Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversations:

A Model for Increasing Teaching Efficacy

by

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Abstract

A shift in higher education towards increasing accountability for teaching effectiveness has institutions reevaluating how they utilize faculty evaluation tools. The purpose of this case study was to probe perceptions on the value of using teaching portfolios, supported by PLC conversations between faculty and deans, as an evaluation strategy that improves teaching effectiveness and promotes pedagogical changes that champion student learning. Because no current terminology exists to define or describe this combined strategy, for the purposes of this study, it is referred to as a Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation (PBFDC).

Findings included that the PLC conversation was key to deep reflection, though inclusion of peer interaction was desired; faculty remained wary on the intended use of the portfolio yet held high hopes for institutional use to drive change; training is necessary to ensure professional development goals are set collaboratively; and faculty commitment to their pedagogical practice and student success was evident, despite the lack of corroborating evidence.

Keywords: teaching ePortfolios, professional learning communities, faculty evaluation
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Faculty evaluation in higher education is facing a paradigm shift towards increased accountability for teaching effectiveness (De Rijdt, Tiquet, Dochy, & Devolder, 2006; Huber & Cox, 2004; Seldin, 1982, 2000). National pressure to improve completion rates, compounded by shrinking budgets and student enrollment, is driving institutions of higher education to critically examine faculty roles and responsibilities (Meiland & Volden, 1996; Nunley, Bers, & Manning, 2011; Seldin, Miller, & Seldin, 2010). Historically, teaching efficacy has been assessed through annual evaluations. If the faculty evaluation process is the primary mechanism used to account for teaching efficacy, then it is important to look at the extent to which the evaluation methodology is suitable for completing the task.

Statement of the Problem

The past forty years have seen significant changes to the purposes of and models used for faculty evaluation in higher education (Ory, 2000). Historically, attaining an advanced degree, an indicator of disciplinary expertise, was the only preparation new faculty received before entering the classroom (Smith, 1995). Even though they were hired to teach, faculty were primarily rewarded for their publishing records (Seldin et al., 2010). This led to evaluative methods that focused on peer or chair reviews, student ratings, self-evaluations, and publication counts (Ory, 2000). Though student evaluations can provide valuable insight if the questions are crafted to focus upon teaching efficacy, single metrics need to be combined with other sources in order to understand the full picture of where improvement needs to take place (Flaherty, 2015). McNelly (2002) and others (Addis et al., 2013; Gearhart & Osmundson, 2009; Reece, Pearce, Melillo, & Beaudry, 2001; Sain & Williams, 2009) have criticized reliance on the traditional, discrete indicators because they decontextualize faculty contributions and do not take student
achievement into consideration. Institutions of higher education, therefore, need to develop new evaluation methods that support the improvement of faculty teaching efficacy (Huber & Cox, 2004; Ory, 2000).

One strategy that has potential to fulfill this need and that has become popular with many institutions is the teaching portfolio (Seldin et al., 2010). Teaching portfolios are a compilation of artifacts that document a faculty member’s most significant teaching achievements and accomplishments and that provide evidence of faculty effectiveness (Knapper, 1995; Seldin, Annis, & Zubizarreta, 1995). Portfolios promote teaching excellence by engaging faculty in active learning; they include reflection on strengths and opportunities for growth in relation to practice within an action plan for improvement (Reece et al., 2001).

There are three main types of teaching portfolios: the learning portfolio, the assessment portfolio, and the showcase portfolio (McNelly, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998). This study focused primarily on the learning portfolio, which was formatively designed to promote reflection and ownership of the learning process and to provide constructive feedback; secondarily, this study examined the assessment portfolio, which was created through a summative design to present evidence of teaching effectiveness to an organization (Babin, Root Shaffer, & Mortan Thoas, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998). These two forms of portfolios not only provide evaluators with concrete evidence of what faculty do as teachers, meeting compliance requirements, but they also document and examine the effects of teaching on student learning (Wolf & Dietz, 1998).

Researchers note, however, that it is not the final product of the teaching portfolio that holds the potential to improve teaching efficacy -- but rather the process that faculty members use to create the portfolio -- that is most essential to this approach (Buckridge, 2008; Knapper, 1995; Leggett & Bunker, 2006; Lim & Lee, 2014; McNelly, 2002; Murray, 1994; Ory, 2000;
Seldin, 2000; Seldin et al., 1995; Tigelaar, Dolmans, de Grave, Wolfhagen, & van der Vleuten, 2006; Way, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998). The process allows faculty to take control of their teaching and improvement, as they choose what evidence to focus upon (Buckridge, 2008; McNelly, 2002; Murray, 1994); however, its real value lies within the discussions that faculty have with others as they process what they discover (Ory, 2000; Seldin, 2000; Tigelaar et al., 2006). It is the reflection and subsequent discussions that transform the teaching portfolio from a static process to a learning episode (Wolf, 1992), making it a professional development tool focused on improving teaching efficacy (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012).

By definition, learning episodes encompass all of the activities employed, including the formative feedback used to modify the teaching and learning activities, to help the learner to gain specific desired skills or knowledge (Gagnon Jr. & Collay, 2001; Jarvis, 2003; Marzano, 2006). Based on constructivist learning theory, learning episodes focus on the learning taking place; the expectation is that learners will connect what they are learning to their own prior experiences to foster shared meaning with others and to reflect on what they have learned (Gagnon Jr. & Collay, 2001). For the teaching portfolio evaluation process to be experienced as a learning episode, it needs to take place within the context of a professional development dialogue that requires faculty to translate learned skills in a way that changes their way of thinking and their pedagogy (De Rijdt, Stes, van der Vleuten, & Dochy, 2013). In order to achieve this type of change, Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry, and Hewson (2003) determined that effective professional development must:

(a) provide opportunities for teachers to build their content and pedagogical content knowledge and examine practice, (b) be research based and engage teachers as adult learners in the learning approaches they will use with their students, (c) provide
opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues and other experts to improve their practice, and (d) have a design based on student learning data that is continuously evaluated and improved. (p. 2)

The methodology that best exemplifies these criteria for excellence is the professional learning community (PLC). PLCs are often initiated as a form of faculty development focused on building a community, based on a shared vision, that will help faculty collaboratively learn to use strategies and data to improve their teaching and thus the learning experiences of their students (Hilliard, 2012; Melville, Jones, & Campbell, 2014). Built upon a foundation of trust and respect between faculty and evaluator, PLCs provide a model that can be used to develop the type of environment that supports the professional development of faculty members through evidence-based conversations (Goe et al., 2012; Melville et al., 2014; Stoll, McMahon, & Thomas, 2006). This form of dialogue, grounded in the shared experience of classroom practices, allows participants to:

• question ideas, actions, and evidence (artifacts of work);
• examine varying perspectives and beliefs; and
• work toward identifying gaps between their vision of high-quality learning and data about students’ accomplishments and understandings (Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008).

PLC feedback and modeling techniques increase the ability of faculty to transfer new insights into their teaching practices (De Rijdt et al., 2013).

Current research abounds on the positive effects of using PLCs as a form of professional development for teaching efficacy (Cox, 2013; Harris, 2003; Lare & Brazer, 2013; Liebermann & Mace, 2009; Margolis, 2012; Mitchell, 2013; Nehring & Fitszimons, 2011; Stoll et al., 2006;
Current research simultaneously promotes using teaching portfolios to improve teaching efficacy (Painter, 2001; Paulsen & Feldman, 1995; Pesa & Syre, 2002; Reis & Villaume, 2002; Roth, 1998; Seldin et al., 2010; Smith, 1995; Way, 2002; Willis & Davies, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998; Xu, 2003). Limited research exists, however, that examines how to combine these two methodologies as a single learning episode that takes place within the context of the teacher evaluation process. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to probe perceptions on the value of using teaching portfolios, supported by PLC conversations between faculty and deans, as an evaluation strategy that improves teaching effectiveness and promotes pedagogical changes that champion student learning. Because no current terminology exists to define or describe this combined strategy, for the purposes of this study, it will be referred to as a Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation (PBFDC).

**Significance**

Given that institutions of higher education are required to evaluate teaching efficacy tied to student learning, this study could provide important information that could not only support the local institution where the study is taking place, but that could have significance for a much broader set of educational institutions. This study looked beyond the development aspect of teaching portfolios, which is the focus of most current research, and questioned whether the evaluation process is perceived as having an impact on improving teaching practice. It thus made an important contribution to scholarly research on this topic and could have significant implications for practice. Teaching portfolios and PLCs, though touted as being time and effort intensive, may be one vehicle through which significant institutional improvement might take place, because, combined, they have the potential to shift the focus away from traditional definitions of teaching effectiveness to a new definition of teaching focused on pedagogical
practices that improve student learning (Buckridge, 2008). If both faculty and deans at the institution that was the focus of this study perceived benefits to the process explored, then other institutions of higher education interested in a method focused upon improving teaching through this approach could easily replicate the model.

Furthermore, the teaching portfolio process, used in combination with a PLC, has the potential to change how faculty rewards are determined (Edgerton, Hutchings, & Quinlan, 1991). This is because the teaching portfolio is designed to serve as a platform for deep reflection on practice, self-assessment, and identification of areas for improvement through collaborative discussions with others (Lim & Lee, 2014). In addition, this engagement of faculty in deep reflection and assessment of the impact of their practice on student learning will meet compliance standards at local and national levels. Thus, institutions interested in adding student success metrics to their faculty evaluation model to meet new state, federal, or accreditation compliance expectations, or those who want a process that moves beyond the traditional tenure review (De Rijdt et al., 2006; Nunley et al., 2011; Seldin, 1997), may find the results of this study of interest.

**Positionality**

My own interest in using portfolios as an assessment tool began when, as a middle school language arts teacher, I had my students keep paper-based portfolios to track and reflect on their development as writers. After moving into higher education, I taught in a teacher certification program that used digital ePortfolios to house student artifacts and reflections for the purpose of state and programmatic accreditation. Though I was initially exposed to paper-based portfolios, the technology-based ePortfolios made the process exponentially easier for both the user and the evaluator. This marked a turning point in my understanding of the capabilities of portfolios
systems, and from this point forward, my focus has been upon ePortfolios, not paper-based portfolios. Therefore, when I transitioned into administration in charge of academic program assessment, I took advantage of my prior experiences and worked with faculty to create a basic Office ePortfolio system to track student mastery of academic program outcomes.

At my next institution, I was fortunate enough to join a culture that was already using rubrics to analyze student work and intended to transition to ePortfolios. After engaging in long brainstorming discussions with my academic program directors and conducting a great deal of research, we designed and implemented a formative/summative three-point-in-time ePortfolio system which enabled students to save program-identified work that corresponded with three levels of achievement: introductory, practice, and mastery. The first two levels were only assessed formatively through student and faculty reflection. External reviewers used program outcome rubrics to assess the mastery level work summatively. Unfortunately, I unexpectedly needed to leave the institution shortly after the implementation of the new system’s pilot, and it has not flourished, with the exception of the one department I had worked closely with to empower faculty and administrators to take responsibility and ownership of the development and maintenance of the system. This experience provided valuable insights regarding the importance of building ownership within the faculty and disciplinary areas, as opposed to driving implementation from a top-down administration perspective.

The feedback I received from program directors, faculty, and students during this pilot experience most powerfully influenced my current opinions, beliefs, and biases. Faculty and students both struggled with the technology. The learning curve was much steeper than I expected. Accreditors, both regional and program-specific, on the other hand, were extremely excited about the system and pleased with how well it met their requirements. The experience as
a whole, therefore, gave me the impression that ePortfolios have great potential, but their successful design and implementation require a driving influencer, whose main responsibility is to support the efforts at a more localized level. I also realized that integrating multiple forms of professional development and training for faculty, administrators, and students is essential to achieve this potential in a mutually gratifying, sustainable manner.

At my current institution, I took the opportunity to embed what I learned about the power of faculty ownership when I was invited to join the Collaborative Committee on Faculty Evaluation as an advisor. As faculty wrestled with identifying the standards to which they wanted to hold themselves accountable and the ways they wanted to show this accountability, their progression mimicked the discussions I had with past program directors when developing clear programmatic learning outcomes, their targets, and the methodologies to assess progress using rubrics. Thus, the idea for my dissertation was born. I became interested in learning whether or not the use of teaching ePortfolios would provide the interest and insight necessary to translate their usage into assessing student learning. Though I know my results are only preliminary, and further research is required to fully understand this process, I hope that this ePortfolio project will provide vital information that can be of interest to many and that may be built upon in the future.

My positive experiences with portfolio systems held the potential to introduce bias into my current research. Briscoe (2005) cautioned that researchers, when seeking understanding, should avoid misinterpretations that occur due to their penchant to view the world through their own experiences and histories. To further complicate matters, much of the research on teaching ePortfolios focuses on design and implementation processes, not on how it impacts pedagogical practice. Without research to counter my own predispositions, I was at risk of falling into what
Briscoe (2005) described as “othering” or backgrounding the faculty body or my institution (p. 30). In this sense, I had to be careful not to distance myself from the group that I studied, and I needed to take the time to consider their contextual influencers as I compiled my findings. Similarly, Fennell and Arnot (2008), though focused on gender studies, warned about hegemony and cautioned against creating a single story; they instead suggested that researchers must look closely at the relational world of those they study.

I wanted to make sure I did not try to unduly influence the direction of the interviews, but that I maintained my stance as a true supporter of faculty driven-initiatives and as a documenter of the perceptions shared. I have learned from my experiences the true value and importance of faculty self-efficacy and that lasting impact can only be attained when faculty have agency in their own development. Though I believed that the PBFDC held excellent potential, gaining an understanding of how the users perceived this initiative provided deeper insight into its true value. This focus kept me grounded and allowed me to listen with an open mind to what the faculty and deans had to say.

**Research Questions**

The PBFDC evaluation process was developed using a vision statement to guide the collaborative effort: “*The faculty evaluation process at the institution is a positive, holistic, collaborative experience that supports student success and the continued professional growth of all faculty members*” (Faculty, 2014). Because the PBFDC evaluation process was designed to support professional growth, this study focused on whether or not faculty reported changing anything in their courses or in their interactions with students in response to their involvement in the learning episode. Therefore, this qualitative case study sought to answer the following overarching question: How do the full-time faculty and deans at Coast College perceive the
impact of the new Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation evaluation process on pedagogical practice?

**Key Terms**

**Assessment.** There are two forms of assessment, formative and summative. Whereas formative assessment involves the documentation and reflection on work for the purposes of improvement, summative assessment involves the evaluation of work for the purposes of passing judgment on quality (Stiggins & DuFour, 2009). Although faculty evaluation processes have traditionally been focused on summative assessment, this study recasts the evaluation process as a formative learning episode.

**Learning episode.** A learning episode is a time-bound, intentionally designed sequence of events that supports learners’ process of reflection and construction of new knowledge. According to Gagnon Jr. and Collay (2001), the six design elements in a learning episode include: a purposeful situation, a group of people and necessary resources, a framework that helps participants connect prior experience with aspirational growth, a task that engages participants in sustained thinking, exhibition of the results, and reflection on the process. For the purpose of this study, the combination of the PLC conversation between faculty and the dean, and the teaching ePortfolio as a space for exhibition and reflection, constitute a “learning episode.”

**Professional learning communities (PLC).** Dufour and Eaker (1998) define PLCs as a group of individuals with current expertise in their field that work together to engage in ongoing study and constant practice to drive continuous improvement. For the purposes of this study, the faculty and dean evaluation conversation has been designated a PLC.
Reflective practice. Donald Schön’s (1983) theory of critical reflection identifies two types of reflection: reflection-on-action, which takes place after an event has occurred in order to create new solutions; and reflection-in-action, which occurs while a learning activity is taking place. Within this study, reflection-on-action takes place during the development of the teaching ePortfolio. Reflection-in-action takes place during the development of the annual professional development and improvement plan.

Teaching ePortfolio. A teaching ePortfolio is a faculty-developed, digital site, organized around key competencies, in which faculty document and reflect on the scope and quality of their teaching (Seldin et al., 2010). The documentation includes supporting artifacts, samples of work, key achievements, and awards, all which provide evidence of the faculty member’s effectiveness in the classroom and at the institution (Seldin et al., 2010). There are three main types of teaching ePortfolios: the learning portfolio, formatively designed to promote reflection and ownership of the process and provide constructive feedback; the assessment portfolio, designed to present evidence of teaching effectiveness to an organization and used for summative evaluation of performance; and the showcase portfolio, a tool used to collect an array of artifacts portraying elements of practice to show a full spectrum of one’s abilities (Wolf & Dietz, 1998). For the purposes of this study, the teaching ePortfolio includes the attributes of both a learning portfolio and an assessment portfolio, going beyond a simplistic showcase of accomplishments.

Transfer of learning. Transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context can be applied to a different context (Larsen-Freeman, 2013; Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Perkins and Salomon (1992) define two types: near transfer, which occurs in similar contexts, and far transfer, which occurs across different contexts. Within this study, near transfer takes place as
faculty reflect-on-action while developing their teaching ePortfolios and reflect-in-action during the PLC conversation with their dean. Far transfer takes place when faculty learning is translated into new or improved pedagogical practices described within their professional development and improvement plan.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The faculty evaluation process in this study involves two key activities: evidence-based reflection that, in turn, drives changes in pedagogical practice. The integration of ePortfolios and PLC discussions in the form of the PBFDC was the strategy employed for attaining that goal, also referred to as the learning episode. Capturing the perceived benefits of the reflective process has been well documented within the literature (Adler, 1990; Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2012; Fook, 2006; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Forlenza-Bailey, Sentner, & Yost, 2000; Kitchenham & Casteauneuf, 2009; Liu, 2013; Lucas, 2012; Mezirow, 1990; Rayford, 2010; Scales, 2008; Schon, 1987; Stronge, 2006; Thompson & Pascal, 2012; White, Fook, & Gardner, 2006). Tying what is learned through the reflective process to evidence of change is a much newer concept. As such, two frameworks were identified to serve as lenses for this study: Schön’s concept of reflection-on/in-action and Perkins and Salmon’s transfer of learning theory.

**Donald Schön’s forms of critical reflection.** Donald Schön’s (1983) *Reflective Practitioner* posed two forms of critical reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, which align with the two methodologies of this study’s learning episode. Reflection-on-action focuses on how one uses evidence to define a particular situation and then reflects on the action that has taken place to create new solutions (Farrell, 2012; Liu, 2013). Within this study, reflection-on-action takes place during the selection of and reflection on artifacts for the teaching ePortfolio, during the portrayal of the artifacts to the evaluator during the assessment conference,
and during the initial faculty suggestions for professional development.

Reflection-in-action, on the other hand, represents for Schön the more valuable contributor to professional growth, because it focuses on reactions that occur in the middle of an action (Schon, 1983). His case studies described situations in which evaluators helped practitioners reframe concepts as the practitioners shared the development and processing of their ideas. For example, architectural students described their designs and received immediate critiques and questions that led the students to change direction mid-design, forcing them to rethink their ideas to address feedback on the spot (Schon, 1987). To correlate this theory within an educational frame, this form of formative feedback would ideally take place within a teaching scenario. Though this would be beneficial to the teacher, it would be disruptive to the students in the class. However, this study found that, when positioned within the PLC conversation between faculty and dean, it held the potential to bring new insights and direction to the design of professional development plans aligned with improved practice.

Critiques to the theory and to Schön’s interpretation. The most significant critique to Schön’s theory in general is the breadth of variety that exists in its definitions and descriptors (Liu, 2013). It is not surprising, then, that a lack of empirical evidence as to the value of reflective practice exists (Lucas, 2012; White et al., 2006). Other critiques have focused on the “dark side” of critical reflection, where participants do not feel empowered to reflect due to the social or political constraints of their contexts, making them reiterate the norms of the institution instead, as a safe reaction (Fook & Gardner, 2007; White et al., 2006). Finally, as many definitions of critical reflection draw upon the usage of assumptions, and there are a wide variety of assumptions that are defined; it begs the question of who decides which assumptions are the most significant when studying this practice (Fook & Gardner, 2007).
Although Schön’s (1983) interpretation is highly cited throughout the literature, and he is considered one of the vanguards of the theory, his vagary has been criticized, and many scholars have questioned whether or not the theory should even be considered usable in regards to healthcare, social work, and education (Ixer, 1999). According to Fook and Gardner (2007), none of his proclaimed assumptions have any practical use, and his ideas are so simplistic that they neglect the reality of power structures that come into play during collaborative reflection (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Scholars have also asserted that the element of forethought, used by practitioners to draw upon their knowledge base and experiences in order to plan future activities, is completely missing (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

**Implications of Schön’s theory for the study.** In its essence, critical reflection refers to how one makes meaning from experience to guide action. Schön’s (1983) theory was chosen for this study because it held the potential to provide insight into aspects of both strategies used during the PBFDC learning episode: the teaching ePortfolio and the faculty/dean PLC conversation. Buckridge’s (2008) work provided support for this choice because he noted that teaching ePortfolios provide textual form for Schön’s reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action; both forms of reflection require a teacher to identify their ideal teaching behavior and then to show how they demonstrate it. They also provide the teacher with the means to evaluate their actions and re-envision new actions. In addition, Nolan (1989) promoted Schön’s idea of the coaching behind reflective thinking as requiring collaboration between coach and practitioner. Nolan (1989) viewed the coach as encouraging reflection on practice and then sharing in the conversation on how to act on interpretations, a process which describes the intent of the PLC conversation between faculty and dean.

**Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory.** Despite the intent of the
design of the PBFDC learning episode, it would have been remiss for this researcher to assume that as faculty begin to use critical reflection skills as part of their evaluation process, they will readily apply what they discover and learn to improve pedagogical practices that support student success. Research on the ineffectiveness of one-time professional development activities has largely proven this assumption erroneous (Henderson, Beach, & Famiano, 2009). Therefore, it was important to view the findings through a second lens that would help to clarify whether the change in pedagogical practice was taking place (i.e., transfer of reflective insight into practice).

Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory refers to when learning in one context can be applied to a different context. According to the theory, there are two types of transfer: near transfer and far transfer. Within this study, near transfer, which occurs across similar contexts, took place as faculty reflected-on-action while developing their teaching ePortfolios and reflected-in-action during the PLC conversation with their deans. As faculty determined how to respond to meeting the faculty competencies outlined within the ePortfolio, they needed to identify practices within the classroom that supported those beliefs. Thus they were transferring their beliefs about how they interact with students to specific applications of practice. The case for using the near transfer is supported by research that notes that self-monitoring and self-reflection are key elements that facilitate learning transfer (Flavell, 1976; Perkins & Salomon, 1992).

Far transfer, on the other hand, occurs across new or different contexts (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Within this study, far transfer occurred when faculty took what they learned through their personal and collaborative reflective processes and translated them into new or improved pedagogical practices described within their professional development and improvement plan. It was possible for concepts that faculty learned during the self-reflection
phase to be further reinforced during the faculty/dean PLC conversation, helping them to understand the usefulness of their new ideas and their impact on others (De Rijdt et al., 2013; Larsen-Freeman, 2013).

**Implications of Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) theory to the study.** All instruction assumes some level of transfer of learning must take place or there would be no expectation that what is being learned could be used in a new setting. Without transfer, the idea of instruction becomes a worthless pursuit. Fink (2013) defined learning in terms of change: “For learning to occur, there has to be some kind of lasting change in the learner. No change, no learning” (p.34). Although Fink’s definition refers to the first step of the learning process, it hints at the idea of lasting change, which would imply that what has been learned will form a foundation from which future experiences can draw. Using Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) theory in this study as a secondary lens allowed the learning episode to be viewed from the perspective of whether or not change occurred, either through faculty members reflecting on their practice within the teaching ePortfolio or by indicating that they could transfer what they learned during their reflective activities to the development of their pedagogical practice.

**Two supporting constructivist taxonomies.** Because this study focused on identifying changes that occurred within the PBFDC, two additional lenses were used to help frame the potential findings. First, Gagnon and Collay’s (2001) constructivist learning design (CLD) was used to identify the aspects of the PBFDC learning episode that needed to be reviewed. There are six CLD elements that defined the PBFDC as a learning episode, and each provided insight into what could be revealed through the study. The first element, *situation*, identified that the ultimate goal was to seek improved teaching efficacy. The study then focused on looking at the *groupings*, the teaching ePortfolio and PLC conversation between faculty and deans.
on the questions that the faculty posed, the study probed the extent to which the faculty could bridge their prior experiences to new learning as they reflected within the teaching ePortfolio and with their dean. Finally, any transfer of learning was exhibited if the faculty members applied their learning to their professional development plan as changes to their pedagogical practices.

