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# Vocational Instructors Experience and Practice Teaching in the Hybrid Environment

Christine Cusano  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Christine C Cusano

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Review Committee

Dr. Cathryn Walker White, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. James Valadez, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Leslie VanGelder, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2018

Abstract

Vocational Instructors Experience and Practice Teaching in the Hybrid Environment

by

Christine C. Cusano

MS, Walden University, 2011

BS, University of Phoenix, 2004

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October 2018

## Abstract

At a technical post-secondary school in the Northeast United States, campus leaders lacked formative data of faculty skills and knowledge needed for instruction in a hybrid format involving both face-to-face instruction and on-line instruction. Therefore, the delivery of appropriate professional development (PD) programs for faculty whose duties include hybrid format instruction has not been provided. The purpose of this study was to identify the faculty experiences of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment, and their perceived PD needs to provide effective instruction in a hybrid-learning environment. This study explored vocational teachers' experiences and perceived PD needs related to teaching in a hybrid-teaching environment. Using Kolb's model of experiential learning, a qualitative case study design was used to sample 8 vocational instructors who met the criteria of teaching in the hybrid-learning environment in the medical assistant or the dental assistant programs. Data were collected using face-to-face interviews and were analyzed using axial coding. Themes emerging from the findings included the changing role of the instructor, concerns of plagiarism, faculty PD for teaching in a hybrid-learning environment, and practice using the learning management system (LMS). Findings based on themes indicated PD on the learning management system (LMS), and pedagogy to teach in the hybrid-learning environment is needed for the teachers. A white paper recommending initial on-going systemic PD for faculty teaching in the hybrid-learning environment was developed. Implications for social change are that faculties will become more knowledgeable instructing in the hybrid-learning environment, which will the development of hybrid teaching skills and better-prepared dental and medical assistant graduates who will provide improved care for clients.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents, Patricia and Donald, thank you for always believing in me and showing me what determination looks like. To DonnaMarie, Carlene, Mark, Donald and Lauren, thank you for your continued encouragement through the hard times and good times as I completed this process. I love you all.

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I would like to thank Dr. Cathryn White for your encouragement, support and motivation in helping me get to the final step of my educational journey. Thank you, Dr. Valadez, for your feedback and suggestions for improvement. I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. Ramo Lord, who provided me with valuable advice, encouragement and support throughout this entire journey. Finally, I would like to thank my sister DonnaMarie, you have always been by my side, encouraging and believing in me through not only this journey but also all my life.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

There is not an exact date that faculty started using a hybrid-learning environment, however, it was noted in Picciano, Dziuban, and Graham (2014) that scholars started to discuss this new phenomenon around 2002. Even today in 2016, there still exist many different definitions and models for hybrid learning. Southwick Tech staff defined hybrid learning as 75% of the course delivered in the face-to-face format and 25% of the course as being delivered asynchronously on-line.

As I researched this topic, I found little on best practices for teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. As a result, I found that a need existed for further research on best practices and professional development. The focus of this research project was on faculty's experiences teaching in the hybrid-learning environment.

Southwick Tech has been offering certificate programs in various allied health programs since 2003. Administrators responsible for the vocational program traditionally hired subject matter experts (SME), a person who has years of experience in a particular field (for this study it is Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting), not necessarily a person who had formal teacher training. It was then expected that the hiring manager would provide training to the SME on pedagogical practices. However, training new instructors on proper teaching techniques has not always been top priority by administrative leadership. The lack of training for instructors in a hybrid teaching environment created a gap in instruction as the campus administrators expanded the hybrid offerings to the Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting programs.

## **Definition of the Problem**

A proprietary school in the Northeast United States (hereafter referred as Southwick Tech) hires vocational instructors to teach courses in which they are subject matter experts. The former campus president stated that campus leaders' lacked formative data of the faculty's skills and knowledge of instruction delivered in a hybrid format (A. Jones, personal communication, November 2012). Therefore, it became difficult to develop and deliver appropriate PD programs for current and future faculty whose duties included hybrid format instruction. Additionally, since 2012, the campus leaders implemented an online component to the traditional course formats, thus creating a hybrid format (75% face-to-face instruction, 25% online instruction) for the Certificate in Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting programs.

In April 2003, the Sloan Foundation held a workshop with education professionals to discuss a new instructional format called hybrid-learning (Picciano, 2014). Picciano, (2014) argued that no definitive definition of hybrid learning exists. Southwick Tech staff defined hybrid learning as 75% of the course delivered in the face-to-face format 25% of the course as being delivered asynchronously on-line (C. Smith, personal communication, 2016).

Prior to the hybrid-learning environment implementation, online courses were available throughout Southwick Tech with one campus out of 30 being only online. However, due to poor enrollment, the corporate leaders chose to dissolve the online offerings and focus on the hybrid pilot program as based on the corporate growth plan to increase enrollment and revenue (former vice president of product development, personal

communication, December 2015). Although Southwick Tech sponsored online courses prior to the hybrid format, hybrid instructors received training only focusing on managing the learning management system (LMS; Southwick Tech, 2012b). Instructors have not been formally trained on proper pedagogical practices in the hybrid format (M. Callahan, personal communication, December 2015). The lack of PD on the delivery of hybrid courses provided to medical and dental instructors implementing the hybrid model created a gap in practice at the local level. In order to more deeply understand this gap in practice related to hybrid teaching instructional needs, it was important to discern how teachers experience their status of knowledge regarding these phenomena as well as perceptions on PD needs to effectively implement hybrid learning in the medical and dental program areas.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

Campus leaders are responsible for following regulatory and compliance rules and regulations. PD for faculty is a requirement of the campus's continued accreditation. Although PD is a requirement of continued accreditation, campus leaders had little to no understanding of the faculty's PD needs for teaching the hybrid format (A. Jones, personal communication, October 2015). A regional director of education at Southwick Tech stated, "The instructors were not shown or taught how to engage the students in online discussions, how to help them engage with the content, or how to flip the classroom to use what the students should be learning online in the on-ground component. This lack of instruction delayed gaining the full benefit of the hybrid

program for both students and instructors” (C. Johnson, personal communication, October 2015). Moreover, per campus training agendas, the instructors were trained on the function of the learning management system but not on proper delivery of information/teaching online (Southwick Tech, 2012a, 2013, 2014). An education supervisor at Southwick Tech stated, “When we started training for the new program, the training was only on how to use the learning management system. We were not trained on how to teach online” (C. Brown, personal communication, October 2015). The campus policy, *Faculty First Year Experience*, does not reference training the instructors in hybrid or online pedagogy (Southwick Tech, 2012a). Further, the school staff continued to rely on faculty (who meet the same subject matter criteria as the instructor staff who were newly hired) currently teaching courses or campus leaders (program supervisors or director of education) to train the new hires as instructors. Having existing instructors train newly hired instructors, who lacked knowledge in online/hybrid pedagogy continued to perpetuate the local gap in practice of instructors not having the knowledge and skills to effectively implement the hybrid-learning format according to Southwick leaders’ expectations (A. Jones, personal communication, 2016).

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

The purpose of this project study was to identify faculty experiences of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and their perceived PD needs to provide effective instruction in a hybrid-learning environment. By exploring teachers’ perceived hybrid experiences including how they described their current knowledge and skills provided campus leaders with important formative data upon which to create and implement PD to

meet instructors' needs in the medical and dental program areas. Boling, Hough, Krensky, Saleem, and Stevens (2011); Crawford-Ferre, and Wiest (2012); Van Doom and Van Doom (2014) agreed faculty needed PD on advances in technology, instructional design and pedagogy for the hybrid learning environment.

Data derived from this project study provided Southwick leaders with the formative data of how instructors perceived their experiences and PD needs, which provided formative data and also baseline data on teacher perceived experiences and needs from which to move the system forward by better supporting instructors as hybrid learning expanded throughout the Southwick Campus. This critical information provided the starting point for campus leadership to individually respond to instructors' explicitly communicated experiences and needs pertaining to hybrid learning instruction. These data will better position campus leaders to offer PD that is uniquely focused to help faculty improve their knowledge and skills related to effective hybrid instruction. Torrisi-Steele and Drew (2013) argued there is a lack of research focusing on hybrid-learning practices and PD which faculty required to transition to hybrid learning instructional models.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Hybrid learning*: a course taught with the combination of face-to-face and online engagement. Blended learning and hybrid learning are used interchangeably (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015).



### **Significance of the Study**

The campus leaders' long-term goals were to introduce additional programs to the hybrid-learning environment. Prior to doing so, the administration, wanted to know the current instructors teaching in the hybrid environment personal experiences and their perceived PD needs to provide effective instruction (A. Jones, personal communication, 2016). The intent of this study was to provide the campus leaders a grounded understanding regarding how the instructors describe teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and their perceptions regarding appropriate PD. The instructors began delivering the medical assisting and dental assisting programs via a hybrid format in March 2013 using a 75% face-to-face/25% online distribution model. Although the instructors were formally trained on using the learning management system, elements of sound pedagogical practices appropriate for hybrid-learning environments were not included (Southwick Tech, 2012c). An administrator at the campus expressed concern about the training from within the campus, specifically, corrupt practices continually passed onto new faculty (A. Jones, personal communication, 2016). This study is significant for the campus leaders in guiding their decisions for PD workshops focusing on increasing the instructors' skills and knowledge in a hybrid environment.

Faculty trained in proper pedagogical practices with hybrid-learning environments are better positioned to prepare students for success in their chosen vocation (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012). Positive social change comes through better-trained instructors helping to prepare and position students for improved patient care.

## **Research Questions**

Southwick Tech leaders implemented hybrid learning into the medical assisting and dental assisting programs without training faculty on proper pedagogical practices in the hybrid environment. In a review of literature, researchers stated a widespread lack of training on proper pedagogical practices for the hybrid-learning environment made available to faculty (Porter, Graham, Spring, & Welch; Porter, Graham, Bodily, & Sandberg, 2016).

In response to the problem, the following questions will guide this study,

RQ1: How do the vocational instructors describe their teaching experiences in a hybrid-learning environment?

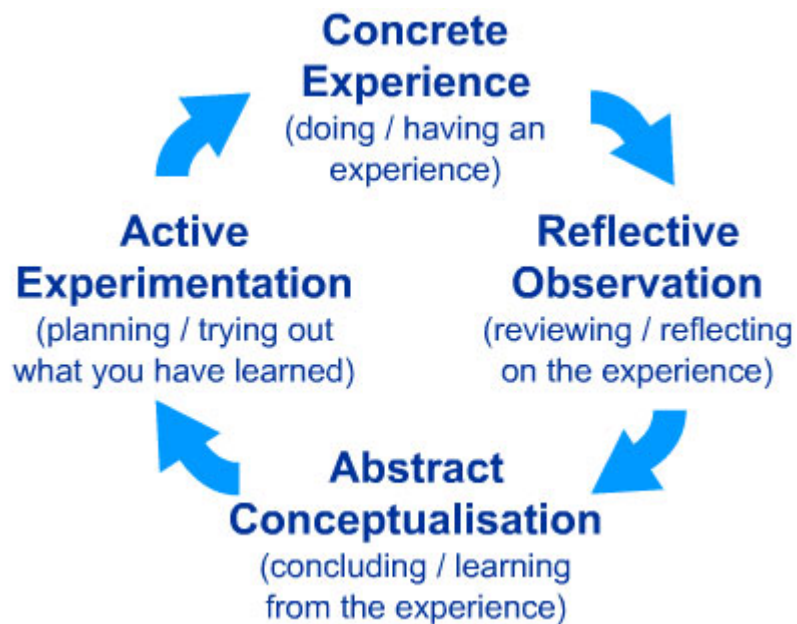
RQ2: What PD needs do vocational instructors have related to teaching in a hybrid-teaching environment?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Kolb's experiential learning theory. Based on the problem that campus leaders lacked formative data of faculty skills and knowledge needed to successfully implement instruction in a hybrid format, Kolb's experiential learning theory considered the instructors' pool of knowledge and skills in a hybrid-learning environment was chosen for this research project. Kolb's conceptual framework combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior to explore the instructors' current instructional pool of knowledge and practices when teaching in a hybrid-learning environment (Kolb, 2015). Kolb's descriptive model has four stages:

concrete experience; reflection, abstract conceptualization/analysis; and, active experimentation (Kolb, 1984, 2015). These four stages provided insight exploring and understanding the vocational teachers' pool of knowledge and skills in regard to having taught/are currently teaching in a hybrid-learning environment as identified through this study.



