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Investigating Key Components of Classroom Engagement in Workforce Development Programming

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INVESTIGATING KEY COMPONENTS OF CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

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DEDICATION

To my husband Steve, for our crazy and wonderful life; for loving our family with all your heart; for your encouragement throughout this journey. I love you more.

To my children Clayton, Ansley, and Aubrey for your unconditional love; for your understanding as I juggled being both mom and student; for supporting my dream as I will always support each of yours. I love you with my whole heart.

To my family and friends for your unwavering support; for the encouraging words and help with the kids; it truly does take a village. I am so blessed that each of you are a part of mine.

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First, I would like to give thanks to my Lord, Jesus Christ. I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Acts 20:24

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study about students who attended First Line Supervision classes at a rural Kentucky Appalachian university. First Line Supervision classes are taught in six hour blocks and are designed to teach students leadership skills. These students took a series of leadership based topics to better prepare themselves for a leadership role in their current employment. In addition, they were seeking the necessary information needed to be successful in filling the educational gaps within their organizations. This study is important because participants identified: key components of classroom engagement; experiences in the classroom; types of classroom engagement currently taking place in workforce development classes; and barriers that exist with classroom engagement. Research questions were designed with the intent to gain insight from the participants regarding classroom dynamics in order to enhance further workforce development programming. The insight gained from this study is significant because it adds to the existing body of knowledge concerning First Line Supervision courses since the literature is scarce as it pertains to the voices of students in workforce development programming regarding their instructional needs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This is a qualitative study about students who attended First Line Supervision courses (Center for Career & Workforce Development, 2015) at a rural Kentucky Appalachian university. First Line Supervision courses are taught in six hour blocks and are designed to teach students leadership skills. These students took a series of leadership based topics to better prepare themselves for a leadership role in their current employment. In addition, they were seeking the necessary information needed to be successful in filling the educational gaps within their organizations.

The students came from a variety of business and industry settings but all had the common goal of enhancing their leadership skills. They were all enrolled in the First Line Supervision Certificate Program. The First Line Supervision Program begins with an eighteen hour seminar, Basic Core Concepts I., which consists of three one-day classes. The students then select an additional eighteen hours that consist of three days of elective seminars. Upon completion of Basic Core Concepts I and eighteen hours of electives, the students receive the Basic Supervision Certificate. At this point, Basic Supervision graduates are eligible to take Advanced Core Concepts II. Core II provides three additional days of advanced leadership training. The students once again select an additional eighteen hours of electives to complete the Advanced Supervision Certificate. The elective options for Basic and Advanced programs include: Accident Prevention; Business Writing; Coaching and Workplace Communication; Conflict Management;

Creative Problem Solving; Dealing with Difficult People; Effective Team Building; Embracing your Emotional Intelligence; Facilitation Skills; Generational Differences; Interpersonal Communication; Legal Issues for Supervisors; Managing Stress; Motivating Employees; Presentation Skills; Sexual Harassment; Time Management; 5 S Training; and Microsoft 2013 instructor led classes.

The Basic Core Concepts I classes allow students who are supervisors, and those who hope to move into a supervisory role, to learn vital skills needed to successfully supervise in today's ever-changing workplace. The supervisor role requires individuals the ability to get tasks accomplished through others. This program is designed to offer a bridge between technical skills and supervising others to increase overall company performance and to develop people skills. A Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality assessment is also completed to enable students to better understand their preferences, as well as the preferences of others.

The Advanced Core Concepts II classes provide an opportunity for a supervisor to expand the concepts introduced in Core I through detailed examination and case-study experiences. Added material includes: the performance appraisal process; the changing workplace; legal aspects of supervision; and growing into management. The First Line Supervision courses are led by a variety of content experts that are hired through the university to deliver and meet the participants training needs.

The Development of this Study

I earned a bachelor's degree in Corrections and Juvenile Justice Studies. This enabled me to secure a job at the Juvenile Justice Training Center Project (JJTCP). Through my work with JJTCP, training was provided to workers who were employed through the State of Kentucky and worked in various juvenile facilities throughout the state. I understood firsthand the criticality of training and the impact of knowledge. I subsequently earn a master's in Industrial Education with an emphasis in Curriculum Development and Design.

My passion for curriculum development and design led me to staff position at the Training Resource Center (TRC) at the university. At TRC, training was provided to State of Kentucky workers who were dealing with foster and adoptive issues, domestic violence, and child support trainings. Again, the need for adequate transfer of information was critical. The trainings provided were expected to meet the needs of the employees who could take the information learned and transfer it back in to the field directly coupled with a variety of sensitive situations.

Currently, I work at a center that provides workforce development programming to business and industry workers. With over nineteen years of experience in training, I have witnessed both positive and negative classroom environments. I understand that the classroom generates both negative and positive effects. Students can be deflated or empowered by the interactions that occur during the learning process in the classroom environment. In conducting this study, the focus was on empowering our students by providing instruction that promotes effective programming.

This study was conducted to determine the types of instruction students from workforce development programming indicate as most effective for learning. Understanding student perspectives in workforce development programming regarding instructional needs is critical in improving future courses. This study can provide the absent research currently available regarding programming needs for workforce development and facilitate further understanding. The interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations provided by the research student participants validates programming needs, where—as the program administrator—I can immediately implement changes to meet the identified training requirements for business and industry. In addition, current programming initiatives can be provided to students currently served in the Appalachian service region.

Problem Statement

Currently, a problem exists regarding the alignment of education and skills needed in the workforce. As an assistant director of a center for career and workforce development, I work daily with a consortium of business and industry partners who cannot fulfill job needs due to shortage of appropriately educated employees. There are many applicants to choose from when hiring in the current market. The problem, however is that business and industry human resource managers are no longer merely looking for applicants (White, 2013). Businesses and industries are looking for educated applicants that can be employed to cover a variety of positions that require the appropriate skills.

Appropriate skills can be a wide range depending upon the business or industry where work is being provided (White, 2013). In some cases, it is the lack of English or Math skills, and in others, time management or customer service skills. When one combines the need for appropriate skills with the need to do more with less, it is clear that companies must hire those most qualified to fill the positions in order to complete jobs smarter, faster than and as precise as possible. Mistakes equal money, and many businesses and industries alike do not have a large margin for error. Ultimately, there is a realization that quality skills are needed, and skilled workers can be hard to obtain.

Employers report hiring substantial numbers of new workers who are poorly prepared, requiring additional company investment to improve workforce readiness skills (Casner-Lotto, Rosenblum, & Wright, 2009). While many employers provide workforce readiness or remedial training to bring their new workers up to speed, many report less than strong results. Therefore, the need is to match the people needing jobs to the jobs available. Some may ask, what is the magic formula to have people think smarter and work harder? The key is education.

In accordance with the last two years, the highest percentage of organizations (26 %) report management/supervisory training will receive more funding than the years before (Training Industry Report, 2014). According to the *Training Industry Report,* the most important priorities for training in terms of allocating resources were increasing the effectiveness of training programs (29 % v. 32 % in 2013), followed by increasing learner usage of training programs (19 % v. 14 % is 2013) and reducing costs/improving efficiency (17 % v. 20 % in 2013).

In many instances, business and industry training programs are not providing the information needed to promote employee success. The gaps are most pronounced in five applied skills training programs where more than forty percent of respondents who offer some workforce readiness training do not provide training to recent entrants in the specific areas that they rate as *high need*: creativity/innovation; ethics/social responsibility; professionalism/work ethic; lifelong learning/self-direction; and critical thinking/problem solving (Casner-Lotto et al., 2009).

Workforce development is a continuous and growing concern for policy makers and educators throughout the United States, particularly during economically recessed or depressed periods (Scully-Russ, 2011). Many semiskilled workers lack knowledge, skills, and abilities to be competitive for reemployment (Killingsworth & Grosskopf, 2013). Recovery in the job market has been slow, with over fifteen million Americans still unemployed and over forty percent of the unemployed having been without work for at least six months (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Uhalde (2011) positions that our nation's public workforce development system faces unprecedented challenges as it tries to help its dual customers: Millions of workers who remain jobless and businesses that are the engines of job creation and economic growth.

Although national and state policies can pave the way for innovation and job growth, it is at the regional level where businesses, investors, research institutions, economic development organizations, education and training providers, and government can best collaborate to help firms develop products and processes, identify and access markets, and facilitate technology and information transfer (Uhalde, 2011). These

entities can also help firms gain access to specialized materials, equipment, suppliers, and services; and hire, train, and retain workers with the necessary skills.

The workforce development community must clearly excel at its core mission of providing education, training, and employment services. The workforce development community must do so as an intentional, integral part of this larger agenda, with strategies that support and enable the community and economic development goals for regional job growth (Uhalde, 2011). Firms have emerged leaner and smarter, with trimmed overhead, transformed production and service delivery processes, altered work organizations, revised staffing patterns, and new skill requirements (Irwin, 2010). To meet the demanding needs, it is then critical that workforce development providers understand the key components for effectiveness in workforce development programming.

Nearly forty-seven percent of training hours were delivered by a stand-and-deliver instructor in the classroom setting (Training Industry Report, 2014). Recent literature on student learning raises questions about the adequacy of relying on traditional ways of teaching (Steuter & Doyle, 2010). It has been suggested that traditional approaches to teaching in higher education do not take into account what is known about how students learn (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Some literature suggests that a major shift in orientation is required—from one that is teacher led to one that is focused on student learning (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). This shift combined with research on student experiences of higher education designates clear indicators of what creates a positive learning experience for students (Comeaux, 2010). The role of the teacher/instructor is as

critical in creating a climate that facilitates student engagement and learning (Russell & Slater, 2011).

Engaging students in learning is principally the responsibility of the teacher, who is less an imparter of knowledge and more a designer and facilitator of learning experiences and opportunities (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). In other words, the real challenge in college teaching is not covering the material for the students; it's uncovering the material with the students. Educators must continue to seek to understand and apply specific, well considered, if not agreed upon strategies, which support student engagement both in and beyond the classroom (Parsons & Taylor, 2011).

Fink (2003) conceptualizes student engagement as involving several components, other than simply getting information and ideas. First, active learning involves experiences, including both doing and observing. Second, it involves reflection, both on what one is learning and on how one is learning (Raghallaigh & Cunniffe, 2013). Through reflection—either alone or with others—students make meaning of experiences and ideas. Fink suggests that teachers/instructors should expand on the opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning. Role-playing simulations and dramatizations are examples of what he classifies as rich learning experiences because they allow students to simultaneously achieve several kinds of significant learning.

Students have changed over the last twenty years; perhaps as a result of a technology rich upbringing (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). They appear to have different needs, goals, and learning preferences than students had in the past. It is important to better understand students and determine how best to engage them in learning; yet, there is a notable lack of student voice or student perspectives in the literature on student

engagement. That said, some critics, such as those mentioned by Bennett, Maton, and Kervin (2008, p. 777), Carlson (2005, p. 2), Dunleavy and Milton (2009, p. 10), Willms, Friesen, Milton (2009, p. 36) do not believe today's students differ or that they require special educational concessions: in fact, they believe we are dumbing down an entire generation through such coddling as Baron is quoted in Carlson (2005):

> It is very common to hear people say, 'Here's the Millennial or the digital generation, and we have to figure out how they learn. Poppycock. We get to mold how they learn.' Administrators push professors to use technology in the classroom because they believe that is what today students want, says Ms. Baron. Faculty members feel pressured to shorten lectures, increase group discussion time, and ignore the multitasking student who is e-mailing his friends in the back of the room—all to attract and satisfy a generation that doesn't have the discipline of its predecessors. 'We think that the students will come if we teach in a way that meets the expectations we have of what the students want. At some point, what we are doing is killing higher education'. (p. 2)

However, as logical as this consideration might seem, the majority of the literature calls for changing education (Project Tomorrow, 2010). Authors practically implore change—or transformation—of education and pedagogy in Kindergarten through post-secondary. It is strongly believed that we fail to meet the needs of students who have grown up in a digital world and are heading into different cultural and economic futures that are rich in ever-advancing technology and information. Today's world absolutely requires collaborative critical thinkers, creative and courageous innovators, and true lifelong learners (Prensky, 2005; Robinson, 2009).

Significant changes in teaching and learning are possible, particularly when interactive technologies are involved. These changes promise to better engage the Net Generation and the adult learner (Ramaley & Zia, 2005). The work of Parsons and Taylor (2011) suggests that successful, student-engaging classrooms often combine these aspects:

1. Learning that is relevant, real, and intentionally interdisciplinary—at times moving learning from the classroom into the community.
2. Technology-rich learning environments—not just computers, but all types of technology, including scientific equipment, multi-media resources, industrial technology, and diverse forms of portable communication technology (Project Tomorrow, 2010).
3. Positive, challenging, and open –sometimes called *transparent* learning climates—that encourage risk-taking and guide learners to reach coarticulated high expectations. Students are involved in assessment for learning and of learning.
4. Collaboration among respectful *peer-to-peer* type relationships between students and teachers (horizontal organization model); Professional Learning Communities working together to plan, research, develop, share, and implement new research, strategies, and materials.
5. A culture of learning—teachers are learning *with* students. Language, activities and resources focus on learning and engagement first, and achievement second. (p. 5)

The consequences of not engaging students in learning are reportedly dismal (Claxton, 2007, p. 2; Gilbert, 2007, p. 1; Prensky, 2001, p. 1; & Willms, 2003, p. 56). Students who are bored, restless, disruptive, and disengaged in the short term have clearly documented negative impacts on students, teachers, schools, and communities (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). The negative consequences of this deficit of engagement in learning would ripple across industry and society for generations. If we fail to make changes to our pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment strategies, we fail our students and jeopardize our futures (Gilbert, 2007; Robinson, 2009; & Willms, 2003).

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. In addition, this study explored the various types of classroom activities currently being utilized by workforce development instructors to promote student engagement. Through this study current elements utilized were identified that promote engagement and success in the classroom. Also, potential barriers for engagement emerged based on the research conducted.

Research Questions

1. What key components of classroom engagement make workforce development programming effective?

2. How do workforce development students describe their experiences in the classroom?
3. What types of classroom engagement currently takes place in workforce development classes?
4. What barriers exist with classroom engagement in workforce development programming?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is a review of the literature related to key components of classroom engagement in workforce development programming. This study: explored the various types of classroom activities currently being utilized by workforce development instructors to promote student engagement; identified current elements utilized to promote engagement and success in the classroom; and identified potential barriers for engagement. This review includes seven aspects that are fundamental to this study: (a) defining workforce development; (b) skills gap in the workforce; (c) workforce students being served in the classroom; (d) classroom engagement; (e) instructors; (f) barriers for engagement; and (g) a conceptual framework.

Workforce Development

In the United States, workforce development training programs have long been key in helping people prepare for better jobs and achieve higher living standards (Jacobson & Lalonde, 2013). Workforce development is an essential component of community economic development in any economic climate. Generally speaking, the Workforce Development term has come to describe a relatively wide range of activities,

policies and programs that sustain a viable workforce that can support current and future business and industry (Haralson, 2010). Workforce development is the coordination of public and private-sector policies and programs that provides *individuals* with the opportunity for a sustainable livelihood and helps *organizations* achieve exemplary goals (Jacobs & Hawley, 2007).

