as tools for development and reproduction of collective consciousness (Collins, 1994). Through rituals, myths, and the resulting symbols, societies work to develop and reinforce shared cultural values, worldviews, and moral constructs. As a result, these rituals provide glue that holds societies together through encouraging certain behaviors and attitudes. Goffman, who saw rituals and myths as a critical component to everyday life, developed Durkheim’s work with rituals into a tool for understanding the inner workings of specific societal events and situations.

Goffman viewed the “self” as a construct shaped by roles people take on for themselves, rather than as a distinct identity separate from these roles. He explained,

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. (Goffman, 1959, pp. 252)

Goffman saw rituals as part of our everyday interactions with people (Goffman, 1959).
Polite exchanges people make with each other, according to the theorist, are rituals they use to preserve and advance their individuality. Protected behind these everyday rituals, people in organic societies use them to protect their own self-interests and statuses.

Goffman used the metaphor of a theater and actors moving about in a theater’s front stage and backstage to convey concepts of rituals in society (Kivisto, 2004). This theatrical nature of everyday life is not a new concept (Kivisto, 2004). Shakespeare (1890), in *As You Like It*, stated, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” (p. 32). For Goffman, the front stage represented rituals participants acted out for the good of the play and the backstage represented the underlying issues and real motives of participants. From this perspective, rituals are tools of power. These tools assist in creation and maintenance of a stratified society. Roles, scripts, and staging shape everyday experience and participants’ perceptions of reality (Goffman, 1959).

Roles, according to Goffman, are aspects of themselves people choose to portray to others in social situations (Kivisto, 2004). How performers assume and believe in their roles is a central component to his dramaturgical social theory. In his landmark work, *The Presentation of Self Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) quoted Park (1950),

> It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role. It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. (p. 259)

The roles people assume eventually become their identities. Instead of people shaping their roles, for Goffman (1959), the role shapes and becomes the “self”. He posited people view their roles along a continuum. This continuum marks the degree to which an individual views their role as their true identity. At one end are those who fully assume their role and view it as their true self. He recounted, “At one extreme, one finds that the
performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he states is the real reality” (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). The second pole is for those who do not believe in their roles. He declared, “When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical” (p. 17). Authenticity, for Goffman, is a construct reserved for those who believe in their own performances.

As in any theatrical performance, scripts play a critical role in dramaturgical social theory. Goffman (1959) argued, while actors in plays take their lines from their scripts, they also fill in how to present those lines, verbally and nonverbally, from the context of the play and from their experience. In other words, based on experience, actors know how to fill out hidden elements of the script to make the narrative believable. So too, in everyday life, performers know the script they are to follow, but only in a general sense. Goffman (1959) maintained, “The legitimate performances of everyday life are not ‘acted’ or ‘put on’ in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do ” (p. 73). He observed it would be impossible to script every action a person should take in a social situation. Instead, people learn the outline of their scripts and fill in the rest based on their experience. While much of the language within daily life is improvisational, scripts provide a framework and a guide for participants and audience. Scripts provide people with an assumed language storehouse for appropriate phrases, images, and attitudes. Commercial settings are especially rich in formalized scripts (Kivisto, 2004).

The stage is another tool actors utilize in their performances (Kivisto, 2004). The stage consists of both a front and a back. The front is where actors perform for the
benefit of the audience. The back is where performers can step out of their roles and relate with each other outside of the drama going on for the audience on the front stage. Goffman (1959) used this theatrical tool to explore the ways people interact with each other in different social situations. Goffman (1959) stated, “It will be convenient to label as ‘front’ that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (p. 24). Within social presentations, the front stage included physical space used by the performer, clothing, age, facial expressions, gender, and other related characteristics. It is on the front stage where social actors played out their scripts through living out of their lines. People do not typically create their own roles with their contingent expectations. Goffman posited, “When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it” (p. 27).

The back of the theatrical stage is where equipment is stored, support rendered to front stage performances, and where performers relate to each other out of character (Goffman, 1959). In the same manner, in social settings the backstage is where performers step out of their social scripts and roles. For instance, within a higher education setting the backstage of the classroom may be back in the professor’s office where the professor jokes with her colleague about a student’s recent attempt to answer a test question. Control of access to the backstage is an important element of social dramaturgy. Since performers do not allow audience access to the backstage, performers may openly discuss with each other about how to improve the ongoing performance. The front and back aspect of staging is a powerful sociological tool to explain everyday
interactions of people. Goffman maintained universities, amongst other institutions, are ripe with sociological dramaturgy.

The final dramaturgical concept to explore is Goffman’s (1959) development of the concept “performance team”. He shortens this phrase to the singular word “team”. A team consists of those performers who work together to maintain the illusion of reality for the audience. Goffman (1959) commented, “A team, then, may be defined as a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained” (p. 104). These teams, according to Goffman, maintain a set of secrets defining actions, behaviors, and attitudes within their performance. “Since we all participate on teams we must all carry within ourselves something of the sweet guilt of conspirators” (p. 105). As a result of the inherent deception at work across teams, Goffman posited, “We can expect the performer to live out his conspiratorial career in some furtiveness” (p. 105).

**Erich Fromm and Modes of Existence**

Erich Fromm’s socioeconomic insights, in *To Have or to Be?*, provided an additional theoretical lens to analyze research findings. Fromm, a psychoanalyst and social psychologist, immigrated to the United States in 1933 (Fromm, 1976). Fromm identified “having and being” as two fundamentally opposed orientations of human existence. These modes, informed by a society’s socioeconomic context, shape the human spirit and life experience of societal members. Fromm argued a societal refocusing on the being mode, as opposed to the having mode, will assist in creating a New Man and solve society’s socioeconomic problems.
Fromm (1976) began his critique of modern society by delineating the failure of society’s fixation on unlimited progress. He stated,

The Great Promise of Unlimited Progress – the promise of domination of nature, of material abundance, of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, and of unimpeded personal freedom – has sustained the hopes and faith of the generations since the beginning of the industrial age. (p. 1)

He argued the industrial age failed to deliver this great promise. Rather, ecological disasters, the gap between rich and poor, and unrestricted satisfaction of desires are evidence of the failures of modern society. As a result, Fromm argued societal members suffer together as cogs in a larger machine. The unrealized promise resulted from adoption of two false assumptions: the aim of life was maximum pleasure and greed leads to harmony. Fromm saw these assumptions as the basis of 20th century capitalism.

Fromm (1976) argued the failure of the industrial age was due to its reliance on the having mode of existence. The having mode looks to things and material possessions. Aggression and greed serve as the basis of this mode. The guiding principle of the having mode, according to Fromm, is, “Where and how my property was acquired or what I do with it is nobody’s business but my own – as long as I do not violate the law – my right is absolute” (p. 57).

Fromm (1976) advocated for the adoption of the being mode to create a healthier society. The being mode roots itself in love and concerns itself with shared experience and productive activity. This mode of existence focuses on the lived experience, experiences the self as the subject of activity, and involves oneself in purposeful behavior resulting in socially useful changes. While the two modes exist within all of life, Fromm believed it important to nurture the being mode. A society centered on the being mode would result in a healthier society with a value for production. “We must put an end to
the present situation where a healthy economy is possible only at the price of unhealthy human beings” (p. 143).

Summary

Examination of relevant scholarly and analytical literature built a foundation for my qualitative research into understanding how instructors integrate assessment within their pedagogy and how they authentically use assessment to advance student learning. A review of the history of the scholarship of teaching and learning provided a background for understanding current assessment and pedagogical issues. The review demonstrated a variety of definitions and features of this new and growing scholarly field. McKinney’s (2007) definition included components consistent with most researchers, “The scholarship of teaching and learning goes beyond scholarly teaching and involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications, or performances” (p. 10). Typically, researchers emphasize one component of this definition over the others within their own research. Other scholars view the field as a movement rather than a specific research field (Hutchings, 2010; Starr-Glass, 2011). Recent scholars are also open to ongoing conversation about definitions for this scholarly field (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings, 2010).

Review of scholarship of assessment literature uncovered three general meanings of assessment within the field (Banta, 2002). The first referred to an individual student’s mastery of a skill or ability. This meaning of assessment emphasized student learning. The second meaning sought to benchmark institutional programs for accountability purposes. The third meaning evaluates programs. The tension within higher education
between accountability and student learning are evident within these three meanings. My research relied on the first meaning of assessment – assessing student learning at the individual level.

Narrowing the review further, I reviewed formative assessment literature. Formative assessment is a type of assessment faculty use while they teach to guide them to know how to change and adapt their teaching to increase student learning (Suskie, 2009; Wehlburg, 2011). Stull et al. (2011) noted instructors use formative assessment in a wide variety of ways to improve student learning. Reviewing the formative assessment literature provided insights into use of feedback, assessment techniques, and current issues within the field. Angelo and Cross (1993) reported classroom assessment directs its attention on the process of learning instead of on learning course content. This review of scholarship of assessment literature provided guidance for my research into how instructors use assessment to advance student learning and integrate this assessment into their pedagogy.

The reviewed analytical theories provided multiple lenses for analyzing my research findings. John Dewey’s philosophical writings on the aims of education, roles of students and instructors, and the importance of experience within education served as central constructs for this research. Erving Goffman developed a microinteractionist theory about how people present themselves in everyday life. Goffman used the metaphor of a theater and actors moving about in a theater’s front stage and backstage to convey concepts of rituals in society (Kivisto, 2004). This dramaturgical theory provided a lens for analyzing specific student and instructor actions and attitudes. Fromm’s (1976)
writings on the having and being modes of existence provide a theoretical lens to consider the differing views of instructors and students about higher education aims.

The review of the relevant higher education literature demonstrated the lack of research on the lived experience of faculty as they seek to assess student learning. A large amount of the assessment literature concerned itself primarily with how to implement institutional assessment programs (Allen, 2006; Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Huba & Freed, 2000; Shavelson, 2010). The scholarship of teaching and learning literature addressing classroom assessment mainly discussed implementation of specific components of formative assessment (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bailey, 2009; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hessler & Taggart, 2011; Khandelwal, 2009). While these studies are helpful, they do not, due to their scope, situate classroom assessment into a broader and grounded pedagogical context. Dewey argued, “Nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching” (Dewey, Boydston, Baysinger, & Levine, 1985, p. 177). This study will work to address this gap in the literature. Overall, this review of scholarly and analytical literature provided a relevant foundation for determining the study’s methods and analyzing resultant findings.
CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

The purpose of this chapter is to describe methods utilized in this research study. Research purposes and epistemological assumptions inform selection of research methods (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of this study was to understand how instructors integrate assessment within their pedagogy and how they authentically use assessment to advance student learning. As a result, the central research question for this study was, “How do experienced general education faculty, within their own teaching, authentically assess student learning?” Symbolic interactionism and pragmatism provided me with epistemological assumptions. These assumptions informed my selection of research methods.

In the first section of this chapter, I explain my determination the case study approach was the best method to answer the study’s research question. A discussion of symbolic interactionism provides a framework for my adoption of the qualitative case study approach. The next section discussed data collection methods. In-person interviews of instructors of general education courses served as the primary data collection method. I then conclude with a discussion on data analysis, coding, validation strategies, research generalization, ethical considerations, and confidentiality.

Three Potential Study Approaches

Qualitative researchers use a variety of approaches (Creswell, 2007). These approaches, each with their own pros and cons, assist in framing research questions and ultimately shaping the outcome of the study. As a result, researchers use care in selecting the approach which will help them to best study the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Since adopting a study approach would result in a different study
structure and methodology, I took care in exploring pros and cons of each approach. In this methodological exploration, I considered narrative, phenomenological, and case study approaches.

The narrative approach (Creswell, 2007) offered me an opportunity to study one individual’s experience of teaching and assessing general education outcomes. Through selection and study of one exceptional and experienced professor who teaches general education courses, I would learn how a faculty member experienced authentic student assessment. Through extensive interviews with this individual, I would learn about his/her educational philosophy and approach to student assessment. To triangulate interviews, I would interview students and conduct limited observations. This research would provide me with data that would provide a grounded and authentic look at exceptional student assessment from the perspective of one instructor. A limitation of this approach is also its strength. While the approach does provide rich and grounded data on one individual, it does severely restrict generalization of study findings (Creswell, 2007).

A phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011), on the other hand, offered the potential for a rich look at student assessment from the perspective of a number of different faculty members. Through this approach, I would interview a number of faculty members from a variety of different higher education institutions. The authentic assessment of student learning within the classroom would be the phenomena under consideration. The intent of this approach would be to understand how faculty members experienced and participated in meaningful student assessment. Focus groups and document analysis serve as potential forms of triangulation. Collection
and coding of data from a number of different faculty members who experienced the assessment phenomena serves as an asset of this approach. From this data, themes would emerge to shape a better understanding of authentic assessment – at least from the perspective of studied faculty members. A weakness of this approach is the removal of institutional context from the study (Creswell, 2007). Since assessment and general education looks different on each campus, it is difficult to separate the classroom assessment process from the context of the institution.

The case study approach would enable collection of context specific and rich data (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Using this approach, I would interview experienced instructors to learn how they authentically assess their students. Grounded within the context of one specific institution, these interviews would provide rich data on how authentic assessment can work within this one specific institution. A weakness of the case study approach is its generalizability (Creswell, 2007). Since interviewees are all from one institution, their experiences only reflect realities of a single institution. Yet, this approach does provide a look at what authentic assessment looks like within one institution.

After reviewing three approaches presented by Creswell (2007), I selected the case study approach. This approach provided me with the opportunity to develop rich data about how experienced faculty at one university authentically assess student learning. While the intent of the study is not to develop a university-wide assessment program, the case study approach does provide the potential of developing authentic assessment insights. In turn, these insights may inform other assessment and accountability efforts.
Methodological Traditions

Methodological approaches flow out of epistemological wellsprings (Creswell, 2007). As a researcher, it is important to recognize this linkage between methods and epistemological assumptions. Symbolic interactionism and pragmatism inform my worldview and approach to research. Pragmatism, an American tradition providing a philosophical foundation for qualitative research, “views reality as characterized by indeterminacy and fluidity, and as open to multiple interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 188). Pragmatists believe meaning flows from practical action and reflection. People understand their realities through these experiences and interactions. Symbolic interactionism has its roots in this aspect of American pragmatism (Givens, 2008).

“Symbolic interactionism is a sociological and social-psychological perspective grounded in the study of the meanings that people learn and assign to the objects and actions that surround their everyday experiences” (Given, 2008, p. 848). Developed by scholars at the University of Chicago, this sociological perspective finds its expression through the work of Mead and Blumer (Collins, 1994). Blumer's 1969 book, Symbolic Interactionism, serves as a major statement on the perspective (Given, 2008).

Symbols, within this model, refer to any objects standing for or representing something else (Given, 2008). The interaction aspect of the model relates to interpersonal communication between people as they discuss symbols. Blumer (1986/1969) founded symbolic interactionism on three premises: 1) people act toward things based on the meanings they have for them, 2) people derive meanings through interactions with other people, and 3) people manage and change these meanings through self-reflection and interpretation. Culture, formed of ideas, objects, and practices of
everyday life, is the result of these interactions (Given, 2008). Blumer (1986/1969) did not see meaning as coming from some predetermined source, but instead “as arising in the process of interaction between people” (p. 4).

Symbolic interactionism has a distinct perspective on the role of the researcher (Given, 2008). Believing it is not possible for a researcher to be value-neutral, symbolic interactionist researchers recognize all research is done from a viewpoint. Rather than attempting to separate oneself from all values and beliefs, the researcher works to identify how beliefs, biases and perspectives shape the self (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher then acknowledges these influences in his or her research and writings. Pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, with their emphasis on experience and the lived experience, served as theoretical footings for my selection of qualitative methods.

Since this study explored experiences of higher education faculty and meaning they placed on these experiences, I utilized a qualitative research approach. Merriam (2009) stated, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6). Selection of this methodology flowed from my interest in how faculty members experienced the assessment of student learning. This research interest lent itself to a qualitative method because of its naturalistic grounding, need for descriptive data, concern for process, and my concern for how participants make meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Harmony University, a pseudonym for a small faith-based liberal arts university, served as the site for this case study. Since I teach at Harmony, I had access to faculty and administrators and firsthand knowledge of assessment initiatives. Qualitative
researchers often experience firsthand the issue or problem under study at their places of work (Creswell, 2007). This naturalistic approach enabled me to consider the context of the assessment process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This contextual grounding enabled me to understand better interactions between the various higher education stakeholders. The iterative nature of qualitative research allowed me to explore and uncover rich data. This exploration led to deeper understandings about how faculty assess student learning.

A case study approach provided a qualitative set of research tools to explore the context of Harmony University’s general education program. According to Creswell (2007), the case study is a methodology where a researcher examines a bounded system or systems over time. This qualitative method requires multiple sources of data collection and an extensive case description. Examples of these data sources include participant observations, interviews, and document analysis. Case studies are especially appropriate when research revolves around “How?” or “Why” questions (Yin, 2009). A quantitative approach, with its reliance on numbers, would not be an appropriate methodology for exploring how the assessment process works or how participants construct meaning through their assessment experiences. Rather, the case study approach allows the researcher to retain a holistic perspective on topics under exploration.

Case study, as a research methodology, has a long history across many disciplines (Creswell, 2007). The disciplines of physiology, medicine, law, and political science all make extensive use of case studies. Demonstrating the research quality of the case study methodology, Yin (2009) cited two examples of famous and best-selling case studies. In the first, Allison and Zelikow (1999), through their study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, demonstrated the power of an exploratory case study. In the second, Whyte's (1955)
A positive characteristic of the case study approach is the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Since one of my goals was to understand classroom assessment at Harmony University, it was imperative to collect data from multiple sources. Creswell (2007) suggested case studies typically collect data from documents and records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts. Yin (2009) provided specific guidance through a discussion of six sources of evidence he believed relevant for case study methodology. These six sources are documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Neither researcher suggested case study researchers should utilize all of these methods of data collection.

Multiple sources allow the researcher greater latitude in exploring issues within a case (Yin, 2009). “However, the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration” (p. 116-117). While researchers do not universally accept the term “triangulation” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), the core concern here is the importance of collecting data from more than one source. While this approach has potential to provide richer data, its real strength is in corroborating the same fact from
more than one source of information (Yin, 2009). This approach results in a more convincing and accurate case study.

**Interviews**

In my research, I interviewed nine faculty experienced in teaching within the general education curriculum at Harmony University. This approach, called purposeful sampling, allowed me to select interviewees who purposefully informed my understanding of the assessment process within general education courses (Creswell, 2007). Since Harmony University distributes its 49 credits of general education courses across its four colleges, I planned to interview full-time professors from each of the four colleges who taught general education curriculum courses. However, since the College of Business offered only one general education course, I did not select faculty from that college.

To assist with the purposeful selection process, I reviewed the fall and spring course schedule and made a list of general education courses. From this list, I added in the instructors’ names. Since I am a faculty member and the university is not large, I know nearly all of the tenure or tenure-track faculty members. Harmony University employs 58 (23 females and 35 males) tenured or tenure-track faculty. Recognizing the general education curriculum is multi-disciplinary and overseen by the entire faculty, I sought to select faculty from across the disciplines. My intention was to select an interview group representative of the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Education, or the College of Theology. Since the College of Arts and Sciences delivers the majority of general education courses at the university, the majority of the interviewees reside in that college. I purposely selected faculty for consideration based on their experience
teaching general education courses. While teaching experience was the main selection criteria, I also sought to include both male and female participants. As a result of the purposeful selection process, I selected 15 faculty members for my potential interview pool. Each faculty member on the list had experience teaching general education courses at Harmony University.

Before contacting or interviewing any of the faculty, I secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Harmony University and the University of St. Thomas. Once I received final IRB approval from the University of St. Thomas, I sent an email invitation to nine faculty members from my pool of interviewees. I based selection of these nine faculty members on their teaching experience, college membership, and gender. Six of the nine accepted my initial invitation to participate in the study. I followed up with a second email checking to see if those who did not respond would like to participate in the study. Two faculty members immediately replied in the affirmative. I did not hear back from the remaining instructor. I then invited a different faculty member, from my interview pool, to participate in the study. This faculty member immediately accepted my invitation.

While I planned originally to arrange for a private campus meeting room for each of the interviews, I learned these private rooms were no longer available as meeting rooms. In making meeting room arrangements with each interviewee, I gave them the option of meeting in a private meeting room or at their campus office. Five of the nine interviewees requested we conduct their interview in their own offices. Meeting in faculty members’ offices, I believe, increased the comfort level for faculty members and
provided me access to their academic, and yet personal, space on campus. Of the remaining four, I interviewed two in private rooms and two in my own office.

Each interview began with review and signing of the consent form (See Appendix A). I also read a prepared script describing the purpose of the study and reinforcing the confidentiality elements of the consent form. Since interviewees are my professional colleagues and they all had experience in graduate research, I did not need to spend much time developing a trusting interview setting. I began the formal interview, after turning on the digital recording device, with two historical questions about their teaching experience. The interview included inductive and open-ended questions (see Appendix B). These prepared questions explored faculty members’ perspectives on purposes of higher education, general education, and ways they assess student learning in their classrooms. I based follow-up questions throughout the interview on the responses of participants. Through the use of open-ended questions, good eye contact, and appropriate affirmation with pauses, I allowed interviewees to share their lived classroom experiences (Charmaz, 2006).