Second, to provide structure to the types of change that might occur in relation to the desired outcome of pedagogical improvements for this study, Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of six kinds of significant learning was used. Though designed for student learning, the taxonomy provided a framework to align the expectations of the evaluation process and to view the pedagogical improvements that were described within the study. Fink (2013) identified the following dimensions of learning that can be connected to researched practices: (a) foundational knowledge or content; (b) application, including problem solving, communication skills, and critical thinking; (c) integration or connecting to self, life, or alternative perspectives; (d) human dimension, including community building, helping others, and taking pride in one’s accomplishments; (e) caring or showing joy in the act of learning; and (f) learning how to learn or valuing continuous improvement as life-long learners. Using this as a foundation, the data from the archival documents, participant interviews, and faculty teaching ePortfolios and evaluations were analyzed and triangulated in order to allow themes to emerge.

**Framework summary.** This study examined a new model for faculty evaluation that required the assimilation of several theoretical frameworks in order to provide a wide enough lens. As such it was important that all lenses being used, the theoretical frameworks, Gagnon and Collay’s (2001) six defining elements of the PBFDC learning episode, and Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning, fell within the same constructivist paradigm; it was also essential that they all focused on meaning making through deep reflection (Merriam, 1991; Ponterotto, 2005).
They also needed to support and build on one another.

To begin with, Gagnon and Collay (2001) defined the new evaluation model as a learning episode by identifying the elements of the episode to be studied through their alignment to the six elements of constructivist learning design. Fink’s (2013) dimension of learning provided a framework to categorize the different types of learning or changes described during the data analysis. Then, Schön’s (1983) two forms of reflection within critical reflection theory provided insight into whether or not the faculty and deans perceived that deep thinking on practice connected to teaching efficacy in the classroom took place. Finally, Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) lens of near transfer indicated whether or not faculty were able to reflect-on-practice within their teaching ePortfolios, and their lens of far transfer indicated whether or not faculty and deans were able to reflect-in-practice during their collaborative conversation.

Conclusion

With heightened scrutiny on teacher effectiveness coming from many quarters, the need to reassess how faculty members are evaluated is paramount. No longer can institutions of higher education simply give lip service to the importance of teaching for student learning. Teaching ePortfolios, designed with comprehensive standards, hold the potential to provide a holistic view of faculty contributions to the institution, department, and student learning; they can also offer insights into opportunities for improvement.

This is not to say, however, that a simple collection of artifacts coinciding with journal entry descriptions will generate teaching efficacy. Instead, critical reflection is required to determine which pedagogical practices promote student success, and which do not. This form of reflection may begin as an individualistic activity during the development of a teaching ePortfolio, but it deepens when it involves multiple perspectives, such as those that emerge from
the faculty and dean evaluation conversations. Furthermore, the learning that takes place during these reflective activities needs to result in some form of change. In this study, the ideal change would be pedagogical improvements that support student success. This study, therefore, focused on probing the perceptions of the faculty and deans on the value of the PBFDC learning episode as a strategy that might lead to pedagogical changes that support student success.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

When The Spellings Commission, charged by the U.S. Secretary of Education to recommend a strategy to reform post-secondary education, released its report in 2006 noting that unacceptable numbers of students were graduating from college without the expected and necessary skills required to enter the workforce, it set the focus on accountability that has driven the past decade of reform efforts in higher education (Nunley et al., 2011). Essentially, the report prompted institutions of higher education to begin to critically examine how they look at student success (Nunley et al., 2011). Given that faculty are closest to students, have the most in-depth knowledge of their learning, and can change their teaching practices to meet the needs of their classroom, their involvement is considered essential to any reform initiative (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Research, however, has found that implementing a fundamental change to the assessment of the impact teaching on student learning is often thwarted by the reigning culture of the institution, especially if the evaluation approach bases its assessment solely on traditional measures of scholarship, service, and course evaluations (Henderson et al., 2009; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Reece et al., 2001). Therefore, developing a new approach to teaching evaluation that is job-embedded, structured, and focused on student learning is imperative if we are to help our faculty meet these new demands (Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

This literature review was designed to study how changing the use of faculty evaluation in higher education could respond to new accountability expectations on student achievement and could serve as a professional development model that impacts teaching efficacy. It specifically examines how combining the use of teaching ePortfolios with professional learning community (PLC) conversations between faculty members and their deans can work together as a method to improve pedagogical practices that support student success. In order to accomplish
this, institutions need to understand these processes, their benefits and challenges, and how they can be applied to a cohesive teaching evaluation process.

Therefore, this review begins by defining the reflective process teachers use to improve their practice as a form of scholarship that portrays a more holistic view of faculty contributions to student learning. This form of scholarship focuses on gathering evidence, reflecting on and reconciling the evidence with other information sources in order to make evidence-based decisions on goals for pedagogical change, and sets the stage for using a new form of faculty evaluation. The review then delves into how teaching ePortfolios can be used as a tool to document these contributions, as well as support faculty self-reflection on their practice and its impact on student achievement. Finally, the review explores the rationale behind using PLCs as an approach to support the professional development of faculty while using a teaching ePortfolio evaluation process.

**Teaching as a Component of Scholarship**

Traditional characteristics of teaching focused on content area experts imparting their knowledge to students; however, recent reform efforts have prioritized changing the faculty role to one of facilitator of learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Henderson et al., 2009). Faculty across the country are becoming involved in initiatives that foster innovative pedagogical practices that require deep knowledge of supporting literature to inform what students need to achieve success (Huber & Cox, 2004). Faculty and institutions are beginning to rethink what it means to be a faculty member in terms of providing evidence of teaching scholarship (Smith, 1995).

**Defining teaching scholarship.** Traditionally, the idea of scholarship has been synonymous with research and publication, but recent reforms have emphasized the need to include demonstrating contributions to students’ knowledge (Atkinson, 2001). This idea of
teaching as a form of scholarship has existed for over 25 years. In his book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer (1990) redefined scholarship to be inclusive of all aspects of faculty activity as vital parts of the professoriate. His definition included four domains: discovery, integration, application, and teaching (Boyer, 1990). Discovery focuses on the traditional concept of research but is expanded to include the joy of pure intellectual curiosity and discovery of new knowledge; integration interprets research to develop new insights; and application integrates theory with practice to see what works and what does not to develop an even larger knowledge base and to allow new ideas to be formed (Boyer, 1990). Whereas the first three domains focus directly on the faculty member and the development of knowledge, the final domain considers the practice of teaching and its effects on the students. Boyer (1990) described teaching as the act of a well informed and intellectually engaged faculty member transmitting knowledge and stimulating others to question that knowledge. This two-way dynamic between teacher and student inspires both to keep the continuous cycle of scholarship alive, as both become active learners through the teaching act (Boyer, 1990).

Though Boyer (1990) remains the seminal author for the new paradigm of teaching scholarship, few scholars have arrived at a consensus on what it means to operationalize this concept (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). In an attempt to do so, many researchers have tried to clarify what teaching scholarship might look like. Atkinson (2001) simplified the definition by looking at the teaching domain as practice that comes about once faculty have developed their knowledge base through Boyer’s other three domains. Kreber and Cranton (2000) further developed Boyer’s (1990) domains into three perspectives on teaching: (a) traditional, which includes conducting research and producing products that they note do not necessarily correspond to teaching effectiveness; (b) excellence, shown through receipt of awards; and (c)
scholarly, which is practice informed by research and theory. Like Atkinson (2001), they asserted that the first two explained how the third was possible. In other words, as faculty reflect on their experience and research-based knowledge, they develop their scholarship of teaching (Kreber & Cranton, 2000).

This combination of deep knowledge and applied practice is important to understanding what teaching scholarship means. Edgerton et al. (1991), in their role as founders of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, promoted this definition as meeting the expectations of scholarship because it relied on a strong knowledge base and expertise. Therefore, by comingling theory, research, and applied practice, many researchers have asserted that teaching scholarship should be considered as rigorous an activity as any other form of scholarship (Knapper, 1995; Kreber & Cranton, 2000).

**Implications for the faculty role.** Despite the growing interest in connecting teaching scholarship to student outcomes, a strong disconnect remains between how faculty are evaluated or assessed for tenure and promotion -- their teaching accomplishments continue to take the back seat to their accomplishments in research and publication (Knapper, 1995; Paulsen, 2002). Fostering the type of dispositions necessary to operationalize the scholarship of teaching requires a new vision of education and a willingness to do things differently (Trevitt, Macduff, & Steed, 2014). Institutions need to become transparently accountable for ensuring students are prepared for their future (Nunley et al., 2011). Much the way faculty used to learn and contribute to each other’s research, the scholarship of teaching requires that they would need to learn how to interact with others in order to learn how to teach more effectively (Smith, 1995). In short, institutions would need to create a new environment where they and their faculty work together to become responsible for the degree to which students learn (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Nunley et al.,
2011).

As Barr and Tagg (1995) asserted, accepting this responsibility, however, does not necessarily guarantee positive outcomes. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching suggested that excellence in teaching would require faculty to begin to raise questions about how students learn in order to improve their own practice (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). This would involve gaining an understanding of how students learn, identifying barriers to their learning, and developing pedagogical practices that promote learning within classroom contexts (Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998). Trevitt et al. (2014) claimed that these important factors represent a major component of academic practice and should be viewed as separate from other contributions made by faculty members. Therefore, the scholarship of teaching requires that faculty must continue to learn and enhance their ability to examine the effectiveness of their teaching on learning (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). By accepting the responsibility for student learning, scholars have asserted that faculty must then create environments grounded in the principles of effective pedagogy wherein students have every opportunity to learn (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999).

**Connection to faculty evaluation.** As far back as 1982, Seldin claimed that faculty evaluation systems were failing for two reasons: (a) they did not identify levels of teaching efficacy, and (b) they did not promote pedagogical improvement (Seldin, 1982). These traditional faculty evaluation practices focused on areas such as lecture organization, class preparedness, content coverage, content knowledge, and respect for student questions; however, they never raised the question of whether or not students were actually learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). These approaches had the capacity to allow a faculty member to be assessed on their instructional or curricular knowledge, but not their pedagogical knowledge (Kreber & Cranton,
Atkinson (2001) argued that changing this focus would allow teachers to focus on their craft and that it would bring deep job satisfaction because it represents a large part of what they do, even though they are not trained in this area. Atkinson (2001) and others claimed that this change would also help shift faculty priorities because, under the traditional system, spending time developing teaching practices meant less time spent on that which would promote faculty careers and their institution: research (Atkinson, 2001; Pescosolido & Aminzade, 1999). With critics claiming that higher education has lost its primary focus on educating, scholars have pointed out that this shift is warranted (Pescosolido & Aminzade, 1999). Furthermore, Kreber and Cranton (2000) stressed that, as long as faculty are reflecting on their practice through the lens of educational research to construct context-specific knowledge, critics should not have an issue with the level of rigor involved.

Studies have found that, institutions that support expanding the concept of scholarship to include the systematic study and improvement of teaching need to create evaluation systems that support ways for faculty to demonstrate their contributions. Indeed, Paulsen and Feldman (1995) identified that evaluations that look at the scholarship of teaching can be modeled after the more traditional evaluation systems that show expertise through high levels of discipline knowledge, innovation, peer-review, documentation, and the ability to be replicated. The process should include inquiry and investigation of questions concerning student learning, gathering evidence from the classroom, being informed by both current pedagogical practices and changes to the academic field, inviting peer collaboration and review, and being transparent to the public (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). Faculty members, Atkinson (2001) emphasized, could highlight their contributions to curriculum development, participation in grants received, development of
new programs, evaluations of teaching practices used or observed, creation of materials or instructional techniques, and use of innovative learning activities.

Furthermore, Kreber and Cranton (2000) asserted that since the scholarship of teaching is inclusive of both knowing and learning about teaching, then the evaluation system should be both formative and summative. The authors claimed that self-assessment and discussions with evaluators can formatively support the learning aspect, and then the overall evaluation can be summatively assessed to discern whether or not what was learned has indeed been acquired or is known (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). Some researchers, such as Trevitt et al. (2014), on the other hand, revealed a preference for an exclusive focus on formative learning, looking at building discipline-based skills and understanding, scaffolding learning, and developing feedback processes, rather than prioritizing summative results. Either way, scholars have asserted, institutions committed to this form of teaching scholarship need to use an evaluation system that creates a continuous cycle of learning that results in changes to teaching behaviors (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Buckridge, 2008).

**Use of Portfolios as an Evaluation Tool**

If the goal is to promote faculty accountability of student learning, research in the field has established that embedding the expectation of this skill within faculty evaluation processes emphasizes its role as a faculty responsibility. In fact, Cohen and Brawer (2008) advocated that the best faculty evaluation systems are those that focus on the improvement of teaching rather than on achieving tenure or salary increases. Teaching portfolios, which are designed to contain a body of evidence that provides a clearer measurement of teaching outcomes (Appling, Berk, & Naumann, 2001), have become the latest best practice to support effective teaching evaluation (Centra, 1994). To understand their appeal, the subsequent sections will explore the
characteristics of assessment portfolios, how ePortfolios add additional dimensions to their use, the benefits associated with using ePortfolios, challenges associated with their use, and the implications of using teaching ePortfolios in faculty evaluation and professional development.

**What are assessment portfolios?** Assessment portfolios capture a meaningful collection of work that demonstrates mastery of a set of competencies; they often include evidence of self-reflection and can be used for both formative and summative assessment (Gorlewski, 2010). Smith and Tilema (2003) defined four main types of assessment portfolios:

- The *dossier* portfolio – a mandated collection of artifacts used for promotional or entry purposes with specific levels of competence met.
- The *training* portfolio – a required or mandated collection of student work highlighting the skills or competencies a person has acquired during their learning.
- The *reflective* portfolio – a personal collection of evidence that shows growth and accomplishment and includes self-reflection.
- The *personal development* portfolio – a personal self-reflection depicting professional growth over a long period of time. (p.65)

Fitch, Reed, Peet, and Tolman (2008), meanwhile, outlined six categories of possible portfolios types: (a) assessment or evaluative; (b) reflective; (c) integrative (combining the first two types); (d) structured; (e) process or learning; and (f) showcase or professional. Still others have categorized portfolios into three main types: (a) the learning portfolio; (b) the assessment portfolio; and (c) the showcase portfolio (McNelly, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998). Overall, the simplicity of this latter categorization captures the intentions of the previous delineations.

For studies using integrative portfolios to meet both formative and summative assessment needs, it is necessary to understand the benefits of both types of portfolios, the learning and the
assessment portfolio, because each serves a different purpose within the institution. In this sense, as McNelly (2002) explained, the learning portfolio aspect is designed to capture elements of the reflective and personal development portfolio, because faculty choose artifacts and reflect on how their practice impacts student success; they then receive formative feedback during their collaborative discussions with their evaluator to inform their professional development and improvement plan. The assessment portfolio aspect is designed to capture elements of the dossier and training portfolio; the evaluator will assess the faculty member on each competency highlighted within the portfolio, but will also provide further insight into what should be included in the professional development and improvement plan (McNelly, 2002). The process using the learning portfolio aspect was formatively designed to promote reflection and ownership of the learning process by creating a tool through which constructive feedback can be provided; meanwhile, the process using the assessment portfolio aspect was summatively designed to present evidence of teaching effectiveness to an organization (Babin et al., 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998).

**Electronic portfolio enhancements.** Whereas portfolios were originally used in the fields of fine arts, music, education, and the humanities as paper-based collections of best work, today’s portfolios are more commonly housed digitally and are described as ePortfolios (Bryant & Chittum, 2013). An ePortfolio is a personalized, digital collection of evidence and artifacts stored on a website or other electronic media such as a CD-ROM (Lorenzo & Ittleson, 2005). By supplementing the text-based evidence collected by paper-based portfolios with audio, video, graphical material, and links to web-based content, the ePortfolio provides a deeper picture of the author’s learning (Kahn, 2004).

EPortfolios contain several embedded features that support the assessment process:
artifacts, assessment, communication and collaboration, learning outcomes, reflections, reporting, and rubrics (Sweat-Guy & Buzzetto-More, 2007). In a survey of 301 Norwegian institutions, Dysthe and Engelsen (2011) found that the most important features of ePortfolios were the collection of work (85%), provision of feedback (76%), summative evaluation (50%), selection of artifacts (37%), and pairing of artifacts with reflection (34%). Because collaboration and feedback on collected work rank so highly, an additional feature of the ePortfolio is its ability to support social media tools that take advantage of and integrate with the platforms that participants are already using to hone their learning, not as lone individuals, but rather as part of a learning community (Sonya Xuesong, Olfman, & Ractham, 2007). Aalst and Chan (2007) suggested using the digital nature of the ePortfolio to support real-world, collaborative learning, where individuals can contribute to the existing body of knowledge, reflect together, add new insights, and work together to determine next steps based on newly developed perspectives. Theses ePortfolio features of storage, tracking mechanisms, embedded reflective techniques, and reporting features has recently made this approach the tool of choice in higher education assessment (Lowenthal, White, & Cooley, 2011).

**Benefits.** The literature on ePortfolio use for evaluation purposes in higher education is divided between those used for formative student assessment practices and teaching ePortfolios used for summative faculty evaluation. However, as the ePortfolio tool used in conjunction with faculty evaluation in this study was applied both formatively and summatively, both bodies of research have been reviewed to understand the true nature of the benefits of the assessment/evaluation process. These two sets of literature combined reveal that ePortfolios provide the following high-level benefits: facilitating critical reflection, showcasing career skills, assisting in assessment, showcasing professional standards (Chatham-Carpenter, Seawel, & Raschig, 2010;
Jafari, 2004; Janosik & Frank, 2013; Sain & Williams, 2009), and collaboration (Aalst & Chan, 2007).

**Reflection.** The Chatham-Carpenter et al. (2010) survey of 43 institutions actively using ePortfolios, 31 from the United States, revealed growing interest in using student reflection as an important part of the process, increasing from 53.5% embedding this component when they first began to use ePortfolios to 74.7% embedding this feature at the time of the survey. It was, in fact, the most common benefit noted, and it helped connect student course and program learning to career and community settings and improved their critical thinking (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010). Graduate students in Janosik and Frank’s (2013) study acknowledged that when they reflected on how much they had accomplished in their program, they were able to gain a more holistic picture of their overall growth. The adult students in Stevens’ (2008) study found the process of selecting then reflecting on their personal competencies and professional attributes to be empowering; they said it improved their self-confidence in regards to what they thought they could offer future employers. The faculty in Ryan’s (2011) study reported that they felt they were able to use the information from the student reflections to implement meaningful curriculum changes. It is important to note, however, that the research repeatedly showed that the level of reflection necessary to achieve these types of transformative behaviors must be taught and feedback must be embedded into the process (Ring & Ramirez, 2012).

Although the use of student ePortfolios has a longer history of research, it is not surprising that the findings are comparable to those found in the research on teaching ePortfolios, where inclusion of faculty reflection is one of the primary benefits (Appling et al., 2001; Centra, 1994; Reece et al., 2001; Sain & Williams, 2009). Both Appling et al. (2001) and Centra (1994) emphasized that the formative nature of the ePortfolio enhances the use of self-reflection and
self-appraisal, capturing not only what faculty did but providing evidence of their actions and improvement strategies. Looking at tenured faculty, Reece et al. (2001) described how teaching ePortfolios allowed for in-depth course analyses that promoted further improvements in teaching methodology. In a study conducted by Sain and Williams (2009) with administrators and faculty, participants identified the value of the self-reflection embedded within the ePortfolio, claiming that it not only allowed them to consider their accomplishments, but it also prompted them to identify areas that needed improvement and to set goals for the following year. Finally, Reis and Villaume (2002) found that ePortfolio use based on reflection resulted in better time management, lesson preparation, and overall organization.

**Career advancement.** Another benefit of ePortfolios is showcasing career skills. At almost 70% of the 43 institutions surveyed by Chatham-Carpenter et al. (2010), those queried reported that ePortfolios gave students an advantage in their career search because they allowed them to see the value of their learning and how it connected to employment skills. With this outcome in mind, Stevens (2008) claimed that students can gain a better understanding of the competencies employers are seeking and can use their ePortfolios to speak confidently about their learning and abilities during interviews (Janosik & Frank, 2013).

Teaching ePortfolios provide a similar benefit, but advantages in this case are most commonly discussed in terms of employment of new faculty members, because the tool provides a venue for them to showcase their educational skills (De Rijdt et al., 2006). However, when teaching ePortfolios are tied to tenure or promotion evaluations, they can provide a longitudinal examination of a faculty member’s growth over time, of examples of their best work, and of contributions they have made to the college and community (Babin et al., 2002).

**Documentation of competencies.** Well over half of the institutions in Chatham-
Carpenter et al.’s (2010) survey used ePortfolios to document student growth over time. Shepard and Bolliger (2011) asserted that this process helped students to visualize their growth during the program and provided direction for future professional growth. This finding, however, represented the institutional perspective; students did not necessarily share this assessment. For example, in one study, when given choice on what to upload to demonstrate competency, some students found they had more content than they needed (Janosik & Frank, 2013). Others could not see the connection between course assignments and the competencies (Ring & Ramirez, 2012). The opposite disconnect occurred in Ryan’s (2011) study where faculty observed that students were more intent on just compiling artifacts to finish the assignment. The students did claim, however, that the process provided them with a sense of focus and professional benefits.

Faculty have expressed that they confront similar issues when determining what to include in their teaching ePortfolios, citing both the stifling nature of having to meet the expectations of the institution and being unsure how to best document the identified competencies (Buckridge, 2008). Willis and Davies (2002), however, revealed how teaching ePortfolios drove improvement within teacher education programs and how they served to document teacher competency for both state and national standards. Given that teacher preparation programs have been using paper-based or ePortfolios to assess learning for a much longer period of time, these could serve as models for faculty members attempting to meet institutional competencies through their teaching ePortfolios.

**Collaboration.** The dialogue of reflection and review within the ePortfolio builds the relationship between faculty and student (Ryan, 2011), contributing to shared learning, new ideas, and broader thinking (Ring & Ramirez, 2012). Peer-review helps students see what is and what is not working, provides exemplars of other student work to model, and leads to revisions of
work (Shepard & Bolliger, 2011). Using the platform to work together allows participants to see
different points of view and to build upon the knowledge of peers (Aalst & Chan, 2007).

Seldin (1997) asserted that teaching ePortfolios are a beneficial tool for mentoring
faculty. They are ideal for fostering reflective and focused discussions about teaching (Cerbin,
1994). In a study conducted by Sain and Williams (2009), when asked to describe the benefits,
administrators were appreciative of being able to use the body of evidence to hold
comprehensive conversations with faculty members, which allowed professional development to
be tied to goal setting; they also noted that the process permitted self-reflection rather than
administrator response to drive faculty improvement.

**Challenges.** Despite these significant benefits, no tool comes without its challenges.
Research has documented that the following challenges occurred across both bodies of literature.
To show correlation, all statements are expressed as between learner and evaluator, rather than
referencing students or faculty as the learners.

**Time.** In Chatham-Carpenter et al.’s (2010) study, participants cited the additional time
required to create a quality ePortfolio ranked as the number one challenge even when learners
dedicated considerable time to its creation (Janosik & Frank, 2013). The time requirement
frequently generated problems with commitment for the learner, who often postponed the task to
focus on other work, and for evaluators, whose willingness to provide support often waned
(Ryan, 2011).

**Buy-in/commitment.** Often viewed in conjunction with the impact of time, researchers
identified an initial response of resistance or a lack of learner and evaluator willingness to
engage with the process (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010; Sain & Williams, 2009; Trevitt et al.,
2014). Lack of clarity or understanding of the purpose of the process by learners (Janosik &
not only impeded buy-in, but also created a sense of distrust because learners worried that ePortfolios would be used in ways they did know or understand (Morris & Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008). Unless adequate time is spent informing both learners and evaluators on the expectations of the criteria to obtain a shared understanding and a consistency of judgments, the hesitancy and mistrust will continue to grow (Appling et al., 2001; Centra, 1994; Trevitt et al., 2014).

**Assessment confusion.** The use of ePortfolios as an assessment process requires a culture shift in teaching, learning, and assessment (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010). Questions that are raised include the reliability and validity of the high level of qualitative data gathered (Ryan, 2011), how to include new learners in an on-going process that they have missed out on, and how to use common rubrics when facing a potential vast variety of artifacts to assess (Morris & Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008). Lim and Lee (2014) established that one of the biggest concerns is clarifying the formative and/or summative use of the tool (Lim & Lee, 2014). Ring and Ramirez (2012) cited training learners and evaluators in the multiple aspects of the process as contributing to confusion. Learners require training to learn how to set and monitor their goals (Trevitt et al., 2014), and evaluators need to communicate how they will handle the wide variety of content they may receive, in an equitable fashion (Sain & Williams, 2009; Trevitt et al., 2014). Without this training, evaluators will often find themselves confronted with a mass of unorganized, repetitious information (Kahn, 2004). Finally, learners have noted the possibility of falsification of ePortfolios to obtain a positive evaluation, which negates their use for improvement (Sain & Williams, 2009).