*Figure 1.* Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. This figure illustrates the four phases of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., New York, NY *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2015. Upper Saddle River, NJ. Pearson Education.

Kolb's theory combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior to explore the instructors' current instructional pool of knowledge and practices when teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. The stages of learning as described in Kolb's conceptual framework provide the framework to view the experience and perceived knowledge and skills of the instructors who were required to implement the hybrid model in the medical

and dental programs. Understanding the instructors' stage of learning related to the Kolb framework will help staff design and implement PD appropriate to their perceived and experienced learning stage. Through their lived experiences instructing in a hybrid-learning environment, the teachers have had the concrete experiences with the phenomenon. Through case study inquiry, the teachers' thick, rich descriptions of their day-to-day negotiation of their instructional role was elicited as informed by their concrete experiences. Further, reflection on what was successful and what needed to be revised was obtained as well as, the subsequent conceptualization of revisions, and putting the revisions into practice (active experimentation).

A review of the literature focused on the move from face to face to a hybrid-learning environment has brought up four main topics in the literature. Faculty expressed concern with lack of technical support including lack of confidence in the use of technology, consumption of time in planning and development, needed pedagogical changes and their lack of PD (Benson, Anderson, & Ooms, 2011; Buxton, Buxton, & Jackson, 2016). Hybrid learning is a combination of face-to-face class time mixed with online content (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Garrison & Vaughan, 2013).

Of note, as identified in the research literature, the research participants in those studies had a choice of their instructional environment of either hybrid learning, face-to-face, or online. For the purposes of this project study, Southwick Tech administrative leaders regulate the delivery mode of courses such that the instructors were not given the choice of instructional environment but rather were told they had to facilitate in the hybrid-learning environment.

## **Review of the Broader Problem**

Databases used to collect literature included *Google Scholar*, *SAGE Premier*, *Education Research Complete*, *Taylor and Francis*, *ERIC*, *Elsevier – Computer and Education an International Journal*, and *JOLT*. Search terms used were hybrid-learning, faculty perceptions in hybrid, faculty development in hybrid-learning, effective online teaching, best practices in blended learning, pedagogical best practices in hybrid-learning, distance education, e-learning, and faculty development.

## **Technical Support**

As faculty add technology into courses, it is inevitable technical challenges will arise that will require support for both faculty and students. Two main categories emerged from this literature review of Technical Support in hybrid learning environments, which included technical support for the faculty and technical support for the students. Multiple studies indicate having technical support available can be a deciding factor for faculty to turn a class hybrid or to stay face-to-face (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012; Ocak, 2011; Patterson-Lorenzetti, 2013). The faculty's concern included wasting time trying to "fix" the problem, students not able to participate in activities, and general frustration with technology failures (Shanedling, Martin, Huibregtse, & Gibson, 2013).

Teaching in a hybrid environment brings with it frustration to the faculty due to lack of technical knowledge and required ongoing technical support (Buxton et al., 2016). To elevate some of the frustration brought on by lack of technical knowledge, campus administration should offer technical support and evaluate their campus bandwidth to

accommodate the additional Internet traffic on campus (Moskal, Dziuban, & Hartman, 2013; Porter et al., 2014).

Once the redesign of the course is complete, faculty are left without support or evaluation of the design. Resources must also be allocated to support hybrid-learning, technical resources to ensure a seamless experience for both the student and faculty, instructional designers, curriculum developers and individuals with technology skills are all critical to the proper development of a hybrid course (Fresen, 2018; Garrison & Vaughan, 2013). Garrison and Kanuka (2004), Graham, Woodfield, and Harrison (2013) and Hill (n.d.) suggested faculty would need technical support as well as administrative support to facilitate a successful online/hybrid course. Porter et al., (2016) suggested having technical support available not only for faculty but also for students. As with any new skill acquired, in this case, technology for both faculty and students, it will take time, patience and support from administration and the IT department to have a successful hybrid program.

### **Planning**

Planning is a key component to a successful hybrid course. Teaching in the hybrid environment requires more preparation than teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment (Adekola, Dale & Gardiner, 2017; Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013; Kelly, 2013; Oliver & Stallings, 2014). McGee and Reis (2012) suggested using caution when redesigning a face-to-face course to a hybrid course, the entire course should be redesigned to optimize the face-to-face time and the online time and not to just add online components to the current face-to-face course. As faculty redesigned each course they

needed to determine which material is best suited for the online portion and what is best for the face-to-face portion of the course (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; McGee & Reis, 2012). Conversely, in some colleges, faculty are no longer the developers of the courses they will work as subject matter experts with instructional designers to design hybrid courses (Brandt, Quake-Rapp, Shanedling, Spannaus-Martin, & Martin, 2010; Shanedling et al., 2013). Although they were not designing the course, the instructor was still be making the decisions as to what content, exercises, discussions will be online and face-to-face (Shanedling et al., 2013).

Southwick Tech aligns with the latter in that subject matter experts worked with instructional designers to design the hybrid course. Betts and Heaston (2014) agreed developing hybrid courses are time consuming for faculty. Faculty needed support and training from instructional designers and technology specialists to produce a quality hybrid course. Korr, Derwin, Greene, and Sokoloff (2012) found instructors that are just starting out in a hybrid course described it as preparing for two classes: face-to-face and online. There are many ways courses were being created in the hybrid environment. Faculty may have found themselves working alongside an instructional designer or they may have been given a blank shell on a learning management system to develop and design the hybrid course on their own. No matter the way the course is to be designed, it has taken more time up front to develop pedagogically sound lessons for both the online component and the face-to-face component (Korr et al., 2012).

## **Pedagogical Support**

Currently there are many conflicting opinions in the literature regarding hybrid pedagogy. Baran et al. (2013) and Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) argued that in a hybrid, student-centered course, the use of the same methods used in a face to face course are not appropriate for a hybrid course, faculty must adjust to pedagogical changes. In contrast, Lee, Fong, and Gordon (2013) argued that pedagogy is the same in a face-to-face class and hybrid class. Teachers' perspective of hybrid-learning pedagogy is that it is the same as face-to-face class pedagogy; hybrid is just another way to deliver classroom activities. Further thought is that face-to-face time is reduced by moving some content to the online environment (Lee et al., 2013).

Porter et al. (2014) and Porter et al. (2016) suggested to campus administrators to offer pedagogical and technical support to faculty teaching in a hybrid environment which was helpful as faculty moved to teaching hybrid courses. Porter et al. (2014) suggested offering a variety of webinars, workshops, ongoing faculty seminars, year-round workshops and student-focused pedagogical support. Bohle-Carbonell, Dailey-Hebert, and Gijsselaers (2013) suggested to administration to provide proper support to faculty as they moved courses to hybrid-learning environment. To properly move courses to hybrid-learning environment it took a variety of expertise including faculty, instructional designer and technical support. Working together, they created pedagogically appropriate learning activities. Ciabocchi, Ginsberg, and Piacciano (2016) argued that faculty development in online pedagogy focusing on engaging students in the hybrid environment is wanted by faculty governance to maintain a quality education.



Researchers agreed some pedagogy used in a face-to-face course is different from pedagogy that should be used in a hybrid course (Betts & Heaston, 2014; Keengwe & Georgina, 2012; Lee, Lim & Kim, 2017; Porter et al., 2014). Although faculty have experience pedagogically sound face to face courses, training and practice will be needed as faculty move to hybrid courses. However, in the current literature although most researchers agree pedagogy is different in a face-to-face learning environment as opposed to a hybrid-learning environment, not all agree. Porter et al. (2014) findings showed that one participating university argued that instructors would not need pedagogical support stating they have sufficient pedagogical experience from teaching in the face-to-face environment. Faculty expressed challenges adjusting the learning activities to the hybrid course delivery, stating the same learning activities were not always appropriate for both hybrid and face-to-face deliveries (C. Smith, personal communication, October 2015). Boelens, DeWever, and Voet (2017) findings expressed the same challenges as the faculty in this study; deciding which instructional activities were successful in the online environment, face-to-face or both.

### **Training for Hybrid Environment Instruction**

Teaching in a hybrid environment is much different from a traditional face-to-face environment. Faculty must redesign their curriculum to be sure the content that is put online is appropriate for that environment. Korr et al. (2012) argued that although faculty were trained in developing courses, developing hybrid courses is not the same as teaching or developing a lesson plan for a face to face course, so it might not be the best use of all faculty time. Faculty needed training prior to teaching and continually as they teach in the

hybrid environment (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, & Stevens, 2011; Crawford-Ferre, & Wiest, 2012). Van Doom and Van Doom (2014) agreed faculty needed continuous training on advances in technology and pedagogy.

To improve participation and acceptance of PD, Terosky and Heasley (2014) suggests PD be guided by wants and needs of the faculty. Faculty expressed a desire for training on topics such as redesigning their teaching method and learning was needed for faculty teaching in a hybrid-learning environment (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Lackey, 2011). Porter et al. (2014) noted faculty were interested in a variety of learning experiences as they learn about hybrid-learning. The instructors suggested one-on-one training and face to face. Wicks, Craft, Mason, Gritter, and Bolding (2014) and Hill (n.d.) argued faculty found participating in a peer learning community was a valuable way of learning and sharing experience and support of each other as they learn and implement hybrid learning. Betts and Heaston (2014) and Keengwe and Georgina (2012) found faculty not only need continued training in hybrid pedagogy they also require training on proper usage of new technology, for instance Learning Management System, and new software's. Meyer and Murrell (2014a) found more institutions are offering training to faculty to teach in a hybrid or online environment mainly face to face and that online webinars on how to teach hybrid or online are not widely accepted. To have a quality hybrid program, institutions' faculty development programs should be continuous, focusing on new technologies, pedagogy and encourage collaboration between faculties (Dittmar & McCracken, 2012).

## **Implications**

This qualitative case study explored vocational faculties' knowledge and experiences' teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. The outcome of this project study is a position paper. The position paper (a.k.a. white paper) is best suited for delivering facts associated with a problem to lead to a recommended solution (Pershing, 2015).

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to identify faculty experiences of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment, and their perceived PD needs to provide effective instruction in a hybrid-learning environment. A review of the literature focused on the move from face to face to a hybrid-learning environment has brought up four main topics in the literature. Faculty expressed concern with lack of technical support including lack of confidence in the use of technology, time consuming planning and development, pedagogical changes and lack of training and PD (Benson et al., 2011; Buxton et al., 2016). The outcome of this project study is a white paper expressing the positive and negative attributes of the hybrid-learning environment the participants expressed during the interview process.

## **Section 2: The Methodology**

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The local problem for this project study is the lack of understanding the campus administration has regarding faculties' skill and knowledge of hybrid format instruction. A review of the literature confirms a broader problem; lack of best practices teaching in

the hybrid-learning environment. The purpose of this project study was to identify faculties' experiences of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and perceived PD needs to provide effective instruction in hybrid-learning environment. By exploring faculty knowledge and skills, campus leaders are now better positioned to offer training workshops that are uniquely focused to help faculty improve their knowledge and skills.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- How do the vocational instructors describe their teaching experiences in a hybrid-learning environment?
- To what extent do those instructors feel prepared to teach in a hybrid-learning environment?