At the end of each interview, I asked participants if there was anything more they would like to add or if they had any questions for me. While none of the interviewees had questions for me, on more than one occasion, interviewees expressed additional thoughts about a previously discussed topic or moved into a new area for discussion. This confirmed for me the value of asking open-ended and inductive question. While I digitally recorded each interview, I also occasionally wrote brief notes about the interviewee’s physical reaction or other notable reactions on my interview protocol.
Prior to each interview, I told the participants the interviews would last between 50 to 60 minutes. In practice, I completed all interviews within this timeframe. At the close of each interview, I thanked participants for their time and willingness to be a part of my study. More than one interviewee responded by thanking me for allowing them to talk about their teaching. After each interview, I immediately wrote my opening memo and notes for inclusion in the transcription of the interview.

**Document Analysis**

Documentation about the university’s general education program, promise statement, and assessment processes served as an additional source of data collection. This source of data is relevant in most case studies (Yin, 2009). For purposes of this case, I reviewed the mission statement of the university, a newly developed statement about the university’s promise to its students (used internally to guide all student services and institutional marketing), general education and assessment governing documents, and supporting documentation used in the implementation of general education assessment. The main purpose of documentation analysis was to corroborate data retrieved from interviews and to understand better the academic context of the interviewees and the general education curriculum. I reviewed available documentation prior to conducting the interviews. This review, while helpful in providing insight into the institution’s mission and historical context, did not uncover data pertinent to the study’s findings, analysis, or conclusions.

Yin (2009) does caution the researcher not to over rely on documentation analysis. Since a document exists, some may believe it represents the unvarnished truth. Researchers need to remember authors of the documents wrote them for a specific
audience and at a specific time. It is the role of the researcher to be aware of these perspectives. Since the majority of documents, I reviewed are public or widely available to the faculty, risk from this form of bias was minimal. I also recognized there is often a difference between a policy position or a governing mandate and operational reality. Part of my task as the researcher was to take these concerns into consideration as I analyzed the documents.

Data Analysis and Coding

Qualitative research results in descriptive data rich in meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Charmaz (2006) posited, “Rich data are detailed, focused, and full” (p. 14). However, without a process of analysis the data only remains a collection of presumably related information. Within qualitative research, the process of analyzing data is an iterative process used to inform subsequent data collection. As an inductive process, abstractions flow from data. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) declared, “Theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than from the top down), from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected” (p. 6). Grounded theory methods also informed my data analysis. According to (Charmaz, 2006), grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible, guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories “grounded” in data themselves. While I did not seek to develop grounded theory from my study, I did rely on the iterative nature of grounded theory data analysis to inform my data analysis. In short, I employed an intentional process of memo writing, data collection, critical reflection, and grounded coding to analyze my data.
I utilized the seven phase analytic process suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011). This process includes organizing the data, immersion in the data, coding the data, generating categories and themes, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternative explanations, and writing a report. Following Maxwell's (2005) guidance, I transcribed and analyzed the data immediately after its collection. These transcriptions followed the format offered by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). The transcriptions and memos informed subsequent data analysis. As a result of this iterative process, I gained a deeper understanding of the case’s context and increased the potential of understanding the lived experiences of study participants. Instead of a rigid and prescribed process, this form of data collection and analysis was intentionally fluid and synergistic.

One of the goals of this grounded approach was to develop rich and saturated data. Data saturation occurs when the researcher finds the data collection process collecting redundant data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While I believe data saturation occurred after the sixth faculty interview, I completed my plan to interview nine faculty members. Although the analytic process suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011) may appear prescriptive, the looping or iterative component of the analysis provided for rich analysis. As I transcribed and read the transcripts, I analyzed them for emergent themes. During this same period, I wrote memos to inform my analysis. This analysis informed collection of data from other sources of data. Triangulation increased internal validity of the study. Through this process, I incorporated my analysis into enriched and opened-questions for the remaining interviews.
Through this ongoing process of analysis, I looked for emerging themes and relationships to assist with the coding process. Maxwell (2005) suggested analyzing data and resultant codes to identify category types as organizational categories, substantive categories, and theoretical categories. While on the watch for threats to validity and discrepant data, I continued to write memos to assist with coding development.

The initial line-by-line coding process resulted in hundreds of *in vivo* codes. *In vivo* codes utilize actual words of participants and help preserve participant meaning (Charmaz, 2006). From these *in vivo* codes, I developed a smaller number of focused *in vivo* codes. Focused codes utilize the most significant line-by-line codes as a data filter. I grouped these focused *in vivo* codes into 13 sub-groups. Upon further analysis, five resultant *in vivo* category codes, each with two or three of the sub-groups, emerged from the data. Utilizing words of interview participants through the different levels of coding provided a grounded and authentic analysis. Additionally, analytical theories and concepts discussed in the literature review informed this analysis. As an additional safeguard against bias and improper coding, I requested a peer to review my coding process and a sample of my coded data. The peer reviewer affirmed my line-by-line coding reflected the meaning of the data and focused codes represented emergent themes. I used the resultant saturated theoretical categories to develop my written analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

**Design Considerations**

**Validation Strategies**

“Did we get it right?” (Stake, 1995, p. 107) is the central question at the core of the qualitative research validation debate. This deceptively simple question leaves unsaid
what *right* means within qualitative research. The definitions and strategies surrounding validation within qualitative research shift as researchers grapple with determining their understanding of what sound practice looks like within the sphere of qualitative research. Yin (2009) argued for construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Within these four approaches, he offered a number of practices supporting these validation strategies. This approach, however rational, appears to reduce validity to a form of external actions. I believe it helpful to approach validation from a perspective that values the constructivist nature of qualitative research.

The work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided a foundation for much of the current understanding of validation within qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Working to reframe validity within more naturalistic terms, a qualitative research value, Lincoln and Guba (1985) used terms like credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to develop validity strategies. The resultant operational strategies included triangulation, procurement of thick data, and auditing of the research. These validation constructs continue to serve as the foundation for validation discussion within the field. Peer review provides an additional and external validation strategy (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers view peer review with a similar spirit with which quantitative researchers view interrater reliability (Creswell, 2007).

More recently, qualitative researchers are discussing the implications of postmodernist understandings of truth and knowledge on validation strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A post-modernist perspective does not support the belief objective truth is possible through right methodology. Rather, a post-modernist perspective of validation
recognizes the importance of different, and quite possibly subjugated, perspectives. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) offered a post-modernist perspective with their suggestion researchers metaphorically look to the crystal to inform their understanding of validity. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) maintained, “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response—not triangulation but rather crystallization” (p. 963). Defining accuracy as determined by both researchers and participants, I adapted Creswell's (2007) synthesized validation strategies for my study. The validation process flowed from the beginning of this study on through the writing of this report. While I incorporated accepted validation strategies, I also recognized the crystalline nature of the qualitative endeavor.

The strategies I employed within this study included prolonged engagement in the field, utilization of multiple sources of data, peer review of data analysis, reflection on researcher bias, and development of rich data. Prolonged engagement was an advantage of a single-case study at my own work site. I am familiar with the majority of the faculty. In addition, I conducted the study over a number of months. My statement of positionality and subsequent reflective memos helped me address researcher bias. Through triangulation, iterative research design, critical reflection, and data saturation, I developed rich data. The peer review of my coding process affirmed the validity of my work and provided insights on how to sharpen focused code labels.

**Generalization**

Due to the nature of qualitative research, researchers must approach the issue of generalization with care (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Maxwell (2005) distinguished
between internal and external generalization. Internal generalization results in generalizable findings within the study population. Within my case, the findings are generalizable. External generalization, on the other hand, is generalization to populations outside of the research population. In my case, this could be other universities or colleges. Since my findings are from one site, the findings are not generalizable across all of higher education.

However, with incorporation of theory, my findings have potential to be more generalizable. Marshall and Rossman (2011) asserted researchers can offer their findings to others with similar frameworks and theoretical constructs. For this increased generalizability to be valid, researchers must build the conceptual framework on sound data collection, analysis, and analytical models or theories. Grounded theory is an example of an approach offering qualitative researchers an avenue for external generalization. Within this study, research-generated theoretical statements may assist others as they experience or plan for the assessment of student learning within a general education classroom or program.

**Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality**

Ethical methodology and practice were of the highest concern throughout this research. Respect for people, beneficence, and justice are three critical components of ethical research (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Throughout the study, I maintained the highest level of respect for all participants. This found practical expression through my care for participants and the following of protocols to maintain confidentiality. I protected participants from harm by defining and managing research risks and followed practices approved by the University of St. Thomas’ Institutional Review Board. Justice
is the concern for subjugated voices and intentional consideration of those who may benefit from my research. I addressed this ethical concern through memo writing, participant selection, and critical reflection.

**Confidentiality**

While it may be possible to infer the actual location of the case site, a distinct disadvantage of a participant single-case methodology, I maintained confidentiality and anonymity of my participants. All participants and organizations received a pseudonym. Within my data collection, to reduce bias and maintain confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to all interview participants. Within this report, I replaced all names, locations, and other identifying terms with pseudonyms. I did not create a list including both individual names and their pseudonyms.

I conducted the personal interviews in mutually agreeable locations that provided for private conversation. I stored digital recordings of my interviews in a password-protected computer. The transcriptions of these recordings were only accessible to me. I maintained all paper field notes and transcriptions at my home. To protect digital records, I password protected all files. I transcribed the audio recordings myself. I plan to keep the transcribed data indefinitely and the audio files no longer than one year. I may utilize this data for future research projects.

**Reducing Risk**

The study had several risks. I informed participants of these risks through informed consent protocols approved by the Institutional Review Board. The first identified risk was participants might disclose personal values and sensitive information during the interviewing process. To minimize this risk, I used open-ended and inductive
questions. I worked to provide an even-handed and respectful atmosphere throughout the interviews. I informed participants they could choose to skip over a question if they were uncomfortable discussing the issue. No interviewees took this opportunity.

The second identified risk was participants might have concerns about discussing strategies and methods utilized in their work. I informed interview participants they could restrict the amount of detail disclosed and could use pseudonyms to avoid identifying key stakeholders. My intent was to understand participants’ experiences and understandings—not to surface or create ill will. I maintained confidentiality throughout the study.

Role Maintenance

Since I am a faculty member and serve on the General Education Committee at Harmony University, it was important for me to be clear with participants about my role as a researcher. Through reflective memo writing and field notes, I monitored my role maintenance. I did not divulge confidential research information to anyone. In addition, requirements of the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) for both the University of St. Thomas and Harmony University assisted me in monitoring my role maintenance.

Informed Consent

Prior to each interview, I forwarded the consent form by email to each interview participant. At the start of each interview, I discussed the participant consent form, study purpose, and any potential risks. Participants had the opportunity to self-disclose to a level to which they felt comfortable.

Since this is a single-case study, it would be relatively easy to infer the site’s identity. As a result, I shared with participants the nature of the study, the consent form,
and allowed them to remove themselves from the study. I brought a printed copy of the consent to each interview. Together we reviewed and signed this consent form. As discussed earlier, I used pseudonyms throughout the report. In addition, I took care not to provide identifiable information about the subjects within this report.

Since informed consent is crucial qualitative research, I read a script about the study to each perspective participant. The script is as follows:

The purpose of this case study is to describe and interpret how faculty and administrators assess student learning across the general education program at Harmony University. I invited you to participate in this study because of your institutional involvement with assessing student learning within the general education program at [Harmony University]. I will audio-record interviews to ensure accurate transcription of your responses. The records of this study are confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. You are free to withdraw your data from this study up to one week after the interview.

**Summary**

A study’s purpose and researcher assumptions inform selection of research methods (Creswell, 2007). In this chapter, I reported on how the purpose of my study and my epistemological assumptions guided me to select a qualitative case study research approach. As I considered the study’s research question, I analyzed three different research approaches. I decided a qualitative single-site case study approach would provide the richest data to help me fulfill the purpose of the study. Symbolic interactionism and pragmatic philosophy served as theoretical grounding for method choices and implementation.

To collect rich data, I interviewed nine instructors experienced in teaching general education courses and analyzed relevant institutional documents. Through use of open-ended and iterative questions, I allowed interviewees to share their lived classroom
experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Document analysis provided a framework for understanding institutional and general education purposes.

Through the data coding process, I sought to analyze data to uncover findings to research the study’s research questions. Using Marshall and Rossman’s (2011) seven-phase analytic process, I organized the data, immersed myself in the data, coded the data, generated categories and themes, offered interpretations through analytic memos, searched for alternative explanations, and wrote this report. After an initial line-by-line coding process, I uncovered 13 in vivo coded sub-groups. In vivo codes utilize actual words of participants and help preserve participant meaning (Charmaz, 2006). Upon further analysis, five resultant in vivo category codes, each with two or three of sub-groups, emerged from the data.

Validation strategies and research generalization considerations shaped design choices. Prolonged engagement in the field, utilization of multiple sources of data, peer review of data analysis, reflection on researcher bias, and development of rich data all worked to develop quality findings and valid data. Since study findings are from one site, they are not generalizable across all of higher education. However, internal generalization results in generalizable findings within this study’s population. As such, within my case, the findings are generalizable.

The concluding section of this chapter reported on the study’s ethical considerations and practices employed to safeguard confidentiality. Ethical methodology and practice were of highest concern throughout this research. Throughout the study, I followed strict protocols, approved by the Harmony University and University of St.
Thomas’ Institutional Review Boards, to maintain confidentiality, reduce participant risk, maintain my researcher role researcher, and ensure informed consent of all participants.
CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS

The case study approach provides researchers with a set of qualitative tools especially appropriate when the research revolves around “How?” or “Why” questions (Yin, 2009). Helpful for this study, the case study approach allows the researcher to retain a holistic perspective on topics under exploration. In my study, participants described their perceptions of teaching and assessing learning general education courses at Harmony University.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the case study’s context and identify emergent findings from the data collection process. The first section of the chapter describes the setting for the case study. The second section provides an overview of study participants and data collection methods. The final section provides a detailed review of research findings. Emergent themes from the data were changing assumptions about students, navigating contested educational aims, shifting pedagogy, bridging the learning gap, and teaching beyond the course. I analyze these themes in Chapter Six.

Case Study Setting

Harmony University served as the setting for this single-site case study. Since its earliest days, Harmony University’s identity drew from its core mission of preparing students for entry into professional church careers. Founded in 1893, Harmony University began as a high school with the sole mission of preparing young men to become pastors. Serving as a boarding school for young men, graduates went on to an out-of-state college and eventually to seminary. This identity as a church work training school continued throughout the school’s transformation from a high school, to a two-year college, and, in 1962, into a four-year college.
During this church work era, academic preparation centered on biblical languages (Greek, Hebrew, and Latin), biblical studies, philosophy, history, and the arts. Ordained men served as the majority of the faculty and administrators. Toward the later part of this era, the college began preparing elementary school teachers to serve in The Church’s (a pseudonym for Harmony University’s sponsoring church body) schools. Rallying around The Church’s core value of doctrinal purity through rational theological preparation, Harmony University, through its clergy-centered faculty, dedicated itself to forming theologically sound pastors and teachers.

However, beginning in the 1960s, the membership of The Church, paralleling other mainline denominations, began a slow decline in membership. The immediate impact on Harmony University was the decline in demand for church workers. As enrollment in church work programs declined throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, Harmony University launched degree completion programs and a myriad of academic programs (communications, psychology, business, kinesiology, and more) to attract a wider student population. In 1997, the institution transformed itself into a university with four colleges: College of Business, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Education, and the College of Theology.

Today, Harmony University offers 42 undergraduate majors and 15 graduate degrees. An early leader in online education, Harmony University now delivers instruction online, face-to-face, and in blended (a mixture of face-to-face and online instruction) classroom settings. In general, the university serves three distinct groupings of students: traditional undergraduate students, adult undergraduate cohort students, and graduate cohort students. Traditional students receive their instruction predominately in
classrooms on-campus – though online offerings are available. These undergraduate students, typically 18-22 years of age, either live in residence halls or commute to the urban campus. Both undergraduate and graduate cohort students, on the other hand, are typically adult learners and receive their instruction online, in blended classroom settings, or at satellite campuses – predominately within a 90-mile radius.

General education at Harmony University consists of 49-55 credits distributed over 10 different content areas. The areas include fine arts, history and political science, communication, global studies, social and behavior science, health and physical science, literature, mathematics and physical science, religion and theology, and writing. Students select courses from multiple offerings from within each of the various areas. Available documentation indicated little change to the general education curriculum or purpose statement since its adoption in 1998. After reviewing this documentation, I did not uncover curricular or faculty development emphases significantly shaping participants’ interview responses or influenced development of study findings, analysis, or conclusions.

During the fall of 2011, the total headcount at Harmony University was 2,800 students. Of this total, 1,182 were traditional students, 510 were adult undergraduate degree completion students, and 1,108 were graduate students. This study’s participants included instructors of Harmony University’s traditional undergraduate general education courses. The Carnegie Foundation, in an effort to assist those conducting research on higher education, developed a classification system to uniformly reference higher education institutions (Carnegie classifications: FAQs, 2011). Relevant Carnegie Classifications for Harmony University are as follows:
Undergraduate Instructional Program: Professions focus, some graduate coexistence
Undergraduate Profile: Full-time four-year, selective, lower transfer-in
Size and Setting: Small four-year, primarily residential
Basic: Master’s Colleges and Universities (larger programs) (Carnegie classifications: Lookup, 2011).

**Interview Participants and Data Collection Methods**

In this study, I interviewed nine faculty members, six males and three females, who reported 4 to 20 years of teaching within higher education. While gender was not a criterion for study participants, I did work to include both male and female tenure-track faculty. Currently, 39% of tenure-track faculty members are female. Participants averaged 14.7 years of higher education teaching experience. Regarding years of career experience, two participants reported 4 to 9 years, two had 10 to 15 years, and five had 16 to 22 years of higher education teaching experience. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant and to the site of the case study.

I selected participants based on their experience teaching general education courses at Harmony University. Participants also represented three of the four colleges of the university. Since the majority of classes general education courses reside in the College of Arts and Sciences, the majority of the interviewed professors teach within this this college. Eight of nine faculty members serve as tenured or tenure track full-time faculty. Of these eight, six hold the highest rank of Professor, one serves at the second highest rank of Associate Professor, and one serves as an Assistant Professor. The one non-tenured faculty member was an adjunct instructor who teaches two to three general
education classes each semester. I selected this faculty member due to his reputation as a successful and engaging instructor.

While career paths varied on how participants ended up teaching at Harmony University, four participants reported Harmony University as their first and only full-time professional position. Each of these participants taught as an assistant in graduate school or served briefly as an adjunct faculty member before beginning their service at Harmony University. Four participants came to Harmony University and higher education after serving in professional positions in their field. One participant taught for a few years at a different higher education institution before coming to Harmony University.

Research Findings

The purpose of this section is to present emergent themes from interview data. The themes emerged after analyzing data from nine interviews. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, emergent themes from the data were changing assumptions about students, navigating contested educational aims, shifting pedagogy, bridging the learning gap, teaching beyond the course. Each of these emergent themes contained relevant sub-themes. The wording of the themes and sub-themes originated from the actual words of the participants.

Changing Assumptions about Students

The emergent theme changing assumptions about students includes sub-themes of not knowing who these kids are, frustrating student behavior, and becoming parental. Participants chronicled different ways today’s traditional students are different from when they first started teaching or from when they themselves attended college. A number of participants expressed amazement and wonder at the often poor classroom
behavior and study habits of their students. In addition, participants recognized the range of preparedness for college level studies was different than when they first began teaching. Participants often disclosed these stories of their changing assumptions as a prelude to discussing their shifting pedagogy.

**Not knowing who these kids are.** Evan observed that when he began teaching his students were not different from himself when he was a student. He stated, “They were kind of ‘mini-me’s. The way they envisaged their learning was much the same way that I did as an undergraduate.” In his first years of teaching, he found lecturing to be an effective teaching method. At some point, he his assumptions about how students respond changed.

Now, I don't know who these kids are. And I don't mean that in a real sense. What their priorities are and what it is that makes them respond or not respond to something is quite often a mystery to me. (Evan)

Evan went on to discuss how he saw these changes in students as the result of what society now expects of young people. Rather than setting high expectations, society expects little of their young people. These low expectations result in poor academic performance.

In a similar way, Chris, when talking about his students’ lack of engagement in classroom activities, believed it to be a lack of preparation at the high school level.

I don’t think they have been conditioned to be in college. I think high school is broken in that fashion. I don’t think they are taught in high school to be ready for college – anymore. And, some students are better at it than others.

This lack of preparation resulted in Chris adjusting his assumptions about student engagement and entrance skills. He saw it as his job to help students learn study skills and classroom behaviors needed for their future academic and professional success. He
said, “I don’t think students are prepared to be in school all of the time. I think it’s our job to get them there. I think that is part of what they are paying for.” This change in assumptions about student preparation resulted in adjustments to Chris’ teaching methods. He concluded, “I think if we want people to have a college education we are going to help them.”