Workforce development is a term used with increasing frequency among education practitioners, policy makers, and scholars alike (Jacobs & Hawley, 2007). In spite of the increasing use of the term, there has been limited discussion about its meaning and implications for established fields of study (Giloth, 2000; Grubb, 1999; Harrison & Weiss, 1998). This discourse is critical for both theoretical and practical reasons, particularly given the economic and social benefits that are expected from workforce development programs (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004).

The literature offers several definitions of workforce development. For example, Harrison and Weiss (1998) state that workforce development consists of a constellation of activities from orientation to the work world, recruiting, placement, mentoring, to follow-up counseling and crisis intervention. Giloth (2000), believes that workforce development is about employment training, yet involves deep employer and community involvement in networks that support both integrated human services and industry driven education or training. The *Urban Institute* states that workforce development systems provide a broad range of employment and training services, as well as targeted assistance to employers (Pindus, Robin, Martinson, & Trutko, 2000). Similarly, the National Governors' Association defines workforce development as the education, employment,

and job-training efforts designed to help employers get a skilled workforce, as well as to help individuals to succeed in the workplace (Jacobs & Hawley, 2007).

For the purpose of this study workforce development was defined in the same manner as a study conducted by Wilson (2011) as post-secondary activities, such as workshops, courses, customized trainings and seminars that enhance and/or develop the skills of existing business or industry employees. This includes any non-college credit training provided to employed or unemployed individuals, which are designated to meet the employment needs of the employer and/or student by enhancing technical, occupation, and/or soft (communication/interpersonal) skills.

Skills Gap

At *Air Products and Chemicals Inc*., about one hundred fifty skilled-labor jobs are open and unfilled at any given time in the United States (Jusko, 2013). The positions run the gamut from welders and instrument electrical technicians, who work with sophisticated controls, to diesel mechanics, pipe fitters, and mechanical engineering technicians. Those unfilled positions represent thirty-eight percent of the roughly four hundred skilled-worker positions *Air Products* attempts to hire each year for its U.S. workforce—which numbers about seven thousand five hundred. "In some cases a position takes as long as a year to fill because of a mismatch of skills—either in the skills area we need or in the geographic area where we need that skill," says John McGlade, chairman, president and CEO of the Allentown, Pennsylvania based firm (Jusko, 2013, p. 1).

When *General Electric* announced plans to ramp up production at its Louisville Appliances and Lighting plant several years ago, the company and its suppliers faced a significant challenge of finding enough skilled workers to staff their plants and factories (Barker & Liu, 2015). Securing skilled labor is a familiar challenge for employers. Although debate continues over the size and nature of a national skills gap, in the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky—a twenty-two county area stretching from Louisville to Lexington—the problem was particularly acute. Brookings' (2013) *Analysis of the Regional Economy* emphasized the area's poor performance in national rankings of skilled workers, with the skills gap both inhibiting growth and constraining opportunity for workers.

Skills gap refers to the difference between the level of existing skills possessed by current employees in a company and the requirements needed to meet its current and future business objectives (Huggines & Harries, 2004). It is the point at which an organization can no longer execute its strategies, fulfill its mission, grow, or change because it cannot fill critical jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities (Galagan, 2009). In a survey conducted by the Workforce Development Boards of North Carolina (2012), the following key findings were discovered pertaining to workforce skills:

- Skill shortages have shifted as the economy and the business sectors undergo change. North Carolina Employers indicate customer service/sales and skilled trades as being in short supply followed closely by competency in office skills and general maintenance.

- Communication and interpersonal skills represents a primary gap in workplace soft skills. Critical and analytical thinking and problem solving were also frequently indicated.
- Business indicated that improved soft skills/personal effectiveness training would be of most values in the future followed closely by occupational skills training.
- Businesses are more often relying on in house training resources to deliver training. The local community college and seminars are also being used frequently as training resources.
- Employers say there is a strong need for standardized work readiness skills training and certification.
- Word of mouth remains the preferred methods of recruiting new employees but social networking is becoming a poplar tool.
- Job applications are frequently rejected due to lack of relevant work experience followed by issues with criminal records or drug screening issues. (p. 3)

The *Associated Press* (July 22, 2015), reports that the government spent nine million dollars a year to train Kentucky workers, yet just eight percent of employers say the state's workforce has *good skills.* This information comes from a report released by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce. A survey of the chamber's sixty thousand members found fifteen percent cannot find people who are able pass a drug test, twenty-three percent have trouble finding people with the right technical skills and twenty-seven percent have problems finding people with soft skills, such as showing up for work on

time and communicating with others. In addition, employers are faced with the prospect of an aging workforce, as well as considerable turnover due to baby boomer's retirement (Szinovacz, 2011). The baby boom generation is comprised of people born between 1946 and 1964. This group has been of interest to gerontologists because it is numerically a very large group—seventy-eight million strong in America alone (Winston & Barnes, 2007). The largest U.S. industrial companies will face an average bill of at least $100-million (U.S.) each over the next five years as they struggle to fill the skills gaps left by the looming retirement of baby boomer factory workers (Weitzman, 2011). The *Nielsen Company* reports that one of the 100 top executives at U.S. manufacturing companies, underlines the scale of the demographic problem facing the U.S. economy. In recent decades, apprenticeships and workplace training have been gradually downgraded, to the extent that many manufacturers now complain they cannot find the skilled workers they need in spite of stubbornly high unemployment (in Weitzman, 2011).

There are many explanations regarding the skills gap as economic change has revealed that the American workforce have: significant out-of-date skills and training; vocational and higher education institutions that are not equipping students with skills employers need; experienced rapid advances in technology and business creating skills that very few possess; businesses that have become more lean and expect more out of their employees; and a population that consists of baby boomers (Wright, 2011). The economy has changed, which means business has changed, which means that education and training need to be updated to supply the 21st century skilled workforce that businesses demand.

Unfortunately, the business needs and skills available continue to move in opposing directions. Our current workforce does not have sufficient skilled workers to meet the demand and therefore many willing workers go unemployed. We must begin to strengthen our commitment and investment in the educational attainment of individuals already in the available workforce (Institute for a Competitive Workforce, 2012). The Institute for a Competitive Workforce reports that a recent Bloomberg news report (July 25, 2012) laid out one of America's greatest—and one of its least reported on—challenges in stark terms: Despite almost 13 million Americans looking for work and 8 million more settling for part-time jobs, almost half of U.S. employers surveyed by Manpower say they cannot find workers to fill positions.

The U.S. Department of Labor underscored this same challenge, stating that even as the great recession stubbornly maintains its grip on our economy, companies have reported more than three million job openings every month since February 2011. Additionally, college students are not graduating with the essential 21st century deeper learning skills, such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and ability to effectively communicate, and work in teams—which are prerequisites for a successful workforce in today's global market (Institute for a Competitive Workforce, 2012).

An article published by the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, states that Kentucky has a jobs deficit that could take several years at the current rate of growth to achieve full recovery and account for the growth in the state's population (Work Smart Kentucky Update, 2013). The commonwealth has added, on average, about 1,500 net new jobs a month since February, 2012. At the worst point in the recession, Kentucky lost an estimated 118,300 jobs. The state has only gained 85,700

of those jobs back for a net loss of 32,600. However, 54,900 additional jobs were needed over that time to keep up with population growth, for a total current jobs deficit of 87,500. If job growth could accelerate to 2,500 jobs a month, it would take about three years—until January 2016—to get back to the pre-recession unemployment rate. At the current level of 1,500 new jobs a month, it will take much longer (Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, 2013).

Neither the business community nor higher education has the ability to alleviate this problem on its own (Institute for a Competitive Workforce, 2012). However, business and higher education working in tandem, along with adequate support from both private foundations and federal and state governments, can meet and master this challenge. The skills gap in America is real, and it is growing. In the 1970s, fewer than thirty percent of jobs in the United States required any education beyond high school. Now, it is estimated that by 2018, six percent of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or training. This means employers will need twenty-two million new workers with postsecondary degrees.

Workforce Students

There is little debate that education and training are critical to enhancing the competitiveness of U.S. businesses in the global economy and to helping more workers obtain well-paying jobs and careers (Unruh, 2011). Many emerging jobs in critical sectors such as health care, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing will be middle-skill jobs; that is, jobs that require education and training beyond high school, but not a

four-year degree. Middle-skill jobs currently make up the largest segment of jobs in the U.S. economy (nearly half) and will continue to do so for years to come (Holzer & Lerman, 2007).

The American South has always and will always rely on middle-skill workers (Unruh, 2011). They are the environmental remediation technicians who will reclaim shuttered plants, and the carpenters and welders who will rebuild those shells into new, more efficient, factories with green heating and cooling systems. Middle-skill workers are the machinists who will use new computer numerically controlled technologies to create new products for export. They are the chemical technicians who will help develop the medications that keep our families healthy and the skilled production workers who make those drugs a reality. Middle-skill workers are the biomedical equipment technicians who keep sophisticated life-saving medical equipment safe and working. Middle-skill jobs pervade almost every industry in this country, from licensed practical nurses and radiological technicians, to claims adjusters and paralegals, to auto repair diagnosticians.

Nationally, growth and demand for many middle-skill occupations has been fast enough to generate not only strong employment growth, but also rapid growth in wages (Holzer & Lerman, 2007). According to *A Skilled and Educated Workforce Update* (2011), Americans need to complete a postsecondary degree or certificate to meet the needs of the employers and help the U.S. maintain a competitive advantage as an innovative economy. Gallagher (2008) presents the following scenario:

> When General Motors (GM) decided to build a new transmission manufacturing plant in Baltimore, Maryland, the company immediately sought a partner to

> address its training needs. The company faced the huge challenge of developing and implementing a major customized training program to prepare hundreds of experienced GM employees for work at the new plant. It was crucial that the employees be trained to understand the state-of-the-art equipment they would use to fabricate key components with fine tolerances and assemble them, according to customer specifications. At the new plant, employees would use computer numerical control (CNC) machine tools, read and interpret blueprints, and rotate among different jobs as part of five to ten person teams. Their previous experience of up to thirty years in the traditional assembly line environment of GM's Baltimore truck plant left them unprepared for this new and totally different culture. GM needed a comprehensive training program including basic skills (reading and algebra), technical skills (metrics, machine parts gauging, computer use, equipment operation, and blueprint reading), and soft skills for the new organizational culture (team building, situational leadership and employee engagement). (p. 68)

The concept of employee engagement has evolved from research on organizational commitment, motivation, and employee involvement (Bernthal, 2004). Researchers have defined employee engagement in different ways (Ellis & Sorensen, 2007; Gibbons, 2006). The *Towers Perrin Talent Report* (2003) proposes that engagement is the employees' willingness and ability to contribute to company success by putting discretionary effort into their work in the form of extra time, brainpower, and energy. The term discretionary effort is often embedded in definitions of employee engagement. Thomas (2006) recently theorized that engagement goes beyond satisfaction

or commitment. It is an enhanced state of thinking/acting that brings both personal fulfillment and positive contributions to the organization.

Engagement in training is an important element to the development of an effective organization (Twehous, Groves & Lengfelder, 1991). Employers report that some of their recent college graduates lack basic knowledge and skills (eg., reading comprehension) with the greater need for development in applied skills (Campana & Peterson, 2013). For example, Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) surveyed 431 employers (ranging from CEOs to HR specialists) about their perceptions of what qualifications recent graduates were lacking. Over ninety percent of respondents indicated that oral communication skills, teamwork, professionalism, written communication skills, and problem solving were very important for job success. Meanwhile, a fair percentage of respondents indicated that four-year college graduates were deficient in written communication (27.8% of respondents), professionalism (18.6%), oral communication (9.8%), problem solving (9.0%) and teamwork skills (8.1%).

As noted by Bloom's taxonomy, memorization of facts typically fails to engage a student's higher-order thinking skills (Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, & Raths, 2001). As students are required to apply their knowledge, evaluate how others have applied knowledge, and create their own solutions to practical problems, they will arguably develop a deeper understanding of content (Campana & Peterson, 2013). Research in the training literature also suggests that emphasizing the long-term, practical implications of learning may be more motivating (Sideridid & Padeliadu, 2001). Therefore students will be more likely to retain and use their

knowledge in an environment outside of the classroom even if they find the topic initially unpleasant or frustrating (Alliger, Tannenbau, Bennett, Traver & Shotland, 1997; Baumgartel, Reyonlds & Pathan, 1984).

Classroom Engagement

In recent years, the subject of students' classroom engagement has been debated extensively among scholars (Finn & Rock, 1997, p. 222; Finn & Voelkl, 1993, p. 250; Karatzias, Athanasiou, Power, & Swanson, 2001, p. 91; Libbey, 2004, p. 274). Classroom engagement is generally related to students' positive feelings towards school and their adaptation level to the school's goals (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). Studies indicate that classroom engagement is strongly correlated with socio-economic level, dropout and self-efficacy beliefs of students (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall 2003; Conchas, 2001).

Traditional class participation techniques are the go-to approaches used by most instructors. These approaches do engage students in class participation; however, they are typically instructor-centered and conducive to students assuming a passive role and a general reluctance to participate in class (O'Connor, 2013). Lectures have their place in college teaching (Burgan, 2006). Students who have the opportunity to observe a reasonably articulate expert presenting difficult knowledge can, at the very least, gain the insight that ideas matter. However, from the typical student's perspective, continual listening to lectures is simply unenjoyable (O'Connor, 2013). Course enjoyment is not only for the student's benefit. Avoiding the silence and uncomfortable situation created when no students respond to questions is a strong motivator for professors to include

techniques that invite student involvement in educational meetings (Boniecki & Moore, 2003).

Educational meetings consists of educational activities that aim to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills and professional performance of practitioners to provide services for patients, the public, or the profession (Roche, Pidd, & Freeman, 2009). Bywood, Lunnay, and Roche (2008) identified the effective components of educational meetings as:

- More interactive (less didactic) or personalized format (small groups, face-to-face sessions).
- Simple (less complex) content, which requires smaller magnitude of change.
- More focused on specific problems (tailored or personalized rather than generic).
- Additional interventions (consultation) or incentives (feedback on performance).
- Motivated practitioners (self-selected practitioners might be more motivated). (p. 40)

Furthermore, adult learning theory suggests that adults have specific needs that should be met in order to enhance their learning capacity (Speck, 1996). Speck defines recommended elements to include:

- Autonomy and self-direction. Adults are more likely to commit to learning if they have some control over the process, without criticism of their competence.

- Life experience and prior knowledge. Adults incorporate their life experience into learning and need to see examples of how concepts are applied to real world situations.
- Goal-oriented. Adults learn more effectively when there are clearly defined elements, requirements, goals and objectives.
- Relevancy-oriented. Learning should be applied, practical, and relevant to their work or responsibilities to be of value. (p. 39)

In addition, these key findings identified by Bywood et al. (2008) increase the likelihood of student success, which include:

- Interactive format, with active participation by students, particularly for more complex topic areas.
- Use of specialist educators with credibility in the topic area.
- Use of additional strategies, such as feedback or follow-up support.
- Targeting a defined group of professionals.
- Having clear educational and behavioral objectives
- Assessing and addressing barrier to change.
- Identifying and repeating essential messages.
- Positively reinforcing messages in follow-up opportunities. (p. 43)

Other variables related to engagement are teachers' and peers' support of students and out-of-school activities (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007). However, there is a gap in the literature about the relationship between classroom engagement and the professional efficiency of instructors working at universities (Sahin,

2003). Instructors who work at universities are expected to have certain abilities. As such, instructors should be well educated for effectiveness before entering service.