Qualitative research examines people, places, and events as it naturally occurs in its environment (Creswell, 2014; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). A qualitative research approach was the most appropriate for this study. There are concepts not yet known regarding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, qualitative research is consistent with exploring the instructors' current experiences, knowledge, and skills when teaching in a hybrid environment as it provides the opportunity to explore and identify concepts not yet known (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is an inductive process whereby data is collected and analyzed from the target population while immersed in their natural settings thus making their world visible (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). The inductive process goes from the participants' concrete descriptions to a more abstract understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010). The qualitative approach helped examine the teachers'

descriptions of experiences when instructing in a hybrid format as well their perceptions on training needs.

### **Case Study**

The research design chosen was a case study. Case studies begin by identifying a specific, concrete case (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the case was medical assistant and dental assistant faculty at Southwick Tech providing instruction in a hybrid-learning environment. Further, case studies are bounded by time and place (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The boundedness was Southwick Tech's medical and dental assistant courses, students, and faculty in the hybrid instructional environment (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010; Stake, 1995). Case studies provide the flexibility for multiple sources of data collection as well as allowing for emergent design meaning revisions from the original design (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

The specific research design was intrinsic case study. The intrinsic case study provided the structure to examine more deeply a specific case to better understand the instructors' descriptions of teaching in the hybrid-learning environment (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). The case in this study was of secondary interest that was faculty providing instruction in a hybrid-learning environment. However, the case plays a vital role to help understand the external interest that is the teachers' description of training (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

### **Design Justification**

Other research designs that were considered for this study included ethnography, phenomenological inquiry and narrative inquiry. Ethnography focuses on the culture of a

group, which would not properly answer the research questions of this study. The research question of this study investigated the experiences, knowledge and practice of individual vocational instructors. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the lived experiences of the participants around a phenomenon. Although phenomenological theory could be a viable choice, this study is focused on a specific issue at a specific campus (Creswell, 2013). In narrative inquiry, the researcher is telling the story of one person's experiences (Creswell, 2013). The focus of this research project was gathering persons' experiences of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and training needs. By interviewing eight faculty members, I was better positioned to produce a well-rounded training series for new and experienced instructors.

## **Participants**

### **Setting**

Southwick Tech is a 33000 square foot facility located in the Northeast United States. At this healthcare school, students learn through hands-on training, with an emphasis placed on marketable skills and knowledge vital to helping students enter new careers with confidence. This campus offers certificate programs in Medical Assistant, Dental Assistant, Massage Therapy and Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning. The campus serves approximately 250 students annually including twenty faculty members and twenty work staff including the admissions department, financial aid, business office and career services.

### **Sampling, Criteria for Participants**

The participant selection for this study was a purposeful sampling of all 10 allied health faculty members at Southwick Tech who had experience teaching in the hybrid-learning environment (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010). The total population available of faculty teaching in the hybrid environment for allied health was 10. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), found that all themes would present themselves at 12 to 15 participants, however that was from a pool of 200 participants. The number of participants for this study allowed me to get the thick, rich descriptions of each participant's experiences, knowledge and practice in the hybrid-learning environment (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The criteria for the sample was that the participants were faculty members of allied health at the target site with experience teaching in the hybrid-learning environment.

### **Access to Participants**

The Campus President of Southwick Tech granted permission to interview faculty members who had taught in the hybrid-learning environments at Southwick Tech by signing a letter of cooperation. I initiated communication with the President of Southwick, upon Walden IRB approval and provided the target site with the Walden IRB approval letter and Walden IRB approval number 03-31-17-0241694. Following official approval from the President's office, I emailed faculty members who met the criteria for this study. A participant list was developed by selection of allied health faculty from Southwick Tech's school catalog addendum located on the public website. Next, I sent the list of potential participants to the Campus President requesting email addresses for

the listed faculty. I sent a letter of invitation and a consent form to participate in the study via email to those faculty meeting the criteria for the study. Therefore, I sent the email to 10 potential participants. Eight potential participants replied that they were interested in participating in the study. I learned, by word of mouth, that the tenth potential participant was unavailable to reply thus a follow up email was not needed.

### **Researcher – Participant Working Relationship**

The ability to collect sufficient data relies on eliciting the thick, rich description from the participants' regarding their experiences. Fontana and Frey (1994) stated that establishing and building rapport with the participant is important to achieve maximization of data. I was also cognizant that each interview prompt being a negotiation of their descriptions of their experiences between what they think I want to hear to what they want me to know regardless of the prompts focus (Errante, 2000; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). At the beginning of the interview, I explained to the participants that all information they provided would be confidential in accordance with Walden's IRB policy.

The participants have interacted with me at the campus since October 2010, as a team member. I discussed the nature and far reaching depth of this research project. Southwick Tech is continuing to introduce additional hybrid programs to their offerings. The participants expressing their experiences will allow future teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the hybrid-learning environment; they are better positioned to provide more robust instruction to not only the allied health students but across all disciplines. Through better instruction, the students will be better prepared to assist with patient care.



## **Participant Protection**

Confidentiality of participants' identity was held by using alias names as organized on a code table. Each participant received, prior to the scheduled interview, a copy of the consent form to review via email. At the start of each interview, I requested that the participants sign two copies of the consent form, one for their records and one for mine. The consent form included information on:

- Criteria for participant's involvement in study
- Objectives of the project study
- Explanation that participation is voluntary
- Assurance, if they choose to decline or exit the study at any time there will be no repercussions
- I assigned an alias to each participant used to ensure confidentiality.

I stored the alias identification on an external hard drive stored at my residence in a fire proof, key locked safe. I will destroy five years from the approval of the project study.

## **Data Collection**

The main data collection tool in this study was personal interviews (Errante, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997). A significant strength of interviews is the ability to capture the information from those who have it through being deeply entrenched in the natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010). The participants for this study were faculty currently teaching in the hybrid-learning environment.

The interviews were conducted in a private office at the campus outside of normal business hours allowing for participant confidentiality through minimizing accidental interruption. A “do not disturb” sign was attached to the office door to avoid interruption. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in length. Transcription was completed within 24 hours of each interview. Data was collected via semi-structured, face to face interviews as I inquired about specific data that is required from all participants needed to answer the research questions. Further, semi-structured interview questions allowed for flexibility, allowing the researcher to further explore responses by the interviewee (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured interview allowed me to obtain a deep-rich insight into the participants’ experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. I developed the interview protocol including the specific interview prompts. The specific prompts were developed from a synthesis of the framework and the literature to elicit data to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010).

Each interview had the same interview prompts, five prompts focused on research question number one and four prompts focused on research question number two. The semi-structured interview allowed me to probe into the participant’s replies to further gather the thick, rich, descriptions of the participants’ experiences. I used a digital recording device to record each interview. After each interview, the audio was then transferred to an external hard drive and stored in a key locked fire proof safe that is kept in my residence. Once the interview was transcribed I emailed each participant their transcript and was asked to review the transcript of their interview to ensure accuracy of information. Five out of eight participants replied that the transcripts were accurate.

Three participants did not respond to the request to ensure accuracy, I did not send a second request. Next, I proceeded to code the transcripts.

### **Role of the Researcher**

At the time of this project study and up to the present day, Southwick Tech. employs me. In my current position, I am responsible for curriculum development for new and existing programs. Currently I do not have supervisory oversight over the potential participants at the selected campus of this study. One point of consideration is from October 2010 to April 2015, I was the Director of Education managing the potential participants. In addition, as the corporate director of product development of Southwick Tech, I had regular interaction with the participants who met the qualifications of this study. The participants and I worked in the same building; my interaction with them is on a cordial basis not a supervisory or managerial basis. My past and current relationships with the potential participants afforded me the trust needed to engage the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Immediately following each interview, I transcribed the recorded interview using Microsoft Word. Once transcription was complete, I began coding each transcript. First-cycle coding was conducted in accordance with initial coding practices. Initial coding consists of reducing the data into distinct pieces of words, phrases, or paragraphs allowing for a focused comparison for similarities (Saldana, 2016). With the computer, I used the colors provided by Microsoft Word for different codes to conduct initial coding throughout the transcripts. A few iterations of initial coding were conducted until no further categories of codes were emerging from my review of the data which indicated

that saturation had been established (Saldana, 2016). Coding was completed by using Microsoft Word. Two columns were created on a Microsoft Word document. Column one contained the participants' responses. In column two, I documented, with the participants' responses, distinct pieces of words, phrases or paragraphs to focus comparison for similarities (Saldana, 2016). Once initial coding was completed I began second cycle coding, axial coding theory was used. Axial coding is taking the initial codes from initial coding and narrowing them into like groups (Saldana, 2016). Axial coding is appropriate for data collected via interviews and documentation (Saldana, 2016). To complete axial coding, I took the words, phrases, and paragraphs gathered during open coding and began to put into similar categories. I continued to categorize similar topics until I achieved saturation, when no new information emerged during coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Evidence of Quality**

To assure accuracy and quality I used member check, peer debriefing and journal reflection (Merriam, 2009). Member checking is conducted to provide credibility and validity to the findings in the project study (Merriam, 2009). Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I solicited feedback from each participant to confirm accuracy of my interpretation of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Five out of eight participants responded to my request stating the respective transcript was accurate. Three out of eight participants did not respond to my request for a review of the transcription for accuracy. I accepted no response as an implied acceptance of accuracy. Next, I requested a former classmate, currently holding an Ed.D. in Adult Education, to complete a peer review.

Prior to providing access to findings, the peer reviewer signed a letter of confidentiality. In addition, I asked the peer reviewer to check the quality and accuracy of the coding (Merriam, 2009). Finally, I kept a reflective journal. The reflective journal was a place to write out any of my personal biases; I wrote in the journal following each interview. In the journal, I kept a log of my personal assumptions, experiences, views and biases (Merriam, 2009). Using member checking, peer review and a reflective journal improves readers' trustworthiness of the study findings.

### **Discrepant Cases**

Discrepant cases are data that appear to contradict established themes having emerged from the findings (Creswell, 2013). These cases are welcome and broaden the findings of the study (Creswell, 2013). They provide the opportunity to grab a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that otherwise may not be present (Creswell, 2013). In only one instance did I have a discrepant case; participant Don had a different opinion of the role of the instructor in the face-to-face portion of the course. Don stated, "The role of an instructor in the face to face is like any other course face to face. We do our class work we mentor the students. We do all the typical face to face any instructor would do in a non-blended environment." The next section expands on the data analysis.

### **Data Analysis Results**

To collect the data for this project study I contacted, via email, the campus president of Southwick Tech to gain permission to interview faculty members who taught in the hybrid-learning environment on her campus. Once verbal permission was granted I emailed the letter of cooperation. Once signed by the campus president and upon Walden

University IRB approval I emailed an invitation and a consent form to participate in the study to faculty members who met the criteria for this study. As I received notification via email from the interested faculty members, I began to schedule face-to-face interviews. For the convenience of the participants, a private office, on the Southwick Tech campus, was utilized to conduct the interviews. Prior to each interview I hung a do not disturb sign on the outside of the door. Once pleasantries were completed, I reviewed the consent form with the participant and requested two copies be signed, one for the participant and one for my records. I then began the interview. Each interview lasted not more than 60 minutes. At the completion of each interview, I thanked the participant and offered a \$5 gift card to Dunkin Donuts for participating. Within 24 hours of each interview, I transcribed said interview. Once transcription was complete, I emailed the participant the transcript requesting them to ensure accuracy of information. Lastly, using Microsoft Word I began initial coding. I created a table using two columns: column one was the participants response and column two I extracted pieces of words, phrases and paragraphs. I then moved to axial coding using deductive thinking. After many iterations, and achieving saturation, coding was complete. Utilizing the conceptual framework, Kolb's experiential learning theory, I used the categories or stages associated with the theory as a lens to which I could view the participant responses and associated codes and categories.