Faith found, after two to three years into her teaching career, her students were consistently not completing assigned tasks or struggling with their work. As a result, she recognized her assumptions about her students needed realignment.

Before, I just had these expectations for students - that a college student "should"… And now the longer that I have been at Harmony I no longer say that statement any longer. And then look at where the students are at - and then have them practice. So I think I have shifted, in terms of the "shoulds" of the student. (Faith)

These shifting expectations of what a college student “should” be able to accomplish coming into class contributed to Faith’s reassessment of what it meant to be an effective teacher. Amongst other things, she found students struggling to listen to lectures, write well, and connect theory to their lives.

Don spoke, on more than one occasion during his interview, of his mystification about today’s traditional undergraduate. For instance, during his discussion about working to get students to read and to be engaged with the world around them, he recounted, “And if you don’t know anything… about the wars that are going on… they just kind of tune out. I’ll never understand that.” He also cited cultural factors making critical feedback difficult for students to accept. He reported students overestimated their abilities. “It’s crazy. How here everyone thinks, ‘I am so great’. And of course we are doing terrible in math here.” Don found the cultural exceptionalism surrounding today’s
undergraduates makes it challenging for students to accept feedback countering this perception. Evan also cited this cultural factor when he declared, “We need to stop thinking of ourselves as the center of the universe. We all live in this spurious present which is something we construct ourselves and surround ourselves which acts like a lens which we interpret everything.”

**Frustrating student behavior.** Participants all described some level of frustration concerning student behavior inside and outside of class. The participants typically framed these frustrations in a larger discussion of how to engage students in their work. These frustrations, while a challenge to the interviewees, served as a prod to adjust their daily teaching style and, for some, as motivator to reexamine their philosophy of education. While expressing ongoing frustration with student study skills and classroom engagement, interviewees used these frustrations as catalysts for adjusting their pedagogy. Participants reported for student learning to take place they needed to recognize and address the reality of their students’ classroom and study behaviors.

Student multi-tasking during class was a common concern expressed by participants. This off-task behavior detracted from engagement in instructors’ planned classroom activities or discussion plans. Participants often cited students’ off-task use of computers as a problem. Gail maintained, “Even though I feel like my teaching has improved, they’re still doing the same things. They're still always on the internet. They are still not engaged as much as I wanted them to be engaged.” While talking about her hoped-for classroom atmosphere, Faith observed, “I guess easy-going, but at the same time I don't tolerate off task behavior. So some people might say ‘She's not easy-going’ because I don't tolerate students playing around on their computers.”
After citing this concern, most participants followed up with how they deal with computers in the classroom. Faith asks students to close the lids of their laptops during class discussions. Gail recounted,

There was one semester when it was just getting out of control. So mid-semester I went to Target one morning and got everybody a notebook and said “There's not to be any more computers unless we need them for something.” It completely changed the class around. It was amazing.

For Chris, computers distracted from student engagement. He related, “Engagement is obviously the buzzword, to make sure they haven’t just sat there for 50 minutes. For the most part, there are no computers allowed in our rooms.” Similarly, Evan viewed computers in the classroom as a major barrier to student learning.

Even those who can type well and want to use it they are always about multitasking. There's not a single person, and this is true for faculty as well. I often don't bring my laptops to committee meetings and such because I know I'll be doing other things if I get bored. And I tell them that. “If I were you - if I had a choice to go anywhere I wanted on my laptop or to listening to me. I know what I would choose every time.” (Evan)

He does not allow laptops in his classroom.

The perceived lack of student study skills also frustrated study participants. Gail mentioned how the success of her teaching strategies hinges on students reading their assigned texts and articles. Hoping to engage students in critical conversations, Gail noted, “If they haven't read, and they're seeing the material for the first time, they can't have that critical discussion.” Expressing frustration, tinged with a sense of resignation, she added, “How can we ensure that our students are going to read? And I don't think there any magic answers. But it's always a goal, I guess to strive for.”

While most participants mentioned the challenge of getting students to complete their reading assignments, each had different approaches to encouraging students to read
their assignments. Don, like many professors, utilized quizzes to assess whether students were reading their assigned texts. He also, when discussing a specific class, spoke of the challenge of getting students to read the newspaper.

I used to want them to do the print and they have such a hard time with that. Just getting them online… to read the newspaper and read these articles. And then little by little by the end of the semester they get tuned in to little things here and there.

For Evan, students’ reading of course material is essential to his pedagogy. His goal is only to have class discussions with prepared students. He recounted, “I’ve had times that when we come in to discuss the article and half the class hasn’t read the article and I said, ‘Class dismissed, go to the article. Read your articles come back tomorrow.’” He also noted he is flexible to shift his daily lesson plan if students appear to be falling behind in their reading.

**Becoming parental.** Within the context of their discussions about student behavior, both inside and outside of the classroom, participants often discussed actions they took to promote better study and class engagement habits. Participants felt they needed to take these actions to help students succeed. Quite often, these actions took the form of sending out reminders about assignments, sharing more specifically the content of future tests, reminding students to take notes, taking attendance, and telling students of the importance of staying on task. Participants indicated they are being more assertive than in the past with these reminders and classroom actions.

Evan, for his part, recently saw the need to be more assertive with his reminders to students. He disclosed, “This is a terrible thing to admit, but it's true. But over the last three or four years I’ve become much more parental in the way that I run my classroom.” While indicating his displeasure with needing to take on this role, he felt it necessary
because of the poor study habits of students. He connected study and classroom habits with student learning. As a result, he is more willing than in the past to tell students what they should do to be successful. He commented, “I am much more of a nag. I am much more confrontational. Not in a mean way.” Study skills and note taking were primary areas of concern as he discussed his need to be more parental.

I am saying, “Now remember this thing that we were studying today, that's in the study guide and will be on the final exam. Now write this down.” It’s amazing to me how many of the students don’t take notes unless you make them. (Evan)

Finn also found himself irritated at some student behaviors. In his discussion about monitoring student behavior, he mentioned he often is looking to see if students are asleep. He also found he needed to take care in his confrontation of students about their poor behavior. Reflecting back on a class session he taught earlier in the morning, he disclosed, “I'm just trying to decide whether to nail that woman sitting there who is engaged somewhere else in her computer. She's not here.” While recognizing all students exhibit this behavior from time to time, he was particularly frustrated at the continual nature of this women’s off-task behavior. He confessed, “At the moment, it's my anger about that that's preventing me from following through. Because I'm not sure if I could follow through politely. It's an insult to me. It's a loss to you that you are somewhere else.”

Chris expected students to engage fully in the classroom experience. He recounted, “The expectation is that they are involved and so… Everybody should be doing, you know, they have paid. They don’t get to sit back and do nothing. That’s not how it works.” He strongly believed it is the instructor’s job to help students be successful in college. He suggested, “And I don’t think students are prepared to be in
school all of the time. I think it’s our job to get them there. I think that is part of what they are paying for.” Chris noted he regularly followed up with students through multiple emails, hallway conversations, and contact with the advising office in his efforts to get them to successfully complete assignments.

While Faith spoke of her high expectations for her students, she also spoke of her more recent recognition of the poor study skills of her students. She remarked, “So really trying to talk about preparing for exams. And really talking about the studying that's required in classes. So I'm finding myself talking much more about how to basically learn.” She reported this observation while noting her students came to her classes more academically diverse. She added she was directive in her guidance on exam preparation. She stated, “In the classroom, I literally tell them different topics that are on the exam. And I tell them that they should every day be studying the topics that we talk about in the class.”

Navigating Contested Educational Aims

The navigating contested educational aims theme incorporated the sub-themes getting a better job and selling to students. Participants’ views of the aims of higher education were diverse and sometimes conflicting. The diversity of views reflected ongoing conversations within larger society about the contested direction and nature of higher education (Duderstadt, 2000). Participant discussion about the purpose for higher education centered around one of two themes. The first theme centered on a more traditional understanding of higher education. This approach, as noted by participants, values primarily the liberal arts and development of the mind for critical thinking. The second theme discussed by participants was the role of higher education in training
professional workers for future careers. Common elements in participant discussion of educational aims included recognition of those who question the value of higher education, student expectations, and participants’ efforts to guide students into their futures. Participants all agreed higher education has a role helping students succeed in their future careers.

**Getting a better job.** Al described the shifting nature of the purpose of higher education from a liberal understanding to a more employment-centered purpose. He stated, “There has been a growth of professionalism in the higher education degree which was driven primarily by economic forces and interests.” He saw these two forces at play against each other. He observed, “What it used to mean to be educated - used to be the canon. Now, to be educated is to be prepared for your vocation. So that is where the tension is.” With a sense of resignation, he remarked, “You get the degree so that you can be a good entry level worker and a lot of places don’t care if you studied Latin for a semester, know the difference between Aristotle and Plato.” Al believed an educated life through the liberal arts enabled an individual to lead a rich life. However, he asserted, “I have a bias that most people don’t want to live more richly. They want to live joyfully or comfortably or even decadently.”

Evan also spoke passionately about the value of the liberal arts.

I am about as old school as they come. Which is that the purpose of higher education is to provide a broad liberal arts education to students to make them better thinkers, citizens, better believers, better everything, to make them more sophisticated, to be more responsible both to themselves, less likely to be a dupe to someone else's propaganda.

Evan viewed himself as a defender of the liberal arts within a society awash in temporal values. He maintained, “We are doing ourselves a disservice by just sort of briefly
sipping at all of these pools without really understanding anything.” He placed much of the blame for devaluation of the arts on consumerism. When discussing societal values, Evan argued it was,

Much more based on having a job that allows one to consume, to own, to experience various things. So that the idea of a classic construct of higher education as this place that makes us better people, not better professionals, but better people, is all but gone.

He asserted those educated liberally should resist movement toward consumerism. He concluded, “I think we see in the social movements of the last several decades a movement away, not just away from… many of the things in my very biased opinion we should value and cling to with all our might.”

Don also spoke passionately about the importance of the liberal arts. He stated, “I’m one of those people who say you don’t go to college just to get a job. So I don’t think that is why they are here.” He saw education as a potential end in itself when he added, “I think education is its own reward. And I know that students don’t want to hear that. If you are going to read something like this book… that’s the reward in a sense.”

He also, along with other interviewees who supported a more traditional view of higher education, recognized most students needed convincing of this perspective. Don gave an example of his efforts to defend the liberal arts to skeptical students when he related, “With literature, for example, to really realize many other people have gone through the same struggles that they may be going through.”

Don, along with other participants who supported a liberal arts purpose for higher education, discussed how a liberal arts education supports a student’s effort to find a quality job. Rather than viewing higher education as training for a specific job, these interviewees saw higher education as a means to prepare future workers to think critically
and broadly. Training for a specific career, according to Don, was not a valuable purpose for higher education. He remarked, “For example, if you are going to study computer science by the time you finish, certain trades, by the time you finish that training your training may be obsolete.” Conversely, Don viewed a liberal arts emphasis as an advantage to students and to society. He argued, “That one of the reasons they want to hire liberal arts majors or graduates is that they can think on their feet. They are well-rounded . . . that they can adjust to a new situation.”

On the other hand, three participants spoke more directly about higher education serving to prepare students for future jobs. While each spoke about the importance of critical thinking and elements of the liberal arts, their emphasis was on teaching skills for specific jobs or preparing students to work as professionals. Chris explained, “The purpose of higher ed. is to give the student the opportunity to explore a wide variety of areas where they might feel comfortable finding employment.” Chris worked to help students explore their strengths and weakness, all with the aim of equipping them to find a career. This approach represented a shift for Chris. Responding now to both student and societal needs, Chris directed his teaching more on preparation of students for the workforce. He commented, “When I am teaching, when I am talking, I am trying to be more career focused as opposed to more skill focused.”

Chris saw his shifting emphasis as a result of a change in society’s view of the purpose of higher education. Society and students, according to Chris, expect demonstrable value for their investment in higher education.

And I think it’s our job as higher education educators to show the value and not just say “Well look – it’s important to critical thinking, it’s important to problem-solving, it’s important to learn how to write.” To be more knowledgeable than that. You can’t just say ….cannot fall back on old arguments.
Chris also observed students view their grade point average as a means to a future job. “They think GPA is what is driving their job. As opposed to before it was learning the material.” This singular aim, according to Chris, of securing a future job and the importance of getting “A” grades shifted attention away from learning. Nevertheless, Chris also spoke about the importance of thinking critically and learning broadly. This broad education will help students face an uncertain future and job market. He commented, “Because you never know what skills are going to enhance your potential in the future. So you have to set yourself up to have the potential to being able to take every challenge on.”

Gail framed her discussion of the purpose of higher education as either an emphasis on technical education or the liberal arts. She did not see the two as necessarily mutually exclusive. However, she did see students at Harmony University as viewing their education as training for specific careers. She stated, “So a student, fitting into higher education, students are coming in to get that four-year degree so that they can get a job.” The purpose for Harmony University, according to Gail, included a strong liberal arts emphasis. She declared, “I think it's broad-based, I think it's more liberal arts, so to speak, than it is technical.” Yet, this broad approach ultimately had a vocational purpose. She added, “Training them to be, you know, a well-rounded person, but then training them in their field to be knowledgeable in their field once they graduate.”

Faith’s view of the purpose of higher education resulted from her reappraisal of what happened to students after graduation. She mentioned, “I have thought much more about what would be a successful graduate. What would be a successful future employee?” This end goal approach resulted, for Faith, in a shift to thinking about what
she could do to help students succeed as professionals. Discussing her thinking about how to prepare her students, she commented, “How can you be a better professional? I think professionalism is something that I’ve encouraged much more in the classroom.” This refocusing on professionalism resulted in a classroom emphasis on teaching professional behaviors within the classroom. “In fact, the other thing that I’ve done much more is that I really talked to students about behaviors. And how the behaviors in the classroom could reflect professional behaviors.”

Finn worked to integrate both his desire to promote the liberal arts and students’ desire for wealth attainment. He explained, “It’s clear to me that one purpose of higher ed. has become getting a better job so that I have a reasonable access to money. In some ways, that doesn't thrill me but that's understandable.” Instead of dismissing the monetary aim, Finn worked to bring a liberal arts perspective into this viewpoint. While he did not accept this viewpoint as the core purpose of higher education, he did see this as an ongoing process. He remarked, “At least not at the heart of higher education, but okay we can do these two things - that will work.” Later in the interview he added, “What are we going to do with the American economy? We need increasingly trained people. Yeah okay, maybe we can participate in that.” He believed, by educating people to think broadly, they will be of more value to their employers and enrich their own lives. He explained, “So that the higher Ed opportunity enriches your own life and therefore enriches how you can be a participant in our common life.” Using this same theme, he spoke critically of higher education’s tendency toward specialization, “Whatever specialty you think you have that's lovely. But the world is more than your specialty.”
**Selling to students.** Along with recognizing the shifting nature of higher education within their students and society, participants also recognized their role as advocates, each in different ways, for the liberal arts. This advocacy role took on a different aspect within their general education courses. Evan noted this role when he talked about his discipline. He maintained, “I think this is the case for many of us that a gen ed class is a chance for us to recruit majors. But I think even more importantly, it's our opportunity to be a missionary for our discipline.”

Chris, as he talked about shifting student perceptions, recounted he now worked to make a case for the value of his discipline to his general education students. In the past, he believed students better understood his discipline. He observed, “I am now more intentional about why [his discipline] in particular is important to all of these people….Now I have to sell that more.” Similarly, Evan recounted his efforts to help his students gain an appreciation for his discipline, “And try to engender in them a kind of enthusiasm or at least on some level a healthy respect and appreciation for what the discipline has to offer.” Gail also expressed she often finds herself battling misconceptions about her field. She maintained, “The general education classes, a lot of people have a bad connotation when they think of [field] unfortunately.” The work to overcome these barriers consumes significant energy. She noted, “A lot of times it's getting through that. And that can be a hard couple of months to get through. (laughs)”

The advocacy role also extends to discussing with students the importance of different general education requirements. Participants observed students often question the value of taking general education courses.

We hear students say “I am never going to use this why do I have to take a class in history or why do I have to take a physical science class.” So I find myself
coming up with creative reasoning - in terms of “Let's not just talk up getting this out of the way - let's talk about what kind of life skills or what kind of application might there be down the road with this.” (Jill)

Jill found teaching students outside of her discipline (as is often the case in general education courses) as an interesting challenge. “It was really interesting for me because I'm teaching everyone who is not in the choir.”

**Shifting Pedagogy**

The *shifting pedagogy* theme included the sub-themes *going beyond content*, *conversing as faculty*, and *wishing the teaching quiver had more arrows*. The shifting of participants’ understanding of effective teaching was a major theme throughout the study’s interviews. These accounts often took on a “before” and “after” element as they discussed the shift to what they viewed as a more effective and authentic pedagogy. The teaching methodology many of the faculty members began with early in their careers centered on content delivery. Multiple participants recounted this was the approach utilized by their own professors when they were undergraduates. Finding students were not learning or responsive to this approach, participants spoke about how they changed their teaching methodology and strategies. A desire to increase student engagement and learning was the primary motivator for their pedagogical experimentation.

**Going beyond content.** Bill talked extensively about how teaching is more than simply sharing content with students. He commented, “If a gen. ed. was ever focused solely on being like a data dump (laugh) that would be miss-aimed.” This approach, beyond being boring, would also do a long-term disservice to the discipline. Since students received a limited amount of exposure to any one discipline through general education, it was important, according to Bill, to have material presented in such a way as
to pique student interest. Bill posited, “There’s, to me, this distinction between proper
and improper exposure to material. If you expose someone to geology simply as a set of
data… that kills their interest maybe.” As Bill thought about his pedagogy he observed,

I would say generally, like as a student, I’ve always thought about… if I was a
teacher I would probably do it this way. What would I have appreciated in taking
a course that I didn’t have some pre-existing interest in?

Envisioning himself as a disinterested student, Bill sought to teach in ways to keep
himself interested. Faith and Gail framed their shift in pedagogy in stark “before” and
“after” terms. Faith began the interview with this statement about her teaching, “I have
gone way beyond content at this point. When I first started, I think I was just sort of
content, content, content. And now, I look at the classes as content, but embedded within
skill building.” As she reflected upon her early teaching approaches she utilized a train
analogy,

I was on a train, we got on the train, and we just plowed through the material and
we got off the train at the end of the semester. I think it took me about three years
to realize that that wasn't good for the students. I wasn't really helping them. It
was not very enjoyable for me. (Faith)

As she described her initial content-centered approach she cast this discussion in
adversarial terms, “When I first started, it's going to sound terrible, but it was sort of like
‘This is what you have to know. You better know it. If you don't know it, too bad for
you.’” This emphasis on content, with little regard for the student, resulted in a rigid and
fast instructional pace. She disclosed, “I was just rushing through the content, where I
just lectured, lectured, lectured, rush, rush, rush, give you an exam, then give you a grade.
I can't remember when, but at some point basically realizing that that's not teaching.”

Faith’s approach was now slower, more centered on the learner, and broader in
scope.
That teaching is really looking at how students are doing at the beginning of the semester and making sure that I am really emphasizing, practicing more, emphasizing more, relearning information, and actually make sure that these key concepts are truly understood, as opposed to who does and who doesn't.

Instead of viewing content delivery as her primary aim, Faith shifted her emphasis to student learning. She remarked, “I think before it was sort of like ‘Let's just see who understands’ and now it's more like ‘Wait a minute this is really important. So what can I do to help them understand?’ That's a huge shift.” This shift resulted in her working to get to know students better so she could understand the strengths and experiences they brought to the classroom. Faith no longer rushed through content. She asserted, “To me, effective pedagogy is not rushing. It's slowing down and being much more intentional about certain key issues that you want students to really know.”

Faith’s teaching methodology now included much more than lecture. The shift from only lecture to inclusion of discussion, self-reflection, and other activities was a major shift. She commented, “Every class. I try to accomplish both a discussion, based on something I said, plus a self-reflection.” She also found it important to connect the content of her classes with students’ lives and experiences. She observed, “Whatever topic we are talking about, they have to connect it to themselves.” Instead of just focusing on teaching the content of the course, she worked to embed the skills of oral communication, writing skills, information literacy, and critical thinking within her courses. She commented, “The students get tired of me saying this, but one of my mantras is, ‘Defend your thinking.’”

Gail also described her pedagogical shift from an emphasis on content to a focus on student learning. This shift began through intentional conversations with other faculty.
Because I feel like, “15 weeks! We have to get all this stuff in 15 weeks!” I've come to the realization that you don't have to jam everything into their throat. But take the time to make sure they learn it, to understand it. (Gail)

Her pedagogical shift resulted in intentional usage of formative assessment activities. As she reflected on her commitment to using formative assessment within her classroom, she declared, “It drives my pedagogy. I guess if you want to think that way. It drives how I am teaching and what I am teaching.” Gail increasingly looked to incorporate discussion as a learning method within her classes. She stated, “Effective teaching is being able to get the content across to students in a way that they understand - while keeping them engaged (laughs) while having critical conversations.” She maintained student engagement continues to be an ongoing challenge.

