

SOCIAL MEDIA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: OPTIONS FOR COMMUNITY
COLLEGE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this effort and achievement to my mother, Pamela Jean McConnell, who gave me breath, taught me how to read, and has only shown me unconditional love, all of which have shaped the person I am.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
CoP	Community of Practice
CASP	College Academic Support Programs
DE	Developmental Education
IHE	Institution of Higher Education
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LMS	Learning Management System
PD	Professional Development
SMIG	Social Media Interest Group
TXST	Texas State University

ABSTRACT

Effective professional development for course instructors in higher education has long been a point of interest in terms of how not only ongoing training can benefit instructors but also how those benefits could possibly improve student experiences and learning outcomes. This qualitative case study specifically examines a population of teachers who have taught developmental writing courses as adjunct instructors at Texas community colleges. Using data from an anonymous online demographics survey, confidential online interviews, and an online forum, this study attempted to gauge the professional development needs of said population as well as their perceptions of and propensity to engage in self-directed, social media based professional enrichment activities as a means of staying current with the field of developmental education. While participant data was mixed in terms of their enthusiasm or lack thereof with the notion of community of practice and group-based learning—including social media as an avenue for professional development—the findings of the data corroborate with current literature about professional development needs for teachers in the field of developmental education, including such topics as understanding students' non-cognitive needs, learning applicable pedagogy, and staying abreast of technology. The findings of this study suggest implications for administrators and policy makers that include increased funding as well as concise professional development needs assessments at state, district, institution, and instructor levels; the provision of flexible professional development delivery options for practitioners of developmental education; and the provision of

applicable relevant content that is specific to helping meet the academic and non-cognitive needs of students placed into developmental education.

I. RATIONALE

This study focused on the perceptions of instructors of developmental writing who are part-time adjuncts at community colleges toward self-directed, social-media-based professional development (PD) in terms of scaffolding their PD needs. Currently throughout the state of Texas and the nation, community colleges rely heavily on a contingent workforce of adjunct instructors to teach developmental education (DE) courses. While participation in quality and effective PD can benefit said population, barriers that prevent such can have detrimentally effects on teacher development and therefore possibly student success. However, some barriers that can prevent or impede participation in quality and effective PD might alleviate due to this study's target population hypothetically participating in self-directed teacher development and networking opportunities afforded by social media (SM). Participation by said population in social media interest groups (SMIGs) could foster collaboration and professional growth. The Vygotskian social-constructivist theoretical framework of co-created learning as well as the community of practice (CoP) conceptual framework of situated learning both underscore the research paradigms of this study.

Significance of the Study

While multiple and diverse studies for decades have posited benefits to teachers from PD, potentially beneficial student outcomes as a result of teacher PD have been difficult and likely impossible to accurately measure and assess due to multiple variables from teacher to teach, student to student, and region to region. One of the greatest assumptions with most PD studies and research is that PD that benefits teachers will therefore lead to increased positive student outcomes. This study is beneficial to higher

education in that it can add to myriad PD research and scholarship by capturing the PD perceptions from an under-researched population—teachers who have taught DE writing as adjunct faculty at Texas community colleges—and by proxy, their students placed into DE writing courses at Texas community colleges. This study is especially relevant to the field of DE in Texas because DE courses throughout Texas are largely housed in community colleges and taught by part-time adjunct faculty who lack the job security and benefits afforded to their full-time faculty colleagues. Another assumption about PD in higher education can be that the more research that can span teaching populations in different genres and at different course levels, the more complete a picture of PD further researchers might benefit from. By focusing on an under-researched subset of teachers in higher education, this study bridged the target participant population with other teaching populations in terms of what could be considered effective PD that might possibly lead to improved student outcomes.

This study is significant to higher education, to research and scholarship pertinent to PD, and to research and scholarship pertinent to adjunct instructors at Texas community colleges, and to research and scholarship relevant to DE teachers—especially adjunct instructors who teach DE writing. The findings of this study corroborate with other research studies citing content-specific PD as beneficial (Conley, 2016; Gaal, 2014; Smittle, 2009; Martirosyan et. al, 2017). Furthermore, the findings align with research over adjunct and/or DE and/or community college teacher populations that cite increased pedagogy skills, understanding the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of their students, and increased technology skills as their content-specific PD needs (Datray et. al, 2014; Martirosyan et. al, 2017). In addition, this study is significant in that it adds to research

and scholarship relevant to online PD, especially the feasibility and flexibility that independent, self-directed, SM-based PD might afford instructors for professional enrichment. Published findings from this study could help academic departments, institutions, and legislators to better assess and accommodate the PD needs of practitioners in terms of both potential content and possible delivery methods.

Scope of the Study

This study purported to measure general research in PD and possible beneficial outcomes for both instructors in terms of pedagogy and content knowledge as well as potentially positive outcomes for students. Though beyond the scope of this study, which attempts to measure participant perceptions of self-directed, social-media-based PD, such positive student outcomes might be measured in terms of such factors as improved writing skills, improved organization and time management skills, improved technology skills and fluency, improved motivation to participate in face-to-face and online course assignments, and ultimately matriculation into credit-bearing writing and math courses. More specifically, this study further examined research pertaining to SM-based PD that involved social-constructivist, group learning for professionals across the education spectrum. Finally, this study explored the plausibility of practitioners to pursue self-directed, SM-based learning as a method of independent professional growth. Based on the stipulation that all participants attested to have taught at least one DE writing course as an adjunct instructor at a Texas community college, this study focused on perceptions of this participant population via an anonymous online demographic survey. From this demographic survey, five anonymous participants volunteered to further participate in this qualitative study via online interviews and optional online discussion forum across an

intended 3-week period. However, unforeseen constraints—such as participant scheduling demands possibly resulting from the Spring 2020 mid-semester and ensuing Summer 2020 semester transition from face-to-face to online learning as a result of the COVID-19 quarantine and statewide gubernatorial stay-at-home mandate—extended data collection into a 3-month timeframe.

Justification for this project was based on research citing the unique cognitive and non-cognitive challenges faced by many students placed into DE writing courses at Texas community colleges, as well as the assumption that teachers who are adjunct instructors of such courses might not receive institutionally delivered PD that is content-specific in addressing these student-population challenges (Datray et.al, 2014). This project also addressed the ever-increasing needs of teachers cited by research to stay current with technology. In doing such, the study explored both national adult digital-readiness demographic information in conjunction with the online learning experiences; self-perceived technological abilities; and SM activities, experiences, and perceptions of the study's participants. This project also focused on research citing the role of CoP-based learning in tandem with SM-based learning.

The study was also justified by the dearth of current scholarship pertaining to the specific needs of DE instructors and their students as well as the absence of scholarship underscoring the needs of this study's target population—instructors of DE writing who have taught or currently teach at Texas community colleges. This research project produced some perceptions by the target population that corroborate with similar scholarship from other teaching populations in terms of PD needs and perceptions of SM-based PD. The findings of this study yielded implications that could help institutions and

legislators better cater PD options and delivery to adjunct instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges in an effort to bolster positive student outcomes.

Definitions

Adjunct faculty consist of part-time instructors, usually who teach introductory or preparatory courses, who are not eligible for tenure nor full-time benefits, and whose employment is contingent on semester-by-semester institutional and/or departmental needs (Anthony et al., 2020).

Community of practice (CoP) refers to a group of practitioners who form around an interest, concern, or profession to share their expertise with one another in the act of building relationships, interacting regularly, and learning together (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Developmental education (DE) is an academic genre of higher education focused on scaffolding the personal and scholastic growth of students deemed underprepared via assessment to engage in such credit-bearing courses as freshman-level reading, writing, and mathematics. Academic and non-cognitive growth of students placed into DE are fostered through advising, counseling, instruction, and tutoring (National Center for Developmental Education [NCDE], 2021).

Non-cognitive skills are a wide range of personal skills, attributes, and characteristics that pertain to such non-academic dispositions as one's behavior, attitude, and motivation as well as emotional, psychological, and social factors (Lee & Stankov, 2018).

Non-traditional is a term for students of higher education who face such challenges as delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, being a part-time student,

full-time employment, parental and/or caregiver duties, lacking a traditional high school diploma, and/or the inability to be claimed by someone else as a dependent (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2015).

Self-directed learning is an independent process in which learners take responsibility for assessing their personal or professional learning needs and sourcing appropriate resources and strategies to accommodate their desired learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975).

Social constructivism is a theory that learning occurs through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Social media (SM) is a term encompassing online community- and electronic-communication based websites where users can compose, share, seek, and store content—such as microblogs, pictures, videos, hyperlinks, and instant messages (e-mail)—as well as form social and/or professional relationships with other users (Kapoor et al., 2018).

A *social media interest group (SMIG)* is either membership restrictive or nonrestrictive themed communities within social media platforms for personal and/or professional conversation and engagement (Britt & Paulus, 2016).

Problem Statement

Community College Reliance on Adjunct Instructors

As a growing number of community colleges throughout the country are relying on a part-time *adjunct faculty* workforce, especially in the field of DE, student success in higher education is possibly at risk (Datray et al., 2014). As many DE professionals are having difficulty finding full-time faculty positions with adequate benefits, financial

security, and opportunities for effective PD, a growing number of DE professionals must face the reality of teaching part-time at numerous institutions with a fraction of the conveniences afforded to full-time faculty (Anthony et al., 2020; Stenerson et al., 2010; Thompson, n.d.). On one hand, compromised financial security resulting from lower pay and lack of benefits such as health insurance as part time employees can hinder their ability to afford effective PD, such as subscriptions to academic journals or travel, lodging, and registration fees necessary to attend relevant academic conferences.

Professional Development: Participation and Barriers

According to Gaal (2014) and Smittle (2009), participation in quality and effective PD opportunities can translate into student success in terms of cognitive learning; noncognitive development such as motivation and time-management skills; and matriculation into credit-bearing courses, graduation from degree or vocational certification programs, and/or job placement or career advancement. Barriers to PD for adjunct faculty could act as barriers in terms of their ability to promote, encourage, and facilitate academic success for their students (Booth et al., 2014; Saliga et al., 2015). Compromised instruction caused by barriers to quality PD for community college adjuncts might negatively affect potential outcomes for students in DE who are underprepared and can possibly benefit with adequately prepared instructors (Pegman, 2015; Severs, 2017)

Statement of Problem

While many teachers of DE in higher education may search for full-time faculty positions with stability, security, and benefits, community colleges increasingly rely on using part-time adjunct instructors to teach introductory courses and preparatory courses

such as DE writing on a semester-by-semester basis. In some instances, institutions and/or departments neither afford nor mandate the same requisite PD for adjuncts as full-time faculty. In addition, in other cases where adjuncts can or are mandated to access institutionally provided PD, the content might not apply to them as teachers of DE writing. Specifically, the PD might not address the academic literacy level of students placed into their DE writing and the non-cognitive challenges many of these students face. Furthermore, such PD also might not empower the teachers of DE writing with further pedagogical skills and knowledge beneficial not only to them but also to their students. Similarly, such PD might not teach adjunct instructors of DE writing applicable technology skills, such as how to use the institutional learning management system (LMS), or what available software can help benefit them as teachers and also benefit student learning in their DE writing courses as well. Such barriers can result in an underprepared instructor teaching underprepared writing students, which might negatively affect outcomes for those students; additionally, no published research nor scholarship exists disseminating perceptions of PD needs specific to DE writing teachers.

Purpose of the Study

Social Media and Teacher Development

The use of SM to achieve professional growth through CoPs that promote social-constructivist interactions has yielded beneficial implications from research for supporting teacher development (Alhamami, 2013; Britt & Paulus, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Elliot et al., 2010; Evans, 2015; Goodyear, et al., 2014; Kabilan, 2016; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Trust, 2012). In the past two decades, SM outlets such as Facebook and Twitter have become platforms for information sharing via

hyperlinked articles as well as social constructivist conversation, namely, in the case of Facebook, in the form of social media interest groups (SMIGs) (Eteokleous et al., 2012; Terlemez, 2015). While SMIGs take on many forms in relation to genre-specific content—whether in terms of hobbies such as gardening, gaming, or fashion; self-help topics such as depression, addiction, or illness; professionally related topics; and myriad others, such as social, religious, or political discussion—Facebook hosts a multitude of SMIGs geared toward education and student success.

Collaboration and Professional Growth

For many community college adjunct instructors—especially those in the field of developmental writing, where intensive reading and assessment of student essays further burdens time constraints already, the ability to seek out professional growth such as content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge through SMIGs can offer opportunities to stay abreast of best practices in the field of higher education.

Collaboration is essential for educators to grow professionally, whether they teach a new skill to a fellow adjunct or examine a teaching method previously used in their own classroom. Professional growth can effectively happen through socially constructed interaction by members of a CoP who share common goals and interests (Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The purpose of this study is to gauge how DE writing teachers who are adjuncts at community colleges perceive self-directed SM-based learning and PD. More specifically, this study seeks to find said population's general perceptions toward the following: their PD needs, why they might participate in self-directed, SM-based PD, and how they might perceive the effects of such.

Frameworks

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized social constructivism as a theoretical framework to serve as a basis to explain the phenomenon of knowledge building and PD via online spaces such as SM. According to Imenda (2014), “A theoretical framework refers to the theory that a researcher chooses to guide him/her in his/her research. Thus, a theoretical framework is the application of a theory, or a set of concepts drawn from one and the same theory, to offer an explanation of an event, or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem” (p. 189). For the purpose of this study, I chose to employ the theoretical framework of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978).

Social Constructivism. Vygotskian social constructivism, which was the theoretical framework underscoring this dissertation proposal, is the central idea underlying the CoP conceptual framework—the notion that learning occurs through group interaction (Wenger, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Socially constructed, community-of-practice interactions between members who share common goals and interests can lead to professional growth (Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The use of SM to achieve professional growth through CoPs that promote social-constructivist interactions has yielded beneficial implications from research for supporting teacher development (Alhamami, 2013; Britt & Paulus, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Elliot et al., 2010; Evans, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2014; Kabilan, 2016; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Trust, 2012). Furthermore, research suggests that social-constructivist PD delivered through a SM-delivered CoP yields benefits to teachers in terms of increasing their confidence (Kabilan, 2016; U.S. Department of Education

[USDE], 2014).

Social Constructivism and Online Learning. In addition, just as CoP's have gained popularity among and have increasingly been used to facilitate social constructivist interactive learning for teachers through communication and interaction (Celeste, 2016), so can SM as a PD tool provide teachers with an asynchronous community to participate in (Alhamami, 2013). The asynchronous nature of online communities is flexible for a busy teacher's schedule while providing an avenue for building and sharing knowledge and offering support from potentially large groups of individuals with a wide array of experiences helpful for diagnosing challenges and solving problems (Trust, 2012). Coupled with the lack of PD opportunities, job security, and institutional support that many instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts endure (Anthony et al., 2020), CoP-based professional learning through SM groups might suffice to better prepare or update adjuncts in the DE field.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized CoP as a conceptual framework to serve as a model to synthesize through empirical and theoretical findings an integrated lens to view the research (Liehr & Smith, 1999). According to Imenda (2014), "a conceptual framework may be defined as an end result of bringing together a number of related concepts to explain or predict a given event, or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 189). For the purpose of this study, I chose to employ the CoP conceptual framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Community of Practice. I proposed to imbed this study in the CoP framework. First coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), the term *community of practice* refers to a

group of practitioners who form around an interest, concern, or profession to share their expertise with one another in the act of building relationships, interacting regularly, and learning together (Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Though often used for the purpose of professional training, a CoP can exist as a forum for hobbyists (such as a gardening club), a mental/emotional health support group, or a fan club, and differing levels of participation and interaction between members can support individual as well as whole-community learning (Moreillon, 2015). Such learning through CoP member participation and interaction can serve as a form of PD. “Often, the formation of a community of practice is organic, whether in education or other fields. A group forms around challenges presented by new initiatives or to share tips or best practices. Social platforms and group networking technology in the workplace have made this practice remarkably easy” (Celeste, 2016, pp. 10–11). Furthermore, research shows that developmental English and math faculty participation in an online CoP as PD yielded positive results for participants in terms of pedagogy and indicated a high level of engagement among faculty, especially adjunct faculty (Khoule et al., 2015).

Community of Practice and Online Learning. Though a CoP can be local and meet face-to-face, it can also be spread across the globe, where members are most likely to communicate electronically, thus rendering Web 2.0 as a powerful and accessible medium of delivery (Lewis & Rush, 2013). While earlier studies in the past decade specifically examined CoP and online PD as spaces specifically designed for the support of teacher interaction (Borko et al., 2010; Koc et al., 2009; Schlager & Fusco, 2003; Schlager & Schank, 1997), SMIGs via SM outlets, like #Edchat on Twitter, have grown organically into PD communities to facilitate educators’ need for professional

conversation and engagement and to discuss educational topics (Britt & Paulus, 2016).

Competing Conceptual Frameworks

While CoP was the conceptual framework that framed this study and research, other conceptual frameworks might have sufficed to encompass the study of learning through online spaces. The following subsections will explore and explain the following potential conceptual frameworks: connectivism (Downes, 2005; Siemens, 2005), social network theory (Adams, 2007; Milgram, 1967), and affinity spaces (Gee, 2005).

Connectivism. *Connectivism* was a viable option as a conceptual framework to guide this study because connectivism can account for learning that takes place in online social networks (Duke et al., 2013). Extending from constructivist and networked learning theory, connectivism supports geographically far-reaching collaborative efforts and learning co-constructed through social and/or professional interactions via shared knowledge and expertise pathways, often through the interface of mobile technology such as laptops, tablets, and cellular telephone (Ozlem, 2013; Downes, 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Siemens, 2005). These monumental mediums that bolster interactive technologies such as SM allow for the expanded reach and impact of information communication (Bandura, 2001).

The theory of connectivism encompasses similar aspects and overlaps CoP, almost seamlessly. In the connectivist learning theory, knowledge, growth, and development occur via network formations that further invite participants to work collaboratively to solve problems through varying ways of thinking and communicating, invariably accomplished in networked communities where participants understand knowledge through diverse, interactive, autonomous learning fueled and mediated by

network participants (Downes, 2006; Downes, 2007).

Furthermore, according to Stafford (2014), connectivist learning theory involves the intrinsic relevance centering around the question of what knowing is. Connectivists are wrought to understand the role of learning, and how it manifests. Connectivism orbits engagement and information flow, synthesizing diverse world-view perspectives (de Waard, 2011). Where the flow of information between and outside of networks exist as relevant means to at least attempt to acknowledge to the conundrum of knowing versus not knowing—often from diverse views globally.

Some researchers, such as Siemens and Downes (Bell, 2011), purport not only a connectivist theory that emphasizes the building of capacity but also emphasize knowledge management. Such suggestion, corroborates with scholarly recommendations urging the need for research-based studies to examine why or why not teachers might embrace, participate in, or at least acknowledge the importance and imperative community- and self-based PD via SM for the sake of professional growth and networking (Holmes et al., 2013; Noe et al., 2014). Such recommendations suggest that further research is needed to examine how participants in SM-based PD are motivated by such an informal means of knowledge delivery.

Therefore, since connectivism aims at overarching theory of knowledge, CoP is more relevant to this study because the population is more concisely described and articulate. Whereas connectivism aims at knowledge sharing/propagation akin to multiple venn diagrams settling over one another, CoP might be better metaphorized as a specific population seeking specific skills to address their specific challenges in a specific field. The overlaps betwixt audience, purpose, and occasion may abound, but CoP purports an

avenue of problem solving and information sharing, rather than a metacognitive overarching theory or ideology of how thought and meaning might and/or might not develop.

Social Networking. In 1967, Milgram (1967) theorized people in general being linked to others by six degrees of separation, a theory that was furthered by Adams (2007), in that we as humans are somehow connect to others who are connected with others, et cetera, and that we are all tied together by the myriad gateways of social/cultural/political/professional boundaries. According to Awolusi (2012), collaboration that is imperative to learning nods towards the act of sharing among networks. In the wake of Web 2.0 and potential interactive technologies, knowledge and professional growth often occurs, and global participants purport forth contributions and potentially the growth of knowledge by utilizing such technologies (Rainie, 2012). Furthermore, social interaction and learned interests and values can be said to perpetuate through activities that are self-directed, socially constructive in terms of cognitive growth. Individuals who utilize SM to build networks and share similar interests often find likeminded participants who negotiate learning through self-directed and collaborative activities (Munn, 2012).

Researchers of online spaces have noted *social network theory* as a framework with which to examine socially structured relationship patterns and identify professionals who might be relevant to initiatives in educational reform and who might be able to contribute to the implementation of new and evolving instructional practices (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2011; Forte et al., 2012; Lisbôa & Coutinho, 2013; Moolenaar, 2012; Schlager et al., 2009). However, for the scope of this study, CoP was the appropriate conceptual framework as the study did not aim to examine socially structured relationship

patterns but instead to measure the perceptions of the sample population in terms of PD needs and if SM can be a viable option for self-directed, CoP-based learning.

Affinity Spaces. Another viable option for a conceptual framework for this study was Gee's (2005) theory of *affinity spaces*. Known for his contributions to discourse analysis as well as the field of New Literacy Studies, Gee conceives of literacy not as an act in isolation but more of a set of cultural or social practices of interaction within group settings (Rogers, 2004). Through research, Gee (2005) has identified affinity spaces according to common characteristics (Gee, 2007, 2013; Gee & Hayes, 2010, 2012; Hayes & Duncan, 2012). For example, common interests or passions of participants, who range widely in experiences and expertise levels and who participate in a forum where both individual and collective knowledge are encouraged, underscores what an affinity space is. Furthermore, encouraging both tacit, common sense knowledge and explicit knowledge, participants in an affinity space can participate in many different ways and at many different levels, and leadership can take on multiple forms and denominations.

While researchers have adopted some features of Gee's affinity spaces as a framework for analysis, such has not been implemented in terms of online spaces for educators but instead has revolved around gaming sites (Lammers et al., 2012). Therefore, because the literature identifies CoP as a conceptual framework in several studies that pertain to online spaces for educators—though not yet online spaces for instructors of DE writing at community colleges who are part-time adjuncts—CoP was a precedented and more appropriate conceptual framework than affinity spaces.

Summary of Frameworks

Student success in higher education is possibly at risk due to the rise across the country of community colleges relying on a part-time adjunct faculty workforce, especially in the field of DE (Datray et al., 2014). As a further result, many DE professionals are facing difficulty in finding full-time faculty positions with adequate benefits, financial security, and opportunities for effective PD (Stenerson et al., 2010; Thompson, n.d.). SM-based PD can serve as a viable avenue for PD and learning. Partly due to the flexibility, accessibility, and affordability of the technological platform, the use of SM to achieve professional growth through CoPs that promote social-constructivist interactions has yielded beneficial implications from research for supporting teacher development (Alhamami, 2013; Britt & Paulus, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Elliot et al., 2010; Evans, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2014; Kabilan, 2016; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Trust, 2012). As evidenced by the following review of literature and methodology sections of this document, the study aimed to better understand how DE writing teachers who are adjuncts at community colleges perceive self-directed SM-based learning and PD.

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs?
2. Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?
3. How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?

Organization of the Study

The write-up of this study falls into four major parts: a review of literature (Chapter 2), the research design (Chapter 3), the finding of the study (Chapter 4), and a concluding discussion (Chapter 5). References used for all citations throughout this study follow the concluding discussion. Finally, appendices replete with data collection protocols and other relevant materials will appear after the references section as follows: Appendix A: Demographic Survey; Appendix B: Interview Questions; and Appendix C: Online Survey Questions.

Review of Literature

The Review of Literature Chapter sources relevant research and scholarship positing potential benefits of PD, which many deem a best practice in DE as well as throughout higher education but especially for adjunct faculty at community colleges, who could benefit from such teaching support. The review of literature then explores why practitioners might want to participate in PD, a subsection that underscores research pertaining to the role of DE in community colleges as well how PD might address challenges for adjunct faculty, DE writing teachers, DE writing students—such as the potential of technology-based learning. Finally, in the third subsection, the review of literature posits possible effects of PD, such as how effective PD might beneficially affect teacher quality as well as student academic success. This final subsection closes the chapter in an investigation of PD predicated by CoP-based, online learning.

Research Design

The Research Design Chapter includes an introduction rationalizing a qualitative-methods approach to this study as well as a section covering the researcher's positionality

through experience earned in graduate school and related networking, PD implementation, DE-relevant publishing and editorial work, publishing-based analytics, and teaching. The next section defines the volunteer participant parameters—they must have taught or currently teach at least one section of DE writing as an adjunct at a Texas community college. The following data collection section describes the following sources employed to gather data from this study's participants: an anonymous pre-formative survey via an online list-serve medium, confidential interviews sourced from pre-formative survey volunteers, and an optional online forum for interviewees as well as ethical and logistical specifics such as data storage and archiving. The data analysis section includes methodology of data calibration such as the data coding, analysis, and organization processes. The Research Design Chapter ends with possible limitations posed by this qualitative approach of data collection toward this study's participants and subsequent target population.

Findings of the Study

The Findings of the Study Chapter presents the coded and analyzed data from both the online demographic survey and the five interviewees who volunteered from the survey. As none of the participants engaged in the optional online forum, it did bore no data. The three sections of the Findings of the Study Chapter organize according to this study's three research questions.

For example, after a brief section about participants' demographic information and a section about the COVID-19 impact on the study (which will be addressed further in the following Discussion Chapter), the first section of the Findings of the Study Chapter represents emergent themes pertinent to participants' perceptions toward their PD needs

(the first research question). Such themes represented participants' perceived PD needs of staying current with teaching methods as well as understanding and meeting the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of the students in their DE writing courses in terms of low student-literacy skills, students' needs for soft skills, and challenges that many non-traditional students face. The next subsection pertains to participants' perceptions toward their PD needs regarding the theme that PD should be applicable, relevant, and specific to them as adjunct instructors of DE as well as to their population of students placed into community college DE writing courses. The section ends addressing participants' need for PD addressing technology, not only so they can learn and improve their own technology skills, but also to teach their students, many of whom face technological challenges as well.