**Level of technology proficiency.** According to Morris and Cooke-Plagwitz (2008), many learners worry about the extent of the technological capabilities required to begin the process
Most of the documented issues concerned the use of tools and navigation (Shepard & Bolliger, 2011), incompatibility between PC and MAC platforms (Jafari, 2004), and slowness of the system (Janosik & Frank, 2013). Most of these problems can be mitigated through additional support measures and peer feedback (Shepard & Bolliger, 2011; Stevens, 2008). Increasingly, simple web authoring programs and personalized web-site hosting platforms, however, such as WordPress, have become more readily available (Kahn, 2004).

**Support.** Support needs to begin at the institutional level with the design of budgets that will ensure adequate resources exist for implementation, training, help desk, and future upgrades (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010; Jafari, 2004). Necessary learner support can be developed by creating supporting documents and exemplars (Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Shepard & Bolliger, 2011), using training videos (Morris & Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008), and/or providing access to face-to-face communication (Janosik & Frank, 2013; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Stevens, 2008). Without support, however, the process will remain in the hands of a few passionate believers and will never achieve its full potential (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010).

According to the literature, in weighing the benefits versus the challenges of implementing an ePortfolio system, creating a sound plan for the purpose of the ePortfolio should be the first step in the process. Doing so allows the institution to maximize the benefits of the system, determine which factors need to play a key function, and use the findings of past research to guide development and achieve the desired goals. Regarding challenges, most can be overcome by creating a training and support program directed at both the learner and the evaluator. To achieve the necessary change in culture, however, both parties need to see the value in investing their time and efforts in the new processes.

**Implications of using teaching ePortfolios with faculty.** By allowing their teaching
practices, learning, and reflections to be viewed by their evaluators and possibly their peers, faculty must become openly courageous when developing their teaching ePortfolios (Kahn, 2004). In this regard, Seldin (1997) noted that teaching ePortfolios are to the scholarship of teaching what publications and grant attainment are to the scholarship of inquiry. Rather than focusing on just one aspect of scholarship, such as the scholarship of discovery, student evaluations, or peer evaluations, teaching ePortfolios examine how each aspect contributes unique information about overall teaching effectiveness (Appling et al., 2001). The interactivity and collaborative aspects of teaching ePortfolios support transparent dialogue on teaching pedagogy and faculty improvement (Tompkins, 2001). However, faculty will be willing to invest time and interest in a tool that supports formative and summative assessment purposes only if it focuses on what is most important to them -- teaching and learning -- and if it is a collaborative process based on mutual respect (Cerbin, 1994).

**Connection to faculty evaluation.** When applying ePortfolio features to the design of a teaching ePortfolio, the literature identified a consistent message. First and foremost, the teaching ePortfolio should include the faculty member’s teaching philosophy statement, which would serve as the foundation for analyses and evidence gathering (Reece et al., 2001; Sain & Williams, 2009). Other possible components include course planning materials, instructional goals, evidence of student learning, instructional videos (Centra, 1994; Sain & Williams, 2009), student and peer feedback (Appling et al., 2001; Centra, 1994), and professional development activities (Centra, 1994). Gathering this data at the end of each semester is ideal, and then, before submission, faculty members can cull through the data set, identifying those artifacts that best exemplify their teaching philosophy (Reece et al., 2001).

The research also noted various implementation options to consider to optimize benefits
and to limit challenges in the implementation of the teaching ePortfolio process. Sain and Williams (2009) offered two alternatives to the annual ePortfolio. The first would extend the submission timeline to every other year and include a professional growth plan to allow for adequate change to occur that could be documented within the reflection. In the second, the teaching ePortfolio would remain an annual event, but would only focus on one identified area of improvement. Centra (1994) recommend that, in differentiating between summative and formative ePortfolios, the former require only positive examples, and the latter include reflection on areas of improvement to address.

Regardless of the chosen format, it is important to point out that most administrators in Sain and Williams’ (2009) study asserted that an ePortfolio focused solely on evidence was not an adequate evaluation tool by itself. This idea was prevalent throughout the literature. Instead, researchers advocated that the evidence and reflection that takes place within the teaching ePortfolio should be combined with other measures that helped triangulate the data, such as collaborative reflection, and student and peer evaluations, so the ePortfolio process can become a formative tool that supports faculty evaluation and drives teaching effectiveness (Appling et al., 2001; Centra, 1994; Sain & Williams, 2009). Additional recommendations were made in regards to these metrics. Appling et al. (2001) cautioned that peer evaluation should be a voluntary process to avoid it being perceived as punitive. Centra (1994) affirmed that when deans choose peers, the inter-rater reliability between deans and peer evaluations is higher. Both Trevitt et al. (2014) and Centra (1994) suggested using multiple reviewers from within the primary academic discipline.

Defining the purpose, scope, and processes to be used during the teaching ePortfolio evaluation is as essential as providing faculty and evaluators with the tools and skills to facilitate
the desired learning. Both faculty and evaluators need to begin with an understanding of the purpose of the system to help them see its benefits. They then need guidance and support to achieve the designed goals throughout the evaluation process. To make the process worth the time and effort required, it must produce tangible results for both faculty and evaluators. In order to achieve this, a form of effective professional development – such as a PLC – is needed to support the effort.

**Using Professional Learning Communities to Support the ePortfolio Process**

The literature has documented that, once schools begin using the embedded features of ePortfolios, professional learning communities (PLCs) can provide a form of professional development that will help the participants to collaboratively learn to use strategies and data to improve teaching and learning experiences for students (Hilliard, 2012). Professional learning communities stemmed from the concept of the learning organization, which was designed to transform how institutions thought about learning (Watson, 2014). In relation to educational institutions, Dufour and Eaker (1998) defined the PLC as a group of individuals with current expertise in their field who work together to engage in ongoing study and constant practice to drive continuous improvement. According to Melville et al. (2014), the conversations that take place within PLCs bridge the theory practice gap. PLCs are grounded in the shared experience of classroom practices, allowing group members to question ideas, actions, and artifacts; to examine their varying perspectives and beliefs; and to work toward identifying gaps between their vision of high-quality learning and data about students’ accomplishments and understandings (Nelson et al., 2008). By using practice, feedback, and modeling techniques, PLCs have a direct impact on the ability of faculty to transfer their knowledge to their workplace practices (De Rijdt et al., 2013). In addition, PLCs provide educators an opportunity to prioritize
student needs and school improvement goals (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008), which in turn supports the university’s goals of increased enrollments and retention (Addis et al., 2013).

This form of professional development is particularly important if design elements of the faculty evaluation tool aim to connect to improved teaching pedagogy that promotes student achievement. Ebert-May et al. (2011), examining the disconnect between how faculty viewed their practices and their actual practice in the classroom, found that in order for faculty to change, they need to practice their skills and receive direct feedback in ways that parallel how students learn. Staff development that requires faculty to translate learned skills in a way that changes their thinking and their pedagogy can play a critical role in improving teaching and learning (De Rijdt et al., 2013). Loucks-Horsley et al. (2003) determined that effective professional development must include elements such as:

(a) providing opportunities for teachers to build their content and pedagogical content knowledge and examine practice, (b) is research based and engages teachers as adult learners in the learning approaches they will use with their students, (c) provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues and other experts to improve their practice, and (d) has a design based on student learning data and is continuously evaluated and improved (p. 2)

Combined with other factors, these elements support the use of professional learning communities.

**Overview of professional learning communities.** At a first glance, PLCs look similar to any high-functioning, collaborative committee because both involve learning and community, and they require organization. However, for PLCs, learning and community are the foundations, and they focus on conversations that evolve from the members’ interests and abilities (Sandell,
Wigley, & Kovalchick, 2004). Allowing teachers to take the lead not only builds capacity, but teachers also gain a deeper understanding both of the issues facing their schools and classrooms and of themselves (Hord, 1997; Mayrowetz, 2008). When all members of an institution are willing and able to accept the collective responsibility for student learning, schools are able to move towards sustained improvement (Horton & Martin, 2013).

Most PLCs share similar basic characteristics. Hord (1997) referenced multiple sources that emphasized the importance of engaging the whole faculty in developing the vision, problem, learning, and problem resolution for a PLC. Nelson et al. (2008) recommended creating group norms that can be revisited on a regular basis, to help keep the PLC functioning. Successful PLCs ensure that the learning cycle continues by implementing required interventions as soon as they are identified; they build a culture of collaboration by engaging collaborative teams in a cycle of questions that leads to improved student achievement; they make all aspects of the teaching and learning process public, negating the excuse for failing to collaborate; and they focus on results so that data becomes useful and relevant (DuFour, 2004).

**Benefits.** The literature describing PLCs identifies a common list of benefits. One of the most transformational is that the collaborative environment forces faculty away from siloed isolation (Hord, 1997; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Sandell et al., 2004), creating a committed, collaborative faculty culture focused on influencing policies and practices, which reduces teacher attrition (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Hord, 1997). Other common outcomes include: interpersonal connections, shared context, enabled dialogue, stimulated learning, captured and diffused existing knowledge, generation of new knowledge (Cambridge, Kaplan, & Suter, 2005; Hord, 1997), collaboration, and a focus on creating change (Addis et al., 2013). Furthermore, the created environment promotes trust, safety, and the ability to take risks (Nelson et al., 2008).
Therefore, effective learning communities that merge mutual perspectives and talents become transformative for teachers, students, and the institutions in which they are engaged (Childers et al., 2001; Sandell et al., 2004). Teachers with a strong sense of their own efficacy are more likely to adopt new classroom behaviors and stay in the profession longer (Hord, 1997). PLC members learn from one another and begin to think of themselves as primary agents leading necessary changes in teaching and learning, and they become activists for instructional reform (Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Wood, 2007). The research demonstrates that teacher engagement in PLCs leads to larger academic gains, smaller achievement gaps, lower rates of absenteeism, and a decreased dropout rate (Hord, 1997).

**Challenges.** No reform methodology, even those publically heralded by teachers, administrators, and facilitators alike, is immune from its share of challenges, especially those that require a culture shift like professional learning communities. According to the research, time, funding, the overwhelming amount of work, and inertia are commonly cited as major challenges (Childers et al., 2001; Sandell et al., 2004; Shulman, Cox, & Richlin, 2004). In addition, institutional challenges, such as financial stress, lack of valuing time spent on teaching as compared to research obligations, institutional support and resources, clear definition of expectations, and promotion or tenure policies, can hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of PLCs (Childers et al., 2001; Shulman et al., 2004).

Nelson et al. (2008) asserted that influencing change necessitates more than a one-time, quick fix professional development encounter, suggesting instead that ample time be set aside for reflection, practice, feedback, and discourse. Faculty, especially those at research institutions, need to be coached into understanding the importance of their pedagogical practices (Sirum, Madigan, & Klionsky, 2009). Otherwise, conflicting duties, personal commitments, and teacher
disinterest can interfere with the work and mission of the PLC.

Another challenge PLCs face is that preplanning is only possible on the overall design; the rest evolves through the collaborative discussions, putting everyone in unmarked waters (Nelson et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important that the conversations be teacher-led, not directed by the institution or the administration (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). Often, however, the social complexity of educational environments makes establishing a direct link between teacher learning and student achievement almost impossible (Guskey, 1998; Sparks, 1997).

**Leadership.** To minimize the impact from the potential challenges and to support the effective implementation of professional learning communities, three different levels of leadership need to be cultivated: institutional, academic leader, and facilitator (Melville et al., 2014). Each of these leadership levels plays an important role and requires adequate training to develop the necessary skills and dispositions. Appointing the right leaders, who can balance formal authority with the ability to influence instructional change, is essential (Melville et al., 2014). Though hierarchical in structure, leadership training can also be carried out within a joint PLC model that uses modeling and a scaffolded approach.

**Institutional.** In a longitudinal study, Melville et al. (2014) found that the process of establishing a model of distributed leadership through PLCs usually takes between 5 and 7 years. Before an institution decides to embark on this journey, Shulman et al. (2004) recommended asking five questions. First, can a sense of urgency surrounding a need that can be addressed within a PLC be established by thoughtfully analyzing student data, building a case for the need for change, and then expressing it in a compelling way that motivates others to support the change (Shulman et al., 2004; Horton and Martin, 2013)? Second, is there a high-ranking leadership team willing to undergo the necessary training and preparation within its own PLC to
support modeling the implementation at the department level (Shulman et al., 2004)? Can a clear and compelling vision be established (Shulman et al., 2004)? Can this vision be communicated in multiple ways and with the same voice (Horton & Martin, 2013; Shulman et al., 2004)? And finally, can tangible progress be made quickly to showcase quick wins and deflate potential dissention (Shulman et al., 2004)?

Developing the answers to these foundational questions will allow the institution to begin working on their four key roles: “ownership and support, professional development, creating clear improvement processes, and differentiating their support” (Thessin & Starr, 2011, p.51). Involving teachers and administrators in developing and leading the PLCs creates a strong base of leaders with the capacity to drive the initiative forward as a team regardless of any one person leaving (Horton & Martin, 2013; Thessin & Starr, 2011; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). Institutional leaders need to teach administrators and faculty how to work together within PLCs, encouraging team-based leadership, sharing of data through discussion, and focusing on the improvement of instruction (Horton & Martin, 2013; Thessin & Starr, 2011). They also need to cultivate academic leaders who set high expectations for themselves and their faculty, are able to deal with resistant faculty, build capacity and share in decision-making, all while maintaining their relationships with their faculty members (Horton & Martin, 2013). Finally, it is important that the institutional leaders express how the work of the PLCs fits into the overall improvement plan of the institution, and that they take into account each department’s unique needs when helping the PLC move to the next step (Thessin & Starr, 2011).

**Academic leader.** Within the model, while it is the job of the institutional leaders to hire and support academic leaders who have the skills and dispositions to support PLCs, it is the job of the academic leaders to create an environment that engages faculty in continuous learning
(Hord, 1997). Using the skills they learned in their leadership PLC, researchers have emphasized that academic leaders need to model these behaviors and practices to their faculty, beginning with creating a shared vision and goals for student learning (Hord, 1997; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Thompson et al., 2004). Then, using a distributed leadership model in which they participate but not dominate, academic leaders can help facilitate the work of the faculty by helping to analyze student data, identify areas of teacher learning and student needs, schedule time for uninterrupted meetings, and assign resources to support teachers’ ideas (Hord, 1997; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Thompson et al., 2004). The roles of the academic leaders will transform from department leader to learning leader as they participate in PLCs and as they learn to question, investigate, and seek solutions for school improvement, jointly with their teachers (Hord, 1997; Thompson et al., 2004). Melville et al. (2014) found that academic leaders who participated in the leadership PLCs: used shared readings, encouraged conference attendance, gave feedback through non-evaluative observations, modeled teaching practices, and created an environment in which teachers began to own and lead the PLCs. They even sought opportunities to take on mentoring of new faculty without being asked.

**Facilitator.** Facilitator selection can be accomplished by hiring faculty development professionals, appointing faculty or staff who have shown interest in a topic, creating an application process, or relying on faculty volunteers (Sandell et al., 2004). However, academic leaders need to be mindful of key, essential characteristics when choosing their PLC facilitators. These characteristics include respect for all group members, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, a non-defensive posture/non-judgmental approach, good organizational skills, savvy about institutional politics, and the ability to initiate and sustain dialogues that allow for all voices to be taken into account (Ortquist-Ahrens & Torosyan, 2009; Petrone & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2004). They
also need to be able to balance group tasks and dynamic relationships while motivating high-quality outcomes (Petrone & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2004).

Ortquist-Ahrens and Torosyan (2009) considered that the role of the facilitator should be divided into two categories -- that of task, which is logistical and organizational, as well as facilitating the collaboration amongst teachers; and that of process, which makes sure everyone has a voice, while neutrally mediating conflicts. Petrone and Ortquist-Ahrens (2004) further defined these roles into champion, coordinator, and energizer; they recommended setting the goal of getting the PLC to a point where these individuals can assume their own leadership roles.

Framing research questions, providing resources, preparing agendas, communicating with members in between PLC meetings, and ensuring continuity from one meeting to the next are additional roles and tasks described in the literature (Nelson et al., 2008; Sirum et al., 2009).

Despite the importance of the role they play in the successful implementation, documentation on the training and preparation of facilitators is somewhat limited. At times facilitator training only consists of reading documentation, receiving directives from academic leaders, or attending a few on or off-campus conferences (Sandell et al., 2004). Including facilitators within the leadership PLCs or within department PLCs led by academic leaders has shown better results (Sandell et al., 2004).

**The PLC structure.** Once time has been set aside for ongoing meetings and leaders have been trained, the next step is to determine the agenda of the PLC (Wood, 2007). Teachers need take on the responsibility of identifying concepts for discussion based on their own classroom reflection or on topics of interest to the institution; the facilitators need to help identify and negotiate beliefs, collect and analyze data, and use collaboration to bring together the diverse viewpoints (Childers et al., 2001; Nelson et al., 2008; Ramlo, 2011). Cambridge et al. (2005)
stated that the organization of PLCs follows four common steps: “(a) develop relationships of trust, mutual respect, reciprocity, and commitment, (b) develop a shared practice, based on an existing body of knowledge, (c) take purposeful action to carry out tasks and projects, and (d) generate and discover new knowledge” (p. 3). To achieve this, the facilitator will need to help break the ice, develop group decision-making processes and group norms, work with teachers to set their goals, and assess the group’s progress (Ortquist-Ahrens & Torosyan, 2009). The ultimate goal is to build the work routine of the PLC (where teachers share what is happening in their classrooms), look at alignment between curriculum and assessment, note misconceptions and levels of student engagement, and identify implementation challenges (Richmond & Manokore, 2011). If the content and design of the work routine is accessible to all group members, then the transfer of knowledge will accelerate and more collaborative problem-solving will result (Childers et al., 2001).

The implementation of PLCs goes through phases: they emerge and then grow, and each phase needs specific facilitation, design, and support to get to the next phase and to finally reach an embedded state within an institution (Cambridge et al., 2005). Cambridge et al. (2005) provided key questions to explore during this process, along with supporting activities, when defining each of the following stages: (a) inquire or setting the purpose, goals and vision, (b) design or create the supporting activities that will help achieve the goal, (c) establish a prototype or start with a small pilot to build a success story, (d) launch or roll it out to the larger audience, (e) grow by engaging in the collaborative learning, and (f) sustain by assessing the goals and creating new ones. Ramlo (2011) acknowledged that PLCs will often hit a roadblock of strong differing opinions and suggested sorting larger issues into smaller themes, noting areas of consensus versus disagreement. Using this method will identify specific points that no longer
need debate and pinpoint areas that need further discussion (Ramlo, 2011).

Finally, though the prevailing method for organizing PLCs was anchored in scheduled time set-aside during the workweek, other structures were also highlighted in the literature. For example, annual conferences were used to survey participants’ needs to support implementation (Childers et al., 2001), and cohort groupings were designed by discipline or grade level to improve the comfort level of participants (Hilliard, 2012). Study groups, using relevant literature to form the basis for action research, were utilized in both teacher and leadership groups (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Thessin & Starr, 2011). Multi-day summer retreats were also commonly used to assess, reflect and plan, with leadership teams meeting first and teacher teams meeting afterwards (Nelson et al., 2008; Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Thessin & Starr, 2011). Finally, school-university partnerships were used to support pre-service teachers or district/college student readiness of curricula expectations (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Sirum et al., 2009).

**Keys to success.** Several common themes emerged as key characteristics for establishing effective PLCs. First and foremost, faculty need to be interested and leaders need to be supportive (Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Shulman et al., 2004). Using a variety of members from different grades, disciplines, or institutional levels helps provide a broader perspective during discussions (Richmond & Manokore, 2011; Sirum et al., 2009). Finally, change should not be expected immediately, but if past initiatives have been successful and the leaders are considered credible, then a better chance for success exists (Shulman et al., 2004; Sirum et al., 2009).

Specific attributes of successful PLCs include early inclusion and reliance on teachers to formulate goals (Addis et al., 2013; Sandell et al., 2004). Taking the time to build relationships amongst members, facilitators, and leaders is also essential (Nelson et al., 2008; Sandell et al.,
An initial starting point, such as a book study, helps gauge interest (Nelson et al., 2008; Sandell et al., 2004). Having a clear structure, but allowing for flexibility, allows tangential interests to be explored and builds teacher ownership in the process (Nelson et al., 2008; Petrone & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2004; Sandell et al., 2004). Overall, the process needs to be based on inquiry, and the goals of the group need to be assessed to determine to what extent they were met (Addis et al., 2013; Hilliard, 2012; Nelson et al., 2008). Successful implementation should result in the creation of a forum for teacher learning and collaboration, increased teacher confidence, and classroom practice that supports student learning (Richmond & Manokore, 2011).

**Connection to faculty evaluation.** The literature clearly suggests that effective leadership roles and implementation practices can result in professional learning communities that engage faculty in discussions that will improve student learning. Bridging the theory-practice gap under a shared vision of student success, the learning community builds a collaborative, supportive environment in which deep reflection on student achievement can be assessed, pedagogy improved, and the level of student achievement increased. By navigating the challenges of time, interest, support, and implementation flaws, the inherent distribution of leadership to the teachers within the PLC model results in a cadre of innovative reform agents.

In order to implement an effective PLC, those in leadership roles need to shed any authoritarian underpinnings and transform into collaborative learning leaders. The roles and responsibilities defined by the literature mirror a shared leadership model. Interestingly, one of the best practices for learning and engaging with new behaviors at high levels of leadership is using a leadership PLC model that scaffolds learned behaviors to the teachers, mimicking the common train-the-trainer model. Leaders at the highest level develop and participate in leadership PLCs that cultivate their own necessary skills and dispositions, model the new
expected behaviors with academic leaders so they in turn can support the scaffolded modeling and implementation with teachers, based upon the individual needs of the school or department. This scaffolded approach keeps everyone engaged in the work, shares the burden of training needs across all areas of the institution, and creates a continuous loop for feedback, improvement, and support.

**Conclusion - Combining the ePortfolio and PLCs into A Learning Episode**

This literature review has identified three key factors that hold the potential to transform how faculty evaluation is designed and implemented within institutions of higher education. It began by portraying how the reflection on teaching can be considered an element of scholarship when it is informed by researched best practices. Acceptance of this idea of teaching scholarship broadens the responsibility of faculty members to include student success metrics, and thus it requires a methodology that can assess a faculty member’s impact upon student achievement. Teaching ePortfolios were then presented as a popular choice, as they look at faculty responsibilities more holistically, embed the requirement of evidence-based self-reflection, are designed for formative feedback and collaborative discussion, and provide the ability to track goal setting. Finally, in order for faculty members to see the relevance of their engagement in such an evaluation process, professional learning communities (PLCs) were discussed as a complementary form of professional development. PLCs provide the safe, collaborative atmosphere that encourages innovation, discussion, skill building, and ownership of the transition to a new way of thinking about the scholarship of teaching. The collective insights discussed within PLCs help faculty members look at the evidence within their teaching ePortfolio, provide guidance on how to identify gaps, and support pedagogical change through collaboratively designed improvement plans. Though no studies directly link the use of teaching
ePortfolios and PLCs, the synergy between these two practices seems to create a unified approach, that once established, will allow faculty to obtain greater insight into their own teaching efficacy, its connection to their students’ overall mastery of programmatic outcomes, and student achievement should increase.
Chapter 3: Methodology Overview

The purpose of this study was to probe perceptions on the value of using teaching ePortfolios, supported by PLC conversations between faculty and deans, as a formative assessment tool that improves teaching effectiveness and promotes pedagogical changes that champion student learning. It draws upon two theories as lenses for analysis, Schön’s (1983) two components of critical reflection theory, reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, in conjunction with Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory. Using a case study methodology within a bounded context, the researcher explored the perspectives and perceptions of the faculty and deans involved in the process to understand the characteristics of practices that advance student success, how the advancement of significant learning was explained, and whether or not these two descriptions of practice and learning were connected to professional development and improvement plans.

Research Question

The following question formed the core of this study: How do the full-time faculty and deans at the institution perceive the impact of the new Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation (PBDFC) evaluation process on pedagogical practice?

Paradigm of the Researcher

This study used the constructivist-interpretivist lens because the paradigm focuses upon determining meaning through deep reflection, while acknowledging that multiple interpretations of perceptions can concurrently emerge (Merriam, 1991; Ponterotto, 2005). Because this study looked at the perspectives of faculty members and deans across disciplines, it would not be surprising to discover that a breadth of interpretation exists. Ponterotto (2005) explained how subjectivity is connected to the context of the situation and indicated that researchers and
participants must engage with participants in the meaning-making process in order to jointly construct and interpret findings. During these collaborative conversations, biases do not need to be disregarded; instead, they can be used to help build rapport between the participants and the researcher in the process (Ponterotto, 2005). By being transparent about biases, it is possible to build a more holistic understanding of interpretations evolving interactively between the researcher and the participants.