Don, for his part, believed a professor no longer needs to have all of the answers to student questions. Recognizing he was a co-learner with students, he acknowledged, “I don’t really know the answers to some of these things. ‘What’s the answer to this?’ You turn it right back on them. You don’t have to know the answers anymore. You just ask them.” He felt this approach allowed students to see him in a more collaborative and authentic role. This allowed students to be more open in their own class interactions.

A shift to utilizing more experiential learning methods was also a theme in a number of the interviews. Gail discussed how she incorporated a service-learning component in a recent class. She observed this experience helped create an atmosphere of collaborative learning. She asserted, “I think for them, students can learn from what they provide, and I think it's just a good opportunity for that collaboration to go on.” She also used a number of activity-based formative assessment activities within her classroom. Don discussed his use of field trips, both on campus and locally, to invigorate
and challenge his students. He stated, “One thing that I like to do is take them on little field trips.” These little trips helped him focus student attention on a particular learning outcome.

Faith used service learning to motivate her students to see beyond themselves. She related, “In some classes, I do service learning, so they are all in a community doing something.” She looked to integrate more service learning and action research into her course work. She added, “But in the classes that aren't doing service learning I think I want to try to do more so that they feel like they are basically applying their knowledge beyond just themselves.”

Jill, on the other hand, has, throughout her career, made use of experiential learning methods. She now recognizes the importance of not relying on one teaching methodology. This realization came home to her when a student shared his desire for less experiential activities and more lecturing in a course. She exclaimed, “I just had this blank stare, Kevin! (Laughter) Can I just say for the record, I have NEVER had one of my students ever come to me and say, ‘Could you please lecture more!’” This interaction helped her realize she needed to be more aware of students’ learning styles.

I do a lot of cooperative learning in that class. Because also it might be my bias, because I have to constantly remind myself, especially because of my bias in using so much experiential stuff in a class… But that's also a learning style thing right? So I realize that not all students may be ours… that might not be their learning preference. (Jill)

With this realization came her intentional inclusion of other teaching methods targeted at a variety of student learning styles. For example, she made extensive use of journaling and other reflective writing assignments. Concluding this thought she asserted, “We have
to open up more in our, especially in our general education. I definitely need to think about the biases and the ways we are teaching things.”

**Conversing as faculty.** Conversations between faculty members about teaching played a role in shaping course development and classroom practice. Evan related some of the best improvements to his teaching came through informal conversations with departmental colleagues. He disclosed, “Discussion with colleagues, now this is where a ton of what we might think of departmental assessment goes on - in the offices and hallway conversations with colleagues in my department. And I think those are weekly discussions.” He found these conversations of value for strategizing and problem-solving classroom challenges.

A lot of it comes out of the complaining that we often do about how unambitious some of our students are. And so it’s a way of strategizing for those things too. If they are going to come to class and not have read the article, what do you do? (Evan)

However, these conversations, whether formally or informally, were not a part, according to Faith, of the academic community at Harmony University. Faith observed faculty at Harmony University did not readily talk about their teaching with each other. She asserted, “Nobody really takes the time. We don't talk about teaching. Everyone has this mentality - like kind of doing it on your own. ‘I'm the professor and it's my classroom.’”

Intentional conversations about teaching were significant events for both Faith and Gail. The group began, according to Faith, seven or eight years ago out of mutual teaching frustrations. She commented, “It was literally talking about frustrations in the classroom, practicing different strategies, coming back and talking about how they worked, how it helped with class discussions, how it helped make the classroom more enjoyable.” This voluntary and informal group was a major element in her shifting
Reflecting back, she recalled, “It just was literally being able to talk about pedagogy and students and learning. It was also kind of that mindset of problem solving to hopefully do a better job at teaching. That really changed my thoughts a lot.”

Gail also viewed her participation in a learning group as a significant ingredient to her improvement as a teacher.

It's just been an awesome experience, it really has. It's a time for us just to come together because a lot of times we vent. Because that's the place where we feel safe, that we can vent about how teaching is going.

The key to the success of the learning group, for Gail, was its safe environment. A safe place from judgment of her questions or practices, the group provided a place to share ideas, successes, and failures. “It’s an opportunity to really learn new strategies in a very safe environment where we can ask a lot of questions. We can say, ‘You know I don’t agree with this.’” She also believed the voluntary nature of the group was an essential element of her group’s success. She observed, “It has always been on our time. Nobody is telling us that we have to do this. If someone was telling us that you have to do this we probably wouldn't do it. (Laughs)”

**Wishing the teaching quiver had more arrows.** Participants, at times, felt frustrated at their inability to assist students in their learning. These comments often came about as they reflected on their pedagogical shifts or the lived reality of their classroom experiences. Reflecting on his desire to engage students in their learning, Finn said, “I wish that my quiver had more arrows in it.” Yet, for these teachers, these moments of frustration and doubt appeared to fuel their desire to keep learning about how to help students learn. Reflecting on her desire to improve student learning in her
classroom, Gail declared, “I don't think there are any magic answers. But it's always a goal, I guess to strive for.”

Evan recounted his ongoing efforts to find ways to engage students in course material and in critical thinking. Yet, he admitted, “What their priorities are and what it is that makes them respond, or not respond, is quite often a mystery to me.” Despite this admission, Evan was resolute in adjusting his pedagogy to meet student needs. He constantly assessed what was working in his classroom. Asked to describe how he decided how to adjust his course, he responded,

Through the assignments, by end of semester feedback, by what, and this is going to sound kind of soft, but you get this feeling, right? You can tell, whether it's the expressions on their faces, or the discussion you have afterwards. (Evan)

Some participants disclosed their dissatisfaction about some element of their classroom teaching. When talking about assessing whether students are learning in her classroom, Jill declared, “I think, first of all, this is a continual challenge. I think this is something that I almost always feel like I have to figure out more ways to do this. I think I make a lot of assumptions. I think a lot of us do.” Finn, while talking about how he assessed student learning in his classroom, revealed, “I'm not particularly satisfied with how I do with checking in or how often I do the checking in.” Gail’s frustration centered on how to motivate students to read assigned readings and engage in class discussions. This original frustration prompted her to shift her pedagogy to a more learner-centered approach. Yet, frustration has not gone away.

So it was a lot of frustration - which today I still have the same frustration (laughter). Even though I feel like my teaching has improved, they’re still doing the same things. They're still always on the Internet. They are still not engaged as much as I wanted to be engaged. They are still not having those critical conversations that you want to strive for and hope for as your ideal. (Gail)
Another way this sense of frustration found an expression was through wondering about what students were really thinking and learning. Jill stated, “But for me I think it's always a challenge to know if I'm reaching them or not. I know I could be more intentional about measuring that.” Jill wished she had a better understanding of what students took away from her classes. She reflected, “I don't always see what comes out of our experience together. Then, maybe somewhere down the road, I see it.” Faith also wondered about what her students were thinking. In her case, she wondered about how students perceived the atmosphere in her classroom, “Maybe the students are saying ‘No she's not easy-going.’ (Laughs) It would be interesting to know.” She also disclosed she felt underprepared to teach a classroom with a wide range of abilities. She asked, “How do you take a classroom with a wide range of abilities as well as more and more students with English as a second language. How do I differentiate the learning?”

**Bridging the Learning Gap**

The *bridging the learning gap* theme consists of the sub-themes *giving me windows into student learning*, *giving feedback*, and *getting to know students*. There is often a difference between what teachers teach and what students learn. Each participant discussed the gap between their teaching and their students’ learning. Discussion about this gap resulted in passionate participant responses. The first sub-theme, *giving me windows into student learning*, captured participants’ intentional efforts to use formative assessment to gauge student learning. Participants incorporated formative assessment as an intentional consideration in their course design and in the course of daily classroom activities. The second sub-theme, *giving feedback*, explored how participants used feedback within formative assessment. The third sub-theme, *getting to know students*,
explored how participants worked to bridge the gap between their teaching and student learning. Each participant shared the importance, in some manner or another, of knowing students and their needs.

The *bridging the learning gap* theme captured the participants’ efforts to improve student learning. While all participants discussed the importance of assessing student learning, two faculty members used language resulting in the naming of this major theme. In her explanation of her usage of the phrase “bridging the gap”, Gail remarked,

I was talking about the gap between what I'm trying to get across and what I think I'm getting across. Versus what they are understanding. Sometimes I think I've gotten it across and then I realize I haven't. So I need to figure out a different way to approach it.

Evan stated it this way, “How can I shorten the gap between what I'm telling the students and how they are receiving it and how they are taking the assignments?” These observations set the stage for a deeper look at how faculty members assess student learning and take actions to improve student learning.

**Giving me windows into student learning.** Student learning is at the heart of the teaching endeavor. Each participant spoke passionately of the challenges of helping students learn. As discussed, changing assumptions about students, contested understandings of the aims of higher education, and their shifting pedagogies all converged on the desire to improve student learning. This student focus was evident within participants’ self-reported pedagogies. All participants discussed strategies they employ to improve student learning. Use of formative assessment, whether in overall course design or in spontaneous applications based on what was happening at a particular moment within the classroom, was an instructional element all participants employ.
Gail spoke directly about her usage of formative assessment. She commented, “I also think of assessment as far as everyday things that I do in the classroom. So trying to go beyond just lecture, to understand, ‘Are you getting it?’” Instead of relying solely on quizzes and tests, Gail incorporated formative assessment as a regular, and at times, daily learning tool in her classroom. She relayed, “There are days where I will do something and I'll say ‘Okay everybody either thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs to the side’ so I can get a quick formative assessment.” Based on this quick assessment, Gail made decisions about whether she should work further with students on the material.

Whether that is in the actual lecture or it's in the next class period, to figure out how else can I bridge the gap, so to speak, between my understanding of how I'm trying to get across and their grasping of it. (Gail)

Gail also used this information from the formative assessment to reconsider her teaching technique. “I would then probably use different techniques to help them figure it out. So instead of just doing a lecture, I might have them do a debate.”

Formative assessment was a central component of Gail’s teaching. She explained, “It drives my pedagogy. I guess if you want to think that way. It drives how I am teaching and what I am teaching.” However, she continued to consider herself new to this pedagogical construct. She disclosed, “I would say I'm very much a novice in it. But I feel like I am starting to get an understanding.” Gail used formative assessment to check on student learning and as a planned collaborative instructional tool. She recounted one of her strategies called “Quiz, Quiz, Trade.”

You get a notebook, like an index card. The students will write down what they think would be a good test question. On the front they flip it around and put the answer on the back. Everyone in class does that and we all get up and we start mixing. So if I am asking you the question I would say, "Okay …. blah blah blah blah blah?” You try to answer it. You can't answer it. I try to guide you towards the answer without giving you the answer. And then we switch. And then you
give me your quiz question. And then what we do is we switch index cards. So now you have to go find another person in class to do the same process to them.

Gail mentioned she used this technique to monitor the depth of student learning. As an instructional tool she did note its success depended on students having correct answers on their cards.

While Gail was a strong proponent of using formative assessment techniques in the classroom, she did state techniques were no panacea. She explained, “Sometimes it's a huge home run. At other times, it's just not effective.” Since most of the ten or so techniques she used relied upon students doing their reading, it was important for students to complete their reading assignments. “If they are not reading, this strategy is not going to work. But they can be really effective.” At another point in the interview she added, “Sometimes they are just a huge success. And other times a kind of bomb.”

Jill discussed her use of formative assessment as a way to gain a better understanding of what students are thinking and learning. Instead of using formalized techniques, Jill largely used reflective writing assignments, typically journals, to gain insight about her students’ learning. By using this technique, she observed her students sometimes surprised her with their lack of learning, “I had one of those moments, ‘Oh my God, I thought I got through to him and I didn't.’ So the reflective writing gives me windows into those pieces of what some of my core objectives are.” Stating her teaching style lacked structure, Jill used reflective writing assignments to synthesize classroom experiences. She asserted, “That's where I find the most of how my students are thinking. It’s through those little short one-page reflective writings. And that happens throughout the whole semester that they do those.”
While she does have a sense of how many reflective writings papers she will assign throughout the course, she makes decisions on when and what to assign writings on dependent upon her perceptions of how students are doing with class discussions and activities.

I actually make my decision to assign the journal based on an activity - based on how the class discussion goes. If I sense that more people have more to say but maybe they aren't speaking up… So I kind of make those decisions as I go. (Jill)

Rather than relying on structured assessments to gauge learning, Jill relied on a collaborative and engaging learning environment. Through their journals, students reflected on their personal participation and learning. She added, “I also believe that effective teaching involves being able to figure out if you're effective. But I'm kind of a little looser about that than a lot of people.”

Jill framed her discussion of formative assessment in terms of faculty assumptions and learning styles. She posited, “I think I make a lot of assumptions. I think a lot of us do, here are my objectives, here’s how I'm getting at those, so they must've been accomplished (laughter).” She revealed a major challenge, addressed through monitoring student learning and her teaching style, was the academic diversity within her classrooms. She explained, “I walk in to every class assuming I have a valedictorian and a couple of students who didn't meet all four academic criteria to even be here. So that's quite a range.”

Chris discussed assessment in terms of how he and fellow faculty members gauged student learning and then helped students succeed. An important first step for Chris was making sure students placed themselves in the correct course based on their
previous academic preparation and skills. He described the process used to support students, especially those that struggle,

We don’t wait for a couple of weeks to give the first assessment. There’s a quiz, usually the second or third day of class. So we find out right away who is keeping up. And we talk to them. We make it very clear… And we need to assess whether you need to change your study habits, whether you are over your head.

Chris followed up with struggling students with emails and appointments. He said, “Then at that point you've done just about all you can. You do as much as possible to try to communicate with them. Eventually, they have to make their own choice. But then you've exhausted all of the possibilities.”

Chris utilized a mid-semester evaluation, completed by students, to help both him and the students gauge how students perceived the course, his instructional methods, and their own learning. Asking students to put their names on the evaluations, he looked to students to answer questions like, “So, are the questions on the tests, do you think they are reflective of what we have learned? And how can I improve this to get to the point that you think this is an excellent class?” He followed up individually with students who expressed concerns. He mentioned he used assessment data to adjust course content and components within the program’s major, “There's always something you can revise. Learners are changing, subject areas are changing, needs of the world are changing, so constant reflection is important. Gathering assessment data is part of the task.”

Chris found the student’s own writing was the best form of formative and summative assessment about a student’s work. He recalled, “From what they have written and everything. You go down the list and you can tell. It’s pretty transparent if they get it or not.” To assist with this process, he made extensive usage of rubrics. He observed, “With the rubric we kind of break it down. With the writing one we break it
down to the grammar and the syntax. And then there are the overarching ideas of it. How do they form it together – the transitions. We have a whole list of things.” Faculty members within his department agreed on these rubrics. Don shared these rubrics with students at the beginning of the course. Utilizing information he received from students’ work, he determined whether he needed to spend additional class time on any particular topic. Depending upon the issue and how common it was across the class, Don used different methods to discuss topics. He asserted, “Going through that as a class – sometimes individually too. Often times, it works best as a class so I don’t have to say it 25 times.”

Evan designed his course to intentionally challenge students to utilize insights they gained from earlier assignments to further their learning in subsequent assignments and projects. Through feedback on assignments and class discussion, Evan shaped and built on student learning throughout the semester. He observed, “A lot of these things sort of circle back and tie into the other things we are doing.” He structured assignments to challenge students to think, read, and write critically. After describing a project requiring this kind of work, he added,

Those are the kinds of things that we try to do in the class - to kind of pull the rug out from under them a little bit and say you have to start over. And you have to think about what it means to be responsible for yourself.

Through feedback on interlocking assignments, he built students’ reflective capacity for work on a summative project. Evan also shared he often informally assessed students’ readiness to learn on their appearance, “Sometimes it's about body language, it's about the kind of things where you can just kind of tell coming in. They are not ready.”
He concluded this thought by saying, “That's one of the joys of teaching a class this often, and this long, I can change on a dime if I need to.”

Finn disclosed his dissatisfaction with his usage of classroom assessment, “My first response would be that I'm not particularly satisfied with how I do the checking in or how often I do the checking in.” On a daily basis, his main way of checking on student learning was to watch for visual cues.

So my first thought in terms of assessment is that I am monitoring the student participation. Take that down deeper a notch and I am monitoring whether they are responding cognitively or affectively. And a little bit of psychomotor. Are we comfortable or are we on edge?

Finn connected this observation of student learning with student engagement. He explained, “Engagement is important for me as part of instruction. There is a time for me when I lecture, even there I'm looking at, ‘Are heads up or are heads down?’” Later he observed about his teaching, “I am assessing, evaluating, checking in on where are we affectively and cognitively. Am I reading a lot of blank stares? Okay I need to backup and cover that term again.”

Finn required his students to provide him with feedback to gauge student learning. After reading assignments, he asked students to send him emails about their understanding of the readings. Typically, he required students to send him quotations from the readings and three questions they have about the readings. He used these email responses to guide construction of his daily lesson plan. He explained, “I am using assessment to shape what I am going to do in the class period. Look at what kind of feedback I need to give. And what I need to build from based on what they presented to me.” Finn also worked with his students to reflect critically on their own work and thought processes. For each paper they wrote, he required the students to email him in
class a response to two questions about their just completed paper writing. His two questions were “What did I learn about this material?” and “What did I learn about myself?” He used these responses to gauge student learning and shape further class discussion. He did not grade student responses to these reflective questions.

Finn also commented on the lower academic competence, in comparison to students from his earlier teaching years, of incoming students. He shared how his assessment practices helped him discover the necessity of reshaping one of his general education courses to match the learning needs of his students.

Because I was assuming students were coming in up here [raises one hand to chest height] they were coming in down here [lowers hand to indicate a lower level]. Major rewrite of the course and I think it was much more appropriately targeted. (Finn)

Reflecting on his views of course design and classroom instruction, Finn maintained, “I can't teach without assessing.”

Faith shifted her pedagogy after her first three years to incorporate many more opportunities for formative assessment. She remarked, “There is some kind of assessment that they are doing almost weekly.” Rather than assuming students were learning, she reported she now took time for formative assessment. She mentioned a recent example where she observed students were not able to complete the assigned task.

The first papers they couldn't do it. They couldn’t literally do it or they didn't turn in anything. And then they e-mailed me and said "I don't understand how to do this". I went from that sort of formative assessment, I then looked at practicing. So we spent at least two class periods practicing applying. (Faith)

She used this information to adjust her classroom teaching. Prior to incorporating formative assessment procedures, Faith centered her teaching on content delivery. She shared her teaching was now about looking to see where students were struggling and
incorporating more learning experiences to help them succeed before the end of the semester.

In her course design, she made sure she now assigned writing assignments early so she could assess student competency. She remarked, “Then I spend a lot of time in class talking about things that I want them to practice and ways to maybe improve on the writing and critical thinking.” Later, she commented about the time she spends in class going over past work, “Going over it. Asking questions. Getting more feedback. Slowing down the classroom when I noticed something isn't working.” However, due to workload constraints, she did not allow students to resubmit reworked papers. She also discussed how she used formative and summative assessments from a lower-level class to design classes and course experiences for higher-level coursework.

**Giving feedback.** The importance of giving feedback to students was a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews. Participants reported the importance of giving feedback to students when they discussed their classroom assessments procedures. Yet, I selected this as a sub-theme because of its prevalence within interviews and because of the different ways participants used the technique within their classrooms. While participants did all discuss the importance of giving feedback, they were generally not specific about what they expected students to do with the feedback. When faculty members talked about feedback, they discussed the feedback they gave to students about their work. In this section, I will briefly discuss participants’ views on giving feedback.

When describing her pedagogical shift to a more student-centered approach, Faith discussed how providing more feedback to students early in the semester was especially important. She noted, “They need to understand. So what can I do to help them
understand? That's a huge shift. So for me, I think assessment is checking in to provide them with more feedback. And I probably didn't do that before.” To help them understand her expectations, she now provides a large amount of feedback on students’ first writing assignments. Faith found quick feedback by email was important and enriched her teaching. She reported, “I'll give them the feedback to them, answer their questions. I find that I am doing an enormous amount of teaching through e-mail questions. I think it's because I am just really quick at getting back to them.”

Faith did note students now seemed to require feedback in multiple ways. She admitted, “At first I was really kind of angry. But then, I think, for a lot of them it's just not knowing the level of expectations that I'm shooting for in class.” To address this issue, she takes time to provide feedback and reminders in a variety of ways. She explained,

I do multiple things. I give them feedback on the exams, on the papers. I also send out e-mails - sort of with the expectations. Reminding them in class. Reminding them in e-mail what sort of level of analysis that I want.