Effectiveness generally refers to the extent to which somebody achieves their purpose (Faleye & Awopeju, 2012). Relating this to the instructor therefore, it is about doing the right things in the teaching process so that at the end of instruction, the goals and objectives are achieved (Awotua-Efebo, 2004). Recent interest in student engagement has encouraged college instructors to reflect on their classroom practices and where needed, shift them toward providing students with greater involvement in the learning process (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Instructors need to consider class participation techniques that engage all learners in the classroom—not just the few reliable students who willingly raise their hands (O'Connor, 2013).

There is a growing consensus that optimal learning comes from active engagement with the classroom material being taught (Prince, 2004). Designing course experiences and conducting class meetings in manner that aims to ensure active participation and cognitive engagement of students is important (O'Connor, 2013). Findings from studies that have put students in active learning situations support the benefits of participatory engagement (Smith & Cardaciotto, 2011; Yoder & Hachevar, 2005). There are advantages and disadvantages to working in a group Beebe & Masterson, 2003). By understanding the benefits and potential pitfalls, a group can capitalize on the virtues of group work and minimize the obstacles that hinder success.

The advantages to working in a group are:

- Groups have more information than a single individual. Groups have a greater well of resources to tap and more information available because of the variety of backgrounds and experiences.
- Decisions that students help make yield greater satisfaction. Students who are engaged in group problem solving are more committed to the solution and are better satisfied with their participation in the group than those who were not involved.
- Students gain a better understanding of themselves. Group work allows people to gain a more accurate picture of how others see them. The feedback that they receive may help them better evaluate their interpersonal behavior.

Although working in groups has its advantages, there are times when problems arise. Beebe and Masterson list these disadvantages:

- There may be pressure from the group to conform to the majority opinion. Most people do not like conflict and attempt to avoid it when possible. By readily acquiescing to the majority opinion, the individual may agree to a bad solution just to avoid conflict.
- An individual may dominate the discussion. This leads to members not gaining satisfaction from the group because they feel too alienated in the decision making process.

- Some members may rely too heavily on others to do the work. This is one of the most salient problems that face groups. One solution to this problem is to make every group member aware of the goals and objectives of the group and assign specific tasks or responsibilities to each member.
- It takes more time to work in a group than to work alone. It takes longer to accomplish tasks when working with others. However, the time spent taking and analyzing problems usually results in better solutions. (p. 12)

Studies on students' preferences for course attributes indicate students prefer classes that rely less on lecture and more on participatory engagement through class activities and group related experiences (Basow, Phelan, & Capoloslo, 2006; Beishline & Holmes, 1997; Levy & Peters, 2010).

Instructors

As far back as 1995, Bar and Tagg (1995) suggested that a major paradigm shift was taking place away from the emphasis for professors on providing instruction to providing learning. The shift from viewing students as passive vessels, where the teacher controls the learning activities, recognizes instead that students must be active discoverers and constructers of their own knowledge (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The new paradigm visualizes students as empowered, with personal relationships among students, between teachers and students, with cooperative learning in class (Fink, 2003). In recent years, a growing body of literature and research has recognized the value of active learning experiences for students (Clouder, 2009, p. 10; Comeaux, 2010, p. 63; Steuter &

Doyle, 2010, p. 68; Zepke & Leach, 2010, p. 167). For example, in one study it was concluded that students were more engaged where teachers employ active and collaborative learning techniques (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

The literature on teaching and learning finds that students benefit from instructors that promote being active rather than passive in learning situations (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Class participation, in all its forms, holds promise for putting students in a favorable position (O'Connor, 2013). As a positive psychological construct, engagement is viewed as a positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work (or studies), and persistence in the face of difficulties (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2012).

University teaching involves diverse modes of instruction, including: lectures; seminars; laboratory; and mentoring (Faleye & Awopeju, 2012). Developing an educational environment that is conducive to optimal student learning is a continual challenge in the field of Higher Education. One essential component of addressing this challenge has been the role and function of the instructor in the classroom, especially as it relates to the concept of teacher expectancy (Kneipp, Kelly, Biscoe, & Richard, 2010). Most higher education institutions have a policy regarding instructor evaluation, and student's play a dominate role in evaluation of classroom instruction. A standardized course/instructor evaluation form is used to understand the relationship of established item responses on the student evaluation forms (Pepe & Wang, 2012). This determines the overall instructor score given by students taking courses. Students reward (with

higher evaluation scores) instructors who they perceive as organized and strive to clearly communicate content. Additionally, instructors need to be informed that students connect the level of respect/concern shown by the instructor and having an interest in student learning with the overall score they give the instructor.

Numerous studies have been undertaken in recent years regarding instructors' perceptions of their function in academic institutions (Gerlese & Akerlind, 2004; Kember, 1997; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). Some researchers have made a distinction between perceptions focused on: the instructor regarding the transmission of knowledge and information; perceptions focused on the instructor-student relations; perceptions focused on the student's activities; and the development of understanding and conceptualization (Weber, Martin, & Myers, 2011).

The expectations for the purpose of this study was that instructors would exhibit the following characteristics:

- Teacher behaviors refer to classroom behaviors in which teachers engage to establish effective and affective communication relationships with their students (Weber, Martin, & Myers, 2011).
- Clarity—the demonstration of clarity is considered to be a process in which instructors effectively simulate meaning regarding course content in the minds of students through verbal and nonverbal messages (Civikly, 1992).
- Instructional communication is a relational process, viewing teachers and students as mutually creating and engaging in verbal and nonverbal messages (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). In engaging in the relational

perspectives, teacher do not focus exclusively on message content, but also address emotions and foster an interpersonal relationship with students (LaBelle, Martin, & Weber, 2013).

- Immediacy is conceptualized as the degree of perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators (Gorham, 1988). Instructor nonverbal immediacy is demonstrated through behaviors that indicate a desire to approach and be approached by students (LaBelle et al., 2013).
- Affirming style refers to the way one interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood (LaBelle et al., 2013).

In a study that interviewed 332 instructors and teachers (Niemi, 2002), the respondents noted six factor that they felt prevented them from engaging in teaching that promote active learning:

- Lack of time due to the need to complete all the required material in a packed curriculum.
- Teaching in large groups does not permit active teaching.
- A shortage of study materials suitable for the active teaching approach.
- Opposition among senior peers to changes after they have developed teaching methods suited to their capabilities and experience.
- A lack of meta-cognitive skills and motivation on the part of the students. The instructors feel that students prefer traditional learning. (p. 773)

Barriers for Engagement

The behavioral dimension of engagement includes students' effort, attention, and persistence during the initiation and execution of learning activities (Meyer & Turner, 2002). The emotional dimension of engagement focuses on states that are relevant to students' emotional involvement during learning activities such as enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment. Engagement itself combines behavioral and emotional dimensions and refers to active, goal directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused, emotionally positive interactions with the social and physical environments, and in this case, dedication to academic activities (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008).

Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and the willingness of people to expend considerable time and effort in doing something meaningful (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2012),. Absorption refers to the cognitive aspect where individuals are fully focused on something and experience a high level of concentration while performing a task. This concept includes being happily engrossed in one's work, so that time seems to pass quickly and one has difficulties in detaching oneself from work (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007; Marx, 2011).

Disaffection, which signifies more than the absence of engagement, refers to the occurrence of behaviors and emotions that reflect maladaptive motivational states (Skinner et al., 2008). Disaffection has both a behavioral component, (including passivity and withdrawal from participation in learning activities), and an emotional component, (including boredom, anxiety, and frustration in the classroom). Emotions may also play a leading role in the dynamics of how students lose engagement and become disaffected

(Roeser, Strobel, & Quihuis, 2002). That is, if students become bored, frustrated, or anxious about classroom work, this likely undermines their behavioral participation in academic activities (Skinner et al., 2008).

Disengagement from learning is often associated with: low attainment; underachievement; a reduced sense of belonging to schools or colleges; disruption in classrooms; poor relationships between teachers and students; truancy; long-term unemployment; and disadvantage (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver 2007, p. 224; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004, p. 60; Lumby 2012, p. 263; Montalvo, Mansfield, & Miller 2007; Niemiec & Ryan 2009, p. 144; Stephenson 2007, p. 38; Willms 2003, p. 36). A wealth of research has concentrated on defining disengagement through focusing on teacher–student relationships and the concept of relatedness (Fredricks et al. 2004, p. 61; Goodenow 1993, p. 79; Hughes & Kwok 2006, p. 466; Libbey 2004, p. 281; Lumby 2012, p. 252; Martin & Dowson 2009, p. 330; Montalvo et al. 2007, p. 144; Niemiec & Ryan 2009, p. 133; Osterman 2000, p. 233; Walker & Greene 2009, p. 437). For example, Furrer and Skinner (2003) have defined relatedness with: respect to school climate; teacher relationships; feelings of belonging and acceptance; and inter-personal support. They have argued that all such factors directly impact engagement, as well as levels of attainment, success, expectation and general interest in school. Research has also considered that, for some, educational disengagement can be exacerbated by factors outside of school, (Broadhurst, Paton, & May-Chahal 2005; Sutherland & Purdy 2006; Visser, Daniels, & MacNab 2005).

When asked about those factors that might be barriers to learning, students frequently mentioned poor or negative relationships with teachers (Duffy & Elwood,

2012). Levels of engagement and motivation were often dependent on whether students liked their teachers. Another factor that emerged as a potential barrier to learning was relationships with peers in classrooms. Young people described how other students, often their friends, could be distracting or disruptive around them, thus interrupting lessons and opportunities to learn. A study conducted by Duffy and Elwood (2012) also revealed students feeling left out of lessons because some of their peers could *take over* the learning. While others described not feeling confident to speak or talk out in large classes.

The quality of teaching range of pedagogical approaches used and ways of teaching the subject were all raised as factors that impacted on students' opportunities to learn (Duffy & Elwood, 2012). Participants in the study conducted by Duffy and Elwood also talked about becoming disruptive, restless, or fidgety in classes where teachers tended to be overly explanatory, leaving little time for student input during a lesson. Callanan et al. (2009) highlighted how changing teaching styles to include more interactive learning could have a positive impact on disengagement. Bryson and Hand (2007) argued that students were more likely to engage when there was support from teachers, and when teachers were themselves engaged with the subject they were teaching and focused on the teaching process. Bielby, Judkins, O'Donnell, and McCrone (2011) suggested that learners are more likely to engage when: they are encouraged to take ownership of learning; when teachers use flexible approaches to teaching; when teachers can demonstrate strong subject knowledge and expertise; class sizes must not be too big; teachers must be more alert when pupils need extra help; lessons should be delivered in an appealing way; and where possible take into account real-life contexts.

Student–teacher relationships are clearly very important and a determining factor influencing the extent to which students engage or not, and can be one of the most fundamental aspects of a student's educational experience (Becker & Luthar 2002, p. 96; Furrer & Skinner 2003, p. 150; Hughes & Kwok 2006, p. 465). Montalvo et al. (2007) argued that there was "little doubt that teachers influence student motivation and achievement" (p. 144). Furthermore, Lumby (2011) highlighted that relatedness is a frequent theme in student narratives about disengagement, with many students citing negative relationships with teachers as a contributing factor of their disengagement.

For the purpose of this study, preference was given to the processes through which an engaged dynamic was created and maintained in the classroom. However, it is important to recognize the barriers that emerged from the study in order to increase overall program effectiveness. What makes classroom engagement a particularly important educational construct is that it functions as a multidimensional pathway to connect students' motivational states with their sought after educational outcomes, such as academic progress and extent of achievement (Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, & Johnson, 2012, p. 352; Jang, Kim, & Reeves, 2012, p. 1179; Ladd & Dinella, 2009, p. 193; Reeves, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012, p. 700; Skinner et al., 2008, p. 767). By engaging themselves with effort, enthusiastically, strategically, and proactively, students have multiple effective pathways to: translate their constructive motivational states into better developed skills; achieved educational objectives; and to academically progress (Reeve & Woogul, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

The models of Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) reveal that student engagement leads to higher quality learning experiences and persistence towards meeting goals. Tinto (1993) emphasized that students' decisions to persist/withdraw depend upon their successful academic and social integration. Academic integration focuses on conformity with related norms, while social integration involves the students' ability to acclimate to their new social environment (Kuh et al., 2006). Thus, student persistence is a function of the individual, as well as factors within the current collegiate environment (Allen, 1999; Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). What makes classroom engagement a particularly important educational construct is that it functions as a pathway to connect students' motivational state with their sought-after educational outcomes (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn, 2009; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009).

Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement framed involvement as the physical and psychological efforts students put forth toward their academic experiences. Astin stated that involved students devote a great deal of energy to studying, spend a lot of time on campus, participate in student organizations, and regularly interact with faculty and peers (Sidelinger, 2010). Astin (1999) articulates it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement. He offered a list of active terms that reflected his notion of student involvement as a behavioral construct that center on the classroom experience

(Sidelinger, 2010). Ultimately, the classroom is the major component of a student's educational experience (Tinto, 1997).

Tinto (1997) stated student involvement matters and leads to greater acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. Involved students are more apt to learn and succeed (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2005; Kuh, 2007). Students who are involved in the content delivered by their instructors demonstrated higher levels of learning gains and positive personal growth (Astin, 1993; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Haung & Chang, 2004). Milem and Berger (1997) advocated early involvement with faculty since it tends to have a positive influence on student persistence in college. Moreover, students who participate in class discussions develop higher level cognitive skills (Wade, 1994). Students who are willing to talk in class and engage in class discussions contribute to their own learning, and to the learning of their peers (Frymier & Houser, 1997; Webb, 2009). Wade (1994) stated that an ideal class discussion happens when almost all students are: engaged and interested; are learning; and are listening attentively to their peer's comments and suggestions. Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) referred to students speaking in class by asking and answering questions, making comments, and participating in discussions as class participation. Overall, students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are given opportunities to think about and to apply what they learn in different educational settings (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005).

Communication researchers are continuously interested in predicting student success in the classroom and strive to determine if that success can be attributed to classroom instruction (Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997). However, Johnson (2009) stated

instructional communication research generally focuses on how teacher communicative traits impact students' classroom experience. Following the general model of instructional communication (McCroskey, Valencic, & Richmond, 2004), it is crucial to consider the roles both teachers and students play in regard to student success. Turman and Schrodt (2006) noted that teachers and students work together to fulfill a variety of individual and educational goals. Instructors work toward enhancing affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning while also trying to establish positive relationships in the classroom (Booth-Butterfield, 1992). Students' goals may be more complicated in that they are trying to figure out who they are, and how to succeed in the college setting (Ellis, 2004; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). Regardless of differing goals, instructors and students should work toward a common outcome. Baer (1997) suggested, given teaching and learning are on the same side of the coin, not opposite sides, instructors and students should work together to develop a positive learning environment.

