

DISSERTATION

FROM INDUSTRY TO THE CLASSROOM: CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION  
FACULTY EXPERIENCES IN THE COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### FROM INDUSTRY TO THE CLASSROOM: CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FACULTY EXPERIENCES IN THE COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

This dissertation presents a constructivist grounded theory study that explored the workforce to teaching transition experiences of career and technical education (CTE) full-time faculty in the Colorado Community College System. The study examined how new CTE faculty in the system conceptualize the role of teacher, the hindering and supportive factors faculty experienced during their transition from industry to education, and the professional development experiences they had that impacted their transition. The research resulted in a theory titled becoming faculty that articulates actionable ways to support new CTE faculty in building supportive interpersonal networks, learning the culture of academia, and finding their voice as practitioners. The dissertation consists of five chapters. The first outlines the impact of CTE faculty on local economies and the training of future workforce members. Additionally, it describes the need for further scholarship on this population of higher education faculty, who come to teaching with a wealth of industry experience but potentially little to no educational expertise. The second chapter summarizes and synthesizes the current literature on CTE faculty development. The following themes from the literature are explored: (a) characteristics of those who transition to teaching from industry, (b) conceptualization of the teaching role, (c) socialization into the culture of higher education, (d) faculty professional development, and (e) teaching practices. The third chapter articulates the methodology, including the constructivist grounded theory design with a conceptual framework incorporating elements of constructionism

and organizational sensemaking. The third chapter also provides details of the methods, including the recruiting approach, data collection and analysis processes, and participant profiles. Chapter four presents the findings organized by the research questions. The findings include an articulation of the following themes: experimentation with instructional strategies, personalization of inherited curriculum, faculty experiences as students, interpersonal connections, navigating bureaucracy, the culture of academia, faculty connections to workforce, and the importance of giving faculty time to develop and flexibility in professional development. Chapter five provides a discussion of the data interpretations, including a synthesis of the findings across all research questions. The conclusions presented include how CTE faculty transitioning to community college teaching from industry need: opportunities to build a network of supportive colleagues, respect for the expertise they bring from the workforce, clarity about the institutional systems and culture they are entering, and differentiated supports. The chapter also details implications and recommendations for practice, including a full articulation of the becoming faculty grounded theory that was constructed from this research. The becoming faculty theory identifies three key ways for new CTE faculty in the Colorado system to thrive in their transition to higher education, including (a) the space to build their village through connections with colleagues, (b) opportunities to learn the college, specifically in relation to culture and bureaucracy, and (c) supports to find their voice in the classroom as confident educators.

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## DEDICATION

To Ben, Teddy, and Lu of course

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

It was an exciting moment. My first official strategic planning meeting with the new director of the Law Enforcement Academy (LEA) at the community college where I serve as an academic dean. The date was May 24, 2022, the day before the second anniversary of George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. This meeting was going to set the vision for how our institution would train future officers in a way that ensured our graduates would make the world of community policing better.

I took on the role of academic dean in 2021, and as a lifelong Quaker passionate about equity issues, LEA was a program I inherited that gave me concern. The state of policing in the United States weighed heavily on me then and now. Within a year of my promotion to dean, our LEA director decided to retire, and I was tasked with finding their replacement. It was a search I took seriously. The graduates of this program would be going out into local communities as officers of the law at a time when there were cries for defunding the police from protesters and activists feeling understandable anger at police brutality. This hire, my first as a dean, was going to directly impact policing in my part of the state. I wanted to find a person who understood the awesome responsibility of their role and viewed officer training as a community endeavor, not a paramilitary effort.

After an extensive search, I found Pam<sup>1</sup>. A retired officer who suffered a job injury that forced her to leave the field before she was ready, Pam wanted to give back to the career she loved. She had extensive experience as a field training officer and a master's degrees in conflict resolution and clinical mental health. Pam told me right from the beginning that she wanted to

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<sup>1</sup> Pam is a pseudonym.

serve as the academy's director because she was determined to train future officers to do the job right, which for her meant ethically with a focus on community-based policing. Stories of people being abused and murdered at the hands of law enforcement officers made her angry and all the more committed to ensuring our academy would be the best of the best, where future officers learned to wield the power they were given with a sense of responsibility and care. Pam was the industry expert I needed to lead the work of transforming law enforcement training at the college.

When we met for our strategic planning meeting, Pam had been at the college for almost three weeks. She spent that time reviewing course materials, meeting the part-time instructors, and most importantly, connecting with stakeholders in the communities whose officers we train. She came into our meeting with a strong sense of purpose about what this program needed to revise and how she could use her role at the college to advocate for policing changes across the state. It was a relief to know the academy would be in such capable hands. And then came the question. Pam looked me in the face and told me not to be disappointed in her lack of knowledge, but could I please help her understand how to write a lesson plan.

As an educator for over two decades, it was a moment of realization. I had made one of the best hires in my career, and I missed the important step of making sure that this industry expert, who is charged with ethically training police officers with life and death power over community members, had the support she needed to be an effective classroom teacher. I had taken for granted that she would have basic instructional skills, such as writing comprehensive lesson plans with clear objectives and authentic assessments. Her teaching demonstration had been strong, but education is its own field of study. It is not appropriate to assume that effective instructional practices or an ability to navigate the culture of academia will emerge naturally for

industry experts transitioning to higher education teaching. It was at that moment I realized more support is needed for vocational community college faculty coming to higher education as a second career and more information is needed for administrators on how to successfully develop new career and technical education (CTE) faculty. The impact CTE community college faculty have on local communities is widespread, yet they are often overlooked in higher education research. They are industry experts who deserve to be taken seriously as educators, and thus, the experience they have when transitioning to teaching is worthy of understanding.

### **Background and National Landscape of Topic**

The term “essential worker” became part of the national lexicon during the COVID-19 pandemic as communities came to rely on the workforce in industries such as health care, emergency response, education, manufacturing, childcare, and transportation. In fact, the contributions of essential workers became so vital to navigating the pandemic, the United States Department of Labor inducted these workers into the Labor Hall of Fame in September 2022 as a way to honor the sacrifices they made and risks they took in a time of extreme community need (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Despite being recognized for their importance, workers in these essential industries quit their jobs in high numbers as the country moved out of the pandemic, leaving the workforce with challenging labor shortages (Bhattarai, 2022; Ferguson, 2022; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2022). Community college CTE programs are well-positioned to address these labor shortages in vital industries. With open-admissions policies, lower tuition costs than four-year institutions, and defined pathways for students to earn vocational credentials, community colleges are being called on to meet this community need (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.a), 66% of the 1.4 million post-secondary occupational education

credentials conferred in the 2016-2017 academic year were completed at two-year, public institutions. Jacoby (2021) conducted a survey of community college students in for-credit and non-credit programs and found that 54% of respondents were enrolled in vocational programs with the intent of developing skills they could use in job settings. Research indicates that higher education graduates who earn a CTE credential are more likely to be employed and work in their field of study than graduates who earn an academic credential (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Additionally, community colleges serve as an important point of entry into higher education for minoritized populations. For example, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (2019; 2021), two-year, public institutions: (a) serve 54% of all Hispanic-identifying higher education students with children, (b) have seen enrollments of students of color rise above White student enrollments, and (c) enroll more female than male students. Magloire (2019) described the open-access missions of community colleges as leading to student bodies that “often come from varying ethnicities, language skills, ages, motivation levels, academic abilities, and socioeconomic statuses. They also have diverse goals, needs, and domestic living situations” (p. 166). Thus, CTE faculty at community colleges have a direct impact on the local economies in which they live and are positioned to support positive outcomes for underserved students.

Federal and state governments recognize the integral role community colleges play in workforce training. During the first years of his presidency, Joe Biden proposed a \$12 billion investment in community colleges to address infrastructure, eliminate education deserts, increase equity efforts, and promote partnerships that build job-training programs (U.S. Archives, 2021). Additionally, former First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, a long-time community college educator, is an

outspoken advocate for public, two-year schools, calling for tuition-free access for the institutions she describes as “our most powerful engine of prosperity” (PBS News Hour, 2021, para. 11). In 2023, the Colorado state government enacted the Career Advance Colorado initiative which put \$38.6 million into fully funding tuition, fees, and materials costs for CTE community college students in high-need programs including law enforcement, education, construction, nursing, and allied health fields (Colorado Governor Jared Polis, 2023).

It should be noted that at the time of the writing of this dissertation it is unclear what effect the current Trump administration’s actions toward higher education in general will have specifically on community colleges. Organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees are issuing regular updates and responses to these actions, which are being enacted faster than the speed of the research in this dissertation (American Association of Community Colleges, 2025; Warick-Smith, 2025). However, during his first term, Trump issued an executive order about the importance of workforce development and vocational education, signaling, at least at that time, a commitment to the kinds of educational programs community college’s serve (U.S. Archives, 2018).

Despite the acknowledged importance of CTE community college programs, limited research attention is paid to the faculty who teach in them. There are entire higher education programs devoted to training pre-service teachers for the k-12 system, and professors in general education disciplines can gain experience teaching while attending graduate school. Yet little attention is paid to what kinds of support are needed by individuals hired for their content and workforce expertise when they find themselves in the role of educator. Literature about higher education faculty development tends to focus on four-year school settings, faculty workloads

across different institutions, or what administrators think faculty members need (Eddy, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). Murray's (2013) review of 14 books on college faculty, published between 1998 and 2013, found that only nine included a discussion of community college faculty. Of those nine books, only three devoted more than 5% of their pages to community college faculty. What literature does exist on CTE faculty at community colleges, articulates that the workforce experience they are required to have does not automatically translate into the ability to employ effective instructional strategies once in the classroom (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021, Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Wakely, 2021). Understanding which factors support or inhibit community college CTE faculty as they transition from industry to teaching will contribute to the effective development of those faculty.

This dissertation explores how full-time CTE community college faculty make the transition from industry to the classroom, which can inform how to prepare new CTE faculty to engage in responsive, effective instructional practices and successfully navigate the systems of academia. Higher education needs content experts – the ones that have achieved true mastery in their field and can contribute to educating the next generation of workforce experts. However, too often, CTE faculty at community colleges are on-boarded by covering the technicalities of the job such as syllabi requirements, college HR policies, and legal expectations. What makes quality, responsive, equitable teaching is minimally emphasized, if at all. Yet teaching is the primary role of these individuals and is at the heart of what they do at community colleges. Additionally, individuals coming from work cultures different than what is found in higher education can find the shift challenging (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2014). Due to the lack of research on this important

population, I sought to contribute to the scholarship through an exploration of this topic from the perspective of the faculty members themselves, by asking: (a) how these faculty make meaning of the role of teacher in a higher education institution, (b) what forces these faculty face that contribute to and hinder their transitions from workforce to the classroom, and (c) how faculty describe their professional development experiences during this transition.

### **Statement of Problem**

CTE community college faculty are directly responsible for training future workforce members in industries on which communities rely at institutions that are well-positioned to serve minoritized students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019; American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). However, despite their impact on local communities, there is limited scholarship on the experiences of CTE community college faculty who make the transition from industry experts to classroom practitioners. This lack of scholarship leads to limits on understanding how to support these faculty in becoming effective teachers and members of the higher education community.

What limited research exists on CTE community college faculty development points to new faculty coming to the institutions with both industry expertise and a humble desire to learn how to be a successful teacher (Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Olson & Einwohner, 2001; Wagner et al., 2021) only to discover their previous careers did not prepare them for the culture of academia or the realities of teaching (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006; Santoro, 2011; Wagner et al., 2021). Assuming new CTE community college faculty will naturally develop skills and strategies for the classroom too often leaves them engaged in a process of trial and error with mixed results at best (Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). Additionally, these faculty come to

higher education with a workforce perspective, and the culture and demands of academia can create challenges to which they are unaccustomed (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2014). While CTE community college faculty bring many skills from industry with them, as well as an enthusiasm for the role of teacher, they are not likely to have graduate school teaching experience, and thus education could be entirely new to them (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021, Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011). To capitalize on their strengths and ensure they have the support needed to effectively serve students in the classroom and navigate the world of academia, additional research is needed to explore what factors support and hinder the onboarding and development of CTE community college faculty as they transition from industry practitioners to teachers.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of new CTE community college faculty who have made the transition from workforce to classroom practitioners. A constructivist grounded theory design was employed and data was collected through semi-structured interviews with new CTE community college faculty in the Colorado Community College System. They were asked to describe their transition from industry to higher education and their development as teachers. During data analysis active coding was used and the role of researcher in constructing understanding was explored. The result was the construction of a theory that can aid in the creation of effective onboarding and development approaches for new CTE community college faculty. The theory, titled becoming faculty, addresses three ways to support faculty through the establishment of peer networks, opportunities for faculty to learn and help shape the culture of higher education, and professional development that addresses impactful practices for teaching adults.

## **Significance**

The results of this study can support understanding of (a) how CTE community college faculty make the transition from industry to the classroom, (b) what professional development experiences they find helpful, and (c) the factors that influence their transition. Such understanding will help administrators provide support to these faculty to ensure they become effective classroom teachers. For community college faculty, teaching is a main job responsibility and those in the CTE disciplines have a direct impact on the future workforce. Results of this study can inform community college administrators on what kinds of support CTE faculty need in order to translate their industry expertise and experience into effective and inclusive teaching strategies that will ultimately impact the students in these important vocational programs. Additionally, results can help administrators identify and break down challenges for new CTE community college faculty. The results of this research can have a direct impact on CTE faculty onboarding, development, and retention programs at community colleges.

## **Research Questions**

The questions asked in this study are:

1. How do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system develop understandings about what it means to be a teacher in a higher education setting when transitioning to the role from a workforce career?
2. What hindering and supportive forces do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system experience when transitioning from industry to higher education?
3. In what ways do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system describe their professional development as they transition(ed) from industry specialists to higher education teachers?

## **Conceptual Framing**

This dissertation employed the frameworks of constructionism and organizational sensemaking. Both frameworks are rooted in interpretive epistemology where the researcher seeks to explore a phenomenon through the understanding and perceptions of the participants (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Bogna et al., 2020; Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Churchman & King, 2009; Degan, 2018; Denicolo et al., 2016; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Jones et al., 2014; Steinbauer et al., 2015). A blended framework applying both constructionism and organizational sensemaking worked well with the grounded theory approach of this study because both focus on how individuals create understandings of phenomena which can lead to the construction of a relevant theory to help others through the process of meaning making.

### **Constructionism**

Constructionism focuses on how individuals construct personal understandings of a novel event or phenomenon through their interaction with the phenomenon and other people (Bogna et al., 2020; Cunliffe, 2008; Sabnis & Newman, 2022). The schemas, or units of understanding, that are built through the process are then used as a framework to guide how the individual will take action and make sense of the next novel event or phenomenon they encounter (Denicolo et al., 2016; Stauffacher et al., 2006; Thorpe, 2008). Thus, constructionism posits that meaning making is highly contextualized and individualized. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described constructionism as assuming “that reality is socially constructed; that is there is no single, observable reality. Rather there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (p. 9). It should be noted that constructionism is less concerned with determining factual accuracy than it is with exploring people’s personal understanding of phenomena (Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008). Because of this assumption that there are multiple interpretations of a phenomenon or

event, constructionism research recognizes the importance of the researcher in co-constructing meaning and that there is no one uniform way to “do” constructionism research (Charmaz, 2020; Denicolo et al, 2016; Peck & Mummery, 2018; Stewart, 2010).

### **Organizational Sensemaking**

Like constructionism, organizational sensemaking focuses on how individuals and groups make sense of novel experiences. Unlike constructionism, organizational sensemaking specifically explores how this meaning-making and schema-building process happens within defined institutions, where individuals are both influenced by and exert influence over the organizational culture, creating institutional identity (Kezar, 2018; Maitlis, 2005; Tan et al., 2020). Multiple researchers who explore organizational sensemaking summarize it as a process where individuals within an organization who are encountering a new phenomenon will ask themselves: (a) what is happening, (b) what does it mean, and (c) what do I do next? (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Erbert, 2016; Moher et al., 2019; Tamtik, 2022; Weick et al., 2005). Individuals then seek out colleagues to help them make sense of the new experience and resolve ambiguity which leads to the creation of a shared understanding – intersubjectivity (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Erbert, 2016; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Weick et al, 2005). In this way, groups within the organization begin to write shared narratives that are in a continual state of maintenance or adjustment as institutional contexts shift (Degan, 2018; Parrish, 2023; Smerek, 2013; Steinbauer et al., 2015; Weick et al., 2005). Thus, the individual and the groups both inform and are informed by the organization’s culture and identity.

### **Blended Framework**

Constructionism and organizational sensemaking together create a meaningful theoretical framework for a study on CTE community college faculty development. As new CTE faculty

transition from industry experts to community college teaching novices they encounter myriad novel experiences from making sense of who they are as teachers to understanding the new and unique institutional culture of post-secondary academia. A constructionism lens allowed me to explore the individual schema construction new faculty experienced and an organizational sensemaking lens allowed me to explore the new faculty members' perception of their place within the broader organization and how institutional factors helped or hindered their transition to the classroom.

### **Definition of Terms**

Career and technical education refers to programs that blend academic preparation with technical skills needed for vocational career readiness (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.b). The goal of CTE programs is to provide students a formal academic framework that will lead to entry into industry settings. Examples of CTE fields are business, computing technology, early childhood education, health sciences, skilled trades (including automotive, construction, manufacturing, and welding), and visual or technical arts (such as graphic and interior design). Such programs can include short term certificates, Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees, and Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degrees. CTE faculty in the Colorado Community College System need industry experience to be qualified to teach (State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education, 2023). Most community college CTE programs are focused on certificate and AAS options, with some schools now offering bachelor's degrees in specific occupational areas. For the purpose of this research, CTE is used interchangeable with vocational education.

The term faculty in this study refers to individuals within the Colorado Community College System who are employed full time to teach in a discipline. Some faculty in this study

also have job responsibilities to oversee their program, such as ensuring it is in compliance with industry standards or Colorado state board requirements. Regardless of the level of leadership they have for their program, they are all responsible for directly teaching and assessing students.

A schema is a unit of cognitive understanding that when combined with other schemas form a framework for mentally organizing knowledge and creating meaning (Spielman et al., 2014). As individuals engage with novel experiences, they seek to make sense of them. Schemas are the resultant units of understanding that are constructed during interactions with others, the environment, or phenomena.

Intersubjectivity is the relationship among people's cognitive understanding. It is a new, shared form of understanding that emerges through social interactions as individuals make collective meaning of novel situations, experiences, and phenomena (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010).

### **Positionality**

My interest in CTE community college faculty development is rooted in a passion for teacher preparation and commitment to the open-access mission of two-year public schools. As a former k-12 educator and professor of education at the community college level, I have first-hand knowledge and experience of the role CTE faculty play in workforce development.

Additionally, my area of content expertise is in teacher development, and I have a strong sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that I have helped facilitate careers for educators at all levels. My philosophy of education is built upon the tenets of social constructionism, and a personal belief in the importance of lived experiences and multiple understandings of a phenomenon. Thus, a conceptual framework rooted in constructionism and organizational sensemaking allowed this research to explore meaning making for me and the participants.

In my current position as the academic dean of social sciences at the largest community college in Colorado, I recognize my title and role come with authority and power over faculty. Engaging in a methodology that allowed me to co-construct theory with the participants meant the resultant becoming faculty grounded theory is something that can apply directly to my practices. While not directly related to the topic of my proposed study, my social identities inform my passion for the community college mission. I am a White, cisgender female who comes from a low socio-economic background, but is now firmly in the middle class. Additionally, I am a first-generation college student and a member of the Religious Society of Friends, a religion that centers equity and social justice. Education was my pathway to economic mobility, and I believe in open-access to higher education. I acknowledge that my positions of privilege as well as my personal history and core values are carried into all my endeavors. To ensure my perspective and position did not overshadow the voices of the participants, I practiced a high level of reflexivity, including keeping a reflective journal and engaging in intentional member checking.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Beyond this initial chapter providing an introduction, chapter two provides a comprehensive literature review of my topic, and chapter three describes the participants and research methodology. Chapter four summarizes the findings and chapter five provides a discussion of the interpretations, implications, and recommendations for practice including a full articulation of the becoming faculty theory.

The literature review in chapter two addresses five themes that emerged in my examination of the current research. Those themes are: (a) characteristics of individuals who transition from industry to higher education, (b) how these new faculty conceptualize the role of

teacher, teaching practices of people who make the transition, (c) the socialization process for new faculty, (d) professional development for these faculty, and (e) teaching practices of people who make the transition.

In chapter three, I provide an overview of why a grounded theory approach aligns with the purpose of this study and the research questions I posed. A full articulation of my theoretical framework demonstrates how a constructionism lens coupled with principles from organizational sensemaking theory were used to inform the data collection and analysis. I also detail my process of developing a robust set of questions for and how I conducted the semi-structured interviews. Participant profiles are included in the section. Chapter three concludes with a description of the data and a discussion of the data analysis processes.

Chapter four articulates the findings from the data, organized by research question. For question one, the chapter explores the themes of faculty experimentation with instructional strategies, faculty personalization of inherited curriculum, how faculty experiences as student inform their teaching practices, and how CTE faculty emphasize preparing students for the workforce and life. Findings for question two explore the themes of interpersonal connections new faculty build with colleagues, how new faculty navigate institutional bureaucracy, and the impact of the culture of academia on faculty transitions. For question three, the findings articulate the importance of valuing faculty connections to industry, flexibility, and having time to develop and learn on faculty professional development.

Chapter five provides a summary of the study, a synthesis of the key findings across the three research questions, and an interpretation of key findings. It also provides an overview of key findings in relation to the literature review and conceptual framework. Chapter five concludes with implications, recommendations for practice, and opportunities for future

research. The recommendations for practice are discussed within the framework of the grounded theory constructed from this study titled becoming faculty with the subcategories of building a village of support, learning the college culture, and finding an individualized voice in the classroom.

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

Community college Career and Technical Education (CTE) faculty serve a vital role in training the workforce on which local economies rely. Although CTE community college faculty are a narrow population within higher education, their impact is widespread. For example, during the 2016-2017 academic year, 68% of all post-secondary occupational education credentials earned were completed at public institutions, and 66% were completed at 2-year schools (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.a). These occupational credentials earned by students in CTE programs are shown to have a direct correlation to employment. Research indicates that higher education graduates who earn a CTE credential, such as a workforce certificate, are more likely to be employed in their field of study than graduates who earn an academic degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Thus, through their efforts to educate the workforce, CTE community college faculty are a contributing factor to the health of local economies. Additionally, community colleges serve as a path to post-secondary education for historically minoritized populations thanks to open admissions policies and lower tuition rates in comparison to four-year schools (American Association of Community Colleges, 2023). In fact, students of color enroll in community colleges at a higher rate than White students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019).

By exploring the experiences of CTE faculty who transition from industry experts to educators in a post-secondary setting, scholars can reveal how to prepare individuals to engage in the kind of responsive instructional practices that can support effective vocational education programs and serve minoritized students. Thriving communities require a healthy, well-educated workforce. Understanding how to develop the professors who provide instruction to that

workforce is an important step in ensuring strong local communities. Existing scholarship reviewed pointed to new CTE faculty using a process of trial and error or replicating teaching strategies they experienced as students (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021, Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011), without asking if such practices appropriately serve students. Thus, failing to examine how CTE community college faculty develop into classroom practitioners could result in the perpetuation of ineffective and even harmful teaching practices.

Yet the scholarship on this important population is limited. What research exists demonstrates that too often the new faculty are ill-prepared to employ effective teaching strategies, navigate the complexities of academia, and translate their workforce expertise to a new role (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wakely, 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). Research also indicates that despite all of these challenges, new CTE community college faculty enter these roles with an enthusiasm to learn and desire to take the strengths they developed in industry and apply them to the higher education institutions (Hardré, 2012; Hora & Lee, 2021; Oleson & Hora, 2014; van Dijk et al., 2022). To ensure that these strengths and enthusiasms are built upon, further scholarship is needed.

To address this need for further scholarship, this research addressed the following questions:

1. How do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system develop understandings about what it means to be a teacher in a higher education setting when transitioning to the role from a workforce career?
2. What hindering and supportive forces do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system experience when transitioning from industry to higher education?

3. In what ways do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system describe their professional development as they transition(ed) from industry specialists to higher education teachers?

To first assess what scholarship already addresses the topic of CTE community college faculty development, I explored and analyzed existing literature. To help focus the literature search and review process, I developed the following guiding question: What does the literature on higher education faculty tell scholars about full-time career and technical education community college faculty making the transition from workforce to teaching and what are the implications? Using this question as a guide throughout the process ensured I had an anchor to refer back to as I delved into my search and analysis.

### **Search and Analysis Process**

The literature on community college faculty development is limited, and consequently I needed to be creative with my searches. Beginning in 2021 and continuing through data collection, I completed searches every three to four months for book chapters and peer-reviewed articles. I accessed a variety of databases including APA PsychInfo BrowZine, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. I experimented with keywords and reviewed references cited in completed dissertations related to my topic to connect me to additional publications. A lack of scholarship specifically on the population I studied required me to broaden my inclusion criteria and review relevant articles on general education faculty at community colleges and universities. I used a variety of search terms including *community college faculty development*, *vocational faculty transitions AND community college*, *new faculty AND higher education OR community colleges*, *faculty socialization AND higher education OR community colleges*, *vocational faculty AND community colleges*, *technical education faculty development AND*

*higher education OR community colleges, post-secondary faculty development, community college faculty transitions AND career technical OR vocational.* Publications were reviewed against my inclusion criteria which were peer-reviewed, published articles or books focusing on faculty in higher education settings. There is more robust research on secondary CTE faculty development than postsecondary CTE faculty. However, I excluded books and articles addressing the k-12 system because the structures and expectations of that system are dissimilar from those found in higher education. The information in such literature does not relate well to the context of postsecondary faculty experiences. I also excluded dissertations and theses other than to review their references during my search process. After each search, I read and annotated the articles, keeping detailed notes in a literature review matrix.

In my first round of literature collection, I created a mind map of the emergent themes I discovered through my annotations and matrix. The five broad themes that emerged addressed: (a) who makes the transition from industry to teaching, (b) how they perceive the role of faculty member, (c) how they are socialized into academia, (d) what professional development opportunities are available to them, and (e) what types of teaching practices they engage with. In subsequent searches, I refined and added to my initial mind map, although the five themes I identified continued to be present in the additional literature. In this way I interacted with the material as a reader and constructed my understanding of the themes.

The existing scholarship provided foundational research for me to build upon to address the specifics of how full-time CTE community college faculty make the transition from industry to the classroom. This literature review begins with a brief overview of community college vocational education. It then explores the literature related to the five themes and concludes with

the opportunities I identified for further research. Those opportunities for further research formed the foundation of this dissertation.