Faith also made extensive use of peer feedback on writing assignments. Other participants also expressed their inclusion of peer reading groups for paper writing assignments. Faith related, “I'm also having them meet in small groups and having them share what they wrote with each other, and look at each other's paper, and give each other feedback.” She encouraged students to ask each other questions about how to make their writing and thinking better and to write notes on their printed papers about ideas they received from their peers. She recalled, “The more they write on it, on their papers from that kind of pure discussion, that's more effective.”
Bill found essays were an excellent tool for evaluating how students were doing. He related, “When someone is trying to write an essay I feel you can see so much more of what’s going on in their minds. To me, that’s the most direct way to peer into their understanding.” Bill’s feedback analyzed the clarity of arguments presented by students. He maintained, “I think one of things that I have to offer, very much sharpened by my graduate school experience, is to push people to really think critically.” To reduce bias, Bill graded student essays anonymously. He said this practice made it more difficult for him to complete the institutional assessment requirements. Bill also utilized classroom discussion to provide feedback to students about their thinking. He recounted, “If someone asks a question that kind of pokes a hole in what I am saying or challenges it - then I know the understanding is starting to happen.”

For Chris, providing multiple levels of feedback was important. The first layer of feedback occurred through work and discussion in class. The second layer occurred through homework. Textbooks and computers provided some level of instant feedback to students. He explained, “Lots of lots of feedback. It’s not, ‘You’ve learned it on your own. Here’s the midterm and the final.’ We don’t think that’s enough.” He also noted the importance of giving fast feedback at the beginning of the course. This allowed time for intervention. He detailed the process he followed to identify and assist students struggling with the material.

You give them feedback instantly. If it isn't working for you - we have to find that out. Then as students show poorly on the first level quizzes you write a note on the quizzes – “Come and see me”. If it goes a couple times and they have not come to see you -- send them an e-mail. If they don't respond to that then you have to pull them aside after class or grab them in the hallway. And then you send an e-mail to the advising group and say, “I am really concerned about the student.” Then at that point you've done just about all you can. (Chris)
As discussed earlier, Chris sought mid-semester feedback from students about the class and his teaching. He remarked, “I think that has always been a very important part of my teaching is getting that honest feedback from the students.” He viewed the teaching process as a partnership between his students and himself.

Don utilized a rubric to guide his grading and feedback on student papers. He typically included a paragraph of summative feedback at the conclusion of each paper. Similar to Faith, Don incorporated peer-reading groups into the feedback process for student papers. He observed, “You know sometimes, I don’t know, some students give good feedback and some don’t really know. Me leading them through workshops.” According to Don, since students of this generation receive primarily positive feedback, it can be challenging to give students honest feedback. He observed wistfully, “It’s crazy. All this feedback and evaluation. That’s just what they do.”

Evan viewed feedback as an important aspect of his teaching as well. However, he observed students pay more attention to grades than on feedback. He felt students overlooked his feedback. “I was always really dissatisfied with the sense that you hand the paper back, they look at the back page, and either smile or frown and that’s all they ever do.” In addition, he found students to be quite emotional about the grading process, “They get a bad grade - it really kind of knocks them off their pins. They suddenly think differently about you, about their course, and almost about their place in the world.” To address this issue, Evan met with each student for a five-minute appointment after an assignment early in the semester. Through these appointments, he was able to discuss his feedback with students. These appointments were a valuable part of his feedback process. Similar to Chris, Evan also looked for feedback from students about his
teaching. He remarked, “I think checking in with them on a regular basis. Breaking things up so that you are not too repetitive in the way you deliver stuff.”

Finn used written feedback on assignments to both help students improve their thinking and to shape his lesson plans. Discussing feedback he recently gave on an assignment, he stated, “I'm giving you specific written feedback about your responses. And I may take those into the beginning of the next class period.” He summarized his use of feedback later in the interview when he recounted, “I am using assessment to shape what I am going to do in the class period. What kind of feedback do I need to give and what I need to build from.”

**Getting to know students.** The importance instructors placed on getting to know their students emerged as the final sub-theme. To bridge the gap between their teaching and students’ understanding, faculty discussed the importance of getting to know the thinking patterns, experiences, and competencies of their students. Without this knowledge, participants believed it difficult to improve student learning.

Finn incorporated activities at the beginning of his courses to give students an opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences about course material. Usage of these activities came about as a result of a course-level assessment process. He explained, “I get some assessment the first day - already of some sense of the nature of the students in the course.” He used this information to shape future lesson plans. He also discussed how, for a recent general education class, he required students to review the syllabus and sign up for a small group meeting in his office. He related, “The first assignment, for two courses, was ‘Review the syllabus, fill out this form with three things you picked up in the syllabus, and show up for one of these group times in my office.’”
While the meetings were time consuming during a busy time of the semester, he discovered the personal interaction a valuable way to get to know his students. Due to time restraints, Finn did not continue this practice.

Don also discussed the importance of getting to know students. This topic emerged as he talked about how he assesses student learning. For Don, getting to know students helps him understand how to assist them in their learning. “Just being with the students. Because we get so much from being with the students. Kind of figuring them out.” He reported how sometimes students surprise him, “Some of the students who - you talk to them. You swear you are talking to a brick wall. But they can turn out to be really smart. They don’t have that social aspect down or something.” Through these student interactions, he learned how to help them improve their work. He did not use special activities to get to know students. He shared, “It’s part of the give and take in class. The classroom atmosphere. Chatting with them here and there. A little bit of small talk.” He believes observing students work together on projects provides him with insightful information about the students.

Jill also found it helpful to observe her students work through a first-day class project. She revealed, “Chatting about how that went. It gives me a sense of what kind of learners each individual student is. Some will speak up - some won't. And we talk about that and that's the first lesson.” She discovered the assignment, used every semester for the class, helped her understand the personalities of her students. “It is an interesting window. I really see myself just sitting back and observing the process.” She shared she did not use these observations as a basis for grading or for assessment of students for the institutional assessment process. As she described her teaching
philosophy, Jill maintained connecting learning to students’ lived experiences strengthens student learning. She remarked, “Which is harder and harder to do the older I get (laughter). Where they are at is on their phones or their laptops, because that’s their world. And I sort of forget.”

Evan often found it difficult, at times, to understand his students. He observed, “I don't know who these kids are. And I don't mean that in a real sense. What their priorities are and what it is that makes them respond or not respond is something quite often a mystery to me.” He did go on to explain, however, students were not really different at their core. Once he was able to share his expectations with them, they generally did respond. Evan worked to get to know his students more personally now than he did a few years ago. He commented, “By calling them by name in the hallway, in the classroom. And establishing that kind of rapport.” He observed this interaction allowed him to monitor how students were performing in the classroom. Students were more willing to tell him what they were thinking. He revealed, “I'm appalled that it took me this long to figure it out (laughs). It is funny the kinds of rewards I've reaped by every day taking attendance.”

Faith described how getting to know students better was an important component of her teaching. For her, effective teaching included an understanding of her students. She suggested, “I think the one thing that I’ve tried to do a better job is trying to get know students better. And also trying to get a better sense of some of the strengths that they bring into the classroom.” She used this information to encourage and motivate her students. These encouragements centered on helping students think about their futures. In addition, this information strengthened the connections between class experiences and
the lives of her students. Seeking to create an open classroom atmosphere, she worked to understand and connect with students. She stated, “I try to have sort of an easy-going classroom atmosphere, but with really high expectations.” While recognizing these two goals can compete with each other, she maintained, “I really encourage questions and I really encourage discussion. I try not to talk too much. So everyone feels like they are contributing to the conversation.”

Teaching beyond the Course

The final theme, teaching beyond the course, concerned participants’ purposeful approach to equipping students for future work and service within society. The two sub-themes discussed in this section, living critically and creating society together, take on a decidedly future and action orientation. Through the living critically sub-theme, participants discussed their efforts to empower students to think and act critically. This critical thinking emphasis went beyond and through the content components in their courses. Numerous participants mentioned their usage of Bloom’s Taxonomy in guiding students toward deeper thinking. The second sub-theme, creating society together, centered on participants’ efforts to teach students to live and lead within a democratic society. These themes provided a future purpose and hope for study participants. Throughout the interviews, participants shared how they viewed their courses as more than transmitting content to students. Instead, their courses provided students with the opportunity to think and act toward a better future. This future orientation served as a source of energy and passion for participants.

Living critically. Participants, each using different terms, expressed their desire to teach students to act and think more broadly and critically. These thinking skills
would then help students in their futures as citizens and as workers. While participants wanted students to demonstrate these skills within their courses, the larger desire was for students to take these skills into their futures. Jill believed the best assessment of her students would be to visit with them three years after they graduate, “In their spaces and places. I feel like I would have a sense of whether I reached them as I hoped to reach them.”

Evan spoke passionately about his desire to help his students learn to think critically. While the content of his course was not critical thinking, at least not according to the course catalog description, he did see teaching of critical thinking as a core element of the class. He maintained, “It's really a critical thinking class…How does one engage in one's own biases and be honest about how those get in the way of doing good work? Basically, how to be a good critical thinker.” He observed students entered the class thinking it would be a content course, “It really is a methods class or a philosophy class to some degree. And it's a workshop.” Through his course, Evan worked to challenge and prod students to think in different ways.

As Evan discussed his efforts to increase his students’ critical thinking skills, he framed the discussion in confrontational terms. Seeing a society absorbed by the trivial, Evan worked to help his students think critically about their cultural, and often shallow, assumptions. Society, according to Evan, obsessed destructively on the ephemeral, “When all you care about or all that is available to you on broadcast television is who's sleeping with whom? All of these things that are titillating and not edifying.” Despite our technological advances, Evan did not see growth in the communal human experience. He observed, “We've never been more isolated from each other and never thought more
selfishly about ourselves and our own interests.” He saw our society’s compulsion to consume as a destructive force, “We truly are letting the marketplace, and not the marketplace of ideas, just the marketplace, and the lowest common denominator rule our lives.”

Against this backdrop, Evan worked to shape critical thinking and skeptical students. Evan looked back to help students think forward when he posited, “How do you think about pulling together a historical or religious way, the great thinkers of the past, and use them as a guide to compare what is going on now and what happened back then.” Part of his goal, going beyond the content of the course, was to help students learn to express themselves in meaningful and positive ways. He added, “To express in a way that actually uplifts and edifies as opposed to dragging us further down into the muck.”

Evan summarized his hope for his students at the conclusion of his course,

You are starting at this level of your college career and by the time you are done with this class I hope you will be more skeptical. I hope you will be more sophisticated. I hope you will understand how important it is to gather widely and diversely in what you read and who you listen to. To me, it is about trying to model those kinds of things.

Al surfaced this theme as he discussed broader tensions within higher education. He declared, “Does education mean to know the right stuff or how to think?” In discussing this duality, Al recounted his preference for teaching to help students think and live more richly, “An education is certainly getting the skills you need. But the whole purpose of getting the skills you need is to use them… in dealing with their everyday lives so that they live them more richly.” Similar to Evan, Al viewed his teaching as an effort to push back against prevailing societal forces. He suggested, “I
have a bias that most people don’t want to live more richly they want to live joyfully or comfortably or even decadently.”

Bill expressed his desire to create a classroom where there is openness to critical thinking and freedom to explore issues. Instead of viewing knowledge as a canon, Bill saw ideas as advancing and malleable, “Constantly trying to make these ideas better and more refined. I think you do actually get somewhere, there are some mistakes we are not going to go back to.” Bringing it down to the classroom level, Bill shared his hope for his students, “Students are actually making progress in their understanding and their ability to think clearly. And stuff like that. And so just seeing that happen – seeing the light bulb go on.” He found these moments especially rewarding. He saw his role, far beyond a disseminator of content, as one of shaping thinking skills. He reflected, “I think what I have to offer, the first that comes to mind, is the ability to sharpen others’ skills with thinking critically, carefully, systematically, through a topic.”

Similar to other participants, Don worked with his students to think critically and deeper. He explained, “It's more of looking at these words and how you analyze them and what should get out of them. It's more than just ‘I like it’ or ‘I hate this one’ but ‘Why?’” Don viewed his course as a launching point for his students’ learning experiences. Instead of attempting to teach all of the answers about his discipline, he views his course as way to prompt students to view education and critical thinking as ongoing pursuits. He argued, “Ultimately they are not going to learn everything … in one semester. One of my goals in the classes is to instill that bit of curiosity or interest.” He worked to dispel the belief that once students graduate they have all of the answers. He added, “They can learn and that they need to keep learning.”
Faith revealed, “I have gone way beyond content at this point. When I first started I think I was just sort of content, content, content.” Her focus was now on building students’ skills to help them in their futures. She declared, “Trying to think about educating the whole person. Thinking much more beyond just my content area.” Instead of emphasizing specific content or viewing the course as a short-term experience, Faith viewed her course as an opportunity to shape a student’s future. “I think I have thought much more about what would be a successful graduate. I have thought more about the end goal for our students. And what can I do to help them get to that end goal.” Faith sought to take her students into the future through her course. She remarked, “Encouraging them to think about their future and of what path they are on. When I teach in a class, I am always sending them information about internships or about opportunities.”

Jill worked to help students view people and society from a variety of different perspectives. She commented, “Trying to help people unpack that and to see from different perspectives.” Instead of responding with judgment, she worked to empower her students to be more open with others. One way she did this was to increase their exposure to different news media. Jill said, “Every week my goal is that by the end of this semester I've trained my students to once a week check a news source like BBC.com.” She viewed her course as a place to equip students with skills in connecting and communicating with different people. “It equips them with different tools for intersecting with different people with different life experiences.”

Many participants mentioned, almost always in passing, their usage of Bloom’s Taxonomy to improve student learning. Al referenced the taxonomy as he discussed
tension between liberal education and vocational training. He believed it important to educate beyond just content and/or analysis. Referencing the entire taxonomy, he maintained, “A truly educated person – whether they realize it or not – has transcended both of them and use the whole scale.” Bill found the taxonomy valuable as he considered ways to assess critical thinking. “How deep is their understanding? Are they synthesizing the material? And stuff like that. I appreciate that they have that… because I think that’s really valuable.”

Evan, on the other hand, designed assignments and entire courses around the taxonomy. Within projects and assignments, he moved students into and up the taxonomy. As he discussed an assignment, Evan shared how he led discussions, “‘What did they say?’ Then we go a little higher – ‘Could you explain how different these are?’ Then thirdly a little higher up the scale – ‘What are the implications? How do you apply what we saw?’” Similar to Evan, Finn intentionally incorporated the taxonomy in his unit and lesson planning. He designed experiences to help students move up the taxonomy. He recounted, “After we have had basic vocabulary for two or three days, we move to the next textbook which moves us up Bloom’s Taxonomy and we are dealing on a conceptual level.” Finn shared the taxonomy with his students and worked through it with them as he taught the course or a unit. His goal for his students was to move them into deeper understanding and thinking. This was how he explained it to students, “If the only thing that you get in other classes is data, well okay, but look how far down the line that is. I am really interested to see how far you get up here.” While noting she probably did not use it enough, Gail shared she uses the taxonomy to guide her course development. She added, “My assignments, I tend to use as more application. If you
want to think of it more in terms of Bloom’s Taxonomy and move to that application piece.”

**Creating society together.** The desire to teach beyond the course included a strong desire to collaborate with students in shaping society’s future. Rather than viewing their courses as static content, participants guided students, through intentional course design, to see their potential for shaping a better community. In addition, some participants taught students how to work toward positive change within society.

Bill viewed his teaching as an opportunity for students to learn to engage more critically with their communities. He mentioned, “To generally equip people for more informed thoughtful kind of critical engagement with the world. You know, how they think of it, which, will of course, affect how they interact with the world.” Bill also viewed this interaction as an opportunity to advance society. He added, “You are also trying to improve human thought and the human situation.” Finn also worked to develop in his students a larger sense of service to community and responsibility. He tells his students, “I'm interested in you becoming a thoughtful and informed participant in the human community.”

Jill spoke passionately about her students and their interaction with society. She declared, “What I hope for my students when they finish a higher education degree program with me is that they enter the world as culturally sensitive global citizens.” She believed students need to take an active role as global citizens. She maintained, “They have a role in the citizenry. And how they, no matter what track or field or academic area they go into, are prepared to deal with people in an equitable and respectful way.” One way Jill worked to build a sense of responsibility to the community was through inclusion
of service learning projects within her courses. She added, “I want people to feel a sense of service with the knowledge that they've gained. We are all sort of creating the society together. A sense of responsibility to each other.”

Faith also, for similar reasons, included service learning in her courses. She wanted students, no matter what their major, to learn how to make positive change within their communities. About her view of community within the classroom, she explained, “To me, that's the community of learning - where the students are realizing the value of listening to other people's experiences, but also the value of realizing that their experiences are strengths.” Her role in this community was to encourage her students. She commented, “I really see the classroom as that community of knowing for the students. Often it's encouraging them that they can do more.”

Faith took the concept of community and change further through an action-related project she required of her students. Through this project, her students worked through a process of addressing a real issue and took actions within the community to make change happen. She commented, “I'm finding that more and more students want to take their learning and do something with it.” She discovered students wanted to do more than do a classroom simulation about change. She observed, “From doing that I realized that the students want to do more.”

**Summary**

Through this study, I interviewed nine faculty members who teach general education courses about their experiences in assessing how students learn. All participants, three females and six males, teach at the same university. The purpose of the study was to understand how instructors of general education courses, seeking to
improve student learning, integrate assessment into their pedagogy. Using a semi-structured inductive approach, I collected data about participants’ classroom experiences.

Using a line-by-line approach, I then coded all of the interviews. I sought to use active language used by participants to construct these codes. After analyzing these codes for emergent themes, I identified five major emergent themes. Each of these major themes included a number of sub-themes. While the themes were not implicitly evident in every interview, they do represent a rich understanding and analysis of the data. The five emergent themes were changing assumptions about students, navigating contested educational aims, shifting pedagogy, bridging the learning gap, and teaching beyond the course.

Through the changing assumptions about students theme, participants expressed how gaining a better understanding of their students served as a catalyst for becoming better teachers. Since the majority of participants have extensive teaching experience, they were able to reflect on their earlier and more recent assumptions about their students. Participants reported students are not the same as when the participants first attended college and began teaching. Participants did express some sad amazement about student academic and classroom behavior. Emergent themes were students’ tendency to multi-task in the classroom, consumerist and vocational views of their college experience, poor study habits, and under preparation for college study. Participants noted this may reflect a change in students attending the institution – not college students as a whole. Participants also recounted how they are now more direct in addressing poor student behavior.
The second theme, *navigating contested educational aims*, explored how participants negotiated various purposes and aims placed upon higher education. Participants noted how students enter into the university with the intent of receiving training for a career. Students viewed their academic programs as a checklist of classes to check-off on their way to a career. Participants, on the other hand, expressed their discomfort with this view and their efforts to help students view their education more holistically. While all of participants recognized the legitimate role of higher education in preparing students for future careers, they differed in their understandings of how to make this happen. Some faculty members worked to equip students with skills to aid them in gaining access to a career. Other faculty, taking a more traditional liberal arts approach, worked to help students become critical thinking learners so they could contribute to society through their careers.

The third major theme, *shifting pedagogy*, examined changes in participant pedagogies. Many participants discussed their shift from a content-centered approach to teaching to one more centered on student learning. These shifts came about through the recognition data dumping was not effective teaching. Participants shared their efforts to teach students to think and live critically. These changes came about in large part through ongoing conversations with other faculty members. While widespread discussion about teaching is not evident within the faculty, two participants did speak favorably about their participation in voluntary and intentional pedagogical conversations. Finally, despite their ongoing work on their teaching, participants shared some frustration about their classroom experiences. Participants viewed working on their understanding of effective pedagogy as an ongoing process.
The *bridging the learning gap* theme explored what instructors do to understand their students’ learning. Participants recognized students often have a different perception and understanding about their learning experiences than faculty. Participants chronicled use of formative assessment as a way of better understanding student learning. Participants reported they used formative assessment as a “window into student learning” in different ways. Some participants used formative assessment as a guide to design their courses and lesson planning. Others used formative assessment as a classroom technique in a more informal manner. The main reason for using formative assessment was to gain better insight into what students were learning. Participants did not report using formative assessment to gain insight into students’ perspectives on instructor pedagogy. Participants did discuss the importance of providing students with quick and multiple forms of feedback. In addition, numerous participants discussed the importance of getting to know students to better assess their learning.

The final theme, *teaching beyond the course*, examined what participants were attempting to accomplish through their courses. Instead of just teaching content, participants worked to teach beyond content and into students’ futures. To do this, participants worked to help students think and live critically. Faculty members sought to press students to examine their assumptions and consider a broader worldview. Working against isolationist thinking, faculty members encouraged students to take an active and critical role as citizens of a local and global community. Many participants were incorporating service-learning and action-oriented projects to engage students in the local and campus community.
While these themes and their sub-themes may appear to stray from the research question, this is not the case. Rather, each theme worked with the others to shape an understanding of how participants authentically assessed what and how their students were learning. These grounded findings provided a foundation for analysis in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX
ANALYSIS

The objective of this analysis chapter is to make meaning of the study’s findings and to develop insights in alignment with the research question: How do experienced general education faculty assess student learning within their classrooms? Assessment of student learning occurs at a number of different levels. At the institutional level, external expectations from policymakers and accreditation agencies drive higher education assessment initiatives. Harmony University is no exception. The university-wide assessment system at Harmony University collects data about the assessment of student learning in general education and its other undergraduate programs.