The blended delivery programs taught by the participants of this project study were not involved in the design and development of the program or individual courses. Subject matter experts from outside of the company worked with instructional designers

to develop the courses, content, quizzes and exercises. Several themes emerged during data analysis; the participants expressed as important to their success and experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. The first of these themes was the role of the instructor in the face-to-face portion and the online portion of the hybrid-learning environment. The instructor's role has evolved from leading the learning in the classroom to a facilitator of the learning environment. The second theme that emerged were concerns of an increase in plagiarism.

### **Findings**

This section contains a summary of findings for each of the research questions. Themes emerging from the findings noted in Table 1. To determine major themes, I analyzed the information that emerged from the transcribed interviews for main categories. Once the major themes were identified, I further analyzed for any subcategories or minor themes. Overall, I found four major themes and two minor themes in the data analysis process.

Table 1

*Major and Minor Themes by Research Question*

Research Question	Major and minor themes	Description
Experiences in a hybrid learning environment	Role of Instructor (Major)	Changing role to facilitator
	Online Portion Concerns (Major)	Concerns of increase of plagiarism
	Hands-on activity (minor)	On-ground class activities
Preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment	Training (Major)	Faculty training plan for teaching in hybrid-learning environment
	Practice (Major)	Practice using the learning management system
	Best Practices (minor)	Faculty shared their best practices for teaching in a hybrid-learning environment

**Research Question 1: Experiences in a hybrid-learning environment**

The research question was as follows: How do vocational instructors describe their experiences in a hybrid-learning environment? Findings indicated that instructors were overall very happy with their experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. They indicated their role as changed to a facilitator of the course as opposed to a sage on the stage. The instructors also shared on-line portion concerns to be aware of while teaching in a hybrid-learning environment.

**Research Question 2 – Preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment.**



The second research question was as follows: To what extent do those instructors feel prepared to teach in a hybrid-learning environment. Findings indicated instructors are pleased with the training and preparation they received. Furthermore, instructors offered suggestions to better prepare instructors starting to teach in a hybrid-learning environment.

### **Themes from the Findings**

Upon review of the analyzed data, I found two major themes and one minor theme from research question 1 and two major themes and one minor theme from research question 2.

**Research Question 1 – experience in a hybrid-learning environment.** I asked participants about their role in the online and face-to-face portions; what the instructors have found to be successful and unsuccessful, and best practices of the hybrid-learning environment. Overall, the participants stated their role has changed since teaching in the hybrid environment. The instructors have more time for hands on activities and warn of added plagiarism concerns in the online portion of the course.

*Major Theme 1: Role of the Instructor in the online vs on ground portions of the hybrid course.* The first major theme identified from the first research question regarding describing their experiences as an instructor in a hybrid-learning environment. Seventy-five percent of participants described their role; their experience as an instructor in a hybrid environment as a facilitator. Facilitating the course is quite different from how the participants had traditionally run classes. Prior to hybrid learning the faculty would lecture on the day's topic then apply knowledge to a hands-on activity. In the hybrid

environment the students are coming in with the knowledge, the instructor is facilitating a discussion and then applying the knowledge to a hands-on activity. Don stated, “The role of an instructor in the face to face was like any other course face to face. We did our class work and we mentor the students. We did all the typical face to face any instructor would do in a non-blended environment.” Donna stated, “lot of reinforcement.” Five participants explained, in the face-to-face portion of class, they reinforced the material that the students would be working with in the online portion of the course. They used some of this time to discuss and answer any questions, so students were properly prepared to continue the discussion in the online portion. Lauren said, “Our role was to sort of go through and outline in a discussion about the subject that we were talking about.” Pat described the face-to-face portion, as “it’s basically to facilitate. Really important in the classroom to keep the students engaged.” Anne further described her time in class with students as a time to reinforce the material by using “a lot of past experiences I had working in the medical field with patients and doctors.”

As an experienced medical assistant instructor, I have taught in both a tradition and hybrid environment. The online activity is a preamble to the face-to-face portion. Lauren stated, “In the face-to-face portion, it is an active learning environment, students worked together, practicing hands-on skills”. The experiences the participants described are consistent with my personal experience.

***Major Theme 2: Online Portion Considerations.*** The second major theme which emerged from the first research question describes the experiences as an instructor in a hybrid-learning environment. Faculty expressed having positive and negative experience

teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. Students were more engaged with the learning material, spending more time in the eBook utilizing the adaptive learning, which lead to higher grades, and added learning. Adversely, Donna, Sara and Linda each stated they noticed more instances of students plagiarizing their work. Although, the faculty found more plagiarism it is possibly due to added demand on the students to write out discussions instead of a verbal exchange in the face to face portion of the hybrid class.

***Minor Theme 2.1: Positive Experience.*** The first minor theme that emerged from the first research question is exploring the participants' positive experience teaching in the hybrid-learning environment. The participants stated that students spoke positively about the hybrid-learning environment; six participants also stated they have had students who were not engaged in the online material. Donna stated, "The students loved it. They were not bored; they are driven to complete their work. I have had students, young and old, tell me I wish this was around in high school, it would have been fabulous." Linda also had positive feedback to share from her students stating, "I was nervous at first but once I started doing it, I loved it." Sara stated, "Students take advantage of the online environment and don't put in as much time and effort as they should." Linda said, "Students believe the blended portion isn't that important. Donna said, "They (students) do not complete their online work". Pat stated "unfortunately, people who do not do the online portion, say they don't feel it's worth their time."

The hybrid-learning environment adds convenience, such as less time spent in the face-to-face class, to learning for both faculty and students. However, for hybrid learning to work properly, students must take responsibility to complete required work prior to

coming to class. The instructor is responsible to make known to the students, the course expectations including time spent outside of class.

*Minor Theme 2.2 Plagiarism.* The second minor theme that emerged from the first research question focuses on an increase in plagiarism. The final concern, plagiarism, was reported from 25% participants. Anne and Shauna both expressed concerns about the increase in plagiarism they had seen since starting in the hybrid-learning environment. One example of plagiarism Anne described was a student copying, verbatim, another students' response to a discussion question in the online environment. Other examples of plagiarism include copy and pasting from a website without citing the source. Although students did speak positively about the online portion of the hybrid program, it is important for faculty to discuss the importance of completing the online work. Faculty also should be aware of the increase in plagiarism in the online environment. Shauna states, "Having a software program to run responses through to determine the extent of plagiarism, such as Turn-It-In would be very helpful to the faculty".

Issues with plagiarism is not a new problem for faculty to address with students. In my early years of teaching, I assumed adult students understood plagiarism however, I was wrong. The first time I encountered a plagiarized paper I confronted the student. The student genuinely did not understand the concept of plagiarism. I decided at that time that to consistently discuss plagiarism. Software, such as Turn-It-In, can be helpful for faculty to uncover instances of plagiarism and used to teach students the importance of not plagiarizing others work.

***Minor Theme 2.3: On Ground portion of the hybrid program allows more time for hands-on Activities.*** The third minor theme that emerged from the first research question centered on participants describing their experiences as an instructor in a hybrid-learning environment. Prior to hybrid learning, faculty were challenged to find enough time to incorporate both lecture and hands-on activities due to the time constraints of the course. Ninety percent of participants expressed the on-ground portion of class was a time for the instructors to have students practice the hands-on activities associated with their programs. Participants were asked to discuss their experience teaching in the face-to-face portion of the hybrid course. Linda and Anne both stated that they “do a lot of hands-on activities, such as suctioning, passing instruments, taking x-rays, and creating molds in the dental assisting program.” Sara and Shauna both said that, “they use the time to lecture while doing a hands-on activity.” Sara went on to explain, for instance, when teaching students to draw blood, instead of a formal lecture, Sara reported that she “used the manikin arm, and other equipment while discussing the equipment, its uses, safety and the procedure of drawing blood.” Then, Sara noted that, “the rest of the time in the face to face portion was centered on watching the students’ practice drawing blood on a manikin, and eventually drawing blood from a human. Lauren, Donna and Pat teach the medical administrative portion of the medical assistant program; all three of these participants reported that they “have short discussions which transition into hands-on activities such as filling out billing forms, role playing or coding medical procedures using the ICD-10 and CPT books.”

The seventh participant, Don, gave a different perspective on the face-to-face environment. He stated, “The role of an instructor in the face to face is like any other course face to face. We do our class work. We mentor the students. We do everything any other typical face to face instructor would do in a non-blended environment.” This practice contradicts much of the literature McGee and Reis (2012) suggested using caution when redesigning a face-to-face course and not to just add online components to the current face to face course. As faculty redesign each course they need to determine which material is best suited for the online portion and what is best suited for the face to face portion of the course (Garrison & Vaughan, 2013; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; McGee & Reis, 2012).

I found it interesting that only one out of the eight participants, Don, expressed that the face-to-face environment has not changed in the hybrid environment. Don stands out from the rest of the participants, although he attended the in-service training and the online training, he stated, “blended learning, online learning has long since been a passion of mine. I only needed to know how to use the tool.” Although Don states, “blended learning, online learning has long since been a passion of mine” his response to the role of the instructor in the face to face contradicts research I found for this study and the other eight participants who attended the same training as Don.

**Research Question 2 – Preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment.** I asked participants about how they prepared to teach in the hybrid-learning environment. Based on the analysis of the data, two major themes and one minor

theme were noted. Major themes that emerged included the training instructors received prior to teaching in the hybrid environment.

**Major Theme 1: Train the trainer; learning to teach in a hybrid-learning environment.** The first major theme emerged from the second research question in response to interview prompts describing their preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment. The instructor-training program at Southwick Tech, prior to hybrid learning, was peer-to-peer training. It included a new instructor observing an experienced instructor and watching internally produced training webinars. The instructors hired were subject matter experts, and not formally trained instructors. Southwick Tech administrators provided many training opportunities for instructors preparing to teach in the hybrid classes.

Eight participants varied in their description of the training they received from their employer, Southwick Tech. Each participant stated that, “the training was sufficient for them to start teaching in the hybrid learning environment.” Lauren and Sara described, “in-service training sessions as having trainers from the corporate office coming to the campus to conduct face to face training on how to use the LMS” (learning management system). Lauren said, “There was definitely lots of training involved.” One-hundred percent of participants discussed an online training that was set up like an online course. The course was mandatory for each instructor to take prior to teaching in the hybrid-learning environment. Linda, Shauna and Anne stated, “A peer sat with each of them separately to explain and show them how to use the LMS.” They all noted this support was very helpful, as having a one-on-one training seemed to help them learn the

material more easily.” Pat described the training as “more of an overview of what the courses looked like rather than actually going into each one and taking a section and following it with this hands on or something like that.” Donna stated, “I learned more by failing, I made mistakes.” Don stands out from the rest of the participants, although he attended the in-service training and the online training, he stated, “blended learning, online learning has long since been a passion of mine. I only needed to know how to use the tool.”

Training can be completed in a wide variety of ways, one-on-one, face-to-face, or online, to name a few. In my opinion, training faculty is like training students; the material is new to the faculty just as material in class is new to students. I have piloted a training program for faculty new to hybrid education. The class was structured so that the instructors were “students” in a hybrid class. They not only attended face-to-face sessions, but they also had online modules to complete.

**Major Theme 2: Practice using the learning management system.** The second major theme emerged from the second research question in response asking participants to describe their preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment. Following Kolb’s experiential theory of active experimentation (Kolb, 2015), 50% of participants described “the need to practice using the learning management system” (LMS).