### **Historical and Contemporary Understandings of Community Colleges**

The history of community colleges and workforce education in the United States begins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The first community college, or junior college, was founded in 1901 with the support of the president of the University of Chicago to create separation between the first years of higher education, which focused on teaching, and the later years, which focused on research (Drury, 2003). In 1920, the American Association of Junior Colleges, now the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), was founded to provide support to colleges offering terminal, vocational-focused degrees and credentials. By the time of the great depression, enrollment in junior colleges was experiencing a boom due to the increase in high school graduation rates and the employment crisis the world was facing (Drury, 2003).

In parallel to the early history of community colleges, workforce education became more prominent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Drury, 2003). Federal support for vocational education in the United States began in 1917 with the passage of the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Act, which provided funding for secondary CTE programs. Since then, Congress has continued to pass legislation defining and refining support for workforce education at both the secondary and post-secondary level (Association for Career and Technical Education, n.d.). According to O'Banion (2019), vocational education became a priority for the federal government during the 1970s when the United States was perceived to be losing "its competitive edge in the global marketplace" (p. 219). In response, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Career Education Act of 1976, sponsored by Representative Carl D. Perkins (O'Banion, 2019). Congress would go on to pass and reauthorize multiple pieces of legislation

named after Representative Perkins that provide financial support for CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary level (Association for Career and Technical Education, n.d.).

The historical approach of community colleges offering both CTE opportunities and preparation for transfer to universities continues to a contemporary understanding of their role in higher education. According to Harbour and Wolgemuth (2015), the dual missions of vocational and transfer preparation place community colleges in the challenging position of needing to align with the expectations of both workforce industries and universities. Although sometimes pursued as separate endeavors, researchers are giving more attention to how community colleges are aligning goals of providing a foundational education rooted in civic values while ensuring the programs offered also meet the economic workforce needs of the communities in which they are situated (Heelan & Mellow, 2017; Jones, 2016; Pura & Parker, 2022). According to the AACC (2022), community colleges have a significant impact on local and national economies. In 2020, graduates of community colleges contributed \$898.5 billion dollars to the economy and supported almost 10.7 million jobs (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022).

Two examples of higher education's alignment with workforce needs can be seen in Colorado where this research took place. In 2024, The Colorado Department of Higher Education launched two initiatives – the General Education Foundational Skills Credential and the Career Connected Campuses Designation. Community colleges in the state are encouraged to participate in both. The first initiative awards a credential to students highlighting their attainment of workforce readiness skill while they are pursuing a full degree (Colorado Department of Higher Education, n.d.a). The second awards a designation to colleges and universities that effectively embed work-based learning into academic curriculums (Colorado Department of Higher Education, n.d.b.).

Thus, the impact of community colleges and the faculty who teach at them to the local communities they serve is widespread. Additionally, a focus on connecting academic learning to workplace skills continues to grow. To ensure CTE faculty at community colleges can provide effective instruction to students who will support vocational industries it is important to explore their experiences and identify their needs as they transition from workforce practitioners to educators.

### **Who Makes the Transition to Higher Education?**

According to Townsend and Twombly (2007), the limited research on community college faculty has led to stereotypes about who teaches at these schools and why. Researchers are attempting to correct this. One area that is increasingly addressed in the literature is the discussion of the characteristics of individuals who transition from vocational industries to postsecondary education. This seems reasonable as CTE programs are more prevalent at community colleges when compared to four-year schools, and community colleges are responsible for much of the vocational training happening in the United States (Atwell et al., 2022). The literature demonstrates that the people who move from workforce to community college teaching careers tend to have similar employment backgrounds, but beyond that there is much variation in the reasons they make the transition and the path they take to get to higher education (Garrison, 2005; Jensen et al., 2006; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Sturman et al., 2011; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Who makes the transition, why they make the transition, and the path they take to get to higher education are all worthy of further examination.

### **Characteristics of Who Makes the Transition**

Because CTE faculty at community colleges are required to have workforce experience as part of their credentials, these faculty typically have years-long first careers in their vocational

area (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Garrison, 2005; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Twombly & Townsend, 2008; Wyles, 1998). However, it is interesting that the literature also noted that new faculty members' previous workforce experience did not necessarily translate to an equal or higher starting salary or position in higher education than they had in their first career, and consequently many of these faculty continue to hold some level of employment in industry (Atwell et al., 2007; Garrison, 2005; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Rojewski & Hill, 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). While new CTE faculty are more likely to have a technical credential or bachelor's degree than graduate-level degrees it is important to note that this is likely to do with the fact that many vocational subjects do not have graduate degrees available (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). In fact, in CTE subjects where graduate degrees are available, those community college faculty tend to have at least a master's level education, thus dispelling the myth that community college faculty who teach in vocational programs have a lack of education (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Faculty who hold workforce credentials regardless of what other degrees they earned are valuable to CTE community college programs as they help ensure curriculums are relevant to current industry standards and they can support employment placements for graduates (Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Twombly & Townsend, 2008; Wyles, 1998).

### **Why People Make the Transition**

Supporting the future of the industry they come from is one reason many CTE community college faculty make the transition to teaching (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Garrison, 2005; Jensen et al., 2006; Sturman et al., 2011). However, beyond that, the reasons people switch to community college teaching careers are widely varied. While there are consistent themes that emerge in the scholarship, there are too many for any of them to be considered definitive. For

example, Garrison (2005) found that many of the participants in their study moved from industry to community college teaching either because they had retired from their first career and were looking to stay active or because they wanted a more flexible work schedule than their current job in the workforce allowed. In Garrison's (2005) study, several participants articulated how having increased autonomy over their work schedule led to a decrease in stress. However, Jensen et al. (2006) noted that participants in their study spoke more about a desire to give back to their community by training the next generation of industry experts. This direct tie to a local community was a theme that emerged in some of the other literature reviewed, but was not consistent across all the scholarship (Atwell, et al., 2022; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Additionally, some studies found that new CTE faculty found joy and intellectual stimulation in working directly with students (Sturman et al., 2011). Other studies found that faculty used their teaching roles to ensure they could keep current with latest trends as automation threatened the stability of their field (Rojewski & Hill, 2017).

### **The Paths People Take from Industry to Higher Education**

Like the reasons why people make the transition from industry to vocational community college education, the paths they take to get there are also highly varied, with no one, consistent path identified in the literature. Twombly and Townsend (2008) described a lack of research attention paid to CTE community college faculty, which has led to what limited scholarship does exist to be held in comparison to university general education faculty. They posit that this is a false comparison as university and even general education community college faculty often have a direct path to teaching that starts with teaching assistant positions in graduate school (Twombly & Townsend, 2008). CTE community college faculty face a more circuitous route to academia due to ever-changing labor markets and industry credential requirements (Atwell et al., 2022;

Fugate & Amey, 2000). Their path can include being directly recruited from industry, having an overlap with a vocational career and part-time teaching opportunities before securing a full-time role, retiring from a first career, or experiencing employment instability in the field (Atwell et al., 2022; Fugate & Amey, 2000; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Rojewski & Hill, 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2000). Some of the literature reviewed illustrated that CTE community college faculty had an interest in teaching before they transitioned to education, but their negative experience as students in public school systems or higher education discouraged them from pursuing vocational education as a career path (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Harris & Zhao, 2004). The literature does illustrate that while the pathway to academia for this population is not direct, once they join the ranks of higher education, their formal career trajectory tends to follow a similar pattern to that of professors at four-year institutions – a probationary period that leads to a more permanent employment status such as tenure (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). However, a standard probationary to permanent position does not guarantee these faculty members will have a smooth transition to becoming effective teachers and navigators of higher education culture.

### **Conceptualization of Teaching Role**

Regardless of the reasons why they transition to teaching or the path they took to higher education, once they join academia, CTE community college faculty must then work toward developing their teaching skills and socializing to their new environment. The first theme that emerged from the literature on the development process is how this population of faculty conceptualize their roles as teachers (Burns, 2012; Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006; Santoro, 2011; Sprouse et al., 2008; Sturman et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2021). The literature addressed the preconceived notions new faculty carry of what it would be like to teach in higher education and how these preconceived notions create tension and confusion for individuals

transitioning to a teaching career. Higher education faculty who transition from industry often carry with them a specific perception of what the duties of a teacher are (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006; Olson & Einwohner, 2001; Wagner et al., 2021). This perception includes a sense that teaching will be less stressful than a career in industry thanks to nine-month contracts, flexible daily work schedules, and at community colleges, minimal or no research requirements (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006). Despite holding these notions about the ease of the job, the literature also demonstrated that faculty transitioning to the classroom from industry recognized that to be an effective teacher requires intentional training to develop impactful instructional strategies, which their previous career might not have prepared them for (Wagner et al., 2021). In fact, Fugate and Amey (2000) found new full-time, community college faculty readily acknowledged that teaching is more than disseminating information to learners. Their study examined both CTE and general education faculty, all of whom had been teaching at community college in a full-time capacity for less than six years. Participants in their research described teaching as “facilitating the learning processes of students, helping them to appreciate learning, exciting them with the learning process, providing avenues for students to acquire the subject matter, and heading students into a career or further education as well-prepared as possible” (Fugate & Amey, 2000, p. 6). This robust description of teaching, coupled with Olson and Einwohner’s (2001) and later Wagner et al.’s (2021) position that new community college faculty coming from industry bring a humble desire to learn how to teach and be successful in the role, illustrates how this population enters into the academy with both preconceived ideas about the scope of the work and a willingness to learn.

### **Conceptualizations That Do Not Match Actualities**

However, this willingness to learn the role of teacher did not prevent new faculty from experiencing a mismatch between expectations about higher education and the realities of the academy (Jensen et al., 2006; Santoro, 2011). According to the literature, although new CTE community college faculty understood how much they needed to learn about teaching despite their extensive workforce expertise (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Wagner et al., 2021), it was not necessarily enough to prepare them for the realities of working conditions in higher education. In one of the earliest studies examined for this literature review, Fugate and Amey (2000) focused their research specifically on full-time community college faculty. They discovered that their participants desired clearer definitions of the professional responsibilities for their new roles. Later research from Jensen et al. (2006) and Santoro (2011) described a sense of shock that many new faculty members experienced when they realized the full scope of their job including course preparation, teaching, grading, service expectations, and in some institutions, research requirements. Santoro (2011) examined experiences at Australian schools, but their findings were similar to what Jensen et al. (2006) saw earlier at institutions in the United States. Faculty who anticipated more autonomy and less stress than what they experienced in industry were surprised to realize the challenges of working with students with myriad needs, learning to balance different job expectations, and negotiating the high level of accountability in higher education. In short, the job was more complicated than they first thought. This process of reconciling expectations with realities illustrates one aspect of how faculty coming from industry “become” higher education teachers.

### **Growing Into the Role and Refining Conceptualizations**

One consistent point in the research is that the paths people take to become faculty at community colleges is unique and individualized (Garrison, 2005; Jensen et al., 2006; Leslie &

Gappa, 2002; Sturman et al., 2011; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). In contrast to faculty who teach at four-year schools, community college faculty members rarely describe their positions as a career goal (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). As a result, community college faculty experience a different process for growing into teachers than their counterparts at four-year institutions. For example, Sprouse et al. (2008) articulated how new CTE community college faculty might not have a clear understanding of how to define teaching competence as opposed to defining competence in their industry career. They found that intentional programs to support new community college faculty through the goal setting and performance evaluation processes are effective in helping them grow into the role of teacher. However, Sprouse et al. (2008) also discovered that the implementation of such programs, even within state-wide community college systems, is often inconsistent.

Such an inconsistency can lead new faculty to rely on their technical, workforce expertise as they seek out ways to translate industry experience and connections into teaching proficiency (Wagner et al., 2021). The literature shows that one approach new CTE community college faculty take during their first years in a teaching role is to build curriculum around opportunities for hands-on experiences that provide practical application of theory, thus connecting their teaching directly to their previous roles in industry (Burns, 2012; Fugate & Amey, 2000; Wagner et al., 2021). The other aspects of higher education work, such as service, are left to later years after new faculty spend their initial years on developing curriculum and experimenting with different instructional strategies (Fugate & Amey, 2000).

Throughout this process of becoming a teacher, new CTE community college faculty refine and adjust their conceptualization of what it means to be in the role. An understanding of this evolving conceptualization is vital to supporting the development of this population of

educators. By understanding what these individuals think a faculty member is or should be, administrators can design and implement targeted professional development to help CTE professors grow into the role and better serve students. Yet the literature on conceptualization of teaching is lacking. What research does exist about community college faculty tends to address conceptualizations of teaching as a tangent (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Sprouse et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2021). Additionally, other research on how faculty who come from industry view teaching tends to focus on four-year institutions (Burns, 2012; Jensen et al., 2006; Santoro, 2011). Consequently, this research sought to capitalize on an opportunity to explore the unique perceptions of full-time, CTE faculty in a community college setting about how they understand their teaching role. Such scholarship can provide important insights to college leaders on ways they can support a group of teachers who are providing vital instruction to tomorrow's workforce.

### **Socialization**

Conceptualization of the role of teacher is only one aspect of the transition from industry to higher education for CTE community college faculty. Socialization to the academy is another major theme that emerged from the literature (Bickerstaff & Chavrín, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mitic et al., 2024; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wakely, 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). A focus on CTE community college faculty is highly limited for this particular theme. Yet what literature does address this population illustrates that aspects of socialization to academia for CTE faculty are shared across faculty populations in higher education. Therefore, there is much that can be extrapolated from the broader literature on post-secondary faculty socialization and is included in this section. Two topics that emerged

from the literature addressing faculty socialization are socialization challenges and socialization through trial and error.

### **Socialization Challenges**

According to the literature on higher education faculty socialization, the challenges within the process are wide-ranging and lead to anxiety, uncertainty, and stress for new faculty members (Eddy, 2010; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Wakely, 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). Challenges specifically addressed in the literature include the wide variety of needs new faculty have, the mismatch of workload expectations and realities in higher education, entering a new career as a novice with limited formal teaching experience and training in education, and navigating the culture of the institution and academia.

New faculty bring with them highly personal and contextualized socialization needs that can exist at the individual, disciplinary, and institutional levels (Wilson et al., 2014). An example of this variation in needs is a general education faculty member at a four-year institution who had graduate teaching experience versus a CTE faculty member at a community college coming from years of workforce experience. Each faculty member will have socialization needs, but they will be different (Palmer, 2002). Additionally, faculty carry with them their own personal identities which influence the socialization process. For example, the literature on new faculty who hold minoritized identities indicates that they often face more disillusionment than their colleagues who hold dominant identities (Johnson, 2001; Lindholm, 2004; O'Meara et al., 2016; Vega et al., 2010). New faculty who hold minoritized identities come to higher education with expectations about being able to build supportive relationships with colleagues and having access to career advancement opportunities that often go unmet (O'Meara et al., 2016). Another aspect of socialization illustrates that location, size, and level of urbanization of the institution can impact

the process (Cejda, 2010; Eddy, 2010; Wilson et al., 2014). For example, new CTE faculty at rural community colleges face the challenge of socializing into both the academy and the rural culture in which the college is situated, which can be especially challenging if the faculty member is moving to the institution from a more urban setting (Cejda, 2010; Eddy, 2010). According to Cejda (2010) and Wilson et al. (2014), smaller institutions might not have the same level of resources as larger schools to support an intentional socialization process.

The literature also reveals several, more universal challenges in the faculty socialization process. First, new faculty might struggle to adjust to the demands of the position expectations. Wilson et al. (2014) found that new CTE faculty coming from industry careers often enter higher education believing academia will be easier than their previous jobs in terms of workload, which turns out to be inaccurate. These faculty might be coming from an industry career that included highly structured hours and clear responsibilities defined by management. Larocco and Bruns (2006) found that it can be an adjustment for some to move to a fluid teaching schedule that might change from semester to semester. They also found that finding a balance among all the job expectations, such as service, teaching, advising, student mentoring, and grading can be a challenge for new faculty (Larocco & Bruns, 2006). Mitic et al. (2024) found that meeting the needs of diverse student populations often found at community colleges was especially challenging for new faculty who might not have the skills for working with students with minoritized backgrounds.

Beyond making sense of unexpected workloads including meeting the diverse needs of students, new CTE community college faculty also might struggle with the realization that they are novices in their new role after years of being in a career where they achieved a high level of expertise and experience. Harper-McDonald and Taylor (2020) conducted a study on nurses who

transition from health care practitioners to nursing program faculty. They found that the participants went through a grieving process where they mourned the loss of working directly with patients and the loss of status they had in their field. That loss of industry status was not unique to nursing faculty. Simendiger et al. (2000) found that new CTE community college faculty across vocational disciplines experienced similar grieving processes as they realized their previously held authority and carefully cultivated reputation did not translate to an equivalent status in higher education. In fact, Simendiger et al. (2000) also discovered cases where the industry experience of new CTE faculty was not only not recognized, but was outright rejected by other academics. Thus, new community college vocational faculty might experience disillusionment when they realize they will need to prove themselves again in a second career, which leads to struggles to learn what their new colleagues and the institution will value and reward (O'Meara et al., 2016; Simendiger et al., 2000; Smith Morest, 2015; Wilson et al., 2014).

According to the literature, this transition between a workforce culture and an academic one is a key experience for new CTE community college faculty. In addition to formal policies and rules, the academy has informal codes and expectations at the institutional, disciplinary, and interpersonal levels (Palmer, 2002; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2014). These so-called “undeclared” cultures are encountered and learned through an informal socialization process rather than being addressed in the formal onboarding systems. According to Smith Morest (2015), new faculty learn quickly what is and is not valued and accepted by the institution and their new colleagues. And O’Meara et al. (2016) found that new faculty members run the risk of disillusionment if their cultural expectations do not match reality. This disillusionment sometimes becomes the first step toward their ultimate departure from the institution or higher education overall (O’Meara et al., 2016).

## **Socialization From Trial and Error to Strategic Navigation**

For faculty who make it past disillusionment with the new culture, the literature articulated the strategies they begin to employ to engage in the socialization process and forge a path from confusion to equilibrium. The scholarship described how new faculty learn to manage different responsibilities of their new job and work through their confusion through a process of trial and error that eventually leads to more strategic navigation (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). Because employment in higher education can be more complicated than new faculty anticipate, O'Shea (2018) found that they might employ a pattern of trial and error to discover what works for them, which often starts by new faculty replicating others' teaching practices to mixed levels of success.

However, according to the literature, there are ways to move new faculty through the trial-and-error stage quickly toward a process of strategic navigation of the institutional culture. For example, Johnson (2001) articulated how the need for engagement in a trial-and-error approach is reduced when the more the informal culture matched both the formal culture and the new faculty member's pre-existing conceptions. Thus, administrators have an opportunity to seek to understand the perceptions of new faculty and be intentional about hiring practices and cultural onboarding. One strategy for onboarding is to help new faculty separate from their careers in industry. In fact, one path to strategic socialization is when new faculty stop trying to evaluate the college environment against the cultural standards of their previous workforce experience (Simendiger et al., 2000). Rather than trying to replicate what they knew in the workforce, Neumann (2012) instead described how new faculty can recognize that the strategic knowledge and skills they developed in industry now enhance their ability to make sense of the

culture of higher education. This ability to take their existing workforce knowledge and skills and adapt them to a new setting can be expedited through an intentional institutional onboarding process that includes transparency about faculty career expectations (O'Meara et al., 2016).

### ***Social Frameworks to Reach Strategic Navigation***

Additionally, Johnson (2001) described how formal and informal mentoring practices between new and senior faculty can help progress the mentees through a trial and error phase quickly. Through mentoring, new faculty can rely on advice from colleagues to effectively adjust their teaching philosophies and practices, thus surviving the trial-and-error phase (O'Shea, 2018). This is reaffirmed across the literature, which showed that building social support networks is one of the main strategies new faculty use during their initial periods of socialization (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mendoza, 2008; O'Shea, 2018; Simendiger et al., 2000).

However, the social support networks new faculty experience can vary widely. Larocco and Bruns (2006) found that new faculty built connections by serving on committees and relying on more experienced colleagues to share materials and resources. O'Shea (2018) and Simendiger et al. (2000) described additional formal socialization processes, such as intentionally engaging in collaborative work opportunities or professional development programs. Other research described how new faculty find success moving through the socialization process through informal cultural experiences such as when senior faculty offer in-the-moment advice while grabbing a cup of coffee with a new colleague (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Johnson, 2001; Mendoza, 2008). The literature described the importance of new community college CTE faculty intentionally finding opportunities to engage in informal, social ways with people at the

college rather than colleagues from industry, which allows them to embrace their new role (Simendiger et al., 2000).

It is important for new CTE community college faculty going through the socialization process to engage in social interactions with colleagues because these relationships help new faculty move through the trial-and-error period quickly and navigate the complexities of higher education (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Johnson, 2001). Hinchcliffe Dunphily (2011) found new CTE faculty experienced high levels of frustration, and sometimes departure, in situations where they were expected to develop as an effective teacher with little or no support from colleagues. Yet, the literature demonstrated there are limited formal orientation programs where new faculty can build intentional social connections at most colleges (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Hamilton, 2006). In fact, Hamilton (2006) found that administrators in higher education institutions assumed supportive, collegial social connections between new and experienced faculty would emerge organically without any formal planning. One potential way to address this incorrect assumption, and ensure that no one is excluded from making supportive social connections, is through quality, intentional professional development programs.

### **Professional Development**

Although there is a lack of literature about CTE community college faculty in the area of professional development, what research that does exist indicates intentional programming, such as mentoring, can support the transition of those moving from industry to higher education faculty members (Fugate & Amey, 2000, Garcia et al., 2021; Gauthier, 2020; Harris & Zhao, 2004; Perez et al., 2012; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Wallin & Smith, 2005). In their study of new faculty, Fugate and Amey (2000) articulated how those new to higher education viewed professional development programs as beneficial on a personal enhancement level and as a way

to orient themselves to the institution. However, Eddy (2007) found that faculty professional development at community colleges is often more random than intentional in design. This could be due in part to the fact that community colleges typically have more limited funding resources than universities, causing administrators to cut professional development programs in times when budgets are tight (Wallin & Smith, 2005). Despite that, Eddy (2010) articulated how intentional faculty development programs are ultimately a benefit to community colleges because they provide opportunities for new faculty members to engage with and take responsibility for their roles as educators. Throughout the literature on faculty professional development, three themes emerge: (a) the varying needs faculty bring with them, (b) the myriad motivations and hindering factors faculty experience in regard to engaging with professional development, and (c) mentoring as a significant example of intentional programming.

### **Professional Development Needs of New Faculty**

Across the literature, researchers identified and addressed the varying professional development needs of community college faculty (Eddy, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). Fugate and Amey (2000) described how many new faculty members come to community colleges without an education background or teaching experience. Thus, they need targeted support around instructional strategies, especially in their first few years at the college when they are establishing their teaching philosophies and styles. Fugate and Amey (2000) went on to articulate that professional development programs need to be flexible and differentiated because of the myriad backgrounds that community college faculty come from. An attempt to create a one-size-fits all approach to professional development runs the risk of failing to recognize the

unique contexts vocational community college faculty exist within, which can cause them to return to their original careers (Fugate & Amey, 2000).

Later scholarship reaffirmed Fugate and Amey's (2000) findings about the importance of professional development. For example, creating a culture of teaching excellence through advancing innovative instructional strategies, was described as a top need for new community college faculty across the research (Eddy, 2010; Jensen et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2012; Sanford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis, 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). However, how those innovative instructional strategies were defined varied. For example, Perez et al. (2012) emphasized the need for new faculty to engage with an active pedagogy where students were the primary architects of their own learning, while Strickland-Davis (2020) examined how new faculty improved their teaching skills through observing more experienced colleagues. Other researchers examined assessment practices and incorporation of new technology in the curriculum, identifying these areas as top points of struggle for new faculty (Eddy 2010; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Wallin & Smith, 2005).

One significant limitation in the literature about faculty professional development needs is that it primarily focused on what college administrators, rather than the faculty themselves, perceived the needs to be (Eddy, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Macdonald et al., 2022; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). For example, Eddy (2010) described how community college administrators identified leadership development as a need for new faculty. The study articulated the administrators' position that new community college faculty need to be developed beyond the classroom to engage in service to the college through activities like institutional accreditation and strategic planning (Eddy, 2010). Although some studies of community colleges uncovered that administrators proposed

professional development for new faculty that centered around individualized faculty needs, including helping them develop a sense of self-efficacy in the classroom, ultimately, they also called for a focus on meeting institutional needs (Eddy, 2010; Strickland-Davis, 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). I sought to add to the scholarship through my research by exploring what CTE community college faculty themselves describe as professional development needs when transitioning to higher education.

### **Motivations and Hindering Factors**

Just as professional development needs for community college faculty varied, the literature indicated that the motivations for and hindering factors of participating in professional development also varied (Gauthier, 2020; Hardré, 2012; Jensen et al., 2006; Matiba, 2024; van Dijk et al., 2022). Although Sandford and McCaslin (2004) found that personal reasons, such as fear or lack of time due to life demands, can limit faculty participation in professional development, the overall literature pointed to lack of defined, supportive institutional values and structures as the main hindering factors to engagement (Gauthier, 2020; Jensen et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2012; Sandford et al., 2007). Gauthier (2020) articulated how many administrators at community colleges do not have a background rooted in teaching in CTE programs, which leads to a lack of understanding about the unique professional development needs of this population. A lack of understanding of these unique needs can lead to professional development programs that are designed too informally, without proper release time from teaching responsibilities, or with little regard to individual CTE faculty learning approaches and which delivery formats would be the most supportive (Perez et al., 2012; Sandford et al., 2007; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Strickland- Davis, 2020; Witcher & Sasso, 2024). In some instances, Perez et al. (2012) and later Gauthier (2020) found that targeted professional development programs were not made available

to new community college CTE faculty, leaving them to learn effective teaching practices and how to navigate their institution entirely on their own.

However, the literature showed that there are colleges that effectively find ways to offer new CTE faculty quality professional development and capitalize on the faculty members motivation to engage (Hardré, 2012; Jensen et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2012; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Strickland- Davis, 2020). Because CTE faculty are necessarily connected to their previous vocational industry, Jensen et al. (2006) found that a desire to keep up with the latest workforce innovations inspired an attitude of continuous learning for these faculty. This attitude can be coupled with an institution's intentional support of quality professional development to encourage faculty engagement. The literature demonstrated that programs linked to unique faculty needs and interests, structured to respect faculty workloads through release time and flexible delivery methods, and provide faculty with constructive, continuous feedback on their development are likely to inspire engaged participation from new faculty (Hardré, 2012; Macdonald et al., 2022; Matiba, 2022; Perez et al., 2012; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004). In fact, Hardré (2012) found that even new faculty with heavy teaching loads will engage with professional development if they feel the structure of the program respects their time and provides meaningful feedback. Additionally, Macdonald et al. (2022) described how professional development designed to intentionally connect faculty with peers and illustrate their leadership skills helped faculty to feel like their contributions toward the institution's culture mattered. One potential way to structure and deliver effective, meaningful professional development for new CTE community college faculty is through mentoring programs.