Student learning, however, occurs at the classroom level. Classroom instructors use assessment primarily to aid in understanding student learning. Classroom assessment processes and methods are typically separate from the university-wide assessment program. For this study, I researched how instructors of general education faculty assess student learning in their classrooms. My interest in this topic came about through serving as a member of the committee with oversight responsibilities for general education at Harmony University. I observed that while the university-wide assessment program was unpopular with faculty, general education faculty work hard within their classrooms to assess and advance student learning.

Through a coding process of data from the study’s interviews, I identified five emergent themes about how experienced general education faculty assess student learning. Each of these five themes has sub-themes that explicate the larger theme. Using actual words of my interviewees as theme labels, these themes provided grounding for an authentic look at how faculty assessed student learning within their classrooms.
The five emergent themes from the data were *changing assumptions about students*, *navigating contested educational aims*, *shifting pedagogy*, *bridging the learning gap*, and *teaching beyond the course*. These themes served as the foundation for identification of the pedagogical factors shaping the authentic assessment of student learning. Through analysis of these findings, informed by John Dewey’s educational philosophy and Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical social theory, I made meaning of findings about how general education faculty assessed student learning within their classrooms. Upon analysis, the five pedagogical factors of authentic assessment are *examining assumptions*, *teaching through the aims*, *centering on student learning*, and *teaching forward*.

Assessment of student learning does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it is one aspect of larger pedagogical and societal processes. Dewey viewed education as more than a series of skills and actions used by a teacher. Rather, he saw education as intertwined within larger life experiences. He claimed, “It never denotes anything self-contained, isolated from the world of persons and things, but is always used with respect to situations, events, objects, persons, and groups” (Dewey, Boydston, Simon, & Kaplan, 1989). This larger pedagogical process required a broad understanding of the learning context. This context includes students’ lived experiences, both past and current, and the broader societal reality. Teachers and students come together, within these constructed and overlapping realities, to participate in an educational experience.

This broader and necessary understanding of the pedagogical process emerged from the study’s data. While the study’s purpose was to explore how general education faculty assess student learning in their classrooms, participants’ situated their specific comments about their assessment of student learning within broader responses about
societal issues, student culture, and their educational philosophies. Dewey saw education as a process flowing through all of one’s life (Dewey, Boydston, Poulos, & Kurtz, 2008). The imposition of a uniform and positivistic assessment process from top down worked against this organic and grounded understanding of the educative endeavor. Evan said as much when he observed the following about the university-wide assessment program, “To me, it is not all that useful to me. It is a tool that the institution has to show accreditors that we engage in assessment.” Evan explained, for him, “real assessment” occurred in his classroom through his intentional interactions and course planning. From a dramaturgical perspective, Evan viewed the university assessment process as front stage performance executed for an outside audience. Real assessment happened in the backstage of his classroom. Don, in a similar vein, commented, “If you ask anyone in the faculty, the whole [institutional assessment process] thing drives them crazy.” Instead, as evidenced from the findings, participants found authentic assessment as educational experiences grounded in broader educational and societal understandings.

**Examining Assumptions**

From Dewey’s perspective, teaching was not something educators do to students. Students, rather than content, were at the center of his pedagogy (Dewey, 1900/1915). With students at the center of pedagogy, it was important for instructors to have an accurate construct of who their students were and an understanding of their lived-reality. Pragmatists recognize there is not one absolute reality to discover (Noddings, 2007). People construct their understanding of what is real through experience and observation of their surrounding environments. Seeking to help students grow, educators work with a set of assumptions about their students and how they learn. When instructor assumptions
about students do not match the lived-experiences and understandings of students the potential for a successful educational experience declines.

The first sub-theme, *not knowing who these kids are,* reflected recognition constructed assumptions about how students think and what they value were important to effective teaching. Without accurate assumptions, instructors will find it difficult to help students learn. This perspective was clear when Evan related, “I don't know who these kids are. I don't mean that in a real sense. What their priorities are and what it is that makes them respond or not respond is something is quite often a mystery to me.” Yet, it was evident from Evan’s ongoing work to reshape his pedagogy he was in an ongoing process to gain a clearer set of assumptions about how his students learn. He believed the student attitudes and behaviors he observed in class were a result of societal messages supportive of this kind of behavior. Society, according to Evan, wrapped young people in a cocoon of supervision and scheduling. As a result, students were not as prepared to be independent and critical thinkers. He observed, “These kids often don't know what to do with themselves without mom and dad looking over their shoulders.” Recognition that past assumptions about how students learn and think no longer worked required instructors to consider different assumptions.

The second sub-theme, *frustrating student behavior,* conveyed participants’ emotional response to how students behave in the classroom and in their academic study skills. As discussed in the findings, frustrations about student behaviors typically centered on off-task behavior in the classroom and recognition students often did not read assigned readings. Gail voiced her frustration this way, “They're still always on the Internet. They’re still not engaged as much as I want them to be engaged. They are still
not having those critical conversations that you want to strive for and hope for as your ideal.” At a different point in the interview, Gail recounted her frustration about students’ unwillingness to read assigned readings, “How can we ensure that our students are going to read? And I don’t think there any magic answers. But it's always a goal, I guess to strive for.”

Ongoing observation of frustrating student behavior may be evidence of a need to adjust pedagogical assumptions and teaching methodology. Dewey believed educators needed to be acute observers of their students – both in their classrooms and in interactions and experiences with society (Dewey, 1938). According to Dewey, students need to interact on a personal level with subject matter for a quality educational experience to occur. Ongoing student disengagement in the classroom and with the reading material indicated this criterion for an effective educational experience was missing. Participants’ recognition that they had different assumptions about what engaged students in their learning was evidence they viewed a working understanding of students’ pedagogical assumptions and lived-reality as an essential component to their pedagogy. Thus, understanding their assumptions about students and how they compared to what occurred in the classroom was an important, if not a first step, in participants’ assessment of student learning.

The final sub-theme, becoming parental, was evidence of participants’ initial classroom response to their students’ behaviors. Recognizing an adjustment in their teaching style was necessary, as evidenced by their discussion of their more parental teaching style, participants worked to adjust their classroom teaching style to match the realities of student behavior. These behaviors included reminding students about
assignments, not allowing computer usage in the classroom, monitoring for wakefulness, and providing additional forms of feedback. These responses alone were not evidence of a pedagogical shift. Without a pedagogical shift, from content to student learning, becoming more parental indicated faculty members’ attempts to reshape students’ behaviors without considering whether students were learning. Yet, as evidenced by the data, participants coupled becoming more parental with a shift in their pedagogy.

The shift to incorporating more parental behaviors into their pedagogy also indicated a change in their perceptions of what it meant to be a professor. Evan declared, “I guess I have decided I need to be less of the professor I was at the beginning.” When he first began teaching, Evan viewed his role as a professor from a more laissez-faire perspective. “I wanted to treat them as adults and for them to learn from their own mistakes.” Besides his other roles as a professor, he now viewed it important to assume the role of a parent professor. He asserted, “My role is to keep their purpose in front of them and to remind them of the mistakes that they often make right in front of my eyes. So they'll do better.”

John Dewey’s educational philosophy, consistent with a pragmatic approach, had a future orientation. Dewey believed a better future was possible through education. This better future, for both individual and society, was possible through an education aspiring to enrich, challenge, and empower learners. A quality education experience for Dewey included intertwining of participants’ experience and active engagement of the student in the experience (Dewey, 1938). These experiences, according to Dewey, offered society and learners the potential for democratic experiences and an enriched communal experience. Dewey, however, was not as valuable in explaining actions of
people as they live and work together. Instead, his strength was in shaping a future-oriented pedagogical perspective. To analyze the day-to-day actions and interactions of participants, I turn to the dramaturgical sociology of Erving Goffman.

Goffman used the metaphor of a theater to explore the everyday actions of people – especially people as they present themselves within organizations (Goffman, 1959). The roles people use to present themselves to others were of special interest to Goffman. Within this study, participants, from Goffman’s perspective, assumed roles requiring them to act, speak, dress, and interact in certain prescribed ways. Instructors served as the primary performers in the classroom. Scripts were an important part of the classroom as theater. The traditional script called for instructors to present their material in an engaging manner and for students to pay rapt attention as evidenced by copious note taking and class discussion. Educational props included the traditional classroom with its chairs, desks, whiteboards, podiums, walls, and multi-media equipment. For the educational drama to flourish, each of these dramaturgical components must work together.

Goffman (1959) wrote, “A teammate is someone whose dramaturgical cooperation one is dependent upon in fostering a given definition of the situation” (p. 83). Faculty members, for their part, are dependent on the cooperation of students to make the academic drama succeed. Instructors find themselves without a cooperative audience when students’ perceptions of their scripts and roles change. The risk, at this point, is for both parties to become cynical. From Goffman’s perspective, participants at Harmony University recognized changes in students because students were no longer staying on the prescribed script. Recognizing the drama was larger than a single classroom, and they
were not the ultimate playwrights, participants reshaped their assumptions about what it meant to be a traditional undergraduate. This recognition of a need to change roles and scripts was heard when Faith talked about her expectation and “shoulds” of a student.

Before, I just had these expectations for students, a college student "should." And now, the longer that I have been at Harmony I no longer say that statement. So I think I have shifted, in terms of the "shoulds" of the student. And realize that we have to practice the skills.

This conflict in the educational drama left instructors relooking at their scripts to bring the drama back under their control. From Dewey’s perspective, this dissonance also created space for pedagogical experimentation and realignment.

This analysis resulted in identification of examining assumptions as the first pedagogical factor in understanding how instructors assess student learning in their general education courses. This factor recognized for assessment to succeed in improving student learning instructors need to understand their students’ life experiences and perspectives. Similarly, instructors need to revisit assumptions they made about students and their own pedagogy.

**Teaching through the Aims**

Higher education is not a value free enterprise. Stakeholders each look to shape the higher education experience to fit their values and purposes. These stakeholders include policymakers, parents, students, faculty, administrators, and surrounding communities. While each of these stakeholders works to shape the higher education experience to fit their needs, instructors and students work behind classroom doors to live out these conflicting aims. As explored in the sub-theme, getting a better job, study participants reported students often viewed higher education as a means to access money through a better job. Participants, while recognizing students’ legitimate desire to
leverage their degree into a career, emphasized the empowering and enriching benefits of higher education. Participants noted they viewed higher education as a way to learn to think and live in order to contribute positively as global and community citizens.

However, participants did not agree about how students should gain access to their careers. One group of participants emphasized teaching specific skills to advance students toward a career. The other group put more of an emphasis on critical thinking and the inherent value of a liberal education. However, all participants recognized the importance of higher education in gaining access to meaningful work.

The pedagogical factor identified through this analysis is teaching through the aims. This factor resulted from analysis of the navigating contested educational aims data. This analysis explored how faculty members navigate the higher education aims their students bring to class, the aims within the broader culture, and their own particular position on the issue. Erich Fromm, a social psychologist and philosopher, provided analytical insight about these aims through his identification of two socioeconomic modes of existence. In his work To Have or To Be?, Fromm (1976) argued there were two modes of human existence informed by a society’s socioeconomic context. These modes shaped the human spirit and life experience. The having mode, based on aggression and ownership, looked to things and material possessions to meet its needs.

The predominant student aim, as described by participants, fit into Fromm’s understanding of the having mode. Finn stated, “It’s clear to me that one purpose of higher ed. has become to get a better job so that I have a reasonable access to money. In some ways, that doesn't thrill me, but that's understandable.” The having mode shaped student views about general education courses. Finn disclosed, “I get irritated with the
student who says, ‘I want to get a general education out of the way.’ As if they were boxes and you can put them on the shelf.” From this perspective, the purpose of taking courses was to complete them and then to cash them in at a later date for a degree. The degree would provide access to a career and to money. Chris affirmed this trend when he declared,

They are looking for “A”s. They think GPA is what is driving their job. As opposed to before it was learning – the material… they always wanted “A”s. Everyone has always wanted “A”s. But it seems to me they are more focused on getting the “A” now and we have to … or more focused on how is this going to help me in the future.

This sense of exceptionalism and possession resonated with Fromm’s description of the having mode. A guiding principle for the having mode, according to Fromm (1976), was “Where and how my property was acquired or what I do with it is nobody’s business but my own – as long as I do not violate the law – my right is absolute” (p. 57).

The being mode, however, has roots in love, shared experiences, and productive activities (Fromm, 1976). This mode is not passive. Instead, it finds expression through socially recognized purposeful behaviors resulting in socially useful changes. Evan’s views on the aims of higher education echoed themes of this being mode,

I am about as old school as they come. Which is that the purpose of higher education is to provide a broad liberal arts education to students to make them better thinkers, citizens, better believers, better everything, to make them more sophisticated, to be more responsible to themselves, less likely to be a dupe to someone else's propaganda. To really think not just about themselves - but about the world, about the implications of their vocational choices. About everything they do. To be more aware, I guess, of everything.

Evan’s evident enthusiasm for teaching points toward a mode of teaching centered more on being rather than having. According to Fromm, a society refocusing on the being mode, as opposed to the having mode, would create a New Man and solve society’s
socioeconomic problems. Evan’s passion for teaching and his navigating contested educational aims were representative of Fromm’s concept of living, or possibly even teaching, in the being mode. Fromm, however, was clear life consisted of both having and being. He argued the being mode should be prominent.

Dewey and Fromm (1976) had similarities in their hopes for society. Both Dewey and Fromm had optimism about the potential for positive change within society. While Fromm advocated for shifts in economic structures to shape the being and having modes of existence, Dewey viewed education as the force for growth, freedom, and basis for the celebration of democracy. Study participants echoed these later themes as they discussed their hopes for their students and their aims for higher education. Jill shared her thoughts on the purpose of higher education,

It's about lighting a fire. I think it's by Yeats. I really see higher education as a chance to expand our experience in the world. To learn to practice critical thinking. To try to open our minds a little bit to different views, different ways of understanding the world and the people in it.

Faith was looking for growth and change in her students, “I think about what skills can I really emphasize so that when they walk out of the class they feel like something positive has happened. Both within the classroom and within themselves - some kind of change.” Don echoed Dewey’s sentiment, “I think, one of my goals in the classes is to instill that bit of curiosity or interest.”

The second sub-theme in this section, selling to students, took on two forms. The first form was instructors selling their discipline to the wider student population. They do this to recruit students for their academic programs and as advocacy for their discipline. Evan summarized these perspectives when he commented, “I think this is the case for
many of us that a gen. ed. class is a chance for us to recruit majors. But, I think, even more importantly, it's our opportunity to be a missionary for our discipline.”

The second form of selling was the support general education instructors give toward the concept of general education courses. Jill relayed the following when students asked her why they needed to take general education courses, “I find myself coming up with creative reasoning in terms of ‘Let's not just talk about it in terms of getting this out of the way.’” Instead, she worked with students to consider reasons for taking the required courses. She continued, “Let's talk about what kind of life skills or what kind of application might there be down the road with this.”

These advocacy efforts, from a dramaturgical perspective, represented the instructors’ efforts to get students on the same script. Scripts, according to Goffman (1959), provided a framework for mutual language and understanding for people as they enter into social exchanges. When faculty members worked to convert students to their liberal arts view of higher education, they were speaking from their script. Evan said as much when he declared,

I think we see in the social movements of the last several decades a movement away, not just away from, general education in the liberal arts but many of the things in my very biased opinion we should value and cling to with all our might.

However, there was more going on here than script alignment. Faculty, with their teaching philosophies echoing Dewey’s themes of freedom, growth, and democracy, were encouraging students to think deeper and more broadly. This represents a progressive hope for education. This hope looks far beyond the attainment of content and skills. Jill captured this hope for her students when she said, “That they are prepared to
contribute to society and that they feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to their communities.”

This analysis identified teaching through the aims as a pedagogical factor important in effective classroom assessment. As instructors and students come together around shared aims, they have opportunity to move forward together into new insights and improved learning. However, society, students, and instructors do not always agree on the aims for higher education. Instructors do not have the luxury or right to mandate what these aims should be for all of higher education. Nevertheless, in their classrooms, faculty work to construct a shared understanding with their students about higher education aims. This co-construction and navigation of higher education aims is important for the creation of quality educational experiences and assessment.

**Centering on Student Learning**

The shifting pedagogy theme emerged as instructors discussed the changing nature of their understanding of what it meant to be an effective teacher. Through analysis of these findings, I identified centering on student learning as an essential pedagogical factor in authentic assessment. Many participants recounted how early in their careers they taught with an emphasis on content. This teaching emphasis mimicked their undergraduate experience. Faith recalled, “I was just rushing through the content, where I just lectured, lectured, lectured, rush, rush, rush, give you an exam, then give you a grade.” She soon recognized both her and her students were not learning through this process. Bill, while recognizing content has importance, posited an improper use of content damages the educative experience. Reflecting on the distinction he stated, “There’s, to me, this distinction between proper and improper exposure to material. If
you expose someone [to a subject] simply as a set of data, that kills their interest maybe.”

Teaching and memorizing content alone did not necessarily increase critical thinking skills. Bill added, “You get practice memorizing something, but that doesn’t actually help you think better.” For Bill, effective teaching required students to work with data and use their developing critical thinking skills.

Prior to the shifting of their pedagogies, each participant discussed their early reliance on lecturing and testing. This early reliance on methodologies they experienced as students is an example, from Goffman’s (1959) perspective, of the power of scripts. Early scripts for instructors included lecturing to students, sharing of copious amounts of content, giving multiple-choice tests, and assuming it was the student’s responsibility to ask questions if they needed clarification on some aspect of the material or its presentation. Evan recounted this approach appeared to work when he first started teaching, “When I started, I was 30 years old. But, they were kind of ‘mini-me’s. They envisaged their learning much the same way that I did as an undergraduate. I could lecture to them more because that's what they expected.” Scripts, according to Goffman, have potential to entrap performers. Goffman (1959, p. 76) recalled the following quote from Sartre (1956) to close out his discussion of the everyday person’s use of scripts, “There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition” (p. 59).

In a theatrical performance, if the audience is not receptive or engaged in the play the actors must look to either their own performance, staging, and, quite possibly, to the script to determine the cause for this dissatisfaction. The changing of pedagogies
discussed by the study’s participants was evidence they changed their operative understanding of the effective teacher script – as opposed to adjusting other less radical aspects of their stagecraft. Faith said, after sharing her early content heavy delivery, “I can't remember when, but at some point basically realizing ‘That's not teaching.’” Faith changed her pedagogy to one more in line with the expectations of her perceived audience.

Students’ place within the academic drama is worthy of additional consideration. Within Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgy, the individual presents himself before an audience as a performer. At first glance, within a classroom setting it would seem the instructor is performing before a student audience. Although, for some situations this analysis may be insightful, I believe it more accurate to view students as part of, what Goffman called, the team. The team working together, as people who alone understand the inner workings of the performance, put on a seamless production to meet society’s social needs. In the classroom, students and instructor come together, each with their own scripts, to put on an academic performance to meet audience expectations. In this case, the audience was higher education stakeholders. These stakeholders included parents, other faculty members, administrators, classmates outside of this particular course, policymakers, donors, business leaders, and community members. A pedagogical shift, necessary because students were not following their old script, now required assent of the student/instructor team. This shift now placed the student more in the center of the learning experience. Dewey’s work provides philosophical and pedagogical substance to this shift.
Rather than viewing themselves as content experts, dumping content on students, instructors viewed themselves as working with students to guide them to take responsibility for their own learning and thinking. Bill explained, “What I have to offer is the ability to sharpen others’ skills with thinking critically, carefully, systematically, through a topic”. Instead of viewing his role solely as content expert, Bill viewed his teaching as something he had to offer to students. With this perspective of teaching as offering, Bill looked for ways to equip each student to advance in their own learning.

Dewey took a similar approach in placing the student, rather than the teacher, as the center of the educative endeavor. Dewey (1900/1915) declared,

> Now the change which is coming into our education is the shifting of the center of gravity. It is a change, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun. In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized. (p. 35)

Faith shared this same major reorientation when she recalled,

> I was solely lecture based when I first started. While it may not seem a big shift - it was a huge shift. So every class I try to accomplish both a discussion, based on something I said, plus a self-reflection.

Through discussion, class projects, and service learning, Faith worked to bring students and their experience into the center of her instruction. She now pays much more attention and teaching time considering what and how students are learning in her class. Reflecting on her reframed understanding of teaching, “Teaching is really looking at how students are doing at the beginning of the semester and making sure that I am really practicing more, emphasizing more, relearning information and actually make sure that these key concepts are truly understood.” These comments reflect the shift in Faith’s pedagogy from a content centered approach to a student-centered approach. Since
Dewey viewed education as a process involving all of life, he believed it was essential to ground this organic process in the individual learner – rather than in content.

The student was squarely in the center of each participant’s pedagogy. Participants only gave glancing references to institutional assessment efforts, accreditation, or influences of other stakeholders. When participants made references about skills business leaders are looking for or other references to stakeholders, it was all in the context of helping their students learn in their classrooms. Concerns about student behaviors, their study habits, and references to their teaching all converged around the importance of students and their learning. For example, when Chris discussed the trend of increased numbers of underprepared students in today’s college classroom, he viewed it as an opportunity to take an active role in helping these students. Rather than allowing students to flounder, Chris asserted it was the instructor’s responsibility to seek out struggling students. Reflecting on underprepared students, he commented, “I think if we want people to have a college education we are going to help them…. Frankly, that is our role.”