Discussion

The final part of this study, the Discussion Chapter, features the finding of the study in comparison to current scholarship and research. The first section of the discussion aligns the study with the urgency and importance of departments, institutions, community college districts, and state legislative bodies conducting needs assessments to gauge the PD needs for adjunct instructors of DE. The following two sections corroborate participants' perceived benefits of PD for both instructors and students with a robust presence of scholarship urging content-specific PD. Such content-specific PD includes that which helps to better prepare instructors to understand and accommodate both the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of students placed into DE writing courses in Texas community colleges. Participants' perceived content-specific needs for PD based on improving technology skills—for their benefit as teachers but also so they can teach such

skills to their students—as well as participants' perceived pedagogy-support needs also align with current and seminal research and scholarship.

The Discussion Chapter continues with a section about participants' history and experience with potential online learning activities such as resource seeking and sharing, networking, discussion groups and forums, SM and special interest group participation, group-based learning, and the plausibility of SM as a delivery method for independent, self-directed professional enrichment. Furthermore, implications and recommendations in the following section synthesize corroborative and variant data from the literature and this study into proposed applications in terms of the following: organizational needs assessments and funding, variety in PD delivery options for adjunct instructors, and the need for further research about possible relationships between PD and potential student outcomes. The study closes addressing limitations of the study, including the unanticipated COVID-19 natural disaster, homogenized participant demographics, and the absence of participation in the third data collection instrument—the online forum.

Research Questions

Current research and scholarship encourage that PD content be specific to respective targeted teaching populations. Literature examining students placed into DE courses as well as the PD needs of instructors of DE courses underscores cognitive and non-cognitive challenges that the students face. The literature also cites technology skills as a need for teachers of DE as well as their students. Regardless of the delivery method, assessing the needs of the instructors seems to be a necessary first step in exploring the main topic of this study—whether or not the teaching population in question would consider self-directed SM-based learning as a means of independent PD beyond what

their respective institutions may or may not provide. Therefore, the first research question in this study was as follows: What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs?

A second topic relevant to participants' perceptions of self-directed, SM-based PD pertains to their history and experiences with online learning; with such online (and SM) affordances as information sharing, networking, and discussion-based, CoP learning; and with SM. These digital-readiness, technological-fluency, and group-learning factors could underscore the propensity of target population members to consider self-directed, SM-based learning as a means of seeking out content-specific knowledge for their professional enrichment. The second research question intended to gauge whether or not participants of this study would be motivated and comfortable engaging in such an avenue of independent PD. Therefore, the second research question was as follows: Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?

A third topic relevant to participants' perceptions of self-directed, SM-based PD relates to effects and outcomes. Most research into PD, regardless of delivery method, is predicated by potential effect on teachers in terms of improving their instruction and, in turn, on whether PD that benefits teachers, in turn, bolsters positive student outcomes. An assumption could be that instructors might be more willing to seek out professional enrichment through SM if they felt that it could benefit them as teachers, and that such benefits could benefit their students. Therefore, the third research question of this study sought to measure participants' perceptions of the potential teacher effects and student outcomes of this manner of professional learning. The third research question was as

follows: How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?

Conclusion to Rationale

In conclusion, the three research questions purported to gauge the PD needs of research participants, their potential propensity to independently seek self-directed SM-based PD, and their perceptions about how such delivery method of professional enrichment might benefit them as adjunct instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges and potentially contribute to positive student outcomes. This rationale chapter cited trends of community colleges becoming increasingly reliant on a part-time adjunct workforce in introductory courses and preparatory courses such as DE as well as subsequent possible barriers to content-specific PD that the target teaching population may face. As a result, some adjunct instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges who don't have equitable access to content-specific PD opportunities might not be or might not feel as if they are adequately prepared to best accommodate their students. Therefore, housed in the CoP framework and underscored by the social constructivism theoretical framework, this study purported to qualitatively measure participants' perceptions of self-directed SM-based PD. More specifically, the study purported to juxtapose the resulting research data against current research literature in an attempt to glean viable alignment connecting SM and teacher development with teacher collaboration and professional growth.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of literature seeks to rationalize the three research questions upon which this study is based. The first section focuses on possible PD needs of instructors of DE writing who have worked as part-time adjuncts at community colleges. This section posits PD as a best practice, citing both the challenges that non-traditional students and students in DE face as well as the high percentage of instructors who work as part-time adjuncts at community colleges. Furthermore, the first section also explores different innovations and course models in DE as well as the roles learning support professionals play in academic scaffolding and student success for DE students. The first section unfolds to rationalize this study's first research question: *What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs?*

The second section of this review of literature focuses on why said teaching population might be willing to participate in self-directed, social-media-based PD. This section touches on the challenges faced by community colleges, challenges faced by adjunct faculty, challenges faced by instructors who teach DE writing, and the mentorship role instructors of DE writing often uphold for their students placed into DE writing courses. The second section also addresses the affordances of technology, such as how adult learners who possess competency in terms of digital readiness have a higher propensity toward personal learning as well as career-based learning. Finishing with notion that such learners can *own* their PD experiences through self-directed learning and, more specifically, social-constructivist learning opportunities afforded by the CoP framework as it applies to SM, the second section unfolds to rationalize this study's

second research question: *Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?*

The third section of this review of literature focuses on how said teaching population might perceive potential effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD. The third section touches on such potential beneficial outcomes as the improvement of teacher quality as well as positive gains in terms of student academic success. Furthermore, this section posits positive effects of CoP engagement via an online, social-media context, summarizing varying beneficial values. The third section unfolds to rationalize this study's third research question: *How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?*

Potential Benefits of Professional Development

Myriad potential benefits could abound from instructors participating in and experiencing quality PD, which has been gaining recognition as a best practice. First, many instructors of DE writing (as well as instructors of lower-level credit-bearing gatekeeper classes in general) are part of the increasingly high concentration of part-time adjuncts—or *contingent workforce*—at 2-year institutions of higher education (IHEs) throughout the country. Quality PD could help said teacher population to better understand the challenges for non-traditional students, who comprise a large part of the student body at community colleges and 2-year institutions across the country. Non-traditional students can be as such because of one or a number of different criteria, such as but not limited to the following: students who are first-generation college students, students who are enrolled part-time, students with full-time jobs, students with children,

and students who did not enroll straight into college after high school graduation for a multitude of possible reasons.

Furthermore, quality PD could benefit instructors who are part-time adjuncts at community colleges in terms of gaining familiarity with innovations and course models that are currently shaping the cartography of DE as a field across the United States. An example of such innovation pertains to secondary, post-secondary, and career-readiness standards as well as placement practices utilized to gauge student college-readiness. In addition, said teaching population could benefit from familiarity with the multitude of course models and DE offerings, which can be institutionally based, systemwide, or legislatively mandated by state law. Examples of such course models are not limited to the following: accelerated, corequisite, integrated, emporium, flipped classroom, contextualized, and intensive/refresher. In addition, said teaching population could benefit from familiarity with the different methods of academic scaffolding afforded through learning support and the respective roles that learning support offers, such as academic coaches, mentors, tutors, and learning assistants.

The collective of aforementioned benefits and learning opportunities for instructors who teach DE writing part-time as adjuncts at community colleges could positively impact said teaching population and perhaps even osmose into positive learning outcomes and matriculation into course-bearing classes, degree- and/or certificate-attainment, and successful job placement for students placed into and enrolled in DE writing. In terms of gaging how said population perceives their PD needs, such outcomes and benefits culminate into rationalization of this study's first research question: *What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their*

PD needs?

Professional Development as a Potential Best Practice

Many adjunct instructors in the DE field recognize the unique opportunity to influence and change the lives of students who are teetering on the margins of success, and they understand that hardworking and dedicated educators deserve the right to accessible PD (Guskey, 2002). Established and new research-, theory-, and practice-based knowledge emerging from the field of education shows that PD is gaining popularity, importance, and practicality in higher education, especially DE, whose teachers are often pedagogically underprepared to teach underprepared students. As a required component of DE programs in Texas, the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) has urged that in addition to assessment, program evaluation, and integration of technology with an emphasis on instructional support, post-secondary institutions must include PD as a component of research-based best practices in DE (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2013).

Professional Development Might Address Challenges for Non-Traditional Students

In addition, instructors who are part-time adjuncts in DE at community colleges could benefit from understanding possible challenges faced by non-traditional students placed into DE. The NCES (2015) identified seven characteristics of nontraditional students: “being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part time, and being employed full time” (p. 7). Approximately three-out-of-four undergraduate students in both public two- and four-year institutions fall into one of said categories (Barrington, 2017). An assumption could

be that the some of these characteristics could underscore students attending school part time. For example, the time constraints (out of other possible affective factors) affiliated with having dependents, being a single caregiver, and full-time employment could influence an undergraduate student's ability to attend school full-time or to delay enrollment in an institute of higher education. At 2-year public institutions, 42% of students are part-time, and 23% of students are over the age of 25, indicating that at least almost one in four students have delayed enrollment (NCES, 2017).

Scaffolding and Supporting Part-Time Faculty at 2-Year Institutions of Higher Education

Regardless of myriad challenges faced by DE students, according to the Digest of Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), the majority of instruction faculty at 2-year public institutions were part-time. The other two categories of part-time faculty at 2-year public institutions were research and public service, both of which comprise a minute sliver (approximately 1.3% combined) compared to instruction faculty. While 30.5% of all instructional faculty at 2-year public institutions were full-time (111,033 full-time faculty members), 69.5% of all instruction faculty at 2-year public institutions were part time (364,348 part-time faculty members).

Professional Development Can Help Practitioners Understand Innovations and Course Models in Developmental Education

The many innovations currently being implemented throughout the country and namely in Texas justify the need for PD for instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts in community colleges. These instructors might possibly benefit at the basest level by achieving familiarity with the fundamental nature of DE as it differs from remediation.

While remediation pertains to “A group of courses and/or activities to assist learners to achieve secondary school-level basic skills in their identified academic deficit areas” (Arendale, 2007, p. 26) the National Center for Developmental Education (2021) described DE as an academic genre of higher education focused on scaffolding the personal and scholastic growth of students deemed underprepared via assessment to engage in such credit-bearing courses as freshman-level reading, writing, and mathematics; furthermore, academic and non-cognitive growth of students placed into DE are fostered through advising, counseling, instruction, and tutoring (NCDE, 2021). The following subsections outline a host of current trends and innovations abound in the field of college readiness.

Standards. To better understand the notion of college readiness—the knowledge, skills, and attributes a student should possess to be ready to succeed in entry-level college courses (Conley, 2016)—instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts in community colleges could benefit from familiarity with standards-based educational frameworks used to gauge college readiness. For example, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2016) is an assessment of learning goals designed to ensure that all students who graduate high school leave with the skills and knowledge needed for success in college, career, and life, regardless of geographic location. In turn, the College and Career Ready Standards are a system of assessment and accountability that gages student learning to determine if secondary students are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014).

Placement. Furthermore, instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts in community colleges can benefit from insights or knowledge of how standards often

influence the placement of students into an appropriate postsecondary course or educational program. Such placement “can be based on previous experiences, scores on admissions or entrance tests, or assessments specifically designed for placement purposes” (Arendale, 2007, p. 25). In many IHEs, students who are developmental are advised and placed into career pathways—small groups of occupations that share common skills and knowledge under the umbrella of a meta major, a general area of interest with coursework that applies to a number of more specific majors or programs of study (Minnesota State CAREERwise Education, 2016; Waugh, 2016).

Course Models. In addition, instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts in community colleges can benefit from familiarity with the multitude of course models being implemented throughout the field.

Accelerated Courses. For example, accelerated courses are offered in a shorter, more condensed time frame than traditional 16-week courses, which can minimize the need for students to remain in long sequences of developmental classes where they do not earn credit toward a degree and are more likely to drop out (Jones, 2015).

Corequisite Courses. Co-requisite models involve students taking a developmental course in tandem with a gatekeeper course, such as Freshman Composition or College Algebra. Research shows that when institutes provide developmental classes as an academic-scaffolding co-requisite rather than a pre-requisite, attrition rates reduce as the likelihood of long-term academic success increases (Complete College America, 2013; Jones, 2015). As opposed to pre-requisite or co-requisite developmental courses, mainstreaming DE students into college-level courses with additional supports—such as tutoring or non-course-based supplements (NCBOs)—

can also enhance student outcomes (Edgecombe, 2011; Rutschow & Schneider, 2011).

Integrated Courses. Integrated courses combine two related content areas. A popular example is integrated reading and writing, where the course goals apply to both reader and writer, and both content areas require similar skills (Rosenblatt, 1978; Tierney & Pearson, 1983).

Emporiums. An emporium is a course offered at a learning resource center—staffed with teachers, tutors, mentors, and coaches—requiring students to work on exercises and assignments with immediate assistance so that they can focus on mastering content they do not yet understand (Twigg, 2011).

Flipped Classroom. The flipped classroom is a learner-centered course model where students experience instruction outside of the classroom, allowing the teacher to scaffold the basic knowledge to promote deeper learning through in-class higher-level cognitive activities (Mehring, 2016).

Contextualization. Finally, many of these course models involve the contextualized teaching and learning approach, which focuses on connecting academic subjects to real-world situations through content that students will encounter in future courses or in their career/workforce pathways (Ambrose et al., 2013; Perin et al., 2013; Smith, 2014).

Intensive/Refresher Courses and Workshops. Furthermore, some institutions offer just-in-time scaffolding for students entering postsecondary education who could benefit from extra support. Often offered before students enter postsecondary institutions, intensive or refresher courses or workshops help to reinforce content areas and support college readiness, responding to the cognitive needs of students who can positively

benefit from the affective aspects of an interactive learning environment (Huskin, 2016; Pelayo et al., 2014). Sometimes, these take the form of a summer bridge or boot camp, which are pre-college intensive accelerated interventions for students, designed to increase college-level gateway course completions and improved persistence (Tomasko, 2016; Wathington et al., 2016).

Learning Support. Finally, instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts at community colleges can benefit from understanding the many different professional roles and learning assistance supports available to help DE students develop the skills they will need for student matriculation into and through credit-bearing gateway courses as well as for continuing postsecondary retention and success.

Academic Coaches. For example, academic coaches are faculty members, staff members, counselors, advisors, and even peers who form ongoing partnerships with students to help them produce fulfilling results in their lives, most often in the affective domain (Webberman, 2011).

Mentors. Mentors contribute to and facilitate student success and increase involvement academically and socially by teaching and modeling effective behaviors (Morales et al., 2016).

Tutoring. Tutoring—which yields many academic benefits and have been foundational throughout the history of higher education in America—happens through content-based assistance from student peers who sometimes have degrees or certifications in their content-area (Arendale, 2011; Vick, et al., 2015).

Learning Assistants. Finally, learning assistants are trained to import student learning and support course-reform efforts (Talbot et al., 2015), and specialized learning

assistance serves specific student needs, such as learning disorders, speech impairments, and other disabilities (Leachman et al., 2012).

Summary of Potential Benefits of Professional Development

In conclusion, the benefits of PD abound in higher education, especially for the high percentage of part-time adjunct faculty members at community colleges and two-year institutions, including instructors who teach DE writing. Not only can quality PD benefit this teaching population in terms of best practices, but also when members of said population engage in quality PD, the effects can manifest in terms of student success and matriculation into credit-bearing courses. Part of such results could be attributed to the teaching population in question being familiar with the cognitive and non-cognitive challenges of non-traditional students, who comprise a large portion of students placed into non-credit-bearing DE courses.

In addition, quality and effective PD could further benefit the teaching population in question by offering members to stay current with innovations in DE across the country. Such innovations reside in such realms as placement, especially holistic placement and advising; standards-based curriculum; course models like the flipped classroom, corequisite courses, and emporiums; pre-college refresher workshops such as summer bridge programs; and a variety of learning support opportunities, with tutors, supplemental instruction leaders, academic coaches, and mentors playing an important role in providing the academic scaffolding that could prove beneficial for the student placed into DE.

The aforementioned benefits of PD could translate into PD needs for instructors who are adjuncts teaching DE writing at community colleges. Therefore, the first

research question of this study will purport to gauge how said population perceives their PD needs: *What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs?*

Impetus to Participate in Professional Development

Many reasons abound pertaining to why participants in this study's population—
instructors of DE writing who are adjunct faculty at community colleges—could
rationalize and seek participation in self-directed, social-media-based PD. Such reasons
relate to the challenges faced by said population, both institutionally (adjunct faculty in
community college) and pedagogically (regarding instructors/instruction as well as
students of DE writing). Furthermore, in terms of technology, motivation, and impetus to
participate in self-directed, social-media-based PD, many members of this study's
population might lean toward the aforementioned PD method due to high levels of *digital
readiness*, an underscoring principle of both *personal-* and *career-based learning*. Both
types of learning can be afforded through *self-directed* knowledge and information
seeking, as well as the co-operative and social-constructivist knowledge negotiation and
networking via the CoP framework afforded by SMIGs on such platforms as Facebook,
which will serve as a research/researcher referent for this study. The collective of
aforementioned reasons culminate into rationalization of this study's second research
question: *Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would
participate in self-directed, SM based PD?*

Importance of Professional Development Regarding the Role of the Community College

Aligned with the idea of access to higher education opportunities as the right of all individuals (Humpherys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012), community colleges provide noncredit courses—such as DE—to 40% of their students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Most often, separate departments govern the administration and delivery of these classes; therefore, challenges for community college leaders in assessing and meeting the needs of DE populations remain difficult (Pruett & Absher, 2015), so assessment and delivery are often handled in isolation from one another. Furthermore, while the role of community colleges is paramount to providing affordable courses and services to students deemed underprepared as a means for them to transition into higher education and career opportunities (Bremer et al., 2013; Humpherys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012; Saxon & Slate, 2013), the institutional reliance on faculty members who are part-time adjunct instructors is imperative, a strong criticism being lack of background, education, and preparation needed to meet the academic and non-cognitive needs and challenges of students in DE and adult education (Datray et al., 2014).

Professional Development Can Address Challenges for Adjunct Faculty

Instructors who are part-time adjunct instructors in DE typically are subject-matter specialists but may not be trained in working with students who are developmental. They often work for substandard pay and job security, and they are asked to serve with dedication and loyalty nonetheless without being fully engaged in the academic and social communities of the institution (Datray et al., 2014; Johnson & Frank,

2013). At many IHEs, especially community colleges, utilize instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts because the institutions hire on a semester-by-semester basis according to course needs, at a fraction of the cost of a faculty member who is full-time, and without having to provide health insurance and other benefits (Stenerson et al., 2010; Thompson, n.d.). Many institutions even restrict the workloads of instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts to avoid providing health insurance requirements mandated by the Affordable Care Act (Fredrickson, 2015). Such conditions could serve at worst to detrimentally repel teachers who are eager to make a difference in their field of expertise (Harrill et al., 2015). Due to such hardships endured by the community-college contingent workforce of adjunct instructors, this population could benefit from flexible, online approaches to quality PD that provides peer interaction and community building (Campbell, 2016; Trust, 2012). Such approaches could be critical to the success of an increasingly diverse population of student learners (Wynants & Dennis, 2018).

Professional Development Can Address Challenges for Developmental Education

Writing Teachers

Furthermore, community college adjuncts who are DE writing teachers face additional and unique challenges. According to Bruning and Horn (2000), writing can be described as “a tremendously complex problem-solving act involving memory, planning, text generation, and revision” (p. 26). In theory, students with a propensity for rhetorical awareness and literacy skills such as being able to discern genres, critical thinking, effective writing skills, and reading proficiencies should be better positioned to succeed in academia as well as their careers (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2014). To be effective college writing teachers, practitioners require a wide

span of knowledge: rhetorical knowledge, linguistic knowledge, instructional knowledge, technical knowledge, and knowledge of ethical and effective research methods (CCCSE, 2014). However, while the quest to educate students benefits from the vitality and necessity for teachers to develop professionally (Roney & Ulerick, 2013), instructors of writing are often belabored by the additional mental, intellectual, and cerebral stamina, diligence, and grit necessary to critically and constructively examine, assess, and respond to hundreds of essays at a time for focus, development, organization, and further myriad rhetorical, mechanical, and semantic considerations.

Professional Development Can Address Challenges for Developmental Education Writing Students

Also, as DE writing courses often lend the opportunity for students to write reflectively or to compose personal narratives or short autoethnographies, DE writing teachers can play a mentor role in a student's non-cognitive development and comfortability with self-expression through words. Such mentorship could be vital for students who might struggle with the social stigma attached with being in a *developmental* or *remedial* course (Arendale, 2005). Research suggests the pedagogical importance of "entering into a relationship with student writers that positions the instructor as a mediator between what it is the writers want to say and the academic audience with which they communicate" (Camfield, 2016, p. 10).

Professional Development Can Address the Potential Facility of Technology-Based Learning

Additionally, as is the case with higher education in general, DE writing teachers face the challenges of responding to a rapidly evolving technology context and

environment in a manner that is responsible and constructive for the benefits of delivery and positive student learning outcomes (Herrington & Moran, 2009). Finally, DE writing instructors, like all teachers, are challenged with the professional motivation and responsibility to keep abreast of current developments and trends pertaining to the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge relevant to their field(s).

In such a climate of innovations and implementations in course models and learning assistance in the field of DE, instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts in community colleges, and who can be considered or who consider themselves *digitally ready* and technologically adept, can benefit from the accessibility and flexibility available through self-directed internet-based learning platforms, professional groups, and web portals to help accommodate their PD needs.

Digital Readiness. Digital divides, once focused on access to digital technology, now also applies to the degree to which people “succeed or struggle when they use technology to try to navigate their environments, solve problems, and make decisions” (Horrigan, 2016b, p. 1). Research from the Pew Research Center shows that people who are reluctant to embrace the affordances of technology tend to rate below average in terms of digital readiness and therefore face barriers, such as finding the mastering of new electronic gadgets to be challenging or being able to easily discern the trustworthiness of online information (Horrigan, 2016b). According to the Pew study, in terms of digital readiness, 48% of U.S. adults are relatively more prepared, *cautious clickers* (31%) having high levels of “technical ownership as well as confidence in their online skills and abilities to find trustworthy information” and digitally ready (17%) as

“ardent learners for personal enrichment”; these learners tend to have access to technology and confidence about their skills and being able to discern between trustworthy versus non-reputable online information, and they also are knowledgeable in terms of online learning resources (p. 3). Those learners deemed *relatively more prepared* are likely to have higher household incomes, at least some to have higher education levels, and are in their 30s and 40s (Horrigan, 2016b). According to Horrigan, the “digitally ready, in other words, have high demand for learning and use a range of tools to pursue it—including, to an extent significantly greater than the rest of the population, digital outlets such as online courses or extensive online research” (p. 4).

On the other hand, in terms of digital readiness, the other 52% of adults who reported being not as motivated to become involved with personal learning activities were less likely to engage in learning through the use of digital tools (Horrigan, 2016b). However, the technological shift that has taken place in the age of the Generation X and Millennial generations has been quick and lofty. As Horrigan (2016b) noted,

It is important to note that the findings represent a snapshot of where adults are today in a fairly nascent state of e-learning in society. The groupings reported here may well change in the coming years as people’s understanding of e-tools grows and as the creators of technology related to e-learning evolve it and attempt to make it more user friendly. (p. 5)

Regardless, the majority of Americans surveyed expressed the desire to grow as people and they look for opportunities to do so: 58% said this applies to them *very well* and another 31% said it applies to them *somewhat well* (Horrigan, 2016b, p. 5). Digital readiness and personal learning can be relevant to self-directed and lifelong learning PD

strategies.

Personal Learning. While place-based learning continues to be imperative to many people and learning activities differ according to differences in income and education, digital technology assists many Americans who seek extra knowledge for work-related and personal reasons as well as to aid in the process of lifelong learning (Horrigan, 2016a). “Most Americans feel they are lifelong learners, whether that means gathering knowledge for ‘do it yourself’ projects, reading up on a personal interest, or improving their job skills” (Horrigan, 2016a, p. 1). In the 12 months previous to the study, 74% of American adults reported participating in at least one of the following activities: reading how-to magazines, consumer magazines, and/or publications related to personal interest; attending a meeting to learn new information; attending a convention or conference; taking a face-to-face or online course related to hobbies or personal interests (Horrigan, 2016a). In terms of learning for personal or recreational purposes, these *personal learners* claimed that self-directed learning “helped them feel more capable and well-rounded; opened up new perspectives about their lives; helped them make new friends; made them more connected to their local community; and prompted them to get involved in career opportunities” (Horrigan, 2016a, p. 4).

Career-Based Learning. In terms of career-oriented learning, 63% of full and part-time workers are professional learners who have taken a class or gotten extra training in the 12 months previous to the study for the purpose of improved job skills, such as acquiring a job-required license or certification, pursuing of a raise or promotion at work or a new job with a different employer, and better positioning themselves out of fear of possible downsizing at current job (Horrigan, 2016a). According to the Pew

Research Study, professional learners claimed that additional education “expanded their professional network; helped them advance within their current company, enabled them to find a new job with their current employer or a new one, [and/or] helped them consider a different career path” (Horrigan, 2016a, p. 4).

Digital Learning Demographics. According to Horrigan (2016a), “as a rule, those adults with more education, household incomes and internet-connecting technologies are more likely to be participants in today’s educational ecosystem and to use information technology to navigate the world” (p. 5):

- Level of Education: “Those with more formal education are more likely than others to pursue learning activities” (Horrigan, 2016a, p. 5)
- Technology Assets: “Those who have both home broadband and smartphones are more likely than those with no internet connections or only one connection option to take advantage of learning opportunities (Horrigan, 2016a, p. 5).
- Personal Outlook: “Those who consider themselves lifelong learners and are eager to seek information are more likely than others to pursue personal enrichment activities” (Horrigan, 2016a, p. 5).