### **Informal and Formal Mentoring**

The literature described informal and formal mentoring opportunities as being a key component in successful professional development programs for faculty coming to academia from vocational careers (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). The benefits of intentional mentoring programs for new community college faculty are: (a) a dedicated person is able to act as a guide and resource for new faculty as they transitioned to teaching, (b) the mentor has the opportunity to engage in meaningful service to the college, and (c) it creates interpersonal connections among the mentor, mentee, and other people on campus (Reynolds et al., 2022). For community college faculty of color, these connections can be the difference in whether or not they remain in higher education beyond the first few years. Vega et al. (2010) found mentoring provided a pathway for faculty of color at community colleges to support career advancement, which contributed to their retention in higher education. Intentional mentoring can take shape according to the needs of the participants, which means it can be accomplished through either formal or informal approaches.

### ***Informal Mentoring Programs***

According to the literature, informal mentoring is rooted in providing new faculty social support regarding work-life balance, accessing materials and resources, and building collaborative working relationships based on a sense of intellectual community (Larocco & Bruns, 2006; O'Meara et al., 2016). Through informal connections, new faculty are able to gain understanding of institutional expectations and learn to balance competing priorities within the job, which helps them clarify their own goals about their teaching role (Simendiger et al., 2000). It is important to note that informal mentoring does not mean unplanned or unintentional. Hopkins & Grigoriu (2005) specifically studied new community college faculty and found that the benefits of connecting to colleagues were increased when the colleges provided the pre-

planned space and time for connections to be built. Reynolds et al. (2022) posited that even informal mentoring programs need to be intentional about connecting mentees to mentors that will support their individual needs and clarify the goals of the mentoring.

### ***Informal Mentoring for Faculty of Color***

Intentional matching of mentors to mentees is especially important when addressing the needs of new community college faculty of color. Vega et al. (2010) found that while there is value in informal mentoring for new faculty of color, there is also the potential for it to contribute to a replication of existing institutional structures and cultures that are harmful to community college faculty of color, such as normative whiteness. For example, Vega et al. (2010) found that when mentees of color had no option but to work with a White mentor, due to a lack of mentors of the same race, they found themselves in situations where the mentors could not speak to the mentees' lived experience. Additionally, experienced faculty of color can face an implied expectation to serve as an informal mentor for new faculty, without consideration of compensation or workload (Vega et al., 2010).

### ***Formal Mentoring Programs***

According to the literature, one way to address shortcomings of informal mentoring programs is to establish intentional, formal ones, which are shown to have impactful psychosocial benefits for mentees (Hopkins and Grigoriu, 2005). Formal mentoring programs can maximize the benefits of collegial connections for new faculty, which are especially important for retaining and supporting faculty of color (Johnson, 2001; Vega et al., 2010). Additionally, formal mentoring can demonstrate to new faculty the path for becoming seasoned faculty members (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020). However, according to the literature there are key criteria necessary for formal mentoring programs to create long-term, sustainable

socialization for faculty. These criteria include employing a variety of ways for mentors to connect with their mentees, training mentors, providing release time from teaching for mentors and mentees, defining mentoring expectations, assessing the mentoring program, intentionally matching mentors to mentees, and finding appropriate, alternative support at institutions where faculty of color might not have mentors available that look like them (Garcia et al., 2021; O'Meara et al, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2022; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Vega et al., 2010).

Effective formal mentoring programs were found in the literature to have multiple benefits for new faculty, including a smooth socialization process, clarity about role and tenure expectations, and increased likelihood that mentees would later becoming mentors (O'Meara et al, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2022; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Vega et al., 2010). However, the literature also revealed that new community college faculty need guidance and support to effectively engage in formal mentoring, including how to build a relationship with their mentor and how to hold consistent, meaningful check-ins (Hopkins & Grigoriu, 2005). Additionally, Reynolds et al. (2022) and Hamilton (2006) articulated that once mentoring programs are established, they are often assumed to be successful, but not often verified to be so, indicating a need for further research on assessment of mentoring programs.

### **Teaching Practices**

The final theme that emerged in a review of the literature was teaching practices. Due to the lack of research specifically on community college faculty, I looked more broadly at teaching practices of new faculty with previous industry experience in higher education overall and how that experience impacted instructional approaches. Expanding the scope of the literature search to include four-year institutions uncovered two main points. The first point is how the workforce experience of the new faculty member becomes part of the classroom curriculum (Elliot &

Oliver, 2016; Hardré, 2012; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014). The second point is that industry experience and expertise does not translate automatically to effective instructional skills (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; van Dijk et al., 2022; Wakely, 2021). Overall, the literature on teaching practices is important to understand, despite its limitations. Smith Morest (2015) articulated how community college faculty are likely to spend the majority of their time engaged in teaching, which makes instructional practices, including curriculum development, a worthy topic of research.

### **Connecting Experience to the Curricula**

The literature demonstrated that new higher education faculty coming from a first career in industry will draw intentional connections between their previous experience and the new curriculum they teach (Elliot & Oliver, 2016; Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hardré, 2012; Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Simendiger, et al., 2000; Wilson, et al., 2014). In fact, the research shows that industry experience can be a significant asset to the curricula in vocational higher education programs. Fairweather and Paulson (1996) articulated that post-secondary curricula does not necessarily match what industry employers want in potential new hires. This finding was echoed later by Santoro (2011) and then Hora and Lee (2021), who all posited that industry partners would like colleges to teach not only the latest standards and innovations in a field, but also soft skills such as divergent thinking and adaptability. The literature showed that faculty with direct workforce experience can use their industry knowledge to inform their curricula through the use of relevant examples, experiential activities that mimic situations students will face post-graduation, and application of current understanding of the latest industry standards (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora &

Lee, 2021; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al, 2014). Connecting faculty workforce experience to curricula is beneficial to both students and the faculty member, according to the research. For example, the students studied in the literature reported that instructors with direct field experience and expertise are better at providing meaningful, relevant assignments and connecting abstract course concepts to applied practice (Elliott & Oliver, 2016; Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Simendiger et al., 2000). For new faculty members, their ability to connect curricula to industry helps them retain helpful connections to their previous career, maintain currency in their discipline, and solidify their identities as teachers (Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Simendiger et al., 2000). In fact, Fairweather and Paulson found (1996) that the benefits of connecting industry experience to curricula were so significant that they recommended colleges should build development programs for faculty members without the direct experience to gain some through sabbatical opportunities.

### **Industry Experience Does Not Equal Teaching Skills**

However, the literature also articulated how having industry experience does not translate automatically to effective instructional practices for new faculty (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Wakely, 2021). This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that faculty coming to teaching from a previous industry career are now at a novice level. Thus, the first years of teaching for new CTE faculty can be especially anxious as they build their pedagogical knowledge, recognizing that they are initially underprepared to teach and need to learn new skills (Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2014). For new faculty coming from successful industry careers, this can be especially challenging as teaching is not a quantifiable practice, yet it is one

they are often expected to focus on because of their relevant connections to workforce (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Smith Morest, 2015). Additionally, Thomsen & Gustafson (1997) and Hardré (2012) found that many community colleges fail to address the lack of teaching skills in new CTE faculty during the onboarding process, which leaves those faculty feeling anxious without guidance about how to succeed in their new role.

Consequently, the research described that new faculty were left to rely on their predetermined notions of effective teaching strategies which were tested through a process of trial and error (Hora & Lee, 2021; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997). These preconceived notions are based on either what the faculty member experienced themselves as a student or what the faculty member believes a college educator “should” do (Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011). Additionally, Oleson and Hora (2014) found that the process of developing sound instructional practices is not a linear one where previously-experienced approaches can simply be replicated. In fact, by relying on their predetermined notions of what it is to be a community college teacher, new faculty are not guaranteed to develop teaching strategies that support students well. Yet the literature also articulated that new CTE community college faculty are willing and eager to engage in programming that will help them develop responsive and innovative teaching practices (Hardré, 2012; Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014). Nachman and Wernimont (2024) found that CTE community college faculty sought to create meaningful relationships with students that would support learners holistically through their careers. This willingness to learn and desire to support students can be capitalized on as an opportunity for researchers and administrators to further understand new faculty needs that will contribute to the creation of effective professional development programs.

## **Conclusion**

The critical role CTE community college play in supporting the local workforce and providing educational access to a diverse group of students cannot be overstated. The impact of their work extends beyond the classroom and reaches into local communities. However, the transition they make from industry to educators in a post-secondary setting has unique challenges. While the literature indicates CTE community college faculty bring an enthusiasm and desire to share their industry expertise to their faculty roles, they also struggle to navigate the culture of higher education and translate their previous career success into being effective teachers. Yet, the existing literature on this population is limited at best. This illustrated the need for additional scholarship to explore the factors that contribute to and hinder successful transitions from workforce to the classroom. The research I completed has the potential to positively impact the onboarding and development of new CTE faculty.

My research questions aimed to address the gaps in existing scholarship by building on the themes that are already present in the literature: (a) characteristics of those who transition to teaching from industry, (b) conceptualization of the teaching role, (c) socialization into the culture of higher education, (d) faculty professional development, and (e) teaching practices.

This dissertation sought to build upon the themes identified in the literature to contribute further understanding of effective instructional practices and successful socialization strategies of CTE faculty into the academy, specifically those within the Colorado Community College System. Through a constructivist, grounded theory design that provided depth of data, I added to the current scholarship on new CTE community college faculty to enhance understanding of how this important population serves students and their local communities.

## CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

Chapter three provides details on the methodology employed in this study. It includes a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions and a detailed look at the grounded theory approach. The conceptual framework provides a description of social constructionism, organizational sensemaking and how the two lenses are blended in this study. The methods section of this chapter includes details on the population, sampling procedures, the use of reflexivity and the data collection and analysis approaches. The methods section also includes detailed participant profiles. The chapter concludes with sections on credibility, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations.

### **Purpose of Study**

Local economies rely on the strength and health of industries in their areas. And those industries rely on the workforce they employ. Community colleges support the education and training of that workforce through their CTE programs. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.a), two-year, public institutions were responsible for awarding 66% of the post-secondary occupational education credentials completed in the 2016-2017 academic year. Additionally, due to open-admissions policies and lower tuition rates than four-year institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020), community colleges play an important role in serving students from minoritized populations. For example, post-secondary students who are also parents attend community colleges at three times the rate they attend public four-year institutions and private for-profit schools (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). In fact, 54% of all Hispanic, 38% of all Black, and 51% of all Asian higher education students with children attend community colleges (American Association of

Community Colleges, 2021). Beyond student parents, community colleges have seen enrollments of students of color rise above White student enrollments, and they enroll more female than male students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Mitic et al. (2024) summarized Austin (2002) and describe it thusly, “community colleges enroll the most diverse student body in terms of sociodemographic characteristics (race, English proficiency, age, disability, veteran status), educational preparation, motivations, and goals” (p. 789). Thus, CTE faculty at community colleges not only have a direct impact on the local economies in which they teach, they also are well-positioned to promote positive outcomes for students with minoritized identities.

Because vocational programs are designed to provide students opportunities to integrate academic preparation with the learning of technical skills, faculty who teach in them must come to the role of educator with industry expertise and experience. Typically joining community colleges as a second career, CTE faculty might have little understanding of the culture of the academy and lack training and experience in effective instructional theories and strategies (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Olson & Einwohner, 2001; Wagner et al., 2021). Yet, the research on CTE faculty at community colleges is limited. The purpose of this study was to better understand how full-time CTE community college faculty make the transition from industry to the classroom. This better understanding can inform how to effectively socialize CTE faculty into higher education and prepare them to engage in responsive, effective instructional practices.

### **Research Questions**

This research explored the experiences of full-time CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system who made the transition from industry to higher education. The goal was to

examine the socialization experiences of these faculty as well as their journey from workforce expert to classroom teacher. The questions guiding this research were:

1. How do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system develop understandings about what it means to be a teacher in a higher education setting when transitioning to the role from a workforce career?
2. What hindering and supportive forces do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system experience when transitioning from industry to higher education?
3. In what ways do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system describe their professional development as they transition(ed) from industry specialists to higher education teachers?

To answer these questions, I engaged in a constructivist grounded theory approach, applying a conceptual framework blending constructionism and organizational sensemaking.

### **Grounded Theory**

Because this study sought to understand the experiences of CTE faculty who transition from industry to higher education, with the goal of revealing ways to support the transitioning faculty, I employed a qualitative, constructivist grounded theory approach as articulated by Charmaz (2008; 2017a; 2021). A constructivist design is one approach to grounded theory research; thus, I will first present a summary of the full methodology, including its history and evolution toward a constructivist approach.

The goal of grounded theory is to explore a process or phenomenon and generate a broad theory to explain it, rather than apply an existing theory (Charmaz, 2017a; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kenny & Fourie, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The assumption is the emergent theory and its potential applications are grounded in the data

collected, which reflects the participants' unique experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explained that a grounded theory approach is well suited to studying populations and phenomena that cannot be explained by existing theory. They wrote:

Because a theory is 'grounded' in the data, it provides a better explanation than a theory borrowed 'off the shelf' because it fits the situation, actually works in practice, is sensitive to individuals in a setting, and may represent all the complexities actually found in the process (p. 343).

### **History of Grounded Theory**

The origins of grounded theory are found in the work of sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) and described in their seminal book, *The discovery of grounded theory*. In the book, the authors articulated techniques for conducting grounded theory research that have persisted through later imaginings of the methodology. Those techniques include the use of theoretical sampling, iterative data collection, systematic comparative analysis, coding, and memo writing (Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kenny & Fourie, 2014), all of which are described further in the methods section of this chapter. As a methodology, grounded theory is characterized by its iterative nature, where the researcher is engaged in a process of creating codes from the data as data segments are compared with each other to reveal overall themes and patterns (Jones at al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The methodology grew out of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) attempt to close "the gap between theory and method" (Glaser, 2016, p. 4) and allow researchers to conceptualize theory relevant to the experiences of the participants in the study.

Since its first inception, grounded theory has grown and evolved. In the 1970's and 80's Strauss began to reconceptualize grounded theory and publish separately from Glaser, which Kenny and Fourie (2014) described as a schism. Strauss and Corbin (1990) articulated this reconceptualization as a systematic design for grounded theory, which uses three prescriptive phases of coding for data analysis, with predetermined codes designed to help researchers discover the underlying theory (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Glaser (1992) responded by defending the original conceptualization of grounded theory, where the goal is to have the theory emerge from the data rather than apply a preset coding process (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Kenny & Fourie, 2014). Despite the divergence in articulation of procedures in later years, the work of both Glaser and Strauss is considered to be objectivist grounded theory, rooted in positivism, which assumes the existence of an external reality that can be neutrally observed (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2021; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Jones et al., 2014). Thus, there is room in guided theory methodology for an approach that centers the perspectives of the participants, rather than an objective reality, and recognizes the role the researcher plays in the development of theory.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

As an evolution of objectivist or classical grounded theory, Charmaz (2008; 2017a; 2021) articulated a new version of the methodology – constructivist grounded theory. A former student of Strauss', Charmaz centered the focus of constructivist grounded theory on the meaning making of the participants, rather than an exploration of facts, and the role the researcher plays in co-constructing, rather than discovering, theory (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2017b; Charmaz, 2021; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Jones et al., 2014).

However, constructivist grounded theory shares the same roots as objectivist grounded theory. Charmaz (2017c; 2021) identified a set of researcher actions to illustrate where her approach converges with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) initial configuration of the methodology and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) later reconfiguration. Those actions include:

- Collecting and analyzing data simultaneously
- Employing comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and memo writing
- Relying on data as the source of conceptual categories and data analysis to develop inductive categories
- Identifying data patterns
- Emphasizing theory being grounded in the data rather than applying previous theory
- Focusing analysis on actions and processes
- Pursuing variation in categories
- Being sensitive to emerging categories and checking them in subsequent data
- Describing the potential implications for application

Constructivist grounded theory retains the foundation of objectivist grounded theory by remaining centered on applying a systematic, interactive, qualitative approach to building or discovering theory (Charmaz, 2017c).

However, constructivist grounded theory stretches previous conceptualizations of grounded theory in two key ways. First, it “locates the research process and product in historical, social, and situational conditions” (Charmaz, 2017b, p. 34). By centering the voices of the participants within the socio-cultural context of their experiences, constructivist grounded theory posits that theory construction is based on a search for understanding of multiple perspectives of

a phenomenon rather than an external reality (Charmaz, 2021). In this way, it promotes a relativist epistemology, rather than a positivist one (Charmaz, 2017a). Second, it incorporates the role of the researcher in the process. According to Charmaz and Thornberg (2021), “Constructivist grounded theory requires strong reflexivity throughout the research process” (p. 315). This is because the researcher influences every step of the process, from question formulation to the dissemination of findings, and is especially influential during data collection which is a shared experience between the researcher and the participants (Jones et al., 2014). In objectivist configurations of grounded theory, the researcher is viewed as a neutral observer, rather than participant. However, in constructivist grounded theory the researcher’s subjectivity is not only recognized, but directly acknowledged as a contributing factor in the construction of the data (Charmaz, 2021). A full description of the methods central to constructivist grounded theory can be found in the methods section of this chapter.

### **A Note on Constructionism and Constructivism**

In some of her writings about constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz discussed its connection to social constructionism (Charmaz, 2008; Charmaz, 2017c). This dissertation used constructivist grounded theory strategies and applied social constructionism as a component of the conceptual framework. Thus, it is important to note the subtle distinction between the two. Constructivism is concerned with the internal process individuals undertake to construct knowledge and understanding, while social constructionism emphasizes the influence of others on the process and the results of understanding being made known to others (Alanazi, 2016). According to Charmaz (2008; Charmaz, 2017c) constructivist grounded theory aligns with social constructionism because it is rooted in the researcher and participant co-constructing, and it results in a “product” of analysis. Constructionism is considered an extension of constructivism

(Alanazi, 2016), which is why I purposely used social constructionism in my conceptual framework. However, the goal of this dissertation was not to explore the differences between constructionism and constructivism, but to hold central the roots of both – the perceptions of individuals and groups are actively constructed and subsequently influence future understanding and actions.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Social Constructionism**

Constructionism is rooted in the idea that individuals build, or construct, personal understanding, knowledge, and reality through interactions with the environment and others (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In a constructionist framework, meaning making by individuals happens via a social process that acknowledges personal lived experiences within the broader culture in which people are positioned (Jones et al., 2014). The cultural influence on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences in the world is central to constructionism, according to Jones et al. (2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a constructionist approach to qualitative research as assuming there is no one universal reality, or interpretation, of a phenomenon. The framing of the phrase “multiple realities” as individual interpretations, is an important one. Constructionists are less concerned with factual accuracy of a phenomenon and more concerned with how individuals experience and make meaning of it through interactions with the environment and others (Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008). The assumption that there is cultural influence on meaning making, and that multiple perspectives exist on an individually-constructed level, means constructionists “see the knower and the information to be known as inseparable” (Griffin & Museus, 2011, p. 18). Constructionists are concerned with how social reality is woven among individuals and mutually shaping (Cunliffe,

2008). Thus, constructionism worked well with this study, which sought to explore how individual CTE faculty have made meaning of their experiences in higher education.

Although a constructionism research framework focuses on the perceptions of the study participants, it also acknowledges the central role of the researcher, especially how they play a part in co-constructing understanding of the phenomena being studied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Griffin & Museus, 2011). My role as researcher in this study was a significant one. I am a former CTE faculty member and current administrator at a community college within the system I studied. Thus, by employing a constructionist framework, I was able to co-construct meaning with the participants, enhancing my ability to understand and support CTE faculty as they develop into effective educators.

The following tenets of constructionism are described further to illustrate how the framework was well suited to my research seeking understanding of how new CTE community college faculty make meaning of their transition from workforce to higher education: (a) constructionism research seeks to explore phenomena, (b) there are multiple, socially-constructed ways for individuals to make meaning, (c) constructionism helps researchers explore how individuals translate their meaning making into action, and (d) there is no one uniform way to apply a constructionism lens to research.

### ***Constructionism Explores Phenomena***

At its center, constructionism posits that individuals make sense of themselves, their surroundings, and their experiences by constructing schemas, which are then expressed in both internal and external language (Cunliffe, 2008; Thorpe, 2008). In other words, individuals experience a new phenomenon and then build a mental understanding of it, which is often refined through interactions with others (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, applying a constructionism

framework allows researchers to explore a particular phenomenon through analyzing individual or group perspectives about it. To do this, constructionism researchers explore both the context of the phenomenon being studied and how those who experience the phenomenon describe their experiences, all the while looking for patterns and insights not already articulated in previous research projects (Bogna et al., 2020; Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Denicolo et al., 2016). According to Charmaz (2020) constructionism research needs to be anchored in meaningful, practical phenomena, such as problems the world is facing, to allow researchers to construct practical responses. Thus, constructionism was an appropriate conceptual framework component to apply to research on the phenomenon of CTE community college faculty transitioning from industry careers to higher education because such a framework provided practical understanding on how to effectively support these faculty on their meaning-making journey.

### ***Multiple Ways to Make Meaning***

A core tenet of constructionism is that individuals construct personal schemas, which then inform the individuals' perceptions of the phenomena being studied. Those perceptions are shaped by the context in which they exist (Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Thorpe, 2008). Subjectivity and intersubjectivity form the roots of constructionism, which means individual and group positions, perspectives, and social interactions blend in the construction of meaning making. Because meaning making is highly contextualized, constructionism assumes that there are multiple ways to make sense of a phenomenon (Cunliffe, 2008; Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Denicolo et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2021; Stauffacher et al., 2006; Thorpe, 2008). Thus, constructionism researchers acknowledge that because multiple understandings exist and participants experience a phenomenon with previously constructed positions, attempting to achieve external validity is not the goal (Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008). Rather,

the goal is to explore the constructed understandings that emerge from the interaction of individuals and their worlds, as expressed by participants (Peck & Mummery, 2018; Sabnis & Newman, 2022). Personal meaning making is described through external and internal language, as individuals articulate the constructs they have built to make sense of life experiences (Bogna et al., 2020; Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Denicolo et al., 2016; Peck & Mummery, 2018). This description of personal constructs was a cornerstone of my research. What limited literature exists on CTE community college faculty often focuses on what administrators believe new faculty need to grow into the role of teacher at a higher education institution (Eddy, 2010; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). Applying constructionism as part of my conceptual framework in a grounded theory approach allowed me to focus on what the CTE community college faculty themselves had to say about their own development.

### ***Translation into Action***

According to Stauffacher et al. (2006), a constructionism approach explores more than the theoretical implications of a phenomenon. It also explores the practical implications of complex social problems by uncovering how individuals take action to solve those problems. Thorpe (2008) articulated that constructed understandings of phenomena need to be closely connected to practice. This need to construct understandings close to practice is because individuals take personal meanings built through interactions with others and the phenomenon being studied and then cross reference them with their existing constructs to guide their decision making about the future (Cunliffe, 2008; Denicolo et al., 2016). In short, constructionism assumes that individuals filter novel experiences through their previously-built schemas and then decide what to do next based on their new understanding (Denicolo et al., 2016). Cunliffe (2008)

described how when this process happens subconsciously it is attributed to an individual acting on their “gut feeling.” By applying constructionism to my proposed study, I explored the schemas community college CTE faculty built to make sense of their transition to higher education. I used the findings to construct a grounded theory titled becoming faculty and formulate recommended practices that institutions can employ to support new faculty. The heart of constructionism is that individual understandings emerge through interactions with others and the studied phenomenon. Thus it was an appropriate component of a conceptual framework for this constructivist grounded theory study examining how new faculty make sense of their roles and take action within higher education.

### ***No One Way to “Do” Constructionism Research***

Constructionism research is rooted in exploring complex, meaningful phenomena (Charmaz, 2020). Thus, it requires researchers to employ a flexible approach, where they intentionally focus on unique contextual factors, and acknowledge that it is not a checklist approach to research. Cunliffe (2008) and Stewart (2010) articulated there is no one, universally defined approach for completing constructionist research. Rather there is a shared assumption that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed (Cunliffe, 2008; Stewart, 2010). In other words, it is highly contextualized, allowing for the individual voices of participants to emerge. The assumption that individual understandings are constructed contextually means constructionism research needs to be anchored in authentic, clear questions that guide the study (Denicolo et al., 2016; Stauffacher et al., 2006). Charriere Petit and Huault (2008) and Thorpe (2008) argued that the freedoms provided by constructionism allow for recognition that individuals are not separate from their unique contexts, which means researchers have the ability to uncover emergent ideas. The reliance on shared assumptions rather than a clear articulation of

methods, allows constructionism research to be creative and employ a sense of open inquiry that can provide a fresh look at an established phenomenon rather than trying to fit results into established theories, ideal for a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2020; Thorpe, 2008).

### **Organizational Sensemaking**

Organizational sensemaking shares common ground with constructionism and can add depth to a conceptual framework for studying faculty transitions. Both assume that individuals use social interactions to make sense of novel experiences or phenomena (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Smerek, 2013; Tan et al., 2020). However, organizational sensemaking adds an institutional level to the meaning making of the individual. It emerged as a framework to explore how individuals understand an organization and their role within it (Perrow, 1991). Described by Weick et al. (2005) as “the quest for meaning in organizational life” (p. 409), sensemaking assumes a give and take between individuals and the institution, where individuals both influence and are influenced by the organizational culture (Maclean et al., 2014; Tierney, 1997). Individuals, or groups of individuals, engage in a continual process of both consciously and unconsciously noticing ambiguity within the organization and constructing narratives to address that ambiguity (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Erbert, 2016; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Weick et al, 2005). Yet much of the research about higher education that applies organizational sensemaking focuses on how individual and group understandings impact the institution or how those in leadership positions navigate change (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Maclean, et al. 2014; Smerek, 2013; Steinbauer et al., 2015; Tierney, 1997). This study provides valuable contributions to the scholarship because it directly explored how new faculty make sense of their organization and thus, centered the voices of a population underrepresented in the literature. Additionally, CTE faculty at community colleges are a group within higher education with unique needs. Workforce

experience and industry credentials, rather than graduate degrees, are emphasized in qualifications for this population. Thus, when coming to higher education, they have to make sense of both their teacher role and the complex culture of academia.

Like constructionism, organizational sensemaking lacks cohesive definitions or clear researcher practices (Jeong & Brower, 2008; Tierney, 2008), which made it an ideal component in this grounded theory study. It was used to explore individual experiences within organizations which were analyzed for emergent theory. What common central tenets of organizational sensemaking exist are examined further here in connection to higher education faculty development. Those tenets are that organizational sensemaking (a) emerges through social interactions, (b) results in the creation of multiple narratives, and (c) is concerned with power dynamics and hierarchies within institutions (Erbert, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2018; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Kezar, 2013, 2018; Moher et al., 2019; Neumann, 2012; Perrow, 1991; Smerek, 2013; Steinbauer et al., 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Weick, 1976).