Donna stated that she “was very nervous starting to teach in the hybrid learning environment.” She expressed she was “nervous about using the LMS properly.” Her advice was to practice “practice the platform over and over and over again.” Sara also agreed that practice is “a big deal”. Sara and Pat suggested, “Going into the shells and



seeing what's there, what you like, what you don't like, and most importantly to complete all of the exercises you expect the students to complete prior to the start of class." By completing all of the exercises prior to the students, as an instructor, you will be well informed of where students may have questions or challenges and can develop lessons around such challenges. Lauren stated, "I think it's the same as being face to face, the more you do it the better you get at it. Looking back three or four years ago when I started teaching blended, I am a much better online instructor now than I was when I first started. So, I think it's like anything else, we learn from what worked and what didn't and improve upon that."

As the participants described, practice using the LMS is important to be better prepared to assist students in the course. Students may encounter issues such as not being able to login to class or the course work is not available in the LMS to name a few possible issues. With instructor's proficient in using the LMS, they are better prepared to assist the student with minor issues to avoid prolonged time away from the virtual classroom and frustration.

**Minor Theme 1: Best Practice.** The first minor theme that emerged from the second research question in response to asking participants to describe their preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment. Participants were asked to share best practices. Seventy-five percent of participants offered suggestions to instructors interested in hybrid learning environment. Sara said, "Get yourself familiar with what they (students) are going to do on ground and what they (students) are going to do online, just be prepared." Donna shared "welcome change. Ask questions during training sessions, ask trainers to

show you (hands-on) how to do something that is confusing. Pull from the strengths of your team.” Don shared “be proactive, don’t procrastinate, prepare as if it was grounded and move forward with that.” Pat stated “I would recommend a new instructor sit with several experienced instructors to see how they approach the blended vs. on-ground portions of the course. Definitely do the work online that the students are going to do.” Linda stated, “Make sure you are always prepared for the following week.” In addition, Lauren said, “be very engaged in the class. Know what information you are looking for from the students in the discussion forums.”

Learning from experienced instructors is a great training tool. The faculty provided best practices that they have learned since they started to teach in the hybrid-learning environment. Be prepared, proactive, expect change and be very engaged are a few of the participants suggestions. A combination of formal training, sharing best practices, and experience working together completes the circle of training.

### **Summary of Findings**

The focus of this qualitative, case study was to identify vocational instructors’ experiences’ of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and PD needs to teach in a hybrid-learning environment. To address the problem Southwick Tech administrators, as described by the former campus president, did not possess formative data regarding faculty’s skills and knowledge, experiences and perceived PD needs of hybrid format instruction (A. Jones, personal communication, November 2012). Therefore, it became difficult to develop and deliver appropriate PD programs for current and future faculty whose duties included hybrid format instruction.

Face to face, semi-structured interviews conducted on eight vocational instructors, each with experience teaching in the hybrid-learning environment.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. How do the vocational instructors describe their teaching experiences in a hybrid-learning environment?

RQ2. What PD needs do vocational instructors have related to teaching in a hybrid-learning environment?

Through data analysis, four major themes and two minor themes emerged. Major themes included the role of the instructor changing to a facilitator, online instruction concerns such as an increase in plagiarism, training plans for faculties' teaching in the hybrid learning environment and practices using the learning management system. Minor themes are increased hands on activity in the on-ground portion of the course and sharing of best practices. Overall, the participants of this project study provided positive input about their experiences in teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. They described their role as changing from sage on the stage to a facilitator of information. The programs taught by the participants are Medical Assistant and Dental Assistant, both described as "very hands-on" (C. Miller, personal communication, 2017). The participants described the face-to-face portion of the hybrid program as a time to focus on the hands-on skills needed for the students' professions. Conversely, Lee et al. (2013) argued teachers' perspective of hybrid-learning pedagogy is that it is the same as face-to-face class pedagogy; hybrid is just another way to deliver classroom activities. Further thought is that face-to-face time is reduced by moving some content to the online environment.

Teaching in the hybrid environment requires more preparation than teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment (Baran et al., 2013; Kelly, 2013; Oliver & Stallings, 2014). McGee and Reis (2012) suggest using caution when redesigning a face-to-face course to a hybrid course, the entire course should be redesigned to optimize the face-to-face time and the online time and not to just add online components to the current face-to-face course. Furthermore, participants shared best practices specifically for faculty new to hybrid learning, to practice while using the learning management system (LMS), set up a mock class, set themselves (faculty) as a student to have the full student experience. The faculty member should complete all exercises they expect the students to complete in class. By completing the exercises, the faculty member will be better positioned to assist the student with troubleshooting any technical issues and to address potential questions or concerns students may have when completing the work on their own. Faculty should also practice using the LMS, and to complete, prior to delivery to students, all exercises expected to be completed by the students allowing the faculty member to prepare for questions and to correct errors.

The findings of this study resulted in the development of a white paper. A white paper presents evidence and recommendations to stakeholders on policies and procedures. In the white paper, I will present the findings of this study and make recommendations to implement a formal faculty PD for teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. An outline of the recommended PD plan will be included. I will present the white paper to Southwick Tech's administration, which will contain an overview of the project study, findings, themes, and recommendations for faculty preparing to teach in a

hybrid-learning environment to acclimate the faculties to the change in the culture of teacher to a hybrid environment.

### **Conclusion**

Section 2 contained detailed information about the methodology of my project study. Utilizing qualitative, case study design was most appropriate to answer the guiding research questions on how vocational instructors describe teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. The participant pool was a purposeful sampling of eight allied health faculty members with experience teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. To achieve confidentiality, alias names were assigned to all participants' identity. Data was collected via semi-structured face-to-face interviews and analyzed using initial coding and axial coding methods. To ensure quality I performed member check, peer debriefing and journal reflection. The result of this project study will be a white paper recommending a formal training program and continued PD.

The next section details the rationale, based on the literature reviewed, for choosing a white paper upon Walden University approval, will be presented to the corporate education team as a new best practice for implementation and ongoing PD of the hybrid program. Recognizing and addressing potential barriers such as faculty's' resistance to change are discussed. Finally, a discussion on the implementation, evaluation and implication of this project will be found.

### Section 3: The Project

## **Introduction**

The aim of this project study was to explore the vocational instructors' experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. This section outlines the project chosen based on the research results and literature reviewed. The project is a white paper that describes the problem; administration did not have an understanding regarding the faculty's skills and knowledge of hybrid format instruction (A. Jones, personal communication, November 2012). Therefore, it became difficult to develop and deliver appropriate PD programs for current and future faculty whose duties include hybrid format instruction. Additionally, since 2012, the campus leaders implemented an online component to the traditional course formats thus creating a hybrid format (75% face-to-face instruction, 25% online instruction) for the Certificate in Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting programs.

### **Description and Goals**

The purpose of this project study was to identify faculties' experiences of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and perceived PD needs to provide effective instruction in a hybrid-learning environment. The semi-structured interviews of eight vocational instructors currently teaching in a hybrid-learning environment allowed me, as the researcher, to probe into the participants' experiences and knowledge of the hybrid-learning environment. As described in the findings of this study, the faculty have had both positive and negative experiences teaching in the hybrid environment. There were three goals of the white paper.

Goal 1: Inform Southwick Tech administration of current faculties' experiences teaching in the hybrid-learning environment.

Goal 2: Make recommendations to Southwick Tech administration to implement and train additional hybrid learning faculty.

Goal 3: Recommend a professional development plan for faculty teaching in hybrid programs at Southwick Tech.

### **Rationale**

Based on the findings of this study, a white paper is best suited to address the problem, to inform campus leaders of faculties' knowledge and skill level in the hybrid-learning environment. A position paper, also known as a white paper, is used to educate readers about a topic, possibly a problem and offer solutions (Pershing, 2015). A white paper presents evidence and recommendations to stakeholders on policies and procedures (Pershing, 2015). In the white paper, I recommend implementing an updated faculty-training plan for teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. An outline of the recommended training plan is included. Upon approval of this project study by Walden University, I will present the white paper to Southwick Tech's administration, which will contain an overview of the project study, findings, themes, and recommendations for faculty preparing to teach in a hybrid-learning environment to acclimate the faculties to the change in the culture of teacher to a hybrid environment.

### **Review of the Literature**

A literature review was conducted using Walden University Library and Google Scholar researching peer-reviewed journals. The databases used to collect literature

included Google Scholar, SAGE Premier, Education Research Complete, Taylor and Francis, ERIC, Elsevier – Computer and Education an International Journal, and JOLT. Search terms used were *white papers*, *position papers*, *writing a white paper*, *change theory*, *hybrid learning*, *blended learning*, *discussion forums*, *faculty development and professional development*.

The genre chosen for this project study was a position paper. A position paper, also known as a white paper, are used to educate readers about a topic, possibly a problem and offer solutions (Pershing, 2015). White papers are short (about 12 pages) fact driven, concise papers often used to sell merchandise or a service (Kantor, 2009; Lyons & Luginsland, 2014; Owl Purdue Writing Lab, 2016). There were many suggestions on how to write a white paper, what information to incorporate into the paper and recommendations for the design. Most individuals agree that a white paper should attract the audience, be engaging, informative, and finally convince the reader why the specified recommendations are the best for their organization (Kantor, 2009; Pershing, 2015; Powell, 2012; Rotarius & Rotarius, 2016; Stelzner, 2007).

When writing a white paper, the author should build the paper based on their audience. For instance, the audience for this white paper is an executive team, very busy individuals. I will have a limited amount of time to introduce the problem and offer a solution. The first section of the white paper will be an executive summary. A well-written executive summary, to the point and answers basic question, will entice the reader to continue reading the rest of the paper (Kantor, 2009; Rotarius & Rotarius, 2016). The next section(s) of the white paper, the writer will recognize the problem and offer



research that will guide the recommendations. Kantor (2009) suggests adding pictures and call-out boxes throughout the white paper. The call-out boxes should be short quotes or other key information so that if a person is flipping through the white paper these statements stand out. Finally, the white paper should include closing thoughts. In the closing thoughts section, the writer should summarize the paper reiterating the reason the recommendations made are the best solution.

### **Context of Change in the Target Setting**

In 2012, Southwick Tech administration decided to pilot hybrid programs in two campuses. Hybrid learning was new to the company, to the industry (medical assistant and dental assistant), to the campus and to the instructors (A. Jones, personal communication, November 2012). Changes were coming for the instructors and campus administrators, in how they taught, interacted with students and advised students, to name a few changes. After a review of literature about change process theory I am able to identify weaknesses Southwick Tech had in the creating, implementation and the ability to sustain the change (Hall & Hord, 2015). The following literature review will provide an outline related to proper change processes for sustainable change.

### **Change Theory**

Change is inevitable. In business, it is critical to stay ahead of the competition with new programs and delivery methods. Change is a process, not an event (Hall & Hord, 2015). Picciano (2015) also suggested that change is a process of purposeful planning for successful implementation. However, change can be difficult and disruptive to the learning environment if not thought out and implemented properly. Ferguson,

Hall, and Hopwood (2015) argued there are three phases to change: creating the vision, implementing the vision and sustaining the vision.

When creating a vision, also referred to as a strategic plan, the first step is to engage key stakeholders, for instance, administration, campus presidents, subject matter experts and faculty. Each of the key stakeholders will bring different perspectives from their positions to complete analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and if the idea is sustainable. This committee is responsible for the direction the project will take, setting priorities, and setting the plan to get to implementation (Ferguson et al., 2015).