In studies using the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, the researcher becomes the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, sharing what is learned from the perspectives and experiences of the participants (Merriam, 1991). The paradigm accepts the interpretation of the particular viewpoint being studied without having to dispute contrary interpretations from competing research (Butin, 2010). As the entire PBDFC process between faculty and deans is constructivist-interpretivist in nature, the research study simply added an additional layer of reflective interpretation on the process as a whole, exploring how participants within the process constructed knowledge and learning.

**Research Design**

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore the problem of practice. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative researchers try to understand how people make sense of their experiences and the meanings they construe from them, which aligns to the purpose of this study. The initial data that was collected had no predetermined categorization; instead the researcher needed to inductively work in stages to assemble the data into structures that allowed rich-thick descriptions to form (LeCompte, 2000). Furthermore, in line with Creswell (2012), multiple sources and theories were used to triangulate and corroborate evidence. The data for this study came from individual interviews, archived document reviews, reviews of teaching
ePortfolio reflections and professional development improvement plans, the findings of which were then vetted through a focus group discussion. In addition, both theoretical frameworks and Fink’s (2013) dimensions of significant learning were used during the coding process, allowing the researcher to triangulate the data.

Merriam (1998) definition of case study was chosen for this study because the emphasis is upon defining the case, or the bounded system, which has a finite number of possibilities for data collection. Within this study, the group of full-time faculty using the teacher evaluation system during its pilot phase represented the boundaries of the case. The topic of investigation, the teacher evaluation system, was not the focus of the study, but rather the perceptions of the bounded system using the tool. Merriam (1998) has also situated herself within social constructivism, where the researcher has personal interaction with the case (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014), meaning-making is subjective (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and data collection is mainly qualitative, using a hermeneutic cycle of learning that takes place between researcher and participant to build rich descriptions. Finally, Merriam (1998) presented the best balance between the strict adherence to design quality found in Yin’s (2002) structure of case study and Stake’s (1995) inclusion of the reader as an active participant in the meaning-making process.

That said, the one area in which the study diverges from Merriam’s tradition was using Fink’s (2013) six kinds of significant learning as a preliminary lens to analyze the first data set from the archival documents. Using a conceptual framework to interpret data is more akin to Yin (2002). However, the primary research question focused on the whether a change was taking place in the form of pedagogical improvements that support student success, and Fink (2013) defined significant learning as learning that creates lasting change. Defining the types of significant learning that occur within the evaluation process and using the archival documents to
inform the definitions, not only provided clarity regarding what these changes might look like, but it also provided a foundation upon which data from other sources could be compared. Furthermore, Merriam (1998) does recognize using a conceptual framework derived from the literature review as a possible starting place as long as how it is used within the study is determined by the data collected and reviewed.

**Research Tradition**

This study was conducted using a qualitative interpretive case study. Studies that focus on “how” and “why” questions, which are explanatory, are indicative of a case study approach (Yin, 2002). The study fits the parameters of a case study because the unit of analysis, the faculty evaluation process, was bound by the nature of the participants (full time faculty), the location of the unit (Coast College), and the timeframe that the study examined (the pilot-implementation of the new process) (Creswell, 2012).

Interpretive case studies reflect a direct interest in the defined case and use theories to inform the findings (Merriam, 1985). Merriam’s (1985) definition of interpretive case studies aligns well with Stake’s (1995) definition of instrumental case studies. Instrumental case studies look beyond the situation being studied -- in this case, the faculty evaluation -- to facilitate an understanding of something else, in this case how the participants perceived the characteristics of a pedagogical practice that connects to student success, how they described their learning process, and whether or not these descriptions connected to professional development and improvement plans (Stake, 1995). The context of the development of the evaluation process was an important factor in the study and was reviewed as part of the archived documentation, but its connection to the phenomenon, or pedagogical practice, was only made clear through the other data collected (Yin, 1981). Case studies allow the phenomenon to be studied through a variety
of lenses, which reveals a variety of factors of the phenomenon; thus, a richer and thicker understanding is developed as compared to phenomenology, for example (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Using this approach and the lenses of the theories of critical reflection and transfer of learning allowed the researcher to analyze both the perceptions of the participants and the documentation contained in their teaching ePortfolios; this permitted rich, detailed descriptions to emerge.

**Participants**

The participants in this study, full time faculty and academic deans who have participated in a full cycle of the pilot year use of the new faculty evaluation process, were purposefully selected by the researcher to ensure a breadth of perceptions across disciplines at the site, Coast College. Coast College covers an area 608 square miles across multiple campuses. Its original mission was to provide job-training skills to local residents of modest means. Maintaining its commitment to this mission, today it serves 64,000 students, approximately half of who are credit-seeking students. In addition, Coast College is part of a system that offers Associate and/or Baccalaureate degrees in a 2+2 model. As such, faculty members are hired without the expectation of research or publication, and their focus is on teaching students skills that lead to either employment or further education. Furthermore, Coast College academic deans are discipline-specific and have the responsibility for annually evaluating the teaching efficacy of their full-time faculty.

The participants were chosen using maximum variation purposeful sampling because the researcher aimed to gather perspectives from as wide a variety of disciplines as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because the study sought to gain perspectives on a process that occurs between faculty members and their evaluators, or deans in this case, it was necessary to include both groups within the sample. Furthermore, by looking at full-time faculty across
disciplines, the researcher recognized that nuances in how each dean may handle the faculty evaluation process might require adding additional participants within each discipline in order to reach data saturation, or to arrive at the point where no new data emerges. The researcher chose three deans and two program directors from across the various disciplines of the college using volunteer sampling and then solicited up to three, associated full-time faculty members within those disciplines, again using volunteer sampling, creating an initial sample size of 14 participants. The researcher both interviewed the full-time faculty and deans selected for this initial sample and reviewed their teaching ePortfolios and subsequent evaluations.

Though no additional participants were required to reach saturation, snowball sampling, where these original participants refer the researcher to additional participants, remained an option (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The initial sample size was limited in that it only represented a small percentage of the existing disciplines, faculty, and deans at the college. However, this study did not intend to make generalizations but rather aimed to understand and describe the experiences of these participants (Merriam, 1998), so the sample size would only have required adjustment if the ongoing analysis of the data required additional participants to reach saturation. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Recruitment and Access**

To conduct this study, approval was first sought from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and then the Coast College Research Review Committee. Coast College required approval from both of these committees before the study could commence. As part of the Coast College Research Review Committee process, the researcher requested initial access to the site from the vice president of academics. During this discussion, the researcher shared the intent of the study, described the participants she aimed to interview,
and outlined intended procedures for the recruitment of volunteer participants.

After receiving approval from both approval bodies, a Call for Participants email (Appendix A) was sent to the Office of Academic Affairs to be forwarded to all academic deans at the college. Once the three deans and two program directors were selected, another Call for Participants email (Appendix B) was sent from the same office to all full-time faculty members who had participated in the pilot cycle of the faculty evaluation process and who taught within the disciplines represented by the chosen deans or program directors. No preference in participant selection was stipulated regarding age, gender, ethnicity/race, socio-economic level, literacy level, health, title, or years of service to the college. The researcher would only have excluded interested individuals if they were not full-time faculty members, had not completed a full evaluation cycle, or were from a discipline not represented by a chosen dean or program director. No incentives were offered.

Once the researcher established a potential participant pool, she made an intake call to each individual to make a personal connection with the potential participants and to provide an overview of the project. The overview explained the participants’ role in the study, clarified the voluntary nature of their participation, and explained their right to end their participation at any point. The researcher also answered any questions posed by the potential participants. Those individuals who agreed to participate were subsequently asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C).

**Protection of human subjects.** The researcher took appropriate measures to ensure confidentiality, and she shared confidentiality methods in detail with participants prior to the interview and before she reviewed their teaching ePortfolios; she also explained these measures prior to any subsequent participation in any focus group discussions. Since faculty participants
would be discussing details of their evaluation process and teaching practices, as well as sharing the contents of their faculty evaluation ePortfolios, there was a slight chance of non-physical discomfort, but the risk was minimal. As dean and program director participants were describing their side of the evaluation process, a slight chance of non-physical discomfort existed, but, again, the risk was considered minimal.

Before any interview, participation in a focus group discussion, or request for ePortfolio sample, participants were informed that if they felt uncomfortable replying to any question or sharing any part of the contents of their ePortfolios, they were free to decline answering, to make the ePortfolio unavailable for review or exclude sections, and/or to withdraw from the study at any time. Verbal consent to participation in any live procedure, interview or focus group discussion was recorded. In addition, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality.

Information that can identify any individual within this study will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with the participant’s expressed permission as required by law. Information that could be associated with an individual was altered to protect confidentiality. The researcher labeled interview recordings and ePortfolio samples with pseudonyms, concealing the participants’ names. A professional transcription company transcribed the recordings under a guaranteed confidentiality agreement, and the transcribed files were encrypted and password protected upon receipt. Only the Principle Investigator (the researcher’s academic advisor) and the Student Researcher in this study have access to the files.

Data Collection

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) asserted that the goal of the data collection phase is to gather enough information from multiple sources to create rich, thick descriptions, and to ensure that
sufficient data is collected to reach saturation. Though the authors did not specify a preferred method of data collection, this study used document review, interviews, and focus group discussions to triangulate the data. In order to reach saturation, the researcher sought convergence of perspectives, but also divergence to assure that as many perspectives as possible were included in the findings (Stake, 1995). The data collection for this study took place during four phases.

**Archival Documentation Review:** Sets the context of the study and seeks to understand the values and intent of the new evaluation system

**Interviews:** Conducted with both full-time faculty and Academic Deans to gain understanding of their perceptions of the process

**ePortfolio Review:** Looking at the reflection sections and professional development and improvement plans

**Focus Group Discussion:** Data analyzed and preliminary findings shared for further feedback and clarity

*Figure 1. Data collection flow chart.*

**Document review.** During the first phase, the researcher reviewed the archival documentation of the college’s Evaluation Committee to help understand both the context and intent of the new faculty evaluation process. The documents gathered included summary reports written by the committee and survey data on faculty and dean perceptions outlining their desires for the new system. The researcher applied Fink’s (2013) categories of significant learning as a framework to help discern the type of learning the evaluation process intended to incorporate into its design. Merriam (1998) recommended using a flexible design to the study, starting with a conceptual framework derived from the literature review that may change as data is collected. During this first phase of data collection and subsequent analysis, the coding protocol and the
interview questions used in the next phases of data collection changed to reflect new ideas that and questions that arose through memoing.

Following the interviews, an additional phase of document review took place. This focused on what the faculty participants chose to include and reflect upon in their teaching ePortfolios. Using Schön’s (1983) lens of reflection-on-action, the researcher analyzed the types of artifacts faculty members chose to highlight exemplary practices and how their reflections connected teaching practices to student learning. In addition, the researcher used Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory to see how the professional development and improvement plans created by the faculty members and deans connected to teaching efficacy and student learning. The researcher also used the definitions developed during the archival document review to gauge the types of significant learning taking place.

**Interviews.** Interviews with full-time faculty members and their associated academic deans or program directors represented the second phase of data collection. These interviews provided the researcher with a broad spectrum of perspectives on both procedures used within the faculty evaluation process, the development of the teaching ePortfolio, and the subsequent PLC conversation between faculty and dean. Using an interview protocol (Appendix D) designed to get to the core of the research questions of the study, the researcher sought to understand how participants defined practice that connects to student learning, how they described their learning, and how they connected their practice and learning to professional growth plans. The interview questions were open ended so that the researcher could delve into perceptions, assumptions, and biases that might be shared by the interviewee through their perceptions of the experience.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and took place at a time and
location of the interviewee’s choosing. The interview phase was designed to establish a rapport with the researcher and probe the perceptions of the interviewee regarding their experiences with the new faculty evaluation process. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to develop and implement a loosely formulated interview protocol (Appendix D) and to maintain the role of an active listener (Creswell, 2013), which permitted her to change or vary the questions based on participants’ responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To probe deeper, follow-up questions were asked, again based on the responses of the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviewees were able to pass on any question they did not feel comfortable answering.

Finally, all interviews were recorded on an iPad and using the Rev recorder on an iPhone and then sent to Rev.com to be transcribed. Copies of the transcriptions were shared with the interviewee for member-checking. Although the lenses of all of the theoretical frameworks were used during this phase, Schön’s (1983) lens of reflection-in-practice was specifically employed to gain an understanding of the PLC conversation that was held between the faculty member and the dean.

**Focus group discussion.** The final phase of data collection occurred during a focus group discussion. All participants were asked to join a final focus group discussion in which preliminary findings were shared for member-checking and further clarification of any new ideas that might have arisen during the analysis stage. The researcher remained open to the possibility that, upon hearing the findings, participants might provide further insights as they refined or clarified their own ideas within a group setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, it made sense to have both faculty and deans participate in the focus group discussion together, a methodological decision that afforded the researcher an opportunity to observe the interplay between the two groups.
The researcher developed a presentation, based on the findings from the previous three phases of analysis, along with stopping points to engage the group in discussion using a semi-structured interview protocol, understanding that the bulk of the questions would be formulated based upon the group’s responses. The focus group discussion was recorded on an iPad and using the Rev recorder on an iPhone. The recordings were then transcribed by Rev.com. The researcher took notes during the focus group discussion to record any ideas that evolved and that needed further exploration; these were added to the interview protocol as additional probing questions. The copy of the final transcription was sent to the focus group participants for member-checking.

The research questions and the conceptual framework developed through the literature review informed and framed the organization of the data collection. To acquire a better understanding of the research questions, these three methods were chosen to allow a sufficient amount of data to be collected and triangulated, and to reach saturation. The table below aligns the research questions with the methods chosen and with the purpose of the methods.

. The primary research question was: How do the full-time faculty and deans at the institution perceive the impact of the new Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation evaluation process on pedagogical practice?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection process.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How do the full-time faculty and deans at the institution perceive the impact of the new Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation evaluation process on pedagogical practice?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Collection Method and Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archival Document Review</td>
<td>-Summary reports written by the Evaluation Committee and preliminary survey data on faculty and dean perceptions and desires for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the new system
- Documents were reviewed to understand the context and intended significant learning to take place through the design of the process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Individual interviews were scheduled with faculty and deans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interviews were designed to solicit a broad spectrum of perspectives on both procedures used within the faculty evaluation process, the development of the teaching ePortfolio, and the subsequent PLC conversation between faculty and dean – specifically, how participants defined practice that connects to student learning, how they described their learning, and how they connected their practice and learning to professional growth plans</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty ePortfolio Review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The review of the faculty ePortfolios focused on the how faculty connected what they chose as evidence to highlight mastery of the ePortfolio competencies to see if the faculty reflections connected back to student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In addition the faculty member’s professional development and improvement plan was reviewed to see whether it highlighted teaching efficacy aligned to any significant learning showcased in the previous reflections.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Discussion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- One focus group discussion was used to share preliminary findings for member-checking, to gain further clarity on any areas that required feedback, and to observe interplay between the participants as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The interview protocol was designed based upon the findings of the first three phases.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Storage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All data used for this study will be kept in a secure location for a period of five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information that can identify an individual participant will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with the participant’s expressed permission as required by law. Information that could be associated with an individual was altered to protect confidentiality. Interview recordings and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ePortfolio samples were labeled with pseudonyms rather than the with participants’ names. A professional transcription company transcribed the recordings under a guaranteed confidentiality agreement, and the transcribed files were encrypted and password protected upon receipt. Only the Principle Investigator (the researcher’s academic advisor) and the Student Researcher have access to the files.

**Data Analysis**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), an iterative process of data analysis should begin with a review of the purpose of the study and proceed to a reading and rereading of the data while the researcher makes notes in the margins to capture ideas, hunches, and tentative themes to use to inform or to compare with the next phase of data collection. Saldana (2013) described this process as breaking data down into small informational pieces which will then be reassembled through a two-step coding process: initial coding (or open coding) and axial coding. The first step allowed the researcher to quickly attribute codes to the information pieces and regroup them into larger comprehensive codes; however, during the axial coding phase, the researcher needed to discern between the dominant codes and those that recurred and served to support or contradict the emerging themes (Saldana, 2013). The dominant codes were then organized under the emerging themes with a supporting hierarchy of codes and sub-codes (Saldana, 2013).

Following Merriam’s (1998) approach to qualitative studies, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, beginning with the very first piece of data collected and using techniques such as the constant comparative method, similar to pattern-matching, to help identify the emerging themes (Merriam, 1998). Those themes that were applicable across data sets were kept; the researcher refined and revised them as more data was accrued (Boeije, 2002). The
research used MAXQDA, a computer-based qualitative data analysis software, to accomplish this process. The final set of themes needed to be: (a) exhaustive – inclusive of all of the research data; (b) mutually exclusive - data could only fall under one category; (c) sensitive - people would know what the category represented; and (d) conceptually congruent – the data could not be considered a sub-group of a different category (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By analyzing all of the data organized within a theme, the researcher discovered the rich, thick, descriptive answers to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this study followed the process defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Saldana (2013), using the defined data collection process: archival documentation review, interview transcript review, teaching ePortfolio review, and focus group discussion transcript review.

Beginning with the archival document review, the researcher read through the documents, making notes on the intent of the new faculty evaluation process. In order to answer the research questions, specific focus was placed on the types of learning that were expected to occur, using Fink’s (2013) six categories of significant learning as a conceptual framework starting place: foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, learning how to learn. Using these categories as a lens during this step of the review process, the researcher was able to deconstruct the data into small informational pieces aligned to one or more of the types of significant learning. She also took notes on emerging patterns, assigned codes to the data using the open-coding process, reviewed the multitude of codes to see how they could be combined into more comprehensive categories, and then grouped the comprehensive codes under emerging themes (Saldana, 2013). The data within the emerging themes provided a preliminary, rich, thick description of the intended types of learning within the evaluation process. These definitions of significant learning and their related codes were used to inform the analysis of the interviews, the
review of the teaching ePortfolio, and the focus group discussion.

Figure 2. Coding Process. The next three steps of the data collection -- interviews, teaching ePortfolio reviews, and the focus group discussion -- sought to gather information and triangulate analyses to answer the research question by exploring definitions of practice that connect to student learning, descriptions of learning, and connections between practice and learning to professional growth plans. Both aspects of Schön’s (1983) critical reflection theory, reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, as well as Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory were used as lenses to analyze the data. As such, the researcher paid particular attention to how participants described identifying needs and creating solutions to meet those needs; changes that may have occurred through their interaction with others, especially their dean; descriptions of learning that took place that related to the types of significant learning described through the archival document review; and whether or not learning was applied to different contexts.
The researcher reread each interview transcription to identify new ideas or new emerging themes that developed through the memo-writing process. Using the comprehensive codes developed during the archival document review as a starting place, information from the transcript was deconstructed and coded, with an understanding that new open-codes would emerge that would require regrouping into new comprehensive codes, or that comprehensive codes may require refining to integrate the new data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, the themes developed through the codes in the first round of analysis expanded, providing the researcher with a deeper understanding of the learning that was taking place within this process. In addition, new themes emerged that allowed the researcher to take into account perceptions on how practice connected to student learning and how significant practice and learning connected to professional growth plans.

The third round of data collection involved the review of faculty teaching ePortfolios. The researcher reviewed the types of evidence faculty chose and how they reflected on this evidence to show their mastery of the teaching ePortfolio competencies; she also reviewed their professional development and growth plans. The data analysis followed the same coding process used for the interviews and applied the theoretical frameworks to inform the analysis.

The final step in the analysis of this study involved sharing the preliminary analysis findings with the participants during a follow-up focus group discussion. A protocol was developed that allowed the researcher to share the findings related to the research question and the definitions of practice that connect to student learning, descriptions of learning, and connections between practice and learning to professional growth plans. The focus group discussion also allowed the researcher to solicit feedback from the participants. In addition, any lingering questions that arose from the analysis were asked. The transcript from the focus group
discussion was submitted to the same two-cycle coding process to see if any further data could be added to deepen the researcher’s understanding of the participant’s perceptions in regards to the research question.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative studies is difficult to clearly establish, mainly because the researcher is trying to understand perceptions of a specific reality through a variety of interpretations of that reality. To achieve trustworthiness, the researcher must provide enough detail to show the reader that the findings and conclusions make sense within the purpose and focus of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study multiple strategies were used to show the trustworthiness to the reader: triangulation, maximum variation sampling, rich-thick descriptions, member-checking, and an audit trail.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to showing the reader how the findings plausibly fit the reality from which the data was drawn (Guba, 1981; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A common method to show credibility in qualitative studies is the use of triangulation, which can include use of data from a variety of participants, data types, or the use of multiple theories to confirm the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies are designed to use multiple forms of data collection, which in this study included data from interviews from multiple participants, document review, and a focus group discussion. This allowed the author to compare what was being said by participants from different disciplines, as well as in relationship to what they documented in their teaching ePortfolios and against what was being shared by the academic deans. In addition the study used two theoretical frameworks as lenses to help interpret the findings: critical reflection theory and transfer of learning theory. Triangulation helped the researcher achieve saturation by searching for opposing viewpoints that might present alternative
Transferability. Transferability refers to external validity, or how well the findings can be applied to other studies or other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The difficulty with transferability in qualitative studies, especially case studies, is that each study is focused on a specific unit of analysis using a purposeful sample. By using maximum variation when devising the sample for this study, the researcher aimed to capture the broadest possible breadth of perceptions, while still maintaining a manageable sample size. In addition the findings were written as rich, thick descriptions providing as many details as possible. These two strategies will allow the reader to determine whether similarities in their situations can be found within the findings of this study (Guba, 1981; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability. Dependability refers to ensuring internal validity, and member-checking is a common strategy used in qualitative studies to achieve this (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within this study, the researcher provided all transcriptions to the participants to ensure they accurately reflected the data that was collected. In addition, during the follow-up focus group discussion, the researcher shared the initial findings of the coding process with the participants to solicit feedback and gain further clarity.

Confirmability. Usually confirmability refers to the ability of a study to be replicated by another researcher. However, qualitative studies are unique to the unit of analysis, and they thus require alternate means to present confirmability to the reader. One strategy to accomplish this is using an audit trail. Audit trails describe how the data was collected, how the data was categorized, and how the researcher made decisions during the study’s process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher used memoing to record her on-going reflections, any questions that arose, and new ideas that could be explored.
**Researcher’s bias.** The one possible threat to this study is the researcher’s bias. Because the researcher was an “insider” and was intimately involved in the development process of the faculty evaluation process under study, she openly outlined her bias in her positionality statement in Chapter 1. In addition, in part due to the researcher’s positionality, Merriam’s (1998) definition of case study was chosen because it accepts the researcher’s personal interaction with the case (Hyett et al., 2014).

However, the researcher applied several additional strategies to minimize the intrusion of bias. Member-checking, as discussed earlier, was one of these strategies. In addition, using a follow-up focus group discussion provided the participants an opportunity to review the emerging findings and provide clarification in case the researcher represented or misinterpreted the data beyond what was stated.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of this case study was to probe the perceptions of faculty, deans, and program directors at Coast College on the value of using a newly developed faculty evaluation tool as a strategy to improve teaching effectiveness and promote pedagogical changes that champion student learning. The new evaluation tool was designed to combine the use of teaching ePortfolios and Professional Learning Community (PLC) conversations between faculty and deans, called a Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation (PBFDC) to support professional growth. Therefore the study focused on whether or not faculty reported changing their approach to teaching or their interactions with students in response to their involvement in the learning episode. This study sought to answer the following research question: How do the full-time faculty and deans at Coast College perceive the impact of the new Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation evaluation process on pedagogical practice?

This chapter presents the data findings triangulated through archival data, interviews with full-time faculty, deans and program directors, and a review of faculty ePortfolio submissions. The findings were further clarified during a final focus group discussion in which the preliminary results were shared with the participants and additional questions were asked. The chapter begins with a rich, thick description of the context of the study and the intent of the evaluation process as presented in the archival documents. The characteristics of the participants of the study are outlined, and an overview of their perceptions of the process, shared during the interviews, is provided to give a sense of the breadth of perceptions and perspectives regarding the new evaluation tool. Finally, the findings of the study are presented, categorized through Fink’s (2013) taxonomy of six kinds of significant learning: (a) foundational knowledge, (b) application, (c) integration, (d) human dimension, (e) joy of learning, and (f) life-long learning.
Study Context

In 2013 the State Board of Education made changes to its administrative rule that defined the expectations of full-time faculty contracts to include quantifiable measurement of the performance of faculty, engagement in continuing professional development, maintaining currency of subject matter, service to the college and community, and using relevant feedback data. In response, Coast College’s governing faculty organization created a committee to determine how the faculty evaluation process at the institution and the tools it used might be updated. The Collaborative Committee on Faculty Evaluation (Evaluation Committee) was comprised of faculty representatives from all disciplines, program directors, deans, and other college administrators with the goal of addressing the needs of as many stakeholders as possible.