### ***Importance of Social Interactions***

Organizational sensemaking centers the importance of social interactions in the creation of understandings that guide subsequent action. At its core, organizational sensemaking posits that when individuals encounter new experiences or phenomena, they ask themselves: (a) what is happening, (b) what does this mean, and (c) what do I do next? (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Erbert, 2016; Moher et al., 2019; Tamtik, 2022; Weick et al., 2005). However, unlike constructionism, organizational sensemaking goes beyond the examination of individually-held schemas. The framework also explores how individuals' schemas interact with others' schemas to create a broader collective understanding of an organization and the smaller sub-communities within it (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Degan, 2018; Erbert, 2016; Jeong & Brower, 2008; Steinbauer et al.,

2015; Weick et al., 2005). Consequently, interactions with immediate colleagues within an organization become an especially important way for newcomers to learn how to navigate ambiguous and complex tasks and structures (Smerek, 2013). By interacting with others, new members of the institution are able to activate their personal schemas and engage in the construction of intersubjectivity with colleagues, where a shared sense of organizational understanding emerges (Jeong & Brower, 2008; Suspitsyna, 2013; Tan et al., 2020). The process repeats itself as units within organizations interact with each other and group stories and meaning making are shared (Clark, 1972; Gonzales et al., 2018; Kezar, 2013; Parrish, 2023; Tan et al., 2020). According to Maitlis (2005) and Tan et al. (2020), the level of intentional engagement among management and different employee units can determine the level of cohesive sensemaking within the institution. That engagement is exemplified in the concrete strategies people use during organizational sensemaking, including campus conversations, inter-departmental collaborations, collaborative leadership structures, and thoughtfully-designed professional development opportunities (Kezar, 2018). Applying organizational sensemaking to this study on new CTE community college faculty revealed the social supports these new faculty used to make sense of their college and their place within it.

### ***Multiple Narratives***

Organizational sensemaking requires a high level of interpersonal and interdepartmental engagement, and consequently, it can lead to the creation of multiple narratives about the institution (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Degan, 2018; Jeong & Bower, 2008; Kezar, 2018; Steinbauer et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2020). Tamtik (2022) stressed that organizational sensemaking is more than just an individual interpretation of experiences or phenomena. Rather it is an active construction of narratives about the institution. According to organizational sensemaking, it is

possible for units within an organization to make meaning that is both inaccurate and allows them to navigate the systems because it is highly reliant on personal interpretation rather than factual accuracy (Kezar, 2018; Worley, 2019). These multiple narratives can emerge at the individual or department levels, and they can contradict the rhetoric of the institution at large, such as when the declared aspirational culture of the college does not match the established one (Churchman & King, 2009; Tierney, 2012). Organizational sensemaking assumes different perspectives will emerge for different stakeholders (Tierney, 1997; Tierney, 2008). Narratives are constructed over time and shared with colleagues leading to the creation of a sense of uniqueness within a group (Clark, 1972), which is manifested in the language and stories of the groups (Erbert, 2016; Kezar, 2018). It can be difficult for an organization to shift to an institutionally-cohesive understanding if departments and individuals are operating with their own sense of reality and understanding (Kezar, 2013). Those different understandings are translated into behaviors, reinforcing perspectives and beliefs (Smerek, 2013; Weick et al., 2005). To break the cycle and help individuals and departments wrestle with novel experiences, intentional support from colleagues to let go of and reform understandings is required (Kezar, 2018). This can be especially important for new CTE faculty as they let go of previously-constructed narratives about higher education and grieve their earlier careers within industry (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Simendiger et al., 2000). This study explored the narratives CTE community college faculty have constructed during the transition from industry to academia.

### ***Power Dynamics***

Organizational sensemaking posits that a mutual process of sensemaking, where individuals have influence over and are influenced by institutional culture, creates a robust,

coherent organizational identity (Kezar, 2018; Maitlis, 2005; Tan et al., 2005). However, organizational sensemaking researchers also acknowledge that a mutual process is not guaranteed due to hierarchies and power dynamics that exist in institutions. In fact, if power dynamics are not examined and addressed, organizational sensemaking will shift to organizational sense giving, where one group engages in a willful attempt to change another group's understanding (Degan, 2018; Tan et al., 2020). According to Churchman and King (2009) and Gonzales et al., (2018), if left unchecked, leadership sense giving can become a dominant narrative, opening the door for oppressive power structures to be reinforced. When this happens, managers engage in authoritarian rationalizations, evoking institutional stories about maintaining culture the way it has "always been" (Parrish, 2023; Tamtik, 2022). The result is individuals and smaller groups are rendered invisible, with their stories being lost within the institutional narrative (Churchman & King, 2009). According to Weick et al. (2005), organizations should explicitly wrestle with internal power dynamics so no group is made to feel beholden to the sensemaking perceptions of others, thus hindering their ability to influence the culture of the institution. Including organizational sensemaking in this conceptual framework provided a way for me to explore if and how new CTE faculty members' meaning-making contributed to or was subsumed by the institution as they transition to academia.

### ***Organizational Sensemaking as Theory***

It is important to note that organizational sensemaking was not applied as a theory during data analysis, since the goal of this research was to construct theory grounded in the collected data. Rather, I included it as part of my conceptual framework to acknowledge the role of the broader organization of higher education in the meaning making process for new faculty. Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially articulated grounded theory as a way for sociologists to stop relying

on established theories and instead discover new ones, and thus, encouraged researchers to not engage in data collection and analysis with any theories in mind. However, Charmaz (2017a; 2021) posited that an acknowledgement of familiarity with established theories can contribute to the reflexivity process for constructivist grounded theory researchers and help to situate the research in the historical and socio-cultural context in which it occurs. She wrote, “Grounded theory means that we researchers consider and assess all possible theoretical understandings of our data, including our own new theoretical constructions” (Charmaz, 2017c, p. 2). Additionally organizational sensemaking as a theory is fragmenting without clearly articulated or cohesive practices for researchers to follow (Jeong & Brower, 2008; Tierney, 2008). In this project, I used it as a lens to inform the construction of my initial interview questions rather than as a theory to explain participant experiences.

### **Bringing the Two Together**

I completed a constructivist grounded theory dissertation that explored the experiences of CTE community college faculty who made the transition from industry expert to teacher in higher education. I used interviews to capture the perspectives of the participants. A blended conceptual framework of organizational sensemaking and constructionism allowed me as a researcher to emphasize the primacy of the participants’ responses to my interview questions, while recognizing my role in co-constructing understanding.

A conceptual framework built on the blending of constructionism and organizational sensemaking was ideal for this study. Having minimal experience with the culture and structures of higher education, new community college CTE faculty must wrestle both on the institutional level with their place in the academy and on the individual level with their new teacher role. Using the tenets of constructionism ensured I created the space for participants to share their

understandings of their personal development within their new career. Using the tenets of organizational sensemaking gave me the guideposts necessary to explore how faculty are making meaning of their new organization. Both approaches provided a context for the importance of recognizing the validity of multiple perspectives and narratives, while searching for common ground, which uncovered new insights on how to support these faculty. Administrators that want to engage in transformational change for their institution can do so at the hiring and socialization processes for new employees, but only if they have a clear understanding of what new employees need and how to effectively meet those needs. As higher education institutions become increasingly complex, the need to understand how community college CTE faculty engage in personal and organizational meaning-making is important to ensure they are able to effectively serve students and meet the mission of their institution.

## **Methods**

### **Population**

The population for this study was new full-time, community college CTE faculty members within the Colorado Community College System, which consists of 13 colleges throughout the state. All participants were adults age 18 or older. New was defined as being in a faculty position for more than one, but less than eight full academic years at the time of the first interview. To further narrow the study's population, I also required participants to have at least five years of full-time, relevant industry experience before transitioning to postsecondary education. I defined relevant industry experience as employment in the same field in which participants teach. The population criteria were selected for specific purposes to ensure the research questions could be fully addressed and the findings could be used. First, holding a full-time faculty status, versus a part-time adjunct status, ensured participants could speak to the full

scope of work faculty face. While adjuncts are responsible for teaching 50% of credits within the Colorado Community College System (Colorado Community College System, 2023), they are not required to engage in the same level of service and leadership expectations full-time faculty are. This study explored the transition process into the full culture and requirements that full-time faculty members experience. Second, the criteria of a minimum of five years of workforce experience ensured participants had enough time in their initial vocation to be able to effectively describe the transition from workforce expert to the culture of the academy. Third, having two to seven years' experience at the community college meant participants experienced the full scope of their new role for at least one academic year, while still being new enough to remember their first year and describe subsequent years of their transition. Finally, the selection of the Colorado Community College System meant I had convenient access to an appropriate population, and as an administrator within the system, I can apply my findings directly to my practice and share my learnings across the system. Thus, this project provided results that can have a direct, positive impact on the faculty with whom I have the honor of working.

### **Sampling Procedure – Theoretical Sampling**

According to Jones et al. (2014), in a grounded theory study, sampling is “aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness” (p. 76). To do this I employed theoretical sampling, a core tenet of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling is the process of simultaneously collecting, coding, and analyzing data to determine what is needed for subsequent rounds of data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described it as a process of intentionally selecting data that will lead to theory construction. In short, the researcher who employs theoretical sampling is continually expanding the size of the sample, as they analyze the collected data, to capture additional perspectives or

new elements of their codes until they reach the point of theoretical saturation (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

The pool of individuals meeting all the inclusion criteria for this research is relatively small compared to grounded theory studies of other phenomena. According to data provided to me by the Colorado Community College System from an internal database (C. Robello, personal communication, January 3, 2025), there are 478 full time faculty positions in CTE programs across the colleges. The system was unable to provide me with exact figures of how many of those individuals meet the full inclusion criteria for this research. However, I know this data point at my own college of employment, which is the largest of the 13 schools in the system. Of the 478 individuals who teach full time in CTE programs in CCCS, 115 of them are at my home college, representing 24% of the total group. This aligns with the college's enrollment numbers. At the time of this writing, my home college serves 24% of the student headcount in the statewide system (CCCS System Office, personal communication, March 19, 2025). Of the 115 CTE faculty at my home college, 29 meet my inclusion criteria, which is 25%. If that percentage is consistent across the colleges, I could expect approximately 119 of the 478 full time CTE faculty in CCCS to meet my inclusion criteria. While there is no guarantee that the percentage is consistent across the colleges, it at minimum provides an educated guess. Additionally, because I wanted to ensure my participants taught in a variety of content areas, I noted which disciplines were included in the data provided to me by CCCS. For example, of the 478 CTE faculty positions on the list provided to me, 103 are in a program that falls under the Nursing label, and 37 are in a program that falls under the computing technology label (C. Robello, personal communication, January 3, 2025). Incorporating this factor in the selection process helped to avoid over-representation of a particular discipline. Thus, with each new participant I

interviewed the pool of potential future participants shrunk based on programs in which they taught. Each of the participants in this study teaches in a different content area.

I began with an initial sample of 10 participants who met my defined criteria, identified through a purposeful sampling approach drawing on my established professional network (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To recruit interviewees, I asked my contacts within the Colorado Community College System to send invitations to their CTE full time faculty who met participant criteria. My contacts include academic deans and vice presidents of academic affairs at all system schools. As a member of the system's Academic Affairs Deans Council, I sent an email communication to the entire 94-member council providing details about my request, using their system-office assigned email address. A copy of the email communication sent to the deans council can be found in Appendix A. I anticipated needing to ask my connections with the system's Academic Affairs Vice Presidents Council, which includes 13 members, to also share an invitation to participate to the CTE faculty at their respective schools. Appendix B includes a copy of that communication. However, based on the volume of responses received through the dean's council, the VP council recruiting avenue was not needed to identify participants.

After soliciting a list of new CTE full-time faculty from system deans, I sent an email to those faculty using their system email addresses. The communication sent to potential participants included the purpose of the study, the importance of participation, assurances of privacy and confidentiality, and details on time commitment (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). A copy of this communication can be found in Appendix C. I compiled a list of respondents that met the inclusion criteria and agreed to potentially be interviewed. From that list, I selected the first four participants to initially interview one-on-one, applying the approach described in the

section on theoretical sampling, while retaining the full list of volunteers as a resource for potential future participants (Saldaña, 2021). As I completed interviews and coded transcripts, I continued to add participants from my list until I reached 10. I knew participants' discipline of expertise and home college, but they had the option of sharing demographic information, including their race/ethnicity, gender identity, and age range (18-30, 31-50, 51+). Those factors were not used as inclusion criteria, but were considered when selecting participants to maximize diversity of race, ethnicity, gender identity, discipline taught, and age. The Colorado Community College System does not publish personal demographic data on full time faculty, so ensuring the participant pool was representative across demographic criteria was not an option. Rather, by incorporating these factors into the selection process, my goal was to identify a group of participants with different backgrounds and viewpoints, thus contributing to the goal of theoretical saturation.

Because the goal was to reach theoretical saturation, rather than have a representative sample that provides maximum demographic coverage of the identified population, I focused on working with participants and adding interviews that could further theory construction. At the same time, I was intentionally cognizant of race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, and CTE discipline makeup of my sample. I sought to include a variety of perspectives in this study, which meant maximizing the number of academic disciplines represented. Two core tenets of my blended conceptual framework are that individuals construct unique schemas to make meaning of a phenomenon and sensemaking in an organization can result in multiple narratives (Bien & Sassen, 2019; Cunliffe, 2008; Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Degan, 2018; Denicolo et al., 2016; Jeong & Bower, 2008; Kezar, 2018; Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2021; Stauffacher et al., 2006; Steinbauer et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2020; Thorpe, 2008). CTE programs vary widely across

the types of content taught and industries they work with, which could be contributing factors to faculty transitions. Thus, to fully understand the phenomenon of CTE faculty transitions in the Colorado Community College System it was important for me to have a range of disciplines included.

Due to the iterative, emergent nature of theoretical sampling and based on the data I collected in first round interviews during fall 2024 (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), I added an additional participant and second round interviews in spring 2025 as I simultaneously analyzed collected data and refined categories and codes. Thus, I expanded my interview samples from 10 to 22, recognizing it can take additional data collection to build a grounded theory (Saldaña, 2021).

### ***Participant Profiles***

This section provides an overview of the participants in the study, including profiles of the individuals who were interviewed. The criteria for participation were as follows:

- Age 18 or older
- Full time, CTE faculty member at one of the community colleges within CCCS
- New teaching status, defined as being in a full-time teaching position for at least one full year and no more than seven full years at the time of the first interview
- Have five years of full-time industry experience in the field they teach

It is important to note that number of full-time faculty in a given CTE discipline could be as small as one at their home college or even within the system. For example, in the area of Cannabis Science within CCCS, which is not a discipline represented in this study, there is only one full-time faculty member across all colleges in the system. Therefore, although pseudonyms are assigned to each participant, the participant information in Table 1 intentionally does not

match assigned pseudonyms with their home college and teaching discipline to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The information is meant to provide a summary of the scope of the participants interviewed and the views they expressed.

**Table 1**

*Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Years full-time teaching experience	Years industry experience	Race/ ethnicity	Gender identity	Age range
Daniel	7	9	White – non-Hispanic	Male	31-50
Elliot	6	37	White – non-Hispanic	Male	51+
Emily	4	20	White	Female	31-50
Jordan	7	20+	Did not disclose	Female	Did not disclose
Keith	4	24	Caucasian/Indigenous	Male	31-50
Maria	4	15	White	Female	31-50
Nina	2	30	White/Caucasian	Female	31-50
Nora	7	14	White	Female	31-50
Ruth	6	33	White	Female	51+
Tammy	3	10	Caucasian	Female	51+
Terry	1	13	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Did not disclose

*Note.* All descriptions were provided by the participants and worded as they shared. Years of full-time teaching experience is the number of years at the time of the first interview.

The following colleges within CCCS are represented in this study:

- Arapahoe Community College

- Community College of Denver
- Front Range Community College
- Pueblo Community College
- Red Rocks Community College

The following list includes the CTE programs taught by the participants in this study.

Some of the program titles have been described using broader categories to protect the identities of the participants. For a discipline to qualify as CTE it needs to offer certificate(s) and/or Associate of Applied Science pathways designed to prepare students for direct entry into employment:

- Allied Health Industries
- Automotive Technology
- Computing Technology
- Criminal Justice
- Early Childhood Education
- Emergency Medical Services
- Law Enforcement
- Multimedia Graphic Design
- Nursing
- Transportation Industries
- Performing Arts

**Daniel.** Daniel sees his faculty role as an educator who prepares students not only for a job, but for life skills as well. He sees higher education as an opportunity for career advancement and personal growth. Since joining the faculty at his college he earned a graduate degree in

education and is considering a doctorate, although he noted his college does not offer any financial support or incentive for pursuing additional degrees. He expressed a high level of enthusiasm for teaching and learning theory. As a faculty member at a multi-campus school, Daniel described a feeling of isolation being on a campus not considered the main one. That sense of isolation was described as being disconnected from the administration of the school, although that abated with a change in administration as the new leadership spent more time on Daniel's campus. Despite the feeling of isolation from the main campus, Daniel also described a strong sense of community with his students and colleagues on the campus where he is located. Daniel's approach to navigating the culture of higher education is informed by his time working in industry. He expressed shock at how much autonomy and empowerment faculty at his college have to make decisions and participate in shared governance.

**Elliot.** Like Daniel, Elliot is located at a satellite campus away from the main campus of his college. He also expressed a sense of isolation from the main campus and a sense of community with those more local to him. Elliot has the most industry experience of all the participants in this study. He comes from an industry that has a strong sense of identity and its own culture. He embeds that industry culture into his teaching and curriculum, which causes him to navigate the balance of industry expectations and higher education culture. There has been a significant amount of administrative change at Elliot's college. In the time he has been a full time faculty member, he has had five deans. Despite this, Elliot maintains that the administration is overall supportive of his program, even considering the distance between his location and the main campus. In fact, he described how the distance allows his program to fly under the radar. He emphasized several times that the connection he has with faculty peers has made a difference in how he has learned to teach. He described how he is learning how to embed a more interactive

pedagogy in his classroom thanks to insight and mentorship from other faculty. Since he began at the college, Elliot has put in significant effort to make improvements in the program and is now undertaking long-term planning for how to create superior student learning experiences.

**Emily.** Experimentation and an authentic engagement with learning new things are two themes Emily expressed throughout our conversations. Emily came from an industry that requires a high level of comfort with change. She was in a senior level position for 20 years before transitioning to higher education. She took a one-year break from industry to focus on her family. During that break she taught part time and when she returned to her job, she decided to make the transition to teaching full time. Her time in industry informs how she navigates the culture at her college. She is used to dealing with bureaucracy and expressed a strong sense of self-confidence about working with administration. While describing herself as someone who speaks her mind and advocates for change where needed, she also said that she believes in collaboration and is comfortable with learning new things. In fact, her interest in higher education inspired her to pursue a doctorate in higher education leadership. Between our first and second conversation, Emily successfully defended her dissertation and earned her EdD. Although she expressed disappointment that she is not able to negotiate a raise for this accomplishment until the next fiscal year, she said she was glad to have completed the degree because it increased her perceived credibility within the institution. As she put it, “I needed that credential to be heard, to have a seat at the table.”

**Jordan.** Jordan came to higher education after experiencing burnout in her first career. She had a strong connection to her industry and found teaching the next generation of the workforce as a way to give back. Jordan self-describes as a partner in learning with her students, which is illustrated her commitment to continued learning about teaching effectively. She

described a high level of enthusiasm for learning about higher education. In fact, Jordan detailed how she took a lot of initiative to learn the faculty job when she first started. She did this by seeking out connections with more knowledgeable and experienced others and taking advantage of professional development opportunities. She described needing to engage in experimentation with her service requirements, and she expressed a wish that the service component of her job had been better articulated to her when she first started. With seven years of full-time faculty experience, Jordan is beyond her provisional period in CCCS, and has been promoted to a chair role. She has a lot of trust in her administration at her college, including the chair that hired her and her dean and president. She articulated that this trust has been built through accessibility to the leadership at her college and their mutual trust in Jordan's subject matter expertise.

**Keith.** Keith was an enthusiastic participant and the first one to agree to be interviewed. He described how he saw this study as an opportunity to share his views of CCCS and higher education in general. Much of our conversation centered on Keith's concerns about how CTE faculty are viewed and treated as less than because of not needing advanced degrees to teach. He was wary about the hierarchy of academia and a system built on jargon that can make people feel like outsiders. He advocated for higher education to adopt more of an apprenticeship style model, where students can learn what they need to succeed in careers and the expertise of the educators can be honored. Despite the overall concern that CTE programs and faculty are looked down upon, Keith also described a strong sense of community with his chair and peers in the department. He articulated a sense of responsibility to prepare students not only for a successful career, but also for overall life skills. At this point in his career, Keith expressed confidence in his teaching skills and a desire to continue to find balance between his instructional and service responsibilities.

**Maria.** Like other participants, Maria's CTE program is located on a satellite campus. Additionally, she began as a full-time faculty member right as the COVID pandemic struck. Thus, she expressed a double sense of isolation during her first year. Her program requires the kind of hands on training that needs to be completed in person, so she returned to in-person teaching sooner than other faculty at her college. However, that in-person work remained isolated as strict social distancing and limits on the number of people on campus were enforced. It wasn't until over a year after being hired full time that she began to interact with colleagues in person. Of all the participants, she described the most struggles and the least amount of support with the transition. She also was one of the most enthusiastic about falling in love with teaching. Maria said she does not have an interest in returning to work in her industry, even in a part time capacity, because she enjoys teaching so much. She said she was surprised to discover how much she loves it and how she feels effective at it. Her confusion and struggles with the transition to higher education related to learning how to navigate the systems and culture of her college. Describing the bureaucracy of academia as something shadowy and behind the scenes, Emily shared stories of needing to figure out on her own what commonly-used acronyms stood for and who was who at the college. She also described a lack of clarity on what individuals would need to do at the college to advance their careers. Despite this, she spoke confidently about being a teacher and supporting students in their career and life goals.

**Nina.** Nina is a unique participant in this study because the nature of her time in industry gave her a lot of experience with training adult learners. She also had over 10-years of experience as an adjunct faculty member before joining her college in a full-time role. Thus, she described her transition within the classroom as seamless and smooth. The parts of the full-time job that Nina found surprising related to the culture of higher education and the expectation of

faculty duties beyond the classroom. She described how she anticipated the job being similar to a full load of classes that adjunct instructors sometimes have, but was surprised to learn that some of her job duties took her out of the classroom. However, Nina also expressed a strong connection to the mission of the college and a commitment to providing an excellent education for her students. This attitude, coupled with her industry experience where she was a manager, gave her a positive attitude about higher education administrators. She said she understood their perspective. She also repeatedly expressed that the culture of higher education was not as bad as her colleagues say it is. She described how she believes the stakes are not so high for a faculty member that they cannot try something new, fail at it, and learn from the experience. One area where she has learned to prioritize is in her service requirements. Rather than join every committee or initiative she receives an invitation for, Nina has learned to “pick and choose” which areas will best support her goals in the classroom. She also articulated how she has built a strong sense of community with her colleagues who teach in the same discipline, calling it a “bubble” that allows her to ignore the naysayers. She called the process of creating this community, “building a village.”

**Nora.** Several of Nora’s answers focused on the disconnection she feels from the administration at her school. She made points about organizational changes at her college and how she feels leadership is less present and connected with faculty than it was before. Nora has very high standards for herself and her students. Drawing on her own negative experiences as a student of the subject, she views her job in higher education as an opportunity to correct that and give the next generation of her industry’s workforce a better start than she had. She referred to this as investing in her students. After being in a full-time role for as long as she has, Nora feels more confident in her curriculum than she did when she first started. She shared that when she

first started she used other people's curriculum she inherited. Her chair at the time encouraged her to focus on easing into the job and making changes to the curriculum as she went along. Empowered by that autonomy, Nora has been making steady changes to her content and how she teaches. She described the process she uses every semester to take notes on what is going well and what needs to be changed for future classes. She expressed a strong sense of passion and commitment to her work and her dedication to connecting with and supporting students was clear throughout our conversations. She identified her department chair as an important area of support for her, and she indicated that she does not see the chair position as part of the administration. She also described a desire to have a better work-life balance. During our second conversation, Nora highlighted how this balance had already improved since our first conversation. One area that she is interested in pursuing is transitioning into the role of chair. However, she said that the recent changes at the college have made her feel "turned off" from the idea.

**Ruth.** Ruth teaches in a program that is not only unique to the college where she is at, but is also unique within the CCCS system and across the nation. Unsurprisingly, she is the participant that spoke the least about relying on peers during her transition, since she has none in the same discipline within the system. However, she did mention being made to feel welcome by other employees at her college when she first started. Most of the support she received to run her program came from her supervisors and her deans. In fact, of all the participants in this study, she is the one that had the most direct access to her dean and executive leadership. She described this as a privilege she wished would be extended to faculty teaching in other disciplines. Ruth emphasized her commitment to teaching, often referring to creating superior learning environments for students. She shared that she keeps students at the center of all her decisions. Like some other participants she comes from a background in industry where she was a trainer

after working on the job for years. She was inspired by her work as a trainer and earned a Master's degree in adult education, which she said gave her the language to go along with her practices. After retirement from her first career she sought opportunities to teach in higher education. Ruth identified the navigation of higher education bureaucracy as the main challenge in her transition to the community college setting. She described that when she first started, members of her department would take care of internal processes for her as a way to "protect" her. This ultimately did not work for her since she was left without knowing how to complete certain tasks when the structure of the college shifted. She overcame this by learning to ask questions and identifying what to ignore based on the priorities of her program.

**Tammy.** Tammy was the only participant to describe multiple career changes in her life. After a successful career in one industry, she returned as a student to the college where she now teaches to learn a new career. She graduated and worked for ten years in the new industry before returning to the college as a full-time faculty member in the same program. Having experienced high levels of success in two careers and being a graduate of the program where she now teaches, Tammy has a unique perspective. She has been at all levels of hierarchy throughout her working life and that informs how she navigates higher education. She described how she feels supported by her chair and dean and how her interactions with upper administration (president and vice president) have been all positive. She said where she felt dismissed and unheard was with some other faculty, especially in times when she did not agree with prevailing thoughts on administration. She also struggled with in the initial years with the required professional development for provisional faculty. Tammy indicated that the professional development programs were not differentiated enough to meet the needs of CTE faculty teaching in unique disciplines. She preferred to self-select what professional development she wanted to engage

with and sought out personalized opportunities during her first years in the role. With regard to classroom teaching, Tammy described how she felt overwhelmed at first, recognizing the responsibility she has to train the next generation of industry professionals. She said she learned to have confidence by relying on her network of peers. This network has led to opportunities for Tammy to teach in other, related programs at the college. In our second conversation she emphasized how proud she is to teach at a community college, serving the people where she lives. This sense of community both within the college and more broadly was a consistent theme she returned to throughout our conversations.