Implementing the vision is the second phase. It is important the implementation phase addresses all potential issues, faculties' feelings and perceptions of the change and continue support from the stakeholders for the vision (Ferguson et al., 2015; Saunders, 2013). As the implementation process continues concerns may be brought up, as Buxton et al., (2016) and Rakes and Dunn (2015) argued teaching in a hybrid (online) environment brings with it frustration to the faculty due to lack of technical knowledge and requires ongoing technical support. Implementation is an important phase for the success or failure of the vision. With active stakeholders, discussions with faculty about their feelings and perceptions and continued support implementation can be successful.

Lastly, is the sustainability of the vision. Ferguson et al. (2015) stated the sustaining the vision phase is "in many ways most critical and neglected" and should be addressed in the initial phase of creating the vision. It should take into consideration

stakeholder turnover, new management with new goals and the continued support for the initial vision.

The change process is made of three phases: creating the vision, implementation of the vision, and sustaining the vision. Each steps' success or failure depends on the previous step, the stakeholders' support, and leadership guidance. In the next section, change leadership will be discussed outlining three types of leaders: Initiators, Managers, and Responders and how leadership affects the change process.

### **Leadership**

Leaders drive change in organizations. There are many different types of leaders and leadership styles. For the purposes of this review, I will focus on three leadership styles, Initiators, Managers, and Responders (Ferguson et al., 2015).

Initiators could be described as the visionaries. This leader develops the short-term and long-term goals, policies and process for implementation. Initiators could also be described as project leaders. Decisions are made in the best interest of the students, faculty and the university (Ferguson et al., 2015).

Managers support change within their school, A manager's decision to initiate change is first based on the budget, faculty, staff and policies. This leader will begin an implementation once they are sure the budget is correct; the faculty and staff are available and not busy on another project. A manager is a supportive leader, trying not to overwhelm their faculty/staff while keeping a close watch on the school budget (Ferguson et al., 2015).

Responders do not believe their school needs major changes. This leader is “friendly and personable” (Ferguson et al., 2015). If any changes are to take place the faculty and staff take the lead. A responder maintains a happy, cohesive, friendly organization. They take a stand off approach to leadership, believing their subordinates are strong and need little guidance (Ferguson et al., 2015)

Each of the three leadership styles play key roles in the implementation of change in a school setting. As related to Southwick Tech the corporate office, the initiators, made the decision to implement a hybrid-learning environment. At the campus level, the campus president is the manager. They are responsible, while implementing change in their campus, to keep the campus running smoothly. They want to be sure the faculty and staff are not over loaded with projects and to be sure the budget can withstand the implementation of a new project (M. Wilson, personal communication, July 2017).

Finally, the responders. The responders at Southwick Tech are the campus presidents, however, if choosing a responder’s campus to implement change in, proceed with caution. At the corporate level, campuses are evaluated to determine if a campus is running efficiently to accept a new project (M. Wilson, personal communication, July 2017). The responder is interested in a smooth running, positive work environment and less interested in supervising the implementation of change.

### **Instructors and Change**

Change can be difficult and disruptive to any environment, more so, in an educational environment. Instructors pride themselves on being masters of their subject, being prepared for class and imparting knowledge to their students (Freeman &

Scheidecker, 2009). The addition of technology, asynchronous work, and cutting back on the face to face time without proper training, support, and equipment may interrupt the learning process for students (Valentine, 2002).

When implementing a new learning environment, such as hybrid learning, following the three phases of Ferguson et al. (2015) change theory, has been used to ease faculties' fears of teaching in the hybrid learning environment (Porter et al., 2016; Porter et al., 2014). Change theory includes, creating the vision, implementing the vision, sustaining the vision, and being proactive in training faculty, providing support both technical and administrative Ferguson et al., (2015). Baran and Correia (2014) also suggested providing various types of support to the instructors was important to the success of the instructor, students and program implementation. Offering workshops and training programs focused on technology, pedagogy, and content were suggested topics (Baran & Correia, 2014).

### **Discussion Facilitation**

Online discussion is a large portion of the asynchronous classroom. Participants in this study noted having been challenged to encourage students to participate in the online discussions. Sara stated, "Students take advantage of the online environment and don't put in as much time and effort as they should." Linda said, "Students believe the blended portion isn't that important. Donna noted, "They (students) do not complete their online work." Pat stated "Unfortunately, people who do not do the online portion, say they don't feel it's worth their time." An, Shin and Lim (2009) found when instructors' intervention was minimal, students tended to share their thoughts and opinions more than

when instructors were present in the discussion. It is important to set discussion and online participation rules and guidelines for students. Rules should outline required or voluntary participation by students and faculty, discussions with individual classmates or entire class and how to share resources (An et al., 2009). Gao (2014), DeCristofaro, Ford-Murphy, Herron, and Klein (2014) suggested providing explicit instructions, such as guidelines for students to follow for discussions. By following the guidelines students' posts, and discussions had a better quality (DeCristofaro et al., 2014; Gao, 2014).

A common question among faculty is related to the frequency of responding and/or posting to students in the discussion forums to improve student outcomes. Hoey (2017), Preisman (2014) found that the regularity of faculties' posts did not influence student outcomes. Conversely, Jaggars, Edgecombe and Stacey, (2013) found that instructors' presence in an online course could positively contribute to students' success. However, Hoey (2017) and Starr-Glass (2014) found that the type of communication from the instructor, instructional, or conversational, did influence student outcomes. Discussion threads not only contribute to the learning but also allow the students to connect with colleagues and with the instructor (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2014).

To support students' critical thinking, participation, and quality discussions it is best to inform students of rules and instructors to have minimal interaction in the discussions (Salter, Douglas, & Kember, 2017). Another option to increase participation, suggested by Salter et al. (2017) was to start the topic discussion in the face-to-face portion of the hybrid class, thereby allowing the discussion to turn into a brain storming session. The instructor then takes the information from the session and continues the

discussion online. Continuing the discussion online allows the students more time to fully explore the topic and discuss peers' findings.

### **Professional Development**

The white paper includes recommendations for PD for the hybrid instructors at Southwick Tech. Professional development is not only a requirement of the school's accreditor but also a company policy (M. Wilson, personal communication, 2017) as it can increase the knowledge of the instructor, which is then passed onto the students. Wilson (2017) expressed concern of instructors not participating or not being interested in the PD offered at the Institute. Dailey-Hebert, Mandernach, Donnelly-Sallee and Norris (2014) suggested when building and planning PD to be aware of potential barriers that prevent participation or engagement. These barriers include: (a) PD program is not of interest to an individual, (b) time to participate, and (c) PD only offered in a synchronous environment. Additionally, Lankard (2015) suggested reviewing institutional policies as they affect adjunct participation requirements in PD. The problem at Southwick Tech is that campus leaders do not understand faculty skills and knowledge needed for instruction in a hybrid format. Mohr and Shelton (2017) conducted a study of purposefully selected experts with a minimum of 5 years of experience in the online learning environment for a panel to discuss online PD. In this study Mohr and Shelton presented best practices for PD for faculty teaching in the online environment. PD courses should not be taught in a one-size-fits-all learning style (Rhode, Richter, & Miller, 2017). Further, Meyer and Murrell (2014b) suggested developers of the PD courses should take into consideration the learning styles of the faculty, in the same way

as the faculty take into consideration the learning styles of their students. Bayer, 2014 suggested PD should consist of six components: (a) Match to existing teacher needs; (b) Match to existing school needs; (c) Teacher involvement in the design and planning; (d.) Active participation opportunities; (e) Long-term engagement; (f) High-quality instructor guiding the PD.

Alexiou-Ray and Bentley (2015) suggested that a participant in a PD course focused on hybrid learning should have the same experience students will have in class. These researchers developed a training format, which helped prepare faculty who may teacher in a hybrid-learning environment by putting the faculty in the role of the students, thereby allowing them to experience the hybrid environment from students' perspectives. By allowing the faculty to have this experience, Alexiou-Ray, and Bentley (2015) found that the faculty were "more authentic and responsive" in their instruction. Multiple researchers suggested PD for online/hybrid teaching has been mainly focused on how to use the technology, such as the Learning Management System (Alexiou-Ray & Bentley, 2015; Schmidt, Tschida, & Hodge, 2016). PD should focus on curriculum development and pedagogy of online teaching and less on the technology (Schmidt et al., 2016).

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of success or failure of the PD course should be conducted not only at the completion of the course, but also evaluate the student outcomes to further refine the PD (Meyer & Murrell, 2014a). Rice and Hung, 2015 suggests a two-pronged approach to evaluating PD to determine learner engagement in the workshop and data mining. Data mining is the process of evaluating students' activity and use of an LMS to establish



patterns, predict student success and determine activities are useful in the learning process.

### **Project Description**

Southwick Tech recently implemented additional hybrid programs across their thirty campuses. The white paper will be presented to the corporate education team as a new best practice for implementation of the hybrid programs system wide. Currently my position at Southwick Tech has been evolving into the hybrid specialist for the company. It has been my responsibility to conduct PD seminars on the topic of hybrid learning. The white paper produced for this project study will be implemented immediately upon Walden University approval of the project study. The resulting white paper contains recommendations for a faculty PD plan for teaching in hybrid learning environment. I have incorporated best practices for teaching adults in the PD plan. The PD will be delivered via a hybrid format including hands-on activities, discussion threads and activities. The facilitator will have experience teaching in hybrid learning, will facilitate, mentor and evaluate faculty enrolled in the training.

### **Potential Barriers**

The first potential barrier of the implementation of the recommendations of the white paper is instructor and campus administration lack of interest to the hybrid-learning environment. Many of the campuses within Southwick Tech have very long histories of very successful programs which leads to a resistance to change and to coming into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with educational techniques. A second potential barrier is working with the bargaining unions of the individual campuses to implement the additional training and

changes. Potential solutions will be to provide solid data on the success of hybrid learning and to present the unions again with solid data.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

Current resources available at Southwick Tech include an online learning module for instructors to complete prior to teaching in the hybrid-learning environment. I will continue to utilize and update the online learning module. Southwick Tech currently has a small education technology team that includes an instructional designer. I will continue to utilize the teams' knowledge as we implement additional hybrid learning. The instructional designer and the technology team attend seminars conducted from the LMS provider and receive feedback and recommendations from advisory board members to keep the content up to date.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

Upon approval of this project study of the Chief Academic Officer, according to Walden University requirements, the white paper will be presented to key education stakeholders of Southwick Tech. Attendees of the Corporate Education meeting will be the Sr. VP of Corporate Education, VP of Education Operations, AVP of Product Development, Product Managers and IT trainers. After the presentation, I will work with the VP of Education Operations to implement a proper policy and procedure for training and continued PD for instructors teaching in the hybrid-learning environment.

Table 2

*Project Implementation Timeline*

Date	Action
10/18	Schedule meeting
10/18	Distribute white paper
11/18	Meet key stakeholders
12/18 – ongoing	Available for consultation

**Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

Not only am I the student researcher for this project, I am also responsible for training instructors to teach in the hybrid-learning environment for Southwick Tech. In 2016 Southwick Tech implemented additional hybrid learning programs to the company's program offerings. Due to my successful experience in implementing the hybrid learning programs and with the added research I have been conducting, I was assigned as the hybrid expert for the company.

**Project Evaluation Plan**

An important part of implementing any project is to evaluate its success or failure. The goals of this project include the following:

Goal 1. Administrators will implement PD program based on recommendations of this project study.

Goal 2. Faculty new to hybrid learning will engage in an onboarding program specifically for those new to hybrid learning.

The evaluations will include (a) supervisors will observe new faculty performance in a hybrid course (b) Administrators will evaluate the implementation of the PD program.