The Evaluation Committee discovered that multiple faculty competency lists existed and were used by various departments, ranging from 24 specific competencies to three generalized competencies. It was also noted that the job descriptions for faculty on the human resources website did not align to the evaluation instrument in terms of the basic competencies, values, or criteria required for the job. Therefore, as part of their onboarding professional development process, the 2011 new faculty cohort researched common college teaching standards. They identified eight standards, which they felt best described the criteria for evaluation and metrics on which they wanted to focus: student survey of instruction data (SSI), grade distributions, duties outside the classroom, team work, class observation, strengths, areas for improvement, and professional development. When the Evaluation Committee surveyed the entire faculty body and the deans, they discovered that these eight criteria also ranked highest as holding meaning within the evaluation, so they recommended adopting the eight criteria to assess the competencies of all faculty members during the evaluation process (Committee, 2013, p.5-6).
Furthermore, they suggested creating a general evaluation rubric that would define the minimum standard for meeting proficiency in each area.

The Evaluation Committee then broke into working groups to research the following five areas to flesh out best practices in each area and bring recommendations back to the group: (a) how to look at data, (b) use of digital portfolios, (c) instructional strategies, (d) contributions to the college, and (e) faculty growth plan/professional development. Their final recommendations included using a digital platform for the evaluation portfolio that would be a time saver for both faculty and deans, was adaptable and flexible to meet the varying needs of the disciplines, was user friendly but secure, provided for faculty reflection, had export capability, and provided consistency across the college. This decision was supported by over 70% of the faculty and deans surveyed by the Evaluation Committee (Committee, 2013). Finally, the Evaluation Committee recommended that the evaluation take place annually, using information gained from classroom observations, materials provided to them by the instructors pertaining to their instructional and professional activities during the year, and an analysis of the results of their SSI course surveys to collect student feedback on instruction. Information gleaned from these items and discussed with the evaluator would be used to create professional goals for the following year. This process, which combined the digital teaching ePortfolio and the collaborative conversation referred to in this study, has been named the Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation (PBFDC).

**Participants in Relation to Experience and Study Background**

During the interview process, each participant shared their background and experience regarding the different components of the process. The analysis of these interviews identified a series of benefits and challenges the participants faced that fell outside the parameters of the
research question in the study. These are included in this analysis because they help develop an overview of the context of the study.

The participants in this study included three deans, spanning liberal arts, workforce, and health programs; two program directors in charge of reviewing adjuncts and full time faculty in liberal arts and health related areas; and nine full time faculty members under the purview of these evaluators. The deans’ experience spanned between three to 10 years in their position at the college; one had experienced the use of teaching ePortfolios at a different institution, and two perceived the new evaluation process as being better than previous renditions. The program directors’ experience spanned between two to 25 years in their position at the college; both had used teaching ePortfolios previously in different capacities, and neither perceived the new process as an improvement. Instead, one said it was definitively worse, while the other said it held potential if the faculty put thought into what they submitted to provide clear insight into the faculty members’ contributions. Finally, the faculty members experience ranged from one to 40 years teaching; six participants were native to the institution and the others had taught at other institutions. Three faculty members had used teaching ePortfolios to secure awards, obtain jobs, and one had created an earlier pilot system at the institution. Three of the faculty said the experience was better than the previous evaluation processes; three said it was difficult to use due to system glitches and the time it took; one made no comparison; and the other two said it was worse.

In regards to the overall perceptions on challenges and benefits of the process, during the interviews, the faculty, deans, and program directors shared a wealth of ideas. The biggest challenge seemed to come from the time it took to populate the teaching ePortfolio and the frustration that it caused. Five faculty and one evaluator expressed this concern using comments
such as: “It took a lot of time to know where all the pieces were that you wanted to pull in, and to be sure that you didn't miss things that you needed to include,” and “it was very stressful because I had not saved things like I should have.” Similarly, one dean expressed that his having to remember the steps of the process and understand the mechanics of what do when was his biggest challenge. In reflecting on the process, another program director suggested that her faculty members were split between those who loved completing the teaching ePortfolio and those who hated it; she suggested that the platform might best serve those who naturally enjoy journaling. Others, who claimed they were not “tech savvy”, found the technological platform difficult. In the words of one faculty member:

Even though I'm pretty organized, you had to figure out how to upload what was important. Okay, how do I ... ? Do I so a screenshot? Do I do a ... ? I tend to be hard copy, so I think I wasted a lot of time copying things and then making pdf s to load into the system.

Finally, one faculty member provided excellent insights on how the nature of the process may have hidden its actual benefits: “I think that sometimes when something is long or cumbersome, it hides the meaningful nature of the activity.”

Perceptions on the process also revealed disparities. Some participants wished for further explanation such as “rubrics that explain what to put in each section” or “some type of 5-minute tutorial” or “an example of a good one.” On the other hand, those who had located the provided supports noted that the “staff had good examples,” “good videos,” and “excellent resources.” Some faculty provided insight into how they kept themselves organized during the year like “putting color codes on my calendar for things I wanted to include” or “I copy and paste everything into a word document so I have them readily available.” Every faculty member
suggested that the process should be started early, rather than rushed at the end of the year. In order to help faculty not wait until the end of the year, one faculty member suggested that email reminders be sent out periodically.

Despite the challenges that faculty and evaluators faced, there were also many positive features shared during the interviews. Several participants noted that they liked having a place to put everything and that the streamlined process made it consistent for everyone. Other aspects they identified that helped make the process meaningful included that it provided academic freedom in so far as they got to choose what they shared, it helped them think more about what they did over the course of a year from a holistic standpoint, it was consistent and organized, and finally, it provided the opportunity and time to sit down and have a one-on-one conversation with their dean. Several said they thought that, as faculty got used to the process, it would become easier.

**Findings**

To determine how full-time faculty and deans at Coast College perceived the new evaluation process in the area of pedagogical practice, the researcher chose to use Fink’s (2013) six dimensions of learning to provide a framework through which the findings could be explored. Analysis of the archival documents defined both a rationale and expectations for each dimension. The table below identifies how the analysis aligned the competencies within the teaching ePortfolio to the dimensions of learning.

**Table 2**

*Alignment of teaching ePortfolio competencies to Fink’s (2013) dimensions of learning.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Learning</th>
<th>Connection to Evaluation Process</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundational Knowledge</td>
<td>Content Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Instructional Strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By triangulating the data from the archival documents, participant interviews, and the teaching
ePortfolios and evaluations, the following themes emerged through the process of analysis:

Table 3

*Alignment of emerging themes to Fink’s (2013) dimensions of learning.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Learning</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundational</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum Currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Use of External Sources to Maintain Currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping Students to Understand Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Application</strong></td>
<td>Teaching Methodologies that Promote Active Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting Higher Order Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of Technology to Enhance Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Communication with Students with Meaningful Feedback</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Supporting Students and Encouraging Student Use of Appropriate College Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integration</strong></td>
<td>Pride in Active Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Comments Drive Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Alone Drives Defensiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Human Dimension</strong></td>
<td>Building Consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with Peers to Improve Student Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process Needs to be Ongoing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Meaningful Conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joy of Learning</td>
<td>Fear and Lack of Connection to Meaning Stifles Joy of Learning</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to See the Results Used to Promote Growth and Change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection is the Key to Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life-Long Learning</td>
<td>Setting Goals to Improve Student Success</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration Helps Develop Better Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Foundational knowledge.** Fink’s (2013) dimension of foundational knowledge describes criteria that focus on understanding and remembering information and ideas. Within the archival documents, the expectations for foundational knowledge were aligned to the fundamental professional tasks of faculty members that allowed them to be effective in their classroom: curriculum development and content knowledge. Examples identified include: formal and informal education that show currency of knowledge, scholarship in the discipline areas, course assessment alignment with student work examples, new textbook integration, course assignments that promote active learning and student achievement of course outcomes, use of syllabi, and course development and revision. Through the data analysis the following three themes emerged within this dimension: (a) curriculum currency; (b) use of external sources to maintain their and their courses’ currency; and (c) helping students understand expectations.

**Curriculum currency.** In regards to curriculum development, the archival documents suggested that faculty should provide examples of teaching materials, syllabi, and be actively involved in the curriculum development and review process. Despite that, during the interviews, one faculty member said they felt it was hard to find the time to commit to developing curriculum beyond the fundamentals; all eight faculty participants provided written examples within their ePortfolios on how they maintain their courses and curriculum; only two, however provided attachments, both of which were syllabi. For several, the written descriptions were
simply factual statements to the effect of: “I review and update my classes every semester based on both the course outline and the results of the previous semester;” “textbooks are current and updated / practices in discipline are added accordingly;” or “I develop and utilize organized course syllabi, handouts.” One went so far as to discuss a new tool he began incorporating for case study interventions after the previous tool was no longer available.

During the interviews a couple of the faculty provided additional examples. One explained how her reflection helped her make changes:

One of the classes we took online. . . this is the first time we've offered it in the summer online. When I was setting up the standard course I went, "Oh my god." They have like 15 assignments to do every week, and I'm like, there's no way. . .I cut back a few things, since I think they were being over-assessed.

Another faculty member discussed how a team of faculty had been reviewing their capstone course, which focuses on taking the practice exam for licensing. This participant said that he felt that the more they analyzed it, the better chances students had at passing the exam, so it was worth it. On the other hand, not everyone had a similar experience. One faculty member expressed how his ePortfolio showed only the bare minimum because he felt the questions did not adequately address the skills he was required to have within his skilled profession.

When discussing the depth and quality of faculty reflections during the interviews, one dean mentioned that he considered them too brief and that there was “not a lot of action to back up what they were implicating.” That said, most deans and program directors did not include statements reflecting faculty contributions regarding the curriculum currency dimension within the evaluation itself, except for one, who kept things very factual. He used phrases like, “She is always current in her knowledge . . . is continually updating her courses to reflect the latest
information” or he “actively seeks to remain up-to-date in his knowledge . . . and is always updating his courses to reflect his gained knowledge in his subject areas.”

**Use of external sources to maintain currency.** In regards to content knowledge, the archival documents described that faculty members should demonstrate mastery of discipline-specific knowledge. In their teaching ePortfolios, the faculty used external sources to improve the currency of their courses and to demonstrate their competency in the field. Three of the faculty named specific courses they had updated as part of the college’s online curriculum revitalization efforts, “using the Quality Matters (QM) standards and rubric” to enhance opportunities for student learning. The professional development training that went along with these revitalization efforts was referred to during the interviews, with faculty regarding the process as leading to a better product and giving the deans a better idea of what a good course should look like. One faculty member mentioned that he hoped that what he gained from this professional development would help him acquire new knowledge, new teaching techniques, and new approaches to help revamp his courses. Another said that curriculum design was the biggest area he wanted to work on. One dean mentioned this work within one of his evaluations, noting the faculty member’s active participation in the QM process as a developer and also a peer reviewer.

In their ePortfolios, two faculty members discussed surveying similar courses across the nation to make sure their courses were comparable in content, expectations, and use of technology. Many mentioned talking to industry experts and reading literature to stay abreast of current tools as methods they used to keep their programs and courses up-to-date. Finally, three faculty highlighted publications and presentations in their fields that spoke to their currency in their area of expertise, one, which was based specifically upon the curriculum changes they had
been making. Only one dean discussed this idea during the interview, but he said that the process had reinforced for him that, although he was no longer actively involved in the field, he needed “to know what is going on, to make sure that our courses are providing the knowledge that students need, and . . . [to make] sure the faculty are staying current with stuff too.”

**Helping students understand expectations.** In further regards to content knowledge, the archival documents described that faculty members should demonstrate expertise in facilitating student learning by conveying curriculum-defined concepts in a manner that facilitates the students’ ability to understand and apply concepts. Half of the faculty ePortfolios discussed methods they used to help their students understand expectations or improve the quality of their learning. Only one did so in a matter-of-fact manner stating, “I feel I have sufficient knowledge of the subject matter and explain it well to the students.” During the interviews, one participant mentioned that she was challenged when faced with writing down how she accomplished this. The rest discussed specific methodology within their ePortfolios such as providing links to further reading to facilitate deeper understanding of concepts or expounding upon topics, providing additional material for consideration within discussion posts, or creating interactive study guides to facilitate review. One faculty member wrote, “At the beginning of each course, I invite students in to look around the course so that they will know what to expect (prior to the official start). I post an introduction, explain how to begin the course, and how to best approach the course for success.” During the interviews one faculty member expressed that her professional development goals usually focused on how to make her courses more interactive and evidence-based. Another said the evaluation process helped make her “accountable to staying on top of new information and making sure that my students are getting it and being able to deliver it in the best manner possible.”
Application. Fink’s (2003) dimension of application highlights skills, thinking, and managing projects. The expectations for application within the archival documents were based on alignment to the college mission and how faculty support student success through pedagogical practice, using instructional strategies, technology and course tools, and student engagement strategies within their class. Faculty expertise in pedagogical practice is intended to be showcased in the ePortfolio through uploaded artifacts that align to the major learning outcomes of courses that exhibit an ability to convey concepts, using a diversity of instructional materials and methods that facilitate student learning. Because only 50% of the faculty and deans surveyed by the college Evaluation Committee stated that the former process helped improve teaching, the new expectations were designed to provide clearer pedagogical expectations, so that the collaborative conversation part of the evaluation could focus on professional development within these areas (Committee, 2013, p.3). Through the data analysis, the following five themes emerged: (a) use of teaching methodologies that promote active learning; (b) organization and delivery of material that promotes higher order critical thinking; (c) use of technology to enhance their teaching; (d) active communication with students with meaningful feedback; and (e) supporting students and encouraging student use of appropriate college services.

Teaching methodologies that promote active learning. Though no faculty members uploaded artifacts to support their reflections, all faculty members and two of the deans addressed the topic of active learning within the ePortfolios and interviews. Most faculty simply listed methodologies used, such as discussion board interactions, asking students to dig deeper in their reflections, group work assignments, hands-on activities, or incorporating case studies to determine best treatment options. However, several provided detailed explanations of their
activities: “group presentations where students have to identify a social problem in their community, find evidence to support their contention, and locate appropriate information to help devise a solution;” “present an argument supported by credible research and apply what they’ve learned during the semester using the Purdue Owl writing lab;” and “find and evaluate a peer-reviewed article that presents the results of a study then present the analysis using WebEx and hold a conversation with at least two other students on the topic.”

Student engagement strategies were also a high priority for both deans and faculty members. During the interviews, one dean explained:

We are constantly trying to come up with new ways to engage students. To abandon the talking off the top of your head, spilling your knowledge for an hour and a half, and expecting students to pick up what they can, to getting more of an interactive, hands-on learning experience for the students.

During his interview, one faculty member who did not provide many details in his ePortfolio explained that for active learning, he focused more upon the atmosphere within his labs: “When the students are enjoying, their mood is upbeat, they're engaged. . .I tend to see them understand things more.” Another faculty member explained how lecturing has gone by the wayside, and he said he just tries to engage his students in conversations. Methodologies discussed within the faculty ePortfolios included evidence-based online educational strategies, relating the activities to the professional workplace, and faculty working with their peers to create activities.

Finally, connecting methodologies to student success was discussed. One dean wrote prolifically within his evaluation on how his faculty member’s teaching techniques, course design, and student support were entirely geared to her students’ success in her courses. Another dean, during the interview, mentioned the importance of aligning professional development to
helping faculty members do a better job in the classroom. These ideas were comparable to the faculty members noting that they look for new strategies supporting student success and leading to greater engagement and retention. Several mentioned aligning new assignments with course outcomes to ensure students are learning what is expected.

**Promoting higher order critical thinking.** In regards to critical thinking, faculty members focused on the ideas of choice and depth within active learning assignments. In the ePortfolio reflections phrases such as “outside the box” and “food for thought” were used. Within the assignments mentioned, students were allowed to choose their own research topics and provide their perspective on their own work and that of others. Faculty encouraged students to integrate their perspectives with evidence-based research to support their points, and they asked leading questions to probe ideas further and push students towards inference and analysis-levels of thinking. One faculty member provided the text of an email that she received from a student as evidence:

> I loved all the scenarios that were given to us. It made us have to step back and make some pretty challenging decisions. I loved that this class challenged my mind, and had me think outside the box. . . There was so much information that I learned it is hard to pinpoint a specific topic.

In their interviews, faculty members discussed how they primarily thought about what was happening in their classes. One stated specifically that by having to reflect on their classes, they were able to see what worked for students, which assignments were not working, and what changes needed to be made.

**Use of technology to enhance teaching.** In the teaching ePortfolios, every faculty member identified some form of technology they used within their courses, ranging from basic
PowerPoints and web links to the use of interactive video and discipline-specific software. During her interview, one faculty member discussed revamping her course by integrating different technologies in response to hearing that her students felt overwhelmed by the amount of material they had to learn. By using a form of adaptive software, she was hoping to provide additional support for her students. Several expressed that they constantly reviewed technology to ensure students were engaging with the best product on the market that could support their success. Over half provided specific details in their teaching ePortfolios that explained the functionality of using the software to support student learning. StatCrunch provided math students with the ability to apply concepts learned within real-life scenarios. Camtasia, YouTube, and audio-enhanced slide capture in PowerPoint were used to provide weekly online summaries, teachable moments, and testing of review materials. One dean highlighted the breadth and use of technology by his faculty member within the evaluation, both within her courses and to communicate with students individually.

**Active communication with students with meaningful feedback.** Within their teaching ePortfolios, every faculty member described how they actively communicated with their students and provided feedback. For many, communication relied on asynchronous formats such as email or discussion posts, but every once in a while, they used the phone or Skype chats. Communication was considered an important component of student success. As one faculty member described, “Showing our students that we are engaged by reaching out to them shows that we care about their performance.” Another created weekly emails to ensure students were aware of deadlines and expectations. Most said they maintained a 24-hour turnaround for all student communication. The most interesting communication story occurred during a faculty interview where the participant described a commitment she made one semester to respond to
every single discussion board post. Though she said the process was unsustainable, she noted how student engagement within the class soared: “Students crave engagement. My SSI scores bloomed that semester.”

Assignment feedback was similarly discussed within the ePortfolios. Most faculty members provided feedback through rubrics or through the online grading platform within a week from submission, though one used video commentary as a primary means. Faculty used phrases such as “copious,” “extensive,” or “detailed” to describe their commitment to communicating and providing feedback. This was supported by a student email that one faculty member included that said the instructor was “always quick to answer any questions I came up with and always had helpful responses and feedback.” For another faculty member, the pace of returning feedback was important, as the assignments built upon one another, and, without feedback, the students would not be able to make improvements in future assignments. She noted that in her SSI comments students were appreciative of the amount of time she spent within the course discussions and the effort she put forth on providing feedback.

Other faculty members provided links to additional resources to help their students make improvements. One even included feedback on the professionalism of their students’ writing, noting that if their work was “poorly developed, poorly proofed, or incomplete, I asked them to think about how the work would be received in the workplace.” The importance of providing feedback went beyond just helping students. One dean noted in her interview that she considered that the level of feedback her faculty provided to students also allowed them to see what was working or not working in their classes.

**Supporting students and encouraging student use of appropriate college services.**

During his interview, one dean noted that the evaluation process gave faculty the opportunity to
share some of their outreach efforts with students. Within the teaching ePortfolios, faculty members identified their office hours, their engagement hours in the learning centers, and their referrals to college services as means to support their students. One faculty member began hosting synchronous chat sessions online that she recorded and made available for student viewing. Two of the faculty evaluations highlighted contributions in this area, noting faculty member’s availability “during open labs as well as after hours to assist student in their learning” or “going above and beyond by staying after hours to assist students.”

During his interview, one faculty member commented that supporting students varies from semester to semester due to the diversity of their needs and expectations. A couple faculty members noted in their reflections that support of students requires compassionate understanding of student lives, accommodating work schedules, and using a variety of teaching methodologies to reach varied learning styles. One faculty member wrote, “Checking in with students and having compassion in situations/events that arise shows that we are human and understand the work/life/school balance. . . Students really appreciate when we are willing to help them instead of punish them.” Referrals made included the online Learning Commons, General Education advisors when students did not have information about courses outside their discipline, English as a Second Language support, Learning Centers, BayCare, and Accessibility Services. One faculty member went so far as to include an entire module within her course that outlined each of the services available for students, along with contact information.

**Integration.** Fink’s (2003) dimension of integration focuses upon making connections between ideas, people, and life. Per the archival documents, the expectations for integration take into account the work that faculty members do to support the college and the community that enhance teaching and learning, as well as student success. They include an expectation of
faculty members using the analysis of data to guide their professional growth. The college Evaluation Committee survey noted that 90% of faculty and deans desired to create a common understanding on how to use the data so that it could become a starting point for conversation within the evaluation tool (Committee, 2013, p.8). The general recommendation of the evaluation committee suggested that faculty could showcase their competency in these areas through: participation in college-wide committees, active involvement with colleagues within one’s discipline or in cross-discipline initiatives, membership in or contributions to professional organizations, utilization of community resources to enhance the classroom experience, participation in community events, and use of data to reflect on and improve teaching practices, including SSI and Success Rates. Triangulated data analysis uncovered the following three themes within this area: (a) pride in active engagement; (b) student comments drive change; and (c) data alone drives defensiveness.

**Pride in active engagement.** Every faculty member, except one, provided a wealth of examples of their engagement in college, department, professional, and community activities; the evaluation provided specific sections for them to include these activities. The one faculty member who did not provide data in this section commented during his interview that he was so new to the profession that his ePortfolio really was not very strong and that he did not have many things to input yet. Three mentioned their reasons for their engagement, citing the importance of staying on top of what is being discussed around the college and helping provide insight on curriculum quality and delivery strategies. During the interviews, one faculty member explained: “I think the more you keep up with things and the more you are involved with the college and the community, the better faculty /person you will be.” In both of his evaluations
that the researcher analyzed, one dean shared positive comments on the commitment his faculty had to the college.

Within the written context of the teaching ePortfolios and associated evaluations, however, information shared was limited. The interviews provided a much more detailed and richer understanding of the faculty members’ perspectives regarding how their engagement had evolved. For the most part, faculty and deans seemed appreciative of the evaluation tool taking into consideration a more holistic spectrum of faculty contributions. One faculty member said, “I think it’s a great way that showcases service to college, community service, those types of things, that got shortchanged before.” Another said that having to speak to how she contributed to the college mission was the most meaningful section for her, and she kept referring back to it, stating that it prompted her reflection and encouraged her to take into account not just what she did, but how she served and how she was growing. One dean said that he felt it helped provide a more rounded perspective on faculty who were hoping to achieve continuing contracts. Another dean countered this and said that, for long-standing faculty members who were already on continuing contract, it held a lot less meaning.

**Student comments drive change.** Faculty provided thorough descriptions within their ePortfolio reflections and their interviews on how they used student feedback within their courses and from their course evaluations to drive change. In many cases, the change occurred as a result of students expressing frustration. One faculty member noted in her interview that, when she gets the same question about an assignment from more than one student, even if she thinks the instructions are clear, she remembers that she has to “step out of [my] shoes and into a student mindset.” Another noted that many students frequently seemed overwhelmed by the program content before they even got started, so she thought about adding links throughout the
program courses so they could see how certain outcomes would develop across the courses. In one ePortfolio, a faculty member noted that students were concerned about differences in assessments across faculty members, and he told the student he planned to talk to his peers about inter-rater reliability using the rubrics. A fourth faculty member noted low scores within the area of group work, and even though she was teaching an online class, she discussed options with students that she could use such as multi-member video conferencing or online chat groups, as long as she could work out ADA compliance issues.

With courses that had traditionally gone well but suddenly had different results, faculty found themselves delving into student comments to figure out why. One faculty member wrote, “Interestingly, this was the first semester I can remember that my online courses had higher scores than my face-to-face.” Another faculty member shared in her interview that “the quantity of data has led me to qualitative data.” Many participants said that, when they tried something new, they would take the time to let their students know why: “We added this module to better prepare you. Then we see what kind of input we get from them. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don’t.” Another mentioned, “I’m not sure why this happened, but next time I can focus on it and try to do it better. It’s always a learning process and a tool I grow from.” In the ePortfolio, one faculty member wrote, “My classes seemed overwhelmed by the quantity of work . . . I have changed the number of quizzes and assignments. Hopefully this will be helpful.” One dean mentioned in his interview that, when he reviews faculty reflections concerning student feedback, it reinforces how everything they do goes back to their commitment to student success. Another dean commented on how she appreciated that faculty stopped to think about what they did, determined what worked or did not, and made plans for improvement.
And when it worked, the faculty expressed their gratitude. One faculty member in her interview noted:

I did decide to focus on my capstone students, on their SSI's, because I kind of felt ... I looked at my tools, which is my first class that I have with our students, and I wanted to see how they felt. I will say at least for the last capstone I taught, I was very pleased. I did get a huge sense of gratification with the fact that across the board they all gave me sevens, in almost all categories.