Self-Directed Learning. Professionals as individuals are expected more and more to take responsibility for their own self-directed PD and learning activities as growth occurs in informal learning communities and networks for the promotion of professional identities and for professional learning (Evans, 2015). Personal learning networks abound in teachers’ use of SM tools, including within social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter; within affinity-based group sites that are specific to career, vocation, hobby, or ideology; within the phenomenon of virtual-connecting individuals around the world;

and with the use of real-time interaction tools such as Skype and instant messaging (Trust, 2012).

According to Trust (2012), “Many teachers are joining online communities of likeminded individuals and subscribing to various blogs and Web sites to continue learning and improve their professional practice” (p. 133). Researchers suggest that to understand the use of digital learning materials by education professionals for self-directed, personal and professional growth, the research community must continually inquire into these tools and how they can best be harnessed “for improved competence and proficiency in our educational leaders” (Britt & Paulus, 2016, p. 448). In a study by Kabilan (2016) of student participants who were preservice secondary teachers in their final semester of a Bachelor of Education degree program, the researcher noted that while grades initially motivated them, they gradually began recognizing community socialization as being key to self-learning and -development.

Social Media and Community of Practice. The use of SM to form CoPs for education-related PD has paid dividends throughout the spectrum of education. Researchers Goodyear et al. (2014) argued that SM be considered for teachers and researchers to engage in professional learning and to overcome financial and schedule demands while supporting pedagogical change. They recommended SM as an additional means of communication between practitioners to support other forms, such as email and face-to-face dialogue (Goodyear et al., 2014). Alhamami (2013) suggested that by creating CoPs, free SM tools for language professionals’ development lend to a creative and effective PD solution for professionals in the field of language teaching. In addition, an important platform for building professional learning networks, SM has increasingly

lent itself to the use of school librarians, who use these free, flexible, and accessible tools to connect with colleagues in a virtual CoP learning environment (Moreillon, 2015). The SM-based CoP via Twitter has yielded positive effects for school librarians, who by vocation, engage in “challenging work that requires continuous professional development” (Moreillon, 2015, p. 127). In addition, through increased information access and the presence of online community, SM has facilitated the possibility of alternate forms of PD to meet the ever-changing demands of training teachers of K-12 (Britt & Paulus, 2016; Dalgarno & Colgan, 2007). Further research results have shown that for PD in higher education, an individual can build a useful community based upon Twitter (Lewis & Rush, 2013).

According to the results of a study using facilitator-mediated SM for professional learning involving seven physical education teachers from a comprehensive secondary school (students aged 11–19) in the UK, interactions through Facebook and Twitter “promoted teacher inquiry, and challenged teachers to develop their existing use of an innovation further, and encouraged them to work together and develop shared practices ... these interactions contributed to the sustained use of the innovation” (Goodyear et al, p. 15). Twitter conversations contributed to teachers’ development of social competence as they developed their own unique identities while valuing each other’s contributions, and the sharing of good practices between the participants carried over from virtual conversation into face-to-face dialogue (Goodyear et al., 2014).

From a similar study of a much larger social-media-based CoP, via qualitative interviews with group moderators and stakeholders as well as observations from group (#EdChat, Twitter) interactions, the researcher observed that “the weekly chat moved as a

river, with the ebb and flow of people jumping in and out. However, the strong team of leaders provided stability and consistency” (Britt & Paulus, 2016, p. 54). The study by Britt and Paulus (2016) of the Twitter #EdChat community (2016) revealed the presence of Wenger’s (1998) CoP indicators such as mutual “engagement, a negotiated enterprise, and a repertoire of negotiable resources, including (1) substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs, (2) sustained mutual relationships, (3) absences of introductory preamble, (4) quick setup of a problem to be discussed, and (5) rapid flow of information” (Britt & Paulus, 2016, p. 53).

Kaliban (2016) found in a study examining pre-service teachers’ use of a social network to host online teaching portfolios (OTPs) that the activity enhanced and supported meaningful PD through participants forming a CoP, developing professional learning and identity, and gaining important teaching skills, access to resources, and confidence. In a mixed-methods study (Kabilan, 2016) of 91 Malaysian pre-service teachers—students from a variety of specializations who were in the final semester of their Bachelor of Education—85% of the participants who created OTPs as part of the study reported the belief that Facebook can be used as an OTP for meaningfully supporting and enhancing their future PD endeavors as teaching professionals. As one of the participants reported, upholding the shared interactive professional learning benefits of a healthy CoP:

[S]haring my opinions with other people, made our interaction livelier and consists of two-way communication where we post our comments, and the comments are replied by other people instead of me just posting my materials for everyone to see and no feedback is received. (p. 24)

In Kaliban's study (2016), the results indicated that pre-service participants gained confidence as a result of participating in the online teacher portfolio project because they were able to express their ideas during discussion and as well as giving feedback to and receiving feedback from others, and to share and exchange materials, ideas, and reflections. As one of the participants reported, "My self-knowledge about teaching also grew in time. I could see the confidence in my ability to work effectively in different settings" (p. 27).

In a case study examining a university academic using a microblogging tool (Twitter) for the purpose of increasing education-related knowledge and experience of SM, the activity proved to be instrumental in the establishment of a personal network with some characteristics of a CoP (Lewis & Rush, 2013). According to the researcher, the activity demonstrated the ease and accessibility of SM in supporting technology-based PD for academic faculty and staff (Lewis & Rush, 2013). Furthermore, in an article examining a CoP model used for redesigning a lecturer PD course that investigated the impact of mobile web 2.0 technologies in higher education, the researcher found that the course had significant transformative impact on both the participants and the learning culture of institutions (Cochrane & Narayan, 2013). The course graduates continued to participate in the original CoP and became technology stewards, forming similar CoPs at their respective individual institutions (Cochrane & Narayan, 2013).

The challenge resides in the way practitioners think about PD, about *who* owns PD. Social-media-based social-constructivist CoP PD can be viewed as centered around the participant rather than the trainer or institution. The prevalence of such can possibly depend on the way that PD is viewed, or our ontological perceptions and conceptions

about what PD is. Oxford University Press (n.d.) defined *ontology* as a set of concepts and categories in a subject area or domain that shows their properties and the relations between them. Chi and Hausmann (2003) described an *ontological shift* as “the re-assignment or re-categorizing of an instance from one ontological category to another” (p. 7), which relates to teaching in terms of instructors reconceptualizing their a priori learning and teaching experience to new understandings of learning theory, such as a shift from lecture-exclusive pedagogical approach to a more heutagogical (student-centered) approach centering around social constructivism (Cochrane & Naryan, 2013).

Summary of Impetus to Participate in Professional Development

In conclusion, many reasons abound for why the teaching population in question might participate in self-directed, SM-based PD. First of all, many community colleges rely on instructors who are part-time adjuncts, often with a dearth of institutional PD opportunities that are afforded to full-time faculty. Such a possible scarcity of PD opportunities could negatively affect instructors who teach DE writing, which is often paramount to student success in their gateway courses, throughout their college coursework, and into their careers. Instructors who teach DE writing are faced by the analytical cognitive load of grading and assessing classes of students in terms of such foundational Aristotelian canons as invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and revision. The population in question also shoulder the responsibility of coaching and mentoring due to the importance and personal nature of composition, often establishing a rapport of trust with students placed into their DE courses.

Furthermore, additional rationale for why the teaching population in question might participate in self-directed, SM-based PD pertains to technology. The demographic

of the teaching population in question consists of instructors who are of the *generation X* and *generation Y (millennial)* age group, born during or after 1965 or 1985, respectively. Demographic research pertaining to digital readiness indicates adult members of these age groups to be adept and willing to utilize Web 2.0 technology for both career-based as well as personal-based self-directed learning. In terms of digital readiness and willingness to learn in a self-directed manner, members of the teaching population in question could benefit from PD nested in the CoP framework, where a community of learners co-construct knowledge, network professionally, and share information—essentially learning from each other and from the collective. SM outlets like Twitter and Facebook (the latter of which this study will focus) offer such affordances via SMIGs.

Essentially, the affordances of SM to provide forums for CoP-based social constructivist, self-directed learning can result in flexible and affordable access to PD. Such affordances and possible benefits can present opportunities for instructors who are part-time adjuncts teaching DE writing to develop as professionals and potentially positively impact student success. Such potential benefits and opportunities underscore the relevance of the second research question: *Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?*

Potential Effects of Professional Development

The third research question in this study pertains to how instructors who are part-time faculty teaching DE writing at community colleges perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD—which is nested in the CoP and social-constructivist frameworks. Therefore, first, quality PD can affect a positive impact in teacher quality in terms of said population understanding how effects of quality

PD could benefit the academic success of students placed into DE courses such as DE writing. Furthermore, the literature focusing on the CoP framework suggests positive results and benefits at the instructional level for practitioners who engage in online learning, especially with regard to perceived values for those who actively seek PD opportunities, and furthermore, the effects that such offers the students of said teaching population.

Therefore, in terms of gaging how said population perceives the potential effects of participation in quality PD, such outcomes and benefits culminate into rationalization of this study's third research question: *How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?*

Professional Development Might Affect Teacher Quality

In terms of teacher quality and the difference it makes to students, much of the educational community in general—at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, and especially in the field of DE—view effective PD as important for keeping up with best practices with the assumption that ongoing training for educators will positively benefit their students in terms of academic and eventually career success (Bingman & Schmitt, 2008; Booth et al., 2014; Gaal, 2014; Guskey, 2002; Saliga et al., 2015; Smith, 2010; Smittle, 2009; THECB, 2013; Yoon et al., 2008). For example, effective PD, peer-networking, and colleague mentorship can afford practitioners the opportunity to acquire and update the skills helpful to provide a successful context for learning, extending beyond the basic cognitive issues of students who are underprepared for credit-bearing college coursework to address their non-cognitive needs as well (Smittle, 2009).

Professional Development Might Affect Student Academic Success

The facilitation of professional learning community engagement and PD opportunities for DE instructors—especially underserved part-time adjunct DE instructors at community colleges who might not have the access to quality PD equitable to what is usually provided to full-time faculty—could boost academic success for DE students, many of whom arrive facing the barrier of being unprepared to successfully engage in college-level work, which limits their opportunities for academic success, career and financial success, and consequently an improved quality of life (Bailey, 2009; Capt, 2011). For such students, good teachers can foster the student learning process; create an environment that encourages exploration, risk taking, and questioning; and provide a safe educational context for the synthesis of knowledge and skills to occur (Bingman & Schmitt, 2008).

When educators are empowered, their enthusiasm is usually evident in classroom instruction, discussions, and activities. While DE populations wield the highest attrition rates among post-secondary students (Pruett & Absher, 2015), research suggests that PD for practitioners proves useful in dealing with specific student challenges (Booth et al., 2014; Saliga et al., 2015). Furthermore, PD for teachers has shown evidence of positive effects on student outcomes (Yoon et al., 2008).

Professional Development via Communities of Practice for Online Learning

Studies about the effects of CoP engagement through online learning indicate positive PD outcomes for education practitioners. Moreillon (2015), who gauged member participation of a regionally based grass roots librarian forum on Twitter, #txlchat, found that participants felt that a strong sense of belonging in the CoP contributed to a

communal atmosphere which manifests beyond SM. According to the researcher,

Many of the study participants communicate with other #txlchat participants outside the chats. Some have collaborated at conferences to co-present the knowledge from the chat; some have done so without ever meeting face to face. More than half of the study participants see other participants in person as well as online. (p. 135)

Though a CoP can be local and meet face-to-face, it can also be spread out across the globe, where members are most likely to communicate electronically, thus rendering Web 2.0 as a powerful and accessible medium of delivery (Lewis & Rush, 2013). While earlier studies in the past decade specifically examined CoP and online PD as spaces specifically designed for the support of teacher interaction (Borko et al., 2010; Koc et al., 2009; Schlager & Fusco, 2003; Schlager & Schank, 1997), SMIGs via outlets, like #Edchat on Twitter, have grown organically into PD communities to facilitate educators' need for professional conversation and engagement and to discuss educational topics (Britt & Paulus, 2016).

Furthermore, just as CoP's have gained popularity among and have increasingly been used to facilitate social constructivist interactive learning for teachers through communication and interaction (Celeste, 2016), so can SM as a PD tool provide teachers with an asynchronous community to participate in (Alhamami, 2013). The asynchronous nature of online communities can be flexible for a busy teacher's schedule while providing an avenue for building and sharing knowledge and offering support from potentially large groups of individuals with a wide array of experiences helpful for diagnosing challenges and solving problems (Trust, 2012).

Potential Value of Online Professional Development as an Outlet of Faculty Learning

A project run by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) has “sought to understand how to capitalize on the promise of online CoPs to support professional learning for educators” (USDE, 2014, p. 2). Participants in the survey regarding online CoPs reported experiencing all five Wenger et al. (2011) interrelated values from the value creation framework: *immediate value* is experienced immediately by participating in community activities; *potential value* pertains to knowledge, resources, and relationships that could prove useful in the future; *applied value* pertains to changes in practice applying knowledge, resources, and /or relationships; *realized value* pertains to outcomes caused by application; and *reframing value* pertains to changes in an understanding of success.

The first two categories emerged as most salient in relation to practitioners’ affective domain. From the study, participants reported *immediate value* in terms of “feeling less isolated, engaging in professional conversations with other teachers with whom they identified, receiving help and support, [and] providing advice or encouragement” (USDE, 2014, p. 2). Participant reports that fell into the *potential value* category pertained further to the affective domain in terms of “increasing self-confidence and a sense of professional identity, . . . expanding the network of professional connections, . . . and increasing trust in individuals and the collective community” (USDE, 2014, p. 2). In addition, participants reported *potential value* outside of the affective domain and more in the cognitive realm in the form of “deepening knowledge through structured process of engagement, . . . gaining a broader perspective by deprivatizing practice, . . . [and] accessing resources and tools” (USDE, 2014, p. 2).

Furthermore, cognitive and practice-centered development was reported in the *applied value* category in the form of “using lessons or ideas from the community in the classroom” and “changing classroom practices” (USDE, 2014, p. 2). The values created by affective, cognitive, and practice-centered development could be foundational in increasing confidence in the classroom as well as a sense of professionalism and connection to the field for instructors of DE who are part-time adjuncts in community colleges. The value creation framework was expanded and built upon a seminal approach for evaluating training that was developed by Kirkpatrick (1976, 1994).

Summary of Potential Effects of Online-Based Professional Development

To conclude, this segment of this study’s review of literature aims to gauge the perceived effects of quality PD by the aforementioned population in this study— instructors who are adjunct faculty and teach DE writing courses in community colleges. Based on scholarly research pertaining to the framework of CoP for online learning, as well as literature supporting the trajectory betwixt teacher quality and student academic success. Furthermore, studies that have focused on CoP in regard to online learning have suggested multifarious values underscoring the benefits of self-directed PD pertaining to professional learning and, in essence, faculty development. Such potential effects underscore the relevance of the third research question: *How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?*

Conclusion of Potential Professional Development Benefits, Impetus to Participate, and Potential Effects

Much of the educational community in general—at both the secondary and post-

secondary levels, and especially in the field of DE—view effective PD as important for keeping up with best practices with the assumption that ongoing training for educators will positively benefit their students in terms of academic and eventually career success (Bingman & Schmitt, 2008; Booth et al., 2014; Gaal, 2014; Guskey, 2002; Saliga et al., 2015; Smith, 2010; Smittle, 2009; THECB, 2013; Yoon et al., 2008). Furthermore, underlying the social constructivism framework (Vygotsky, 1978), socially constructed, community-of-practice interactions between members who share common goals and interests can lead to professional growth (Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The use of SM to achieve professional growth through CoPs that promote social-constructivist interactions has yielded beneficial implications from research for supporting teacher development (Alhamami, 2013; Britt & Paulus, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Elliot et al., 2010; Evans, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2014; Kabilan, 2016; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; Trust, 2012).

To focus even further, research suggests that social-constructivist PD delivered through a social-media-delivered CoP yields benefits to teachers in terms of increasing their confidence (Kabilan, 2016; USDE, 2014). While Saliga et al. (2015) have demonstrated through research that face-to-face workshops improved confidence for adult education math teachers, Kabilan's study (2016) implied that using an online social network to form a CoP supported a variety of benefits for Malaysian pre-service K-12 teachers, including their confidence and affective well-being. Furthermore, research from the USDE Office of Technology (2014) revealed that participants (largely K-12 teachers from multiple online communities) in the survey regarding online CoPs reported experiencing all five interrelated values from the value creation framework (Wenger et

al., 2011). This includes *immediate value* and *potential value*, which pertain to the affective domain of development, and, specifically, confidence.

While Saliga et al. (2015) and Kaliban (2016) conducted their studies on participants through organized PD activities, the USDE study (2014) gathered data from voluntary participants of self-directed online CoPs. Regardless, all three studies reported beneficial effects on teacher confidence. However, a gap in the literature shows that no published studies have attempted to gauge how self-directed, online, CoP-based PD might affect the confidence level, professional growth, and teacher development of instructors who are part-time adjuncts in DE at Texas community colleges—a population that might well benefit from the flexibility and accessibility of social-media-based delivery method and learning community involvement. As this population of teachers is responsible for so many DE students throughout the state of Texas, accessible PD opportunities through SM can serve to mitigate a potential myopic imbroglio of teachers who are underprepared going into DE college classrooms to serve students who are underprepared.

In terms of rigor and scholarly integrity, the majority of articles in this literature review hail from empirical publications as well as government-funded reports. While I as researcher sourced some non-juried articles pertaining to PD and PD evaluation (Guskey, 2002), writing and literacy (Celeste, 2016), and adjunct instructors (Anthony et al., 2020), I more heavily utilized peer-reviewed academic journal research articles relevant to PD adult and post-secondary learners (Saliga et al., 2015; Gaal, 2014; Bingman & Schmitt, 2008) as well as such government reports as pertaining to PD and student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007) as well as research pertinent to online CoP design (USDE, 2014),

technology and lifelong learning (Horrigan, 2016a), and gaps relevant to American adults and levels of college readiness versus demographic factors (Horrigan, 2016b).

With emphasis on defining the gap as specifically and empirically as possible, I further utilized peer-reviewed articles based on DE-focused pedagogy (Smith, 2014; Smittle, 2009). To be even more specific, I focused further on articles depictive of this study's sample population—teachers of DE writing who have worked as an adjunct instructor at a Texas community colleges. These peer-reviewed articles help to better contextualize DE at Texas community colleges (Booth et al., 2014; Capt, 2011; Saxon & Slate, 2013) and specific innovations in DE across Texas such as instructional technology practices (Martirosyan et al., 2017) and summer bridge programs (Wathington et. al, 2016). Furthermore, in writing this literature review, I toiled to tie recent and current scholarship with seminal works that help to frame the context of literacy (Elbow, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1978), CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), and PD evaluation (Guskey, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 1976, 1994) in higher education.

Finally, in terms of social learning (e.g., CoP and social constructivism), professional development, and online technology, the peer-reviewed articles I sourced and analyzed hailed mostly from academic journals that were international in scope. For example, though these international articles were based on such aspects of faculty development as using social media for the development of language teachers, published in the *Arab World English Journal* (Alhamami, 2013); redesigning faculty development through social learning technology, published in UK-based *Research in Learning Technology* (Cochrane & Narayan, 2013); utilizing Facebook as a learning e-portfolio for

pre-service faculty development, published in the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* (Kabilan, 2016); or employing the use of social media and CoP to facilitate pedagogical change among physical education teachers, published in UK-based *Sport, Education and Society* (Goodyear et. al, 2014)—the international articles were based on technology- and social-based learning as a means of effective PD. Furthermore, an international peer-reviewed academic journal based in the US, *School Librarians Worldwide*, boasted an editorial review board representing 14 different countries as well as a citation in this literature review about librarians in higher education using Twitter for professional development (Moreillon, 2015). Though international technology and social media usage is outside of the scope of this study, the dearth of US- and specifically Texas-based articles in lieu of the wealth of international articles pertaining to CoP- and social-media-based PD underscores a gap in the literature which helps to predicate and rationalize the integrity of this study.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

To help better understand perceptions of community college developmental writing adjunct instructors toward the use of SM as a means of self-directed PD, I employed qualitative methods for this exploratory study. While an extensive breadth of study exists pertaining to institutionally provided social-media-based in higher education, few studies focus on community college adjunct perceptions and opinions on self-directed social-media-based avenues toward practitioner professionalization, lifelong learning, information sharing, and field-specific knowledge building via CoPs. I proposed contributing to the literature about PD in higher education by identifying central perceptions of the population sample that could lead to such developments as community college academic departments incorporating, allowing, and/or recognizing SM as a viable form of PD that affords amicable accessibility and flexibility for part-time members of the contingent workforce.

Introduction to Methods

The following subsections outline the methodological approach this study employed. I first rationalize why I chose to utilize qualitative methods. I then qualify my positionality as an appropriate researcher for this topic by highlighting my experience in the field of DE, as follows: graduate school and networking, PD implementation, DE-relevant publishing and editorial experience, work with publishing-based analytics, and teaching experience in higher education. From there, I outline participant sampling followed by the following data collection imperatives: data sources applied to the study—focusing further on the pre-formative survey, qualitative interviews, and online forum. The following subsection explicates data-collection media, such as ethics and logistics,

archiving, the logos involving the pre-formative survey, and incentive for participation in the study. The following data analysis portion of this methodology section pertains to the following: rationalization of this effort as a case study; data calibration, coding, and analysis; and organizational and data-follow-up efforts.

Qualitative Methods

I employed qualitative methods for this study for the purpose of producing thick, detailed descriptions of the participants' perceptions of the content area—the usage of SM as a means of self-directed PD—so that I as researcher can interpret the data through cross-reference and triangulation of multiple interviews (Denzin, 1989; Yin, 2018). I chose qualitative case study for data sources because my overarching questions involved how participants perceived the possibility of PD via SM, which is a contemporary phenomenon, which I—as researcher—had no control (Yin, 2018). For this study's empirical research inquiry, I sought to gage the perceptions (i.e., feelings and beliefs) of teacher sin higher education who have taught DE writing as an adjunct instructor at a Texas community college. The unit of analysis for this bounded case study is the group of participants as a subset of the aforementioned population as opposed to each individual participant as a separate unit of analysis. Furthermore, I employed as data sources research interviews as Kvale (1996) defined as “whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (pp. 5–6). Furthermore, according to Kvale (1996), utilizing conversation in the form of research interviews dates as far back as Thucydides—who interviewed participants from the Peloponnesian Wars to produce historical texts—and systematic interview research has emerged as a new phenomenon in the modern social

sciences in the past decades. To gather the data, I used as data sources open-ended interview questions, which, in terms of descriptions, according to Glesne (2006), “tend to be richer ground” (p. 82).

Researcher Positionality and Experience

My positionality as researcher emerged salient in this study due to over two decades of experience in the field of student success and college readiness. As of the Fall 2019 semester, I have been teacher of record for 73 sections of college-level courses, attesting to the culmination of experience giving me ethos as a practitioner. I chalked said experience by virtue of my graduate program networking imperatives, experience with grant-funded PD implementation in higher education, DE-relevant publishing and editorial experience—including familiarity with publishing-based analytics; and extensive teaching experience in the DE- and literacy-based college classroom. My emic positionality via personal and professional experience as a graduate student, graduate research assistant and editor in the fields of PD and publishing, and adjunct instructor of DE writing at Texas community colleges anchored the research lens that filtered and focused the mental framework and line of inquiry that I used to guide this study. This emic positionality and research lens guided this study's research questions as well as research protocol.

Graduate and Networking Experience

As a doctoral student at a large state university, I worked as a graduate research assistant for seven years. I have used SM in various ways and in various capacities pertinent to my role as a student of DE as well as a graduate research assistant. As a student, I have utilized SM to network with colleagues in the field of higher education

and, more specific, DE. I have met some colleagues at various conferences or industry-related events, I have met some in classes on the campus where I attend, I have met some online through the aforementioned colleagues who served as conduits, and I have met some through Facebook SMIGs. These SMIGs served as field-specific CoPs that involved information sharing, such as hyperlinks to relevant articles, conference information, publications' calls for submission, face-to-face PD opportunities, online training sessions and webinars, relevant graduate programs, and job notifications. As a student, I have utilized SM outlets like Facebook to connect and communicate with likeminded scholars, to keep abreast of best practices in higher education—especially DE and adult education—and even as a research avenue for class projects and program benchmark projects (comprehensive exam and dissertation). All of these activities constituted self-directed PD via SM and contributed to my emic research positionality.

Professional Development Implementation Experience

Furthermore, as a graduate research assistant, I worked for 7 years in different capacities in the field of PD. Consequently, previous research and activities leading to the formulation of this study included experience from and data inspired by three specific projects under the umbrella of The Education Institute (TEI) at TXST. TEI, according to their institutionally sponsored website, was “a nationally recognized resource that provides quality research and innovative educational services to communities and professional organizations, including school districts and state agencies, which work collaboratively with diverse and underserved populations” (para 1). For the TEI-managed *Texas Success Initiative Professional Development (TSI PD) Program*, I gained experience developing surveys pertaining to participants' preferences for PD delivery in

terms of face-to-face, online, or hybrid. I administered the surveys at two face-to-face *Contextualization Institute* PD events in January and February 2016. I included in the Likert-scale survey opportunities for participants to offer qualitative data relative to their opinions of the possibility of using SM as a means of PD.