**Terry.** Like Nina, Terry comes from a successful career in their industry where they were a trainer. Terry described their transition to the classroom at their college as a seamless one. They expressed that their years of experience as a trainer in a non-credit capacity gave them a good foundation for working at their college. Terry expressed cynicism about academia and the bureaucracy that comes with it, because they came from a large, bureaucratic system in the workforce. They employ a strategy of keeping their head down and focusing on teaching while outlasting the latest initiatives launched by the administration. Terry described those initiatives as “the flavor-of-the-week stuff.” Focusing on the classroom was a point Terry returned to multiple times in our conversations. They articulated that they see rigor and holding students to a high standards as a big part of their job. Pursuing a PhD is helping them to apply more advanced learning to their work, including engaging in the kind of data analysis being championed by their administration. Terry talked about one area that no other participant mentioned. They described how they feel isolated within the culture of their college because of their more moderate viewpoint. According to Terry, having a moderate viewpoint reads as more conservative than others in higher education, which leaves them holding a different perspective than colleagues.

We discussed how they share a commitment to a lot of the same principles as their more liberal colleagues, but that they still felt a need to keep their opinions to themselves.

## **Reflexivity**

A central tenet of constructionism and constructivist grounded theory is that the researcher is part of the process and consequently must engage in a high level of reflexivity (Charmaz, 2017b; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). In a constructionism lens, the researcher plays a role in co-constructing understanding with participants (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2021; Stewart, 2010). Denicolo et al. (2016) articulated that the researcher's constructions and the participants' constructions interweave and cannot be denied. This is illustrated through how researchers make continuous decisions about topic selection, methods, and interpretations of participants' responses in their data analysis (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Peck & Mummery, 2018; Sabnis & Newman, 2022; Stewart, 2010), which influences the research at every step. Sabnis & Newman (2022) posited that the same phenomenon studied by a different researcher would lead to a different result.

However, Charmaz and Belgrave (2019) also emphasized that while researchers co-construct with participants, ultimately this is done as the researcher follows the lead of the participants. Because the perspectives of the participants are central to my conceptual framework and in constructivist grounded theory, I was called upon to engage in consistent reflexivity during this study (Charmaz, 2017b; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Charmaz (2017b) described this deep level of reflexivity as methodological self-consciousness, which “means dissecting our worldviews, language, and meanings and revealing how they enter our research in ways we had previously not realized” (p. 36). Included in that dissection, is reflecting on how researcher privilege and power influence the process

(Charmaz, 2017b). In my research, methodological self-consciousness was especially important. As a former CTE faculty member within the Colorado Community College System, I carried my own understanding of the transition from workforce to higher education. Additionally, I now serve in administrative position within the system. This means I am responsible for supporting others in making the transition to higher education, and I have professional power over faculty. This showed up in the interview process as I told participants how I could relate to the experiences they shared, or I thought about ways I interacted in the past with new faculty members. Thus, I was intentional in my reflexivity practices.

Beyond the memo writing required by a grounded theory methodology, which is described further in a later section, two reflexivity strategies I employed were reflective journaling and engaging in intentional member checking. Details of the member checking process are described in the credibility section of this chapter. The personal journal provided me a space to record my thoughts on the project, taking note of when I needed to bracket my perspective and when it contributed to the co-construction of understanding. Additionally, the journal helped me process my understanding of the power dynamics at play. I asked faculty to authentically share with me how their transition went, which included challenges and pitfalls created by administrators in positions like mine. Thus, by engaging in reflexivity I centered my participants viewpoints while acknowledging my role in constructing understanding of CTE faculty transitions (Charmaz, 2017c; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

### **Data Collection**

Although described here as a seemingly sequential process, because I used a grounded theory approach, data collection and data analysis happened simultaneously (Charmaz, 2008; Charmaz, 2017a; Charmaz, 2017b; Charmaz, 2017c; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Belgrave,

2019; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I employed interviews to collect data. The simultaneous data collection and analysis process took seven months, which aligned with guidance articulated by Bhattacharya (2017).

In this study, interviews were essential to exploring the experiences of CTE community college faculty transitioning from industry careers to higher education, because their development in the academy was not an observable behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus I followed Charmaz's (2021) articulation of "intensive interviewing" (p. 16) as the main data collection process. Per the standards of qualitative research, participants provided thick, rich descriptions of their experiences "that are detailed, expressive, and explicit explanations of the phenomenon under study" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 36). Interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended guiding questions. First round interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. Second round interviews were 45 minutes. A semi-structured interview format allowed me "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111), which aligned with my methodological approach and conceptual framework.

Initial recruiting, as described in the theoretical sampling section of this chapter, took place early in the fall 2024 semester after faculty had returned from summer break, and first round interviews were scheduled starting in late August. Interview questions were sent to participants in advance. Toward the end of data analysis on first round interviews in November 2024, the becoming faculty grounded theory began to approach theoretical saturation. To reach saturation, it became clear to me that additional interviews were needed (Saldaña, 2021). I added an 11<sup>th</sup> participant in early in the spring 2025 semester and contacted my first 10 participants to schedule second round interviews with them. My 11<sup>th</sup> participant had a first round interview in

January. All participants completed their second round interview in February. No participants opted to drop out of the study. In total, I collected 22 transcripts of data.

I recorded and transcribed all interviews as well as took notes during the conversations. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and recordings were kept on a password-protected computer until they were transcribed. To transcribe the interviews I copied and pasted the Zoom-generated notepad created with the closed captioned function onto a Word document. Then, I formatted the closed captions into an interview format and listened to the recordings while reading along, correcting any discrepancies. After transcription, interviews were permanently deleted. Notes, memos, and transcripts were maintained digitally, using password protected folders and stored on a password-protected computer. Data was backed up on a password-protected external SD card that was kept in a locked container when not in use.

### ***Interview Development***

Five broad themes emerged in the literature I reviewed for this proposal: (a) characteristics of people who transition from industry to teaching, (b) how faculty conceptualize the role of teacher, (c) socialization of faculty into academia, (d) professional development initiatives, and (e) teaching practices. From articulating these themes and applying my conceptual framework, I identified four areas that I used to build the initial interview questions: conceptualization of teaching role, socialization experiences, attitudes toward professional development opportunities, and beliefs about instructional practices.

According to Charmaz and Belgrave (2019), in-depth interviews in a constructivist grounded theory approach “gives permission to participants to discuss topics and issues otherwise unshared or avoided” (p. 748). Specifically, interview questions addressed how participants engaged in meaning making during their transition. I explicitly asked them to

describe the strategies they used and experiences they had to reveal the schemas they constructed during the process. Additionally, concepts of organizational sensemaking were used in development of initial interview questions that directly address collaboration with peers and experiences with institutional hierarchies, to explore the supporting and hindering factors that impact faculty transitions. Appendix D includes a copy of the initial interview questions.

It is important to highlight that in order to effectively employ theoretical sampling and reach theoretical saturation, a grounded theory approach calls for iterative, concurrent data collection and analysis processes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The goal was the construction of theory grounded in the data. Thus, my initial interview questions were used during the first round of data collection. Follow up interview questions were constructed in response to the initial data and analysis. After coding was completed on first round interview transcripts and the categories that formed the basis of the theory started to emerge, I identified additional opportunities to gather data for each of my research questions. Second round interviews sought to confirm or challenge the codes and categories from first round interview data. Appendix E includes a copy of questions used during second round interviews and which research questions they relate to.

### **Data Analysis**

Looking at the collected data through a conceptual framework that includes both constructionism and organizational sensemaking allowed me to explore questions such as (a) what schemas do CTE community college faculty construct when transitioning from industry to higher education?, (b) what individual perspectives emerged in interview responses and are there common threads among them?, (c) what factors within the organizational structure hindered or supported faculty transitions?, (d) how did faculty make sense of the hindering and supporting

factors?, and (e) how do faculty exert influence over the organization while being influenced by it? Interview responses were coded and analyzed looking for patterns of schema construction that led to fresh concepts and theory. The ultimate goal was the development of a substantive theory, which Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described as a middle grounded theory, one that sits between a working hypothesis for a specific setting and a theory intended to apply to many situations or large groups of people. Thus, my aim for this research was to establish a substantive theory grounded in the transition experiences of CTE faculty within the Colorado Community College System. For the analysis process, I employed the grounded theory practices of constant comparison, coding, and memo writing. These practices led to the selection of a core category, becoming faculty, and three subcategories derived from the data as the foundation for theory generation (Charmaz, 2017a; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The full becoming faculty theory is articulated in chapters four and five.

### ***Constant Comparative Method***

Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the systematic analysis of qualitative data through the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2017a; Charmaz, 2017c; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this method, the researcher moves back and forth between data collection and analysis by constantly comparing “data with data, data with codes, codes with codes, and codes with categories” (Charmaz 2017c, p. 3). In other words, researchers follow an iterative, inductive process where they gather and code data, sort the data into categories, gather additional data, and then compare the new information to the emerging categories, keeping the analysis grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2017c; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To engage in this method with my research, I employed a theoretical sampling approach, which included interviewing an initial group of 10 participants. I coded each interview transcript as it was completed and then compared them other completed interviews to identify which categories emerged from the data. An additional participant and second round interviews with all participants were added for a total of 22 transcripts to reach categorical saturation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

### ***Coding***

A key component of the constructivist grounded theory approach is the coding process. Charmaz (2021) described codes as the labels and containers for data and articulated a two-part process for coding – initial codes and focused codes (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Jones et al., 2014). Initial coding is a first cycle process where the data is broken down into parts and the researcher examines and compares the parts (Saldaña, 2021). In alignment with Charmaz’s (2021) and Saldaña’s (2021) articulation of coding processes for a constructivist grounded theory study using interview data, I conducted line by line initial coding using in vivo and process codes. In vivo codes were created directly from the language of the participants, and process codes were used to describe the action in the data (Saldaña, 2021). For example, one participant stated that she “got started right out of the gate and I had no clue what I was doing.” This line was coded as “no clue what I was doing” for an in vivo code and then “feeling unprepared” for a process code. Another example is a participant who described their “past educational experiences in the classic education model.” This line was coded as “past educational experiences” for a in vivo code and “remembering own student experiences” for a process code. Line by line initial coding ensured my codes were closely tied to the data. Close coding in constructivist grounded theory is important because according to Peck and Mummery (2018), one of the challenges for

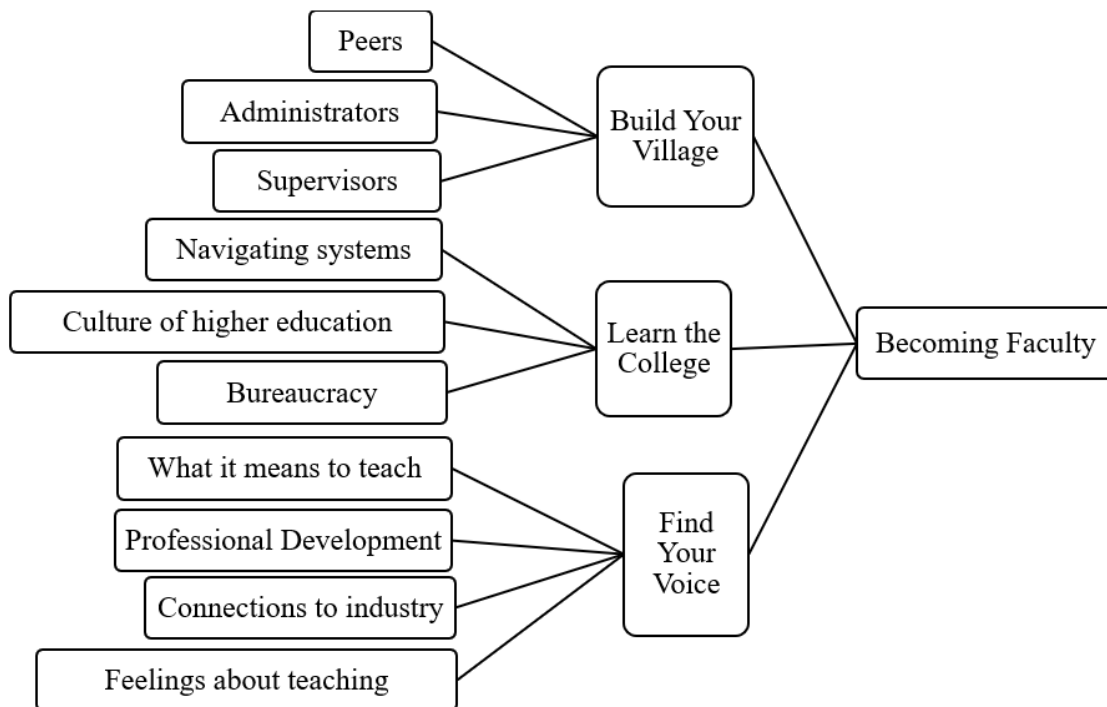
constructionism researchers is reconciling the multiplicity of individual participants' understandings with the search to find common ground. Thus, close coding was important to ensure the categories and subsequent theory construction are grounded in the data capturing participant experiences (Charmaz, 2021). During the first coding cycle I generated 2,645 unique in vivo codes and 506 unique process codes. Both the in vivo and process codes were recorded in the order they emerged in the transcript allowing me to read through them and scan them analytically (Saldaña, 2021).

In the second cycle, I engaged in a focused coding process. The goal of focused coding is to identify the most significant and frequent initial codes and then compare and reorganize them into categories that will eventually lead to a core category for theory construction (Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Jones et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021). Thus, after completing my initial codes on the data collected, I compared the codes to each other and newly collected data to identify the broader, emergent categories, which Jones et al. (2014) described as “more integrative and theoretically rich” (p. 80). I employed categorical thinking as articulated by Freeman (2017), where the qualitative researcher reviews data, discriminates level of detail needed to classify/compare, creates classifications, and groups classification into relational categories. To complete this process I kept a spreadsheet of each in vivo and process code for each participant, as well as the frequency of the codes. As I completed interviews and coding, I would add to the spreadsheet. I also printed all the codes and cut them up so I could physically group and categorize them, identifying the emergent patterns. This process led to the focused codes, which I then grouped by the study’s research questions. As subsequent initial and second round interviews were completed I continued this process adding to the existing focused codes and identifying new ones, until I had reached saturation. In total, I

generated 27 unique focused codes. Using those focused codes, I grouped them according to the research questions forming the basis of this study which revealed the ten categories. For example, in vivo codes such as “I’m still learning that,” “we all get better,” and “I give myself time” were grouped with the process codes “wanting to do better,” “developing teaching style,” and “embracing learning” to construct the focused code “time to develop.” This focused code then led to the category “what it means to teach.” From the 10 categories, I identified the central category of becoming faculty and the three subcategories of build your village, learn the college, and find your voice that led to the grounded theory, discussed in detail in chapter five. A visual representation of the categories can be found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Graphic Representation Showing Categories Leading to Central and Subcategories*



***Memo Writing***

Another key component of constructivist grounded theory is memo writing. Charmaz (2021) described memo writing as “a form of analysis in which, in narrative form, you explore your ideas, hunches, and questions about your data, codes and comparisons” (p. 171). In short, memos are written notes created by the researcher to explore their ideas about the data and ask themselves questions about codes and categories, how they connect, and what they signify (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). These notes can be of any length and should be spontaneous rather than prescriptive (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, the memos need to focus on analysis of the data rather than description (Jones et al., 2014). Throughout the simultaneous data collection and analysis processes in my research, I employed memo writing to help me make sense of the data and construct the becoming faculty theory. Memos were helpful in my ability to brainstorm, organize my thoughts, and articulate the codes and categories. I wrote memos immediately after coding transcripts, using the identified codes and my notes from the interview to process what the data was telling me. Memo writing also helped me to identify where my own thinking was supporting or inhibiting theory construction. This was especially important when reflecting on how faculty described the support or lack of support from administrators at their school, since it is a title I hold. Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the impact the researcher has through their decisions on how to view and categorize the data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019). Thus, my use of memo writing enabled me to create a dialogue with the data, engage in reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness, and ultimately contribute to the co-construction of theory (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Charmaz, 2017b; Charmaz, 2021).

## **Credibility**

To ensure credibility of my data and analysis, I engaged in the qualitative practice of member checking. Member checking is the process of the researcher sharing initial data reports with participants to solicit feedback about their accuracy (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), member checking ensures the perspectives of the participants have not been misrepresented and the biases of the researcher are not influencing the study. I completed member checks during the data collection and analysis process in two ways. First, when I met with participants for second round interviews I began the session by sharing their draft profile and the initial analysis of the data. I asked them if their profile and the emergent grounded theory described their experiences and accurately reflected their perspectives. I emphasized that the becoming faculty theory was in draft form and represented an iterative analysis of what I learned from all participants, but at minimum, they should be able to see themselves somewhere within the theory. Because of my use of the constant comparative method, I refined the participant profiles and emergent theory as I completed second round interviews. Thus, I completed an additional member check after reaching saturation. For this additional member check, I sent all participants an updated copy of their profile and a summary of the refined theory. Additionally, they were each sent a copy of the quotes I highlighted from their transcripts that I identified as summarizing their perspectives. They were also offered opportunities to review their transcripts. In my second member check, I informed the participants that they had the option to let me know if they (a) wanted to make revisions to their profile, (b) wanted to strike any quotes from being used in the analysis or as a potential direct quote in the final dissertation, or (c) did not see their perspective reflected in the

emergent theory. All participants agreed with my summaries and analyses and they all thanked me for providing them the opportunities to review how I was presenting their experiences.

### **Limitations**

Multiple limitations exist in this constructivist grounded theory research. First, I used a cross-sectional sample, which means the interviews yielded data that represents one point in time, which is limited in scope (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Although my simultaneous data collection and analysis occurred over seven months, that represents a small window in the overall trajectory of a full-time CTE community college faculty member's career. It is possible that results would vary at different points of faculty members' careers. Another limitation is that the participants were restricted to new CTE faculty members in the Colorado Community College System. There could be unique factors within the system that impacted the transition to teaching for CTE faculty. Thus, the resultant theory might not be applicable outside of the Colorado system. A third limitation was the existence of power dynamics. I am an administrator in the Colorado Community College System. Although my aim in collecting data from within the system was to construct theory that will help administrators better support the CTE faculty we work with, the reality is that as a dean I hold a position of authority within the system. Despite my best efforts at reflexivity and assurances that responses would not impact their employment, participants might have been inclined to present a rosier picture of their transition than they actually experienced. Finally, because I employed theoretical sampling, it is probable that my participants include over- or under-representation from specific demographic groups. Being a member of certain demographic groups is likely to have an impact on the participants' career transition experiences and self-awareness of those experiences. Although I tried to be sensitive to demographics during participant selection, I did not have control over who opted to volunteer,

and the ultimate goal was selecting participants that provided information to further theory construction. Thus, participant selection could not consider demographics as much as would be ideal. An opportunity for further scholarship exists, examining which identities have been left out of the research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants were asked to agree and sign an informed consent document. As described in the data collection section of this chapter, participants were informed of their right to confidentiality. Additionally, because I hold a position of authority in the Colorado Community College System, participants were assured that their participation and views expressed in interviews would not negatively impact their employment within the system. The informed consent document can be found in Appendix F. Finally, I strove to uphold the ethical responsibility of accurately reflecting the expressed perspectives of the participants through a two-step member checking process.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of my methodology from conceptual framework to methods. It also included information on participant selection and their profiles. The purpose of this proposed constructivist grounded theory project was to explore the experiences of CTE community college faculty within the Colorado Community College System who transition from industry to higher education. By employing a blended framework of constructionism and organizational sensemaking to interview question creation, I ensured I asked about participant experiences with regard to their individual development as a faculty member and their integration into the larger organization of higher education. I utilized the strategies of theoretical sampling, iterative data collection, comparative analysis, memo writing, member checking, and

reflexive journaling to ensure the resultant becoming faculty theory is grounded in the experiences of the participants, with an acknowledgement of my role as a co-constructor. At the center of my goals was theory construction. Constructing theory grounded in the data enabled me to articulate ways for community college administrators to effectively support new CTE faculty during the transition process.

## CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings for this constructivist grounded theory study. The chapter is organized by the three questions that guided the research and led to the construction of the becoming faculty theory discussed in detail in chapter five. Using in vivo and process codes to analyze the 22 interview transcripts ensured I was able to prioritize the perspectives of the participants and keep the resultant categories and becoming faculty theory grounded in their experiences (Saldaña, 2021). I completed the coding and analysis described in chapter three with the following research questions guiding me:

1. How do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system develop understandings about what it means to be a teacher in a higher education setting when transitioning to the role from a workforce career?
2. What hindering and supportive forces do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system experience when transitioning from industry to higher education?
3. In what ways do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system describe their professional development as they transition(ed) from industry specialists to higher education teachers?

For question number one, I describe the findings around how the participant group developed understandings of what it means to teach in higher education. Specifically, I describe strategies of experimentation, personalizing the curriculum of others, drawing on their own experience as students, and focusing on preparing students for an industry career. For question two, I describe the hindering and supporting factors articulated by the participants with regard to their transitions. This section examines the importance of interpersonal connections with supervisors,

administrators, and peers as well as the roles played by the culture of academia and bureaucratic systems. For question three, I share how faculty described their professional development during the transition from industry to higher education. I describe the key elements articulated by participants about effective professional development. These elements include the importance of how their development as teachers connects to their experiences as industry professionals, the need for extended time to develop including space to ask questions and learn, and flexibility and faculty agency. A synthesis of the findings in relation to existing scholarship can be found in chapter five.

### **Findings for Question One**

Question one of this study asked how CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system develop understandings about what it means to be a teacher in higher education when transitioning to the role from a workforce career. Findings for this question are rooted in participant schema constructions of their conceptualizations of the role of teacher at a community college. In chapter two of this study I noted how the literature on conceptualizations of faculty positions addressed the broad nature of faculty job responsibilities with little intentional focus on the act of teaching in community college settings. What scholarship does exist on teaching practices was primarily related to four-year institutions (Burns, 2012; Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006; Santoro, 2011; Sprouse et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2021) This study sought to address that lack of teaching focus by emphasizing teaching practices at a community college. Participant responses to interview questions designed with this research question in mind focused on four thematic areas: experimentation as a way to dealing with feeling overwhelmed, inheriting curriculum from others and learning to personalize it, drawing

on their understanding of teaching from their experiences as students, and preparing students to go into the workforce.

## **Experimentation**

How the participants employed experimentation as a strategy varied based on how much experience these faculty had as trainers or adjunct instructors in their field. Those with past experience training others, such as Keith, Nina, Ruth, and Terry, felt less overwhelmed at the prospect of implementing a curriculum than other participants in the study. Nina called her transition to full time teaching seamless saying she was able to take what she was doing in industry and apply it to the classroom well. Terry and Ruth were industry trainers, facilitating classes similar to community college curriculums before they became faculty members. But even these participants still described a sense of struggling to figure out all the expectations of being a teacher at a community college as well as the differences between training someone in the field versus teaching in a for-credit program. Keith described it like this:

I didn't know what I didn't know. I had a very industry-centered perception of "I'm gonna come in there and I'm gonna teach things the way they should be taught to get these guys ready for a job." I cannot tell you the mountain of things that I did not understand about education or how people learn best or that there was a better way of teaching people than the way I had previously done it on the job.

This statement is significant because it describes a trajectory of development for Keith where he brought his pre-constructed schema about teaching to a new situation and was forced to adjust. Thus, even with experience being in front of learners, these participants still needed to try new things and figure it out as they went.

For the rest of the participants the very idea of delivering lessons in front of a classroom they were fully responsible for was overwhelming when they first started. Tammy described it as being “pushed out of a boat in the middle of the ocean” and she asked herself, “How were they crazy enough to hire me? Why did they think that I could do this?” She also articulated the strong sense of responsibility she felt when she said, “if I screw up my job, am I going to break my students?”

Thus, experimentation looked different based on the participant, but they all expressed some level of trying new things to help them put into practice the kind of teacher they want to be. The spectrum of experimentation strategies described ranged from failing completely at something to continual refinement of practices. Ruth described that she employed an ask forgiveness not permission approach where she would “move the noise out of the way and plow through,” until someone told her different. Maria shared, “I think I had to do it kind of the wrong way first to figure out what needed to be corrected,” while Nora described her refinement practice as, “I would look at the outcomes of each project and ask myself, ‘How is this working? Did they get the skills? Do I see a common thread throughout the projects, like something that they didn't get?’” It is important to note that none of the participants described the experimentation process as random trial and error. Attempts to experiment with curriculum and teaching practices were intentional efforts to get better at teaching. Jordan and Maria described paying attention to student results on assessments and how they responded in the classroom to different teaching strategies. They both talked about adjusting their approaches based on the explicit and implicit feedback they got from students. Jordan described it as “just watching students and when they check out and when they engage.” Maria shared how “hearing what students were struggling with and what challenges they were facing,” helped her realize “Oh, I

need to change this. This isn't the students' learning problem. This is my teaching problem.”

Emily likened it to the kind of practice professional athletes go through to become great. As she put it:

I would spend hours and hours and hours just going through [the content], going through the examples, make sure that I knew it. Now, fast forward five years. Most of these classes I've taught many times, so I don't have to spend a whole lot of time preparing.

This quote illustrates both the commitment Emily has to improving her teaching practices and the intentional way she does so. Regardless of where they fell on the experimentation spectrum, or what motivated them to try new things, each participant described using it in some intentional way.

### **Inherited Curriculum**

Another strategy several participants in this study employed as they developed what it means to teach in a community college was taking an inherited curriculum and making it their own. I defined inherited curriculum as the course structure, learning materials, textbooks, and lesson plans given to new faculty but designed by others. Only one participant in this study joined their community college in a brand new program where everything had to be developed from scratch. Everyone else started their role using curriculum designed by others. For example, Nora described at length spending her first two years at the college implementing pre-existing lessons as a starting point and then refining them. She keeps notes of what she is going to change each semester, and her first action was to redo the program's previously used curriculum that she found to be suboptimal. She described it like this:

I keep a Word doc, and it just says, "Fall 24 class changes," and when I see something that I don't like in the project or something like that, or I get feedback or just an idea of

something I need to do better, I just write it down, and I'm going to change it for next time.

This statement illustrates how new faculty work systematically to make the curriculum their own.