Conclusion

Vella (2002) articulated the importance of creating a relationship between teachers and learners that involve: respect; safety; open communication; affirmation; listening; and humility. Classroom respect involves trust in the knowledge and competency of the instructor. Trust in the design of the course includes the sequencing of activities; feasibility and relevance of course objectives; and maintenance of a non-judgmental environment. Instructors have the ability to nourish students' inner lives and encourage them to create their own learning rather than simply filling them with the

instructors' knowledge (Hill, 2014). Pietrzak, Duncan, and Korcuska (2008) found students valued instructors they perceived as friendly and found them to be effective when they expressed compassion, enthusiasm, empathy, and concern for students' learning. Therefore, in creating effective workforce development classes, it is important for instructors to identify the key components that create classroom engagement for students. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming.

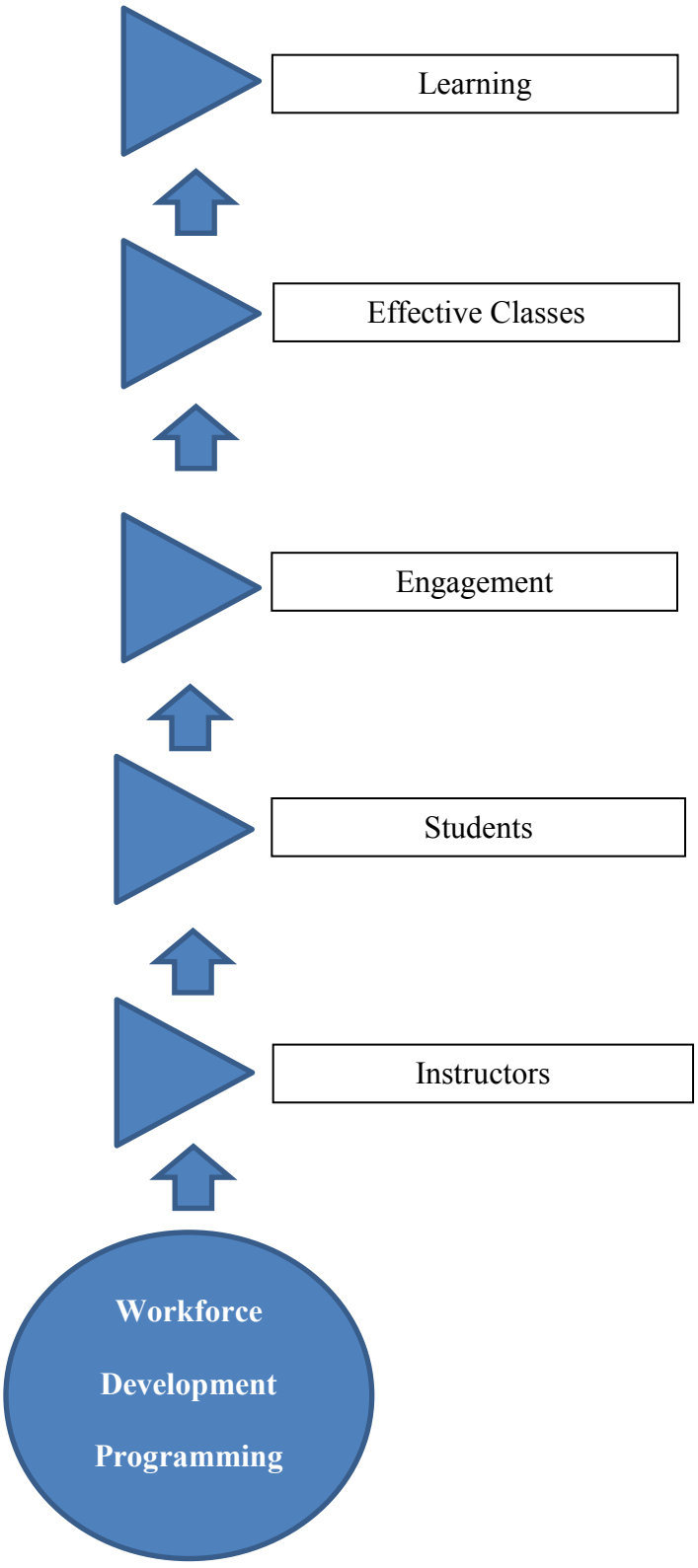

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology and research design are discussed. In chapters one and two, an overview of the study and the literature review were provided to support the study's purpose which was to explore the key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. In addition, the study provided insight about the various types of classroom activities currently being utilized by workforce development instructors to promote student engagement. Also identified were current actions taken to promote engagement and success in the classroom. Potential barriers for effectiveness was also noted based on the research conducted in this study.

Research Approach

Qualitative research is a way in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from human experience using his or her eyes and ears as filters (Lichtman, 2010). The purpose of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience. It often involves detailed interviews/or observations of humans in natural and social settings. It can be coupled with quantitative research, which relies heavily on hypothesis testing, cause and effect, and statistical analyses.

Lichtman's (2010) ten critical elements of qualitative research were used because it served as a guideline in my own research process. It helped me to stay focused as a qualitative researcher while conducting this study. After each of Lichtman's critical elements, I provided my own rationale for this study. First, Lichtman begins,

> The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand human phenomena, human interaction, or human disclosure. Qualitative researchers tend to ask how, what, and why questions that lead to a particular meaning. Because qualitative researchers are interested in meaning and interpretations, they typically do not deal with hypotheses. Quantitative research is designed to test hypotheses. Qualitative research is not designed to test hypotheses or to generalize beyond the particular group at hand. While early efforts at qualitative research might have stopped at description, it is now more generally accepted that a qualitative researcher adds understanding and interpretation to the description. (p. 12)

The existing knowledge that students can be deflated or empowered by the interactions that occur during the learning process, which I have personally encountered in my career, led me to this dissertation study. In conducting this study, I placed emphasis on empowering students. The knowledge that was generated through this research will promote effective programming. As Lichtman suggests, I used a qualitative approach to identify the key components of classroom engagement that make workforce development programming effective. As students are required to apply their knowledge, evaluate how others have applied knowledge, and create their own solutions to practical problems, they will arguably develop a deeper understanding of content (Campana & Peterson, 2013). There is a growing consensus that optimal learning comes from active engagement with

the classroom materials being taught (Prince, 2004). Designing course experiences and conducting class meetings in a manner that aims to ensure active participation and cognitive engagement is important (O'Connor, 2013). Specifically this study identified: the types of classroom engagement that have currently taken place in workforce development classes; actions taken to evaluate student success in the classroom; and existing barriers impacting classroom engagement in workforce development programming.

Second, Lichtman (2010) explains,

> Qualitative research is thought to be fluid and ever changing. As such, it doesn't follow one particular way of doing things. Qualitative researchers often conduct interviews in which the participants tell their stories and do not follow a predetermined format. They may find that the questions they investigate evolve as they begin to gather and analyze their data. (p. 13)

Understanding student engagement dynamics in the classroom is a complex process. Findings from studies that have put students in active learning situations support the benefits of participatory engagement (Smith & Cardaciotto, 2011; Yoder & Hachevar, 2005). Studies on students' preferences for course attributes indicate students prefer classes that rely less on lecture and more on participatory engagement through class activities and related experiences (Basow, Phelan, & Capoloslo, 2006; Beishline & Holmes, 1997; Levy & Peters, 2010). It was essential to conduct interviews to find out the perceptions of these students and their thoughts regarding participation in the classroom environment. This process was not an inquiry with variables that are

measureable. A qualitative approach in this case was necessary in order for questions to evolve where each student's perspective of the experience contributed to the study.

Third, Lichtman (2010) discusses that there is not just one way of qualitative research.

> When qualitative research began to take hold in education, many equated qualitative research with ethnography and saw extensive fieldwork as the way to conduct research. There are potentially several ways to interpret what you see and hear. As the researcher, you do the interpretation. Your interpretation will carry more weight if the data you gathered, the manner in which you organize the data, and the vehicle you use to present your interpretation support it. (p. 13)

By not only interviewing the students, but also going into the learning environment, additional information was observed and recorded. A more accurate account is given from not only what was reported by the students interviewed, but also in the interactions that were noted during the learning process. Bar and Tagg (1995) suggested that a major paradigm shift is taking place away from the emphasis for professors on providing instruction to providing learning. The shift from viewing students as passive vessels, where the teacher controls the learning activities, recognizes instead that students must be active discoverers and constructers of their own knowledge. The new paradigm visualizes students as empowered, with personal relationships among students, between teachers and students, with cooperative learning in class (Fink, 2003). University teaching involves diverse modes of instruction, including: lectures; seminars; laboratory; and mentoring (Faleye & Awopeju, 2012). Developing an educational environment that

is conducive to optimal student learning is a continual challenge in the field of Higher Education.

The fourth critical element for a qualitative study as described by Lichtman (2010) involves inductive thinking.

> Qualitative research moves from the concrete to the abstract. Researchers begin with data then use the data to gain an understanding of phenomena and interactions. When using an inductive approach, one thing leads to another. You being by gathering a considerable amount of data. You then go through your data to see whether you can find many examples of a particular thing, in order to identify a central issue or idea. As you collect and simultaneously look at your data, you begin to move to more general statements or ideas based on the specifics found in your data. (p. 14)

Interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations were used as the primary data collection sources for this study. I utilized all possible forms of data collection to gather a considerable amount of information to provide clearer interpretations of perceptions and interactions pertaining to classroom engagement. Bywood et al. (2008) identified the following key elements as likelihood to increase student success:

- Interactive format, with active participation by students, particularly for more complex topic areas
- Use of specialist educators with credibility in the topic area
- Use of additional strategies, such as feedback or follow-up support
- Targeting a defined group of professionals
- Having clear educational and behavioral objectives

- Assessing and addressing barrier to change
- Identifying and repeating essential messages
- Positively reinforcing messages in follow-up opportunities (p. 43)

Other sources related to engagement are teachers' and peers' support of students and out-of-school activities (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007). The topic of student engagement has encouraged college instructors to reflect on their classroom practices and where needed, shift them toward providing students with greater involvement in the learning process (Axelson & Flick, 2011). Instructors need to consider class participation techniques that engage all learners in the classroom (O'Conner, 2013).

The fifth consideration is deciding to perform a qualitative study, Lichtman (2010) provides the holistic characteristics.

> Qualitative researchers want to study how something is and understand it. They are not interested in breaking down components into separate variables. Qualitative research aims for description, understanding, and interpretation and not examination of cause and effect. (p. 15)

Students answered open-ended questions such as, "What it is like to be a student in the First Line Supervision program?" These type of questions allowed study participants to provide detailed accounts that created a visual of their real experiences. The models of Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) indicate that student engagement leads to higher quality learning experiences and persistence towards meeting goals. Tinto (1993) emphasized that students' decisions to persist/withdraw depend upon their successful academic and social integration. What makes classroom engagement a particularly important

educational construct is that it functions as a pathway to connect students' motivational state with their sought-after educational outcomes (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn, 2009; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009).

> Sixth, Lichtman (2010) discusses variety of data in natural settings.
>
> Qualitative research typically involves studying things as they exist, rather than contriving artificial situations or experiments. So a qualitative researcher might be interested in looking at a particular classroom, rather than having a teacher change her classroom to see how something she does might affect how the students learn. Natural settings are preferred when talking to people or observing them. Interviews can be conducted in the home or office of the participants, or by phone. (p. 15)

Following Lichtman's suggestions, all observations and evaluations were conducted in the classroom setting. Questionnaires were distributed prior to the beginning of class. Interviews were conducted immediately following the classroom session. Some participants answered questionnaires while other participant volunteered for interviews conducted outside of the classroom setting. These interactions were based upon the best accommodation for the participants. Tinto (1997) stated student involvement matters, and thus leads to greater acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. Involved students are more apt to learn and succeed (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2005; Kuh, 2007). Overall, students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are given opportunities to think about and to apply what they have learned (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005).

Seventh, Lichtman (2010) explains the role of the researcher.

> The researcher plays a pivotal role in the qualitative research process. Data is collected, information is gathered, settings are viewed, and realities are constructed through his or her eyes and ears. The qualitative researcher is responsible for analyzing the data through an interactive process that moves back and forth between data collected and data analyzed. Finally, the researcher interprets and makes sense of the data. (p. 16)

Unlike doing an experimental study, in which scientific scales or measuring instruments are often used, when doing qualitative research the research decides what information to gather (Lichtman, 2012). Communication researchers are continuously interested in predicting student success in the classroom and strive to determine if that success can be attributed to classroom instruction (Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997). However, Johnson (2009) stated instructional communication research generally focuses on how teacher communicative traits impact students' classroom experience. Following the general model of instructional communication (McCroskey, Valencic, & Richmond, 2004), it is crucial to consider the roles both teachers and students play in regard to student success. Vella (2002) articulated the importance of creating a relationship between teachers and learners that involve: respect; safety; open communication; affirmation; listening; and humility. In this study, it was critical that I use all means available to gather an abundance of information regarding key components of classroom engagement. The data gathered enabled me to provide a clear and precise explanation of the results for this study.

In Lichtman's (2010) eighth critical element for a qualitative study, the need for an in-depth study is stated.

> Another critical element of qualitative research involves looking deeply at a few things rather than looking at the surface of many things. An important aspect of the investigation is to look at the whole rather than isolated variable. If we want to understand something fully, we need to look at it much more completely. (p. 17)

In investigating effective classroom engagement, I wanted to conduct this study inside the classroom. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement framed involvement as the physical and psychological efforts students put forth toward their academic experiences. It is not so much what the student thinks or feels, but what the student does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement. Astin offered a list of active terms that reflected the notion of student involvement as a behavioral construct that center on the classroom experience (Sidelinger, 2010). Ultimately, the classroom is the major component of a student's educational experience (Tinto, 1997). It is important to use the necessary tools such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires to get a complete view of the key elements that foster engagement.

Words, themes, and writing are the focus of the ninth critical element discussed by Lichtman (2010).

> Words, rather than numbers characterize qualitative research. Quite often, direct quotes from the participants are included to illustrate a certain point. Details are often included about those studied or the setting in which a study is conducted.

> Data does not have to be numbers: data can be words and visual representations as well. (p. 18)

The research site for this study was located at a center for career & workforce development at a rural Appalachian university. The research site was selected based on the physical concentration of workforce development class offerings. The location decision provided maximum opportunity for researcher engagement with observations of class components and instructor interactions. The workforce development training room was furnished with required technology (e.g., computer, projection screen, sound, and Internet connection) and met the space requirements for conducting training activities. The research site included materials necessary to conduct, observe, and record training experiences. One hour interview session were conducted in a private closed door setting with audio recording capabilities. Observations were viewed clearly from an observer station that was positioned in the back of the classroom. Flipcharts were available for classroom use and the content provided additional information that contributed to this study. Also, the workforce development training environment allowed for questionnaires to be administered to the participants at the beginning of the class session. Likewise, at the end of the training session evaluation were completed before class certificates were disseminated.

Finally, Lichtman (2010) ends with a discussion regarding a nonlinear approach to qualitative research.