Developmental-Education-Relevant Publishing and Editorial Experience

In addition, I served as editor of the *Texas Developmental Education Professional Community Online (TX DEPCO)* as well as the *Journal of College Academic Support Programs (J-CASP)*—two publishing platforms, both of which were housed under TEI. As editor, I utilized SM platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest to disseminate the published articles and PD opportunities to colleagues who subscribed to these *TX DEPCO* and *J-CASP* SM pages as well as to members of SMIGs on the three SM platforms.

Publishing-Based Analytics Experience

Throughout the *TX DEPCO*'s publishing cycle, I gathered age- and geographic-region-related user statistics through the SM platform analytics as well as from analytics for the WordPress site, which hosted the *TX DEPCO*. From the analytics included in the *J-CASP* website, an Open Journal System provided through Texas Digital Libraries, I collected information about user downloads and galley views of the free online journal's five published issues: Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring/Summer 2019, Fall 2019/Winter 2020, and Spring/Summer 2020. Data from these three projects contextualized the applicability of this current study, demonstrating not only the act of practitioners accessing free online PD resources but also showcasing their willingness to do so. Therefore, my involvement in utilizing SM to foster and share PD-related opportunities

and information with relevant online CoPs rationalized my positionality and interest in how practitioners might perceive PD as delivered through SM channels.

Teaching Experience

Furthermore, my interest specifically in DE adjunct writing instructors at community colleges hailed from my teaching experience as such. In the decade following my MA in English in 2003, I taught multiple writing courses including DE writing at multiple public and private IHEs, including community colleges. I often taught simultaneously at up to three different IHEs—up to 8 sections—in a given semester at three different campuses with differing curricula and differing, if any, PD offerings. Due to time, travel, and flexibility constraints, I often looked to SMIGs as a means of staying abreast of current practices in the field of DE writing pedagogy, especially as I sought full-time employment.

Participants

To yield the most relevant data possible from the study, I selected participants based on purposive sampling, meaning that I chose the target population in a deliberate manner (Yin, 2011). More specifically, I utilized criterion sampling as a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants based on the following criteria: they had at least one semester of experience teaching DE writing as an adjunct instructor at a Texas community college. I initially recruited participants via a demographic survey, using Qualtrics through my Texas State University (TXST) student account to create the survey, and I posted the survey on the TXST-hosted email list-serve for College Academic Support Programs (CASP), a list-serve resource for higher education professionals throughout Texas (casp-forum@group.txstate.edu). The post on the CASP

List-serve consisted of an initial recruitment cover letter and hyperlink to the demographic survey created by and available via Qualtrics. All TXST materials that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved—such as cover letters, survey scripts and required documents, participant contact correspondence email scripts, informed consent script, and all other methodology-based materials—can be found in the appendices of this document.

All information disclosed by participants of the demographic survey has been kept completely anonymous as indicated in the initial recruitment letter for the survey. Participants of the demographic survey had the opportunity at the end of the survey to leave a non-institutional email for contact and correspondence if they consented for me to interview them online via the TXST-approved Zoom videoconferencing online platform for approximately 30–45 minutes and consider participating in the optional closed group online forum via TRACS, the LMS for TXST at the time of the study. I first contacted each respondent with a participant recruitment letter. I then sent participants the TXST-required informed consent form via email before the interview, and I reviewed the consent form with them during the beginning of the video-recorded interview, at which time I obtained verbal consent from the participants as well. I have kept all information obtained from participants from the interview confidential.

Therefore, while I utilized criterion sampling to recruit participants, those who participated in the initial demographic survey did so voluntarily and with anonymity, as requests for participation would have changed the sampling and overall nature of the study since adjuncts do not hold institutional relationships. I employed for the unit of analysis the participants as a group and not each participant as a subset of institutions.

To protect the confidentiality of participants, this study did not require nor did I as researcher inquire into information about current and/or past community colleges where participants have taught as adjunct instructors.

The interviewees appear in the Results Chapter of this dissertation under pseudonyms, and to maintain participants' confidentiality, I as researcher occluded any identifying information pertaining to interviewees, their colleagues, and any respective institution they might have mentioned during the course of data collection. In this study, role designation was disaggregated by geographic markers, and stratified sampling was by region—urban and non-urban—surrounding major Texas metroplexes: Dallas/Fort Worth/Arlington; Houston/The Woodlands/Sugar Land; San Antonio/New Braunfels; El Paso; and Austin/Round Rock/San Marcos. According to the Texas Department of State Health Services (March, 2015), at the time of the 2010 census, approximately 65 % of the Texas population lived in the aforementioned urban geographic regions, with the percentage having projected to increase to approximately 66.4% by 2020. All participants identified as having experience as a community college adjunct writing instructor in DE in at least one of these Texas regions.

Data Collection

This next section underscores the paradigmatic principles guiding the data collection for this study. Such principles pertain to the data-collection methods I utilized—including general outlines of the specifics of initial anonymous demographic survey, research protocol pertinent to the confidential interviews, the online participation forum via LMS or TXST, and data-collection media. Such data collection media included themes pertinent to ethics and logistics of data collection, archiving, the demographic

survey medium, and incentives offered to participants.

Data Sources

I employed qualitative methods for this study for the purpose of producing thick, detailed descriptions of the participants' perceptions of the content area—the usage of SM as a means of self-directed PD—so that I as researcher could better interpret the data through cross-reference and triangulation of multiple interviews (Denzin, 1989; Yin, 2018). This qualitative approach was a case study because my overarching questions involved how participants perceived the possibility of PD via SM, which is a contemporary phenomenon, over which I—as researcher—had no control (Yin, 2018).

To gather information from volunteers about their perceptions of using SM for PD, I used three different data sources: a short-answer online demographic survey using TXST-hosted Qualtrics and posted on TXST-hosted CASP list-serve (casp-forum@groups.txstate.edu); individual online participant interviews using TXST-approved Zoom; and an online special-interest group using TXST approved TRACS to act as a PD forum for the participants. Participation in the forum was requested but optional for interviewees.

The qualitative research design of this study involved 5 participants who each agreed to participate in the following data-collection procedures: an initial short answer survey—a questionnaire pertaining to demographics and experience; an interview gaging participants' PD needs and perceptions about topics relevant to the notion of social-media-based, self-directed learning; and requested but optional participation in a closed-group TRACS online forum moderated by me, involving prompts relevant to themes of the study.

Online Demographic Survey. First, I gathered data from the TXST-approved Qualtrics qualitative demographic survey of short answer questions that probed into such topics as participants' educational backgrounds, internet connectivity, and SM usage as well as demographic information such as participants' self-identified gender, race, and geographic location in Texas. The online demographic survey also inquired as to whether survey participants considered themselves lifelong learners, as well as other areas of interest in this study pertaining to demographic information of instructors who have taught at least one DE writing class as an adjunct at a Texas community college. Such areas of interest pertained to topics such as time spent commuting to and from campus(es) each week as well as whether or not participants have worked as an adjunct instructor at multiple institutions during the same semester, or whether they were employed in another capacity in addition to the course(es) they taught as a Texas community college adjunct instructor of DE writing.

Online Participant Interviews. Next, to further gather data about this study's population's perceptions of social-media-based PD, I employed the specific methodological qualitative approach of research interviews as Kvale (1996) defined as “whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (pp. 5–6). As a method of data collection, I asked open-ended interview questions, which, in terms of descriptions, according to Glesne (2006), “tend to be richer ground” (p. 82). I conducted semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2011) with predetermined questions; however, I catered the wording of the questions and allowed audibles in the order of the questions according to the general flow of the conversation. To meet the needs of each participant, I attempted to

employ an informal style and tone to the interview, which involved open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses from participants as opposed to one-worded responses. Furthermore, I presented myself as a colleague by disclosing to interviewees my emic positionality as a teacher with experience teaching DE writing as an adjunct instructor at various unnamed Texas community colleges. I disclosed my positionality to interviewees in an attempt to encourage reflexivity and dynamic conversational on the assumption that a bond of camaraderie might better induce thick, rich description from participants.

Online Forum. During the course of the study, I provided an online forum to emulate a SMIG—a *closed group* exclusively for the participants and me in this study. By implementing the use of a SM discussion forum, a practice that underlies the social constructivist framework (Vygotsky, 1978), I intended for my study to align with methodological data-collection practices of various studies pertaining to SM-based PD and community-of-practice learning experiences for educators (Alhamami, 2013; Britt & Paulus, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Evans, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2014; Kabilan, 2016; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; & Trust, 2012). Participation in the discussion forum was optional for the interviewee participants. I as researcher posted a total of five topics for participants to respond to if they wished. The topics pertained to possible PD needs for the participant population, and participants in this study had access to post their own topics, respond to each other's' posts, and share resources.

Data-Collection Media. To collect data for the interviews, I utilized Zoom, a free online tool that allows synchronous communication through audio and video, allowing the interviewer and interviewee to converse and see each other on their respective computer screens in *real time*. Because this study centered around the use of computer

and internet technology as a means of PD delivery and participation, I believed that using Zoom for data collection was appropriate because the features of the web-based video-conferencing interface were comparable to social-media capabilities. In addition, ironically, as this study involved participants' perceptions of online PD opportunities, the data collection media also engaged them in the practice of participating in online PD through the interview and forum processes, thus calibrating the message with the medium.

Ethics and Logistics. I required each participant to sign a consent form for agreeing to the interview being recorded. With participants' consent, I recorded the interview in both audio and video to obtain a rich sample of not only replies to semi-structured questions but also facial expressions, physical gestures, and aural/vocal rhythm and intonation that might further inflect possible meaning to participant responses. The online Zoom interviews occurred between May and July of 2020. I interviewed each of the five participants once for at least 30–45 minutes apiece, with requested follow-up sessions to serve as possible member-checks to clarify indiscernible initial-interview data as well as to draw out further data through conversation or additional questions that might have arisen through the interview interpretation process. In terms of location, I conducted each interview in my home office on in San Marcos, Texas. I conducted all interviews from this same location for consistency and standardization of setting and to eliminate varying background elements—such as background noise, pedestrian traffic in a public area, or room design elements.

Archiving. As a backup archive, I also audio-recorded the interviews on GarageBand, an Apple program that allowed me to store the files on the Apple iCloud, a virtual storage drive that has allowed me to access the files from anywhere. GarageBand

is compatible with all Apple devices, enabling me to work from my MacBook Pro laptop computer, iPad, or any student-accessible Apple PC on the TXST campuses in San Marcos and Round Rock. Furthermore, while GarageBand has been often primarily used for music production, the digital editing features enabled me to manipulate the recorded interview vocal tracks to discern clarity and articulation during the transcription process. For example, I was able to slow down the tempo of the audio file to better understand words, phrases, and sentences that might have seemed hurried. I was also able to adjust bass and treble tones if certain interviewee vocalizations were tonally inaudible. I was also able to loop sections of the interview for ease of transcription.

Demographic Survey Medium. I conducted the short-answer needs assessment via Qualtrics, where they have been archived. I also copied/pasted or screenshot then saved the information into a Microsoft Word file. For the online CoP-based SM group discussion forum, I planned to meticulously document and archive all group feed interaction with screen shots. For purposes of ease and organization, I first thought to derive a methodological naming convention for the screen shots so that the post narratives (i.e., the trajectories, movement, development of the various posts as determined by potential participant participation) could be easily traced and analyzed. To secure and protect all gathered data. I saved copies of all documents on my laptop computer, cloud drives, and external storage devices.

Incentive for Participating in the Study. For participating in the study, participants were not compensated outside of the potential altruistic realization that participation in a doctoral dissertation study aimed ultimately at improving student outcomes makes the world a better place. The participants were not compensated further

via currency nor gifts for their participation and contribution to this study.

Data Analysis

In terms of data analysis, I purported to rationalize my methods as such: rationalizing this research project as a case study; underscoring the necessity of qualitative data calibration; highlighting and underscoring the process of data coding and data analysis; and following-up with appropriate organizational mechanisms and member-check protocols.

Case Study

This research project was a qualitative case study because the exploratory nature allows for analytical description and explanation of the phenomena in a context akin to real life (Creswell, 2004). This case study purported to transcend description and generate a theory grounded in data from experiences and perspectives as revealed by the interviewees, whom I recruited via criterion sampling based on their experience as adjunct instructors of DE writing in Texas community colleges. Said interviewees as a group constituted the unit of analysis, not each individual as a separate case. During and after the online one-on-one Zoom interviews, I adamantly captured my thoughts, feelings, and interpretations through field notes, jottings, and memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Once I transcribed the interviewee audio/video recordings onto a Microsoft Word file then printed it all out to familiarize myself with the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009), I read the data repeatedly and wrote self-reminding and research-related memos by jotting notes in the margins of the transcription (Miles et al., 2014); I also re-watched the interviews several times to glean my perceptions of facial and hand gestures and memo congruous to the text where said gestures occurred in an attempt to decipher

and infer potential meaning that gestures might have inflected upon corresponding speech.

Data Calibration

My ultimate goal in this study was to attempt to diagnose and discern patterns in an attempt to answer the research questions while avoiding false conclusions and other errors (Neuman, 2009). By grouping, subcategorizing, and organizing the data according to thematic defining codes, I sought to draw out emergent generalizations that could give insight into defining principles underlying the data. According to Saldana (2016), "Just as a title represents and captures a book, film, or poem's primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence" (pp. 3–4). The purpose of this analysis was to be able to identify themes in data from the interviews as a means of discerning community college DE writing adjuncts' perceptions of social-media-based PD. According to Yin (2014), this method aids in testing and comparing patterns as well as facilitates in shaping and organizing the analysis process. In an attempt to discover commonalities and differences via data collected from participants, my methodological process entailed that I open-coded the induced and consolidated data in an attempt to find emergent categories that could be relevant (Saldana, 2016), a process that involved multiple rounds of immersion, rereading, and further coding until I could not discern further emerging codes (Miles et al., 2014). I transcribed all interviews so as to immerse myself in the data (Merriam, 2009). Once I transcribed all data, I coded disclosed data by employing an open-coding method, which allowed me to identify potentially relevant content (Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2016). This inductive method of open-coding (Saldana, 2016) guided my search for emergent themes and commonalities

in the data.

Coding. The coding process occurred in two major stages, which, according to Saldana (2016) are *first cycle* and *second cycle* coding. In the first cycle, I applied the method of *values coding* (Miles et al., 2014) to “reflect [the] participants’ values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (p. 75). The values coding application was appropriate because (a) this was a case study, (b) this study explored and examined interpersonal and intrapersonal participant actions and experiences (Miles et al., 2014), and (c) my study gaged participant perceptions, which are affective in nature, as is value, attitude, and belief. For this reason, I utilized a qualitative approach due to the nature of self-reporting in an attempt to draw out rich descriptions from interviewees.

In the first cycle of coding, I identified content with themes that reflect the values, attitudes, and beliefs constituting participants’ perceptions of their PD needs, their experience with online learning, and social-media-based PD. Using the definition by Miles et al. (2014) of values, attitudes, and beliefs as a guiding instrument, I filtered the data accordingly:

A value (V:) is the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing, or idea. An attitude (A:) is the way we think and feel about oneself, another person, thing, or idea. A belief (B:) is part of a system that includes values and attitudes, plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world. (p. 75)

Analysis. In analyzing the data, I employed the following methodological process: (a) meticulously transcribed the audio recording to develop a verbatim

transcription replete with field notes from both the audio and video recordings; (b) continued to check the data while assessing and confirming the process by reviewing the audio, video, and transcriptions multiple times while attentively taking relevant notes; (c) launched the first cycle of coding; and (d) followed up the second and third rounds and so on until the well had been tapped dry (Miles et al., 2014). I again reread, coded, and reassessed codes for all data multiple times at Saldana's (2016) urging that several iterations of coding are often necessary, and from these readings might emerge sub-themes in the *second cycle* of coding, and so on, within the larger three *value, attitude,* and *belief* thematic frameworks.

Organization and Follow-Up. I transferred and organized the data onto a spreadsheet, which I then used as a guide as I conducted member checks, which were intended to serve as follow-up interviews, with each participant. In this phase of data analysis, I utilized one-on-one Zoom interviews to ask for each participant to verify my interpretations of the various statements of participants in question (Merriam, 2009), and allowed said participants to extrapolate, elaborate, and expand—all of which would have been subject to further coding. I separated all coded data into numerous categories, ultimately collapsing the categories into three overarching themes congruent to my research questions as deciphered through triangulation and cross-reference (Denzin, 1989; Yin, 2018).

Instrumentation. As the researcher, I acted as interviewer and therefore the primary data-collection instrument. As such, during the course of this dissertation project, I identified myself as a doctoral candidate, and I explained my positionality as well as formalities regarding the consent forms, which I distributed beforehand.

Limitations

One initial limitation of this study could pertain to barriers as to whether or not a participant has been or is willing to adopt and utilize SM technology. Two of such barriers were functional barriers and psychological barriers (Hu et al., 1989). Some functional barriers could have included lack of time or skills, or the unwillingness to utilize SM for social as well as professional purposes (Donelan, 2016). A psychological barrier could have included a participant negatively viewing or being skeptical of SM (Donelan, 2016). These factors could have influenced participants' engagement with the technology and therefore their perceptions of the value of social-media-based PD and how it can be utilized.

A limitation of this study that pertains to the functional barrier concerning lack of time relates to the inability of a researcher to accurately measure the efforts, constraints, and challenges posed to the members of the interviewed population. While all of them have served as instructors of DE writing, their syllabi and grading methods may have varied. For example, while one participant may have exclusively required several longer, more formal essays that required in-depth grading and feedback—for final drafts as well as rewrites—another participant may have utilized more low-stakes writing assignments that required minimal short concrete feedback (Elbow, 1997). Furthermore, a participant may not have demanded much of the students academically and therefore didn't spend much time nor effort giving feedback. In summary, each individual participant's time constraints correlated directly to the time and effort directed toward out-of-class efforts.

Another limitation of this study pertaining to time constraint challenges involved factors such as number of sections taught in a given semester, number of institutions

taught at in that same semester, and commuting factors such as the distance between institutions and traffic context. For example, whereas one participant may have taught multiple sections at three different institutions that were far from one another and scheduled in such a way that necessitated said participant navigating rush hour traffic through construction zones, another participant may have taught two sections at two institutions—one section at each—with a shorter commuting distance at a low-traffic time of the day. Furthermore, the potential use of public transportation, allowing more time for grading and creating lesson plans, could have been a factor in terms of consistency of time constraints among interviewees.

Summary

In summary, I used qualitative methods for this exploratory study to help me as the researcher to better understand perceptions of community college adjuncts who are instructors of DE writing developmental writing toward the use of SM as a means of self-directed PD. To gather information from self-selected faculty about their perceptions of using SM for PD, I used three different data sources: a short-answer demographic survey, individual participant interviews, and an online special-interest group to act as a *PD forum* for the participants. By applying open-coding to the induced and consolidated transcribed data in an attempt to find emergent categories that could be relevant (Saldana, 2016), I sought to contribute to the literature about PD in higher education by identifying central perceptions of the population sample that could possibly lead to such developments as community college academic departments incorporating, allowing, and/or recognizing SM as a viable form of PD that affords amicable accessibility and flexibility for part-time members of the contingent workforce.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach, I applied data-gathering processes to clarify the following pertinent research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs?
2. Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?
3. How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the first section of this Findings of the Study Chapter, as researcher, I derived emergent themes from the online interview data involving participant's perceptions of their PD needs. I began this chapter by describing the demographic survey as well as interview data, and I introduced the five participants of the qualitative interview. Following participant demographics, I presented important and notable data concerning the COVID-19 quarantine and its unexpected impact on this study. For the remainder of the first section of this chapter, I summarized the 4 dominant themes and organized them according to this study's three research questions. The first theme pertained to participants' perceptions about staying abreast of teaching methods in the field and of their student's general needs. The second theme pertained more specifically to participants' perceptions of the challenges for and level of cognitive and noncognitive readiness of students placed into DE writing at community colleges; additionally, this theme also included soft skills and challenges for students who fall under the non-traditional category. The third theme involved participants' perceived need for PD to be applicable, relevant, and specific. Finally, the fourth theme involved participants' perceived need for PD in order to acquire technology skills, both for the benefit of their preparation and knowledge as teachers as well as to be able to teach it to their students, who often do not have basic technology skills. Please refer to Table 1 for an overview of the emergent themes in this chapter, organized by their respective research questions, which constitute the three sections of this Findings of the Study Chapter as follows: participants' perceptions toward their professional development needs, why they say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD, and their perceptions of the effects.

Table 1*Emergent Themes According to Research Questions*

Research Questions	Emergent Themes
Research Question One: Participants' Perceptions Toward Their Professional Development Needs	Theme One: Staying Abreast of Teaching Methods and Student Needs Theme Two: Student Challenges Theme Three: Professional Development as Applicable, Relevant, and Specific Theme Four: Technology
Research Question Two: Why Participants Might Say They Would Participate in Self-Directed, Social-Media-Based Professional Development	Theme Five: Professional Development as an Institutional Requirement Theme Six: Participant Technology Usage Technological Fluency Theme Seven: Self-Directed and Lifelong Learning
Research Question Three: Participants' Perceptions of the Effects of Participating in Self-Directed, Social-Media-Based Professional Development	Theme Eight: Student Benefits Theme Nine: Motivation to Participate in Professional Development Theme 10: Motivation to Participate in Community-of-Practice-Based Learning Theme 11: Effective Professional Development Theme 12: Opinions of Self-Directed Social-Media-Based Professional Development

Participants' Demographic Information

For this study, I employed three data sources: an anonymous demographic survey that I posted on the CASP list-serve, whose membership included DE and learning support practitioners throughout Texas; confidential interviews sourced from demographic survey participants who volunteered to be interviewed by leaving their contact information for the survey's final question; and an optional online forum via TRACS, the IRB-approved LMS for TXST. The stipulation for participation in the study and its three qualitative approaches was that participants have in the past or currently teach DE writing as an adjunct at a community college in Texas. These criteria constituted the case for this study, and served as the basis for the criterion sampling, I employed to recruit participants for data collection. Nine practitioners completed the survey, and of those nine, five volunteered to be interviewed. To protect interviewee confidentiality and identity, I assigned a pseudonym to each: Ann, Beth, Claire, Dawn, and Eve (see Table 1). Though all five interviewees expressed interest in participating in the optional online forum, none did so, and I addressed their collective absence of participation in this third qualitative approach in further detail in the Discussion Chapter.

Of the nine practitioners who completed the anonymous demographic survey, at the time of the survey, five taught in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, one taught in "Rural East Texas" and another in Austin, and two taught in the West Texas geographic region—Lubbock and El Paso, respectively. Of these demographic survey participants who volunteered to be interviewed, at the time of the survey, Ann, Claire, Dawn, and Eve taught in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, and Beth taught in Lubbock. All of the participants of the demographic survey identified as White or Caucasian (five identified

as White, four as Caucasian), and one identified as male while the other eight identified as female. As such, all five interviewees therefore identified themselves as White, and all of them identified as female. In the following Discussion Chapter, I have addressed uniformity of race as well as the geographic dominance of the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex among interviewees as a limitation of the study.

In terms of education level, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) (2019)—the "regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions ... [that] serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions in ... Texas"—urges that faculty teaching general education undergraduate courses should have at least a master's degree with 18 graduate hours minimum in the teaching discipline (SACSCOC, 2018). As such, I assumed that all participants of the demographic survey fulfilled this educational requirement as they all professed to having experience as having taught (or currently teach) at least one course in DE writing as an adjunct instructor at a Texas community college. Nevertheless, the participants—replete with their self-disclosed level of graduate education and geographic teaching location at the time of data collection—appear in this Findings of the Study Chapter and in the following Discussion Chapter under the pseudonyms in Table 2.

Table 2*Interviewee Demographic Matrix*

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Region	Education
Ann	White	Female	DFW	Master's in Secondary Education; Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (36 credit hours) in Neurodevelopmental Education; 18 Graduate level credits in English
Beth	White	Female	Lubbock	Master of Science in Education, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); Master of Arts in English
Claire	White	Female	DFW	Master's in Reading
Dawn	White	Female	DFW	Master's in Education
Eve	White	Female	DFW	Master of Arts

The findings that I have presented in this chapter and have discussed further in the following chapter represent themes that emerged via triangulated data from the five interviews and the demographic survey. From the demographic survey, data from five questions bore neither notable uniformity nor triangulated with data from the interviews to contribute to emergent themes that I've presented in this chapter and have discussed in the next. Those four questions appear in Table 3.

Table 3

Unused Demographic Survey Data

Unused Demographic Survey Questions
If currently employed, how many IHEs do you currently teach at (adjunct and full-time)?
Are you or have you ever been employed outside of your position while working as a community college adjunct in developmental writing?
Are you currently seeking, or do you plan to seek in the future, full-time employment as a DE writing teacher?
How many hours per week do you estimate that you spend (or have spent) commuting to the institution or multiple institutions where you work(ed)?
Does your birth year fall into this range: 1965-2000?

COVID-19 Impact

An important consideration for this study is the COVID-19 quarantine that launched an unprecedented mid-semester shift from face-to-face classes to online learning across the country but especially in Texas, one of the hardest hit regions for the virus. Please note that I submitted the final draft of the application for IRB approval for this study in early March—before the pandemic reached quarantine proportions—and received approved on March 30, 2020. This IRB approval occurred 17 days after Texas Governor Greg Abbot declared a public health disaster statewide as the virus continued to spread, and 11 days after issuing an executive order warning Texans against social gatherings and clustering in groups larger than 10 people (Escobedo, 2020).