In Jordan's case a fully built curriculum was not shared with her, rather, "Someone handed me an outline, and then someone visited once a semester, but there wasn't a lot of...guidance about what I should be doing in the classroom." In other cases participants were given a basic curriculum and encouraged to adjust it. Elliot described it as "working from other people's lesson plans and starting to develop an understanding of my role in the classroom." Starting from a pre-built curriculum helped Elliot to see how his initial thoughts on what a college teacher is "supposed" to do lined up with what students actually responded well too. As Maria described it, "they're like, 'this is the foundation, you teach it however you want to teach it.'" Being told they had the space to make the curriculum their own made Jordan, Elliot, and Marie feel both nervous about getting it right and excited to personalize it. Tammy also experienced a sense of freedom to make changes which ultimately empowered her to define the curriculum for herself. She said, "My initial priority was to take the content and put it into my voice. I felt very strongly that I could not effectively communicate the topics I wanted to communicate if it wasn't in my voice." Through inheriting and then personalizing curriculum, faculty in this study built schema around what it means to teach and what kind of teaching style they want to employ. The idea of faculty putting the curriculum into their voice was a key finding that contributed to the final becoming faculty theory.

### **Experience as a Student**

Several participants described that their own experiences as students had a direct impact on how they view themselves as a teacher now. Experiences ranged from having teachers who were models of what to do or not to do, to completing degrees that helped shape their sense of self as a teacher, to remembering what it is like to juggle being a student with other life challenges. All these types of experiences helped inform how participants developed an understanding of what it means to teach in higher education.

In Maria's case, she experienced a learning environment in her master's program that intentionally created emotionally harmful competition between students which she vowed not to replicate in her own classroom. She said, "it was not a supportive environment. So when I came into it, into teaching, that was my perception, that was my experience, and I knew I didn't want to be like that." Providing her students a supportive environment was important for Maria and she embraced a responsive teaching approach when she realized "on a community college level...our purpose, our goal, is to help students be successful in any way that we can." This statement illustrates how Maria's previously constructed schema interacted with her new role and was reshaped. She was one of the participants who expressed the most enthusiasm when talking about her passion for supporting students.

Nora described how the program she went through did not teach her the realities of the workforce when left her feeling underprepared for her first career. Nora struggled during her early years in industry because of what she felt was a lack of quality preparation in college. She said the experience of having to train herself in the workforce taught her:

what I didn't want to be as a teacher, and it really motivated me. I saw this as a serious position for me, where I was going to come in and mentor students. And it reminded me of the program I went to and how I didn't get what I wanted.

As a result of her own negative college experiences, Nora now prioritizes making sure her students are prepared for their future careers.

Elliot shared that he had to unlearn what it meant to be a teacher because of his own experiences as a student in a lecture-based model. He had to challenge himself to think about what a good teacher should do, rather than just the examples he had experienced. He described it thusly, “I think my past educational experiences in the classic education model really were a drag on my development as a faculty member. The only reason I felt comfortable with them was because that's what I knew.” His quote is interesting because it demonstrates how relying on existing understandings is a starting place of comfort for new faculty. When he realized that there were better ways to teach, Elliot leaned into learning them. Jordan had a similar experience to Elliot's, when she recognized she was carrying a perception of what it meant to teach based on what she had experienced as a student. She shared realizing that she came of a world where lecturing was the norm, but she could instead choose to follow the rarer examples of teachers who broke that mold. She said, “I think the best teachers I had asked more questions than they gave me answers, and...those were the biggest growth times personally.” This realization contributed directly to Jordan's definition of a teacher being a facilitator of student learning.

Three participants in the study had recently completed or were in the process of completing graduate level work in the field of higher education or adult learning. They articulated how being a student in those programs influenced their development as teacher. In Daniel's case, earning a master's degree in education helped him confirm his capabilities, providing him with confidence. He said:

it was in those early years as a student, after I'd already got in industry, got my certificates, that I discovered that, that I can. I am capable...my personal life is, in my perception, a testament to the work that's done at a community college.

That enthusiasm for learning has led Daniel to consider pursuing a doctorate degree. His experience mimics the trajectory of his students and keeps him connected to their perspectives. Emily successfully defended the dissertation for her EdD between our first and second interviews. Earning that degree taught her how she wanted to remain focused on teaching rather than advance in an administrative capacity. She initially thought she would pursue a community college presidency one day, but after finishing the program she decided “that’s not what I want to do. What I want to do is exactly what I’m doing right now. But you don’t discover that until you go through these programs and do the learning.” Thus, Emily’s experience did not just inform her teaching practices. It also influenced the overall trajectory of her career as it reaffirmed her commitment to staying in the classroom. Ruth described that completing a master’s degree in adult learning helped her define what it means to teach. She said:

I call myself a teacher, but I feel like really I'm a learning facilitator. I like to see what the class will do. If you give them a question and resources they'll come up with stuff. And it's amazing to me what they come up with. I want to just lead them in the direction they need to go, provide the resources they need, help them to figure out exactly what it is they're trying to find out.

For Nina, remembering her experiences of being a student meant being able feel empathy for the students in her classes and the overall life circumstances they deal with. Having stated her career on a similar path as her students, she said, “I understand trying to juggle being a student while also working full time and I'm empathetic to the fact that they're probably trying to cook

dinner while they're attending a real-time remote class.” This ability to understand the perspective of learners informed Nina’s teaching philosophy when it comes to addressing for the social-emotional needs of her students. It also contributes to her understanding that to teach at a community college means caring for the students holistically.

### **Preparing Students for Industry and Life**

Supporting students holistically was also apparent in other areas of the conversations with participants. The interview question about how participants would describe the role of a community college CTE faculty member was one of the few that interviewees answered similarly across the board. Although answers were not identical and varied in nuance, every participant in the study described a sense of responsibility to prepare students for future careers in their field of study. Most of the participants also described how they want to prepare students for life outside of their careers.

Due to the nature of teaching in a vocational field, including meeting requirements to align curriculum with job readiness, it was not surprising to hear the participants describe their desire to make sure students are well-prepared to start their careers. Many of the answers focused on preparing students to deal with the realities of what work in the industry looks like. Nora described sharing:

everything with my students as far as experiences go—the good, the bad, the ugly. I talk about my worst jobs, I talk about crying in the bathroom every day, I talk about how I had to stick it out because I needed a paycheck at that point.

This quote illustrates how Nora personalizes her teaching and emphasizes preparing students for the true realities of the industry, including the challenging personal aspects of it. Terry described preparing their students for the workforce by contextualizing the content they get through

sources such as the textbook. They said, “What I’ve done, especially for my in-person classes, is try and say, ‘Okay, so here’s what the text says, here’s how this actually translates into real life.’” Terry’s statement is significant because it emphasizes how they connect the theoretical to the practical, acting as the bridge between school and workforce. Terry’s approach was also expressed by other participants in the study, who described using examples and personal experiences from their own career in the field to exemplify course content. Elliot highlighted his goal to prepare students for the specific culture that exists in the industry he teaches which is different from the culture of higher education. He incorporates elements of that culture into how he structures his classes, so students are experienced from day one. He described a strict code of discipline in the industry that is modeled in his program, which he had to explain to the college administration.

Other participants took the idea of preparing students a step further by describing how they want students leaving their classroom well prepared for life. Tammy expressed delight at seeing graduates in the field when she interacts with industry colleagues. She said, “And I love seeing my students out in the wild as graduates, and they're doing amazing things. And they make me so proud.” The idea of making sure her students were well-prepared to take on multiple challenges after graduation is a theme Tammy returned to more than once during our conversations. Daniel said that he feels community colleges are especially well positioned to “support people where they're at, take them to the level they want to be to, and give them the opportunity to help them build a vision for where they want to be moving forward.” Keith felt preparing students for life was a cornerstone to what he does in the classroom, even in cases where students ultimately wind up in other fields. He said:

the role of education isn't just making people job-ready. It's making them life-ready. And that is a very important skill set to have with young people who may not pick your career as their life path, but you can impart life skills and self-worth and integrity, all these important things. There are things that will never show up in the curriculum that you actually do have a pretty major part of.

The interesting thing about Daniel and Keith's comments is how they reveal that both of them do not just connect their personal teaching philosophies to student preparation. They also connect it to the mission of community colleges.

The participants' experiences shed light on how they understand their teaching role in the Colorado Community College System. Through experimentation strategies, personalizing curriculum, applying their own experiences as students, and emphasizing career and life preparation, participants illustrated how they made meaning of their new responsibilities in education. As described in the next section, faculty members' ability to thrive in their new role is often influenced by a range of factors that impact their transitions to teaching.

### **Findings for Question Two**

Question two of this study addressed the forces that hindered or supported CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system during their transition to higher education. The interviews revealed three main themes addressing this question. The first was interpersonal connections, including those with peers, immediate supervisors, and administrators. The second was the challenge of negotiating the bureaucracy of higher education. The third was the culture of academia and how CTE programs are viewed within it.

#### **Interpersonal Connections**

Every participant in this study identified the interpersonal connections with their supervisor, administrator, or peers as a key factor in their transition. In some cases these connections were a supportive factor in making the move to higher education, and in other cases the connections were a hindering one. However, all participants described them as being a significant force in their transition to teaching, and all participants were able to articulate at least one level of interpersonal relationships that provided support.

### *Connections to Peers*

Across the study, all participants identified peers as being important to their transition to higher education. How that manifested itself looked different for the participants. Although Ruth is the only individual at the college who teaches in her program, she still described experiencing a sense of belonging and feeling welcomed by colleagues who had their offices nearby. This welcoming attitude expressed by faculty in other disciplines helped her build connections with peers who teach in different disciplines. Other faculty in the study described similar strong relationships with colleagues within their departments. In Elliot's case, connecting with peers had a direct impact on his teaching. He said:

I got a chance to work very closely with a couple of people here at our campus who had been teaching for a while, and they really helped me get a different understanding of the role faculty play, not just in terms of preparing lesson plans but really looking at performance objectives, looking at where your class fits into an overall curriculum, and trying to pass that information on to your students and find different ways to do that.

In this way, Elliot described how peer networks are a supportive factor in helping him develop his identity as a teacher.

For Tammy and Keith, peer relationships, especially those formed in the first couple of years in a full time role, provided social connections to hold each other up. Keith said that having connections with faculty who started the same time he did meant that “we’re on that journey together. So as they rise up and as I rise, we maintain sort of that friendship.” And for Tammy, peer colleagues across different disciplines provided a space to share concerns and fears. She said, “it doesn't matter, you know, what people are teaching if they can have somebody that they can talk to about the scariness of the teaching.” Tammy teaches in a large department which enabled her to have a mentor from the same discipline during her first year. That mentor, and the connections she made with other faculty, helped reduce her sense of feeling overwhelmed and was a factor in being able to move out of her experimentation phase quickly.

A final way peer relationships were a supportive factor for participants was in providing networking opportunities to get answers to questions. Jordan viewed peer networks as a source of information for navigating bureaucracy and learning new things. She said, “I think it was really just talking to other faculty members and asking, ‘Hey, where did you get that? Or how do you do this?’” Nina expressed a similar viewpoint. She made a comment during our first conversation that provided the build your village subcategory for the becoming faculty theory constructed from this study. She said:

The more that you can build your village, meeting other people who have been doing this for a while, so they are a wealth of knowledge, or those just starting out like you, you can kind of lean on each other to figure things out.

The use of the phrase “build your village” illustrated how Nina saw the idea of collective support as being a key to her success. Having access to seasoned colleagues who could answer questions and be a sounding board for ideas was a supportive factor articulated by multiple participants.

### *Connections to Supervisors*

Immediate supervisor support also emerged as a significant factor for all faculty. In most cases this supervisor held the title of department chair, although in some cases participants reported directly to the dean. Jordan, Keith, Nora, Ruth, and Terry all expressed a feeling of being directly connected to their immediate supervisor and gave them credit for creating a supportive working environment. As Terry put it:

I can sit down with my faculty chair, and because I know she's dealing with some of the same stuff, because she has to teach too, there's definitely an ease of access and ease of communication there that makes things fairly simple.

The more faculty in the study felt that their immediate supervisor understood the day to day realities of teaching and could navigate the college's systems, the more supported they felt. As Keith felt similar support. He said "because our department chair was well-trained for his position, he is able to disseminate information to us incredibly well. And he is able to move our issues and stuff up the chain effectively." These statements demonstrate how for Terry and Keith, having a chair who understands and even deals with job responsibilities similar to their own helps them feel connected to and advocated for by their supervisors.

Another way participants described being connected to their supervisors was in how they empowered the faculty and believed in them. Jordan described feeling empowered when her chair assigned her responsibilities, "I didn't know I was ready for, but they trusted that I was." When Nora first started she said her chair eased her into the full time role by intentionally adjusting her teaching load to ensure it was manageable. Ruth reports directly to a dean and she said his support when she first started was critical to her success. She said it gave her "the confidence that I needed to actually pull this off because I was really wondering because of my

lack of academic skills when I started.” Thus, access to and trust from supervisors emerged as an important supportive factor for new CTE faculty in the Colorado system. It was a continual theme shared by participants.

### ***Connections to Administrators***

Unlike the positive descriptions of relationships with supervisors, descriptions of relationships with administrators were more mixed. Some participants described their administrators as being supportive. Nina shared examples of having direct access to her dean that made her feel like she always had a place to go to get her questions answered. This kind of access provided Nina with a point of contact to help her navigate the complexities of the system. Tammy experienced something similar. She joined her college in the same year her program was going through a site visit from an accrediting body. She said leadership “made it clear” to the team how supported they were in going through the accreditation process. She described how she “always felt” support from the dean, provost, and even the college president during the site visit. In both Nina and Tammy’s cases the presence of and access to the administration was identified as a supportive factor in their transition.

However, other participants described a feeling of disconnect from administration. Maria said, “I feel like the faculty and administration are very different entities, with very different goals, directions for the college, and I don't feel like they're on the same page at all.” This is a telling statement because Maria expressed a strong commitment to creating supportive learning environments. To describe the administration as not being on the same page indicates that she sees administrators as aiming for something antithetical to her goals. Terry talked about a faculty member who was promoted to an administrator. They said that this newly minted administrator suddenly forgot what it was like to be a teacher and began making decisions without consulting

faculty or considering negative impacts. Their experience with this administrator is a contrast to their experience with their chair, who they identified as understanding faculty roles.

In Nora's case she had a shift in the organizational structure of her college that led to both her department chair and her dean switching at the same time. This change represented a shift in the level of support and connectedness she felt. She described her initial structure as accessible. She said, "I had a great chair, a great dean, and I had support that I felt like I could be open, I could be honest, and I could come to leadership with anything." Once the organizational structure shifted Nora felt less connected to her dean. She experiences a hierarchal structure where she no longer feels her work is valued by the administration. She said, "I'm a bottom feeder...you know, I'm a boots-on-the-ground person. You know, I'm doing the work at the bottom with the students." This has left her wondering if putting in extra effort to create dynamic learning experiences for students is even worth it anymore, demonstrating how the administration has gone from being a supportive to hindering factor.

### **The Bureaucracy of Higher Education**

All participants in this study identified the bureaucracy of higher education as a hindering factor to their transition. The Colorado Community College System is made up of 13 schools, so each participant experienced learning about a bureaucracy within a bureaucracy. Participants described being frustrated in multiple ways, from feeling like they were tied up in complicated processes that delayed their ability to work effectively, to adjusting to never ending changes, to not knowing who to go to and what acronyms stood for. Even participants who felt immediately comfortable in the role of teacher described navigating bureaucracy as a hinderance. Ruth summarized it like this:

Most of the confusion has been around the college policies and procedures more than anything else. And I've just kind of struggled and struggled until I couldn't figure it out anymore and then finally asked somebody. I usually could figure it out if I struggled enough, but I realize how much time I was spending on struggling with little things that should have been done in seconds. And it was taking me hours and I was getting nowhere. So...that's when I decided to start asking for help.

Ruth's description illustrates how she was left to problem solve on her own, rather than being given the information from the beginning that would allow her to concentrate on students instead of systems. Nora echoed this sentiment by sharing how the processes at her college are so complicated it creates animosity between divisions over small things which leaves her feeling demoralized. She said, "I do feel like our processes could be easier. You know, we're not the enemy. We are on the same team. Treat me like we're on the same team." Nora's insight demonstrated how the bureaucracy creates a gulf between divisions rather than connections to better serve students. Terry described it as taking something simple and creating complication, such as needing "17 committees that meet for 3 different years to be able to change this one thing." Navigating complex processes with little or no support means participants spent precious time and effort during their early years not focused on teaching, but focused on cutting through red tape.

Adjusting to never ending changes was another bureaucratic hinderance participants articulated. Both Maria and Jordan talked about institutional changes creating confusion for them. Jordan said that such changes leave her "in a perpetual state of 'is something due this week that I didn't know about?'" Maria said she tells herself "Okay, well, this is what we're doing for now, but we know it'll change next year because they'll have some new policy in place." Terry

echoed this. They added that even when they thought they had a handle on a process or understood who to go to for help, “You talk to them, and they’re like, ‘Oh no, I used to do that last year, but now they’ve created a new position, and there’s a new Vice Chancellor, Assistant of Whatever to deal with that now.’” These types of institutional and system shifts left participants feeling demoralized and confused. It forced them to expend excessive energy on relearning things rather than concentrating on working with students.

Beyond causing new faculty to overly focus on navigating red tape, bureaucracy in some cases created barriers for faculty trying to help students or understand the college. Keith and Nina both described feeling helpless to support students by not knowing who was who at their institutions or how processes work. Keith described it as “how does the student finance system work? How do students actually register for class? Because it's really embarrassing to not be able to help them.” For someone who sees himself as a guide to help students learn life skills, Keith’s frustration came through with this quote. He saw the lack of clarity with processes as a barrier to supporting students. As described earlier, Nina intentionally tunes into the social-emotional needs and life challenges her students have. She shared that she spent time in her first years trying to figure out who was who on campus so she could let students know where to find support. She said, “it’s confusing to know where to send students for the right help.” And Maria described how names of colleagues would be evoked in meetings without context, leaving her confused about who it was she was being directed to. She said:

They'll throw out people's names like, "Oh, yeah, Linda," and I have no idea who Linda is. And they seem to have this level of understanding, like, yeah, they see Linda every day. They know who Linda is, and everybody should know who Linda is, but I don't.

This statement illustrated how when the information new faculty receive is not contextualized, they feel frustrated and are left to resort to figuring it out on their own.

A lack of clarity about acronyms was another area that several participants mentioned in their interviews. Nora shared how when she first started people would casually use institutional acronyms around her, leaving her confused. She said:

it would be nice if there was a cheat sheet for acronyms because people would just throw them out. And I'm like, I have no idea what half the things you just said are. And I'm trying to take notes and I just, I'm never going to remember all that.

Like Nora, Jordan also kept a running list of acronyms during her first years, which she would then ask a trusted peer to translate for her. In these cases both Nora and Jordan are expressing how they were put in a position where they could not contribute to the conversations because they were putting their effort into simply following along.

Jordan's approach of relying on a trusted colleague to translate her list of acronyms was an example of one of the three strategies participants identified to navigate the hindering bureaucratic confusion. The first was to ask directly for help, although several individuals expressed feeling fearful that doing so would expose their ignorance. As Nora succinctly put it, "sometimes it's hard to go to your boss and ask stupid questions." The second strategy was to cover all their bases by communicating with everyone about everything. This is an approach Daniel takes. As he put it, "I find myself just CC-ing or sending it to everybody and saying, 'Whoever wants this, here you are. Good luck.'" The third strategy was to find workarounds or short cuts through the red tape. Jordan described that she sometimes has to pay for materials out of pocket to ensure her program is properly equipped. She described her role in navigating bureaucracy as being a bridge between her program and the college. She said, "I feel like my job

is to work between the two and figure out how we can follow the rules and still get the thing done.” Yet, the fact that her work around is to make personal donations to the program illustrates how the bureaucracy has failed to serve the program and is an obstacle to her securing what she needs to effectively teach.

### **The Culture of Academia**

The overall culture of academia was cited as either a neutral or hindering factor for all the participants. While interviewees talked about developing positive relationships with others, especially peers and supervisors, no one indicated that higher education culture was a supportive force in their transition. There were three ways the culture of the academy was described by participants. The first was when they were made to feel as less than, sometimes by colleagues and sometimes by attitudes toward vocational education. The second was when they worried about not knowing enough about higher education, a field where knowledge is a form of legitimacy. The third was a mismatch between what they expected the job to be and the realities of it.

### ***Institutional Elitism***

Several participants articulated a sense of institutional elitism and exclusionary culture that made them feel less than. Tammy described being told by a peer at a faculty senate meeting that her vote in favor of an unpopular initiative should not count as much as a faculty member with more seniority. She was shocked by this since the bylaws of the senate explicitly stated that all faculty had an equal vote regardless of years with the college. Her response was to advocate for herself and set the colleague straight, but the fact that she even needed to illustrates how new faculty are sometimes put into a situation where they experience a sense of exclusion. Terry also described feeling excluded. They expressed how they keep their socially moderate viewpoints to

themselves, anticipating that they will be viewed as conservative and going against the accepted, liberal norm. Their main strategy is to simply keep their opinions to themselves. They said, “I think I've navigated it fairly well. But...I definitely don't feel that the college is like, oh, hey, we really want to hear everybody's opinions on things.” It speaks to the overall culture of higher education, a supposed place for the exchange of free ideas, when faculty with viewpoints considered different from the majority do not feel comfortable expressing them.

A sense of not being accepted showed up in other participants' stories beyond personal opinions about politics and college initiatives. Both Keith and Emily shared how teaching in a vocational discipline was perceived by others at the institution as less rigorous or important than general education classes. Keith emphasized his sense that CTE programs are not as valued in higher education as transfer degrees and that “the current system doesn't really value the type of intelligence that [CTE faculty and students] display.” He described his program as a practical one aimed at learners who thrive with kinesthetic educational approaches. This feeling of being less than translated to not being treated as full participant in the college's culture. As Keith put it:

you may speak, but they may not be listening. There are a number of committees where they do want to relegate you to a sort of less-than role. There are a number of opportunities just generally within the school that I feel like get closed off to you.

Emily experienced a similar attitude at her institution to the point where she earned a doctorate in community college leadership as a way to have a voice. She said, “I needed that credential to be heard, to have a seat at the table.” The idea that CTE disciplines are less valuable than general education programs placed participants in this study in the position of not only having to learn the ropes of their new job, but also of having to advocate for their very right to be treated as full members the college.

### ***Not Knowing Enough***

This advocacy position, coupled with the natural transition that comes with learning a new job, left participants in this study feeling like they had no room to make mistakes. Post-secondary education as a career field is made up of highly educated individuals who value knowledge and expertise. For some of the participants in this study they faced an assumption that CTE faculty do not have the same level of expertise as others, because not all vocational programs require graduate degrees, or have them available. Thus, assumptions are made about CTE faculty and their level of education. Terry described being required to participate in professional development on effective teaching despite having extensive experience as a trainer in the workforce. Interviews also revealed how new faculty worry about looking ignorant, or as Ruth put it, “I didn’t want to be the one who didn’t know anything.” This fear kept some participants from revealing that they didn’t know everything about their new jobs, despite it being natural to have a learning curve when starting a new career. Keith summarized the strategy of keeping his head down because of potential perceptions like this:

We're scared of looking like idiots. We know what we're good at, but teaching in front of a class isn't that. And so we're all afraid of being dumb. Nobody's gonna volunteer for anything. We don't want to look stupid in an environment where the worry is we're already perceived as being stupid.

Leaving faculty to navigate a new culture without establishing an atmosphere where it is safe to ask questions created unnecessary struggle and hinderance to participants’ transition to higher education.

### ***Mismatch of Industry and Higher Education Culture***

Even participants in this study who felt confident in their teaching skills identified an aspect of the culture that hindered their transition from workforce to higher education – the mismatch of what they anticipated the job would be with the reality of what it is. Jordan said that “nothing matched” what she expected and Nina described being overwhelmed by the job responsibilities not related to the classroom. She said the tasks related to mentoring students, ensuring her program meets college and system requirements, and engaging with community partners “filled up so much time that I feel like the teaching part of it is secondary. And that was my biggest surprise.” It took Nina two years to learn which tasks outside of teaching she was truly expected to prioritize and which she could skip to focus on the classroom. She described looking back and realizing that she participated in some things during her first two years that were not a good use of her time. For Elliot the biggest mismatch came with learning that higher education had different limitations and expectations than the industry he came from. He had to find a way to balance running the program within college requirements and values with preparing students to go into a field with a stricter disciplinary culture. This took effort to navigate with his administrators. Daniel expressed shock at the level of autonomy he gained when joining his community college. He described the difference in culture in his first career with this teaching career like this:

coming from industry...there's a very top-down hierarchy where you come into work, you're told what to do, and you do it. If you don't like it, you go get a different job. It's just very black and white, and there's no opportunity to participate... So there's been a transition period for me in understanding this idea of shared governance.

He described needing time to get used to the idea that faculty could question administrative decisions or expect to be consulted on them. Daniel's quote illustrated how new CTE faculty have to come to terms with the difference between industry and higher education cultures.

New CTE faculty navigating the transition to higher education encounter myriad supportive and hindering factors, including interpersonal relationships, complex bureaucracy, and a culture that can be significantly different from what they experienced in their first careers. A key way to help them not only survive but thrive could be through meaningful professional development opportunities.

### **Findings for Question Three**

Question three of this research sought to uncover how CTE faculty in the Colorado community college system described their professional development during the transition to teaching from workforce. Participants in the study described both positive and negative experiences with professional development. All interviewees acknowledged the impact of quality, relevant professional development on their growth as educators. I identified three main themes from the interviews articulating what factors made professional development valuable or not. The first theme addressed how these faculty were able to connect their industry expertise and skills to their development as teachers. The second addressed level of flexibility and choice in professional development participation. The final theme addressed how much time and space faculty were given to develop and learn.

#### **Connecting to Industry**

The first theme I identified about how faculty describe their professional development addressed participant connections to their previous workforce experience. Participants in this study spoke of a desire to see those connections celebrated as a benefit to the college. When

faculty were able to maintain connections to industry or when their industry expertise was treated as an asset during their development as teachers, the results were positive.

All participants came to their roles at their colleges with a high level of expertise from workforce, which they all viewed as an asset to their teaching ability. As Maria put it, “I think having a well-rounded [industry] experience before coming into teaching gives me the ability to give lots of examples in every setting so I can appeal to a wider variety of students.” Nora and Emily saw their workforce experience as a way to help students understand the realities of the jobs they would be entering. For Keith and Elliot, their first careers gave them a work ethic and understanding of the unique cultures of their respective fields that they wove into their curriculums. Tammy described her experience in the field as being instrumental in her ability to support the maintenance of her program’s accreditation. Terry, Ruth, and Nina all came to their teaching roles from jobs in industry where they facilitated a lot of training. For Terry, being required to go through training on adult learning theory felt like an unnecessary hoop they needed to jump through. Daniel was given the space to maintain his connections to industry and see the skills he brought with him as valuable. The result for him was the ability to blend both worlds. As he put it:

I am at the point where I feel like okay, I've started my new career and it's adjacent to my old career, which really they're now merging now into my career as one. So now I feel like an educator in industry rather than just an educator or just in industry. I feel like I'm finding those overlaps now.