> Qualitative research can be viewed as iterative and nonlinear, with multiple beginning points. You could start with an interest in a particular type of individual. You could begin with an observation about how an event affects

certain individuals. In qualitative research, the researcher moves back and forth between data gathering/collection and data analysis, rather than in a linear fashion from data collection to data analysis. (p. 19)

In conducting this study, I focused on empowering students by gaining knowledge that provided instruction to promote engagement. Through the literature review, I understand classroom engagement is a key component in learning and therefore, I looked at all the areas related to the classroom environment. I also acknowledged the barriers for engagement. The behavioral dimension of engagement includes students' effort, attention, and persistence during the initiation and execution of learning activities (Meyer & Turner, 2002). The emotional dimension of engagement focuses on states of mind that are relevant to students' emotional involvement during learning activities such as enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment. If students become bored, frustrated, or anxious about classroom work, this likely undermines their behavioral participation in academic activities (Skinner et al., 2008). The quality of teaching range of pedagogical approaches used and ways of teaching the subject were all raised as factors that have an impact on the students' opportunities to learn (Duffy & Elwood, 2012). Callanan et al. (2009) highlighted how changing teaching styles to include more interactive learning could have a positive impact on disengagement.

Research Questions

My research questions were generated based on the need to understand key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce

development programming. Working at a center for career & workforce development it is essential that students are presented an optimal learning environment so that every extent is taken to ensure a prime learning opportunity.

1. What key components of classroom engagement make workforce development programming effective?
2. How do workforce development students describe their experiences in the classroom?
3. What types of classroom engagement currently takes place in workforce development classes?
4. What barriers exist with classroom engagement in workforce development programming?

Interview Questions

1. What is your current job title?
2. Could you tell me about your experiences working in this role?
3. What do you find easy about your job?
4. What do you find difficult about your job?
5. Describe the professional development training (s) you have participated in.
6. What it is like to be a student in the First Line Supervision program?
7. What are your thoughts regarding professional development opportunities?
8. What type (s) of classroom activities do you believe are most beneficial?
9. Describe the barriers you believe exist with this training opportunity?

10. What part of this training session did you find most frustrating?
11. What part of this training session did you find most rewarding?
12. What about you has changed since participating in this class?
13. How does stress play a part in your role as a student?
14. What were your expectations coming in to this training session?
    a. Where those expectations met?
15. What differences can you make based on your experiences from this class?
16. Overall, what is it that you are trying to accomplish by seeking training?
17. Is there anything else you can share that would help me to understand what it is like to be a student in this program?

Research Sample

This study included ten workforce development classes in the First Line Supervision program with a minimum of five classroom participants and a maximum of forty per class. In this study ten participants were interviewed and a convenience sample was utilized. The participants interviewed varied in educational levels, experience, job category, and job title. First Line Supervision classes are designed as professional development for business and industry workers. The attendees hold a supervision position within their companies or are preparing to take on a new supervision role.

Data Collection

This study utilized interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations as the primary data collection sources. These data sources were relevant and useful in exploring the key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. Participants were asked to sign a consent form permitting the use of audio voice recording throughout the training sessions. Each of the ten participants were interviewed up to one hour using a voice audio recorder in a private conference room.

Questionnaires (Appendix C) were administered at the beginning of each workforce development class session in order to gain additional participant information. Observations were conducted throughout the session and recorded via audio voice recorder, flip chart, or in the form of written participant materials. A class evaluation (Appendix D) was also administered at the end of each session to collect additional data. Ten, in-depth, individual interviews were conducted following the class sessions. Interviews were recorded conversations with workforce education students. If students were unable to participate in an interview immediately following the class session other arrangements were made to accommodate an alternate time. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher. The interviews and information gathered in this study is stored in a locked file cabinet in my office and will be maintained for three years at which time everything will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations were conducted, administered, recorded, and collected in the same manner for each of the ten workforce development training sessions. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Each transcript was utilized to note reoccurring themes and contextual repetitions, as well as other thoughts or comments. The questionnaires were utilized to gain participant perceptions of professional development trainings, as well as to collect additional participant data for each session. Observations were recorded and coded in each of the fourteen sessions which provided a comparison for instructor activities and student engagement. Evaluations were also conducted in each of the fourteen sessions to: gather feedback; gain participant insight on initial perceptions and thoughts; determine most effective class components; and determine least effective class components of the workforce development training sessions. In addition participant interview information transcribed from individual discussions provided perceptions along with any barriers identified regarding the training sessions.

Researcher Subjectivity

Breuer, Mruck, and Roth (2002) believe that the (social) sciences usually try to create the impression that the results of their research have objective character. In this view, scientific results are—or at least should be—independent from the person who produced the knowledge (from the single researcher). According to this perspective,

objectivity is what makes the difference between valid scientific knowledge and other outcomes of human endeavors.

Researchers know that they influence the research and results (Lichtman, 2012). Researchers maintain distance and the need to reduce bias by identifying ways to reduce the subjectivity of the qualitative research (Bruer, Mruck, & Roth, 2002). Mehra (2002) explains qualitative subjectivity in this way.

> The point that has to be made is one quite familiar to mediators. It involves behaving in as neutral a fashion as possible. It involves being aware of the power of the researcher in the dynamics of the relationship. It involves getting the participants to tell their perspectives without requiring an approval or confirmation from the researcher. It involves asking open-ended questions that does not steer the participants in a way which might appear to endorse a particular response. It involves modeling interviews after conversations between two trusting parties. This said, the criteria for trustworthiness applicable to qualitative researchers become essential for ensuring that the research actually reveals more about the subject than about the researcher. (p. 14)

It is noteworthy to mention that I have a certification in Meeting Management and Facilitation Skills. I am also certified to administer the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and have taken several classes related to generational differences and emotional intelligence. The information that these topics generate provides a self-awareness that allows me to act as a neutral facilitator. I am very cognizant of my preferences and have removed them from the various interactions that occurred in this study.

Trustworthiness

The following strategies were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the study procedures and findings. First, the data was administered, recorded, and collected in the same manner for each of the fourteen workforce development training sessions. Second, each participant had the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the sessions so that all had equal opportunity to provide feedback. Third, all interviews were conducted in the same format, using an audio recorder, then transcribed and checked for accuracy. Fourth, all observations were documented so that accuracy could be verified. Fifth, the information for the study was gathered directly from the participants, facilitated in a neutral manner, and removed the bias or influence of the researcher. Sixth, the various forms of documentation collected from each training session provided the actual findings of the study.

Benefits and Risks of the Study

The benefits of this study far outweighed the risks. The information learned from the study will be utilized to provide better professional development, specifically in this case, for workforce development programming. Key components of classroom engagement were identified so that current class structures can be modified to create maximum outcomes. An awareness through student response in this study will determine the types of engagement planned for future class sessions. The procedures taken in this study to identify student engagement through interviews, observations, questionnaires

and evaluation will provide the necessary feedback to promote improvement. The barriers identified in this study will be addressed so that optimal programming is the end result.

The study was conducted in a safe and stable environment that involved conventional training techniques and procedures. All data collected were been kept confidential and utilized only for the purpose of the study. The information obtained is of great benefit to the university as we strive to provide the most effective programming available for a workforce in need of education.

Connection between Research and Classroom Engagement

For the most part, quantitatively minded social scientists and policy oriented academic researchers are concerned with producing and acquiring knowledge that will better equip them to address the social issues currently affecting society (Nathan, 2013). Classrooms are complex social systems where student-teacher relationships and interactions are also complex, multicomponent systems. We conceive that the nature and quality of relationship interactions between teachers-students are fundamental to understanding student engagement can be assessed through standardized observation methods, and can be changed by providing teachers knowledge about developmental processes relevant for classroom interactions (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Learning is not a spectator sport—students must: talk about what they are learning; write about what they are learning; relate it to past experiences; and apply it to their daily lives. Students must make what they learn part of themselves (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

Engagement is an interactive process. It reflects students' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and motivational states and capacities. Engagement is conditioned, in part, on interpersonal relationships as activators/organizers of these states and capacities, servicing some larger developmental task or aim (Crosnoe, 2000; Dornbusch, Glasgow, & Lin, 1996; Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). From this perspective, engagement is best understood by understanding relationships and their behavioral expression in interpersonal interactions in the classroom—through observation of exchanges and interpretation of their value and meaning. This is in regards to fostering the opportunity to learn and develop (Pianta et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The literature review in this study demonstrates a growing consensus that optimal learning comes from active engagement with the material taught (Prince, 2004). Designing course experiences and conducting class meetings in manner that aims to ensure active participation and cognitive engagement of students is important (O'Connor, 2013). We must better understand students and determine how to best engage them in learning; yet, there is a notable lack of student voice or student perspectives in the literature on student engagement (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). This study provides additional data to add to the literature regarding the key components of classroom engagement as communicated by the students from the learning environment. This study also generates additional information, provided by students, regarding barriers that hinder the classroom learning experience.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter the results of this study are discussed. The purpose of the study was to explore the key concepts of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. Interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations were utilized as the primary data collection sources. Ten participants from an Appalachian university were interviewed from a First Line Supervision Program after their completion of one or more workforce development sessions. These participants were all from business and industry and selected by their employers to attend this program. The data from questionnaires, observations, and evaluations were also collected from the First Line Supervision Program which included fourteen workforce development training sessions. The sessions took place from February 16, 2016 through June 17, 2016. The following topics were offered: Basic Core Concepts I; Legal Issues for Supervisors; Creative Problem Solving; Motivating Employees; Time Management; Managing Stress; Conflict Management; 5 S Training; Accident Prevention; Emotional Intelligence; Coaching & Workplace Communication; Generational Differences; Dealing with Difficult People; and Project Management.

Interviews

Chickering and Gamson (1987) proposed seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, all of which are related to student engagement. They are:

- Student-faculty contact
- Cooperation among students
- Active learning
- Prompt feedback
- Emphasizing time on task
- Communicating high expectations
- Respecting diversity

Kuh (2009) reported that institutions of higher education can directly influence engagement by implementing these seven principles. The research questions in this study were generated based on the need to understand key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. Interviewing students from this program was a necessary approach to gather detailed information. The information gathered through the interviews was from the viewpoint of the students regarding their own personal experiences as they relate to each of the seven principles.

Student-faculty Contact. Effective learning experiences are shaped by student-faculty contact that support the development of peoples' social and emotional competencies (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). When students have opportunities to connect with faculty who approach these relationships with: a spirit of caring; empathy; generosity; respect; reciprocity and a genuine desire to know students personally, they

can make a unique contribution to an individual's emerging adaptive capacity, self-sufficiency, resiliency, confidence, and knowledge of themselves as learners (Dunleavy & Milton, 2009).

Qualitative research aims for description, understanding, and interpretation and not examination of cause and effect (Lichtman, 2010). For this reason students, were asked to answer open-ended questions such as, "What it is like to be a student in the First Line Supervision program?" These type of questions allowed participants to provide detailed accounts that created a visual of their real experiences. Each of the ten participants volunteered to be interviewed and readily shared their perspectives regarding the question presented above. Bill said,

> Well, I have never looked at myself as a student. I signed up for the classes voluntarily to better myself. I looked at the program more as an opportunity for growth, but really ended up valuing the teacher–student environment. All of the instructors treated me professionally and I felt like I contributed to each of the classes I attended.

Kayla shared,

> I found the classes to be very enjoyable. Each class attended helped me to take a closer look at myself and my role at work. The instructors in the courses encouraged me and created a sense of confidence I needed when responding to various situations I encountered in the work place. Also, I gained insight on my own aspirations and how I want to define success in my career.

In addition Anthony shared that classes were very enjoyable. He included that the atmosphere and way the classes were conducted proved to be a positive experience. He too noted that the instructor interactions were key in his learning experience.

Again, this question was referenced, "What it is like to be a student in the First Line Supervision program?" Emily said,

> All classes were welcoming and very friendly. I had no bad experiences, honestly I found the classes to be empowering and overall a great environment. I wanted to get back in school at a university and this was a great first step. I was a full time student several years ago. The instructors and the environment reminded me of the importance of educating myself. I have a renewed interest in developing myself and continuing to be a life-long learner.

Stacy summarized best the consensus of the participants regarding student-instructor contact. She said,

> Each instructor I had gave to me a piece of knowledge that I could take from each class and apply to real situations I deal with every day at work. The program was very valuable to me and I appreciated the fact that the instructors were not just telling us how to do something. They were telling us how they did it when they were supervisors. Also, the group interactions led by the instructors enabled the class to share as a group and learn from the experiences of others.

Cooperation among Students. Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort and promotes cooperation among students. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reaction improves thinking and deepens understanding (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

Cooperative learning places students in a variety of group assignments and team projects. As peers, teachers and mentors, students compare and challenge perspectives, add insights, and strengthen their grasp on academic material (Dominguez, 2010).

During the interview process, participants were asked their thoughts regarding professional development opportunities and to describe the professional development trainings they have participated in. John shared the following,

> I would strongly suggest any opportunity to gather knowledge, but I would highly recommend the Core I class. Supervisors are hired in and they don't really know how to be a leader. Most of the time they bring what skills they have to the table and are not exposed to things they do not know. They do things because that is how they have always been done. They need to be exposed to leadership thoughts and ideas from others to grow in their positions. All the classes that I have been a part of have enabled me to meet new people and gain new ideas.

Sara indicated professional development opportunities are extremely important. The information can be critical in preparing and succeeding in a new role. It can provide different ways to see a situation and can create change in an environment. Interacting with other people in the class made her realize that many of the same problems exists regardless of the company. It was helpful for her to get insight from others on how certain supervision issues were successfully addressed. In addition, David agreed by saying,

> I feel professional development trainings are very beneficial. The classes I have taken [in this program] provided an opportunity for me to interact with other individuals. The information I received from group interactions have helped me

to improve my job skills. I have utilized several ideas from others to help employee performance and in turn, my own leadership style.

Amanda said,

> I am a life-long learner so I am always looking for growth opportunities. I feel there is always something to gain from anyone you encounter. It is nice to have a group of people in the class that may not do the same thing I do but are having the same leadership issues or frustrations that I am. These supervision classes have provided a great opportunity for me gain additional knowledge. I thrive in an active learning setting and the hands on group discussions have been useful to my professional growth.

Active Learning. Active learning is, in short, any learning activity engage in by the students in a classroom other than listening passively to an instructor's lecture. Active listening includes everything from listening practices that help students absorb what they hear, to short writing exercises in which students react to lecture materials, to complex group exercises in which students apply course material to real life situations and/or new problems (Faust & Paulson, 1998).

Participants interviewed in this study were asked, "What type (s) of classroom activities do you believe are most beneficial?" John provided this response,

> The activities in Core I were very helpful. For example, I learned a lot from the zoom activity where we were forced to work together as a team. We only had a sheet of paper with a picture. We could not show anyone our picture but we had to describe to everyone our particular piece so that we could solve a bigger puzzle. I feel some people are never able to realize that their piece of work fits

into the bigger puzzle. That one activity helped me with communication, attention to details, problem solving, and leadership. It can relate to all types of work situations I encounter daily.