With mass efforts not only in Texas but also across the nation to transition to online learning for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester (Khurana & Roy, 2020; Lederman, 2020), the interview participants' stringent availability delayed the data collection timeline. Whereas the study's original methodology framed the data collection

in a three-week time period—ideally within the first month of IRB approval, in April 2020—I collected data from mid-May until mid-July, after the participants had transitioned and calibrated their courses online and completed the semester. The effects of the COVID-19 quarantine was notable to this study for two main reasons. First, as a limitation to the study, this unique mid-semester online-transition phenomenon skewed the data in terms of what I originally aimed to measure through this study. While this study pertained to online learning and social-network based PD options as well as participants' perceptions of their PD needs, neither the proposal for this study nor the approved IRB application took into account nor sought to gauge participants' perceptions with regard to the quarantine and rush to transition to "the new normal"—a context where online interface with other human beings has become a professional and social best practice in the global battle against the pandemic. Instead, I sought to gauge participants' pre-apocalyptic perceptions of their PD needs and the viability of self-directed, SM-based PD. Secondly, the mid-semester online transition was notable to this study for the same reason as the first—but a different side of the same coin. While the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine and mid-semester transition to online learning most likely affected or influenced participants' perceptions, the interview data captured a snapshot of the phenomenon in its early stages, strengthening the relevance and timeliness of this study to community college instructors who have experience teaching DE writing as adjuncts. Essentially, most higher-education professionals across Texas and the nation had to adapt.

All five participants commented directly on the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine, and/or mid-semester transition from face-to-face to online instruction during the Spring

2020 semester. Note that Ann (5/12), Beth (5/18), Clare (5/18), and Dawn (5/20) cited such during their mid-May interviews while Eve (7/15) did so in her mid-July interview. For example, citing an increase in her technological fluency and abilities, Ann commented as follows: "I think I've definitely made a huge jump in the last two months [laughs] since I've been doing all my teaching online, so I guess it's just been learning how to use the LMS better." In addition, Beth, indicated change in her technological fluency and abilities—though neither positive nor negative—in direct relation to COVID-19, saying, "I don't know if right now is the best time to ask that, or wait three months when I've had time to process a little bit more." Furthermore, regarding the Spring 2020 semester, Clare alluded to the role COVID-19 played and the erratic transition to online instruction: "Well, [the semester is] over now, but it was a weird one for sure." Regarding the COVID-19 quarantine and mid-semester transition to online learning, three out of the five interviewees indicated duress of some level in the aforementioned examples.

Furthermore, Clare also indicated an increase in her SM usage as a result of the same, saying the following: "Well, during the quarantine, I posted every single day what I'm doing, because I think it's funny." Please note, again, that Clare's interview occurred on May 18, after the initial stay-at-home orders and state shutdown ended, before further spikes of COVID-19 and ensuing quarantine throughout Texas. Her statement could have alluded to her possible feelings of isolation in tandem with the quarantine—which might have been a stressor that contributed directly to her increase in SM usage. Conversely, Eve referenced the benefits of online instruction in terms of vehicle maintenance and, one could assume, consequent time and resources necessary for commuting to campus to teach:

Yeah, so that's what I'm saying about this COVID ... I'm saving wear and tear on my car, and I'm saving all that mileage. I try to look for what could be good about this, and you know, I'm not putting 85 miles a day [on my car] five days a week for five weeks.

Another category of data pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic concerns in some capacity the transition from face-to-face to online instruction. For example, Beth mentioned institution-provided PD to help accommodate instructors scrambling to transition. Beth stated the following:

... our IT and Blackboard people and full-time faculty pulled together 16 crash courses in moving to online classes If it weren't for that abrupt shift [COVID-19], there's no way I would have taken on that much information that fast.

Likewise, Dawn cited her institution's LMS as moving into a more central role due to the shift to online instruction, saying, "Right now, we have Webex since school's been out." Finally, Eve discussed the chore of switching over to a synchronous online interface that she was inexperienced with, a direct result of COVID-19 and the transition to online instruction:

I was pretty savvy [in terms of technological fluency and abilities], and then the Zoom came along, and it was challenging. I had done Zoom meetings before, but I'd never set them up. I do it now, but just sharing the screen and just simple things—it was a learning curve.

While at different points in the interviews, participants disclosed having experience with online learning in some capacity, the above comments indicate challenges they faced in learning and incorporating further technology skills as a result of

the COVID-19 quarantine and consequent mid-semester shift to teaching online. As such, I as researcher believe that this data possibly affected interviewee perceptions of their PD needs and strengthens the most dominant finding of this study, which pertains to technology as a PD need—not only so that they can improve their technology abilities for their own benefit as instructors but also for the ability to teach said skills to their students.

The final category of data pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic is relevant to participants' perceptions of technology's increasing importance as a medium and interface for learning—for both instructors and students. For example, as I have discussed further in the final chapter of this dissertation study, Beth talked about online, social-media-based, self-directed PD as an important means of affecting teacher quality in terms of better understanding how to use technology, and how to teach those skills to students—both of which are important themes from the data and which appear further in this chapter. Beth stated as follows:

It has everything to do with it. I said we [in higher education] were headed toward more online anyway. COVID has certainly pushed the envelope with that. You know where you switch from one edition of the text to another, you need updates with how to use that—everything is updated. I need to keep up with that, so the PD and how to interact and how to use that technology is huge. It gives me choices as an instructor, and it helps me to help students know how to navigate systems as well.

Furthermore, pertaining to her perceptions of how self-directed, SM-based PD could affect teacher quality, Eve also indicated her belief that online learning could play a greater role in the future of PD delivery. According to Eve, "Well, I hope it affects

[teacher quality] in a positive way because 10 years from now, that's probably all we'll be doing." Eve further extrapolated on her point, citing that the COVID-19 pandemic and mass mid-semester transition to online learning in higher education during the Spring 2020 semester as foreshadowing as opposed to serving as a pivot for what she indicates to be inevitable. Eve underscored the growing importance, relevance, and possible necessity of technology and online learning as a PD delivery method—for both administrative and practical purposes. Eve continued as follows:

I don't mean to be a downer. I'm just stating facts that technology's going to become first and foremost. People don't realize that, and this is just a precursor of what's to come, and I laugh at my students [participant poses question from students], could robot take your place? I say, absolutely not, I hope [participant laughs] you know, so I think it's all gonna be online eventually, not necessarily because of Corona—it's just shown us that everything can be online. You can do anything you need to do online if you're equipped and set up to do it, so why do schools need to pay for people to travel to go to conferences? I think that's going to happen, I mean, it's the logical way to reduce budgets, and everybody's always fussing about their budgets, so I think it will all [participant emphasizes] end up online, and I hate that.

In summary, interviewees' comments relevant to this national health crisis emerged without prompt. I as researcher assumed that the COVID-19 lens influenced participants' perceptions of technology-related themes that emerged from the data and appear further in this chapter. The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine and transition in higher education from face-to-face to online course delivery weaves

throughout the following discussion chapter.

Research Question One: Participants' Perceptions Toward Their Professional Development Needs

Theme One: Staying Abreast of Teaching Methods and Student Needs

The first emergent theme in this section pertains to the role of PD in terms of practitioners staying abreast of teaching methods and student needs, a theme upon which all five participants commented. In terms of how PD could affect teachers' teaching methods, Ann stated, "So what I think we need to focus on is how to give [students] the tools, and this is what I think professional development should be: what kind of tools can they use right now, that technology to bring them up to college—to be able to do college level work. That's what I think we should be pushing in professional development." Ann also stated her personal PD needs more specifically, citing technology, a very specific and dominant theme covered further in this section of the study's results chapter.

According to Ann, "I would like to get better at online teaching ... I need to be better at teaching online for developmental [students]. ... So, my teaching, one, but I also think I'd like to take some classes on just being a better online educator." Like the other four interviewees, Ann's statements indicated that she perceived PD could help her to be a better instructor and therefore benefit her students.

Pertinent to the same topic, how PD can affect teacher quality, Beth said, "I would know what options I have to best suit what I need to do in that class that semester."

Similarly, according to Clare, "It's good to stay up-to-date, it's good to see what other people are doing that's working. It's just being a good instructor." Clare also said that effective PD, "makes me better, more understanding." Dawn stated that effective PD

helps her to be "better equipped to teach the students and meet them where they need me to be ... for me, PD helps me make the connection with the kids that don't know, or maybe why they don't know, or different ways to reach them." Furthermore, Dawn elaborated as follows:

I think that any professional development keeps me inspired and helps me to understand the obstacles that the students might have that I never thought of as a problem. And it just keeps you from a burning out. It gives you new, fresh ideas to try in your classroom.

Eve also commented on keeping abreast of student needs, saying, "You have to really meet the students where they are. So that kind of professional development would help a bit—how can you best understand your students? That's what we're here for."

Furthermore, Eve commented pertaining to the importance of instructors' familiarity with DE writing students as follows:

Sometimes the people who are hired particularly as adjuncts are not the best qualified, so if they had professional development just with the very basics of, you know, this is what you're dealing with, you know, or if they hire somebody from you know a PhD in English that's, you know, desperate for a job, *I'll teach your development or writing class*—well, that's not necessarily a good fit ...

In addition, Eve iterated this theme further, a notion that fleshes out in more detail later in this results chapter in participant data pertinent to self-directed and lifelong learning.

According to Eve:

It's a responsibility to stay current in the field. I mean, it's an absolute requirement, so I would continue to develop professionally even if it weren't a

requirement, but in the field that we're in, it's just it's a necessity. I'm taking three classes right now—I develop. I believe in it, and I've learned so much more through professional development than I have—even offered through a specific college—but mostly outside and beyond the college because it gives you a completely different perspective. Sometimes when we stay in our own institutions, we just kind of get institutionalized, and so it's good to. I really think it's essential.

Pertaining to the population of students in DE writing and the importance of practitioners understanding the needs of those students, Eve stated the following:

[We need to] understand what makes students tick, what gets in their way, what obstacles they have to jump over, and not only understand, but empathize with them. ... So, I'm not saying be a softy and just lay down and say, "Okay, you get an A." You've got to be firm but help them and support them and meet them where they are and try to understand."

In summary, all five practitioner participants somehow viewed PD as a means of staying abreast of teaching methods in DE writing. The participants collectively summarized that their PD needs related specifically to acquiring further skills as teachers to therefore benefit their students. Throughout the course of the interviews, they prioritized and elaborated on two dominant categories contributing to the theme of staying abreast of teaching methods for their specific student population. One of these categories emphasizes learning new things and obtaining fresh ideas from colleagues through PD. The other category focuses on participants' PD need to be better prepared to understand the needs of their student population and better prepared to provide their

students with the tools to succeed.

Theme Two: Student Challenges

The second emergent theme in this section pertains to the role of PD in terms of practitioners gaging and understanding student challenges, another theme upon which all five participants commented. This theme breaks down into three subsections. The first pertains to participants' perceptions of the lower level of cognitive skills for many of their students, mostly in terms of writing but also with a mention of technology. The second subsection pertains to participants' perceptions of many of their students' noncognitive needs, namely "soft skills." The third subsection pertains to participants' perceptions of challenges faced by nontraditional students.

Lower Level of Student Skills. The first subsection of the student-challenges theme pertains to participants' perceptions of cognitive skills for many of their students. Three of the five participants commented as such. For example, Ann stated, " ... developmental students are—you know, they're pretty weak students anyway." I believe as researcher that Ann's comments indicate that she perceived PD as positively benefiting her to be able to meet the cognitive challenges of her students. Additionally, Ann reiterated with more specificity, citing literacy skills as well as technology skills in terms of student needs. Ann also implied in the interview that the following quote applies to non-traditional student challenges as well. According to Ann:

I think students who are the weakest students are pretty weak across the board with everything, so it's not just with reading and writing—it's going to be their skills with computers; it's just skills with everything, so it's like a double whammy for those guys.

Furthermore, Dawn addressed the low cognitive skills of many of her students in DE writing, particularly how she perceives their writing skills. While Ann addressed a lower level of myriad general skills, Dawn's following statement was more specific while also citing the accelerated structure of the corequisite course model. According to Dawn:

What I notice is [that] they don't understand grammar, structure. They don't understand parts of speech, and they don't know where to begin ... this is the first semester I taught the one that's hooked right to the English class—it's concurrent with the English class (corequisite) and that was my feedback from them: I'm over here trying to teach them how to read a chapter and take notes so that they could write a response, but instead they need to know how to outline it.

In addition, Eve also commented on the lower level of writing skills of many of her students in DE writing, extrapolating further with commentary about her perceptions of potential negative effects of accelerated models of DE delivery. I find Eve's perspective to be valuable in that it corroborated with Dawn, indicating further duress placed upon potentially struggling students due to more aggressive modes of course delivery, such as corequisite courses. Eve stated as follows:

Last semester I had somebody in a [corequisite] class ... reading at a first-grade level ... and, you know, I can't get somebody [who is] reading at a first-grade level through an academic research paper in one semester. It's not gonna happen, so I think what's happening is [that] some of these measures that were meant to help students are actually weeding them out, and that's unfortunate.

Eve furthermore reiterated her perception, saying, "I'm just seeing a lot of students leave because of the pressure to move so fast ... I think we're losing students in things that are

supposed to help them."

In essence, according to three out of five interviewees, one of the greatest challenges for students placed into DE writing is the low-level of cognitive skills that they possess entering post-secondary education. First, the participants accounted for many of their students' very low-level of literacy, both in terms of reading at a level far below college readiness as well as being underprepared in rhetorical skills such as organization. Secondly, participants also indicated that many of their students possess minimal technology skills, which I have addressed in more detail further in this chapter. These challenges for students of DE writing can be barriers to their academic success and retention, and PD addressing these challenges can possibly translate into adjunct instructors of DE writing being better prepared to understand and accommodate their students.

Students' Need for Soft Skills. The second subsection of the student-challenges theme pertains to participants' perceptions of noncognitive needs and challenges of many of their students, particularly in terms of "soft skills." Two of the five participants commented as such. Beth's first statement relates to the noncognitive challenges of her students in DE writing, and her statement is also pertinent to her perceptions of challenges faced by nontraditional students, which is the third and final subsection of the student challenges theme. Beth perceived that many of her students needed to develop skills in terms of "interacting with instructors, learning to use a more formal professional tone with me like they would with their advisors." In addition, Beth further stated:

They need a lot of social support. [Participant's institution] is 70% Hispanic, and virtually all of my students come out of low SES. They are often the first ones in

their family to go to college, and many of them have zero support from home, so [they need] campus support in general.

Though only two participants mentioned that they perceived that many of their students in DE writing needed to develop better non-cognitive "soft skills," Eve, who worked as a full-time community college instructor for 26 years, offered plentiful data on this topic during the course of the interview. Pertaining to the population of students in DE writing and her perception of their basic learning challenges, Eve stated the following:

They need to be prepped before they get to the classroom—what to expect: how's this gonna go down?; do you need to take a piece of paper to class? ... yeah, that would be helpful ... so if they knew how to do certain academic things, that they were ready with their academic learning skills intact—not so much in a discipline, but just how you do college? Because they're not prepared for that.

Eve's statement represented a departure from lower level of cognitive skills and into a theme more representative of students' affective development. In addition, Eve further elaborated on her perception of students of DE writing and their basic non-cognitive learning challenges, including motivation and soft skills:

I guess one thing that I've been really grappling with for the last couple of years is: what do we do with these students that are working at such a low level [sic] that they may not make it, and I very seldom say that or give up on a student, but the levels of students I'm seeing coming in seem to be lower and lower, and there's some that aren't gonna make it in academia, so I think recognizing that and do professional development on how do you take the person that can be

motivated—how do motivate them to pull themselves up, to really invest in the course, invest in the skills ... the humanistic side, which teachers really don't have time to do. I know we all care deeply, and we all want to do the best job we can for students ... so I really think that an understanding of soft skills in the classroom is essential—so that kind of professional development.

Through this subsection, two of the interviewees indicated that another challenge for students in DE writing classes pertained to non-cognitive abilities or "soft skills." The participants of this study highlighted challenges for their students such as interacting professionally with their instructors as well as the need for their students to be better prepared coming into college to understand the demands of coursework and basic learning skills. Furthermore, as indicated, participants expressed how many DE writing students need social support and campus support as they transition into higher education. The result of participant data related to their students' needs for soft skills indicated that PD for instructors of DE writing could be beneficial for them to be able to understand their students' non-cognitive challenges and to help instructors motivate their students to strive for academic retention and success.

Challenges for Non-Traditional Students. The third and final subsection of the student-challenges theme pertains to participants' perceptions of challenges faced by non-traditional students. Four of the five participants commented as such. Three participants commented on time and responsibility constraints faced by non-traditional students in DE writing, while one of those three participants commented additionally about non-traditional students, especially older students, potentially feeling out of place. The fourth participant, Ann, implied during the interview that her following statement, which

appears previously in the subsection of this chapter addressing lower levels of student skills, applied to non-traditional students as well. Ann stated the following:

I think students who are the weakest students are pretty weak across the board with everything, so it's not just with reading and writing—it's going to be their skills with computers; it's just skills with everything, so it's like a double whammy for those guys.

In terms of time and responsibility constraints, Clare, Dawn, and Eve also addressed their perceptions of the challenges that students who are non-traditional face. This recognition by four of the interviewees of nontraditional student challenges could have indicated that they had experience with nontraditional students in their classes, which I as researcher saw as confirmation of the overlap between DE and nontraditional students. Clare stated the following:

They have more of a pull for their time. Maybe they're working full time, or they are parents, or they're taking care of someone else—that's not a normal situation that the average [participant signals quotation marks with hand gestures] student goes through. ... The demands on their time are different, so they might take night classes.

In addition, Dawn echoed Clare's comment, elaborating further on perceived time and responsibility constraints that they perceived pose challenges to non-traditional students as well as traditional students placed into DE as being out of the habit in terms of non-cognitive student skills such as study skills and time-management. Dawn stated the following:

They have families, and they have to work They might only have time on

Monday and Tuesdays ... they might work on the weekends. ... Or they're out of the habits of studying, and so they don't really know how to organize their day to fit studying into it. So I think there's a little learning curve for them, at least during the first semester or so to get in the groove. ... Just things like that, being out of the habit, knowing themselves, setting aside the time for themselves that they need, juggling kids—they might not be married and have kids—or, who knows, life situations and circumstances.

Finally, Eve echoed Clare's and Dawn's commentary in terms of their perceptions of non-traditional student challenges pertaining to time and responsibility constraints, but with more specific examples. Eve's following comment could have indicated that she possessed more concrete experiences with nontraditional students placed into her DE writing classes, further indicating the overlap between nontraditional students and students placed into DE writing. Eve stated the following:

The other problem with nontraditional students is [that] they're juggling—and all students are, but certainly nontraditional students seem to be juggling a few more balls than the rest of the people: they've got jobs, not part time jobs for extra money, but survival jobs, families, survival, family commitments, spousal commitments, just an array of things that get in their way. I lose a lot of non-traditional students for that reason. They want to do so well. They're perfectionists because they're finally back in school, and then they've got, like, PTA meetings and this and that, and running kids to sports or whatever. It's just a lot; it's admirable. I mean, I try to tell them to hang in, you can do this, but sometimes they just can't. I mean, there's just too much going on.

Furthermore, Eve added to the data via her perception of how some non-traditional students, especially older students, might feel out of place or separate from their younger, traditional student classmates. Eve added the following:

I think they face the challenge of being—feeling—separate somewhat especially in a day class. Night-time is it a bit different, but in a daytime class, a lot of the kids come from the high schools, and they know each other, and the older students kind of band together themselves. This last semester, I had one older student, and the rest were like from three high schools—they all went together and joined in the same class—so she was intimidated by their youth, thinking that they were all that more and savvy with tech and stuff, and they weren't, and they were intimidated by her because she did her work [and] always had an answer. I always try to mix them up; I'll have group work where there's non-traditional/traditional, and make sure that they [get to] know each other, and, you know, really relate that they're harmless entities—they are in it together, we're all in this together.

This final section of the student-challenges theme revealed participants' perceptions of challenges faced by non-traditional students, who often overlap the DE student population. One topic of this theme pertained to time constraints that non-traditional students face due to non-academic responsibilities and commitments. Secondly, while non-traditional students placed into DE writing courses face the same challenges as traditional students placed likewise, the data indicated that many non-traditional students could feel out of place, which could be caused by age difference or due to them feeling removed from basic academic skills. These indications alluded to

participants' perceptions that PD addressing these non-traditional student challenges could help instructors better understand barriers that these students face.

In conclusion, the participants of this study perceived that amongst the greatest PD needs of instructors of DE writing is to better understand the challenges faced by their students. The participants indicated the low-level of skills that many of their students in DE writing courses face. These challenges manifested cognitively in the forms of literacy skills and technology skills as well as non-cognitively in the form of soft skills and basic learning skills. In addition, the data indicated further non-academic challenges such as extra-curricular commitments and responsibilities that can act as barriers to academic retention and success for non-traditional students. Effective PD that helps instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges to better understand the challenges that many of their students face could better prepare the instructors to accommodate those students, which could possibly promote and facilitate the students' academic retention and success.

Theme Three: Professional Development as Applicable, Relevant, and Specific

The third emergent theme pertaining to participants' perceptions of their PD needs involved PD being applicable/relevant/specific to them and their students. This theme is important and relevant due to the specific context of students placed into DE and the challenges they face—both cognitively and non-cognitively—as I have summarized in the previous section. Interviewees indicated that they wanted such PD that helps them prepare to better understand the needs and barriers of their students placed into DE writing so that the participants as instructors could better accommodate those students and potentially make a positive impact on them.

Three of the five participants commented on this theme. For example, Ann

disclosed her perceptions of her needs in terms of quality PD as such: "I want some specific resources when I go to PD. I would like specific studies that I can read, texts, websites, technology to use. So for me, it's about having something I can take out of the PD specifically that I can use." Beth as well cited specificity as a PD need, especially pertaining to technology, which was another emergent theme covered in more detail further in this section of the findings. According to Beth, "Technology—not the generic. I need to know how it works within [participant's] college system. So, like, generic Blackboard or generic—you know, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about whatever system this particular institution uses." Both Ann's and Beth's perceptions of how content-specific PD could benefit them as teachers and in turn could benefit their students align with Clare's following statement, which could indicate that they've experienced PD that was not applicable, relevant, nor specific to them as adjunct instructors of DE writing—and therefore possibly not helpful to them in meeting the challenges of their unique student population. Furthermore, Clare said the following:

I like it to be research driven if at all possible. I like for it to be somehow pertaining to reading and writing. I really like it whenever it talks about the developmental student. I find it helpful when [the purveyors of PD] realize that what works best for one student doesn't always work best with another student.

In addition, both Ann and Clare reiterated the theme further by implying negative perceptions of PD sessions that were not applicable, relevant, nor specific to them and their students. For example, Ann said, "Make it meaningful; make it specific. I think that's why people hate professional development most of the time, because they don't feel it applies to them." Clare echoed Ann's sentiment as follows:

I think that most professional developments are aimed for the traditional college student who doesn't necessarily have learning difficulties, and it's not super fun to [participant laughs] go to a professional development or listen to one or read something and then it doesn't really relate to your students in the same way as everybody else ... it's just not super helpful ... having professional developments that are not designed for developmental students. There are very few professional development sessions that are put together with my students in mind ... have it catered toward your students specifically. I would want to see more professional development that is geared toward developmental students than the honor students.

In summary, this theme of how participants expressed the need for specific, applicable, relevant PD underscored all others in this section, which elaborate on more specific PD needs. To keep abreast of teaching practices and understand the needs and challenges of their students, these instructors of DE writing prefer PD that applies to their specific student population, and that applies to them as instructors of DE writing. More specifically, participants of this study indicated their need for research-driven resources and for teacher development that they can use immediately in the classroom with their students.

Theme Four: Technology

The most dominant theme that emerged in terms of participants' perceptions of their PD needs pertained to technology—namely their need to be able to teach technology skills to students who lack such. In the modern classroom, technology has taken a key role in both teaching pedagogy and curriculum delivery for instructors. Most IHEs utilize

a LMS for students and teachers to interact through, essentially creating the potential for a hybrid learning environment for many courses. Furthermore, for most courses, students must utilize technology for assignments such as essays as well as employing online skills for research. Of the emergent technology theme, participants of this study indicated that not only were technology skills a dominant student need but also a PD need for instructors, so that they can teach their students how to use technology.

Student Technology Needs. All five participants commented on technology needs. While Dawn acknowledged that, "We're using more and more technology," in terms of current innovations in DE, the other four participants were more articulate regarding technology skills as a specific student need. For example, Ann stated that, "They definitely need more computer skills. It's not just online; it's just in general. They don't have any Word skills; they can't type." According to Beth, " They need to ease themselves into technology. Of course, they know how to surf, but interacting with blackboard." Clare stated, "I've had students who are much older, and they didn't know how to send emails, so using Google docs was the first for them, so the technology use." And, finally, in terms of student technology needs, Eve stated, "You know, I mean, just the basics: how do you work your learning management system if you're there for the first time?" Further into the interview, Eve also stated, "So I'm grateful that tech has advanced like it has, but we assume students coming in will be tech savvy, and there's a whole lot who aren't ... especially those nontraditional students."

In summary, technology use in the classroom has become a prevalent medium for interaction and logistics between students and instructors in the DE writing classroom. However, while one could assume that students come to college versed in technology

because they grew up in a heightened age of information, such is not always the case. Participants indicated that while technology use in the classroom has increased, many students had limited technology skills necessary to use institutional LMS s as well as basic word processing skills, which have become necessities at all levels of higher education, especially in literacy classes and therefore in DE writing classes. The participant data from this section indicated that PD might help instructors of DE writing to understand the barrier that their students with challenged technology skills might face.

Professional Development to Help Participants Teach Technology to Students. Furthermore, four of the five participants indicated the ability to teach technology to their DE writing students as one of their own PD needs. This perception of interviewee PD needs could further indicate the increasing eminence of technology as a tool for course delivery and student assignments. For example, according to Ann, "You have a lot of students coming back to school who just aren't computer savvy, so I need skills in that: how to teach them." Pertaining to the potential effects of PD on teachers, Beth said the following:

I would also know where and how to help students interact and integrate their work with technology. I can't give them direction over something I don't know anything about, so technology is constantly changing as you know, and just my ability to keep up with it and know what options I have is huge.