One implication of this shift in pedagogy is teaching methodologies and practices now serve as tools teachers use to keep student learning at the center of the classroom experience. Gail made the following comment while discussing her views on formative assessment, “It drives my pedagogy. I guess if you want to think that way. It drives how I am teaching and what I am teaching.” Gail noted she used assessment not as an end to itself, but as a tool to advance student learning. A content emphasis, on the other hand, left students out of the center of the learning experience. Faith also recounted how she viewed classroom assessment as a tool to improve student learning. “They need to
understand. So what can I do to help them understand? That's a huge shift. So for me I think assessment is checking in to provide more feedback. And I probably didn't do that before.”

The second sub-theme within the shifting pedagogy theme was conversing as faculty. This sub-theme explored reported conversations between faculty members and how these conversations influenced participants’ pedagogy. Participants, while noting the importance of faculty conversations to their understanding of effective teaching, disclosed collegial conversations about teaching are not a common practice at Harmony University. Faith revealed, “We don't talk about teaching. Everyone has this mentality, kind of doing it on your own. ‘I'm the professor and it's my classroom.’”

This tendency to not discuss their pedagogy and consider the classroom as their own personal space indicated emphasis on content delivery may continue to influence the social interactions of faculty. As related earlier, Dewey (1938) viewed the student as the center of the classroom – not content. A content emphasis also placed the instructor as the central authority within the classroom. With the instructor and content in the center of the classroom, it was not surprising some faculty members viewed their classrooms as their own sanctuaries.

Dewey viewed the educative process as an organic process. As an advocate of observation and experience, Dewey saw reflection on the lived-experience within community as essential to quality education. Speaking about education, he commented, “It never denotes anything self-contained, isolated from the world of persons and things, but is always used with respect to situations, events, objects, persons, and groups” (Dewey, Boydston, Simon, & Kaplan, 1989, p. 268). The coming together of faculty to
discuss their teaching is an example of growing together through reflection on the lived-experience.

Resistance to discussing pedagogy with colleagues was also an indication adoption of a new instructor script was not complete. The older script, calling for the professor to stay at the center of the classroom experience, due to their mastery of content, still found use at Harmony. Lack of self-disclosure about their teaching was part of this content-centered script. Colleagues, as fellow teammates, needed to abide by this script as they interacted with each other. As members of this performance team, faculty members kept to unspoken rubrics and roles. These roles called for isolation and lack of self-disclosure. Through these interactions, faculty members continued on the front stage without moving into backstage conversations.

Yet, study participants reported it valuable to meet informally with colleagues to discuss their pedagogy. Evan discussed how quality departmental assessment occurred outside of mandated and formal channels. He explained, “Discussion with colleagues. Now this is a ton of what we might think of departmental assessment. It goes on in the offices and hallway conversations with colleagues in my department.” These kinds of discussions, though often backstage, provided participants with energy and impetus to consider pedagogical change. The result for participants, in each case, was a shift to a more student-centered pedagogy. From Dewey’s (1938) perspective, these conversations were quality education experiences due to their connection with instructors’ classroom experiences and their orientation to future applicability. Reflecting on her experience discussing pedagogy with trusted colleagues, one participant revealed,

So it just was literally being able to talk about pedagogy and students and learning. Just trying different things and just trying to be more creative. It was
also kind of that mindset of problem-solving to hopefully do a better job at teaching. That really changed my thoughts a lot.

The final sub-theme, *wishing the teaching quiver had more arrows*, originated with Finn when he remarked he felt he lacked the pedagogical tools to teach the way he would like to teach. In this instance, Finn was looking for additional ways to connect his students to their communities. “I am looking to increase the engagement because I am trying to think more ‘Oh that will increase the outside of the classroom engagement.”

This sentiment ran throughout the majority of interviews. Typically, participants would pause and wistfully comment about how they felt under-equipped to meet needs of some students. Faith related it this way,

I don't really know how to do it … I want to practice getting better at differentiated learning. How do you take a classroom with a wide range of abilities, as well as more and more students with English as a second language? I don’t feel equipped.

Themes of growth and freedom run throughout Dewey’s writings. He believed education is an ongoing process of growth and learning. The teacher’s task is to provide educational experiences to meet the changing needs of students. As a result, Dewey’s pedagogy was not static. Adapting Finn’s phrase, teachers need to make quiver replenishment and ongoing pursuit. The recognition one can improve and grow, from Dewey’s perspective, was a sign of pedagogical health. By recognizing the need to expand one’s pedagogical range, participants were recognizing the changing contexts and nature of their students. Acting on their wish “the quiver had more arrows,” participants were continuing their growth as quality and progressive educators.

From Goffman’s (1959) perspective, a decidedly less optimistic perspective, participants’ desire for expanded teaching skills was their recognition they were running
out of lines for the script they were using. The student-centered script, employed by all participants, was a change from the script they used when they began teaching. As a result, participants were actively working to expand their pedagogical “lines” to meet demands of the new script. Unlike a real theatrical performance, where performers follow the script verbatim, performers in everyday social interactions do not have all of their lines provided. Now, classroom instructors must develop their own “lines.” These new “lines” follow an ever-changing and adjusting learner-centered “script”. Combining dramaturgical analysis with Dewey’s understanding of the education process as a dynamic and organic enterprise refocused assessment and teaching on improving student learning. Participants all made it clear they found energy in this challenge.

The pedagogical factor identified in this section, centering on student learning, calls for instructors to center their teaching and assessment efforts on student learning. Content delivery alone does not provide a pedagogical foundation for quality assessment and learning. Authentic conversations between faculty members, and possibly with students, about pedagogy help support instructors in their efforts to improve and provide evidence of a learning-centered pedagogy.

Opening Assessment Windows

The theme bridging the learning gap resides at the heart of the learning process. This theme explored how participants bridged the gap between their hoped-for learning outcome and the reality of students learning experience. The resultant pedagogical factor from analysis of this theme is opening assessment windows. Each of the previous themes built toward this theme’s core pursuit: the improvement of student learning. Assuming students were learning without checking on this assumption no longer was part of the
effective teaching script. Jill recognized making assumptions about student learning was an easy, but unfortunate, trap for faculty. She revealed, “I think I make a lot of assumptions. I think a lot of us do, ‘Here are my objectives, here’s how I'm getting at those so they must’ve been accomplished.’” She then went on to detail the many ways she checked in on her students’ learning.

In this section, I analyze three sub-themes of the larger theme *bridging the learning gap*. These sub-themes all center on improving student learning. The first sub-theme, *giving me windows into student learning*, explored various ways participants used formative assessment to improve student learning. The second sub-theme, *giving feedback*, examined how participants used feedback within their classrooms. The final sub-theme, *getting to know students*, examined how getting to know students helped participants improve student learning.

All participants discussed their classroom usage of formative assessment to improve student learning within their classrooms. For instance, Gail reported formative assessment was at the heart of her pedagogy. She also used the phrase “giving me windows into student learning” to describe her usage of classroom formative assessment techniques. Unlike summative assessment, formative assessment is an aspect of an ongoing educational process. Formative assessments are pedagogical processes and techniques instructors use while they teach to help them know how to change and adapt their teaching to increase student learning (Suskie, 2009; Wehlburg, 2011). Unlike summative assessment, formative assessment is a part of the ongoing instructional process. This process helps instructors and students continue to adjust and improve the learning process throughout the learning experience.
Dewey’s viewed education as an organic and growing process (Dewey, Boydston, Baysinger, & Levine, 1985). As such, the process was dynamic, fluid, and ever changing based on experiences of learners and learning outcomes. Participants’ reliance on formative assessment to improve student learning aligned with Dewey’s pedagogical beliefs. Through formative assessment efforts, participants gained insights into students’ formative life experiences, progressed toward meeting the experience’s learning outcomes, and improved effectiveness of their pedagogy. Usage of formative assessment techniques demystified the classroom learning experience. Instead of making uninformed assumptions about student learning, expectations, outcomes, and concerns, instructors who used formative assessment techniques worked to uncover lived educational experiences of all participants – themselves included.

By opening channels of communication about pedagogical practice and participant learning, participants worked to create learning experiences exemplifying, according to Dewey, a quality education. For Dewey (1938), a quality educational experience included continuity and opportunity for students to interact personally with the material. Continuity for Dewey meant recognition the learning experience needed to advance students into the future. Grounding the education experience in the students’ context enabled the instructor to use those experiences to project learning into a new future. Faith struck this chord when she commented, “I really see the classroom as kind of that community of knowing students, encouraging them….that they can do more. Encouraging them to think about their future and sort out of what path they are on.” Rather than viewing education as static, Faith saw the potential for her classroom to be a place of transformation. She used formative assessment to make this happen. Through
intentional feedback, assignment design, and course structure, Faith used formative assessment elements to create enriching and forward thinking education experiences.

Dewey’s (1939) second element for quality education experiences called for students to interact personally with the material. To make this happen, instructors need to take care in course and class planning. For example, collaborative and interactive teaching strategies lend themselves toward the potential for increased student engagement and personal interaction with course material. Formative assessment, however, gives instructors a methodology to see if this is really happening for students. Data instructors receive from formative assessment enables them to make adjustments to their teaching. These adjustments seek to increase engagement and student learning.

Gail, for example, used a variety of formative classroom assessments techniques in her classes to gauge student learning. After using a technique, she analyzed the data to assist in shaping how and what she would teach during the next class session. She explained, “I would then probably use different techniques to help them figure it out. So instead of just doing a lecture I might have them, I don't know, do a debate.” Evan, however, used his experience and informal assessment techniques to make adjustments to his lesson plan while he was teaching. He observed,

Sometimes it's about body language, it's about the kind of things where you can just kind of tell coming in. They are not ready. I can change on a dime if I need to. So that allows me some leeway to work on one thing or another.

Interestingly, participants did not mention they used formative assessment as a tool to gain student feedback explicitly about their teaching. The primary reason for using assessment techniques was to gauge the extent of student learning. Any insights faculty received about effectiveness of their teaching methods came as a result of
inference. Goffman’s (1959) insight into usage of scripts and roles may explain this observation. The old content-centered script placed the teacher in the center of the learning experience as the expert. As such, the script did not call for the instructor to be transparent about their pedagogy. The assumption was the instructor always knew what was best. While there is an emerging learning-centered script in place, elements of the old script are evident through the lack of pedagogical transparency. For instance, one participant, a strong proponent of formative assessment, wondered about student perceptions of the classroom experience, “I don't know, it's kind of funny, you don't really know if it's working or not working.”

The second sub-theme, giving feedback, provided an analysis point about how participants provided feedback to their students. Feedback for participants typically meant providing written feedback on a variety of writing-related assignments. However, participants also referred to feedback as any assessment related information they shared with their students. Feedback in these contexts was an essential element of the assessment process. Within the formative assessment arena it, was especially important, according to participants, to provide prompt feedback through multiple mediums.

Dewey (1938) expected much of his teachers. While he believed the student should be at the center of the learning process, he did not believe the student should direct and guide the learning experience. Instead, teachers needed to work hard to engage students in forward leaning growth experiences. To make this happen, instructors needed to serve as guides for students’ thinking and intelligence. Participants’ use of writing assignments early in a semester to create early feedback, a type of formative assessment, was an example of this Dewey expectation made real. Faith remarked, “I think in every
class, I try to have something pretty early on where I can gauge the level of where they are at.”

Another example of participants using feedback to improve student learning was their intentional use of formative assessment feedback. While all participants spoke of their use of formative assessment, they each used formative assessment differently as befitting their teaching styles and personalities. Jill, for example, recounted she uses semi-spontaneous reflective writing assignments to augment and process her experiential classroom activities. Another participant used planned classroom assessment techniques, similar to those developed by Angelo and Cross (1993), within the daily lesson planning process.

Evan, however, developed his entire course around formative assessment feedback loops. Utilizing assignments built upon each other, reading groups, individual meetings with students, and group projects, Evan designed his course so students received multiple loops of feedback. Throughout the course, these feedback loops built on previous education experiences and assignments. These intertwined feedback threads provided Evan with the opportunity to assist student growth in critical writing and thinking. The participants’ application and integration of formative assessment into their pedagogy worked to create an enriched learning experience for students. These efforts embodied Dewey’s (1938) call for promoting a critical and open mind among all learners.

The final sub-issue participants reported they used to bridge the learning gap was getting to know students. Dewey (1900/1915), as earlier described, placed the student at the center of the educative experience. This kind of care resulted in students more likely to engage and grow through the guidance and support of the instructor. Multiple study
participants recounted getting to know their students helped them to assess students’ needs and their learning. Dewey believed it was the instructor’s responsibility to shape learning experiences built on the life experiences of students. In addition, these learning experiences should advance students forward into growth and new learning. This emphasis on getting to know students better was an essential element in determining how best to help students learn. Don’s statement reflected his recognition of the importance of getting to know students, “We get so much from being with the students - kind of figuring them out.” This care for students threads itself organically through classroom pedagogy – including the iterative assessment process.

From a dramaturgical perspective, the importance of getting to know students better relates to Goffman’s (1959) understanding of the importance of teams in daily social interactions. As actors work together to put on a performance, they collaborate, support each other, and share inner secrets of success within the team. Participants’ recognition of this need demonstrated students were more than a passive audience within the classroom drama. Since students had a specific role and script to play, which interacts with the instructor’s script, it was important for them to have a mutual understanding of each other. While there was definitely a hierarchy within this team, with instructors as lead, the two groups worked together to co-create a successful education experience. For example, when students stopped acting according to their script, instructors reported themselves at a temporary loss. One subject explained a particular assessment activity usually worked – but not always. The instructor recounted, “Usually the times that it was not effective is because they are all reading types of
strategies. If they are not reading, this strategy is not going to work.” When students did not play by the team rules the academic drama faltered.

*Opening assessment windows* is the fourth pedagogical factor identified in this analysis. Formative assessment, in its different forms, served as a tool to help instructors understand what students were learning, how they were learning, and what instructors might do to improve student learning. These assessment efforts provided windows into both student learning and effective teaching. Building on previous pedagogical factors, *opening assessment windows*, provides grounded teaching methodology to improve student learning.

**Teaching Forward**

The final theme, *teaching beyond the course*, explored how participants positioned their teaching to help students learn within their current context and toward their future. Analysis of this theme resulted in identification of *teaching forward* as the final pedagogical factor. *Teaching forward*, along with the other four pedagogical factors, shapes authentic assessment. This theme related directly to Dewey’s (1939) belief that instructors need to orient their educational experiences toward the future. Dewey (1938) wrote, “The future has to be taken into account at every stage of the educational process” (p. 47). Faith captured this thought when she said,

> I think I have thought much more about what would be a successful graduate. What would be a successful future employee? What would be a successful graduate student? I have thought more about the end goal for our students. What can I do to help them get to that end goal?

Faith worked to teach beyond the course content and into the future.

> I will analyze two sub-themes to explain the larger theme of *teaching beyond the course*. The first sub-theme, *living critically*, explored how participants guide students to
live and think critically about past, present, and future concerns. This sub-theme resonated with Dewey’s (1938) position that education should promote growth, freedom, and an open mind. The second sub-theme, *creating society together*, stated how participants worked to develop a sense of responsibility to the wider community. Many participants made a concerted effort to connect their course work to the wider community through incorporation of service learning into their courses. This theme shaped the learning assessment issue by providing an empowering aim for student learning across general education. Going beyond course content, participants hoped to impart an ethic of critical thinking and a commitment to building an equitable and democratic community.

The first sub-theme, *living critically*, brought together Dewey’s (1938) belief in shaping of open-minded students and the importance of preparing students to be lifelong learners. Evan captured this thought when he reflected on his future hopes for his students, “And to really think not just about themselves but about the world, about the implications of their vocational choices about everything they do.” Jill was also passionate about her goal of motivating her students to think beyond the boundaries of her course. One of the goals for her class was to motivate students to consume a wide variety of news.

So that they have an idea about the world and about what's going on and how it might be relevant to them and the choices they make. You know when they buy clothes - having a sense of where they came from. How old the kid was in the factory. (Jill)

Participants spent little time in the interviews discussing course content. While they recognized value in content, their real passion was aiding students in developing their critical thinking and living skills so they can live productive and positive lives. Faith was an example of this “beyond the content and course” teaching perspective. She
said, “I have gone way beyond content at this point”. She went on to explain how she made a concerted effort to connect her assignments to the lives of her students and to their future professional careers. She routinely shared information with her students about opportunities to get involved in community service.

The final sub-theme, *creating society together*, connected activities of the classroom with society. Dewey believed it was essential for students to stay connected with their communities. Isolation and the ivory tower have no place in Dewey’s pedagogy. For instance, in his discussion of ethical conduct and principles, Dewey believed ethical principles and conduct in schools must find grounding in its surrounding society (Dewey, Boydston, Levine, B. & Hahn, 2008). Participants reflected this pedagogical thinking through their incorporation of service learning into their courses. One participant observed, “I do it - service learning, so they are all in a community doing something. I want to try to do more so that they feel like they are basically applying their knowledge beyond just themselves.” Through service learning, participants worked to create learning experiences to empower students to envision possibilities for building a better society.

Dewey (1938) viewed education as the foundation for advancement of democracy. For Dewey, democracy was more than a political construct. Democratic living empowered people to find equitable ways to navigate philosophical and daily differences. He posited, “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey et al., 1985, p. 93). He envisaged education as the means for reducing the public’s compulsion to polarize into opposite camps. Rather than reacting out of ideological instinct, Dewey
believed an educated person learned how to think critically through the social knots inherent within a democratic society.

Three of the study’s participants used experiential projects to teach how to make positive change within community organizations. One participant recounted, “I’m finding that more and more students want to take their learning and do something with it.” As a result, this participant designed a class experience that worked to bring real change to an organization. This connection between classroom and community was essential to Dewey’s pedagogy. These experiences, from Dewey’s perspective, not only enriched our current society, but also modeled a progressively improving future society. Jill’s hope for her students was an example of this pedagogical concept, “I feel like I want people to feel a sense of service with the knowledge that they’ve gained. With the experiences they’ve had. We are all sort of creating the society together.”

The final pedagogical factor, teaching forward, provides direction and purpose to authentic assessment. This assessment calls instructors and students to connect their education experiences to their futures and improvement of society. Just as Dewey’s educational thought was optimistic about society and students, teaching forward calls instructors and students to partner together to use student assessment to create an improved future for students and society.

**Summary**

Through this chapter, I analyzed the study’s findings to make meaning of how instructors of general education classes at Harmony University assess student learning. An authentic understanding of assessment finds grounding in its context and deep pedagogical reflection. The analysis of the findings resulted in identification of five
pedagogical factors. These pedagogical factors work together to shape authentic assessment of student learning. The pedagogical factors are *examining assumptions*, *teaching through the aims, centering on student learning*, and *teaching forward*.

The educational philosophy of John Dewey served as a pedagogical lens for data analysis. As a pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey advocated for a pedagogical approach valuing student experience, student learning as the center of the educative endeavor, and a commitment to empowering learners for positive lives of ethical and democratic living. Dewey’s work, as an analytical lens, provided a holistic framework for analyzing how faculty assess student learning. Irving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical sociology provided a second analytical lens. Using a theatrical metaphor, Goffman’s (1959) work examined the everyday presentation of self through social interactions. This dramaturgical approach provided a tool for analyzing specific actions, attitudes, and responses of participants.

Using these analytical lenses, I analyzed five emergent themes and their related sub-themes. From this analysis, I identified teaching actions or aptitudes that reflect each emergent theme. Named “pedagogical factors” in this analysis, these teaching actions and aptitudes resulted from an analysis and synthesis of emergent themes. As a result, these pedagogical factors emerged from the lived teaching experience of study participants. Each pedagogical factor contributed to an authentic and holistic understanding of how experienced instructors assessed and improved their students’ learning.

Analysis of the first theme, *changing assumptions about students*, explored how recognition of the changing nature of today’s students is a pedagogical response to the
importance of knowing and acting upon the educational context. Dewey’s (Dewey, 1900/1915) concept of student-centeredness and contextual awareness served as analytical support. Goffman’s (1959) insights about how people use roles and scripts to present themselves in social situations explain why faculty found a need to act more parental when students varied from the traditional script of “right” classroom behavior. This section’s analysis demonstrated an understanding of how students think and learn was essential to any educational process – including assessment of student learning. The resultant pedagogical factor was examining assumptions.

The second theme, navigating contested educational aims, explored participants’ efforts to navigate the conflicting aims for higher education they faced within their classrooms. According to participants, students viewed their education from a consumerist and vocational perspective. Participants, while recognizing the legitimacy of the students’ position, placed more emphasis on the need for acquiring critical thinking and living skills. Erich Fromm (1976), a social psychologist and philosopher, provided a construct to analyze the two different higher education aims. Fromm (1976) viewed the socioeconomic world through a lens of two modes of thinking: having and being. The having mode focuses on obtaining and consuming. From the participants’ perspective, students viewed education from a having mode viewpoint.