Emily stated the key activity for her was discussion. She went on to explain that discussing real work issues and how they were resolved or not resolved was most beneficial. She was able to have a better understanding of the different ways various issues or problems could be addresses. Furthermore, in another interview session Joe said,

> Hands on and working together stands out as the most beneficial classroom activity. In the Motivating Employees class we got up, shook hands, and were very engaged when talking with one another. It was an opportunity to learn something new about the group and I found it to be very interesting. At times activities needs to be added in the classroom so that momentum can be maintained. I do want to say that not all activities are beneficial. For me to stay engaged during exercises, I must be able to apply the examples to learning. The best form of engagement is when participation can occur that shares views and thoughts with others and the instructor. Very hands on exercises with meaning are most beneficial to me.

Lastly, when addressing the types of classroom activities that are believed to be most beneficial Sara shared,

> For me I am a very visual learner so I like demonstrations or hands on activities that allow me to actively engage in the learning process. I hate for someone to just stand and read to me because I do not get anything out of it. I need to get the

knowledge in a hands-on manner in order to apply it. It is also helpful if I can receive immediate feedback on the activity. The feedback helps me to gain confidence if it is a new skill.

Prompt Feedback. Providing students with meaningful and prompt feedback can greatly enhance learning and improve student achievement. When individuals are trying to learn new skills, they must get some information that tells them whether or not they are doing the right thing (Stenger, 2014). Stenger notes that learning in the classroom is no exception. Both the mastery of content and, more importantly, the mastery of how to think requires trial-and-error learning. Feedback is an essential part of any context. Timely, detailed feedback, whether delivered formally or informally, helps people learn more effectively by providing a clear sense of where they are and what they have to do to improve (Naylor, Baik, Asmar, & Watty, 2014).

The participants interviewed were asked, "What part of the Fist Line Supervision training session(s) did you find most rewarding?" Stacy shared,

> The most rewarding part for me was practical applications. Again, I like the interaction and feel I can retain the most knowledge when I am actively involved. I really don't like to be told how to do something I like to be, shown. The use of real situations is much more meaningful when I need to learn something new. Plus, I was given immediate feedback and that made me certain I had learned the material correctly.

Joe added,

> The most rewarding part of the training sessions was learning ways to improve in my public speaking role. The Presentation Skills class allowed me a chance to

practice in front of a group, be critiqued by my peers, and provided immediate feedback. I was then able to take that feedback and practice in front of the group once more to correct the areas that I felt needed work.

Amanda stated,

> I valued the knowledge and ideas that I could bring back to work. The Creative Problem Solving content was one session that I could immediately implement at work. I credit this to some of the activities that provided the needed feedback to help me master the material being taught. It was very rewarding to hear others in the class validate my thoughts and ideas. I am excited about the information I learned and feel the training was personally rewarding because I have new ideas to share with my team [at work].

Anthony provided this statement,

> The most important part of the sessions for me was to learn new skills and be presented with new ideas. It was very rewarding to share with others and feel like my ideas could create change. The feedback I received from my instructors and classmates was extremely important in my learning experience. I think it is important to allow enough time during the class sessions so that everyone feels their ideas have been heard and considered.

Emphasizing Time on Task. Voklwein and Cabrera (1998) suggest that the single most important factor in affecting multiple aspects of student growth and satisfaction is the classroom experience. Emphasizing time on task is one of the classroom teacher's most important jobs in managing the classroom effectively (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Emphasizing time on task was relevant when asking participants,

"What part of the First Line Supervision training session(s) did you find most frustrating?" David said,

> The only part of the training sessions that I found frustrating was the amount of time allowed for activities and discussion for the different topics being covered. I often found that I would have liked to have spent more time completing activities and discussions around all the topics. I do understand that each class only has a certain amount of time but my recommendation would be to increase session time. Some topics need to be covered in two days instead of one.

Bill expressed the following,

> I can think of two separate sessions where I experienced frustration. Each session was a frustrating experience because I do not feel the instructor gave enough time to engage us in the material being covered. There were a number of questions from the group that could not be answered due to time.

Kayla added,

> It is frustrating when there was an expectation for the class and that expectation was not met. I had a personal expectation based on other classes attended and there was one class that did not measure up. I left feeling defeated because due to lack of time I could not get the answers I needed from the class to be able to go back and effectively apply a few of the ideas introduced.

Communicating High Expectations. When teachers have high expectations for students and provide tasks that are engaging and of high interest, students build self-esteem, increase confidence, and improve academic performance (Ferguson, 2002). To merely increase expectations without helping students achieve success leads to frustration

and failure (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010). Participants in this study were asked, "What were your expectations coming in to the training session(s)?" and "Were those expectations met?" Bill stated,

> I did not know what to expect coming in to the first training session. I am fifty-seven years old and had no formal training. I hoped to gain knowledge that would help me with my supervisor role. By the second class I could see how the program was structured and that it was going to benefit what I was trying to accomplish with the employees I supervise. The instructors more than met my expectations in the efforts they put forth to accommodate each student and the group as a whole. I am not sure I had clear expectations other than just gaining knowledge. I can say that I would highly recommend these trainings to others in my organization. I can say I felt that I learned many things that I can apply in my current position.

Amanda addressed her expectations as follow.

> My expectations were that I wanted to learn as much as possible to make myself a better candidate to become a supervisor. I do believe those expectation were met. I felt each instructor had expectations for the class, the group as a whole, and the students individually. The objectives of the class were made clear at the beginning of each session and students were expected to be active learners.

Additional information was gained when Stacy added,

> My hope in taking the supervision classes was to learn to improve my work skills and be more productive as a supervisor. I know this is something I will have to continuously work on but, I feel I was given a good start by just being a part of

the classes. I realized I do need to set expectations for myself and my professional goals. These classes and diversity of the group, helped me to realize that I have to be willing to step outside my comfort zone in order to learn new ideas. You cannot continue to do the same things and produce different outcomes. If I want to improve my supervision skills, I need to learn new techniques. I feel like I was able to learn new things, but I plan to take more classes in the future.

In addition John said,

> Creative Problem solving met all my expectations. The trainer really set the tone for how engaging the class would be. If the instructor follows the manual and has relevant learning experiences, expectations will be met. The Creative Problem Solving class exceeded my expectations. I had another class were my expectations were not met due to time limitations. I do believe the instructor holds the key to an engaging learning environment.

David expressed the following,

> My expectations were to gain as much knowledge as possible about the topics being taught. I wanted to hear real ideas that I could use to be successful in my own job. My expectations were met because in each class I was introduced to a concept or thought process to help me in some way to supervise others. My expectations were exceeded by the interactions and diversity of the groups. It was reassuring to be in the various groups with so many different perspectives, but still find the ability to solve problems that occur in many of our work places. I was also able to create a network of resources through the many people I met in

the classes. If I am trying to resolve a certain situation, I know I can reach out to the instructors or others I was able to connect with in class.

Respecting Diversity. Culturally responsible instruction aims to teach students that differences in viewpoints and culture are to be cherished and appreciated rather than judged and feared. The participants interviewed were asked, "What differences can you make based on your experiences from the training session(s)?" Joe stated,

> Well, I will be better at listening than I was before. Sometimes I just focus on my end of things and don't realize that others may need more direction. I have realized that just because I know what I want to accomplish does not mean that others do. Like the example of drawing a house…my ideal house is very different from the ideal house of someone else. Also, I will be more mindful of others especially if their ideas are not just like mine.

Anthony added,

> I have been able to utilize different strategies at work based on what I learned in class, especially in communication. I have realized that in certain situations I need a diverse opinion to make the best choice for all involved. It is important to consider the opinion of others even if they do not share my same viewpoint.

Stacy stated,

> The difference I can make based on the training I have received is to take into account my audience and be a little more understanding. I will be better prepared to deal with stressful situations on the job. Also, I will not hesitate to get the opinion of others if I know they can add useful insight to the problem. I have learned a diverse group provides valuable information when answering

complicated problems. My way is not always the best way and sometimes others provide the best answers.

Emily provided additional insight by saying,

> The thing that truly hit home to me through the learning process was that I can make a difference. It all starts with me and my attitude, work ethic, emotional intelligence, team building, communication, listening skills, and the list goes on and on. I believe people need to feel valued and recognized for a job well done. Each person, though, can communicate differently and may need to be recognized in various ways. I have to always be aware of how I am impacting others. It may take a little extra on my part, but it will be well received by people I supervise. I have learned that a little really does go a long way.

Lastly Kayla indicated,

> The difference I can make is to take the information I learned from the classes and bring it back to my job to share with others. I have been exposed to a lot of different people with different backgrounds and opinions. The things I learned from others in the classes will help me as I try to manage the diverse supervision problems I encounter. I plan to continue to take classes and implement ideas learned whenever possible. I feel strongly about the program, the people, and materials presented. I cannot wait to get others in my organization involved in the learning opportunities.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire is a well-established tool within social science research for acquiring information on participant social characteristics: present and past behaviors; standards of behaviors or attitudes and their beliefs; and reasons for action with respect to the topic under investigation (Bulmer, 2004). The questionnaires in this study were utilized to gain participant perceptions of professional development trainings, as well as to collect additional participant data from each training session. Questionnaires were administered to the participants at the beginning of each workforce development class session and were asked to provide answers on a voluntary basis.

The nine short answer questions and one open-ended question were provided to participants in each training session. A total of eighteen questionnaires were returned by participants.

1. What is your current job title?
2. How many years have you worked in this role?
3. What types of professional development training(s) have you participated in?
4. Where did you participate in the training(s)?
5. What are your thoughts regarding professional development opportunities?
6. What type(s) of classroom activities best help you retain information?
7. What barriers do you believe exist with classroom engagement in professional development trainings?
8. What top five factors do you feel contribute to an excellent professional development session?

9. What factors do you feel contribute to a poor professional development session?
10. Is there anything else you can share that would help me to understand your experiences as a student in this First Line Supervision program?

Students were given the opportunity to answer the following questions, and responses were collected upon completion.

1. What is your current job title?
    - Project Manager
    - Test Lab Supervisor
    - Director of Construction
    - Production Supervisor
    - Supervisor of Logistics/Transportation
    - Supervisor Quality Assurance
    - Schedule Attainment Supervisor
    - Shift Foreman
    - Service Supervisor
    - Risk Management Coordinator
    - Administrative Specialist
2. How many years have you worked in this role?

    The years of time worked in current positions ranged from less than one to over thirty years.
3. What types of professional development training(s) have you participated in?
    - Leadership
    - Socratic

- Quality control
- Manufacturing
- Microsoft

4. Where did you participate in the training(s)?

The majority of participants indicated they had only participated in professional development trainings at the university. However, a few indicated other training sites.

5. What are your thoughts regarding professional development opportunities?

- Every employee should participate in professional development provided he or she is interested.
- I am extremely grateful when selected to receive professional development training.
- Employees should take advantage of every opportunity provided by their employer.
- Professional development is important to all employees but especially to those who are new on the job.
- Always be open to new ideas that professional development can provide.
- Professional development classes are helpful if feedback is given to employees taking the class. It is important to gain knowledge but also to get confirmation that the knowledge is understood.

6. What type(s) of classroom activities best help you retain information?

The majority of questionnaires indicated that the types of activities that best helped participants retain information were group activities. However, two responses indicated hands-on activities. Blake had a differing opinion and stated,

Activities that engage, but not necessarily "class participation". That is, activities that require me to think about the concepts and articulate understanding in either written, demonstrated, or verbally communicative ways.

7. What barriers do you believe exist with engagement in professional development trainings?

The majority of the questionnaires specified the barriers that exist in classroom engagement in professional development trainings are due to group activities for the following reasons:

- Lack of individual attention
- Loss of attention among group
- Non-participants
- Conforming to group expectations
- Some voices are not heard

One participant indicated that group activities become an obstacle when some members of the group dominate the outcomes.

8. What top five factors do you feel contribute to an excellent professional development session?

- Participation
- Honesty
- Excellent content
- Diversity
- Group activities
- Real life situations

- Comfortable communication
- Prompt feedback

9. What factors do you feel contribute to a poor professional development session?
    - Non-communication between instructor and students
    - Lack of student involvement/accountability
    - Unapproachable instructor
    - Formal atmosphere
    - Lack of class control
    - Lack of engagement
    - Poorly managed schedule
    - Lack of diversity
10. Is there anything else you can share that would help me to understand your experiences as a student in this First Line Supervision program?

Question 10 was strategically asked last to allow participants to provide additional thoughts. Very few participants provided answers to this question. However, the information given by the few was helpful in allowing this researcher to be exposed to other factors that may not have been considered. One such factor shared by Evan was that some third shift workers come straight from work to attend the classes that begin at 9 o'clock in the morning.

Elizabeth shared that a significant amount of material was covered, many concepts were introduced, and there was limited time to retain the information. She would appreciate additional time added to each session, allowing more time for group discussions and the ability to retain information. Andrew indicated that the diversity of

students in the program provided opportunities to view ideas from different perspectives. In addition, Sam rationalized that real learning occurs when the instructor facilitates the group, then steps back to allow the discussion to unfold. He indicated the diversity of the group as engaging and insightful.

Observations

In this study, observations were recorded in fourteen various training sessions to provide a comparison for instructor activities and student engagement in the classroom. Like the research of Miller and Cunningham (2011) I was interested in relationships between environment constructs and multiple concepts, including active learning, engagement, motivation, group dynamics, and relationships between students in the classrooms, as well as between the teacher and students.

Active Learning. In each of the fourteen sessions active learning was observed. It was noted that in three sessions students were invited to participate in a keep/change exercise which allowed students to anonymously comment about activities deemed worthy to keep and indicate activities they believed needed to be changed. Students were able to provide feedback to the instructor on what did and did not work allowing participant to initiate change in the learning environment.

Four observations included role play in the training sessions. The role play scenarios all addressed a different supervision issue. However, each of the observations revealed similar aspect about active learning environments. First, the role play scenarios were all set up in the same manner. A concept was: introduced; discussion took place

about the concept; volunteers were asked to play designated roles; the volunteers provided their answers during the role play; and then group discussion took place to further explore the situation.

In each of the four observations, the research participants verbally indicated it was more difficult to come up with a solution when put on the spot during the course role play activities. In each instance, during the group discussions, students stated that the best approach is not to deal with a supervision issue referenced to by the students as being put on the spot. Each group, in all four courses, decided it is best to step away from the situation, gather the necessary data, then provide a solution to the employee or employees involved.

Again, these participant observations detailed four different active learning scenarios introduced, however each separate activity produced the same outcome. Based on the observations, it was essential to include all students in the active learning process to form a consensus and achieve engagement.

Engagement. Fassinger (1995a) noted that both students and professors can see the benefits of student engagement, and Fritschner (2000) found that students thought participation was ‘‘essential’’ to their own learning. A direct observation was made in each session of an instance where it was abundantly clear that students thought participation was essential to learning. One such observation occurred when the class was in a group activity setting, two of the six students at one table were clearly not paying attention to the tasks given to the group. The other students in the group were visually distracted. The spokesperson, which was chosen by the group to lead the activity, finally spoke up and held the non-participating members accountable. When this

group reported to the rest of the class, the spokesperson did not hesitate to explain to the class that the thoughts only reflected the work of four of the group members. He added that group members participating would have received more from the activity if everyone had equally contributed.