### **Justification for Evaluation**

Based on the findings gathered from this study, I have chosen a formative evaluation to assess the white paper, because it gathers data for improving learning (Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Wiggins, 1998). The characteristics of formative evaluation are to improve teaching and learning, ongoing, they answer questions such as what is working and what needs to be improved (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Some forms in which formative evaluation can take place include observations, question/answer sessions, self-evaluations and reflections on performance. The administration will be advised to utilize a variety of the forms of formative evaluation based on the individual faculty member and the PD subject being evaluated. The goal of the evaluation is for administration to provide feedback to faculty, to improve teaching and learning and to evaluate what is working and what needs improvement. The key stakeholders in evaluating the program include campus administration, faculty and the students. Each stakeholder serves to benefit from a successful implementation and continued execution of the PD program.

### **Project Implications**

#### **Local Community**

The implications on social change will be a snowball effect. Because of the hybrid program, the medical and dental assistant graduates are comfortable using technology. The medical and dental fields are becoming more reliant on the use of technology in the office for example, electronic medical records, and in past program advisory meetings

(PAC) it has been expressed by employers the lack of technology skills the students have is interfering with patient care (PAC meeting minutes, 2012). Additionally, another benefit to the students and community is the added face-to-face time students utilize to master the hands-on skills needed to be a successful, contributor in the medical and dental office.

### **Far-Reaching**

Professional development, training and best practice research is limited at this time for schools moving to hybrid learning. Researchers or faculty trainers may find the participants experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment useful in developing PD program. Although the white paper written for this project for Southwick Tech, the recommendations contained within may be beneficial to any school, program or individual instructor interested in utilizing the hybrid-learning platform in a course.

### **Conclusion**

In this section, the description of the resulting white paper from a qualitative case study on faculties' experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment was discussed. Development of the white paper as informed by four major themes and two minor themes that emerged from the study, role of instructor, online portion concerns, hands-on activity, training, practice and best practices. I discussed the implementation, evaluation and implications of the project. The final section of this project study will serve as an overall reflection and conclusion of the project.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

In the final section, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the project study. I also analyzed myself as a scholar, practitioner and as a project developer. Finally, I discuss the implications, applications and directions for future research on faculties' experiences in the hybrid-learning environment.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The result of this project study was a white paper. The white paper allowed me to address the initial problem that drove this study, administrations' lack of understanding of faculties' knowledge of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment at the target site. Through this white paper, I will be able to recommend a PD program to the Corporate Education Department of Southwick Tech. The PD will be for faculty new to hybrid learning and for experienced hybrid instructors.

This study had limitations in the participation sample. The participant sample was restricted in that the quantity of faculty teaching in hybrid at Southwick Tech was ten. I was able to interview eight out of the 10 potential participants. The low number of potential pool of participants did not follow the recommendation of Guest et al., (2006); they found that all themes would present themselves at 12 to 15 participants; however, that was from a pool of 200 participants.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Organizers of PD sessions acknowledge challenges they face in the planning process. Attendance, paying attention and utilizing new knowledge to name a few of the

challenges organizers acknowledge (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2014). The following are potential alternatives that may be utilized:

- Recommendation 1: Establishing a mentorship program. Having experienced instructors of hybrid learning mentor an inexperienced faculty member.
- Recommendation 2: Involve the faculty in the preparation of the PD. Survey the faculty asking their opinion of topics they need to learn.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

During this journey, I learned many new skills including developing knowledge of methodology, identifying peer reviewed articles, how to conduct research, and how to conduct data collection and analysis. Through this process I learned how to conduct a proper interview to gather not only the participants' responses to initial questions but to also probe further to gather the deep-rich insights into the participants' experiences.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

The development of this project took many iterations. I learned to be flexible and allow the project to emerge from the data and research. The result of this project study is a white paper offering recommendations on a hybrid learning training program to be presented to the Corporate Education Leadership. Applying my knowledge from my Master's degree in Instructional Design and Technology, I understand that evaluation is not only summative by evaluating the end product but can also be formative in which parts of the project are evaluated as they are implemented to examine the success of each individual component of the successful implementation. To evaluate the training

program, I will initially introduce the material to the Corporate Education Leadership for feedback. Alterations will be made as necessary. Immediately following each training, a confidential survey will be requested of each participant to obtain feedback and make alterations as necessary. Monthly calls will be set up for trainees to continue to share best practices. At the campus level, the supervisors are required to conduct classroom observations of both the face-to-face and hybrid portion. The results of the observations can guide the supervisors to additional topics that may be necessary for training.

### **Leadership and Change**

During the project study, I have come to see myself as a leader in hybrid learning. Being a leader is about being well informed and the ability to lead and teach others on the topic. I am confident in my knowledge and research skills to lead and teach faculty best practices of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. As technology continues to have a large presence in adult education, I believe my knowledge and skills will assist in making a positive change in faculties' and students' education.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

When I began this journey, I did not expect to see many changes in my work and myself. Now, I have such a wide range of knowledge about research, data collection and delivery of said information, I am confident to continue moving forward with research topics that I have written down to research once this doctoral journey is complete. I have implemented data collection and research tools learned into my everyday work. Completing this program has given me the confidence to call myself a scholar.



**Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As I have been proceeding through this journey I have found myself asking probing questions regarding information presented to me to learn about how research can be used to support recommendations and conclusions in the context of the local study cite. The research is pivotal for establishing credibility and validity of the recommendations and guiding principles established for development of the project deliverable. I am no longer accepting information at face value. Prior to completing this project study, I would not say I was naïve, but I did not question the authenticity of data presented. Now, I not only question the authenticity of the data, but I am knowledgeable of recommended criteria to determine if a study is of value for the greater good or for a local population.

**Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

In my current position, I am a project developer/manager. I currently write curriculum, update and implement educational programs of study at Southwick Tech. Often I am called upon to manager other projects such as bringing degree granting to six of our campuses that currently only offers certificate programs. However, I believe with every project, I learn something new about myself. In completing this project, I learned to follow the data, and not make any pre-assumptions about outcomes. Before collecting the data, I assumed the project genre would be PD. However, following the data and themes formulated, I was directed to write a white paper. As I move forward in my career, I will continue to build on my project development and research skills.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

At the inception of this project study, little research had been published on best practices and faculties experiences teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. The work I completed for this project study is an important contribution to the lack of research on hybrid learning. I learned the participants of this project study were knowledgeable in facilitating a hybrid-learning course and shared best practice ideas that they learned as they have been teaching.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

By learning the faculties' experiences, and recommendations for the hybrid-learning environment, this will allow the campus administrators to increase the quality of the delivery of educational material by the faculty. Hybrid programs allow students, who may not have otherwise had an opportunity to attend school, the ability to attend classes on a flexible schedule. Allowing students to continue to work and tend to family obligations. This studies result will assist school administration on one piece of preparing their faculty for hybrid learning.

There is a wide variety of topics for future research in the field of hybrid learning. Isolating best practices specifically for the online portion or especially for the on-ground portion are two very important topics to guide instructors who would like to implement a hybrid course. Further, research on non-traditional student's perceptions of hybrid learning could assist faculty in developing a successful hybrid course. Finally, research on graduation rates of non-traditional students' and course outcomes from a hybrid

program can assist college administrators and faculty in determining the success and viability of a hybrid environment.

### **Conclusion**

In the final section, I discussed the outcomes of the project study, recommending of a PD program to the Corporate Education Department. The quantity of participant sample size of the project study I consider a limitation. I was fortunate that eight out of the possible ten participants agreed to participate. I learned a lot about myself as a scholar, practitioner and as a project developer. During this process, I became a better leader, asking probing questions, and researching the credibility of information. Although this project study will contribute to the research of hybrid learning, I recognize there are still a lot of topics to be researched.

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Appendix A: The Project

# Teaching in a Hybrid



# Learning Environment

Presented to Executive Team

Christine Cusano, Ed.D.

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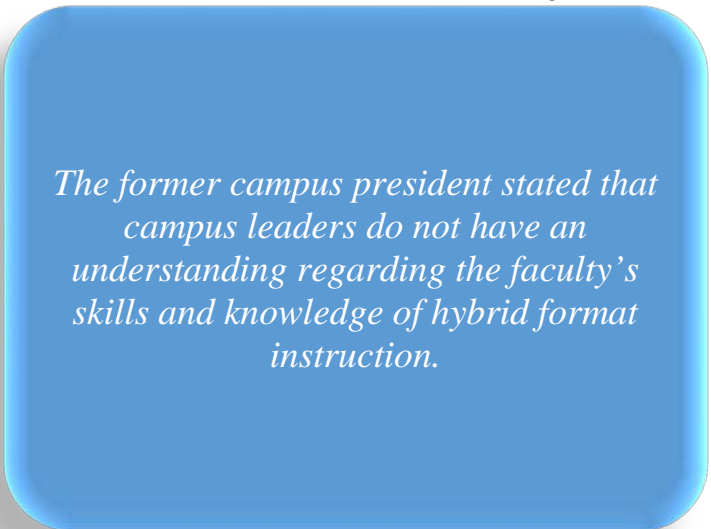
## I. Executive Summary

Hybrid-learning environment in post-secondary educational institutions is one of the fastest growing learning delivery systems today. The benefits to implementing hybrid programs is the amount of flexibility it provides for the students, faculty and institution. Additional benefits include increased student retention and an increase to students learning. The move to a hybrid-learning environment will require faculty be trained in online pedagogy, use of the learning management system (LMS), best practices in using threaded discussions and analyzing data taken from the LMS to recognize struggling students. It is this researcher's recommendation to complete the required training in the form of a series of professional development (PD) workshops.

## II. The Problem

The advances in the health field coupled with the advances in technology have required allied health schools to re-think the curriculum and the delivery of programs to students. Advisory board members have voiced concerns of the allied health student's lack of proficiency in using computers in the medical office. In addition, the January 1, 2014 federal mandate for all public and private healthcare providers to move to Electronic Health Records (EHR) has led to allied health programs having to add technology to the curriculum. A problem that arose from adding technology to the curriculum is that post-secondary technical

schools usually hire subject matter experts (SME), who have worked in the field and may not have the most up-to-date technical proficiency. In 2012, the campus leaders implemented an online component to the traditional course formats thus creating a hybrid format (75% face-to-face instruction, 25% online instruction) for the Certificate in Medical Assisting and Dental Assisting programs.



*The former campus president stated that campus leaders do not have an understanding regarding the faculty's skills and knowledge of hybrid format instruction.*

The campus administration and faculty lack the understanding of the skills and knowledge needed to teach properly in a hybrid format instruction. The former campus president stated that campus leaders do not have an understanding regarding the faculty's skills and knowledge of hybrid format instruction (personal communication, November 2012). Therefore, it became difficult to develop and deliver appropriate professional development programs for current and future faculty whose duties include hybrid format instruction. Instructors have not been formally trained on proper pedagogical practices in the hybrid format (personal communication, December 2015). The lack of professional development specific to hybrid learning created a gap in practice at Southwick Tech.

A regional director of education at Southwick Tech stated, “The instructors were not shown or taught how to engage the students in online discussions, how to help them engage with the content, or how to flip the classroom to use what the students should be learning online in the on-ground component”. This lack of

*An education supervisor at Southwick Tech stated, “When we started training for the new program, the training was only on how to use the learning management system. We were not trained on how to teach online”.*

instruction delayed gaining the full benefit of the hybrid program for both students and instructors” (personal communication, October 2015). Moreover, per campus training agendas, the instructors were trained on the function of the learning management system but not on proper delivery of


information/teaching online (Southwick Tech, 2012a, 2013, 2014). An education supervisor at Southwick Tech stated, “When we started training for the new program, the training was only on how to use the learning management system. We were not trained on how to teach online” (personal communication, October 2015). The campus policy, *Faculty First Year Experience*, does not reference training the instructors in hybrid or online pedagogy (Southwick Tech, 2012a). Further, the school administrators rely on faculty, who were trained from within the campus, to train newly hired subject matter experts to teach in instructional

practices. This practice of training from within, with existing materials and knowledge, will continue to contribute to the school's issue of improper training for faculty teaching in the hybrid programs. Porter, Graham, Spring, and Welch (2014) recommended, when implementing a hybrid program, provide initial and on-going technical and pedagogical training to faculty.