The being mode, the mode expressed by the majority of participants, values growth, love, and collaboration. Dewey’s belief in education as a lifelong organic enterprise provided analytical support for participants’ efforts to guide students to consider other educational aims (Dewey, Boydston, Baysinger, & Levine, 1985). Goffman’s (1959) explanation of how people use scripts in social situations explained
participants’ efforts to bring students back to their scripts. When all academic actors, including students and instructors, were using the same script the academic performance proceeds with fewer disruptions. Analysis demonstrated the contested nature of higher education and the challenge of assessing student learning within this environment. The resultant pedagogical factor is *teaching through the aims*.

The *shifting pedagogy* theme offered an opportunity to analyze participants’ shift from a content-centered instructional approach to a more learner-centered approach. Dewey’s support for a student-centered pedagogy that incorporated students’ life experiences and directed students’ growth into the future served as the main analytical tool. All participants spoke of their support for this approach to teaching. Participants’ willingness to shift from their previously entrenched beliefs resulted from recognition their past assumptions were not working. Goffman’s (1959) insights into how teams work within social dramaturgy provided insight into how students and instructors work together to construct their image of a successful academic experience. With students no longer working with instructors to make the academic drama work, faculty members worked to change the script to meet student needs. In this situation, instructors and students worked together as a dramaturgical team presenting an academic presentation for an audience of higher education stakeholders. This analysis offered pedagogical support for the importance of placing student learning and not content at the center of higher education. The resultant pedagogical factor was *centering on student learning*.

*Bridging the gap*, the fourth theme analyzed, addressed how participants worked to bridge the gap between their instructional intent and what students learn. The core of Dewey’s (1938) beliefs about criteria for a quality education experience served as the
main analytical theme for this section. Formative assessment, a pedagogical tool used by all participants, met Dewey’s demand for pedagogical tools that shape and guide the intellectual development of students. Feedback, an important sub-theme within the data, promoted open-minded thinking and student growth. Dewey’s recognition of the importance of knowing the lived-experience of students served as a foundation for participants’ recognition of the need to know their students well to assess well. These insights demonstrate the pedagogical importance of faculty taking initiative in getting to know about the life experiences of their students. The resultant pedagogical factor was *centering on student learning*.

The last theme, *teaching beyond the course*, provided direction for student learning into the future. Dewey contented education needed to be community-based and forward thinking. This contention served as an analytical foundation for participants’ efforts to guide their students into future service and work (Dewey, Boydston, Simon, & Kaplan, 1989). The emerging theme of *creating society together* directed the pedagogy of participants toward service and efforts to create a sense of social responsibility and, in some cases, activism within the student community. This analysis demonstrated assessment of student learning needs to extend beyond course content and into future-related aptitudes and community action. The resultant pedagogical factor was *teaching forward*. 
This chapter provides a summary of the research, conclusions and discussion, and limitations of the study. In addition, the chapter discusses implications for research and practice. The purpose of the study was to understand how instructors of general education courses, seeking to improve student learning, integrate assessment into their pedagogy. The study’s participants all taught general education courses for traditional undergraduates at the same university. Loosely structured iterative interviews served as the main method of data collection for this qualitative case study. Through an analysis of interview data, I found five emergent themes explaining how participants assess student learning. Using analytic theories and philosophy, I identified five pedagogical factors that contribute to a grounded and holistic understanding of authentic classroom assessment. These pedagogical factors are *examining assumptions, teaching through the aims, centering on student learning,* and *teaching forward.*

**Summary of the Research**

Through this study, participants described how they navigate various expectations of higher education and faculty members as they assess student learning, how they authentically assess student learning within their own classrooms, how they used assessment results to improve student learning, and how assessment fits into their understanding of effective pedagogy. Through collection and analysis of interview data, I identified themes and sub-themes explaining how experienced higher education instructors assessed student learning in their general education courses.

Utilizing qualitative methodology and analytical theory, I found meaning within the participants’ narratives about authentic assessment. This meaning describes a broad
pedagogical understanding of authentic assessment of student learning within general education courses. The pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey and the socioeconomic philosophy of Erich Fromm served as interpretative frameworks for understanding the lived pedagogical experiences of participants. The dramaturgical sociology of Erving Goffman offered an analytical tool for understanding participants’ reported social interactions. The reported pedagogical factors work together to provide a grounded framework for assessing student learning. The five identified factors are *examining assumptions, teaching through the aims, centering on student learning, opening assessment windows, and teaching forward*. These pedagogical factors work together to serve as a framework for, what I call, authentic assessment.

**Conclusions and Discussion**

Analysis of study findings uncovered shared participant meaning for authentic assessment of student learning in general education courses. Participants reported effective teaching and assessment requires an understanding of broader pedagogical influences and forces. The pedagogical factors, emergent from analysis of the data, provide insight into authentic assessment. In this section, I discuss each pedagogical factor, how they relate to student assessment as a whole, and position them within a broader higher education context.

Teaching without knowing context lacks its foundational support. Dewey (1938) argued understanding and teaching from students’ experiences was essential to quality education. Studying student assessment outside of the broader pedagogical landscape limits and disassembles. The first pedagogical factor of authentic assessment is *examining assumptions*. Through this factor, instructors intentionally work to understand
cultural and academic assumptions of their students. The landmark works of Chickering (1969), Astin (1977) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) all provided insight into student developmental theory and support the importance of instructors getting to know their students. Understanding how students learn, their cultural perspectives, and their attitudes enables instructors to design meaningful education experiences. Meaningful classroom assessment requires instructors to incorporate into their pedagogy strategies to understand students’ assumptions and experiences.

*Teaching through the aims* is the second pedagogical factor. Participants all discussed their experiences of teaching students within a culture and classrooms with conflicting aims for higher education. The conflicting nature of these aims made it challenging for participants to engage students in course-related activities. Students, from the participants’ perspective, tended to view their course work from a utilitarian and vocational perspective. Conversely, participants preferred a liberal understanding of higher education. These contested aims, as documented in the literature review, surfaced in the earliest days of American higher education.

Fromm (1976) chronicled the existence of two modes of existence in human society. These modes find their expression in socioeconomic aspects of our culture. The first mode, *to have*, works to possess and consume. The students’ observed vocational aims aligned with Fromm’s *to have* mode. The second mode, *to be*, concerns itself with shared experiences and productive activity. Participants reported aims aligned with this mode. Fromm posited while both modes have legitimate expressions, the being mode offered society a richer alternative. Participants, facing the reality of these different aims each day they entered the classroom, shared how they recognized and validated these
different aims and worked to construct shared aims within their classrooms. Navigating and teaching through these different aims provided participants and students with a shared purpose and foundation for shaping quality learning experiences. Without this navigation and construction of shared aims, assessment of student learning would be without its anchor.

The third, pedagogical factor is centering on student learning. This pedagogical factor serves as the philosophical heart of authentic assessment. The findings indicated participants, over time, moved their pedagogy from content delivery to student learning. The ongoing tension within higher education between the liberal arts and vocational training echoed the dynamics within this pedagogical factor. Dewey (1938), while also rejecting pedagogy based on data transmittal, called for educators to construct education experiences around growth-oriented student experiences. Participants affirmed this perspective as they worked to connect their teaching to the lives and futures of their students.

As evidenced by the content focus of many institutional assessment initiatives, student-centered learning is not a pedagogical given within higher education. Many participants mentioned the importance of backstage conversations about teaching to their pedagogical development. While there remains a general resistance to discussing what happens in the classroom, participants did share safe conversations with colleagues helped them work through teaching challenges and equipped them to center their teaching on student learning. These revelations ground similar observations by Brookfield (1995) and Palmer (1998). Viewing the teaching process as dynamic and changing, dependent on experiences and learning of students, participants demonstrated an ongoing desire to
increase their pedagogical skills to increase student learning. Teaching, for participants, was a dynamic learner-centered process.

The fourth pedagogical factor is *opening assessment windows*. This factor has a methodological orientation. Participants, as they described their practice, discussed their efforts at formative assessment, providing feedback, and building relationships with students. These practices provided participants with windows into their students’ learning. Taking information gleaned from students through these processes, participants adjusted their teaching methodology to bridge gaps in student learning. Participants reported providing plentiful feedback and getting to know students individually improved their ability to assess and improve student learning.

Dewey (1938) spoke strongly against efforts by some in his day to formularize teaching. Teaching should be an organic process that meets the educational needs of learners. Participants, in their varied usage of formative assessment, lent support to this perspective. Incorporating formative assessment into their teaching, participants shaped formative assessment methods and techniques to fit their own pedagogical perspective and skill set. While some participants used formalized classroom assessment techniques similar to those researched by Angelo and Cross (1993), others used formative assessment as a principle and process for overall design of their courses, units, and assignments.

*Teaching forward*, the final pedagogical factor of authentic assessment provided participants with direction and grounding for their teaching and assessment. Participants all looked beyond their courses and into their students’ futures as they planned their classroom activities and assignments. This forward-looking perspective included
advocacy for service beyond themselves and into their communities. Students, according to participants, were looking for ways to connect their learning into their lives and be a positive influence in their communities. This perspective correlated to Dewey’s belief that education was an organic process threaded through all of life. He declared, “Education is a mode of life, of action” (Dewey, Boydston, Poulos, & Kurtz, 2008, p. 39).

Participants’ desire for their students, both now and into the future, to live critically and to create collaboratively an improved society transcended the content of their individual courses. Service learning and other efforts to connect students with the surrounding community served as pedagogical tools to support these future-oriented goals. Authentic assessment reflects this pedagogical future orientation. Instead of serving as a static process, authentic assessment equips students to grow and create for an improved society.

**Limitations**

I acknowledge a number of limitations inherent within a study of this nature. Since the lived experience of instructors within their classroom is personal and unique, it is not possible to extend the findings to be representative beyond the study’s participants. In addition, participants all teach at the same university. While this is an intentional component of the case study methodology, the single site aspect of the study does limit transferability of the findings. Since there is wide variability in how higher education institutions deliver general education, each university will have different expectations, assumptions, and operative frameworks about their general education efforts. Recognizing these assumptions and operative frameworks influence delivery of general
education coursework, general education instructors from other institutions should apply
the findings with care.

I also acknowledge there may be additional perspectives about assessment of
student learning at Harmony University. While the methodology of iterative and loosely
structured interviews did result in rich data, additional themes may surface through
expansion of the interviewing pool to include different faculty groups. For example, this
study interviewed mainly experienced faculty members. Adjunct instructors and newer
instructors may also bring additional perspectives and findings.

Study participants, while representative of faculty demographics at the study’s
site, are not representative of the larger population or the student population. Nearly all
participants were of the same ethnicity. In addition, with three female participants and
six male participants, there was not a balance between genders. A broader representation
of participants, possibly at a different site with more diversity, may result in different
findings.

Although the qualitative case study method, with a primary reliance on loosely
structured iterative interviews, provided rich data to answer the study’s research
questions, I would consider several adjustments to enhance the study. First, I would
consider inviting a group of faculty members to assist in developing and/or field testing
potential interview questions. I could facilitate this through either a limited number of
personal interviews or in a group meeting. The advantage of this approach would be to
ground the questions more deeply in the instructors’ experience. Secondly, I would
consider expanding the number of interview participants – especially from under
represented instructor groups. While the collected data was rich, I believe the inclusion
of more instructors would increase the probability of hearing underrepresented perspectives. Thirdly, I would consider increasing triangulation by interviewing academic administrators and/or observing classroom interactions.

**Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice**

**Theory**

In this study, I identified pedagogical factors that work together to construct authentic assessment of student learning within general education courses. Additional research should follow to determine how these factors work together. I recommend further study for development of a holistic and grounded theory for assessment of student learning. While there is research in formative assessment techniques and activities, the field would benefit from a model considering broader contextual and pedagogical factors.

Microinteractionist theory provided a valuable lens for understanding student and subject interactions. Specifically, Goffman’s dramaturgical insights provided an initial analysis of the roles of student and participants within the classroom. The interplay between instructor and student roles warrants further theoretical development. I recommend further exploration of teaming relationship of students and faculty as they work to present themselves on the academic stage. This analysis may clarify and further explain student and faculty interactions and construct an optimal academic environment for improving student and faculty learning.

Through this study, I identified conflicting socioeconomic aims for higher education. Since aims for higher education within society help shape instructional aims within classrooms, additional theoretical work about the social construction of higher education aims would benefit classroom instructors and higher education institutions. I
recommend additional study for development of a grounded theory on how instructors navigate contested aims of higher education within their classrooms. Work of Fromm (1976) or other social theorists from the conflict theory tradition (Collins, 1994) may prove valuable for this endeavor. Additionally, critical pedagogy theory may also provide insight into contested construction of higher education aims. Development of grounded theory may help instructors in their construction of growth-oriented learning experiences. This grounded theory would be of value to educators, students, and society.

Research

The single site case study approach was a methodological choice that focused the study on how one group of instructors assessed student learning. To check the findings for additional insights and applications, I recommend the replication of the study at other institutions. I also believe a multiple site case study methodology would provide a valuable look at broader issues of student assessment. Since there is little research exploring how instructors assess student learning, additional qualitative studies exploring the issue from different settings and faculty populations would advance understanding in the field.

Further research into institutional influence on how faculty members assess student learning would also be valuable. Mission statements, campus culture, faculty morale, faculty policies, and academic standards are unique to each campus. I recommend study in how these factors influence the assessment pedagogy of general education faculty. Findings from these studies may assist with faculty development initiatives, exploration of pedagogical assumptions by faculty, and improvement in a grounded theory of student assessment.
With the large increase in the number of adults pursuing undergraduate degrees, it may be useful to replicate this study within an adult undergraduate degree program. Due to the unique nature of these academic programs and ages of the adult learners, additional research on how instructors assess learning of adult students would be beneficial. Adult learning theory coupled with the educational philosophy of Dewey may serve as useful analytical resources for this research.

While this study targeted the general education instructor population, it would be valuable to do additional research on how experienced faculty assess student learning within academic programs and majors. During the study’s interviews, participants often referred to their teaching in upper level courses within their disciplines. These teaching experiences with upper level undergraduate students informed how they taught and assessed at the general education level. Findings from such research may provide a deeper understanding of the potential for assessment of student learning in general education courses. Since many institutions hire adjunct instructors to teach general education courses, findings from this research may be useful in supporting their assessment and teaching efforts.

In this study, participants discussed the shifting of their pedagogy from a content focus to a student-centered approach. Since this shift in pedagogy was important for the pedagogical development of each participant, it would be helpful to explore further how and why this shift occurred. This shift also implies a developmental process in the formation of higher education instructors. Since higher education instructors often come to their roles without formalized instruction on how to teach or a foundation in
educational theory, additional research in how higher education instructors learn and grow as educators would benefit the field.

Finally, it would be helpful to explore the relationship between the classroom assessment explored in this study and institutional assessment efforts. The purposes of classroom assessments seek primarily to improve learning at the student level. Institutional assessment efforts aim primarily to provide accountability to accrediting bodies and other stakeholders. With these cross-purposes, as is evident in the literature, there is often tension between these two aspects of assessment. I recommend additional research into how findings from this classroom assessment study might inform and advance institutional assessment initiatives.

**Practice**

The findings from this study inform the practice of instructors teaching general education courses. Especially for instructors who teach traditional-aged college students, this study provides insight into factors supporting an assessment of student learning to improve student learning. The study has implications for instructors and for those who design faculty development experiences. In light of society’s increased concern about higher education accountability and the questioning of its value, I recommend a reconsideration of how higher education institutions develop faculty members.

Critical reflection serves as a tool to help faculty learn about and improve their teaching (Brookfield, 1995). The study’s findings demonstrate the value of critical reflection in helping faculty to explore their assumptions about their students and their own teaching. While they each shared their own path toward a critically reflective practice, participants did not speak of institutional efforts to promote such reflection. I
encourage higher education institutions to consider expanding their efforts to support faculty in making intentional critical reflection a priority within their practice. Additionally, I support continued efforts of faculty, as exemplified by the study’s participants, to take responsibility for improving their teaching through personal critical reflection.

Finally, study findings support the value of faculty pedagogical conversations in helping improve student learning. Additionally, findings demonstrate these conversations are not a regular component of faculty interactions at Harmony University. Yet, participants noted the important role critical conversations played in their own development as higher education instructors. I support efforts to expand these conversations and encourage work to foster institutional cultures valuing transparent and collegial discussion of classroom pedagogy. As discussed in the findings, participants reported these conversations to be especially valuable in centering their pedagogy on student learning.

**Concluding Remarks**

Assessment continues to be a contentious topic within higher education. At the institutional level, administrators utilize assessment programs to report institutional progress in meeting learning outcomes to stakeholders. Pressure for higher education institutions to demonstrate their value through these assessment programs continues to increase. Due to ever-increasing tuition costs, a thriving K-12 accountability culture, and other cultural factors, policymakers and accreditation organizations are calling for documented evidence of student learning. These institution-wide assessment programs are typically not popular with higher education instructors. Reporting these assessment
efforts often do not improve student learning, instructors often express concern about the benefits of institution-wide assessment efforts.

Higher education instructors, however, do find value in understanding how and whether students are learning in their courses. Instructors within general education courses are no exception. General education courses, a core element of undergraduate education, offer instructors and institutions opportunities to guide students into learning experiences that empower, enrich, and expand intellectual capacity. Building on lived experiences of students, general education instruction equips students to make sense of their expanding future and how to construct an equitable and democratic society. Recognizing a content-centered pedagogy no longer meets student and societal needs, higher education instructors increasingly center their pedagogy on advancing student learning.

Student learning results from the interaction of numerous educational and cultural factors. Consideration of student learning outside of this context, through imposition of centralized rubrics or pedagogical recipes, misses the potential for creating rich and quality learning experiences. Central to this endeavor is the centering of student learning within the educational enterprise. With a pedagogy centered on student learning, instructors work alongside students to collaboratively assess and improve their shared educational experiences. An authentic assessment of student learning, grounded in lived student and instructor experiences, empowers students to serve and work for a productive and democratic future.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Grounding Assessment in Authentic Pedagogy: A Case Study of General Education Assessment

I am conducting a study about how experienced general education faculty authentically assess student learning. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your role in the general education program at [Harmony University]. While I serve as a faculty member at [Harmony University], I am conducting this research for my doctoral dissertation at St. Thomas University, St. Paul. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kevin Hall
Advisor: Dr. Kate Boyle Associate Professor | Program Director: Leadership in Student Affairs

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand how experienced general education faculty authentically assess student learning and seek their wisdom as colleges and universities respond to calls for meaningful institution-wide assessment programs.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: After obtaining your informed consent, we will discuss and agree upon an interview site that is convenient and private for you. The interview will be between 40 and 50 minutes. I will interview you about your experience with the university's effort to assess student learning within the general education program. I will digitally record the audio from the interview.

Participants will contribute to the study through personal interviews. I will conduct the interview in a mutually agreeable on-campus private meeting rooms. To allow participants time to review the informed consent forms, I will email the consent form to the interviewees prior to the interview. After receiving informed consent from the participants through the return of their signed consent form, I will begin the 50-60 minute interview with a review of the confidentiality agreement. With the consent of the participants I will digitally record each interview. The interview will include inductive and open-ended questions. I intend to base follow-up questions on the responses of the participants. I may request a follow-up interview. This interview would take substantially less time than the first interview.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has two risks. First, participants may disclose personal values and sensitive information during the interviewing process. To minimize this risk the participant may request to conclude any particular question and I will proceed with the next series of questions. I will not require or pressure interviewees to answer any questions that they are reluctant to answer.

Second, participants may have concern about discussing strategies and methods utilized in their work. Participants may restrict the amount of detail disclosed and may use pseudonyms to avoid identifying key stakeholders. I will maintain strict confidentiality at all times. You will receive no direct benefit for participating in this study.
Confidentiality:
The records of this study are confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include audio recordings, field notes, and transcriptions of the interviews. I, as the researcher, will be the only person with access to these records. I will personally transcribe all recordings.

I will erase all recordings no later than one year after the completion of the study or by May 31, 2013 – whichever comes first. For future research I will keep de-identified transcripts and notes in a password-protected computer and locked drawer to which only I have access. To de-identify written data, I will substitute numerical codes and/or pseudonyms for participant names on all transcripts and notes. I will not create nor keep a record that could identify pseudonyms with actual names. I will also de-identify demographic information, specific names shared within the transcripts, identifying dates, etc…

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with [Harmony University] or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you I will not use the data in the study. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions
My name is Kevin Hall. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 507-210-3352. You may contact my advisor, Dr. Kate Boyle, at 651-962-4393. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. My questions have was to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I consent to have my responses recorded by audio-recording.

_______________________________  __________________________
Signature of Study Participant      Date

_______________________________
Print Name of Study Participant

_______________________________  __________________________
Signature of Researcher            Date

_______________________________  __________________________
Signature of Instructor            Date
Appendix B

Qualitative Research Questions
Inductive, Semi-structured Individual Interview

1. Tell me your thoughts about the purpose of higher education.

2. Tell me about what you see as the purpose of general education.

3. How do you use assessment to help students learn?

4. Please describe what effective teaching means to you.

5. How does assessment fit into your understanding of effective teaching?