Motivation. Williams and Williams (2011) report that motivation is one the most important factor that educators can target in order to improve learning. Student motivation is an essential element that is needed for quality education. Students are motivated when: they pay attention; they begin working on tasks immediately; they ask question; volunteer answers; and they appear to be happy and eager (Palmer, 2007). These characteristics were noted in eleven out of the fourteen class sessions I observed. Eleven of the sessions began with some type of introduction icebreaker activity. From the beginning of the class session, students were asked to interact with one another given a task in order to get to know each other. Subsequently, I observed students in all eleven classes were eager to get involved and appeared motivated to complete the assignment given by the instructor.

During one such activity the students were asked to meet every person individually in the class. The instructions included: reading each person's name tag; making eye contact; shaking hands; and lining up in birth month order without verbally speaking to one another. The observation revealed eager participants moving from one person to the next. The students were visibly happy and willing to take on the task given to them. There was laughing in the group but students did refrain from verbally speaking. I could almost feel the energy in the room as students worked to finish the task and nonverbally communicate their birth months in order to form the correct sequence.

Once every one had finalized their positions, the instructor provided a quick debriefing session and confirmed that everyone was in the correct order. The students were then asked if the tasks were difficult. Many replied that eye contact and shaking hands were not hard, but they missed the ability to verbally communicate. The instructor then asked if the students felt like they had sufficiently met everyone in the group. The group unanimously indicated making connections with one another. The instructor indicated that nonverbal interaction are as important as verbal, as well as in any work dynamic it is important to look someone in the eye, shake their hand, and let them know you are eager to participate or be part of the group.

Group Dynamics. Beebe and Masterson (2003) believe that there are advantages and disadvantages to working in a group. By understanding the benefits and potential pitfalls, a group can capitalize on the virtues of group work and minimize the obstacles that hinder success. Each of the fourteen observation session provided an opportunity to record information pertaining to class structure and group dynamics. Each instructor took various approaches in teaching their sessions. The one consistent aspect of all classes was the opening agenda that each instructor took time to display. This agenda set the time frame and structure of how students would spend their time in the session.

Three instructors addressed the fact that students learn in different ways, therefore a variety of activities were included in the sessions to address the different learning styles. The instructors asked their students about their learning preferences, and in all three classes the majority of student, by show of hands, preferred hands on learning. One of the instructors went a step above and told students that at any time they felt they were not fully understanding the material, a different approach could be taken to explain the

concept. During this observation the topic of mindfulness was discussed when students stated they would indeed like additional examples. The instructor improvised and a role play scenario was created that lead to a whole new level of participation and understanding. Some of the more previously skeptic students voiced verbally that they now understood and were able to benefit from the group dynamics and peer interactions.

Relationships between Students in the Classroom. High-quality relationships in the classroom include interactions that are courteous and kind focusing on learning the material to building academic skills (Furrer et al., 2014). In all of the observations high-quality relationships in the classroom were observed. However, there were a few instructors that did provide class ground rules at the beginning of the training session. The ground rules covered the following:

- Participate in your own learning
- Be respectful
- Keep an open mind
- Limit your air time
- Do not interrupt while others are sharing

Nevertheless, all observations noted were positive interactions, and the need for ground rules seemed unnecessary or never needing to be enforced.

The students appeared open to the opinion of others and actually sought advice from peers from time to time in the various sessions. I noted that several of the students took multiple classes together. They did not know each other prior to enrolling in these courses and met because of their desire to take supervision classes. Several bonds were formed and many connections were established and noted during the observations.

Although many of the students came from different industry backgrounds, it was clear through the conversations that they experienced the same supervision issues. It was also clear they appreciated the knowledge they had gained, not only from each other but from the instructors as well.

Student-teacher Contact. Students feel they belong in class when teachers express involvement, warmth, and affection demonstrating to students they enjoy having them in class (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Each instructor observed, visibly worked at making a connection with students in their class sessions. For the most part, it was easy to pin point how and sometimes when the connection was made with students. Instructors made it a point to call students by their names, invite them to participate in the sessions, and go above and beyond to make all students feel comfortable and welcomed. Observations documented that all opinions were treated with respect and addressed timely by the class instructors.

However, one student in particular that enrolled in a few courses was not as engaged as other students. The instructor in each situation attempted to use techniques to create an effective learning environment, yet that one student in those particular sessions would not engage. At first glance it was hard to pick up on what exactly was taking place. Observations noted the instructors continually trying to engage the non-participant in various forms of activities throughout the session.

Out of curiosity, after one of the classes, I asked the instructor to comment on the non-participative behavior. He summed up the behavior in this manner:

> Some students just never achieve the comfort level to share their ideas with others in an open format. In no way was the behavior taken as offensive or rude. I

conducted the class in a way that was open and non-threatening, but still some students take longer to process their ideas and thoughts before speaking them out loud. I do believe the student took away a better understanding and knowledge of what was taught today. My hope is that as the information is processed, if questions arise, then that student will reach out to me personally so I can provide additional clarification. Students are unique in that they learn at different paces and engage at different levels. I respect each student and value the opportunities to learn as much from them as they do from me.

This approach is in accordance with Martin and Marsh (2009) in that over time, warmth, structure, and autonomy support from teachers and peers not only operate as social resources but also help students to construct their own personal motivational resources.

Evaluations

Student evaluations of teaching have long been the subject of research, primarily focusing on two areas (Heine & Maddox, 2005). First, the accuracy of students' perceptions regarding their teachers' performance in class. Secondarily, research has focused upon uncovering the source of students' perceptions about teaching effectiveness and quality. The Workforce Education Evaluation was the means, in this study, by which students evaluated a course and an instructor. The evaluations were administered during the last fifteen minutes of the class session. The course administrator explained that the evaluations were extremely important to the program. It was ensured that the feedback received from the students on the evaluations would be utilized to enhance programming.

The students were asked to complete the evaluation anonymously and then leave it turned faced down to be collected. The evaluations were collected in a random order, then shared with the course instructor for review.

The first area of the evaluation addressed the accuracy of students' perceptions regarding their instructors' performance in class. A series of three forced choice questions were provided on the Workforce Education Evaluation and were designed to gain information regarding the usefulness of the information, the knowledge gained from the session, and the quality of the presentation. The first question on the evaluation asked, "How useful was the information?" The possible choices consisted of "not at all," "somewhat," or "very useful." In the fourteen sessions that were evaluated the majority of participants indicated the information from the training sessions was very useful. The remaining participants indicated the information from the training sessions was somewhat useful.

The second question on the evaluation asked, "How much knowledge was gained?" The possible choices consisted of "none," "some," or "much." In the same fourteen sessions that were evaluated, the majority of participants indicated that much knowledge was gained from the training sessions. The remaining participants indicated that some knowledge was gained from the training sessions.

The third question on the evaluation asked, "What was the quality of the presentation?" The possible choices consisted of "poor," "good," or "excellent." In the fourteen sessions that were evaluated the majority of participants indicated the quality of the presentations were excellent. The remaining participants indicated the quality of the presentations in the training sessions were good.

The second content area of the evaluation focused upon uncovering the source of students' perceptions about teaching effectiveness and quality. A series of five open-ended questions were provided on the Workforce Education Evaluation and were designed to gain information regarding initial perceptions, most effective components, least effective components, learning outcomes, and barriers in the training sessions.

1. What were your initial perceptions and thoughts about this workforce development training?
    - Small class size
    - Knowledge learned
    - Practice new skills
    - Passionate instructors
    - Relevant information
    - Engaging
    - Student involvement
    - Interactive
    - Helpful
2. What were some of the most effective components utilized during this training session?
    - Small class sessions
    - Quality material taught
    - Open learning environment
    - Exchange of group information

- Real world examples
- Student diversity

3. What were the least effective components utilized during this training session?
    - Long introductions
    - Lack of time
    - Lack of participation from all students
4. What did you learn as a result of the training session?
    - Strengths
    - Weaknesses
    - Allocate resources
    - Communication skills
    - Seek clarity
    - Stress management
    - Deal with difficult people not only in the workplace but in ever day life
    - Problem solving
    - Continue with college education
5. What barriers did you experience during this training session?

Jacob, shared the obstacles he experienced were his own inner emotions. He realizes the need to be more sensitive and understanding when addressing the perspectives of others. Ruben explained, the barrier he experienced was when the material presented did not follow along with the participant book. The only problem Tiffany voiced, was the time allotment for the class session. She expressed a need for additional time to master

the concepts discussed. Andrea was concerned about applying the information learned immediately to reinforce new skills.

The barrier Joel experienced was having a difficult time staying awake in class, because he worked the night before and came straight to the training course. Tony shared the barriers that existed were ones he created. He now realizes the learning process and gaining new information is less difficult than he anticipated. He believes he needs to be open to new ideas to grow in a leadership role.

Sandy admitted, at times during the training session it was hard to see things from different perspectives. She appreciated the diversity but acknowledged it was hard to change her mindset after doing things a certain way for a long time. Mary shared, the biggest barrier was her own ideas and beliefs. She acknowledged being part of the problem and is now committed to be part of the solution.

Lucas discussed the barrier he encountered was the need for an attention shift. He needed time in between topics to digest the information. Andy commented, the barrier she experienced was when others were not willing to open up and share with the group. She explained, some never shared their thoughts and experiences and believed it would have helped the group discussions. Adam admitted his barriers were lack of knowledge. He felt like everyone had more experience and time on the job, which he found to be intimidating.

Anderson stated the barrier he had to deal with was the fear of speaking in front of a group. He indicated class experiences helped him to get over that fear and now believes what he has to say is important. Marley concludes her thoughts with this comment, great class sessions! She did not experience any barriers while attending the workforce

development sessions. The responses to these evaluation questions expressed an overview of all participants and their thoughts on workforce development classes attended.

Conclusion

In this chapter the results of this study were discussed. The purpose of the study was to explore the key concepts of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. Interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations were utilized as the primary data collection sources. The participants in this dissertation study were all from business and industry and selected by their employers to attend this program. In conducting this study, I focused on empowering students by gaining knowledge to enhance instruction and promote engagement.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was about students who attended First Line Supervision classes at a rural Kentucky Appalachian university. These students took a series of leadership based topics to better prepare themselves for a leadership role in their current employment. In addition, they were seeking the necessary information needed to be successful in filling the educational gaps within their organizations. These students came from a variety of business and industry settings but all had the common goal of enhancing their leadership skills.

I am the administrator of the First Line Supervision Program and therefore was interested in exploring the key components of effective classroom engagement in higher education workforce development programming. The findings of this study were discussed in Chapter Four and an analysis of those finding will be summarized and my conclusion will be provided based on participants' perspectives. This study is important because participants identified: key components of classroom engagement; experiences in the classroom; types of classroom engagement currently taking place in workforce development classes; and barriers that exist with classroom engagement. Research questions were designed with the intent to gain insight from the participants regarding classroom dynamics in order to enhance programming.

Key Components of Classroom Engagement

In accordance with Chickering and Gamson (1987) this study, based on information provided by the participants, concludes the key components of classroom engagement that make workforce development programming effective are: student-instructor contact; cooperation among students; active learning; prompt feedback; emphasizing time on task; communicating high expectations; and respecting diversity. The information collected from participant interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations all indicated these factors as the key concepts for effective programming. There was an overwhelming response from participants regarding the classroom environment and the impact that instructors had on student engagement.

Student-instructor Contact. The students that participated in this study had a broad range of job titles and time worked in their current roles. The various job titles ranged from an entry level supervision position to director. The years of time worked, in the participants current positions, ranged from less than one to over thirty years. This information was significant for a couple of key reasons. The first key finding indicated the instructor has a pivotal role to satisfy in the classroom. The class curriculum had to be able to resonate with an entry level supervisor, as well as a veteran employee. Several of the participants indicated they were intimidated to enter the classroom setting due to lack of experience and knowledge regarding supervision initiatives. Veteran employees shared that they were not sure what to expect from the instructors or classroom experience. They expressed concern that the curriculum would not be challenging given their time and experience with supervision issues. However, all participants indicated

that instructors exceeded expectations and course content was challenging, relevant, and engaging.

Engaging students in learning is principally the responsibility of the instructor, who becomes less an imparter of knowledge and more a designer and facilitator of learning experiences and opportunities (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). The second significant finding regarding student-instructor contact encompasses class dynamics. The First Line Supervision classes entail a variety of participants at various learning levels with a range of learning experiences. The participants indicated the instructors were instrumental in providing a nurturing a supportive learning environment. Many of the students shared they had not been in a classroom setting in a number of years. In addition, their days were not spent sitting but rather in continuous motion. A number of participants indicated it was the nurturing environment created by the instructors that enabled a sense of security and freedom to learn. Emily shared,

> All classes were welcoming and very friendly. I had no bad experiences, honestly I found the classes to be empowering and overall a great environment. The instructors and the environment reminded me of the importance of educating myself. I have a renewed interest in developing myself and continuing to be a life-long learner.

Like Emily, many other participants shared positive responses due to the learning environment. Another commonality shared by participants was the encouragement received in the learning environment through cooperation among the students.

Cooperation among Students. Cooperation among students is necessary in the classroom environment. Students who participate in class discussions develop higher

level cognitive skills (Wade, 1994). Students who are willing to talk in class and engage in class discussions contribute to their own learning, and to the learning of their peers (Frymier & Houser, 1997; Webb, 2009). Through this dissertation research study several key factors emerged regarding student relationships. In the first key finding, the majority of participant indicated they valued the information their class peers had to offer. When dealing with supervision issues it was referenced numerous times that new insights were gained from the ideas of others. Participants shared that group interactions helped to reinforce the material being presented and in some situations fostered new ways of thinking. Participants expressed the willingness to share thoughts and opinions because positive interactions among the students created a sense of encouragement.

The encouragement felt by the students was recognized in the second key finding when participants expressed that their thoughts and ideas were validated through peer acceptance. A number of participants shared that they felt empowered by peer recognition. Several participants in the group setting shared ideas they each had been considering, but had not proposed to upper management. In each instance these participants believed their ideas would enhance production but did not have the confidence to submit them for consideration. These participants realized that their ideas had value and because of peer support those ideas could become a reality in the various workplaces to enhance productivity. The majority of students in this study referenced peer interactions and an active learning environment as highly important in achieving success in the classroom.

Active Learning. A key component of classroom engagement is active learning and the ability to provide students with the courses needed to meet their desired learning

outcomes to achieve success. In conducting this study, it was important to capture the various types of programming the participants reported taking part in and the locations of the trainings. This information allowed this researcher to first, find out what types of information the participants have in their knowledge base and second, if the training occurred at the university, or off site at another location. This insight provided by the participants regarding training attendance and location are key for several reasons. The first key finding indicates the instructor needs to know what base line of knowledge participants bring to the classroom. In this study, some participants reported taking instructor led classes such as: leadership; Socratic; quality control; manufacturing; and Microsoft training. However, half of the participants indicated they had not previously attend any type of professional development training. The majority of participants who identified having previous professional development session indicated those were taken at the university. However, a few participants did indicate attending sessions at other locations. This information provides a starting point as to how the curriculum needs to be adjusted to meet the current needs of the students.