### III. Research Evidence

The intent is to provide professional development topics based on the instructors' description of teaching in a hybrid-learning environment and their perceptions regarding appropriate professional development to support continued growth in discussion forums, online pedagogy and in-class activities.

Porter et al., (2014) and Porter, Graham, Bodily, and Sandberg (2016) suggested to campus administrators to offer pedagogical and technical support to faculty teaching in a hybrid environment which was helpful as faculty moved to teaching hybrid courses. Porter et al., (2014) suggested offering a variety of webinars, workshops, ongoing faculty seminars, year-round workshops and student-focused pedagogical support. Bohle-Carbonell, Dailey-Hebert, and Gijsselaers



*Porter et al. (2014) suggested offering a variety of webinars, workshops, ongoing faculty seminars, year-round workshops and student-focused pedagogical support.*

(2013) suggested to administration to provide proper support to faculty as they moved courses to hybrid-learning environment. To move courses to hybrid-learning environment it took a variety of expertise including faculty, instructional designer and technical support. Working together, they created pedagogically appropriate learning activities. Ciabocchi, Ginsberg, and Piacciano (2016) argued that faculty development in online pedagogy focusing on engaging students in the hybrid environment is wanted by faculty governance to maintain a quality education.

Professional development is not something to be a last-minute decision. It is

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*“A school’s faculty must engage in ongoing development of teaching skills as part of its plan for faculty improvement. The school may provide its own faculty training using in-house resources or utilize resources outside the institution. In either case, teacher training shall include such elements as: formal education; workshops/seminars presented by an appropriate individual focusing on areas related to instructional methods and teaching skill development; or formal in-house mentoring programs with appropriately qualified and experienced faculty.” (ACCSC, 2018)*

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recommended having all PD seminar topics, and speakers selected and secured by the beginning of each year. The campuses’ accreditor, The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools & Colleges (ACCSC), policy on PD proffered guidelines the faculty must engage in ongoing development, described: Not only is the administration of the campus responsible to prove all faculty has completed

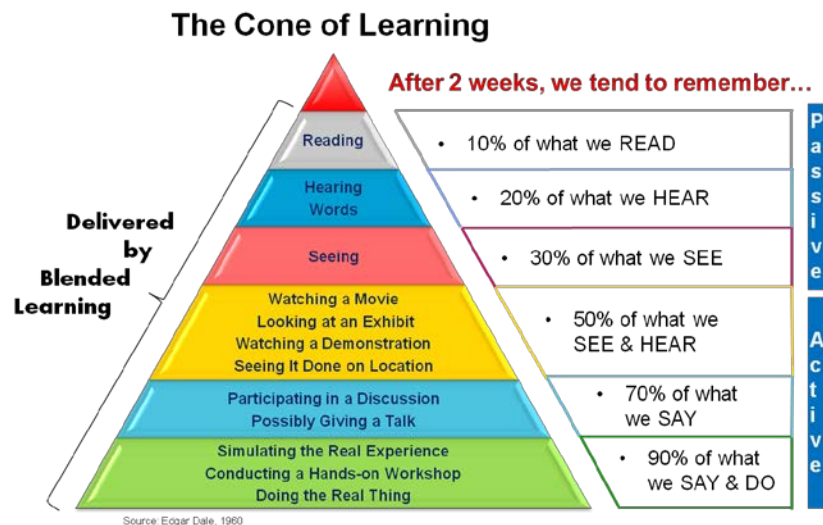


PD to ACCSC, but it is also an internal company policy (personal communication, August 2018).

#### IV. Purpose and Design

The purpose of this white paper is to recommend a professional development program based on the findings of the research on exploring the faculty's' current pool of knowledge and skills for hybrid environment instruction as judged against the current understanding of best practices as evidenced in the research literature. By exploring faculty knowledge and skills, campus leaders can now understand what topics to offer in professional development that are uniquely focused to help faculty improve their knowledge and skills. Campus leaders will execute the professional development program in a hybrid-learning environment. Based on the recommendations of the study participants, it will be beneficial to the faculty to be a student in the hybrid course, so they can relate to their students once the students and faculty are active in hybrid learning. The development of the PD program will utilize the active section of The Cone of Learning, focusing on see, hear, say and do exercises.

Figure 1: The Cone of Learning



## V. Results

The focus of the qualitative, case study driving the recommendations contained in this white paper was to identify vocational instructors' experiences' teaching in a hybrid-learning environment. Face to face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight vocational instructors, each with experience teaching in the

hybrid-learning environment. Through data analysis, four major themes and two minor themes emerged. Major themes included the role of the instructor changing to a facilitator, online instruction concerns such as an increase in plagiarism, training plans for faculties' teaching in the hybrid learning environment and practices using the learning management system. Minor themes are increased hands on activity in the on-ground portion of the course and sharing of best practices. Overall, the participants of this project study provided positive input about their experiences in teaching in a hybrid-learning

*The participants described the face-to-face portion of the hybrid program as a time to focus on the **hands-on skills** needed for the students' professions.*

environment. They described their role as changing from sage on the stage to a facilitator of information.

The programs taught by the participants, Medical Assistant and Dental Assistant, describe both as "very hands-on" (personal communication, 2017). The

participants described the face-to-face portion of the hybrid program as

a time to focus on the hands-on skills needed for the students' professions.

Furthermore, participants shared best practices including the recommendation to faculty new to using a learning management system (LMS) to practice using the

LMS and to complete, prior to delivery to students, all exercises allowing the faculty member to prepare for questions and to correct errors.

Table 1

*Major and Minor Themes by Research Question*

Research Question	Major and minor themes	Description
Experiences in a hybrid learning environment	Role of Instructor (Major)	Changing role to facilitator
	Online Portion Concerns (Major)	Concerns of increase of plagiarism
	Hands-on activity (minor)	On-ground class activities
Preparation to teach in a hybrid-learning environment	Training (Major)	Faculty training plan for teaching in hybrid-learning environment
	Practice (Major)	Practice using the learning management system
	Best Practices (minor)	Faculty shared their best practices for teaching in a hybrid-learning environment

*Note.* Data for table from Cusano, 2018

## VI. Recommendations

It is the recommendation of this researcher the campus will benefit from a formally designed professional development series for initial and continued teaching in hybrid learning environment. The training session topics will include best practices for teaching adults, online pedagogy, LMS, active learning,

threaded discussions and using data from LMS to recognize struggling students. The training includes hands-on activities, discussion threads and activities, delivered via a hybrid format. An experienced, trained, instructor will facilitate, and mentor faculty enrolled in the training. Evaluation of success or failure of the PD course should be conducted not only at the completion of the course, but also evaluate the student outcomes to further refine the PD (Meyer & Murrell, 2014). Rice and Hung, 2015 suggests a two-pronged approach to evaluating PD to determine learner engagement in the workshop and data mining. Data mining is the process of evaluating students' activity and use of an LMS to establish patterns, predict student success and determine activities are useful in the learning process.

The following is the recommendation of a five-part PD program:

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### *Course 1: Introduction to Hybrid Learning*

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**Delivery Mode:** Hybrid (face-to-face and online)

**Level:** Beginner

**Description of Course:** This week-long workshop will provide participants with a hands-on experience of being a student in a hybrid course. You will be introduced to hybrid learning benefits.

**Format:** Synchronous and asynchronous. Total length of course is 7 days; Monday to Sunday. Days 1 and 4 (Monday and Thursday) will be two-hours (each) face-to-face seminars.

**Who Should Attend:** Faculty interested in learning about adding hybrid delivery to a course.

**Pre-Requisite:** None

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### *Course 2: Hybrid Pedagogy*

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**Delivery Mode:** Hybrid (face-to-face and online)

**Level:** Beginner

**Description of Course:** This week-long workshop will provide participants with a hands-on experience of being a student in a hybrid course. You will be introduced to hybrid pedagogy.

**Format:** Synchronous and asynchronous. Total length of course is 7 days; Monday to Sunday. Days 1 and 4 (Monday and Thursday) will be two-hours (each) face-to-face seminars.

**Who Should Attend:** Faculty interested in learning about adding hybrid delivery to a course.

**Pre-Requisite:** Completion of Course 1 Introduction to Hybrid Learning

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### *Course 3: Hybrid Interactions*

---

**Delivery Mode:** Hybrid (face-to-face and online)

**Level:** Beginner

**Description of Course:** This week-long workshop will provide participants with a hands-on experience of being a student in a hybrid course. You will be introduced to best practices in using discussion threads.

**Format:** Synchronous and asynchronous. Total length of course is 7 days; Monday to Sunday. Days 1 and 4 (Monday and Thursday) will be two-hours (each) face-to-face seminars.

**Who Should Attend:** Faculty interested in learning about adding hybrid delivery to a course.

**Pre-Requisite:** Completion of Course 1 Introduction to Hybrid Learning and Course 2: Hybrid Pedagogy

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### *Course 4: Learning Management System (LMS)*

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**Delivery Mode:** Hybrid (face-to-face and online)

**Level:** Beginner

**Description of Course:** This week-long workshop will provide participants with a hands-on experience of being a student in a hybrid course. You will be introduced to using the Learning Management System (LMS) to optimize faculty and student experiences.

**Format:** Synchronous and asynchronous. Total length of course is 7 days; Monday to Sunday. Days 1 and 4 (Monday and Thursday) will be two-hours (each) face-to-face seminars.

**Who Should Attend:** Faculty interested in learning about adding hybrid delivery to a course.

**Pre-Requisite:** Completion of Course 1 Introduction to Hybrid Learning, Course 2: Hybrid Pedagogy and Course 3: Hybrid Interactions

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### *Course 5: Implementing the Hybrid Environment*

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**Delivery Mode:** Hybrid (face-to-face and online)

**Level:** Beginner

**Description of Course:** This week-long workshop will provide participants with a hands-on experience of being a student in a hybrid course. You will work through building a hybrid course and implementing into your curriculum.

**Format:** Synchronous and asynchronous. Total length of course is 7 days; Monday to Sunday. Days 1 and 4 (Monday and Thursday) will be two-hours (each) face-to-face seminars.

**Who Should Attend:** Faculty interested in learning about adding hybrid delivery to a course.

**Pre-Requisite:** Completion of Course 1 Introduction to Hybrid Learning, Course 2: Hybrid Pedagogy, Course 3: Hybrid Interactions, and Course 4: Learning Management System (LMS)

## VII. Closing Thoughts

In response to employers and program advisory board member recommendations to increase the students working knowledge of basic computer knowledge, the campus implemented hybrid learning environment. After implementing the hybrid environment, the administration soon realized the training originally provided to the faculty fell short on many levels. It is the recommendation of this researcher to implement a five-course PD training to faculty. The training will incorporate the findings from the research project study *Vocational Instructors Experience and Practice Teaching in the Hybrid Environment*. Once the participants of the PD program implement hybrid learning it is further recommended to evaluate the success of the program. The final step is to determine the faculty to be included in the first PD Hybrid course.



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## Appendix B

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Atlantic Corner,  
Hertzog Boulevard &  
Heerengracht  
Cape town,  
8001 South  
Africa  
USAPermissions@pearson.com

Aug 22, 2018

PE Ref # 206155

Christine Cusano  
WALDEN  
UNIVERSITY  
218 Maple Brook Rd  
Bellingham, MA  
55401

Dear Christine Cusano,

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