Another in her ePortfolio said, “my scores reflected that I made a concerted effort to be even more present in my courses.” A third wrote about how gratified he was to see the positive results in his course evaluations because he felt he taught one of the hardest courses in the program and had been expecting poor student reviews. Finally, one faculty member wrote that “comments from students that reflect that I have touched their lives/learning process in some way [are] very energizing to me.” In their evaluations of faculty members, only one of the deans made specific references to data, stating that “overwhelmingly, glowing feedback in the SSIs indicates their grateful appreciation for her and their courses.”

**Data alone drives defensiveness.** Whereas reflecting on student comments seemed to create an open-minded venue for considering change, looking at the data alone did not result in the same level of commitment from the faculty to improve. In their ePortfolios, faculty members noted differences amongst the students, and in some cases, they wondered about the reasons contributing to this, such as time of enrollment. None of the reflections included possible changes they would make based on data alone. Instead they provided explanations that focused on the students’ behavior, such as them being unprepared for the scope and work of the course, unwilling to commit to what is required, not following through with tutoring recommendations,
not placing a priority on their education, or taking too many courses. When asked about this
during their interviews, one faculty member mentioned that he learns much more from his
students during his labs than by looking at the scores. Another mentioned, “I’m not sure that
actual data is very helpful. You don’t have the comments from the data.” Others suggested that
the section was difficult because it was the first time they ever had to look at the data. Another
said that when he looked at the data, he felt he either had to agree or disagree with it.

The deans and program directors, on the other hand, seemed to appreciate being able to
see all the data in one concise place. One said in her interview, “Now I’ve got this person’s five
classes. I can see their success.” Another dean said that having all that data imported into their
teaching ePortfolio allows faculty to not only see what is going well and what is not, but also to
identify the outliers so they could talk about them during their evaluation conversation. One of
the deans suggested that the faculty who had been at the college longer seemed to be able to do a
better job reflecting than the newer ones who were still on a learning curve. Another said that
how faculty members approach their reflections in this area is an indicator of how the evaluation
meeting will go and the amount of feedback that will be required.

**Human dimension.** Fink’s (2003) human dimension focuses on learning about oneself
and others. Within the faculty evaluation, this dimension looks specifically at changing the
conversation that takes place between the faculty and evaluator. Based on the college Evaluation
Committee’s survey of the faculty members and the deans, 60% said the process supported the
continued growth of the faculty and 90% stated that the interaction was positive (Committee,
2013, p2-3). Additionally, 90% observed that the process could be improved through training
both parties on how to conduct evaluations, interpret data, provide meaningful feedback, and set
collaborative goals (Committee, 2013 p.8). Furthermore, 60% of faculty members and deans
involved in the survey felt that further conversation needed to take place in order to construct a shared context on what influences student success, what should be focused on during class observations, and ways to make the evaluation conversation a collaborative rather than a punitive planning session (Committee, 2013 p.9). Consequently, the expectations for this dimension focused on developing interpersonal skills, the collaborative conversation, observations, and building collaboration. Though not explicitly stated within the teaching ePortfolio tool, skills identified as important in the training and discussions included: teamwork, professional conscientiousness, altruism, social effectiveness with others, self-awareness, building rapport, fostering communication, and use of diplomacy. Through data analysis in this area, the following themes emerged: (a) building consensus; (b) working with peers to improve student learning; (c) process needs to be ongoing; (d) meaningful conversation.

**Building consensus.** The idea of having some form of common understanding was discussed in the interviews by all evaluators, except for one dean and two members of the faculty. The faculty reported that having a shared expectation made the conversation much easier and pleasant and that it allowed them to approach the process as a shared learning experience with constructive feedback, not as criticism. The program directors expressed that beginning with discussions on what is important and including this feedback within the ePortfolio allows everyone to speak the same language. Of the two deans, one discussed how important it was to lead those faculty members that might struggle with self-confidence at a pace that was comfortable for them. The other emphasized that encouraging faculty to highlight items they felt were most significant provided insight into what kind of professional development would be most productive for them.
**Working with peers to improve student learning.** Four faculty members and one program director discussed the importance of working with their peers to put together their ePortfolios. Whether this involved being a leader encouraging peers to use new methodologies, or working as a group of peers to develop new teaching materials, the faculty said that having all faculty members within a program on the same page was an important factor for student success. During the interviews, two more faculty members expressed support for similar ideas. Both said that the evaluation tool held considerable potential to serve as a starting point to hold departmental conversations on good teaching practices. One stated, “We have an opportunity to use this tool within the faculty body as a way to start some good discussions about how we teach, how we are able to reach our students.” One program director vaguely referred to the importance of working together in the evaluation process, mentioning the value of the faculty member’s contribution to departmental projects, calling her a “true team player.”

**Process needs to be ongoing.** In regards to how the process was handled in the various departments, perceptions were varied. Faculty and deans in two areas commented that they held conversations together throughout the year, so the formal evaluation conversation became more of a time to look specifically at items that faculty wanted to talk about and professional development opportunities. One dean said, “We see each other every day so we have conversations about what is happening all the time. I think that makes a huge difference.” Her faculty member concurred stating, “She doesn’t wait until evaluation time to check in with you. She comes to our offices every week to see if we need anything.” This was in stark contrast to a faculty member who noted that the conversation was more along the lines of “let’s go through this, get it done, and mark it completed.” Another faculty member said they wished there could be more time for the meeting since creating the ePortfolio took so much time and very little was
able to be shared face-to-face. One program director admitted that he used a two-tiered system, where newer faculty got more attention than the more veteran instructors. And one of the deans commented that, in some cases, this was the only opportunity they had to speak one-on-one with their faculty members, other than in passing.

Many faculty members expressed concerns about the length of time between completing the teaching ePortfolio and the scheduling of the conversation, wishing it was more immediate. One faculty member shared, “When I had my evaluation, I was asked if I had gone back and read what I wrote. Being honest, I said no. It was like, out of sight, out of mind.” This inconsistency was described by three of the evaluators, admitting they had waited until the last minute to schedule the appointments and that they hoped to do better the following year.

Several of the faculty members expressed their desire to have more feedback included in the process, either through classroom visitation or simply by not having the same evaluation conversation every year. Interestingly, one of the deans from a different discipline concurrently commented, “The evaluation is not as beneficial for both parties if we just keep talking about the same things over and over again.” They were looking for more administrative feedback, rather than relying mainly on student comments. One faculty member described it by saying: “There's not really so much in there about what any person at a supervisory level from the college thinks about the class or thinks about the individual teacher.” Another genuinely wanted feedback by being observed in class by someone who really understood their particular field. In contrast, one of the program directors said the teaching ePortfolio provided far more insight into the faculty’s style of teaching than she would have acquired sitting in a classroom for one period.

**Meaningful conversation.** Despite several faculty members mentioning their fears of having to defend themselves during the conversation or that no one might actually review the
work they put into their teaching ePortfolio, the vast majority of faculty, deans, and program directors commented that the conversation was the most meaningful part of the evaluation process. The reasons provided by faculty included the quality feedback the one-on-one session provided, the collaborative nature of the conversation, hearing what they were doing right and wrong, and the joint creation of the professional development plan. One faculty member said, “The biggest thing that I got from it was when I got a chance to discuss with my supervisor, that they could tell me what I was doing right or wrong.” The evaluators commented on the value of being able to see so much of what a faculty member had done, gaining an understanding of what faculty considered was significant, the collaborative nature of the conversation, and the ability to begin to identify where they could better support their faculty. According to one program director, “The person who seems to benefit the most is the evaluator. . . I can look at more of what they’ve done and that helps me provide a better evaluation.” One faculty member explained that using the template of the teaching ePortfolio to guide the conversation helped the conversation look at the bigger picture, “making the program director see a more well-rounded faculty member.” In the words of a different program director, using the teaching ePortfolio provided depth to the conversation:

The teaching ePortfolio is much more robust. In the past, I think we were a little guilty of ... as long as you weren't having problems with a class, it tended to be a very short conversation. I think with the teaching ePortfolio, you have a much more complete and thorough conversation.

Though several of the evaluators and faculty expressed how they felt it was important for faculty to drive the direction of the conversation, using phrases such as, “I pretty much let them steer the conversation,” a couple of the newer faculty said they wished their dean or program
director “took a more proactive approach, rather than the faculty member coming in saying here’s what I think we should talk about.” However, both faculty and evaluators discussed the overall collaborative nature of the process during the interviews. Ideas on this topic ranged from simply noting “everything is back and forth” and “it was a very collaborative conversation with my dean,” to tying the conversation back to the professional development plan. One faculty member noted that the conversation usually ended with her describing her professional development plan and her dean asking what was needed from her. This idea of the evaluator asking how they can assist at the end of the conversation was common in the processes used by all of the evaluators and, and all of the faculty commented on this dynamic. One faculty member cited this as the reason the process was so worthwhile: “It was very positive because it’s a two-directional process. Now you actually have faculty and program administration working together on evaluations versus a program director basically giving one-way feedback.” Another stated, “I think you should walk in with the idea that this is a collaboration or hey, this is what you do well. This might be where you need improvement.” One faculty member went so far as to comment that the college should continue to frame the process to new and reluctant faculty as a tool that aims to enhance their “professional growth and [make] connections to student success.”

Finally, the one area where discrepancy arose between faculty perspectives within the conversation concerned the use of data. Some faculty said the dialogue was more meaningful because the data no longer had to be pulled: “Now we have something to look at and talk about. . . I think the data helps drive the conversation.” Others said the volume of data was “just too overwhelming” and “time consuming.” For the evaluators, however, it provided an efficient way to acquire an overview and identify areas for discussion. One program director explained:
I can go through each faculty member and click through and see what it says. This person is predominately sixes and above, okay, they're doing fine ... Oh, but I can also see how many responses they had. Oh, they only had two responses. Maybe we need to go back and do something about it. Or, this person's in the fours. I've got some concerns. Thus, the data provided different levels of usefulness for different groups.

**Joy of learning.** Fink’s (2003) dimension on caring or joy of learning focuses upon developing new interests, feelings, or values. The archival documents described this dimension as providing faculty with the having the opportunity to share the types of continuing education they chose to participate in, as well as the activities they engaged in within the community and in their fields. They also recommended that faculty record what they learned from meeting their previous year’s goals. During the data analysis of the ePortfolios and evaluations, three themes aligned with this dimension emerged: (a) fear and lack of connection to meaning stifles the joy of learning; (b) desire to see the process used to drive change and promote growth in a broader way; and (c) reflection is the key to change.

**Fear and lack of connection to meaning stifles the joy of learning.** Having developed a shared context of the components that defined measureable faculty contributions, the archival documents recorded the expectation that faculty members would identify areas to grow and develop that they had chosen during the year. Despite the foundation of common ground, four of the faculty and one program director wrote about how fear or lack of meaning in the process held them back. The faculty articulated this by writing, for example, “I was afraid it would reflect negatively on me;” and “It would be a representation of my success or failure.” One participant described feeling like, “Oh my God. I’m going to lose my job after I complete this.” The program director agreed, noting, “I just think a lot of faculty members feel like they are being
looked at under a microscope in a judgmental way.” That said, eight of the nine faculty members included specific references to continuing education they completed during the year, seven took the time to list a wide variety in detail. Each of them listed their involvement with trainings on the course revitalization effort and their participation in college-sponsored professional development opportunities. Seven documented participation in external professional development directly related to their fields, and several noted the course or challenge they were trying to use the training to improve. Six supported various community-based organizations such as Rotary, Special Olympics, and the Department of Elder Affairs.

The one faculty member who did not include participating in continuing education shared during his interview that he was working on his Master’s in Curriculum Development to help build his teaching skills. He admitted that his evaluator viewed the process as a check box, and so his ePortfolio was not strong, the process was not very valuable, and he mainly just filled it in. One dean clearly expressed that the process needed to be meaningful for faculty members to see its value and to take the time to reflect and share their contributions. One of the program directors also said that some faculty, especially those who had been teaching for a longer period of time, seemed less inclined to do anything beyond the bare minimum. A long-time faculty member corroborated this, stating that she knew the document would not be read by that many people, so she kept it short. Another stated, “I truly believe that people will put down what they are doing if they see how it benefits them, their job, and their students.”

**Desire to see the process used to drive change and promote growth in a larger way.**

Despite fear on how their personal teaching ePortfolio may be used against them in some way, many faculty members expressed that the true value of the process would emerge when and if the college used it in some way to drive change. One faculty member explained that she focused
mainly on processes that she helped improve because she wanted “people to understand what’s working or not and how we could approach things differently to become a team instead of separate people working within the same department.” Another faculty member described the process as “a gold mine of data” that the college should be using to identify not only all the areas in which faculty were contributing, but also to recognize where the common challenges, barriers, and stressors existed to help faculty improve student success. Several faculty members took this idea one step further, suggesting that the process could be used to drive cross-departmental conversations on successful strategies that used by the faculty. One faculty member described how “talking to different faculty member at times gives me insight into how to do some different things.” A couple even brought up the idea of faculty mentoring, having experienced it themselves at different institutions. The goal of these suggestions was clearly to shape the process so that it could used to effectively drive change, as one faculty member stated:

I want people to actually read it and not just, Oh, this person's done it. Let's move on. I want them to read it. I want them to ... Where there are suggestions or ideas for change, I want them to actually take it to heart. I want it to come out to where it's a tool that's being used to improve faculty development. It's a tool that's being used to better guide, not discipline.

To get to this point, however, many of the faculty members stated that the institution and evaluators needed to do a better job framing how “it can be used for your professional development and making connections to student success,” because without that frame it was too easy to get caught up in not wanting to complete the ePortfolio.

**Reflection is the key to change.** The archival documents identified that this dimension focused on the ability of faculty to reflect on what they learned from their continuing education
and professional growth opportunities, and how these contributed to student success. During the interviews, the deans and program directors said the process brought out deeper thoughts. One dean said he thought the faculty had “kind of been on autopilot for so long that they hadn’t really considered what they do and how it affects things.” Another stated that “the reflection period is really, really good for them,” while a third noted that “it’s hard for them to keep in mind that the college is bigger than just their classroom, and it’s helpful in that respect.” They did note, however, that the depth of reflection varied among the ePortfolios they reviewed, with one dean putting it succinctly: “For the ones who were thoughtful in their reflection, I think it was a good experience.” One of the program directors agreed, noting how the process provided faculty members with “an opportunity to view themselves and their teaching in a very holistic manner,” but that achieving this depended upon whether or not they chose to avail themselves of the opportunity.

When the faculty discussed their reflective processes, they often concurred with the deans and program directors, commenting, for example, that the process “was an opportunity for a reflection, which I really did like;” “reflecting was good;” or they explained how they acquired “a whole picture of what we do at the college.” They tended to connect these reflections back to how the process affected them or how they hoped it would help them. One faculty member noted that she spent the whole year thinking about what she could use to support the different sections in the ePortfolio, and she stated “it makes you more aware of what you’re doing for student success. You are constantly looking for ways you go above and beyond.” Another said she hoped that what she put down in her ePortfolio as goals would help make her a more efficient educator in developing critical thinking skills.
In the ePortfolios, the faculty did indeed tie their reflections on their professional development back to student success strategies in at least one of their goals, if not more. The most common goal listed focused on course revitalization. In the words of one faculty member:

I think that the most impactful goal has to do with the revitalization of courses. This will be a huge benefit for students and an important strategy for student success. I find that it is also energizing and inspirational. I am learning a great deal about online learning strategies and ways to improve student learning and course success.

Another faculty member said she felt excited about working with graphic artists to create more engaging assignments since her SSIs continually reflected that she did not vary her assignments. One faculty member even tied her reflection to increases in student success rates that she had been tracking on her revitalized courses in an effort to see if she could get her online course success rates to match those of her face-to-face courses.

The other goals the reflections revealed were usually discipline specific, but still often tied learning back to classroom strategies. One faculty member reported that she had finished her doctorate and integrated her new knowledge of evidence-based learning into critical thinking strategies within case study assignments. Another had learned about the changes to the students’ credentialing exam at a national conference and began updating his question banks within courses to better reflect the new expectations.

**Life-long learning.** Fink’s (2003) life-long learning dimension focuses on becoming better faculty and self-directed learners. According to the Evaluation Committee’s survey, only 40% of faculty and deans reported satisfaction with the faculty professional development plan (Committee, 2013, p.4). The new process was designed to have faculty and evaluators use what was discussed through the reflections within the teaching ePortfolio to collaboratively identify
specific areas in which professional development could improve teaching and student success. Areas that were identified as important included scholarship, continuing education, discipline-related community involvement, contributions to college initiatives, and pedagogical improvements. The expectations of the plan outlined a timeline for meeting measurable goals that were reflective of effectiveness of instruction, student success, college and departmental initiatives, and/or personal goals. The two themes that evolved from the data analysis for this dimension were: (a) setting goals to improve student success; and (b) collaboration helps develop better goals.

**Setting goals to improve student success.** Within their ePortfolios, all faculty set goals for the upcoming year, except for one. The faculty expressed that they felt conflicted in their abilities to create solid goals. One said she was grateful to have the teaching ePortfolio to help with this task, saying, “You might not have thought of all of the areas without the different sections that are in the faculty evaluation now.” Another stated that “when you reflect more, you set better goals for yourself.”

Whereas some faculty members connected their goals directly to identified areas of improvement, others had more difficulty and a disconnect existed between these two concepts. Those that made the connection continued to do so during their interviews. For example, one faculty member discussed in her interview how her professional development was focused more on her role as an academic chair and her desire to understand managing budgets better. This was expressed again as an identified area of improvement, and she set a goal for training in budget management. Though her goal did not tie directly to student success, she identified within her ePortfolio that she felt confident in both her teaching and support of faculty. Another faculty member said during his interview that he felt confident in his ability to engage students but that
he needed to work on curriculum design. He stated that “most of my professional development stuff is looking at trying to improve my general teaching skills or habits because I don’t come from a teaching background.” Within his ePortfolio he identified organization and last minute course preparation as areas to work on and set goals on providing better instruction and adjusting projects and rubrics based on student feedback.

Others revealed a disconnection between the areas they seemed to want to focus on improving and the goals they set. For example, one faculty member identified wanting to find a better approach for group projects and incorporating videos that were ADA compliant, so she set the goal of revitalizing two courses over the year. Interestingly, however, throughout her interview, she expressed that she felt quite positive about the progress she was making on her courses and preferred to focus her upcoming growth on areas that would improve the department as a whole. Another faculty member who identified improvement areas in her ePortfolio of organization and collaboration only addressed course improvement in the goals section. The need for course revitalization played a heavy role in goal setting and interview discussions amongst the faculty, but for some, even if their goals made a token nod towards the idea by identifying when their next course would be completed, their goals tended to focus on other areas such as publication, conference attendance, and meeting departmental priorities.

In reflecting on the support provided to faculty in the area of goal setting, both program directors and two deans said it was important for them to offer some guidelines or expectations so that faculty could understand what to put in their professional growth plans. One program director actually created a template that listed certain things that every plan should include; the other bemoaned the fact that the old approach of choosing one item from each possible list of components was no longer included. One dean took the lead in the plan development, providing
faculty with a skeleton for them to flesh out further in the reflection section. Other deans said they also thought providing guidance was essential, and one stated, “I think a lot of times they don’t know where they can grow because they’re looking very narrowly.” Another noted, “It’s not just about the individual but also the 25,000 foot level too.” One of the faculty members whose ePortfolio contained a disconnect described during her interview what she thought might be missing from the process:

I think there might be a little disconnect between here is my professional growth plan and being able to demonstrate, in the tool, how it relates to your student success or whatever. . . I think it’s important to identify upfront why you are going to do it. What’s your expectation from that and how are you relating that? Because otherwise, it loses importance.

Focusing upon this type of connection might help faculty members make better connections rather than as one participant suggested “look at what it was asking for, consider what the college might want to hear, and craft up something like that.”

**Collaboration helps develop better goals.** In regards to the level of collaboration that occurred during the development of the growth plan and the setting of goals, faculty and evaluators had very different perspectives. Whereas the deans expressed that the process provided the opportunity to collaborate, most faculty did not articulate the same perspective. The evaluators commonly asserted that “it was collaborative all the way through. . . but then we talk all year long” to “it’s collaborative in terms of setting goals” to “ the conversations were very productive in terms of getting them to collaborate . . . [that] was the best part of the evaluation process for me.” Faculty, on the other hand, expressed ideas such as, “I don’t see it being any more collaborative that anything we’ve done before” or “I didn’t need to collaborate
with anybody, including the dean. . . we just self-evaluate,” and “I didn’t see a lot of collaboration.”

That said, the evaluators discussed how they tried to get faculty to share by asking questions about what they could have done better or what might help the faculty overcome certain challenges noted in the ePortfolios. One dean expressed, “Maybe, for whatever reason, they’re not sharing much. . .that’s when I’d throw out ideas... I want it to be about figuring out where we can help each other.” The evaluation conversation gave the deans and program directors an opportunity to share ideas on professional development that were available at the college. A program director said she used the following words to take advantage of the opportunity to make positive suggestions: “Wow, you haven’t done this yet? I have a list of some things you might want to try. Have you thought about any of these?” Another dean simply asked about opportunities that the faculty members might like to try. This aligned well with one faculty member’s suggestion that she would “love to see where we say this is what I’m going to put in my plan whether it exists or not. Then the college can use that to guide what they do.”

As for setting goals, most faculty members said they felt they accomplished this task on their own. One dean said she tended to guide faculty to include goals that helped develop the department or that supported college initiatives. This was corroborated by one of her faculty members who noted that although “you need to develop the appropriate goals for yourself,” she also felt that she should have taken into account the conversations she had with her dean throughout the year about “adapting how your personal goals can also reflect your departmental goals or college goals.” Though most felt that the evaluation system had not evolved to this point yet, one faculty member expressed it well:
I think you should walk in with the idea that this is a collaboration on what you do well and where you might need improvement. . .Walk in with the attitude that this is a shared learning experience and that it’s constructive feedback not criticism. Finally, another faculty member said she thought that, if the process was not seen as a professional development tool by the faculty, then they were missing the real benefit.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this case study was to probe the perceptions of faculty and their evaluators -- deans and program directors -- on the impact of the new evaluation process implemented to improve pedagogical practices. The teaching ePortfolio was designed to assist faculty members to reflect on their pedagogical practices and student success data in a meaningful and narrative format and to provide a foundation for the collaborative conversation with their evaluator to help identify best practices and guide professional growth. By aligning the data analysis to Fink’s (2013) dimensions of learning, the themes that emerged within each dimension spoke to the areas the faculty defined as the most important contributors to student success. As educators, they focused on areas of curriculum development, building student understanding, active learning, critical thinking, use of technology, active communication and feedback, student support, building consensus, collaboration, and reflection. The areas that presented the greatest challenges for this group included the use of data, fear, and lack of understanding of how the results would be used.

The study took place following the yearlong pilot project implementation; therefore, it was not surprising to identify a wide variety of perceptions and perspectives. That said, both faculty members and evaluators expressed that the collaborative conversation was the most meaningful part of the process, and most said the teaching ePortfolio provided a more holistic
picture of their contributions as faculty members than the previous approach to evaluation.

Many faculty and evaluators provided suggestions on how to improve the process and garner greater buy-in from the faculty as a whole.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

National pressure to improve completion rates in higher education has driven institutions to focus on faculty evaluation tools as a way to account for the role they play in student success (De Rijdt et al., 2006; Seldin et al., 2010). Teaching ePortfolios and Professional Learning Communities (PLC), though touted as being time and effort intensive, may be the vehicle through which significant institutional improvement might take place as colleges and universities shift the focus away from traditional definitions of teaching effectiveness to a new definition of teaching which prioritizes pedagogical practices that improve student learning (Buckridge, 2008). Limited research exists, however, that blends the use of teaching ePortfolios to capture achievements and evidence of effectiveness (Knapper, 1995; Seldin et al., 1995) and PLC conversations between faculty members and their evaluators (Goe et al., 2012; Melville et al., 2014; Stoll et al., 2006). Making an innovative contribution to the literature, this study viewed the combination of these two approaches as a single learning episode, called a Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation (PBFDC).