All of these examples, point to faculty coming to higher education with a wealth of skills and knowledge. Having that expertise acknowledged or not impacted how trusted they felt by

administrators at their colleges to do their jobs, which influenced how they saw themselves in the role of teacher.

### **Flexibility and Choice**

When participants described the professional development opportunities available to or required of them in their first years of teaching, many of them highlighted the importance of flexibility and choice. Daniel and Elliot described how in industry they were used to a top down structure where they were told what to do. They were both surprised at having more choice and freedom to set their own development goals within higher education. Daniel described it like this:

In industry, I never had to fill out this academic plan and use a SMART goal for what I plan to do in the next year. I was always told, "You show up to work, you do what you're told to do, and you go home at the end of the day."

In both their cases, this agency inspired them to pursue additional training specifically in adult learning theory. During his time as a new faculty member Daniel earned a graduate degree in education and is considering pursuing a doctorate.

Nina and Nora also described a similar sense of empowerment. Nora shared how important it is for college leadership to trust her to do her job, which she said includes having the flexibility to try new things. For Nina, empowerment shows up when she is given choice in training opportunities. She said, "those professional development opportunities really help because you can pick where you're struggling and sit there and learn about it with other people. I take advantage of all of those kinds of things." Jordan echoed this sentiment, saying she has access to myriad professional development opportunities, "that are right there on campus." In Keith's case, his sense of agency in his development has led to new ways to support the training

of students. He said, “I am in the driver's seat, and I actually have the ability to potentially do more for the world. That's not the way I saw things when I started.”

However, not all faculty had empowering professional development experiences in their first years. Terry and Tammy both found themselves in required trainings that did not meet their needs. Despite coming from an industry background where they had experience teaching and training, Terry was required to complete an introductory professional development program. He said:

You know, coming into education, it's very much like, “Oh, well we're gonna have you take another pedagogy course for the 13th time,” and maybe it'll sink in this time, or maybe you'll fall asleep cause it's the same stuff that you've heard, for, you know, whatever.

The underlying sentiment in this quote illustrates a lack of acknowledgement of Terry's experience and need. Another example of this came from Tammy. She teaches in a CTE program that requires interaction with students in off-campus settings during times when the college does not run a lot of classes. Those were the times when most of the required professional development programs for new faculty were scheduled. Rather than find ways to be flexible, facilitators told her she had to prioritize the training sessions over her teaching schedule, despite being the only qualified faculty member to supervise students in the outside setting. That experience left her feeling frustrated, and she now pursues outside professional development opportunities related to her field more often than internal ones.

Nora experienced something similar when all the internal professional development trainings were scheduled at times that clashed with her heavy teaching schedule. She prioritized being in the classroom and expressed a wish for more asynchronous options. She said:

they always seem to be, it's Thursday this week and Thursday in two weeks. And well, guess what? I'm still teaching. Thursdays at that time still doesn't work for me. So I wish that there was a little bit more variety.

Because many CTE programs require unique student contact hours, such as labs, clinicals, or practicums, professional development opportunities designed around general education faculty teaching loads might not be accessible to CTE faculty. This was exemplified in Nora and Tammy's experiences.

Even Daniel, who expressed enthusiasm for professional development, had to find ways to make required trainings more applicable to his needs as a CTE faculty member. He worked to tie everything back to the industry trainings he had tailored for educators in his discipline. He described his experience in a required adult learning theory program like this:

taking that class and referring back to my textbook from my initial industry certification or my industry training class on how to become a [discipline redacted] educator. And I referenced that book probably more than I referenced the course material.

Daniel's experience illustrated how CTE programs have unique content needs that traditional professional development programs about teaching do not address.

### **Time to Develop and Space to Learn**

The final theme that emerged around research question three was having time to develop, including the ability to ask questions and learn. Effective professional development provided the needed supports for this process, according to participants. It took multiple semesters for Elliot to feel comfortable effectively applying what he learned about adult learning theory through professional development and connecting what he knew from industry to the classroom. As he put it:

I have this body of knowledge, but I have to translate it into the classroom. And the way I'm going to do it is engage you to put a framework to it. It really helped me start to develop my own thoughts about teaching. Since I've trained in adult learning theory and seen the results of it the last three semesters now I feel so much better prepared.

This act of translating his skills is not one that happened overnight for Elliot. In fact he calls it a trajectory that he continues to be on, one that he enjoys “because I feel like I’m constantly learning about how to become a better instructor.” Other participants in this study echoed Elliot’s idea of being on a continuum that takes time. Nora described it as a “fake it til you make it” process where she learned on the go, but ultimately grew into her confidence. It was interesting that Nora categorized her development approach as “fake it til you make it,” when the actual strategies she described, such as her collection of reflective notes, were actually intentional and thoughtful. Jordan likened her professional development over time as building up her toolbox. She said:

I think because of a lot of this professional development, I feel way more confident now than I did at first and have different tools to fall back on if things aren’t going well. And I think I’m much more confident now and really just like having a toolbox that I didn’t have at first.

This metaphor of building a toolbox illustrated how Jordan views her development as an ongoing process. She went on to say “I remember there being a turn from being afraid that I wasn’t in the right place—like I was poser—and to being really excited about...what we could do with students.” Daniel echoed this idea. He described having the time to grow into the role of teacher and how it meant that when he was ready to start taking more initiative, he could do so with confidence. He described it as a slow process that reached a point where he was ready to go:

it was probably more of a little bit of a slower change or transition there, but that's really how it felt...like I literally went from one day being very low and flying under the radar to the next day being a very full engaged participant in all of the opportunities offered.

Daniel and Jordan's tipping points speak to the idea that when given time to build a foundation, faculty will begin to engage with confidence.

In addition to having time to develop, participants expressed that space to be a learner was also critical to their professional development. As described in the section about the culture of academia, some participants in this study came into higher education being made to feel as less than. The level of safety available in professional development opportunities to new faculty to not know everything made a difference in its effectiveness. As Keith put it "I had to be brave enough and swallow my own humility enough to ask these real easy, like 101 style questions that just never got addressed." When participants in this study had room to ask questions it made them more open to learning. For Emily, being able to ask questions allowed her to learn quickly what to focus on. She said she would speak up and ask, "'What does that mean? And how does that impact me in my role?' You know? 'What does that mean to me as faculty?'" She went on to say that she viewed professional development opportunities as the place where she could learn how to go from good to great in the classroom. She said, "I want to be a great faculty member. You know, tell me how I can do that." This quote illustrates how new CTE faculty come to higher education with a willingness to learn. Maria and Jordan saw being in the student role for professional development as a way to connect with colleagues and learn how to be a more effective teacher from them or discover more about the culture of the college. For Daniel, it allowed him to grow confident in knowing how to take advantage of resources available to him even after his first years. He said:

Now, you know, I have no problem reaching out when I'm looking for a resource, trying to teach my students how to write an academic paper. I have no problem reaching out to my colleague, my friend, even in the English department.

By providing Daniel the space to not know everything when he first started, it gave him the confidence to know it was ok to rely on resources and connections going forward, thus moving him forward in his development.

### **Summary**

This study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system develop understandings about what it means to be a teacher in a higher education setting when transitioning to the role from a workforce career?
2. What hindering and supportive forces do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system experience when transitioning from industry to higher education?
3. In what ways do CTE community college faculty in the Colorado system describe their professional development as they transition(ed) from industry specialists to higher education teachers?

This chapter provided an overview of the results from the interviews with participants in relation to the research questions. For question one, interviews revealed that new CTE faculty develop their understanding of what it means to teach by employing experimentation, adjusting inherited curriculum, letting their own experiences as students inform their practices, and focusing on preparing students to enter the workforce. While on this journey to develop as a teacher, they also faced hindering and supportive factors within their institutions. Those factors included connections with colleagues, the culture of the higher education, and systems of bureaucracy.

Professional development opportunities also played a key role in the faculty members' transitions. Participants described effective professional development as those programs that allowed them choice, time, space to be in the role of a learner, and the opportunity to connect the strengths they brought from industry to their faculty role.

Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings from this chapter, including how they related to the existing literature and their interpretations. Chapter five also includes a full articulation of the core category, becoming faculty, which is the foundation of the theory constructed from this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this dissertation begins with a summary of the overall study, including a short review of the purpose, the conceptual framework, and the major themes from the literature. The chapter continues with an interpretation of the key findings in relation to the existing literature broken down by research question. The interpretation section also includes a synthesis of the findings across all three research questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the research and the recommendations for practice. The recommendations section goes into detail on the becoming faculty theory that emerged from the research, including actionable steps for community college administrators.

### **Summary of Study**

This summary section is structured in three components: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) overview of the conceptual framework applied to the research, and (c) highlights from the literature review.

### **Purpose**

This grounded theory study explored the transitions of CTE faculty in the Colorado Community College System to higher education from industry. The goal was to articulate ways to support faculty making this transition by clarifying (a) how new CTE faculty construct understandings of the role of teacher, (b) what hindering and supporting factors new CTE faculty experience during the transition, and (c) what professional development experiences impact the transition. This research contributed to the scholarship by focusing on the faculty perspectives about these transitions and addressing community college settings. The results provide college administrators with crucial information about barriers that exist for new CTE faculty during their

transition to higher education and ways to support them in becoming successful educational practitioners.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study employed a constructivist grounded theory approach, using a conceptual framework blending social constructionism and organizational sensemaking. Discussed in detail in chapter three, the use of this framework allowed me to emphasize participant perspectives, while acknowledging my role as a co-creator of the emergent theory. The tenets of social constructionism that are present in this study are exploring a phenomenon, recognizing that meaning making of the studied phenomenon is individualized, documenting how individuals translate meaning making into action, and following a fluid, non-prescriptive process for conducting research. The tenets of organizational sensemaking evident in this study are the importance of social interactions, the creation of multiple narratives within an organization, and the influence of power dynamics. As described in chapter three, because I used a grounded theory approach, organizational sensemaking as a theory was not applied during data analysis. Rather it is included as an acknowledgement of the role organizations play in the construction of meaning making. It primarily informed the construction of the semi-structured interview questions.

Using constructivist grounded theory as my approach and a framework that blended constructionism and organizational sensemaking allowed me to focus on the following ideas during data collection, data analysis, and construction of the final theory:

- The schemas new CTE community college faculty construct during their transition to higher education.

- The common threads that emerged from the individual participants' perspectives in the study.
- The organizational factors that hindered or support faculty transitions and how faculty made sense of those factors.
- How faculty are influenced by the organization and how they exert influence over it.

### **Literature Review Themes**

As discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, the existing scholarship on CTE faculty development in community colleges is limited at best. What scholarship does exist primarily emphasizes challenges in faculty workload, what administrators identify as faculty needs, or the unique needs of vocational faculty at non-community college settings (Eddy, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Murray, 2013; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). This study centered participant experiences and understandings and focused exclusively on faculty teaching in the Colorado Community College System. Thus, the results of this study are well positioned to add to and confirm the current literature.

In the literature review process, I noted five major themes present in current research. Those themes are: (a) characteristics of faculty who transition from workforce to higher education, (b) how faculty conceptualize their role as teachers, (c) the process of socialization into the culture of higher education, (d) professional development opportunities for faculty, and (e) teaching practices. Discussions of how the findings of this study connect to the themes found in current scholarship are found in the next section of this chapter.

## **Findings In Relation to Existing Literature**

The findings of this study demonstrate the complexity and nuance of community college CTE faculty development while highlighting common threads among participant experiences. Specifically examining how new CTE faculty in the Colorado system construct understanding of what it means to teach, the hindering and supportive factors they face, and how they describe their professional development, this study revealed important faculty experiences and needs. When interpreted and synthesized the findings provide a foundation to the becoming faculty grounded theory with the subcategories of building your village, learning the college, and finding your voice. The following subsections summarize the key findings described in detail in chapter four, how they relate to existing literature and the conceptual framework of this study, and my conclusions about those key findings. These discussions are organized by research question and a final synthesis across the three questions. Some participant examples from chapter four are restated to illustrate the conclusions drawn.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Question one of this study asked how CTE faculty in the Colorado Community College System develop understandings of what it means to teach when transitioning from a career in industry. The findings revealed that participants engaged in four key strategies: (a) employing experimentation to find out what worked for them in the classroom, (b) using and then adjusting inherited curriculum to make it their own, (c) drawing on their own experiences as students to identify what they did and did not want to replicate in their own classrooms, and (d) focusing on preparing students.

Question two asked what factors participants faced that either supported or hindered their transition to higher education. Three main factors emerged in the findings. The first was the

importance of interpersonal connections with peers, supervisors, and administrators. The second factor was the challenges of navigating higher education bureaucracy. The third was the overall culture of the academy.

Question three explored how faculty describe their professional development during their transition to higher education. Participants in this study described three factors that made professional development valuable to them or not. The first was how much room existed for faculty to connect their development to their time in industry. The second was the amount of agency they had in determining their professional development interests and needs and the level of flexibility in those offerings. The third was the importance of having time to develop and learn.

When interpreting the findings I returned to the tenets of constructivist grounded theory and my conceptual framework. Specifically, I focused on analyzing participant responses for actions and processes through in vivo and process codes (Charmaz, 2017c, Charmaz, 2021, Saldaña, 2021) to reveal how participants constructed meaning and translated their schema into action (Stauffer et al., 2006; Thorpe, 2008). The goal of understanding how faculty made meaning and took action based on their schema was to build a grounded theory that could support other new faculty in their transition from workforce to higher education. Organizational Sensemaking as a theory was not applied in the analysis, though some examples of how it was present in the participant experiences emerged from the data.

Recognizing that I was a co-constructionist in the process of building the theory, I practiced reflexivity and member checking during the data analysis process to ensure I was accurately describing participant perspectives (Charmaz, 2017b, Charmaz, 2017c, Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). After articulating the findings according to the research

questions, I worked to synthesize the results across all three questions to provide the foundation for the emergent theory. This process resulted in the emergence of four faculty needs that were expressed across all participants even as their individual experiences had unique nuance. The four needs expressed were: (a) social connections with colleagues, (b) recognition that the expertise and skills new CTE faculty bring from industry are an asset to their community college roles, (c) clarity in the transition pathway, including both defined expectations in the first years and how faculty can navigate higher education processes, and (d) differentiated supports that allow faculty to get their individualized needs met. Applying Freeman's (2017) articulation of categorical thinking, these needs connected to the subcategories that led to the final central category of becoming faculty, a key aspect of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2021).

### **Interpretation of Question One Findings**

Question one of this research asked how CTE faculty in the Colorado Community College System develop understandings of what it means to be a post-secondary educator. As described in depth in chapter four, participant interviews revealed faculty use experimentation, curriculum personalization, connections to their own experiences as students, and a focus on preparing students for industry and life to develop their understanding of what it means to teach.

#### ***Experimentation***

Experimentation as a strategy was evident in the literature, although it appeared under the label of trial and error and primarily addressed socialization into the culture (Hora & Lee, 2021; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997). What literature did address experimentation in teaching practices highlighted how new faculty tend to replicate what others do or what they have seen in industry trainings (O'Shea, 2018; Simindiger et al., 2000). However in my findings, I concluded that the term trial and error found in literature implied a random

approach to figuring out their jobs that was not evident in this research. Additionally, participants in this study exhibited more nuance than the kind of replication described by O’Shea (2018) and Simindiger et al. (2000). Where this theme emerged with participants related more to their teaching practices than their meaning making about the culture of higher education. The participants in this study expressed an intentional approach to trying new things, even when they did not know that was what they were doing. For example, Nora labeled her attempts to figure out what worked well in the classroom as a “fake it til you make it” style. However, she also described a thoughtful note taking process where each semester she kept a list of what needed to change for the following semester based on how students were responding to instruction and how they were meeting course objectives. Despite Nora assuming she was faking it, she was actually intentionally experimenting with evidence to guide her responses. The same was true for Maria and Jordan where they talked about having to do something “wrong” before figuring out what was right. Yet, they also described carefully monitoring student reactions to instructional strategies and their success on assessments. They then adjusted their practices based on that information. This kind of reflective practice points to a systemic, informed approach to instruction, not a random trial and error attempt. Additionally, I concluded that new CTE faculty use the experimentation process in the classroom as way to address the overwhelm they might feel when first teaching. Tammy’s comment about feeling like she was “pushed out of a boat in the middle of the ocean” and Keith’s quote about “the mountain of things that I did not understand about education or how people learn best” demonstrate the starting point for new CTE faculty when they begin to teach. For participants, experimentation became a way to counter the feelings of being unprepared to teach. This points to a need for faculty to be supported in scaffolded ways to develop effective experimentation strategies. Thus, this study

adds to the literature by looking at experimentation practices applied to instructional strategies rather than cultural socialization and refining what previous scholarship implied as a random or replicating approach.

### ***Inherited Curriculum***

Personalization of inherited curriculum was a new theme this study found that was not present in the literature. Yet it connects well to the conceptual framework guiding this research, specifically how participants employed individualized schema to take action. I interpreted faculty descriptions about adjusting inherited curriculum in three ways – as an opportunity to improve the program, as a pathway to empowerment and confidence building, or as a mix of the two. One example is Nora’s attempt to update the content in her program. She described that when she first started, it was clear to her the existing curriculum was not designed to prepare students for the realities of the industry. She immediately started revising it, requiring students and adjunct instructors to start using more up to date industry tools. Elliot saw the chance to refine curriculum he was given as an opportunity to apply what he learned about education and grow as a teacher. In Tammy’s case she used the opportunity to adjust her curriculum to both provide students with a better, more industry-relevant learning experience, and to help her find her voice as a teacher. Her passionate description of how important it was for her to have the curriculum in her voice illustrates her understanding that faculty expertise must be present in the content. This relationship she has to the curriculum informs who she is as a teacher. All three examples, plus the deeper findings described in chapter four, show how faculty came into their positions with established schema about what it means to teach and to make adjustments based on what they learn. I concluded that new CTE faculty develop their teacher identities when empowered to

make sure the curriculums they teach have been personalized to their style. This finding added to the literature because it is a concept not present in the current scholarship.

### *Experience as a Student*

The theme of using personal experience as a student to inform how to teach illustrated the ways participants took their previously built schema about what college teachers “should” do, applied it to a new setting, and then adjusted their actions. Elliot and Jordan provided two examples of how faculty adjust their preconceived notions of what college teachers should do. Elliot described his student experience in a classical education model as “a drag” on his development as a faculty member, and Jordan talked about coming from a world where traditional lecturing was the norm. Rather than continue with a traditional model, as they applied what they learned about different ways to teach, Elliot and Jordan embraced a student-centered approach in the classroom with more experiential learning and active engagement. At one point in our conversations, Elliot described his recognition that learning environments do not have to be spaces with four walls and a screen showing PowerPoint slides. He said “the classroom could be anywhere—you know, it could be out in the parking lot, it could be at the [industry site], or any number of places.” Thus, both Elliot and Jordan needed to unlearn what they understood teaching in higher education to be before they could define it for themselves. Another example can be found in Ruth and Daniel’s experiences where they each earned graduate degrees in adult learning theory which inspired them to redefine their understandings of what a teacher could look like. Using these examples, I concluded that the theory constructed from this study must acknowledge that unlearning and relearning what it means to teach is a continual process, supported by opportunities to reflect on personal experiences as a student. For study participants their student experiences were a baseline to start from, rather than an end point.

The literature on this topic is highly limited with only a handful of studies even mentioning the idea the faculty carry their own student experiences into the classroom as teachers (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Harris & Zhao, 2004; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011). When the scholarship did mention faculty experiences as students, it was in relation to how those experiences influenced the faculty member's career path to higher education rather than their practices once there (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Harris & Zhao, 2004). Thus, the findings of this study contribute to existing scholarship by addressing how the experiences new faculty have in a student role impact their understandings of their teacher role.

### ***Preparing Students***

The final key finding related to question one illustrated the importance CTE community college faculty place on preparing students to be successful in industry and life. Each participant cited this as contributing to their understandings of what it means to teach in higher education. The literature in this area is robust. Connecting industry experience to curriculums is a major theme that emerged during my literature review process. Studies on vocational post-secondary faculty highlighted how people are attracted to teaching the next generation of workers as a way to give back and they feel a responsibility to ensure students enter the workforce well-prepared (Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al, 2014). Thus, it is validating and unsurprising that every participant in this research highlighted preparing students as an important part of their job. Terry and Nora emphasized the significance of making sure students understand the day to day realities of the industry, beyond what is found in the textbook. Emily cited the importance of embedding rigor in her classes to ensure graduates were prepared for the fast-paced changes they would see in the field. These three examples illustrate how time in industry contributes to faculty

understandings of what it means to teach. They bring the pre-formed schema about what it took to be successful in their first careers and applied it to their classroom understandings through the active embedding of industry skills in their courses.

Keith and Daniel provided insight that went beyond what is already in literature on this topic. They both talked about feeling a responsibility to prepare students for more than a career. Keith even went so far as to articulate that he understands students might not stay forever in the career he is preparing them for, but he hopes that they will use the “life skills and self-worth and integrity” they learn from him throughout their lives. From these descriptions, I concluded that preparing students is a key part of how CTE community college faculty understand their role in the classroom. This conclusion reinforces and validates what previous scholarship has demonstrated about the importance of student preparation to vocational faculty understandings of what it means to teach in higher education. It adds to the scholarship by focusing exclusively on community college faculty experiences.

### **Interpretation of Question Two Findings**

Question two in this study asked what hindering and supportive factors new CTE faculty face when transitioning from workforce to higher education. Chapter four describes in detail the three factors that emerged as findings from interviews. Those three factors were the importance of connections with colleagues, the bureaucracy of higher education, and the culture of academia.

#### ***Interpersonal Connections***

The first key finding related to this question, connections with colleagues, was heavily represented in the literature, although research on community college faculty populations were rare. Specifically, the existing scholarship highlights the importance of colleague networks and

peer mentoring in supporting new faculty socialization into the institution (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mendoza, 2008; O’Shea, 2018; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). It should be noted that while the literature about mentoring did mention the benefits for the faculty member being mentored, overall the research focused on how to support faculty becoming contributing members of the institution rather than on how the institution can support the individualized development of the new faculty members. Thus, the described benefit was to the organization. Reynolds et al.’s (2022) examination of mentoring programs, and Vega et al.’s (2010) research on the unique needs of faculty of color were two notable exceptions. However, they still emphasized the ultimate goal of ensuring faculty were socialized into existing cultures. This study sought to extend the current scholarship by focusing on how interpersonal connections benefit the faculty regardless of their institutional socialization.

Throughout my analysis of the data related to question two, the importance of faculty supervisors and peers kept rising to the top in my conclusions. For example, Nina described having direct access to her supervisor as a key factor in helping her get her questions answered. Another example can be found in Ruth and Jordan’s experiences, where their sense of confidence was improved when their supervisors demonstrated confidence in them, such as through assigning increasing responsibilities. As for peer relationships, Elliot, Keith, and Tammy all described being part of a department that felt like a cohesive, supportive team. Keith referred to his department as operating “like a family,” and Tammy cited her colleagues as the group of people who provide a safe space to work through “the scariness of the teaching.” The conclusions I drew from these descriptions pointed to peer and supervisor connections as doing more than just helping faculty fit into a new culture as described in the literature (O’Meara et al.,

2016; Simendiger et al., 2000; Smith Morest, 2015; Wilson et al., 2014). Rather these connections were critical in helping new faculty believe in their own efficacy as teachers. In this way, the findings of this study both validate and extend what the literature had to say about the connections new faculty build with colleagues.

A hindering interpersonal factor that was expressed by many of the participants in this study related to relationships with the college administration, which was defined as deans and higher. Interestingly, administrators as a population of colleagues are mostly absent from the literature. The ways connections with supervisors and especially peers supported new faculty were highlighted (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Macdonald et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2022; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). However, research that included administrators was limited to studies that explored what administrators believe faculty need to grow into effective teachers (Eddy, 2010; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). This is an area that this dissertation directly addressed and is a theme discussed at length here.

Although Nina, Tammy, and Ruth spoke well of their administrators, primarily as being a positive presence overall, the rest of the participants described the administration as either a decoupled neutral force or as a hindering factor. For example, Maria considers the administration at her college to be on a “different page” than the faculty, complete with different goals for the institution. This was telling because Maria expressed a strong commitment to serve students. If she believes administrators have different goals, then I interpreted this to mean she thinks administrator goals are antithetical to serving students. Terry described administrators who disregarded faculty input and an approach they take is to wait out “flavor of the month” initiatives. Terry also said that they are not afraid to voice concerns to the administration, but

they also have no expectation of those concerns having an effect on decision making. These statements from Terry led me to conclude that they see administrators as a group to be tolerated at best or even ignored. For Nora, the administration at her college has gone from being a supportive factor to a hindering one. With an organizational change, her access to the administration decreased, which left her wondering if she is on the same team with them anymore. Her comment about being a “bottom feeder” in relation to administrators was especially striking to me as she is engaged in teaching students – the main purpose of the college. Yet, she characterizes herself as being at the bottom of the power dynamics. When I asked her about her place within the hierarchy of the college, she answered like this, with her inflections included:

*(Laughs)* I'm a bottom feeder, Anne Marie. You know, I'm a boots-on-the-ground person. You know, I'm doing the work at the bottom with the students, I'm face to face with them. And I feel like we're a little disconnected right now. You know, I feel like leadership is doing their thing and implementing, and I think that there could be more discussions...I mean I really liked when we had the last VP here. I was so sad when she left, but I felt like I could walk in her office, and that is such a good feeling. Like, she supported *me* you know? Now I feel like management is getting farther and farther away.

This quote demonstrates a clear sense of feeling devalued and disconnected from administrators in a way that is personally impactful to Nora.

Throughout my analysis about the interpersonal connections described by participants, I kept returning to the question of why peers and supervisors were seen as a supportive factor, but administrators were not. I asked what was contributing to the narrative that administrators are separate from faculty. My conclusions pointed to access. In the case of the three participants who

had openly favorable opinions of college administrators, they all had direct access to the administration. For faculty who saw administrators as more neutral, their access to them was more limited, but still existent. For participants that saw administrators as a hindering factor for faculty, the access to them was rare. This conclusion helped inform a key component of the building faculty theory subcategory build your village. It also added an important missing piece to the literature.

### ***The Bureaucracy of Higher Education***

The second key finding for question two was the bureaucracy of higher education being a hindering factor to CTE faculty in the Colorado system making the transition from workforce to higher education. This theme was not addressed in the literature, perhaps due to the fact that each institution of higher education will have its own structures in place. The minimal connection this factor does have to the literature shows up in research about socialization regarding formal and undeclared policies, practices, and rules (Palmer, 2002; Simendiger et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2014). However, this topic not fully explored in the scholarship in relation to community college settings. For the purpose of this research, my conclusions and resultant theory can help contribute to the Colorado Community College System setting.