Beth elaborated further, employing the following comparison to textbooks being updated:

You know where you switch from one edition of the text to another, you need updates with how to use [technology]—everything is updated. I need to keep up with that, so the PD and how to interact and how to use that technology is huge. It

gives me choices as an instructor, and it helps me to help students know how to navigate systems as well.

In addition, Ann elaborated with the following anecdotal example from her teaching experience as pertaining to potential benefits of being able to teach technology skills:

I've taught a lot of students who have dyslexia or reading problems, and I have a student who I knew when he was in 8th grade but I've known him all the way since then, and he said he went to college, is an electrician, and I said, "Well, you know, how did you get through college, what did you do, how do you get through when you have to write out stuff?" And he said, "Well, I just take my phone, and I ask it, and it shows me, and I write it down," and for me that was a perfect example of how, "Okay you have disabilities; you need to learn how to use technology to get by," and he did, so that's why I think professional development really needs to teach teachers it's okay for students to use those, and we need to teach them how to use those to overcome some of these disabilities.

Clare further elaborated enthusiastically, with examples from her teaching experience in terms of potential benefits of using technology in the classroom as an innovation in DE writing:

The use of technology in reading and writing has just kind of blown me away. As primarily a reading instructor, that's kind of what I thought I would bring to the table, and there are so many different apps that my students use now to read text to them, or for them to do annotating as they're listening. There's an app that you can speak to, and it'll write it on your text for you. That was just not available

when I was in school. I think it's really, really cool, and for my developmental students to have access to that, it's pretty awesome—unbelievable, actually.

Finally, two of the participants mentioned student need of technology skills as a constraint to classroom time and efficiency. Ann said, "Those basic word processing skills aren't there. Those are skills you need for college, and if I'm spending a lot of my class just teaching those skills, then a lot of that time is coming out of the skills they need to learn how to read and write." Eve echoed the same sentiment, as follows: I spent so much time helping people learn how to log into their emails, into the college page, and it's just a time waster."

In summary, the interviewees indicated that not only do many students placed into their DE writing classes have challenges with technology, but also the participants expressed the need for PD that can help instructors acquire knowledge to teach technology skills to their students. Because technology is constantly changing, participants expressed the need to teach their students how to work technology into their assignments as well how to introduce and instruct them on myriad affordances of technology. Furthermore, PD that can help instructors teach technology skills to their students could save class-time that instructors could otherwise use to teach content.

Summary of Participants' Perceptions Toward Their Professional Development Needs

In conclusion, this section of the Findings of the Study Chapter summarizes what the participants of this study perceived to be their PD needs. Due to lower levels of cognitive, non-cognitive, and technology-based skills that many students placed into DE writing at Texas community colleges face, all five participants expressed the desire for PD that addresses these specific needs of their students as well as impart skills and

teaching methods necessary for instructors to gauge and connect with students. Finally, as pedagogy continually changes as well as higher education in general, so does technology, which has become a driving medium in terms of content delivery and coursework in the DE writing classroom. To accommodate students in this rapidly changing technological environment, all five interviewees identified technology as a challenge for many of their students, and four interviewees underscored the need for PD that not only teaches technology skills to instructors but also teaches instructors the skills to in turn teach technology to students.

Research Question Two: Why Participants Might Say They Would Participate in Self-Directed, Social-Media-Based Professional Development

The second section of this Findings of the Study Chapter pertains to why participants of this study might participate in self-directed, SM-based PD. The data from this section hail from participant interviews, inflected upon further with relevant data from the initial demographic survey, posted on the CASP List-serve in Spring 2020. This section begins with the emergent theme of required or mandatory PD at participants' respective institutions of past or current employment. However, though PD is urged as a best practice by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, not all institutionally provided and/or mandated PD is specific to the needs of instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges. Consequently, many adjunct instructors of DE writing face the chore of seeking out the specific resources they need from outside of institutionally provided PD. SM affords the opportunity to engage in free online learning and resource sharing that can be specific to the needs of DE writing instructors, as well as the opportunity for professional networking and online discussion, especially in SMIGs.

Therefore, this section focuses on participants' experiences with technology, including perceptions of their technological fluency, experiences with both personal and professional online learning, online information and resource sharing, online networking, online discussion groups, and SM activity. The section closes focused on lifelong learning. The research rationale for this section pertains to the assumption that if adjunct instructors of DE writing have in the past or currently engage in the affordances of online knowledge cultivation, then they might have more of a propensity to turn to SM for their PD needs.

Theme Five: Professional Development as an Institutional Requirement

First, during the interview, participants disclosed many reasons for why they would be motivated to participate in PD. Throughout this chapter, many emergent themes relevant to participants' PD needs almost self-explain, aiming toward what might seem like an obvious motivator for participating in PD: understanding the students and meeting their needs, being a better teacher and learning fresh ideas to apply to the classroom, being better prepared to utilize technology. However, in response to discussion during the interview as to why the participants of this study would be motivated to participate in PD just in general, three of them disclosed with a modicum of sarcasm how participation in PD was a requirement at their respective institutions. For example, Ann said, "Um, having to. [laughs] ... Obviously, when you have to do them." Likewise, Clare commented that, "Well, we have to, it's part of our job—you have to have a certain number of hours." In addition, Eve reiterated the point further: "It's a requirement."

Institutional PD requirements for the participants of this study, who have worked as adjunct instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges, confirmed that PD is

being regarded by community colleges in Texas as a best practice, as indicated by academic and state agency research. However, as indicated through data collected from participant interviews and dappled through this results and discussion chapters, participants had their own respective opinions of what PD will best suit them. They understood that their students placed into DE writing, whether traditional or non-traditional students, had specific challenges they faced and barriers to their success. They understood that to best benefit themselves as teachers as well as benefit their students, they needed PD to enhance their technology skills. They understood that they wanted research-driven PD that was relevant to literacy and, even further, the DE writing classroom. Perhaps these perceptions might lean toward the possibility of participants in this study understood their PD needs well enough to have potentially attended institutionally required PD sessions that were irrelevant, non-specific, and inapplicable to them as adjunct instructors of DE writing.

Theme Six: Participant Technology Usage

The next part of this section pertains to participant technology usage, first, in terms of their perceptions of their technological fluency and/or challenges, their experience with online learning, then their experience with such SM affordances as networking and discussion groups. Finally, the last part of this section gages participants' perceptions of how much they use SM. This section aims to explore why participants *might* participate in self-directed SM-based PD, which is why their technological fluency and online activities are relevant to this study.

Technological Fluency. Four of the five participants in this study talked about how they felt concerning their technological fluency. Their perceptions spanned across

various levels of how they felt regarding their digital skills. For example, Ann said, "I put myself as average. I don't think I'm great at it, but I'm probably average. I know there are people who are much worse." On the other hand, Beth ranked her technological fluency as seemingly lower, although redeemed by stating relative commentary by someone with more expertise: "Right now, I feel like my tech abilities are next to nothing, although our younger son just graduated with a computer science degree, and he tells me that I know more than what a lot of the faculty that he worked with know." Like Ann, Clare ranked herself as more average than not, saying, "I'm not the most techie [technically fluent/savvy], but I know how to send emails and use Google docs— kind of in the middle, maybe?" Finally, Eve acknowledged a history of utilizing technology in her classes, stating the following:

I was pretty savvy, and then the Zoom came along, and it was challenging. I had done Zoom meetings before, but I'd never set them up. I do it now, but just sharing the screen and just simple things—it was a learning curve. I've always used some kind of, uh, digital product in my classes."

Digital Literacy and Online Learning. In terms of participants' experience with digital literacy and online learning, all five commented in some way that they had experience with online learning, whether for personal and/or professional purposes. Four of the five mentioned experience with online learning for professional purposes, though Eve developed online classes for an institution she worked for or where she currently works while the remaining three took online classes while pursuing an academic degree. Only Beth mentioned the opposite, stating that her experience with online learning was, "Honestly, not very much." Eve had developed online classes, and she noted how the

technology has become more user-friendly for her. According to Eve, "I've developed one of the first online classes that [participant's institution] had before we had an [information technology] person ... and [the LMS] was just very complicated, and now, it's like, botta-bing, botta-boom—you can just do all kinds of things."

The other three related their experiences taking online classes. Ann stated, "I've taken a ton of online classes myself, like 37 credits postgraduate after my master's. I'm finishing another 18 credits in English, so I've taken a lot of online classes." Likewise, Dawn indicated a somewhat robust history in terms of taking online classes. According to Dawn, " Probably 1/3 of my classes in my masters were online ... so I've done it. I do it all the time." Finally, Clare mentioned, "I took some classes in college that were online."

Online Learning for Personal Purposes. In terms of online learning for personal purposes, both Beth and Dawn talked about their experiences. According to Beth, "I do a ton of stuff on my own time, um, everything from *how to do sourdough bread*, to *what kind of miniature roses can I have*, to *this Star Trek episode has a weird word—what does it mean?* Furthermore, Dawn mentioned online learning for personal and romantic development, as follows:

But I do like garage sales online. If I want something, and I don't want to pay much, I look at the Facebook garage sale. Or I used to date online. It's easier—you don't have to go to a bar. People think it's weird, but it's not really weird if you don't party a lot or something. What else are you gonna do, stalk the library or something, you know?

Challenges of Online Learning. Additionally, while the only one of the five participants who spoke specifically about negative aspects of online learning, Dawn

critiqued the time and focus involved in taking online classes or modules while trying to balance a home and family life. According to Dawn:

I guess it depends on the situation, when I was single, I didn't mind modular ... when I was a divorced and we were sharing custody, and I had a lot of free time alone, and that's when I got a lot of those Marilyn Burns and a lot of those Region 10 professional developments that were modular, um, but now that I'm, you know, I have my kids home, you know, we got back together, so dinner's kids all the time. Now [that] I have grandkids, I almost need to leave and go, you know, to the face-to-face place to be able to focus and get it done 'cause I get here, and I have to cook dinner, there's cartoons on in the background, you know, like somebody needs to do laundry, my son needs a ride to the store, you know. So modular is good if you have the privacy and the time to do it.

Furthermore, Dawn continued, summarizing in depth drawbacks she's perceived in taking online classes, citing convenience as a redeeming factor. According to Dawn:

What my experience is [is that] it's harder than face-to-face because you have to read everything and you have to stay on track, and it doesn't take less hours than if you went and sat Saturday afternoon, so the benefit of it is just merely the convenience of doing it when you want to. ... I think people confuse online as it's going to be easier, but it's not. It takes just as much or more time as it does to go to class, and I think that's the big misconception when people first take an online class. It was for me. I think it's harder to take the online class.

While all participants explained their experiences with online learning, Dawn's perceptions triangulated with other themes in this chapter, such as motivation or lack

thereof to seek out CoP -based learning or even online groupwork, as well as Dawn's tirade against what she perceived as less than desirable face-to-face PD experiences. One of the most prevalent themes that brought much of the data together was that all people are different, and some don't benefit from CoP and online PD options, that it takes the right kind of person to benefit from such. These themes will culminate further in the concluding discussion chapter of this study.

Online Information and Resource Sharing. The next topic relevant to participants' technology usage pertains to online information and resource sharing, with which all five of the participants indicated having past experience. While Ann, who linked her information and resource sharing to her history with taking online classes, stated, "It's been very different depending on the course, so it's really been dependent on the course and on the instructor," she also claimed at a different point in the interview that, "I'm pretty good at finding my own materials to teach with online." Furthermore, while Beth acknowledged experience with online information and resource sharing with brevity, stating, "Technically, that's there," Clare elaborated upon her experience with PD-based databases at various institutions, as well as with Google documents file-sharing technology. According to Clare:

There's always the database [at participant's current institution of employment]. Every college I've ever attended or entity has had something. And then sharing documents—Google Docs is amazing. I'm thinking back to all those group projects I had to do [when participant was a college student] when we'd send each other a copy of a power point, and then they'd make changes and send it back. I shudder. I wish it would have been around when I did schoolwork.

In addition, Dawn also highlighted Google documents as a means of online information and resource sharing. Dawn stated, "I'm really good at it, like with Google and sharing documents. I've done it with my colleagues more than I've done it with students in in my class." Finally, Eve commented, specifically mentioning a popular SM platform for online information and resource sharing: "I do that a lot. I do it all the time, mostly on Twitter."

All five had experience in information and resource sharing online, and participants described many methods of how this occurred or occurs in their professions. In some academic courses, such as credit-bearing classes in undergraduate and graduate studies, the online resource and information varies based on the particular course and particular instructor. However, institutional databases at some community colleges offer PD opportunities in the form of accessible resources for faculty. Furthermore, participants mentioned online resource sharing with colleagues and on a SM platform. As all had history with online resource and information sharing, which is an affordance of SM, perhaps all might have had the proclivity to access specific and research-driven articles as a form of self-directed PD.

Online Networking. The next topic relevant to participants' technology usage pertained to networking with others online. While all five participants commented on online networking, only Eve claimed to a greater extent to have experience with such. According to Eve, "A lot. I belong to organizations that are pretty tech savvy, and ... I'm involved with probably three groups, and they're not all educational, but there are things that could help my classroom teaching." On the other hand, Ann stated that, "I haven't done a lot of that," while Beth said, "Doesn't happen." Though with less history and

experience with online networking than Eve, both Clare and Dawn acknowledged online networking in more detail than Ann and Beth. According to Clare, her experience with online networking was, "Not so good. I mean, I don't do any of that really—every now and then. I'll email [an author] about an article, but I don't seek out [networking]—no, nothing like that." Finally, Dawn, while not affirming experience with online networking, acknowledged a popular SM outlet that is professionally based, saying, "Not too much. I've seen LinkedIn. I think it's probably a good thing now in these days and times—I just haven't needed it."

Online networking could be a major PD feature accessible through SM, allowing practitioners of a specific discipline, such as instructors of DE or instructors of DE writing, from across the institution, state, nation, and globe to meet. However, without much experience nor enthusiasm toward the possibility of online networking, all except for Eve might not have viewed that aspect of self-directed, SM-based PD as beneficial. This possible revelation resonated as well in terms of negative opinions further in this chapter about CoP-based learning, practitioner motivation to pursue PD, and the following topic, online discussion groups.

Online Discussion Groups. The next topic relevant to participants' technology usage pertained to their experience participating in online discussion groups. As in the previous topic, which pertained to online networking, some SM platforms afford opportunities for synchronous and/or asynchronous online discussion, especially in SMIGs that are thematically based. Such online discussion amongst colleagues that are relative to pedagogical practices and innovations could serve as PD in that practitioners can learn from each other, even ask questions about a specific discipline, such as DE

writing at community colleges. While all five participants commented on this topic, two did so more negatively than the other three, while two commented that they did "a little bit," and the last positively acknowledged the LMS at her institution and online discussion potential.

First, while Beth simply answered, "No," Ann elaborated further, with critique possibly relevant to other negative statements by multiple participants in this chapter pertaining to, as aforementioned, drawbacks to group work and CoP-based learning as well as the motivation to participate. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter. Ann stated as follows:

Whoah, so I'm starting now to know how my students feel. I'm not a big fan of discussion groups because I put a lot of effort into my original post, and then maybe not as much into reposting to other classmates just like my students do, so I sort of understand why people don't like to do it.

On the other hand, Clare and Eve described participating in online discussion groups in a somewhat limited fashion. Clare said, noting another popular SM outlet, "I've done that a little bit—Facebook ... ReadWriteThink [an online PD option sponsored by the] National Council of Teachers of English. If someone posts a question or there's a scenario I can respond to or ask a question, I'll definitely do that." In addition, Eve discussed multiple forums for online discussion as follows:

A little bit, not a lot. ... I consider the CASP List-serve to be an online discussion group, although it's not really widely used, but I mean, that is a way to impart information. Probably not much. I mean, I'm either in a class with other people or on a platform that's controlled by SLACK or some other work platform but ...

there are online discussions there, but they're contained [participant makes gesture of containment, as if holding an imaginary sphere in front of her] like our students are within Canvas or Blackboard or whatever. They're not just open forums.

Finally, Dawn described with a modicum of enthusiasm an institutionally based online system with the facility for group communication that she has used in the past. According to Dawn:

Right now, we have Webex since school's been out. It's like Zoom, but you can chat, so you could pull up the margin and do a chat room thing over there and still see that presenter, I think you can see everybody at the same time. Only one person can talk at a time, but you can chat on the side, so if you have questions while someone is presenting, you can type your question, then they can go back and answer them.

The diversity and range of answers—from mere dismissal of the topic with no elaboration, to negative experiences with online discussion groups, to a participant account of their system's institutional LMS with no emphasis on participant's usage or experience, to accounts of light-to-moderate at best participation in online discussion groups—also resonated across the interviews with the sentiment that seeking out CoP - based, social constructivist PD online, involving other people, and even groupwork in online courses, was not everybody's cup of tea. For such manner of online PD to be beneficial, it takes a motivated person who wants to do it and who likes that manner of PD acquisition/delivery/learning than face-to-face and/or modular.

Social Media Activity. The next topic relevant to participants' technology usage pertained to their SM activity. Experience with SM and frequency of activity could be the

biggest indicator for why adjunct instructors of DE writing at community colleges in Texas might participate in self-directed SM-based PD—because they are already familiar with and active in that medium. All nine participants in the demographic survey attested to being a member of at least one SM platform, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, etc., and while eight participants answered "Yes," one answered "All." Furthermore, all but one demographic survey participant admitted to belonging to one or more SMIGs—all the way up to ten and 27—and of those eight participants, seven of them affirmed belonging to between one and three SMIGs relevant to their career in higher education. Furthermore, all nine demographic survey participants noted having access to the internet at home as well as the Texas community college(s) where they currently work or worked in the past as an adjunct instructor of DE writing.

I recruited the interviewees based on criterion sampling from participants who filled out the demographic survey, and all five participants commented on their respective SM usage, which ranged from sporadic depending on time allotment, to daily, to throughout the day. For example, according to Ann:

I think it used to be a lot more. It's gotten to be less. I use Messenger on Facebook a lot more than I actually go through the news feed, and I actually use some sort of private groups more than I use the general news feed. But I'm sort of sporadic. Like, it depends on how much time I have, to be honest.

Likewise, Clare stated more moderate SM usage whereas Beth, Dawn, and Eve indicated using SM throughout the day. Clare said the following:

Well, during the quarantine [interview took place on 5-18-2020], I posted every single day what I'm doing, because I think it's funny ... as far as professional

development goes, maybe once or twice a week. I have to seek it out—they don't just pop up on their own. I have to kind of go looking for it.

On the other hand, Beth, Dawn, and Eve elaborated on their daily respective SM activities, indicating a higher level of usage than the other two participants. Beth commented, saying the following:

I would probably say two-to-three hours a day in one form or another. I Facebook, talk to people, check the news—we've been trying to work out some sort of stuff with my family over the summer—three different email accounts, keeping up with those. The other more personal stuff. I have a whole stack of recipes that need to be put in ... [and] shared eventually. I'm not on Instagram, I'm not on Twitter, so it's really pretty simple.

Furthermore, Dawn also commented on extensive use of SM as follows:

A lot? Yeah, I thought about giving it up, but I did not, but, yeah, I just compulsively check my email, look at my Facebook, check my email. I have 3 emails—I have two school, personal ... then I look at Facebook, then I go back. It's constant, if I'm not doing something, then it's constant, sad but it is [participant laughs].

Finally, Eve stated that she used SM, including for professional purposes, "Daily [throughout the day]. Yeah, I mean, I wish not, but yeah. I'm trying to start a business, so I'm on Twitter ... and LinkedIn—I use LinkedIn a lot."

The SM usage data clearly shows that most participants understood the affordances of SM and belonged to SMIGs, and some of those groups for professional purposes pertaining to their career in higher education. Their respective usage ranged

from sometimes, to 2-3 hours per day, to more excessive usage. With that in mind, whether they realized it or not, many participants in the demographic survey as well as the interviewees could have been closer to the possibilities of PD afforded by SM than they realized.

Theme Seven: Self-Directed and Lifelong Learning

The final topic in this section pertained to lifelong and self-directed learning, which is yet another affordance of SM-based PD, where in an ongoing basis people of any profession or personal interest can in theory connect and network with others like them, find or post pertinent resources, and join or create a special interest group for said networking and resource-sharing as well as online discuss. As most basic SM subscriptions are free and only require registration, SM can provide a medium for affordable and ongoing self-directed learning. All nine of the demographic survey participants, all of which stated being members of at least one SM platform, considered themselves to be lifelong learners, with six of them writing the word "Yes" then three more emphatic affirmations of the question: "YES," "Absolutely," and "Definitely."

As I've mentioned before, I sourced all five interviewees through criterion sampling from the nine participants of the demographic survey. All five interview participants described ways in which they have sought learning in the past and/or did such at the time of their respective interviews, Ann having been the most vocal on the topic. Ann stated as follows:

To be honest, I'm finishing 18 credits right now that I've been working on since October, so I'm always taking other classes [laughs], so I don't usually have a problem doing stuff like that on my own. I'm pretty self-motivated. I can't speak

to how other people do it, but I've always just kind of been a life-long learner, so I'm always working on another degree or certification.

Ann, who also mentioned that she was looking into a regional university for a possible doctoral degree, continued her sentiment for self-directed, lifelong learning elsewhere in the interview as follows:

You know at this point in my life, I'm happy where I am. I like teaching at the Community College because there are students who need help—to be honest—and that's what I enjoy doing, and I just like to learn for myself. I'm just ambitious at what I'm doing, so I just like to be better at it. I'm not really interested in a big career—I just like learning, and I like being better at what I'm doing.

In addition, Beth explained her voluntary participation at her institution in PD designed to help with the sudden transition to online learning due to the COVID-19 quarantine that started in March of 2020 [note that this interview took place during mid-May of 2020].

Beth explained as follows:

The most recent PD was the week after spring break, and very much to their credit, our IT and black board people and full-time faculty pulled together 16 crash courses in moving to online classes, and my need to know was through the roof, and I [voluntarily] participated in virtually all of those. If it weren't for that abrupt shift [COVID-19 TRANSITION], there's no way I would have taken on that much information that fast, but again, it's hard to ask about stuff if I don't know it exists in the first place.

Furthermore, Clare commented on subscriptions to blogs, articles, and the resources available to her at her institution. Clare explained as follows:

I follow a lot of the International Literacy Association blogs. I read all the articles or the magazines they send out. I get them either over my email, and I get two delivered to my house every quarter, so I make sure that I follow up on that ... at [participant's institution], there they have a professional development website you can go, and you can look at stuff and see what you want to learn, and I've done that before. Whatever works for my students that semester.

In addition, Dawn talked about her extensive history with self-directed, lifelong learning experiences to supplement her teaching skills. Dawn explained as follows:

I've done a lot of that because I was AC [alternatively certified for public school] ... so I had no idea how to teach when I was first in the classroom, so I did [the public school region's] modules, I did [non-institutional based PD] on my own, I got my own Master's degree from [a regional university] in reading because I felt like I didn't know how to teach reading ... so all of my teaching experience education—most of it has been self-directed.

Finally, regarding self-directed learning, Dawn said, " Oh, I think life is a classroom. We should be learning every day. ... Because I love school. I mean, school's where it's at. I love it, love it, love it. ... I'm always learning new stuff—I just can't get enough."

In summary, all interviewed participants revealed enthusiasm for the notion of lifelong learning, another dominant theme that emerged from the data. Participants justified their zest for lifelong learning with reasons pertaining to ambition, motivation, and love for learning. Participants also indicated voluntarily taking classes, participating in PD sessions, and reading blogs and articles to update their skills and become better teachers. From my positionality as researcher and teacher of developmental and freshmen

writing at multiple community colleges and public as well as private universities for two decades, I've always thought that the best way for one to continue learning is to become a teacher, for education is a field which almost demands continuous learning. The affirmative and emphatic data that emerged from the participants of this study, all of which have a bachelor's degree and at least one graduate degree related to their field, illuminates the strength of such a hypothesis.

Summary of Why Participants Might Participate in Self-Directed, Social-Media-Based Professional Development

In conclusion, at the time of the interviews, though at many community colleges throughout Texas PD was a required component of employment as an adjunct instructor, all of the interviewed participants affirmatively identified themselves as life-long students who love to learn and grow in their field and profession. The data in this section suggested that while the participants didn't perceive themselves to possess exceptional technological skills, they all had experience and familiarity with online learning as well as online information and resource sharing, both being affordances of SM. Furthermore, all of them were members of at least one SM outlet, some belonging to one or more SMIGs relevant to their profession. These are reasons that cumulatively emerged as a notion as to why those instructors interviewed in this study might have considered participating in self-directed SM-based PD. The only categories pertaining to technology usage that didn't bear unanimously positive data were based on online networking and online discussion groups, which related to motivation to participate in PD, particularly PD based on CoP principles that involve interacting actively with other PD participants. Motivation and CoP will be addressed in the next and final section of this results chapter.

Research Question Three: Participants' Perceptions of the Effects of Participating in Self-Directed, Social-Media-Based Professional Development

The third and final section of this Findings of the Study Chapter pertained to what participants of this study might have thought could be the results or benefits of participation in self-directed, SM-based PD. This section begins with the emergent themes pertaining to participants' perceptions of potential benefits for students due to teacher participation in PD. From there, this section continues to develop based on the emergent theme pertaining to motivation, both motivation to participate in PD as well as motivation to participate in CoP -based learning. Progressing further, this section will address participants' perceptions of what they consider to be effective PD as well as some commentary on perceptions of what might be considered non-effective PD. Finally, this final section of the results chapter concludes with participants' opinions of self-directed SM-based PD.