In focusing on meeting the needs of the students, the second key factor addresses a standard of incorporating active learning in all current workforce development sessions. The students who reported taking classes in this program provided vital information regarding the professional development classes. The information provided allowed this researcher to draw conclusions based on participant responses. Participants indicated the most effective components utilized during the training sessions were: small class sessions; quality materials taught; an open learning environment; the exchange of group information; real world examples; and student diversity. The participants also indicated,

with overwhelming responses, a desire for a hands-on approach with all materials being presented. In addition, participants indicated a gap in course offerings.

The gap in course offerings emerged because some participants sought training opportunities with other workforce education providers. A few participants specified that they utilized other providers due to the lack of course offerings in several content areas not currently available at the university. This concludes that additional offerings need to be added to meet the training needs of students in the service region. In workforce development programming, the goal of student is to learn new skills to enhance their current work duties and responsibilities. The goal of the university is to provide those students with the content areas needed to enhance workforce development skills. Workforce development students want to be engaged in the classroom and know that they are grasping the core concepts needed to enhance their work duties and responsibilities.

Prompt Feedback. Students in this dissertation study repeatedly indicated a need for prompt feedback, understanding is necessary for success in the learning process. An overall consensus that emerged from participants in this research study was summed up in this statement,

> Professional development classes are important and especially helpful if feedback is given to [his] employees taking the classes. It is important to gain knowledge, but also to get confirmation that the knowledge is understood and can be applied in the correct manner in the workplace.

This statement provides valuable information for program development and delivery of training sessions. This key element indicates that professional development is important to participants. Anthony, a participant in the program, shared these thoughts,

> The most important part of the sessions for me, was to learn new skills and be presented with new ideas. It was very rewarding to share with others and feel like my ideas could create change. The feedback I received from my instructors and classmates was extremely important in my learning experience. I think it is critical to allow enough time during the class sessions so that everyone feels their ideas have been heard and considered gaining insight from instructor and class feedback.

Again, participants acknowledged prompt feedback as necessary to the learner and learning process. The participants in this study are being trained for supervisory positions. These same participants, filling their supervisory roles, will be responsible for overseeing other employees and their professional development plans. Based on the positive comments for professional development training from participants, this research concludes that supervisors will recommend professional development training for the staff they oversee. The emphasis on feedback and positive group interactions in the classroom, the participants themselves have experienced, ensures time well spent when sending employees to the training sessions.

Emphasizing Time on Task. Emphasizing time on task is a key concept of classroom engagement and a suggested solution by participants when engaging in group activities.

The participants in this study, indicated that barriers exist in professional development training, for the following reasons:

- Lack of individual attention
- Loss of attention among group

- Non-participants
- Conforming to group expectations
- Some voices not heard

Participants specified group activities become an obstacle when some members of the group are dominating the outcomes. Based on responses in this study, it was indicated not all participants have the same level of comfort in group activity settings. Some have a fear of embarrassment, some do not want to stand out, and others participants shared a need to fit in regardless of sharing the opinion of the group. In addition, most participants agreed that groups can have a loss of focus, especially if all members of the group are not active participants.

Emphasizing time on task enables the instructor to maintain a connection with students as they participate in various group activities. The responses provided by the participants indicated that there is a need for group activities to be effectively facilitated by placing emphasis on what outcomes need to occur, in what order, and in what timeframe. Overall, participants believed clear expectations enable each group to function at the highest capacity to achieve the desired learning objectives.

Communicating High Expectations. It is the responsibility of both the instructor and student to communicate high expectations and hold each other, as well as the learning environment, accountable. Participants were asked to list the top five factors they believe contributed to an excellent professional development session. The majority of the participants indicated: participation; honesty; excellent content; diversity; group activities; real life scenarios; comfortable communication; and prompt feedback form the

instructor. Therefore, these factors must be considered key when maintaining, revising, or creating course content.

In addition participants were asked to list the factors they believe contributed to a poor professional development session. It was indicated that: non-communication between instructor and students; lack of student involvement/accountability; unapproachable instructor; formal atmosphere; lack of class control; lack of engagement; poorly managed schedules; and lack of diversity all contribute to a poor class environment. Conversely, Stacy a very reserved student indicated a different but helpful perspective of her experience in the classroom.

> My hope in taking the supervision classes was to learn to improve my work skills and be more productive as a supervisor. I know this is something I will have to continuously work on, but I feel I was given a good start by just being a part of the classes. I realized I do need to set expectations for myself and my professional goals. These classes and diversity of the group, helped me to realize that I have to be willing to step outside my comfort zone in order to learn new ideas. You cannot continue to do the same things and produce different outcomes. If I want to improve my supervision skills, I need to learn new techniques. I feel like I was able to learn new things, but I plan to take more classes in the future.

However, if expectations are not met by students and if instructors lack the ability to communicate core standards, the professional development session will lack success in delivering desired outcomes. In addition, if the current instruction offered at the university does not meet participant expectations, this research concludes that

participants are less likely to return for other professional development opportunities. Therefore, a key concept in classroom engagement revolves around meeting and communicating high expectations in programming for each training course delivered while safeguarding diversity.

Respecting Diversity. A key concept for classroom engagement, as shared by the participants, revealed that students in this program value the interactions and opportunities to hear a variety of perspectives pertaining to supervision practices. Most participants voicing their perspectives referenced their appreciation and respect for the diversity of the students in the training sessions. This statement pertaining to class diversity best summarize the consensus shared by the majority of participant,

> I learned that these classes are not just relevant to my field, but that a diverse group can utilize the same trainings. Basically, all supervisors deal with very similar issues and have to address the same kinds of problems. At times, during the training sessions, it was hard to see things from different perspectives. I appreciated the diversity, but it was hard to change my mindset after doing things a certain way for a long time. I realized I like being asked to think about other's perspectives and having my views challenged as part of the classroom experience. I can get so focused on doing things a certain way that I miss available opportunities and/or solutions by not incorporating the ideas of others.

Experiences in the Classroom

Workforce development students described their experiences in the classroom through: one-on-one conversations; feedback provided on a class questionnaire; and end of the class evaluations. It was communicated by participants that instructors were pivotal to the learning experience. The majority of the participants stated that the instructors were not only knowledgeable, but passionate about the sessions they taught. It was established through a number of responses that participants appreciated the opportunities facilitated by the instructors to promote cooperation among students. Group discussions and activities were referenced by the majority of participants and observed many times in this dissertation research. Numerous participants acknowledged the discussions as meaningful and necessary to promote an active learning environment. Participants indicated the feedback given by the instructors, as well as peers, provided confidence and reassurance to fully grasp new concepts and ideas. All participants agreed the class management, demonstrated by the instructors, kept the sessions on task so that new concepts could be introduced and mastered through various learning activities. High expectations were addressed by instructors and students to promote and maintain an accountability that participants indicated fostered a diverse learning group. The diversity of the students in the classes were referenced continually by participants. As shared before, but relevant to this discussion, Stacy provided her thoughts on the classroom experience,

> Each instructor I had gave to me a piece of knowledge that I could take from each class and apply to real situations I deal with every day at work. The program was

very valuable to me and I appreciated the fact that the instructors were not just telling us how to do something. They were telling us how they did it when they were supervisors. Also, the group interactions led by the instructors enabled the class to share as a group and learn from the experiences of others.

Types of Engagement

In this study participants shared many different examples of classroom engagement that currently take place in workforce development classes. Participants indicated the information that was easiest to retain was presented in a manner that involved the entire class in some type of action or process that allowed for group interactions. This study revealed the best received course formats includes: the information being introduced; the students processed the information as a group; the information was demonstrated when possible; the group could practice; and subsequently receive feedback on the information presented.

There are advantages and disadvantages to working in a group (Beebe & Masterson, 2003). By understanding the benefits and potential pitfalls, a group can capitalize on the virtues of group work and minimize the obstacles that hinder success. Participants agreed that the following are advantages to working in a group:

- Groups have more information than a single individual. Groups have a greater well of resources to tap and more information available because of the variety of backgrounds and experiences.

- Decisions that students help make yield greater satisfaction. Students who are engaged in group problem solving are more committed to the solution and are better satisfied with their participation in the group than those who were not involved.
- Students gain a better understanding of themselves. Group work allows people to gain a more accurate picture of how others see them. The feedback that they receive may help them better evaluate their interpersonal behavior.

Although working in groups has its advantages, there are times when problems arise. Beebe and Masterson list these disadvantages:

- There may be pressure from the group to conform to the majority opinion. Most people do not like conflict and attempt to avoid it when possible. By readily acquiescing to the majority opinion, the individual may agree to a bad solution just to avoid conflict.
- An individual may dominate the discussion. This leads to members not gaining satisfaction from the group because they feel too alienated in the decision making process.
- Some members may rely too heavily on others to do the work. This is one of the most salient problems that face groups. One solution to this problem is to make every group member aware of the goals and objectives of the group and assign specific tasks or responsibilities to each member.
- It takes more time to work in a group than to work alone. It takes longer to accomplish tasks when working with others. However, the time spent taking and analyzing problems usually results in better solutions. (p. 12)

Participant responses were in accordance with the finding of Beebe and Masterson when addressing disadvantages of working in a group. The majority of participants indicated, overall, effective student participation in group work is a key component of classroom engagement and important in mastering learning outcomes in workforce development courses.

Barriers

There were barriers that emerged from this research study and currently exist with classroom engagement in workforce development programming. The barriers noted in this study by the participants are: control of inner emotions; sensitivity and understanding of others perspectives; flow of course material; additional time needed to fully develop concepts; using the information immediately so it would not be forgotten; work scheduling to make time for classes; and the ability to be open to new ideas and see things from different perspectives. The barriers presented by the participants are important factors to consider in workforce development programming. For example, the insight provided by participant Joel is of importance for future consideration in regards to overall programming. The barrier Joel experienced was having a difficult time staying awake in class, because he worked the night before and came straight to the training session.

As the administrator of this program, I was unaware that a number of students attend our classes after working third shift. These participants, as well as other, come straight from work to attend our six hour training sessions. To best serve business and

industry needs, additional research should be conducted to identify if alternative programming is required to meet the training needs of the third shift working population. Another modification in programming that should be explored, identified by this research study, was the comments from many participants addressing the need for additional time in the training sessions. This is an important finding for the First Line Supervision Program.

Conclusion

Learning is not a spectator sport—students must: talk about what they are learning; write about what they are learning; relate it to past experiences; and apply it to their daily lives (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Students must make what they learn part of themselves. For example first, the student instructor relationship is the core of the class. This was validated multiple times when addressed by perceptions of participants. Students value meaningful instructor interactions and appreciate when instructors are passionate about the material being taught. Second, the participants see cooperation among students as one of the most effective components of active learning. This information was noted when participants discussed the diversity among the group and the importance of feedback. Third, participants continually shared their emphasis regarding time on task and the ability of the instructor to manage the group. Finally, through the information gathered by the evaluations it was clear that instructors and students must communicate high expectations. Each must hold the classroom environment accountable so that the ability to work together creates effective classroom engagement.

The insight gained from this study is significant because it adds to the existing body of knowledge, since the literature is scarce, as it pertains to what students in workforce development programming have to say regarding instructional needs. This information provided by the interviews, questionnaires, observations, and evaluations validate programming needs. Based on this dissertation research study, current programming initiatives will be structured to meet student needs and in turn the needs of business and industry as they strive to hire and maintain quality employees in the workforce.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Correspondence

Invitation Correspondence

Hello,

The "Basic Core Concepts I" training will be held on February 2, 9, & 16 at the Perkins Conference Center, Quads C & D. In conjunction with this training I will be conducting research for my doctoral dissertation. The title of the research project is Investigating Key Components of Classroom Engagement in Workforce Development Programming. You are invited to participate in this study. Please see the information listed below:

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to understand the key components of classroom engagement in workforce development programming.

Why are you asking me?

I am inviting you to participate because you are currently enrolled in workforce development class at Eastern Kentucky University.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

You will answer a 10 question questionnaire, and be asked to be interviewed by the researcher. You will also complete an evaluation of the class. The questionnaire should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. The duration of the interview will be no more than 60 minutes. The evaluation should take about 10 minutes to complete.

You do not have to participate in the study in order to take the class. Participation will be voluntary and will consist of answering a 10 question questionnaire, asked to be interviewed, and complete a class evaluation. Additional information will be available during the Basic Core Concepts I session. Your participation would be greatly

appreciated. If you have additional questions please let me know. I wanted to make you aware of this additional educational opportunity and I look forward to seeing you in class!

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
Investigating Key Components of Classroom Engagement in Workforce Development Programming

Principal investigator
Susan Cornelius
202 Perkins / 521 Lancaster Ave.
Richmond, KY 40475
(8594) 622-6216

Site Information
Eastern Kentucky University
Center for Career & Workforce Development
202 Perkins / 521 Lancaster Ave.
Richmond, KY 40475

What is the study about?
You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to understand the key components of classroom engagement in workforce development programming.

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Initials: _____ Date: _____

Is there any audio or video recording?
This research project will include an audio recording of the interviews conducted. The recording will be transcribed only by this researcher. Any names or identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms. The recording will be kept securely in the office of Susan Cornelius in a locked cabinet. The recording and all study documents will be kept for 36 months after the completion of the study. The recording will be destroyed at that time.

What are the dangers to me?
None, unless the interview makes the participant uncomfortable, however, the participant can stop their participation in this study at any time without penalty.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?
There are no benefits to you for participating, however, the information you provide will improve programming for students.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?
The questionnaire and evaluation will not ask you for any identifier information that could be linked to you. The transcripts of the tapes will replace any names other participant identifiers with pseudonyms. As mentioned, the tapes will be destroyed 36 months after the end of study. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?
You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or not participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of student services you have a right to receive.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By signing below, you are indicating: that this study has been explained to you;
you have read this document or it has been read to you; your questions about this research study have been answered; you have been told that you may ask the researcher any study related questions in the future; you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it; and you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Investigating Key Components of Classroom Engagement in Workforce Development Programming*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____
Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____
Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

Questionnaire

1. What is your current job title?
2. How many years have you worked in this role?
3. What types of professional development training (s) have you participated in?
4. Where did you participate in the training (s)?
5. What are your thoughts regarding professional development opportunities?
6. What type (s) of classroom activities best helps you retain information?
7. What barriers do you believe exist with classroom engagement in professional development trainings?
8. What top five factors do you feel contribute to an excellent professional development session?
9. What factors do you feel contribute to a poor professional development session?
10. Is there anything else you can share that would help me to understand your experiences as a student in this First Line Supervision program?

APPENDIX D

Evaluation

Evaluation

WORKFORCE EDUCATION EVALUATION

| 1| 2 | 3| 4 | 5|

not at all somewhat very

HOW USEFUL WAS THE INFORMATION?

| 1| 2 | 3| 4 | 5|

none some much

KNOWLEDGE GAINED?

| 1| 2 | 3| 4 | 5|

poor good excellent

QUALITY OF PRESENTATION?

First Line Supervision Certificate Program
Semester/Year:
Class – Location:
(Date)
Instructor Name:
Lead Trainer:

Please Provide Comments:

1. What were your initial perceptions and thoughts about this workforce development training?

2. What were some of the most effective components utilized during this training session?

3. What were the least effective components utilized during this training session?

4. What did you learn as a result of the training session?

5. What barriers did you experience during this training session?