The purpose of the study was to probe perceptions of faculty members, deans, and program directors regarding the value of using the PBFDC as an evaluation strategy that improves teaching effectiveness and promotes pedagogical changes that champion student learning. Because faculty are closest to students, have the most in-depth knowledge of their learning, and can change their teaching practices to meet the needs of their classroom, their involvement is considered essential to any reform initiative (Grunwald & Peterson, 2003). Therefore, specifically, this study examined the extent to which faculty reported changing anything in their courses, how they planned to interact with students, or if they proposed to seek
professional development to help them achieve their desired changes in response to their involvement in the learning episode.

A case study approach was used first to explore how various sources -- including archival documents, interviews, teaching ePortfolios, and evaluations -- described significant learning and practices directed at advancing student success. Subsequently, the researcher examined the extent to which these descriptions of practice and learning transferred to the faculty members’ professional development or improvement plans. The participants in this study included three deans, spanning liberal arts, workforce, and health programs; two program directors in charge of reviewing adjuncts and full time faculty in liberal arts and health related areas; and nine full time faculty under the purview of these evaluators. Using Fink’s (2013) six dimensions of significant learning to align the findings not only allowed the themes that emerged to showcase the type of learning taking place, but the inter-relational and non-hierarchical structure of Fink’s (2013) model provided insights into how to approach any gaps identified through the analysis.

Finally, the faculty evaluation process in this study involved a two-part dynamic: evidence-based reflection that drives changes in pedagogical practice. Consequently, two frameworks served as lenses for this study: Donald Schön’s (1983) Reflective Practitioner, which poses two forms of critical reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, and Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory, which describes near and far transfer. Though these two theories are discrete, together they provide the necessary insight into the two elements of the PBFDC: the development of the teaching ePortfolio and the PLC conversation. During the development of the teaching ePortfolio, faculty use near transfer when identifying specific practices that align with meeting each faculty competency. As they reflect on their actions, they are expected to self-evaluate on how well their practices support student success.
and growth. During the PLC conversation, faculty reflect-in-action with their dean as they discuss their teaching ePortfolio and work as a team to develop a professional development and improvement plan. If their plan aligns with what was learned during the teaching ePortfolio development and reflects new or improved pedagogical practices that will improve student success, then far transfer has taken place. By viewing the emerging themes through these frameworks and keeping in mind the gaps that might present themselves within Fink’s (2013) dimensions of significant learning, the following findings emerged:

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Frameworks</th>
<th>Dimension of Learning</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schön's Reflection-on-Action - Identifying how one meets competencies &amp; self-evaluation AND Perkins and Salomon's Near Transfer - Reflections that show changes to future pedagogical practices that support student success</td>
<td>Foundational Knowledge</td>
<td>Curriculum Currency</td>
<td>Faculty reflection on their competency of foundational knowledge is perceived as more of a norm or requirement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use of External Sources to Maintain Currency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Helping Students to Understand Expectations</td>
<td>Gaps - Depth of evidence varied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Teaching Methodologies that Promote Active Learning</td>
<td>Faculty members apply pedagogical practices that engage students through active learning and meaningful feedback.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting Higher Order Critical Thinking</td>
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<td>Use of Technology to Enhance Teaching</td>
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<td>Active Communication with Students with Meaningful Feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Supporting Students and Encouraging Student use of Appropriate College Services</td>
<td>No gaps identified.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pride in Active Engagement</td>
<td>Student feedback, not straight data drive faculty change efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Dimension</td>
<td>Schöns Reflection-in-Action - do the goals get discussed and created collaboratively</td>
<td>Joy of Learning</td>
<td>Perkins and Salomon's Far Transfer - do the goals reflect learning from personal reflection outcomes and highlight ways to improve student success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Consensus</td>
<td>Ongoing conversations, built upon shared expectations, are key.</td>
<td>Fear and Lack of Connection to Meaning Stifles Joy of Learning</td>
<td>Reflective process was beneficial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Peers to Improve Student Learning</td>
<td>Process Needs to be Ongoing</td>
<td>Desire to See the Results Used to Promote Growth and Change</td>
<td>Gaps – Faculty desired to see how the institution would use the process to drive change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Conversation</td>
<td>Gaps – Including more peer interaction and continuing to develop shared understanding was needed.</td>
<td>Reflection is the Key to Change</td>
<td>Gaps – Faculty desired to see how the institution would use the process to drive change.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Setting Goals to Improve Student Success</td>
<td>Faculty goals indicate desire to grow professionally but are disconnected from learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration Helps Develop Better Goals</td>
<td>Gaps - The goals were not created collaboratively.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The remainder of this chapter will discuss these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and the literature, identify the limitations of the study, and suggest implications for future practice and recommendations for future study.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Frameworks and Literature: Stage 1**

Within the first stage of the PBFDC evaluation, developing the teaching ePortfolio, faculty were expected to reflect-on-action (Schön, 1983) and have near transfer (Perkins and Salomon, 1992) occur by identifying the pedagogical practices within each competency that they
were using to support student success. Data analysis of the archival documents identified the areas of the ePortfolio that allowed them to do this, which aligned to three of Fink’s (2013) dimensions of significant learning: foundational knowledge, application, and integration. Through an analysis of the themes that developed during the research, three findings emerged, two of which also highlighted gaps that need further attention to ensure faculty and evaluators can have the best experience possible using the new evaluation process. These themes are: (a) faculty reflection on their competency of foundational knowledge is perceived as more of a norm or requirement; (b) reflection on pedagogical practices that engage students highlights faculty commitment to continuous improvement; and (c) student feedback, not straight data, drive faculty change efforts.

**Faculty reflection on their competency of foundational knowledge is perceived as more of a norm or requirement.** Referring to a basic understanding that is necessary for other kinds of learning (Fink, 2013), the data analysis identified emerging themes that highlight Boyer’s (1990) more traditional aspects of faculty activity within the definition of teaching scholarship: discovery and integration. These ideas of maintaining currency, developing curriculum, and supporting student understanding of material are discussed as foundational elements in most teaching ePortfolios (Edgerton et al., 1991; Kaplan, 1998; Knapper, 1995; Major & Palmer, 2002; Seldin, 1982, 1997; Shulman, 1986). Atkinson (2001) helped define this level of learning as the capacity to understand pedagogical literature and content knowledge well enough to translate it into types of teaching activities that will optimize student learning. Therefore, as faculty reflected-on-action within their teaching ePortfolios on currency and curriculum development, each one referred to using various external sources to support their curriculum development such as Quality Matters (QM) standards and rubrics, publications and
presentations they created to enhance work they were doing in their classrooms, and surveys of similar courses across the nation to ensure their own pedagogy was aligning with expectations. They also all provided details on specific methods they use to help students understand expectations.

Although all faculty and one dean discussed efficacy in this area, the explanations varied in depth, and none of the faculty included artifacts beyond their syllabi. Written descriptions were often basic and factual, though during interviews, a couple of faculty provided more detailed explanations. One faculty member shared that she struggled with how to put what she does down in words. Thus a gap can be perceived between how faculty reflected upon this dimension of learning and their ability to provide evidence that transference occurred. De Rijdt et al. (2013) affirmed that, for faculty to engage in transfer, they need to have both personal motivation and view an activity as relevant.

What faculty prioritized in their ePortfolio may align with how many years experience they had in the field, with first and second-year faculty more likely to focus on course development and planning (Way, 2002). Newer faculty members were possibly more likely to take advantage of professional development opportunities, considering them a time to integrate new ideas into the basic outlines of their syllabi, assignments, and initial interactions with students. Faculty further along in their careers, meanwhile, may have integrated this process as part of their normal everyday actions and may have turned their time and attention to more specific areas of the teaching and learning process (Ebert-May et al., 2011). Therefore, faculty members, who said they had a solid understanding of this competency may not have perceived the same level of benefit from reflecting on an area that they were already actively engaging in on a regular basis, a finding which coincides with a study by De Rijdt et al. (2006). This aligns
with Schön’s (1989) assertion that, as practitioners become more versed in their craft, their actions become spontaneous, and they will require time and practice to learn how to reflect in a way that will challenge their tacit understandings. Cushman (1999) indicated, however, that when the process evolves correctly, even those faculty approaching retirement see the benefit of setting new goals. Or it is possible, as one faculty member suggested, that the criteria simply did not adequately address the skills he perceived as essential within his profession. Berrill and Addison (2010) found similar trends and recommended that the categories should only serve as suggestions rather than absolutes to allow faculty to better express themselves.

Reflection on pedagogical practices that engage students highlights faculty commitment to continuous improvement. Focusing on making learning useful (Fink, 2013), the emergent themes in this dimension speak directly to Boyer’s (1990) domain of application, which integrates theory with practice to determine successes and shortcomings within pedagogical practices. In this study, no gaps between reflection and transference occurred in this dimension of learning, as faculty clearly identified specific practices that showcased examples of active learning, promotion of higher order critical thinking, active communication with meaningful feedback, and encouragement to use college support services. If the purpose of teaching ePortfolios is to highlight teaching efficacy in line with an institution’s mission and support further professional development (Babin et al., 2002; Berrill & Addison, 2010; Buckridge, 2008; Centra, 1994; De Rijdt et al., 2006; Knapper, 1995; Leggett & Bunker, 2006; McColgan & Blackwood, 2009; McNelly, 2002; Painter, 2001; Roth, 1998; Seldin et al., 2010; Willis & Davies, 2002; Wolf, 1992), then this dimension of learning exemplifies that purpose.

De Rijdt et al.’s (2006) study on the use and effects of teaching ePortfolios in higher education identified that 84% of respondents saw their use as a way to reflect upon their
educational practice, and the most important reason cited as to why this was a successful method was receiving confirmation of their approach to practice. This was supported by faculty in this study who shared that having to reflect on their classes allowed them to see what worked for students, which assignments were not working, and what needed to be changed, which is similar to what Roth (1998) found. Faculty descriptions and evaluator’s comments provided detailed explanations on how pedagogical practices were being implemented and changes that had been made to encourage deeper student engagement. This aligned with the benefits cited in De Rijdt et al. (2006) and Way’s (2002) contention that the degree to which a faculty member can demonstrate efforts to improve teaching through documentation and reflective narrative should be the major criterion for determining teaching effectiveness. Evaluators and faculty concurred regarding their focus on finding new strategies that supported student success and that led to greater engagement and retention. This is was more in line with Root’s (1987) findings than Centra’s (1994).

Despite the wealth of learning showcased within this dimension, Ebert-May et al. (2011) cautioned that what faculty write may not actually represent what is occurring in the classroom. Many authors have suggested that teaching ePortfolios tend to focus on best practices and do not illustrate the full picture of teaching efficacy (Babin et al., 2002; Berrill & Addison, 2010; Burns, 1999; Leggett & Bunker, 2006). However, when time is taken to develop a common understanding of expectations, as shown through the common voice of participants in this study, the reliability of the results increases (Root, 1987).

**Student feedback, not straight data, drives faculty change efforts.** This final dimension of learning identifies the ability of the learner to see and make new connections (Fink, 2013); it aligns with Boyer’s (1990) final domain, which looks more at the practice of teaching
and its effects on students. As such, included in this dimension are the ways that faculty support the college and community outside the classroom, as well as an analysis of student-level data. Though the first category may seem more aligned to a showcase or professional portfolio than a learning portfolio (Fitch et al., 2008; McNelly, 2002; Smith & Tilema, 2003; Wolf & Dietz, 1998), it helps evaluators get a more holistic picture of faculty contributions (Seldin et al., 2010). Faculty and evaluators appreciated the ability to exhibit their efforts in these areas that had previously been discounted, even though the written descriptions they provided remained factual. One faculty member even stated that her reflections in this area drove her to realize just how much she had grown over the course of a year.

That said, the second category of data reflection constituted the main driver for faculty willingness to change -- student feedback regarding their frustrations. Student course evaluations have long been used as a viable, quantitative method for evaluating faculty efficacy (Centra, 1994; Knapper, 1995; Seldin, 1982). However, when individual comments made by students drive educators to more deeply probe potential problem areas of pedagogy, real change may occur (Babin et al., 2002). Participants in the study noted that having direct access to student data within their teaching ePortfolio led them to seek qualitative data to help explain it, especially when several students voiced frustrations. Specific examples of changes made based on student feedback threaded throughout the faculty teaching ePortfolios, and many participants included narratives about how they shared modifications with the students and how they felt gratified when the changes were successful in subsequent semesters. Evaluators commented on how these reflections reinforced their understanding of faculty commitment to student success and pedagogical improvement.
Though the faculty seemed open to reviewing courses and pedagogy based upon direct student feedback, reflections on the courses success data identified a gap and responses tended to focus on feelings of defensiveness and frustration, rather than on student learning. The participants in Cushman’s (1999) study expressed discomfort during a similar process, as soon as they felt they might be evaluated against a standard, rather than having the teaching portfolio used as a tool to inform their practice. Other scholars have emphasized that the teaching portfolio needs to not reflect a competitive or punitive dynamic (Smith, 1995; Way, 2002). Faculty members’ use of data in this study provided the most diverse perceptions between faculty and evaluators, akin to Centra’s (1994) results; therefore, additional training will likely be needed to create a more collaborative understanding regarding the use and benefits of reflecting on student level data to drive improvement (Berrill & Addison, 2010). Finally, as the teaching ePortfolio brings the essence of teaching out of isolation and into a shared, community perspective, open to review by others, time will be required to allow participants to become comfortable with this change (Flaherty, 2015; Seldin et al., 2010; Smith, 1995).

**Overall discussion on stage one: the teaching ePortfolio.** Within the context of this first step of the evaluation process, the faculty were expected to transfer understandings of what a particular competency required by determining appropriate evidence of practice. They then reflected-on-action by describing how they were meeting that specific competency. Many frequently indicated how they made or intended to make changes based on their reflections. Schön’s (1989) description of the reflective process does not distinguish between thinking and doing, which reveals the interconnectedness of these two processes. Though faculty seemed able to describe appropriate practices, they did not include specific samples of their work. This was counter to what is suggested both within the literature and the archival documents describing the
intent of the new process. Though this may be because they were novices to the approach, they may require additional training or mentoring.

The process itself, especially the application of competencies, supported the intended use of teaching ePortfolios within an evaluation model (Babin et al., 2002; Barr & Tagg, 1995; Burns, 1999; Centra, 1994; De Rijdt et al., 2006; Knapper, 1995; Leggett & Bunker, 2006; McColgan & Blackwood, 2009; McNelly, 2002; Meiland & Volden, 1996; Murray, 1994; Pesa & Syre, 2002; Reis & Villaume, 2002; Seldin et al., 2010; Way, 2002; Willis & Davies, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998). Having to respond to specific competencies increased faculty reflection and awareness of teaching practices, and participants were encouraged to consider and express new ways to improve their teaching (Boileau, 1993; Pitsoe & Maila, 2013). The overall challenges they discussed mimicked those identified across the literature on using portfolios: time (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010; Janosik & Frank, 2013; Ryan, 2011), buy-in/commitment (Appling et al., 2001; Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010; Janosik & Frank, 2013; Morris & Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Ryan, 2011; Sain & Williams, 2009; Trevitt et al., 2014), and level of technological proficiency (Janosik & Frank, 2013; Morris & Cooke-Plagwitz, 2008; Shepard & Bolliger, 2011). Finally, though faculty reflections on student comments helped them identify specific changes to make within their courses and their pedagogical practices, analysis of data did not lead to the same types of change. Additional training on data analysis and on collaborative understanding of how to use this form of data, as well as increased mentoring by the evaluators may be needed.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Frameworks and Literature: Stage 2**

In this model, during the second stage of the evaluation process, a conversation takes place between evaluators and faculty members. Designed to support attributes of a professional
learning community, this conversation allows the evaluator, dean or program director, to assume
to role of coach and facilitator. First, they help the faculty member reflect-in-action (Schön,
1983) by encouraging them to share components of their teaching ePortfolios. Then by
collaboratively connecting what they learned through their reflections, they work together to
design to a professional development and improvement plan, using far transfer (Perkins and
Salomon, 1992). In this study, data analysis identified the specific components of the teaching
ePortfolio that supported this task, aligned to Fink’s (2013) three dimensions of learning: human
dimension, joy-of-learning, and life-long learning. Through an analysis of the themes that
developed during the research, three findings emerged, each of which also highlighted gaps that
remain in the learning process. These themes are: (a) ongoing conversations, built upon shared
expectations, are key; (b) the reflective process was beneficial to faculty growth; and (c) faculty
goals indicate a desire to grow professionally, but are disconnected from learning.

Ongoing conversations, built upon shared expectations, are key. Focusing on the
interactions with others as a tool for driving the learning process (Fink, 2013), in this study, the
emergent themes within this dimension spoke to the perceived significance of the PBFDC
conversation between the faculty and evaluators. This collaborative conversation was designed
to provide a platform to share learning and identify gaps requiring mitigation through
professional development (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hilliard, 2012; Melville et al., 2014; Mullen
& Hutinger, 2008; Nelson et al., 2008; Watson, 2014). Scholars have documented that the use of
modeling and feedback techniques provided by a coach have a direct impact on the ability of the
faculty member to transfer their learning (De Rijdt et al., 2013). For Schön (1983), this is the
more important contributor to professional growth, and it is based on the reciprocally reflective
dialogue conducted between faculty and coach. The coach accomplishes this by connecting the
learning that occurs during reflection to the faculty’s reflection-on-action (Nolan, 1989). Two of
the deans in the study discussed how important it was for them to lead their faculty members
through the process at a pace that was comfortable for them, particularly when they struggled
with self-confidence.

The participants in the study highlighted similar themes as essential to a successful
collaborative conversation, confirming previous studies: building consensus (Cambridge et al.,
2005; Nelson et al., 2008; Shulman et al., 2004), ongoing (Hord, 1997; Mullen & Hutinger,
2008; Sandell et al., 2004), peer inclusion (Childers et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009, Way,
2002), and focusing on meaning-making (Cambridge et al., 2005; Hord, 1997). Faculty and
evaluators indicated that having a shared understanding of expectations allowed the conversation
to be more constructive and less critical. Faculty who had experienced conversations with their
dean or program director throughout the year were much more supportive of the process than
those who wished that more time had been available for the conversation. Over half of the
participants discussed the value of including a stronger component of peer interaction in the
process, emphasizing that what they learned from colleagues was as valuable as the process
itself. This idea is strongly supported in the literature (Addis et al., 2013; De Rijdt et al., 2013;
DuFour, 2004). From the perspective of the evaluators, the ability to spend one-on-one time
together with their faculty members provided significant quality feedback and helped deans and
program directors develop a better understanding of what faculty considered important. All
participants emphasized the significance of the collaborative nature of the conversation.

Though no actual transfer of learning was expected for this dimension of learning, what
occurred during the conversation set the participants up well for transference later. As such, it is
important to note the two main gaps that were identified. First, perceptions of the value of
discussing student level data varied between faculty and evaluators. Whereas the evaluators liked having the data in front of them for discussion, the faculty varied between thinking it was helpful to being overwhelmed by it, which coincides with the findings of (Svinkicki, Williams, Rackley, Sanders, & Pine, 2016). Second, faculty spoke about the importance of collaboration with their peers and said they felt the teaching ePortfolio provided the institution with a starting point for interactive group conversations about good practices, a finding extensively supported in the literature (De Rijdt et al., 2006; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011; Lim & Lee 2014). This was not an initial consideration of the faculty evaluation process; however, it holds potential for innovative future discussion.

**Reflective process was beneficial to faculty growth.** Related to the way a learning experience changes the way the learner begins to care about something (Fink, 2013), this dimension highlighted the effect reflection had on the faculty experience. The primary goal of reflective practice is for faculty to gain a deeper understanding of their pedagogy (Pitsoe & Maila, 2013), because if they do not develop this skill, they will simply become skilled technicians, unable to make good decisions or understand the consequences of their actions (Braun Jr & Crumpler, 2004). Faculty and evaluators alike said that having reflection tied to the evaluation process brought out deeper thought, though the descriptions used seemed derived more from reflection-on-action, rather than reflection-in-action. Evaluators described dynamics such as faculty being on autopilot, and they recognized that the faculty needed more time to contemplate what they do and how it affects more than their classroom, but the college overall. Faculty, on the other hand, tended to connect their reflections back to how it specifically affected them. One participant, for example, said she spent much of the year thinking about what strategies she used that would correspond to the standards in the ePortfolio in order to illustrate
her support of student success; she also contemplated how to identify the ways she tended to go above and beyond and how to make note of them. Though the deans did note that the level of reflection varied, they felt it depended on whether or not the faculty members availed themselves of the opportunity. That said, Nolan (1989) asserted that the more the coach encourages reflection and then shares in the collaborative reflection process by discussing the learning and developing interpretations together, the greater the likelihood that faculty reflections will improve.

Faculty were also able to show far transfer for the first time within this dimension of learning as they connected student success strategies they had newly implemented to the goals of the previous year. By matching the learning context and the application context, they drew new connections (Perkins & Salomon, 1992), or, as Billett (2013) explained, they aligned the actions they took with what they had learned and experienced. Some of the faculty reflections focused on curriculum improvements made and the resulting data analysis of course success rates, while others integrated new knowledge into course upgrades. Each reflection described how professional development goals helped them enhance pedagogical improvements, similar to the expectations identified in Lim and Lee (2014).

The gap that was identified within this dimension had less to do with faculty learning than institutional learning. Despite the fear expressed by faculty regarding the potential use of the contents of the teaching ePortfolio for negative critique, correlated in Lim and Lee (2014) and Sain and Williams (2009), the faculty said the benefits would be greater if the institution used the wealth of information shared to help drive change. Part of this involved them simply wanting to make sure that, after the work it took to put the ePortfolio together, it indeed would be read and used (Reis & Villaume, 2002). However, they also shared very specific visions of
solutions to common issues and challenges that they hoped would help faculty improve individually and that would contribute to cross-departmental pedagogical discussions. However, most asserted that, before this could be put in motion, additional conversations needed to occur that addressed the institution’s perspective regarding how the design and implementation of the teaching ePortfolio could support professional development, a finding which corresponds directly to the research of Lim and Lee’s (2014) and Way (2002).

**Faculty goals indicate desire to grow professionally but are disconnected from learning.** Learning in Fink’s (2013) final dimension of life-long learning speaks to the heart of his definition of learning: “For learning to occur, there has to be some kind of change in the learner. No change, no learning (p. 3).” In this case, the learning refers to the faculty’s ability to use far transfer (Perkins and Salomon, 1992) and to translate the learning that took place during the reflective process (Schön, 1983) into professional development activities that would continue to support pedagogical changes and improve student success. That said, all faculty were able to determine professional development goals for the upcoming year, but a gap occurred – not all of their goals were directly connected to the learning they had analyzed. In some cases, when asked directly about their goals, faculty identified areas they wished to focus on that aligned to their learning, but these were often different from what they wrote within their plan. Others focused on more traditional goals, such as conference attendance and meeting departmental priorities, without highlighting how the activity would connect back to student success. This is not an uncommon finding (Buckridge, 2008; Janosik & Frank, 2013; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Ryan, 2011). Faculty admitted to having difficulty setting goals, though they said they felt that the teaching ePortfolio highlighted areas they might not have considered before. The literature documents that training is necessary for faculty to learn how to set appropriate goals (Kahn,
2004; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Trevitt et al., 2014), and this training should occur for both coaches and faculty to gain the true benefit of the collaborative conversation (Cerbin, 1994; Nelson et al., 2008).

The second gap that emerged was the perceived lack of collaboration that took place during the goal setting stage. Although deans and program directors spoke about how they helped set guidelines and claimed they took the lead in the process, most faculty felt there had been little to no collaboration or direction. Because collaborative goal setting is a key aspect of Schön’s (1983) reflection-in-action, and it directly correlates to the use of the PBFDC to aid in transference, this might explain why an analysis of the goal setting process revealed a disconnect between the two.

**Overall discussion on stage two: the portfolio based faculty development conversation.** Within the context of this second step of the evaluation process, faculty were expected to reflect with their evaluator on what they had learned during the creation of the teaching ePortfolio and collaboratively design a professional development and improvement plan that would support the growth of their pedagogical practices. The study participants identified the conversation as the most meaningful part of the evaluation process, which corresponds to previous findings in the literature (Aalst & Chan, 2007; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Ryan, 2011; Shepard & Bolliger, 2011). This finding also illustrates their perceived value of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) and the mentoring relationship that developed (Cerbin, 1994; Seldin, 1997). Faculty demonstrated far transfer of learning (Perkins and Salomon, 1992) in regards to their past professional development and improvement plan; however, they were not all able to successfully transfer learning to their new goals and plans. Smith and Tilema (2001) acknowledged that when teaching ePortfolios are mandated, they tend to encourage superficial
professional development. The disconnect shown in this study emphasizes the need for further training to ensure all parties understand the expectations of the goal setting process and to help further facilitate the transfer process through mentorship (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Centra, 1994; Way, 2002).