Theme Eight: Student Benefits

The first emergent theme of this section pertained to participants' perceptions of how general PD for teachers might affect the academic performance of the students. With the assumption that PD for instructors will improve their pedagogical preparedness to accommodate the cognitive and non-cognitive challenges that students of DE writing face and therefore affect the academic performance of their students, the participants of this study summarized in section one of this chapter the perceived needs of their students. This subsection presents further elaboration of the benefits for students that the participants perceived PD could yield. Four of the five participants of this study commented, and all four of them positively, that participant participation in PD could

have beneficial effects for students. Ann cited the notion of being able to transfer specific PD learning from PD directly into the DE writing classroom, saying, "Tremendously. If I can leave professional development with something that I can immediately put into the classroom or onto the Internet—in whatever way I'm teaching it—and if I'm excited about using it, I can give that directly to the students. Students will buy into it." Clare also commented on how PD for participants could positively affect the academic performance of students, referring to how PD that improves her teaching methods would translate into improved student academic performance, saying, "It would improve it. If I'm doing something better, and I can teach my students better, it would result in better writing, better reading skills." Furthermore, Clare also posed the following rhetorical question, which may not summarize the scope but certainly the underlying motivation behind this study: "Anytime you ask what's the effect of professional development, shouldn't it always kind of be to improve students' learning, right?"

In addition, Dawn commented, citing how for her, PD has positively affected lesson development for her and increased engagement for her students. According to Dawn, "I believe that it helps me create better lessons, and it keeps them more engaged. ... little activities that I've learned in professional development that keep the kids who wouldn't normally engage engaged, and it helps them experience." Finally, Eve also commented positively on the merits of instructor PD for affecting student academic performance in terms of increasing her students' level of preparedness, saying, "Absolutely, it's necessary." Eve also stated in the interview, "I think that, you know, anything we can do to help a student prepare is good."

In summary, participants of this study perceived that PD in general, whether face-

to-face, hybrid, modular, or self-directed and SM-based, could positively benefit their students' academic performance. A major assumption from participants' perceptions about how PD for instructors of DE writing can translate into increased student academic performance, retention, and success rested with the notion that beneficial effects on teachers in turn yields beneficial effects for students, especially in such cases where instructors can take the learning they acquired from PD and apply it directly into their courses for their students. Furthermore, PD that is exciting and inspirational for instructors can translate into increased student preparation as well as student "buy in" and motivation to succeed in the course.

Theme Nine: Motivation to Participate in Professional Development

The next emergent theme in this section of this Findings of the Study Chapter of this study pertained to motivation to participate in PD. As evidenced in the previous section and other parts of this results chapter, participants of this study indicated that PD was required at some of their respective institutions, but a much stronger theme pertained to participants citing specific, relevant, applicable content as one of their PD needs. Furthermore, participants talked about how PD could help them as practitioners to meet the needs of their students. Four of the five participants mentioned in some form the importance of instructor motivation to develop professionally. The participants' comments ranged from how they positively perceived their own motivation to participate in PD versus comments on how they negatively perceived other practitioners' lack of motivation to participate in PD. For example, Ann and Clare both addressed their positive perceptions of their own respective motivation. Ann said, "My background is in all kinds of different things, but basically, I'm interested in being a really good teacher, so

everything else I learn is just tools that I keep to be a good teacher." Clare, addressing self-directed learning, stated the following: "I've always been pretty motivated. I think it's great, I think that it's awesome we can do that. I don't think it's for everyone, but I have no problem doing that."

While Ann and Clare both identified positively with their motivation to participate in PD, Dawn and Eve addressed negative perceptions of instructors who are not motivated to participate in PD. For example, Dawn, referred to the importance of being inspired as a teacher with fresh, new ideas, which can be a benefit of PD for instructors in terms of teaching methods, and that in turn benefits the students. Dawn stated as follows:

I feel like people that don't go to professional development probably should quit teaching because you need to be inspired, and you need to have ideas, and you can't just use the same ideas. Some of them can use the same idea, but I just feel like it [PD] keeps you inspired, and that that directly benefits your students if the teacher's inspired.

Likewise, Eve commented pertaining to PD and lifelong learning, basically summarizing that learning and developing professionally shouldn't be relegated as a chore or a burden.

Eve stated as follows:

We should be learning every day. That's what just irritates me. It's like, why are you in school if you don't want to do this class? ... If you're not—if you don't want to learn—then go do something else. I mean, just go do something else and leave that time and energy for people who want to, but not all people are very motivated ... so I think it's ultimately a motivation factor, it's, like, if somebody wants to

learn, that person will learn.

Ultimately, this emergent theme pertaining to participant motivation to participate in PD aligned with the theme of self-directed lifelong learning, which participants of both the demographic survey and the interviews addressed affirmatively. These instructors of DE writing in Texas community colleges not only identified as lifelong learners, but they also underscored the importance of having the motivation to seek out and/or participate in PD. According to them, they were motivated to participate in PD in order to acquire tools to become a better teacher, to seek and/or gain inspiring teaching practices, and to continue learning.

Theme 10: Motivation to Participate in Community-of-Practice-Based Learning

Perhaps one of the sections most rife with qualitative data from participants of this study pertained to motivation necessary to partake in CoP -based learning, which can often be an integral framework for both online discussion-based, social-media-based, group-based, and/or group-work based learning for PD. To summarize early, all five participants in this study commented on CoP-based learning. All of their comments pertained to the investment and motivation for such to be effective, that such depended on the people involved and their motivation for investing in learning in group-based settings. For example, Ann said, "I think that could be great if you have the right people." Ann continued further with accounts of her observations and opinions of CoP-based learning, how she recognized the concept in her professional interactions as well as positive statements about motivation positively perpetuating the learning process. According to Ann, "I can already see it kind of developing now with some people that I work with, so I think it is a really good way to network. I just haven't done it personally

yet. But I can see the beginnings of it."

As the main theme of this section pertains to motivation, Clare alluded to participant motivation as well as passion for the subject, that perhaps not all learners benefited from group-based work/interaction for the purpose of learning. Clare said, pertaining to CoP -based learning, "I don't think it's a universal tool. I think that people have to seek it out, which isn't always done." However, Clare also extolled potential virtues of CoP-based learning pertaining to participants who were passionate about such framework of learning, particularly in online environments. As Clare further stated:

I think it's great that people who are there are passionate about it. Anytime I've ever asked a question in one of those groups, I have, like, 55 people who are ... really trying to help me understand something, and that's really great. I've found it overall to be really helpful. I think it's a positive thing."

Eve also mentioned data pertaining to how the motivation to learn and succeed—by virtue of passion and fascination—was relevant to knowledge-acquisition success in the CoP framework. Eve further stated as follows:

I love it because people don't go to the group unless they're fascinated by the topic. I mean, it's not something that you *have* to do. I guess occasionally you get somebody that doesn't really care, but it's passion driven. I think you have to want to do it.

Furthermore, Eve disclosed her participation in multiple groups in which she identified with CoP -based learning. Eve disclosed the following, noting interest, specialization, and participation of other members of the CoP, as follows:

Yeah, I'm in two groups like that right now, three groups ... and I learn so much

from those types of situations because there may be two or three experts and 20 or 30 pseudo-experts, and I kind of learn from all of them—but because they're there for that cause, for that purpose, that discussion.

In addition, in terms of CoP-based interaction for learning and/or PD, Dawn indicated participant engagement and potentially motivation. Dawn stated the following:

I think it's more difficult with this depending ... [on whether participants are] engaged because they *have* to be online or because they want to be engaged. I think it just depends on the participants on how much they want to get out of the meeting.

In addition to the topic pertaining to how CoP -based PD might benefit both students and teachers, two participants commented negatively about group-based aspects of CoP -based learning. For example, as Dawn stated, "Anytime it's a group, most of the time it's turned out painful. Either there's someone that won't work or someone that's a control freak." Furthermore, Beth addressed motivation in that some students took a larger role in the learning and project-completion aspect than others, which could possibly hinder the positive development of a CoP -based, group-work participant. Beth stated her CoP membership preferences as such, echoing back to CoP-based groupwork engagement leading to unbalanced duties/responsibilities by respective group members, and opting for smaller CoP group involvement:

I am the person all the way through school that, when we did group work, I'm the one that did the work. I know that people work well in group. My masters in English was entirely online. There were some other students that I really, really enjoyed following their discussion threads. Others, I wouldn't even know how to

respond to because I didn't know what the person was saying. All that to say because I don't like groups for the sake of groups; however, when I've had a chance to be in with a smaller group, that has worked much better for me, a smaller group that sort of self-selects.

As in the previous subsection, according to participants of this study, motivation to be involved and develop was a key concept underlying potential learning success from CoP-based learning. They held that while such interactive, group-based learning worked well for some learners who were passionate about it and engaged, CoP-based learning might not be a beneficial and/or effective PD option for practitioners who don't want to participate. In addition, in terms of groupwork situations, such members can possibly mar the learning experience for others in the group. The participants of this study alluded to the notion that CoP-based learning worked best when more members than not were motivated and responsible to the group and group-based interactive learning.

Theme 11: Effective Professional Development

The penultimate topic in this last section of this Findings of the Study Chapter of this dissertation study pertained to what participants of this study perceived to be effective PD, and by negation, what participants of this study perceived to be negative qualities of PD delivery. These results were mixed. First, Eve offered a proposal of how effective PD could work in the schools, while others indicted the pitfalls of other approaches. For example, Beth posited that one quality of effective PD would be to "be considered a legitimate instructor" as a part-time adjunct in DE writing the same way as would a full-time faculty member. Secondly, Dawn commented on the approach of what could be considered by scholars to indicate negative PD practices in her experience.

Dawn stated that an effective quality of PD for her, as an adjunct instructor with experience in DE writing, would involve professional delivery of the PD. Dawn stated the following: "The instructor actually being organized and being good at what they're doing." During the course of the interview, Dawn extrapolated further, saying the following:

Some of the professional developments I've been to, um, are pretty good, and I get some good ideas, and a lot of them are somebody just—it's their part time job, they get paid \$60 to conduct the PD, and it's not really that good.

In Dawn's opinion, she benefited from activities in PD sessions that also allotted time for required assignments, if such were the case. Dawn explained these effective strategies that she felt applied to her growth and knowledge as follows:

I like it to be hands-on. I don't wanna sit there and watch a slideshow, so I like hands-on. If they want an activity, I like them to let us kind of do it. It's more effective for me if we do it then or get a good start on it during the development. I have courses where they give me homework, and it's funny, but I'm getting worse the older I get at wanting to go home and do it—when I get home, I'm done because I just sat all day. I'll put it off and forget about it—it's terrible—but, yeah, hands-on activity.

Furthermore, in terms of qualities of effective PD, Dawn extrapolated further, noting the detriment of what could be considered non-effective PD, that sometimes the implementors of PD fell short of effective PD. Dawn alluded to non-effective PD as feeling almost forced by session teachers who negatively affected her engagement by overloading the session participants with information via a marathon of slideshows as

opposed to providing hands-on activities and using session time to let the participants work on PD assignments. Dawn stated as follows:

[they] just regurgitate slide shows. That blows my mind—I'm, like, I can't believe you're doing this to me; it's Saturday, the pastries weren't good, I had to get my own coffee, and, you're just, like, regurgitating slideshows quickly as you can 'cause you're trying to fit it into six hours. That's why I don't do my homework because then I'm beat, and then I gotta go home and write some paper about it.

However, regardless of potential dissent in possible modes of PD delivery, Eve went on record to indicate the potential for more broadly-based PD, beyond department and institution. Eve stated as such this final boon to the integrity of PD for contingent adjunct instructors of DE writing and beyond. According to Eve's testament in the interview, she indicated the following:

Bring in more of the schools, other disciplines, too, especially now that they're doing coreqs with government and history and all these other classes. Bring in the college and help them—I mean the faculty, the administration, whatever—help them understand what developmental writing is all about because so many people just don't get it. ... They need to again expect communication, so hold professional development with more stakeholders involved.

In previous sections of this Findings of the Study Chapter, themes that emerged from interviews pertained to how participants perceived their students' needs as well as their own PD needs. Other themes emerged about how the participants felt they would benefit from PD that was specific and relevant to them, PD that would help them better understand and accommodate the needs of their students. These themes related to PD

content needs. However, this subsection is about what the participants deemed to be effective PD in terms of quality of delivery. Participants collectively indicated that PD-delivery needed to include quality instruction and organized, professional instructors—with delivery that was diverse and engaging, and that could benefit an institution's entire academic community to participate in.

Theme 12: Opinions of Self-Directed Social Media-Based Professional Development

The final emergent theme of this last section of this Findings of the Study Chapter pertained to participants' perceptions and opinions of self-directed, SM-based PD. This is the subsection whose title is included in the title of the study and also in two of the research questions driving this research: *why might this population of instructors participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?* and *what might they perceive could be the effects?* Participants' perceptions and opinions ranged from negative to ambivalent to positive. For example, Clare cited convenience, saying, "It's just nice to be able to do it from home in my pajamas, can't beat that." In terms of how self-directed SM-based PD might affect teacher quality, Clare talked about the benefit of research and learning that was specific, relevant, and applicable, a dominant emergent theme in the first section of this chapter and throughout participant interviews. Clare said the following:

Well, because I'm seeking out what I want to learn, not necessarily what's available, I'm finding exactly what I'm looking for, so [when] I find someone with professional development opportunities with developmental learners, I get more from it. I find what I'm looking for, which, you know, leads to me doing a better job, my students understanding more.

Furthermore, Dawn commented on how self-directed SM-based PD could become more

acceptable in the future. Dawn stated the following:

I think it's where it's gone. My son as a matter of fact is trying to get out of going to college already. He's only in 10th grade. He's gonna be, like, an Internet marketing guru, and he's all the time walking around with his phone, and I can tell he's listening to some type of webcast or something about how to be a marketer or whatever, so I think that it's gonna be lucrative for the people that are putting the PD on social media.

In addition, Eve posited self-directed SM-based PD as an easy and effective way to exchange information globally, which echoed her statements in other parts of her interview about communication serving as a type of PD need. Eve stated, "I think it's good, I mean, if people are around the country and they have something to contribute ... it's an effective way to transfer ideas certainly."

On the other hand, Ann and Beth didn't treat the topic with as much enthusiasm as the other participants of this study. Ann described her potential reluctance to participate in self-directed SM-based PD because of the potential of other people involved who could be non-beneficial to her learning experience, a sentiment that echoed themes of motivation, online discussion, and CoP-based learning—that it all depended on the person in question and/or the people involved in the SM-based interactions. Ann said as follows:

I don't know. People are kind of loose cannons. It might be a good thing. I think it would take a while. I'd go in there, and I'd probably look around awhile at how people relate to each other on those types of forums and then decide. I mean, there's always nutsos, you know, but there's always people who aren't so, maybe.

I'd have to follow up for a while and decide what I think of the group.

Finally, Beth did not have an opinion of self-directed SM-based PD due to lack of experience using SM for professional purposes. Beth said, "I don't know that I can answer that question just because I don't have the experience or background to be able to make a good answer to that." Furthermore, Beth cited monetary compensation as being a driving factor in her motivation to participate in PD in general. Beth stated the following:

I know this is going to sound very mercenary, but for every one hour of preparation that I spend for one hour of class, my salary gets halved, so how many times do I cut my salary in half? Because the classroom is going to take priority over self-directed professional development. It has to—that's just the immediate thing—so honestly, compensation at a professional pay would make a huge difference.

This final theme about essentially what participants of this study thought about the idea or possibility of self-directed, SM-based PD. They identified several other themes related to this topic, such as the potential convenience afforded by online learning and the ability for participants to seek out specific resources and learning opportunities as well as to learn, spread, and transfer new ideas amongst colleagues. Self-directed, SM-based PD could become more acceptable as a PD option in the future due to the rapidly changing widespread global technology context. However, as evidenced as well by themes pertaining to CoP-based learning, and online discussion and networking—based on the variety of different data from this subsection—self-directed, SM-based PD might best benefit those instructors who are motivated to seek it out, and those who feel comfortable with group-based social-constructivist learning.

Summary of Participants' Perceptions of the Effects of Participating in Self-Directed, Social-Media-Based Professional Development

In conclusion, this final section of the Findings of the Study Chapter shed light on important themes that emerged from the data pertinent to what interviewed participants perceived as potential effects of SM-based PD. Participants of the study generally felt that PD of any manner could translate into improved academic performance for students, especially if the PD content was specific to participants' needs as instructors. These needs, as summarized in section one of this chapter, pertained to content that could help instructors to understand the needs and challenges of students of DE writing at Texas community colleges as well as pedagogical teaching methods to help them connect with such student needs—PD experiences that they could immediately apply directly in the classroom. While the general consensus pointed to their PD needs in terms of content, they also indicated other needs such as quality instructors and flexible delivery, the latter of which pertained to motivation. While participants held that instructors' motivation to participate in PD and develop professionally for the benefit of them and therefore their students should be a given in the teaching profession, their responses differed in terms of CoP-based learning, indicating that while instructors *should* seek and participate in activities that further their professional knowledge, discussion- and group-based learning might not benefit all involved parties equally.

Conclusion of Findings of the Study

I arranged and organized the three sections of this Findings of the Study Chapter according to the three research questions. The first section represented emergent themes as to what participants of the study perceived to be their PD needs. The second section

represented why they might pursue and/or participate in self-directed, SM-based PD. Finally, the third and last section represented further emergent themes relevant to what they perceived might be the effects of self-directed, SM-based PD.

First, as represented in section one—about PD needs—participants believed that PD in general could be beneficial to instructor development and in turn student academic performance, as represented in section three. For example, participants in the study expressed the need for specific PD that is relevant to instructors of DE writing at community colleges for three main reasons. First, they sought to better understand the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of and challenges for their unique population of students placed into DE writing. Additionally, they sought to learn new ideas and teaching methods that they could apply in the classroom. Finally, they sought to stay current with technology relevant to them as instructors of DE writing as well as institutionally specific technology, both for their own development as instructors as well as to be able to teach such technology skills to their students. Furthermore, they perceived that PD could yield learning and academic performance benefits for their students.

Secondly, while participants sought PD relevant especially to specific technology needs, they had experience with technology and online learning, and taking online classes. They also had experience with such social-media affordances as online resource sharing and with seeking out information online, for both personal and professional purposes. All participants had SM accounts, many with membership in at least one special interest group, and some with membership in at least one special interest group for professional purposes. Furthermore, regardless that many community colleges in Texas require PD for part-time instructors who teach as adjuncts, participants identified

as lifelong learners who strove to learn for personal and professional growth and benefits.

Finally, two affordances of SM that were least popular with participants pertained to online discussion groups and online networking. Not all participants seemed to have felt as comfortable as others with the group-learning dynamic. This sentiment related to participants' general perceptions of CoP -based learning, that such better led to beneficial PD learning outcomes when the participant in question as well as other group members were motivated to learn—that it took the right person and the right group. That same theme triangulated participants' overall perceptions of self-directed, SM-based PD, that it could work and be beneficial for those who wanted that method of PD delivery and who were willing to seek it out.

In the following Discussion Chapter, I further explored the aforementioned summarized overarching themes. In addition to a summary of this study's key findings and how they related to the three research questions, I compared the findings on pre-established research from the review of literature chapter, followed by a discussion on limitations of the study as well as possible implications of the findings in terms of theory, practice, and policy—and, finally, recommendations for future research. The Discussion Chapter extrapolates further on emergent themes from data that I as researcher gathered in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs?
2. Why do community college DE writing adjunct instructors say they would participate in self-directed, SM-based PD?

3. How do community college DE writing adjunct instructors perceive what might be the effects of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD?

V. DISCUSSION

Throughout Texas as well as across the nation, community colleges have been following the trend of relying heavily if not primarily on a contingent workforce of instructors who are part-time adjuncts to teach DE courses. This study focused on the perceptions of this population of teachers, specifically in Texas urban and non-urban areas, toward the possibility of seeking out self-directed PD through SM as a means of scaffolding their PD needs. While some community colleges require a certain amount of PD activities from their instructors who are part-time adjuncts, others have no such requirements, and some do not offer PD to this population of teachers. Just as access to and participation in effective and quality PD can benefit this population in terms of pedagogical knowledge, so can barriers that prevent such on the institutional level have detrimental effects, not only on teacher development but also possibly student success. However, the modern affordances of technology and the global community of SM can provide myriad opportunities for teachers to develop professionally through such activities as resource sharing, networking, online discussion—all of which can foster collaboration and professional growth. SMIGs are places where educators with similar interests can meet, share and find links to relevant research, and find professional growth in a CoP. This study focuses specifically on the population of instructors who have taught or currently teach DE writing at a Texas community college.

This study was housed under two types of frameworks. The theoretical framework, social constructivism, applies to knowledge acquisition and co-creation through communication and mutually making meaning between one or more agents. The conceptual framework, community of practice (CoP), applies to the learning process

happening among an interactive group of people who have the same goals or personal/professional interests. Due to the communicative imperative of both the social constructivist theoretical framework and the CoP conceptual framework, both underscore such emergent themes in the data as online courses and both online and face-to-face groupwork as well as SM-based interactions in SMIGs for the sake of personal and/or professional learning.

Many potential benefits of PD abound. For example, PD is considered a best practice for helping teachers stay abreast of developments in the field in terms of pedagogical knowledge and skill acquisition. Furthermore, quality PD could help the population represented in this study understand the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of students placed into DE writing, as well as the challenges faced by not only the population of students placed into DE writing, but also challenges faced by non-traditional students who are often older than traditional students, who face in addition to coursework such challenges as having full-time jobs and family responsibilities, being non-native speakers of English, and/or being a first-generation college student. Furthermore, while PD can provide scaffolding and support for instructors of DE writing who are adjuncts at Texas community colleges, PD can also help practitioners understand such innovations in DE as standards placement; learning support implementations such as academic coaching, mentoring, and tutoring; and such course models as co-requisite courses and the flipped classroom model.

Additionally, instructors of DE writing who have worked in the past or currently work as adjuncts at Texas community colleges might seek out PD for a variety of reasons. For example, PD can address the role of the community college in higher

education as well as the challenges for adjunct faculty. Quality PD can also address challenges faced by students placed into DE writing as well as challenges for instructors who teach DE writing as adjuncts. Effective PD could also address potential benefits of technology-based learning, such as digital learning, personal learning, career-based learning, and self-directed learning. Effective PD could also address and the role and potential benefits of CoP-based learning as afforded via SM, and CoP-based learning is the conceptual framework that predicated this study to gauge practitioner perceptions of SM-based PD.

Finally, instructors with experience teaching DE writing as community college adjuncts might participate in PD because of potential effects and benefits. For example, PD might affect teacher quality positively by helping participants to acquire further pedagogical knowledge. Likewise, participation in PD by instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges could affect student academic success by helping the instructors understand both the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of and challenges faced by their students. Furthermore, PD might also serve as an avenue for CoP-based, online learning—such as SM could provide—or inform participant of such avenues that they can seek out for further professional growth. Within these PD possibilities, especially in a CoP based on specific teachers in specific academic genres at specific types of institutions, such as adjunct instructors who teach DE writing at Texas community colleges, both online and face-to-face professional enrichment could blossom for practitioners through practice of this study's theoretical framework—social constructivism.

In conclusion, this study aimed to gauge the perceptions of instructors of DE

writing at Texas community colleges toward their PD needs, their impetus to participate in PD, and why they might consider self-directed SM-based PD. This discussion chapter will summarize key findings related to the research questions, explanations of the findings in tandem with the research, limitations of the research, implications of the findings, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Professional Development Needs

Though the delivery of PD continues to change and transform from state to state, institution to institution, and department to department, the goal and focus remains the same as reflected in seminal as well as current literature—to enhance teacher knowledge and skills for the benefit of student success. For example, Guskey (2010) defined PD programs as "systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 381). Subsequently, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined PD as "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes" (p. v).

Need for Needs Assessments

Key findings from the first section of the results pertain to participants' perceptions about their PD needs, which is the most robust section of data from this study. Current literature suggests that entities along the higher education pipeline—from state, district, institutional, and departmental levels—consider data pertaining to the PD and learning needs, desires, experiences, and contexts of part-time faculty in order to best accommodate practitioner PD (Bickerstaff & Xiaotao Ran, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, relative to assessing and addressing practitioner needs, literature

suggest that such higher education entities clarify avenues of connecting teachers with accessible and informative policies, resources, support, and mentorship (Bickerstaff & Charavin, 2018; Bickerstaff & Xiaotao Ran, 2020). Furthermore, because the aforementioned needs assessments could benefit the specific needs of the population of this study, such a focused assessment of adjunct instructors of DE writing would reflect the subjects of assessment as a CoP.

Professional Development Can Benefit Instructors and Students

The participants indicated that they believed that PD could benefit both the instructor and the students. Scholarship supports participants' perceptions indicating that professionals in both secondary and post-secondary education deem effective PD and ongoing training as an avenue for keeping up with beneficial teaching practices with the assumption that it will positively affect student success (Bingman & Schmitt, 2008; Booth et al., 2014; Gaal, 2014; Guskey, 2002; Saliga et al., 2015; Smith, 2010; Smittle, 2009; THECB, 2013; Yoon et al., 2008). Participants' perceptions of PD being potentially beneficial further correlates with the literature, such that barriers to PD for faculty who are adjunct instructors at community colleges could compromise instruction and their ability to bolster positive student outcomes for students of DE writing who are underprepared and could benefit from sufficiently prepared instructors (Booth et al., 2014; Pegman, 2015; Saliga et al., 2015; Severs, 2017).