Limitations to the Study

Several limitations of the study became apparent during the data collection and analysis phases. First, the study only included a small subsector of faculty, deans, and program directors at the institution. However, the purpose of the study was not to make generalizations, but rather to understand and describe the experiences of the participants. The diverse perspectives of the participants provided the researcher with a thorough understanding of the benefits and challenges they faced during the process. Their experiences, however, should not be considered conclusive or representative of the entire institution or of faculty and evaluators at similar institutions that are using teaching ePortfolios or collaborative conversations as part of their faculty evaluation process.

Second, the study used a PLC model of collaborative conversation as part of the evaluation process. However, because the conversations only consisted of two participants, they were not fully representative of the traditional make up of PLCs. That said, many of the findings were in line with the research and literature on PLCs. Therefore, this study makes a contribution, albeit a limited one, to the research on the implications of PLCs and pedagogy, professional development, and collaborative learning.

Finally, the greatest limitation is that, because of a lack of research that examines the use of teaching ePortfolios and PLC-like collaborative conversations combined, this study had to consider these as separate steps leading to the overall intent of the evaluation process to assess
the extent to which the findings aligned with, corroborated, or refuted each strand of research. This required the researcher to employ two theoretical frameworks, combining them, to develop a lens that permitted a more holistic analysis of the data and of the findings. Grappling with this theoretical conundrum, however, rather than keeping the frameworks separate, strengthened the analysis and may have implications for theory-building.

**Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to look at perceptions of faculty and evaluators during the implementation of a new faculty evaluation process designed as a tool to promote professional development of pedagogy and to optimize student success. The findings suggest two broad categories that could enhance future practice. These implications are discussed below.

**Professional development needs to be ongoing and based on reflective learning derived from the process each year.** The analysis of the findings of the pilot year revealed several additional professional development needs. The first addresses the concern over the lack of identified supporting artifacts within the teaching ePortfolios. Because this was a first year pilot, possibly the faculty focused more on what they wanted to highlight in their reflections than on finding artifacts to support their thoughts and pedagogy. However, because the teaching ePortfolio aims to not only provide space for reflection, but also to capture examples of practice that support those reflections, additional professional development training may be needed to assist faculty in this area. The literature clearly documents the need to support faculty in learning how to select appropriate artifacts (Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Schon, 1987; Shepard & Bolliger, 2011). Seldin’s (2010) book provides a potential list of artifacts that could be discussed amongst faculty and administrators to provide suggestions that correlate with the different evaluation categories.
The second area concerns the use of data within the teaching ePortfolio. In light of the current educational environment focused on accountability (De Rijdt et al., 2006; Huber & Cox, 2004; Seldin, 1982), this is possibly one the most important areas to underscore for evaluators and faculty. Developing a common understanding of data use at an institutional level can help faculty feel comfortable delving into their own analysis (Reis & Villaume, 2002). For Schön (1987), developing this understanding is crucial because reflective supervision on the part of the evaluator forces the faculty member to leave their isolated realm and begin to take risks, which leaves them vulnerable and easily defensive. Therefore, this understanding must be continually clarified between participants in the evaluation process, as well as at the institutional level, so that faculty can begin to see their analysis as simply a normal part of their reflection that can help them identify areas requiring change to better support student learning. The institution also needs to clarify whether or not the data use and analysis will be tied to evaluative consequences. Research has documented that, when data use and analysis are linked to consequences, the entire process becomes less effective, and what is shared becomes more perfunctory rather than focused on real professional development (De Rijdt et al., 2006; Lim & Lee, 2014; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Way, 2002).

In addition, further discussion needs to be had concerning the use of course evaluations as supporting evidence of teaching efficacy. Student feedback within the course evaluations was the primary factor associated with faculty willingness to make changes within this study. Though this tool has been traditionally used as a component of faculty evaluations (Centra, 1994; Knapper, 1995; Seldin, 1982), a recent study note that positive student feedback has a negative correlation to subsequent course success for students (Braga, Paccagnella, & Pellizzari, 2011). The key to their use may be in the questions being asked in order to make sure they align to the
characteristics defined by the institution when it comes to teaching efficacy (Stark & Freishtat, 2014). Therefore, conversations on their use and effectiveness as a change agent within the evaluation tool needs to be addressed.

Finally, learning-appropriate coaching and mentoring practices requires making a commitment to developing a safe and supportive long-term relationship (Schön, 1987). Therefore, those institutions interested in implementing the teaching ePortfolio approach need to include appropriate professional development for faculty and their mentors/evaluators in this regard. If not, it is possible that the process will never achieve its full potential, but will rather only work for a few true believers (Chatham-Carpenter et al., 2010).

Consider making teaching ePortfolio categories optional and allow for more faculty choice. In its current state, the teaching ePortfolio examined in this study has mandatory standards for faculty reflection. The literature has established that greater buy-in occurs if faculty have more autonomy regarding the categories on which they would like to focus (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Lim & Lee, 2014). Faculty in this study mentioned this aspect: in some cases, the categories did not align with their actual teaching practices; in others, where faculty struggled to figure out what to write about, they said they felt the category was simply not applicable. Faculty who could focus on particular areas during a given year might find it easier to spend more time on reflection and on the identification of supporting artifacts. Several faculty members commented on the extensive length of the ePortfolio; alleviating this issue is fairly straightforward. In addition, allowing faculty to choose where to focus their energies may make tying their professional development to student success easier -- with fewer factors to consider, they might perceive the direct connection more quickly and more clearly.

Implications for Further Research
In addition to potential changes to future practice, this study highlighted several areas that could benefit from further research. Currently no comprehensive body of research exists that combines the use of teaching ePortfolios and PLC collaborative conversations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the two areas that are highlighted for further research regard their joint use. A final area looks specifically at the role that the portfolio based faculty development conversation could play in assessing teaching scholarship and potentially expands the use of this study into the realm of more research-focused institutions.

**The mentor role in a two-person PLC.** This study has shown that using the teaching ePortfolio as a tool to facilitate discussions during the collaborative conversation has perceived benefit. In addition, it has identified that both the evaluators and faculty considered that the collaborative conversation was the most important aspect of the evaluation process. What seemed to need additional support, however, were the connections made during the conversation. Though PLCs have traditionally been conceptualized and discussed as large communities of teachers and/or their supervisors (DuFour, 2004; Melville et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2008), this study has begun to probe the extent to which the same type of relationship can develop in a one-on-one situation. Further research that examines this dynamic is warranted.

The foundational aspects of a well-designed PLC (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2008) seem to hold the same relational qualities that would support the type of collaborative conversation that the evaluation process examined in this study sought. Additional research on how to develop this type of relationship, what kind of training would enhance its use, and determining the best methods to assess its functionality is needed. In order to allow faculty and evaluators to collaboratively discuss learning as reflection-
in-action and to far transfer their understanding into supportive professional development goals, institutional commitment to the development of these two-person practices is required.

**Use of peer collaboration to enhance learning on pedagogical practice.** This second area for further research evolved unexpectedly during through the research process and was confirmed in the findings. Several of the faculty spoke about the importance of collaboration with their peers and indicated that they thought the teaching ePortfolio provided the institution with the opportunity to use it as a starting point for broader conversations about good practices. In literature that supports the learning process, the idea of including peers in the evaluation procedure has been viewed as providing a supportive, lower-stakes version of evaluation (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Ory, 2000; Way, 2002). Therefore, the idea of including peer input as an aspect of the evaluation process or of developing it as a supporting side process deserves further consideration. It is possible that it could not only complement the development of learning during the evaluation process, enhancing the conversations that take place, but it could also provide a forum for continued learning throughout the year based on the results of each evaluation cycle.

**Refining the portfolio based faculty development conversation to assess teaching scholarship.** A key component of this study was to establish pedagogical practice as a worthy component of teaching scholarship (Boyer, 1990). In a study that came out days before the end of this study, the researchers discovered no connection between teaching quality and research quality of tenured faculty, meaning one does not exist at the loss of the other nor does it mean that because one exists so will the other (Figlio & Schapiro, 2017). Though research contributions have long been heralded as a valued component of faculty evaluation (Seldin et. al, 2010), the study corroborated the need for different methods to assess teaching efficacy. More
importantly, by separating the two qualities, its findings suggested that institutions consider the reality of needing both traditional scholars and scholar-practitioners to meet both policymakers and student needs (Figlio & Schapiro, 2017). Therefore, for those institutions, who are looking to prioritize teaching excellence, refining the potential of the Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation into a tool that truly captures elements of both teaching efficacy and teaching scholarship may provide better assessments on their impact on student success.

**Conclusion**

This study documented the perceptions of faculty, deans, and program directors regarding the value of a newly developed faculty evaluation process. By using a case study approach, the researcher collected qualitative data to answer the research question: How do the full-time faculty and deans at Coast College perceive the impact of the new Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversation evaluation process on pedagogical practice? Its findings have provided insight into an area of faculty evaluation that has not previously been researched: the combined use of teaching ePortfolios and a PLC-like, collaborative conversation between evaluator and faculty, the PBFDC.

The data collection was triangulated through archival review, interviews with the participants, and an analysis of faculty ePortfolio submissions. The researcher further clarified the accuracy of the data collection and interpreted results during a final focus group discussion where the preliminary findings were shared. The data analysis, aligned to Fink’s (2013) six dimensions of learning, uncovered 20 sub-ordinate themes that informed the study’s findings.

Two frameworks served as lenses for this study: Donald Schön’s (1983) *Reflective Practitioner*, which posits two forms of critical reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action; and Perkins and Salomon’s (1992) transfer of learning theory, which describes near and
far transfer. Though these two theories are discrete, together they provide the necessary insight into the two elements of the PBFDC: the development of the teaching ePortfolio and the PLC conversation. Within the teaching ePortfolio, the findings suggest: faculty are able to determine appropriate strategies to discuss for each teaching standard even though they did not include supporting artifacts; faculty reflections identified new pedagogical practices; changes were made due to student comment more than as a result of data analysis; and key challenges included time, buy/in or commitment, and technological proficiency. Within the PLC conversation stage, the findings suggest: the collaborative conversation was the most meaningful part of the process; faculty had an easier time connecting learning to past professional development than to future goals; successful collaborative conversations need to be ongoing, built on consensus, include peer feedback, and focus on meaning-making; and further training is necessary to improve the evaluator/faculty conversation for the conversation to reach its full potential.

Finally, this study advanced the practice of faculty evaluation by combining two discrete evaluation processes into a single learning episode for the first time. In doing so it uncovered two implications for future practice: the importance of ongoing training based upon reflective analysis of each year’s process and the consideration of making ePortfolio categories optional to allow faculty to focus on particular areas of improvement each year. In addition, it identified two primary areas that require additional future research to acquire a better understanding of their relationship to the process: the role of the evaluator/mentor within a two-person PLC, and the use of peer collaboration within or as a complimentary process to the evaluation.

Though the study is limited by the small number of participants, the unconventional use of the PLC model, and the lack of existing corroborating research in this area, it has potentially opened a new field of research and has made contributions to practice that could be beneficial to
both other institutions and to scholars in this field. The overall benefits outlined by the participants, along with their asserted expectation that the process will continue to grow in popularity and use, emphasized its potential as a process that other institutions can adapt and implement. Finally, the identified challenges align with existing research and should be taken into consideration by institutions interested in using a PBFDC process.
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Appendix A: Call for Participants Email to Dean

Subject Line: Doctoral Research Study with Sabrina Crawford

Dear (Dean),

As you know, I have been working on my doctoral studies at Northeastern University. I have finally come to the dissertation stage of my program. My study will focus on how deans and full-time faculty members at St. Petersburg College perceive the new faculty portfolio evaluation process in relation to teaching practices that support student success and faculty professional learning. My goal is to arrive at a better understanding of how faculty pedagogy is perceived to be connected to student success, how learning is being described, and whether or not this learning and improved practice is being connected to student success during the evaluation process. I hope that the findings from this study will help to inform future improvements in the design and process of the faculty evaluation.

As the first part of my participant solicitation, I am asking you to consider participating in this study to share the dean’s perspective on the new evaluation process. If you agree to participate, I will be contacting the full-time faculty in your area to ask for their participation, hoping to find 2-3 faculty members.

Your participation will include meeting with me for approximately an hour to talk about your experiences with the faculty ePortfolio evaluation process at a time and location convenient to you. Although the interview will be audio-recorded, your confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, and I will ask you to review all transcriptions I make for accuracy, as well as share my results as I analyze the data. Finally, it is possible that if further clarification is necessary during the analysis, that you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion. Your participation in this focus group discussion will be voluntary. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at Crawford.Sab@huskey.neu.edu. If you are selected, I will schedule a phone conversation to discuss the study in greater detail and schedule a time for our interview, as well as provide you with a consent form for you to sign. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding my study.

Sincerely,
Sabrina Crawford
Appendix B: Call for Participants Email to Faculty

Subject Line: Doctoral Research Study with Sabrina Crawford

Dear (Faculty Member),

For the past couple of years I have been working on my doctoral studies at Northeastern University. I have finally come to the dissertation stage of my program. My study will focus on how deans and full-time faculty members at [University Name] College perceive the new faculty portfolio evaluation process in relation to teaching practices that support student success and faculty professional learning. My goal is to arrive at a better understanding of how faculty pedagogy is perceived to be connected to student success, how learning is being described, and whether or not this learning and improved practice is being connected to student success during the evaluation process. I hope that the findings from this study will help to inform future improvements in the design and process of the faculty evaluation.

During the first stage of solicitation, your dean volunteered to participate in this study. In order to get a balanced understanding, I am asking you to consider participating in this study to share the Faculty’s perspective on the new evaluation process. Your participation will include meeting with me for an hour to talk about your experiences, allowing me to review your faculty portfolio, and possible participation in a follow-up focus group discussion. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

The initial interview will take approximately an hour and take place at a time and location convenient to you. Although the interview will be audio-recorded, your confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, and I will ask you to review all transcriptions I make for accuracy, as well as share my results as I analyze the data.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at Crawford.Sab@husky.neu.edu. If you are selected, I will schedule a phone conversation to discuss the study in greater detail and schedule a time for our interview, as well as provide you with a consent form for you to sign. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding my study.

Sincerely,
Sabrina Crawford
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Template 1 Format for Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies Doctor of Education Program
Name of Investigator(s): Sara Ewell, Gail Matthews-Denatale, Sabrina Crawford, Martha Campbell
Title of Project: Portfolio Based Faculty Development Conversations: A Model for Increasing Teaching Efficacy

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in my study. You have been selected to be a participant to share your perspectives on the new faculty portfolio evaluation process. This form will tell you about the study, as well as the email that is sent with it that outlines the study and interview timeline. You may ask Sabrina Crawford any questions that you have by contacting her at 828-773-3235 or Crawford.sab@husky.neu.edu. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not via email. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement, scan it and return it via email to Crawford.sab@husky.neu.edu. The researcher will email you a signed copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study to provide information on your experience using the new faculty portfolio evaluation process to assist researchers in understanding the experiences of faculty who use teaching portfolios as part of their annual evaluation process.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to speak with faculty and deans who use teaching portfolios to understand their experience with using this evaluation method.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview that will take place at a time and location of your choice. During the interview you will be asked questions that are designed to gain an understanding of your perceptions with the new faculty evaluation process. Although you are not obligated, you will be asked to share your completed portfolio. Finally, if the study warrants follow up questions, you will be invited to participate in a focus group discussion.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Following completion of the interview we will send you your interview transcripts to review for any comments prior to data analysis. You will have three business days to review the transcripts and comment via email to Crawford.sab@husky.neu.edu if necessary.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Since you will be discussing details of the evaluation process and teaching practices, as well as sharing the contents of your faculty evaluation portfolios, there is a slight chance of non-physical discomfort, but the risk will be minimal. You will be allowed to skip any question during the interview process, decline
sharing your teaching portfolio or specific sections of the portfolio, and can request to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help to inform future improvements in the design and process of the faculty evaluation.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Only the research team will know your identity as a participant in this study. Your name and institution will not be released. Background information asked during the interview will be presented in aggregate to describe the participant sample. Background information that will be asked is: years as a dean/faculty member, previous use of teaching portfolios, comparison of current evaluation process to previously used processes.

The interviews will be audio recorded and stored on the researcher’s password protected laptop and a flash drive kept in the researchers locked office. Although you will be identifiable on the audio recording this audio tape will only be heard by the research team and transcription service. The interview transcripts will be coded with a participant number to ensure your name is not associated outside the research study. Transcripts will be stored on the researcher’s password protected laptop and shared through password-protected email and a password protected online data analysis program. In any publications associated with this research you will only be identified as participant number and not your name. A list of names and matched participant numbers will be kept in the researchers locked office. Transcripts and audio files will be destroyed seven years after the study is complete. Completion is defined as the dissertation being accepted and printed and subsequent publications have been in print.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Sabrina Crawford Crawford.sab@husky.neu.edu person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Sara Ewell, S.Ewell@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Kate Skophammer Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: k.skophammer@neu.edu You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

No, there is no payment for participation in this study.
Will it cost me anything to participate?
No, no cost is expected with this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?
n/a

I agree to take part in this research.

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Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Faculty

Research Questions:

1. How do faculty and deans define practice that is connected to student success through their description of the reflective processes?
2. How do faculty and deans describe faculty learning through their perceptions on whether or not the evaluation process was meaningful?
3. How does faculty and deans connect faculty learning and their practice to student success and professional growth within their teaching portfolio and professional development and improvement plan?

Part 1: Introduction

Before we begin, I’d like to thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. This study is seeking to understand the perceptions of full-time faculty members and the deans, who have participated in the first year pilot use of the new faculty portfolio evaluation process, insofar as its ability to support student success and the professional growth of our faculty. Through this study I hope to gain insight into ways we can improve the process if necessary and support its continued use at the college as a tool that promotes significant learning.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [If yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording equipment.] I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts.

After the interview is transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review by date. If you could please review it by date and let me know any changes you would like to make, I’d appreciate it.

The interview should last about 45 to 60 minutes. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question, just let me know and we’ll move on to the next one. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part 2: Background Information (15-20 minutes)

1. How long have you been teaching in higher education? Were all of those years at Coast College?
2. Have you ever created a teaching portfolio before? If so, can you briefly describe the purpose of that portfolio?
3. Have you participated in a faculty evaluation process at Coast College in the past? (or at a different institution) Without giving me details, as I’ll be asking further questions later, how did this process compare to those – would you rate it about the same, better, or worse?
Part 3: Faculty Evaluation Experience

1. Let’s start with the teaching portfolio itself.
   a. Please describe what it was like putting your portfolio together?
   b. With so many possible options to choose from, how did you decide what items and artifacts to select and share within your teaching portfolio? (is there anything that you included that you are especially proud of – explain)
   c. Were there things about developing the teaching portfolio that you liked? (what did you like about them, how were they meaningful to you as a person or as a faculty member)
   d. Were there things about developing the teaching portfolio that you didn’t like? (what didn’t you like about them, how were they not meaningful to you as a person or as a faculty member)
   e. If there was one thing you would want a new faculty member to know about the process, what would it be?
   f. Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think is important for me to know about your conversation?

2. Now let’s talk about the conversation you had with your dean.
   a. Please describe what having the conversation with your dean was like?
   b. Were there things about the conversation with your dean/faculty that you liked? (what did you like about it, how was it meaningful to you as a person or as a faculty member)
   c. Were there things about the conversation with your dean/faculty that you didn’t like? (what didn’t you like about it, how was it not meaningful to you as a person or as a faculty member)
   d. Were there things you would have liked to discuss with your dean during this conversation that didn’t come up?
   e. If you were in charge of training a new group of faculty members about how to handle the conversation with the dean part of the process, what would you make sure you let them know about?
   f. Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think is important for me to know about your conversation?

3. When the committee designed the process, they were guided by their vision statement: that faculty evaluation at SPC be a positive, holistic, collaborative experience that supports student success and the continued growth of all faculty members. I’d like to break this statement apart and get your thoughts on the different pieces to see where you see the process as achieving the vision and where it might be falling short.
   a. In what ways was this experience positive? If it was not, please explain.
   b. In what ways was it holistic? If it was not, please explain.
   c. In what ways was it collaborative? If it was not, please explain.
   d. In what ways did it support student success? If it was not, please explain.
   e. In what ways does it support the continued growth of faculty members? If it was not, please explain.
4. Because this evaluation process was designed to help faculty members learn and grow, it specifically includes a professional development and improvement plan.
   a. What kinds of things did you include in your plan?
   b. Why did you choose these things to focus on?
   c. Please share something that you learned about yourself from this process?
   d. Please share something that you learned about your students from this process?
   e. How do you hope that the things that were included will change your faculty member, their class, and/or their students?

Thank you for participating today. I will be transcribing our conversation and sharing it with you by XXXX. If you have any questions or concerns in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me. I also want to let you know that after I develop some preliminary findings for this study, I will be contacting you to see if you’re willing to participate in a focus group discussion where I’ll be sharing what I’ve learned, get everyone’s feedback, and gather further clarification. It is completely voluntary on your part, but I’d love to have your participation.

Interview Protocol: Dean

Research Questions:

1. How do faculty and deans define practice that is connected to student success through their description of the reflective processes?
2. How do faculty and deans describe faculty learning through their perceptions on whether or not the evaluation process was meaningful?
3. How to faculty and deans connect faculty learning and their practice to student success and professional growth within their teaching portfolio and professional development and improvement plan?

Part 1: Introduction

Before we begin, I’d like to thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. This study is seeking to understand the perceptions of full-time faculty members and the deans, who have participated in the first year pilot use of the new faculty portfolio evaluation process, in so far as its ability to support student success and the professional growth of our faculty. Through this study I hope to gain insight into ways we can improve the process if necessary and support its continued use at the college as a tool that promotes significant learning.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [If yes, thank the participant and turn on the recording equipment.] I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts.

After the interview is transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript for your review by date. If you could please review it by date and let me know any changes you would like to make, I’d appreciate it.
The interview should last about 45 to 60 minutes. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question, just let me know and we’ll move on to the next one. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part 2: Background Information (15-20 minutes)

1. How long have you been a dean in higher education? Were all of those years at Coast College?
2. Have you ever created a teaching portfolio before or evaluate a faculty member using one before? If so, can you briefly describe the purpose of that portfolio.
3. Have you participated in a faculty evaluation process at Coast College in the past? (or at a different institution) Without giving me details, as I’ll be asking further questions later, how did this process compare to those – would you rate it about the same, better, or worse?

Part 3: Faculty Evaluation Experience

1. Let’s start with the teaching portfolio itself.
   a. Please describe what it was like to review the teaching portfolios?
   b. With so many possible options to choose from, what is your sense of the factors that went into the faculty members’ decisions to choose the items and artifacts that they shared within their teaching portfolios?
   c. Were there things about reviewing the teaching portfolio that you liked? (what did you like about them, how were they meaningful to you as a dean)
   d. Were there things about reviewing the teaching portfolio that you didn’t like? (what didn’t you like about them, how were they not meaningful to you as a dean)
   e. If you were asked to give a brand new dean advice on how to review these portfolios, what is the one thing you’d make sure to let them know about?
   f. Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think is important for me to know about?

2. Now lets talk about the conversation you had with your faculty members.
   a. Please describe the conversations you had with your faculty members?
   b. Were there things about the conversation with your faculty that you liked? (what did you like about it, how was it meaningful to you as a dean)
   c. Were there things about the conversation with your faculty that you didn’t like? (what didn’t you like about it, how was it not meaningful to you as a dean)
   d. Were there things you wanted to discuss with your faculty during this conversation that didn’t come up?
   e. If you had to help train a new dean on how to conduct these conversations with faculty, what piece of advice would you make sure you’d share?
   f. Is there anything I haven’t asked that you think is important for me to know about?
3. When the committee designed the process, they were guided by their vision statement: that faculty evaluation at SPC be a positive, holistic, collaborative experience that supports student success and the continued growth of all faculty members. I’d like to break this statement apart and get your thoughts on the different pieces to see where you see the process as achieving the vision and where it might be falling short.
   a. In what ways was this experience positive?
   b. In what ways was it holistic?
   c. In what ways was it collaborative?
   d. In what ways did it support student success?
   e. In what ways does it support the continued growth of faculty members?

4. Because this evaluation process was designed to help faculty members learn and grow, it specifically includes a professional development and improvement plan.
   a. Can you share something that you learned about yourself from this process?
   b. Can you share something that you learned about your faculty from this process?
   c. Tell me about how the plan was developed.
   d. How do you hope that the things that were included will change your faculty member, their class, and/or their students?

Thank you for participating today. I will be transcribing our conversation and sharing it with you by XXXX. If you have any questions or concerns in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me. I also want to let you know that after I develop some preliminary findings for this study, I will be contacting you to see if you’re willing to participate in a focus group discussion where I’ll be sharing what I’ve learned, get everyone’s feedback, and gather further clarification. It is completely voluntary on your part, but I’d love to have your participation.