Content-Specific Professional Development

More specifically, participants deemed content-specific PD as important to better familiarize themselves with the cognitive and non-cognitive needs of their students; to gain pedagogical learning and teaching methods they can use in the classroom; and to

stay current with technology—all of which align with recommendations from research (Conley, 2016; Gaal, 2014; Martirosyan et al., 2017; Smittle; 2009). Participants' stance toward their PD needs could allude to the reality that many community colleges place growing emphasis on using part-time adjunct faculty despite possibly lacking content-specific education, background, and preparation to meet both the cognitive and non-cognitive challenges of students placed into DE and adult education (Datray et al., 2014). Conceptually, content-specific PD geared toward adjunct instructors of DE writing at Texas community colleges would be aimed at that population of IHE instructors as a CoP.

Students' Cognitive Needs. For the purpose of better familiarizing themselves with students' cognitive needs, some participants mentioned DE-writing-specific course content as a PD need, which suggests that they believe such PD could help them foster improved writing skills in their students, benefitting students' use of such cognitive faculties as organization, project management, critical thinking skills, and rhetorical knowledge that can better prepare them to succeed in higher education as well in their careers (Bruning & Horn, 2000; CCSE, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, participants' comments about "meeting student needs" align with Camfield (2016), who suggested the pedagogical importance of “entering into a relationship with student writers that positions the instructor as a mediator between what it is the writers want to say and the academic audience with which they communicate” (p. 10).

Students' Non-Cognitive Needs. The five participants of this study unanimously referred to better understanding their students' non-cognitive needs as a PD need, a perception that affirms scholarship underscoring the importance of PD that specifically

addresses the non-cognitive needs of students placed into DE, as well as the challenges faced by nontraditional students—a student population that overlaps DE—and/or students in community college classes (Guthrie et al., 2019; Jacobs-Biden, 2006; MacDonald, 2018; Regier, 2014; Watkins-Lewis, 2016; Xiaotao Ran & Sanders, 2020). All five interviewees had experience teaching DE writing at Texas community colleges. Their PD need as community college instructors to understand the non-cognitive needs of their students aligned with scholarship citing the responsibility of community colleges to bolster not only the academic livelihood of community college students but also to holistically consider the unique emotional challenges many community college students face, such as stress, anxiety and depression, and possible resulting substance addiction (Jacobs-Biden, 2006). According to Jacobs-Biden, "The emotional stability of the student cannot be discounted" (p. 33). Furthermore, participants interviewed in this study identified many challenges faced by their non-traditional students. Some characteristics from this study's interview data were that students who are nontraditional tend to be older, might be attending school part-time, and have other responsibilities to *juggle*, such as caregiving duties and full-time employment. By further discerning the challenges of non-traditional students from those considered traditional, this perception supported scholarship urging post-secondary institutions, administrators, and instructors to learn, understand, and acknowledge factors imperative to as well as factors detrimental to the success of non-traditional students, many of whom may have not written an essay nor studied for an exam in a decade and are relegated into DE courses (Jacobs-Biden, 2006; MacDonald, 2018; Regier, 2014; Watkins-Lewis, 2016). In addition, further scholarship urges the importance of adjunct faculty members familiarity with specific non-academic

resources for the benefit of their students' non-cognitive challenges (Guthrie et al., 2019; Xiaotao Ran & Sanders, 2020).

Teachers' and Students' Technology Needs. The most specific PD need cited by participants of this study pertained to technology—they wanted institution- and genre-specific PD to inform them how to use institutional LMSs as well as literacy software and resources that they could use with their students of DE writing. This need transcended practitioners being able to understand and use such technology and also applied as well to their need to be able to teach these technology skills to their students. This need corresponded with the literature in that throughout higher education, instructors face a quickly and ever-changing technology landscape and therefore the responsibility of responding in such a way as to benefit content delivery and positive student learning outcomes (Herrington & Moran, 2009; Horrigan, 2016b). Furthermore, research also suggests that post-secondary institutions render technology solutions to bridge the myriad needs and challenges of non-traditional students with flexible media of instruction as technology affords (Regier, 2014).

Statewide, the Texas Success Initiative demanded that post-secondary institutions in Texas provide PD that underscores technological integration with an emphasis on instructional support as a component of research-based best practices in DE (THECB, 2013). Texas DE-specific research revealed that not only do instructors of DE in Texas identify lack of up-to-date technology and technology training as well as institutional support as factors impeding technology integration in their courses, but also the dearth of technological skills among their students presents hurdles for technology-inclusive instruction (Martirosyan et al., 2017). Such research citing technology as a PD need for

instructors of DE in Texas as well as a skill-need for students corresponded to perceptions of such by participants of this study—that not only did they need content-specific PD to help them improve their technology skills, but they also wanted such skills so that they could assist students challenged by technology.

Pedagogical Needs. Participants of this study cited content-specific PD pertaining to new, improved, and/or updated pedagogical practices to help them foster student success. Literature identified PD that is specific to or includes content pertinent to supporting teachers' pedagogical learning as a suggested practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Further scholarship underscored pedagogy-focused PD for adjunct instructors as a practice for fostering successful academic outcomes for students (Hirsh & Killion, 2009; Guthrie et al., 2019; Yoon et al., 2007), and that community college instructors frequently desire such pedagogical content-based PD (Bickerstaff & Charavin, 2018). Current scholarship positively identified effective content-specific PD that models applicable instructional practices and contextualizes models of curriculum such as lesson and unit plans as well as samples of syllabi and completed student assignments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Additionally, research also suggested that collaborative, community-of-practice-based learning for instructors can result in improved learning for student (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hirsh & Killion, 2009). In summary, the general consensus among interviewed participants of this study is that they believed effective pedagogy-focused PD would translate into positive improved student outcomes, which corroborated with the aforementioned literature. According to Hirsh & Killion (2009), "when educators learn, students learn" (p. 465).

Summary of Professional Development Needs

This first section of the discussion chapter purports to answer this study's first research question: What are the perceptions of community college DE writing adjunct instructors towards their PD needs? This first section of the discussion chapter also relates to Research Question Number 3—What do participants perceive could be the results of their participation in self-directed, SM-based PD? All participants indicated that beneficial PD—despite delivery method that might add to the professional enrichment of faculty—could therefore bolster positive student outcomes. Data from interviews demonstrated that to benefit them and their students, adjunct instructors of DE writing in Texas community colleges could benefit from PD that helps them to understand the challenges of their students specific to DE writing. This teaching population could also benefit from PD that instructs them with diverse teaching methods as well as new ideas in terms of content and delivery that are specific to their DE writing course and student population—resources they can take into the classroom to apply to these students whom they want to better understand. Finally, technology can be considered a binding link connecting aspects of instructors' needs to understand their student population with aspects of skills and resources with which they can approach the classroom. Effective PD that addresses specific technology needs could empower instructors with improved skills that they can in turn teach to their students as technology continues to rapidly evolve and digital literacy skills continue to grow indispensable to higher education.

Participants and Technology

Relevant to the second research question—which pertains to why participants might engage in self-directed, social-media base PD—all participants indicated that they

had experience with technology and online learning and taking and/or teaching online classes. This breadth of experience suggests that they had history in this manner with both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study as the nature of many online classes involves both a CoP of learners with common ground. Furthermore, as message boards and online forums often constitute a large part of online course content, the interviewees most likely engaged and learned through social constructivism. This experience suggests that they are among one-out-of-two adults in the US who are more *digitally ready*, defined as Horrigan (2016b) as having a "high demand for learning and use a range of tools to pursue it—including, to an extent significantly greater than the rest of the population, digital outlets such as online courses or extensive online research" (p. 4). Furthermore, all participants in the demographic survey and therefore the interviewees disclosed having a formal education of at least one master's degree, having access to technology assets such as computers and internet at home, and considering themselves to be lifelong learners, all of which correspond with Pew Center research underscoring such demographics of those more disposed to digital learning (Horrigan, 2016a).

Furthermore, all participants in this study indicated experience with such social-media affordances as online resource sharing and with seeking out information online, for both personal and professional growth. This experience further corresponds with Pew Center research implicating the participants as being part of the half of US adults who are motivated to become involved with personal learning activities and are more likely to engage in learning through the use of digital tools (Horrigan, 2016b). In addition, participants' willingness and experience with self-directed information-seeking and personal/professional enrichment corresponds further with their self-identification as

lifelong learners (Horrigan, 2016a). All participants in the demographic survey also disclosed having SM accounts—with such social media platforms as Facebook and Twitter—with membership in at least one SMIG, and many with membership in at least one for professional purposes. Such SM and SMIG membership aligns with literature positing such as a widening avenue for information sharing for educational topics (Britt & Paulus, 2016; Eteokleous et al., 2012; Terlemez, 2015). Furthermore, SM and SMIG membership underscore the CoP conceptual framework in that SMIGs usually exist with membership criteria for a certain theme, such as instructors of DE writing. In addition, such online group forums usually exist for the specific purpose of communication among members and socially constructed learning.

While participants' technological fluency, experience with formal online learning as well as with online information and resource sharing for personal and professional enrichment, and identification as lifelong learners suggests *why* they might have or might be willing in the future to participate in self-directed SM-based PD, most either did not have much or any experience nor were enthusiastic about online networking and participating in online discussion groups. This negative perception could indicate that group- and/or social-oriented online interaction might not result in beneficial learning outcomes for some participants of the study. Not all interviewed participants seemed in consensus with a group-learning dynamic, which predicates the social constructivist theoretical framework which houses this study. For example, four of the five participants disclosed having very limited if any experience with online networking, and in terms of online discussion groups, only one interviewee disclosed positive perceptions while two disclosed negative perceptions and the remaining two had very little experience in this

category. This sentiment carried over into their general perceptions of CoP-based learning, including social-media-based learning—at least in terms of disparity of opinions. All five indicated that CoP-based learning might lead to possibly beneficial professional learning experiences; however, they all cited the necessity of motivation and investment by those practitioners involved in CoP-based PD delivery for such beneficial professional learning experiences to occur. In terms of SM-based PD, which can incorporate elements of CoP-based group learning, the five interviewees were split in their opinions. While two interviewees mentioned positive aspects of such, two mentioned negative impressions, while one remained ambivalent due to lack of experience with the notion of SM-based professional learning.

The diversity and range of interviewee perceptions of CoP as well as social-media-based learning mirror the literature to a certain extent. On one side of scholarship pertaining to CoP-based learning, Maher (2020) stated that "social interactions are an important part of learning" (p. 93) while Bickerstaff & Charavin (2018) reminded that "not all part-time faculty want additional connection" (p. 8), citing the attractiveness of part-time, adjunct positions to experienced teachers for the expressed purpose of limited engagement. An interesting irony emerged pertaining to participants' perceptions of CoP and group-based interactive learning—the interviewees who didn't favor such method of learning still subjected their students to it in DE writing courses. However, the implications of such are beyond the scope of this study. Regardless, scholarship suggested evidence of benefits pertaining to PD that involve collaboration and engagement among professional learning community participants (Hirsh & Killion, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). More specific and relevant to the population of this

study, research indicated positive results in terms of pedagogical learning and high levels of engagement for faculty of DE in both English and math who participated in PD involving an online CoP (Khoule et al., 2015).

Regardless, just as with CoP- and group-based learning, interviewees shared the same disparity of opinions regarding the notion of social-media as an avenue of PD. In the past ten years, SM has morphed into a versatile and virile chariot for information gathering and dissemination in different professions and domains (Hruska & Maresova, 2020). Furthermore, research indicated beneficial learning outcomes concerning educators' professional social-media experiences, citing positive impacts upon teaching skills as well as student learning benefits (Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). In addition, the use of SM to achieve professional growth through CoPs that promote social-constructivist interactions has yielded beneficial implications from research for supporting teacher development (Alhamami, 2013; Britt & Paulus, 2016; Cochrane & Narayan, 2013; Elliot et al., 2010; Evans, 2015; Goodyear et al., 2014; Kabilan, 2016; Lewis & Rush, 2013; Moreillon, 2015; & Trust, 2012). However, while social-constructivist learning within a CoP of learners constitute the frameworks that predicated this study, not all interviewees felt comfortable with such manner of group-based interactive learning.

Regardless of the research, only two out of the five interviewees disclosed positive perceptions of SM-based PD, citing the benefit of being able to find specific content and to transfer ideas easily and across geographic expanse. Therefore, only a minority of participants perceptions of both CoP-based learning and social-media-based PD aligned with the afore-cited scholarship. However, the participants talked about

motivation as a factor. While participants unanimously indicated that they perceived effective PD resulting in teacher benefits would positively impact student outcomes—though that perception was not specific to self-directed, SM-based PD—they indicated that CoP-based group learning and interaction through SM as a means of professional enrichment could work well, for the right person. They indicated that such manner of PD could be effective for learners who were passionate, engaged, and motivated to learn through online social constructivist interactions. These perceptions varieties of perceptions toward group-based learning and social-media as a means of PD could correspond to research positing that individuals with high levels of personality extraversion have more of a propensity as active online SM users (Hruska & Maresova, 2020).

Implications and Recommendations

One implication of these findings was that—according to the results of this study and subsequent alignment with current research and scholarship—to successfully develop as teachers, instructors required content-specific PD to enhance their teaching skills, better understand the needs of their students, and stay current with relevant technology and skills. Furthermore, participants of this study seemed confident and concise in diagnosing PD needs that could benefit them as teachers and therefore bolster positive student learning outcomes. Participants also indicated that institution-provided PD was not always content-specific and relevant to them as instructors of DE writing. This could imply a disconnect in terms of institutions' understanding the PD needs of faculty members. A rather large assumption could be that this disconnect might continue up the organizational pyramid, that disconnects regarding effective practitioner PD that can

positively affect student outcomes might also exist between districts and their respective institutions, and between districts and the level of state legislature. Therefore, the first recommendation stemming from this study is that needs assessments should be conducted along all levels of the higher education pipeline, not only for the consideration and benefit of instructors in terms of PD needs but also for the support and resources needed by institutions and districts to make such possible. This recommendation aligns with current scholarship urging the same (Bickerstaff & Charavin, 2018; Bickerstaff & Xiaotao Ran, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, this recommendation supports this study's CoP conceptual framework in that needs assessments should specifically target groups of educators bound by genre, such as the target population of this study—adjunct instructors who have taught DE writing at Texas community colleges.

Another implication is that though the literature cited CoP experiences as beneficial to teacher PD, both in face-to-face workshops or classes as well as in online environments, not everyone felt comfortable in an interactive group context. Furthermore, while all of the practitioners interviewed evidenced aspects of the digital literacy skills beneficial to such online learning as SM could afford, not all were comfortable with SM as a means toward PD. Regardless, all participants in the interviews as well as the demographic survey identified as lifelong learners, and the interviewees disclosed rich personal and professional histories with lifelong learning. This could imply that though practitioners could have been savvy enough to network, exchange ideas and resources, and seek out relevant content-specific information, they did not consider doing so on SM platforms as a form of professional learning, even though they might have been

doing it anyway. Regardless, as a second recommendation from this study, institutions should consider myriad and flexible means for practitioners to satisfy PD requirements, including such delivery methods as face-to-face and online workshops, self-paced modular options, and self-directed, SM-based learning. Requiring a PD portfolio for semester review and providing a stipend for fulfillment could be a potential solution for practitioners who prefer remote, self-paced delivery and non-social-constructivist learning, and it could utilize free online platforms of information and resource exchange, such as SM, among other avenues. While the CoP conceptual framework and social constructivism theoretical framework predicated this study, the findings have shown that a variety of PD offerings could benefit both those practitioners who desire interactive, group-based learning as well as those who do not desire such.

A third implication of this study pertains to funding. Regardless the delivery and formality of PD, if such is an institutional requirement, then adjunct faculty should be compensated for their efforts outside of the classroom to professionalize for the betterment of the student. The literature stresses as an effective practice the compensation of adjunct faculty at community colleges for their PD efforts (Bickerstaff & Charavin, 2018; Bickerstaff & Xiaotao Ran, 2020; Guthrie et al., 2019). However, PD stipends do not manifest out of thin air; therefore, community colleges should consider allotting more money from their budget for such options. Furthermore, the state should consider funding these efforts. By budgeting money for community colleges to provide specific PD with flexible delivery and assessment frameworks, legislators could make an important difference for students in community college DE classes.

While a recommendation is that funding for PD trickle down the higher education

organizational structure in Texas, the reality—especially in light of teacher and student needs and stresses further exacerbated by the context of COVID-19—is that funding needs to cascade rather than trickle down the organizational structure to best accommodate DE faculty and students in a timely, productive, and appropriate manner. This study’s third recommendation aligns with current scholarship, that to accommodate the PD needs of adjunct instructors of DE, funding be increased at the state, district, and institutional levels for the specific purpose of positively impact the learning outcomes of students placed into DE (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hirsh & Killion, 2009; Martirosyan et al., 2017).

A final implication from the findings of this study relates to the difficulty in assessing the success of PD in terms of teacher benefits and therefore student learning outcomes. Regardless of myriad initiatives in community colleges and other IHEs geared toward scaffolding academic success and matriculation of students placed into DE courses, great difficulty rests in concisely measuring ever-changing student demands and therefore ever-changing teacher PD needs (Hagedorn & Kuznetsova, 2016; Henry & Stahl, 2017). Furthermore, while an assumption purports that beneficial PD—which can improve faculty teaching skills and help them to better understand the cognitive and non-cognitive challenges of students placed into DE courses—improves student achievement, empirical evidence lacks, as best summarized by Yoon et al. (2007), "The challenge is evaluating the gains" (p. 4). Therefore, the final recommendation from this study aligns with scholarship urging further rigorous research into the effects of content-specific PD, based on intended outcomes as a framework to better measure direct benefits to faculty and indirect benefits to students (Bickerstaff & Xiaotao Ran, 2020; Guskey & Yoon,

2009; Yoon et al., 2007).

Limitations

Utilizing the social constructivism theoretical framework and the CoP conceptual framework, the purpose of this study was to gather data in an attempt to qualitatively measure participants' perceptions of their PD needs, why they might participate in SM-based PD, and what they think could be the outcomes of SM-based PD. However, what developed beyond such and became possibly more important was the COVID-19 context in which the data gathering took place, which I did not plan. The data-gathering process and the COVID-19 context were purely coincidental. However, this coincidence made this research study emergent and adaptive as well as stand out as qualitative capitol due to the fortuitous COVID-related findings. As mentioned in the previous chapter of this document, the IRB at TXST approved the study on March 30, within 2 weeks of COVID-related gubernatorial stay-home orders and six weeks after the dissertation committee approved the proposal. Therefore, the interviews occurred within four months of the COVID-19 as participants joined the multitude of faculty members across Texas in transitioning from brick-and-mortar classroom-based to online teaching and learning half-way through the semester in response to a viral pandemic that stretched to the end of 2020 and could possibly continue considerably into 2021 (Houle, September 7, 2020). As a result, the participants of this study disclosed their perceptions about online-based learning and their PD needs at a significant point in higher education history, and therefore the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent shift to online learning inevitably skewed the scope of this study. However, the data that emerged became accidentally more timely and more applicable to the current context of the PD needs of

faculty who are part-time faculty at Texas community colleges. As such, the implications of the findings and recommendations from this study would be flawed without consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic and Spring 2020 mid-semester shift to online learning.

Due to COVID-19, teachers in this nation and many other countries throughout the world have endured a shift to such delivery methods as fully online or hybrid models—often involving videoconferencing to support teaching and learning—midway through the Spring and Fall 2020 semesters in the face of the disruptive pandemic and consequential quarantine (Burke, L., November 17, 2020; Maher, 2020; Reimers et al., 2020). Literature suggests that institutions, administrators, and faculty along the education pipeline continue to brace themselves to prepare for an uncertain future with changes in instruction, content-delivery, and enrollment that could provide barriers to quality teaching and mentorship for students—even affecting faculty-members' sense of job security and motivation to continue in their current positions (Course Hero, November 18, 2020; Seltzer, R., September 9, 2020). The literature further suggests this type of job stress to cause burnout in faculty members and workplace satisfaction, as well as stress from trying to meet students' increasing COVID-related mental health and emotional challenges (Course Hero, November 18, 2020). The implications of the COVID-19 quarantine and subsequent shift in higher education from face-to-face to online classes further underscores PD needs for practitioners such as technology skills—to both use and to teach to students—and the gaging of students' non-cognitive demands, which COVID-19 has played Hell with like a trickster god.

Another limitation of this study regards the homogenized participant demographic

profile as a whole. Though a result of criterion sampling via an academic list-serve, all of the participants of the online demographic survey identified as White or Caucasian. Eight of the nine identified as female while one identified as male. Two of them identified the West Texas region (one for El Paso and one for Lubbock), one identified East Texas as her home, and five identified the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex as their home. Of the five interviewees—all of them confidential volunteers from the online demographic survey—all identified as female, and four identified the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex as their current home, while one identified her current home as West Texas (Lubbock).

Therefore, the collected interview data did not comprehensively and therefore adequately capture a broad snapshot of the study's target population of adjunct faculty who have taught DE writing at a Texas community college. The data did not reflect the voice and perspectives of African American nor Hispanic teachers, nor capture any regionally-based data variants that might have emerged from hypothetical participants in the Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and El Paso urban regions as well as expansive population areas like East Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. The dearth of more diverse sampling in this study could partially have been the result of the COVID-19 quarantine and consequent mid-semester shift, as such could have caused reduced participation in list-serve traffic. An amendment to this study would have been be that the online survey be disseminated more widely and for a longer period of time, until a more diverse and representative sample of interviewees accumulated.

Another limitation of the study was that none of the interviewees participated in the optional online discussion forum, which narrowed the overall timbre of potential data. While interviewees' lack of participation in the forum corroborated somewhat with their

mixed perceptions of CoP-based learning and online interaction for professional purposes, all of them expressed in their interviews that they planned to participate in the online forum but didn't. Of the three data collection methods employed in this study, the optional online forum represented both frameworks. Conceptually, the interviewees represented a CoP, and participation in the optional online forum would have reflected the interactive communication that represents the social constructivism theoretical framework. Their non-participation possibly could have been influenced by COVID-imposed stresses and time constraints. Regardless, the online discussion forum was optional for the interviewees who all volunteered to participate in the study without tangible reward. Another amendment to this study would be some manner of financial compensation to participants upon completion of the online discussion forum stipulations.

Conclusion of Discussion

Positive student learning outcomes matter, and that is why PD exists, for practitioners to not only develop professionally but also to lift their students into academic success and matriculation. For many adjunct instructors of DE writing and educators across the higher education spectrum, we have in our lifetimes witnessed science fiction turn into more than just reality—we've experienced technological progress become necessary. Not only do we currently interface with students who don't know of a world before Smart Phones, but soon we will interface with such a student population whose parents don't know of a world without the internet—and the rotary dial telephone was the standard technology in most homes in the United States a mere seven presidential administrations ago. Students, technology, and ensuing pedagogy change continually.

Somewhere around the fifth century BC, the ancient Greek, pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus posited that a man could not step in the same river twice—that by the second stepping, he was a different man, and the river was a different river. His student, Cratylus, clarified the parable further, that a man could not step in the same river once, for the man and the river continually change and never resemble the point of origin. Two and a half thousand years later, no other metaphor could be further than the truth. Teaching methods change, student challenges change, and technology changes—continuously. Even the COVID virus evolves into different strains as we as the world itself braces for a future wrought with uncertainty. Quality and beneficial PD, regardless of delivery method, can ease and accommodate students' transition into higher education as students' affective, non-cognitive, and emotional challenges as well as the context of hyper-evolving technology continue to assume the pole position in the race toward success for students placed into DE courses.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. What region do you currently teach in? (Dallas, Ft. Worth, Austin, San Antonio, Houston, El Paso)
2. What race do you identify as?
3. What gender do you identify as?
4. What is your educational background?
5. Do you consider yourself a lifelong learner?
6. How many institutions of higher education do you currently teach at? (adjunct and full-time)
7. Are you employed outside of your position as a CC adjunct in DE writing?
8. Are you currently seeking or do you plan to seek in the future full-time employment as a DE writing teacher?
9. How many hours per week do you estimate that you spend commuting to the institution or multiple institutions that you work for?
10. Do you have access to internet technology at home?
11. Do you have access to internet technology at the CC you teach at?
12. Are you a member of at least one social media platform? (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Linked-In, et cetera)
13. How many social media special interest groups (SMIGs) do you estimate that you belong to?
14. How many SMIGs that you are a member of pertain to your career in higher education?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What factors might motivate you to participate in PD?
2. What is your understanding of current DE innovations? Please talk about all innovations in DE that you know about and understand.
3. What experience do you have as a community college adjunct instructor in DE writing?
4. What would you say are your PD needs as a CC adjunct of DE writing?
5. What do you perceive to be the needs of students placed into DE writing courses at community colleges?
6. How do you perceive PD could affect you as a teacher of DE writing at a community college?
7. How do you perceive PD experienced by you could affect the academic performance of students at community colleges placed into DE writing courses?
8. What is your experience with self-directed learning as an adult?
9. How do you perceive your abilities, fluency, or challenges in terms of technology use? In terms of digital learning?
10. What is your experience with digital literacy and learning? [ROL_INTRO]
11. What experience do you have with online information and resource sharing?
12. What experience do you have with online networking?
13. What experience do you have with online discussion groups?
14. How often do you engage in social media? Please describe your weekly social media activity.

APPENDIX C: ONLINE FORUM QUESTIONS

WEEK 1

MONDAY

What PD activities have you participated in during the past year?

THURSDAY

What challenges have you experienced as a community college adjunct instructor in DE writing?

WEEK 2

MONDAY

What do you think the role of the CC should be in terms of PD for adjunct instructors in DE writing? How have CCs you've worked for as an adjunct supported your PD needs?

THURSDAY

What do you think about self-directed, online, social-media-based learning as an avenue for faculty PD?

WEEK 3

MONDAY

What was your best PD experience as a community college adjunct instructor of DE writing? What was your worst?

THURSDAY

What would be your ideal PD experience?

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