Participants in this study had wide-ranging experience with bureaucracy in their first careers. Even participants with extensive experience with bureaucracy in complex industries described the ones at their home college and in the Colorado Community College System as a hinderance. For example, Terry came from an industry connected to state government so they had years of experience working with complex systems. They self-described as being able to “roll with it” when it comes to bureaucracy, but they also acknowledged that new faculty coming from other industries might feel shock at needing to “fill out these 18 forms and go through the

process” before being able to make changes. This description is an apt summary of the kind of hindering blocks bureaucracy can put in someone’s way. Keith and Nina shared how not knowing who to go to in the system left them helpless to support students. Their examples of not being able to connect students to support structures or to help them navigate processes such as registering for classes, demonstrates the way bureaucracy can create barriers rather than streamline operations. Daniel, Jordan, and Maria saw this when they tried to navigate how to get answers they needed or secure supplies for their program without jumping through prohibitive red tape. Jordan’s experience of spending her own money on supplies to effectively do her job illustrates that the bureaucracy she deals with has become obstructionist. Maria shared an example of spending months attempting to purchase software she needed but, due to delays in paperwork and funding approvals, she was not able to get it in time to use it effectively. These stories demonstrate the frustrations faculty face when running up against bureaucracy. I interpreted their examples to mean that any additional time and energy spent navigating complex systems is time and energy not spent on working directly with students. Large scale organizations and systems, such as the one in Colorado, need a bureaucratic framework to function. However, when the framework prevents faculty from meeting student needs it becomes a case of the people serving the system, not the system serving the people.

### ***The Culture of Academia***

The final factor regarding research question two that emerged from the interviews with participants is the culture of academia. This is addressed in the literature on faculty socialization into higher education, although much of that literature focuses on general education faculty working at four-year institutions (Bickerstaff & Chavrn, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mitic et al., 2024; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wakely,

2021; Wilson et al., 2014). The conclusions I made from these findings contribute to the scholarship by focusing on the perspectives and experiences of CTE community college faculty.

Participants in this study described the culture of academia as elitist, which the findings show came from either how the faculty were treated by members of the institution or the perceptions the faculty themselves came into the position carrying. In the former category, Tammy and Terry shared stories of exclusion based on their respective seniority and moderate political views. Terry's description of keeping their opinions to themselves illustrates a practice of self-censorship and is a limitation on their ability to engage as a full member of the college. Keith emphasized how higher education is not structured to support faculty and students who prefer to learn through experiential or kinesthetic modalities, which are important parts of vocational education. Emily articulated how she assumed when she started she would not be accepted by people she described as elite. She also shared that completing a doctorate in community college leadership was her way to "have a seat at the table." Interestingly, both Keith and Emily also described feeling welcomed by colleagues, indicating that their sense of feeling less than was not communicated in individual relationships with peers, but still an influencing factor on their transitions. Institutional elitism about CTE programs in community college cultures was not a topic found in the literature. I attribute this to the fact that limited scholarships exists about community colleges (Murray, 2013). Because the literature themes articulated in chapter two came from research across institution types, it is unsurprising that elitism aimed at vocational programs in two year schools is not directly addressed. Thus, this study added this dimension to the scholarship.

Finally, some participants indicated a mismatch between the culture in higher education and the one they were used to in industry. This concept was well represented in the literature

(Fugate & Amey, 2000; Jensen et al., 2006; Larocco and Bruns, 2006; Santoro, 2011; Wagner et al., 2021; Wilson, 2014). For example, Wilson (2014) and Larocco & Bruns (2006) directly addressed this in their research, which found new faculty coming from industry careers are often surprised by both the fluid nature of teaching schedules and the challenge of balancing myriad job expectations. These two findings were confirmed by participants in this study. Daniel described feeling like he was suddenly in a space where he had less oversight and more autonomy to make decisions, which did not align with the top-down culture he was used to in the workforce. And Nina expressed surprise at all the non-teaching duties in the job, such as student advising and representing the college with community stakeholders. Daniel and Nina's experiences illustrate an adjustment to their schema as they confront what they thought the job would be with what it actually is. They then had to translate that new understanding into action by adjusting their work habits.

Wrestling with making sense of the culture of academia represented a significant undertaking for participants. When the culture arose as a hindering factor, faculty adjusted their schema and took action based on new understandings. This is demonstrated by the creation of communities within departments, like the one Keith described, that provide insulation from a culture of elitism. It was also demonstrated in Emily's completion of a doctorate and Nina's attempts to decide which administrative duties in her program she needs to prioritize. These findings both confirm and add to the literature on how the culture of academia impacts CTE faculty transitions from industry to higher education. It adds the dimension of institutional elitism to scholarship on cultural factors faculty find hindering. This is important because it is a lens especially applicable to community colleges where faculty in vocational programs can teach

without graduate degrees. The study also confirms what other research has found about the mismatch of industry and higher education cultures.

### **Interpretation of Question Three Findings**

Question three in this dissertation explored the ways participants described their professional development as they transitioned to higher education. As summarized in chapter four, faculty shared that their professional development was influenced by how much they were able to connect their development to their industry experience, how much flexibility and choice they had in that development, and how much time they had to develop and learn. The literature addressed faculty professional development in depth, although community college faculty are not often a population studied and the scholarship showed that professional development programs are not often intentionally designed (Eddy, 2007; Fugate & Amey, 2000, Garcia et al., 2021; Gauthier, 2020; Harris & Zhao, 2004; Perez et al., 2012; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Wallin & Smith, 2005). This research question added to the literature by exploring how CTE faculty in community college settings described their professional development and what could be concluded about how to make development programs effective.

### ***Industry Connections and Faculty Development***

The first key finding for research question three was the importance of industry connections to faculty development. The literature I reviewed related to workforce connections primarily recommended colleges help new faculty learn to separate from their first career to help them better socialize into the new culture of higher education (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Simendiger et al., 2020). I found it interesting that the scholarship recommended faculty “separate” from industry, considering previous industry experience is required for vocational faculty and workforce connections are cited as a way for faculty to strengthen the curriculum

(Elliot & Oliver, 2016; Fairweather & Paulson, 1996; Hardré, 2012; Hora & Lee, 2021; Nachman & Wernimont, 2024; Oleson & Hora, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Simendiger, et al., 2000; Wilson, et al., 2014). In this study, the participants contradicted what the literature recommended. They did not describe letting go of industry connections during their development process. Rather, they identified those connections as an asset that they wished their colleges better understood. For example, Elliot shared about the necessity of connecting the work culture in his industry to what students experience in the classroom, which needed to be explained to college administrators. In Tammy's case, her depth of industry knowledge was a strength in supporting her program's accreditation process. Nora described how teaching in higher education was a conscious choice to help influence the next generation of workforce professionals. She said:

We're not here for the paycheck. We could make more money in the industry, for sure...We could probably make double what we make in education, so it's not about that. I think it's about making a difference in people's lives.

Harper-McDonald and Taylor (2020) and Simendiger et al. (2020) posited that faculty needed to learn to separate from industry. Yet Nora's quote speaks to her understanding that the connection she has to industry is one that is influencing her very decision to be an educator. These examples demonstrate how faculty take their understood schema about industry and apply it to the classroom to make them effective educators. Thus, I concluded that professional development experiences for new CTE faculty must acknowledge and honor the connections to workforce these faculty bring to their positions because it influences how teach. Daniel summarized it well when he described a third space where his understanding of industry and his work as a teacher came together, merging into one where he now feels "like an educator in industry rather than just

an educator or just in industry.” This description illustrates how important it is for faculty to have access to professional development that allows them to blend both worlds. The final becoming faculty theory from this study builds on this theme with the inclusion of this concept in the find your voice section of the theory.

### ***Flexibility and Choice***

One key finding around this research question was a sense of flexibility and choice. Study participants articulated a theme of wanting to have a say in their professional development and needing development offerings to be flexible enough to meet their unique needs teaching in a CTE program. For example, several participants in this study came from extensive experience providing formal trainings in their industry, yet they were required to take entry-level professional development in teaching effectiveness which they did not find helpful. Terry described the program as one that was repetitive for them and “ticks” a box as a performative way to support faculty. This demonstrates how opportunities exist for college administrators to honor the expertise faculty bring with them to the job by creating differentiated approaches to professional development. One way to do that is by giving faculty choice in what topics to engage with for their development. For example, Nina cited in-service week workshops as a place where she could self-select topics that interested and challenged her. And if professional development offerings did not take into account factors like unique CTE faculty teaching schedules or requirements of CTE programs it made it impossible for participants to engage or apply to their classrooms. This concept shows up in literature. The research showed that poorly designed programs that do not account for the needs of CTE faculty limited development for this population (Perez et al., 2012; Sandford et al., 2007; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Strickland-Davis, 2020; Witcher & Sasso, 2024). Perez et al.’s (2012) and Gauthier’s (2020) research

specifically found that there is a lack of professional development programs at times and in modalities that are accessible to CTE faculty at community colleges. This scholarship is confirmed in this study. For example, Tammy and Nora were not able to attend professional development programs based on when they were offered and there were no alternative options for them to participate. This forced them in the position of choosing between teaching their classes or engaging in programming designed to help them teach their classes. The findings show that professional development opportunities must allow for faculty choice and must be flexible in how they are offered. The becoming faculty grounded theory constructed during this research aims to address this need.

### ***Time to Develop and Learn***

A second key finding for question three addressed faculty having time to develop and learn. This is a theme only broadly hinted at in the literature, so the interpretation of this finding is a contribution to the scholarship. Fugate and Amey (2000), and later Eddy (2010) found that faculty use their early professional development experiences to orient themselves to the institution and define their responsibilities as educators. Other scholarship on the development needs of new faculty described what college administrators defined as important needs, rather than the faculty themselves (Eddy, 2007; Eddy, 2010; Macdonald et al., 2022; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Sandford et al., 2007; Strickland-Davis et al., 2020; Wallin & Smith, 2005). Thus, the interpretations of the findings from this study, which centered faculty perspectives, add to the existing scholarship.

Participants who expressed feeling comfortable about taking time to develop their identities as teachers and apply what they were learning to the classroom also expressed increased confidence. For example, Elliot and Daniel both took multiple semesters to see the

results of applying what they learned in professional development experiences and to feel confident to fully engage with the college community. Jordan described the development process as building up her toolbox. Being able to ask questions and learn was another aspect of faculty development articulated by participants. Emily shared how she used her ability to ask questions to help her learn what aspects of college life directly connected to her role. Maria expressed enthusiasm at engaging in professional development right from the start as a way to help her find her passion for teaching. She described an “amazing course” on inclusivity as being impactful in helping her to see how her experiences as a student inform her teaching practices. She, Keith, and Daniel also shared how engaging in internal professional development programs helped them to build connections with colleagues that lasted beyond their first years at the school. These examples all demonstrate how the professional development of new faculty is authentic and meaningful if they are given the room to learn and time to grow. In fact, I concluded that such time and room helped participants in this study develop both strong relationships with colleagues and a flexible mindset that helped them move beyond the experimentation phase quickly. By having time to develop their identities as teachers and the space to be in the learner role, participants in this study exemplified the process of schema construction and adjustment. Thus, I determined the resultant becoming faculty theory needed to include this type of long term trajectory.

### **Interpretation of Findings Across the Three Research Questions**

The goal of this dissertation was to build a theory to support new CTE faculty in the Colorado system from the participant data in alignment with a constructivist grounded theory approach which explores a phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Charmaz, 2021). Thus, it is important to synthesize the interpretation findings across all three research questions. Taking the

results from the interviews and breaking the findings down by each question allowed me to then recombine the findings to identify the commonalities that emerged across answers from all participants. These commonalities, which I conceptualized as faculty needs, subsequently informed the core category, becoming faculty, and theory construction. Four needs are described in this section: network of colleagues, respect for expertise and skills, clarity of systems, and differentiated supports.

### *Network of Colleagues*

As described in chapter two, the literature on community college faculty socialization is limited. Including scholarship about faculty at four year institutions was necessary during my literature review process. What research exists on this topic, identified social support networks as critical to faculty development (Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mendoza, 2008; O’Shea, 2018; Simendiger et al., 2000). Interview responses in this study confirmed this importance. Participants identified three types of colleagues that impacted CTE faculty transitions to higher education and the roles they played in those transitions. Those three types were peers, supervisors, and administrators. Peer relationships were impactful based on how welcoming they were and if peers were accessible as formal or informal mentors. Peer networks were described as the space where faculty could build supportive connections and seek out answers when feeling overwhelmed. In the literature, peer networks were described as formal and informal mentoring (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). Participants in this study did not universally refer to peer connections as mentoring, but the type of benefits described by Reynolds et al. (2022), including peers acting as a guide for new faculty, were articulated in interviews.

Supervisors, most often identified as department chairs, were described as the individuals positioned to provide the most direct support in participants' early years at the college. How supportive supervisors were made a difference in how quickly new faculty moved through the initial experimentation phase and saw themselves as competent teachers who could face new challenges. Administrators were described as important, but in a different way than supervisors. Rather than providing direct support, faculty in this study wanted college administrators to be accessible to them, but not so present that they micromanaged or failed to allow faculty to be the subject matter experts that they are. Supervisors and administrators were only minimally present as an influence in the literature. Thus, this study extends the scholarship by adding these two additional groups of colleagues to how CTE faculty in the Colorado Community College System develop as educators.

### ***Respect for Expertise and Skills***

One way to support new CTE faculty in their development from industry to education is for the people at their new institution to respect the expertise and skills they bring from the workforce. Participants described appreciating opportunities to explicitly draw connections to how their skills translate to the classroom. They also appreciated when their industry skills such as experience training workers on the job, experience with complex bureaucracies, and connections to industry partners were treated as assets to the college. One area identified in this research as needing a shift in higher education is the recognition that in many workforce industries years of experience and industry trainings take the same level of effort and time as advanced academic degrees in general education disciplines. Participants described that acknowledging new CTE faculty are coming to teaching from already successful careers can create a culture where asking questions, learning from mistakes, and not knowing everything

about higher education when someone first starts, will be normalized and lead to confidence in the classroom quicker. This faculty need extends the literature on faculty socialization and development, which focused on industry experience being an asset to creating relevant learning experiences for students, but otherwise was described as something faculty should “separate” from (Burns, 2012; Fugate & Amey, 2000; Harper-McDonald & Taylor, 2020; Simendiger et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2021).

### *Clarity of Systems*

Another faculty need that emerged from the interpretations across the research questions was the importance of clarity in new faculty members’ career pathway at their respective colleges and the systems they encounter. This concept was expressed in relation to the culture of academia and the navigation of bureaucracy. Participants described different levels of comfort and understanding with the development processes required in the Colorado Community College System such as moving to non-provisional status or maintaining a CTE teaching credential. Additionally, participants wanted clear definitions of service requirements or “other duties as assigned” and guidance for how to meet expectations while keeping teaching at the center of their job. Jordan’s comment about being in a constant state of not knowing what was due when exemplifies the frustration faculty have. Interviewees also expressed confusion about understanding what opportunities for advancement existed at their colleges, such as how they could develop as a leader within the institution, take on additional challenges while still remaining in a teaching role, or find support for seeking additional degrees. Finally, participants articulated frustration at not being able to effectively navigate bureaucratic systems, such as connecting students to support resources or making a needed change without jumping through layers of red tape. Limited research exists on community college faculty navigating such

systems, with a focus more on faculty at four-year institutions (Bickerstaff & Chavrn, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mitic et al., 2024; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wakely, 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). This faculty need is understood in this dissertation through the lens of the Colorado Community College System and its unique processes and bureaucracies. Thus, it is acknowledged that the portions of the becoming faculty theory constructed to address this need are grounded in the specific circumstances of the studied population.

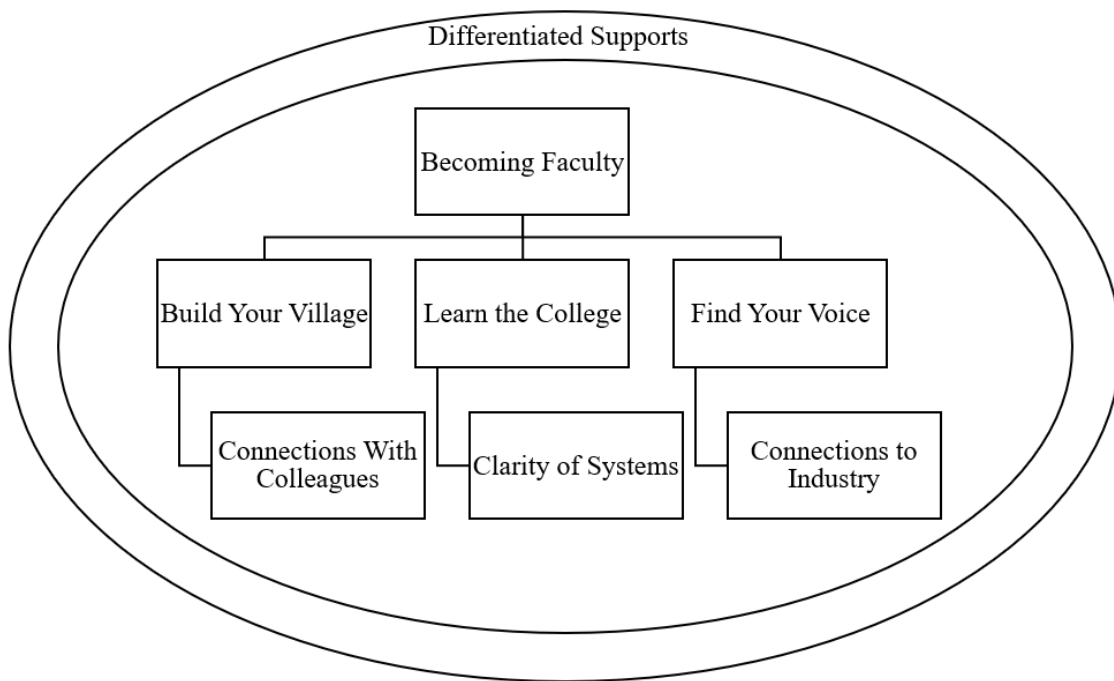
### *Differentiated Supports*

The final broad faculty need that emerged from the interpretation of findings across the research questions was a need for differentiation in the supports new faculty receive. Despite having common experiences with other new CTE faculty, participants in this study also described unique needs they had during their transitions, such as Tammy and Nora's teaching schedules that prevented them from participating in professional development programs. Another example is Terry, Ruth, and Nina's previous experience with adult learning theory and providing industry trainings, making introductory-level professional development about teaching not relevant to them. Participants provided several examples of support differentiation. When it comes to formal professional development programs, participants valued (a) having choice in what they engage with and (b) acknowledgement of their varying needs, expertise, and interest. Time to develop their own style as teacher and definition of what the role of teacher is within their unique discipline was also appreciated. And finally, participants appreciated when supervisors and college administrators recognized that not all CTE disciplines are the same and provided intentional support for faculty to maintain connections with industry. Fugate and Amey (2000) and Hardré (2012) described the importance of differentiation and flexibility in

community college faculty professional development programming. However, Eddy (2007) found that differentiated, intentional programming at community colleges is not often available. Thus, the inclusion of differentiated supports in the final becoming faculty theory is an important one to include to ensure faculty needs are met. The need for differentiation is conceptualized as being an overarching one that encompasses the other needs as well as the central and subcategories in the becoming faculty grounded theory. An illustration of the faculty needs across the research questions in relation to the final theory is found in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Graphic Representation Showing Faculty Needs and Their Relationship to the Central and Subcategories of the Becoming Faculty Theory*



**Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for supervisors and administrators that support CTE faculty in the Colorado Community College System. Although this study centered

the voices and experiences of the faculty, the ultimate goal was the construction of a grounded theory that could be used to support CTE community college faculty during their transition from industry to higher education. It is the responsibilities of the home college supervisors and administrators and to establish and implement the support structures necessary to ensure successful transitions for this population. This section details the broad implications for the supervisors and administrators that are best positioned to support faculty transitions. The section on recommended practices, found later in the chapter, provides concrete actions for supervisors and administrators to take, articulated through the becoming faculty grounded theory.

### **Implications for Administrators**

The findings in this research point to several implications for administrators at the home colleges within the Colorado Community College System. The first is that it is vital for administrators to have an accurate understanding of the culture at their college. This includes the formal, declared culture that shows up in places like faculty job postings and published faculty handbooks and the informal, undeclared culture such as attitudes expressed during faculty meetings and bureaucratic work arounds people use to navigate the system. Participants in this study described aspects of the hidden culture, including how to juggle varied job expectations and relations between administration and faculty, as elements of their new role that they found especially surprising and difficult to navigate. This finding was noted across the colleges represented in the study, indicating that it is not localized to a specific institution. By honestly recognizing the culture new CTE faculty walk into, administrators can position themselves to break down hindering factors and build up supportive factors that exist in the culture.

A second implication for administrators is the importance of recognizing how individual faculty meaning making leads to organizational sensemaking. An honest understanding of how

faculty translate their schema into action, including the interpersonal relationships they build to make sense of their new faculty roles, can help administrators understand the construction of organizational narratives. Citing my blended conceptual framework of constructionism and organizational sensemaking discussed in chapter three, it is worth noting again that individual and group meaning making are not reliant on factual accuracy (Charriere Petit & Huault, 2008; Kezar, 2018; Worley, 2019). Thus, administrators who seek to build positive structural relationships with faculty must acknowledge that personal and shared understandings can be shaped outside of facts and intentional steps must be taken to address that. For example, in this study Maria's characterization that faculty and administrators have different goals at her college might not be one shared by the administrators. They might cite strategic plans articulated through language about student success and employee wellbeing as evidence of shared goals. And in Keith's case, where he shared examples of feeling less than due to teaching in a CTE program, administrators at his college might describe how dedicated funding to CTE programs or faculty awards given to CTE instructors demonstrate that such programs are valuable to the college. Because schema construction is so personalized and organizational sensemaking is based on shared meaning making, such evidence might not be enough to undo established narratives. Administrators who acknowledge and accept this will understand that part of their role is to help shape those narratives through regular, collaborative interactions with faculty and aligning day to day operations with the declared values of the institution.

A final implication for administrators is to translate an attitude of support into actions of support. Constructionism is concerned with the process of translating understandings into action (Denicolo et al., 2016; Stauffacher et al., 2006; Thorpe, 2008). The literature review for this study pointed to institutions of higher education often having a lack of intentional, cohesive

supports for new faculty, instead relying on orientations that limit onboarding to completing hiring paperwork, trusting that socialization will happen naturally (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Hamilton, 2006; Murray, 2013). The conclusions of this study point to faculty needing clarity in their development pathway, supportive collegial relationships, acknowledgement of the strengths they bring to the college, and access to supports that meet their individual needs.

Administrators who want to create supportive environments for new faculty need to examine what kind of funding and explicit frameworks they have in place and ask themselves “who is being served by these supports and how?”

### **Implications for Supervisors**

According to the findings of this study, supervisors also play a key role in the transition of new CTE faculty to the Colorado Community College System. Thus, there are several implications for them. The first is the recognition of the significant role that they play in supporting faculty. Cited as a key influence in most of the participant interviews, the role of the supervisor cannot be overstated. New CTE faculty look to their immediate supervisor, most often a department chair in the Colorado Community College System, as the person who is their primary point of contact to help them navigate the system. Supervisors can help shepherd faculty through the first years or they can contribute to faculty feelings of overwhelm.

Another implication is that supervisors play a key role in helping new faculty establish the kind of important collegial networks cited in participant interviews and the literature (Bickerstaff & Chavarín, 2018; Macdonald et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2022; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wilson et al., 2014). Supervisors can ensure faculty have non-evaluative peer relationships that are safe spaces for faculty to ask questions without being made to feel ignorant. Those relationships can also be a space for new faculty to foster

interdisciplinary connections and learn from faculty across the college. This means establishing a departmental culture that celebrates CTE faculty and their programs.

The final implication for supervisors is the recognition that the type of supportive cultures faculty need do not happen organically. They need to be intentionally cultivated. For supervisors to be effective at this, they need explicit training and skill development. Leading a team of faculty requires more than institutional knowledge. It requires a commitment to building and maintaining productive interpersonal relationships. Supervisors need training and support from their leadership to take on these duties.

### **Recommendations For Practice**

This section builds on the conclusions drawn from key findings as well as the implications to articulate the full becoming faculty theory. Taking what was learned from interviews with the participants as well as what was learned through the existing literature and applying a constructivist grounded theory approach, I sought to create an actionable theory related to the Colorado Community College System. This grounded theory was constructed and refined throughout the simultaneous data collection and analysis phases. It is intended to be a theory with practical application abilities to support new CTE faculty transitioning from industry to higher education within the Colorado system. As articulated by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the becoming faculty approach is intended to apply to colleges within the Colorado system as a middle grounded theory, which is located between a hypothesis for a local setting and a theory that can apply to multiple large groups across myriad situations. As described in chapter three, the interview data collected from 22 transcripts were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method, where data was compared to data, codes compared to codes, and categories compared to categories (Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2018; Charmaz & Thornberg,

2021; Jones et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021). The resultant categories emerged directly from the data, with the final core category of becoming faculty conceptualized as the foundation of the theory. It is constructed as a three pronged approach to move new CTE faculty through the onboarding and socialization process, creating space for them to both fit into and contribute to their college's culture. Recognizing that faculty will create understandings and build narratives through the schema construction and organizational sensemaking processes, colleges have a unique opportunity at the beginning of the transition to help guide that meaning making.

### **Becoming Faculty**

The theory constructed from this research is titled becoming faculty, which is the central category from the data analysis process, encompassing the spirit of the approach and the holistic nature of the journey from industry to teaching (Charmaz, 2021). This central category was constructed from the three categories that emerged in the coding process and came from participant statements. The three categories were build your village, learn the college, and find your voice. These subcategories make up the core tenets of the becoming faculty theory, which is designed to provide practical recommendations for effective CTE faculty onboarding in the Colorado Community College System.

### ***Build Your Village***

In my first interview with Nina, she emphasized the importance of her department colleagues in helping her during the first two years of her full time position, likening it to building a village. Although the only one to evoke that specific metaphor, all participants talked about the impact relationships with colleagues had on their transition. Peers, supervisors, and administrators all fell under the colleague label in the conversations I had with participants. While peers and supervisor relationships were described as the most positive across the data

analysis, this portion of the theory addresses all three. To effectively build a village around new CTE faculty, the conclusions of this study recommend the creation of intentional mentoring programs, opportunities for interdisciplinary interactions, and leadership development programs.

The literature showed that formal and informal mentoring is a key way to support new faculty, although the scholarship on community college faculty was limited (Fugate & Amey, 2000, Garcia et al., 2021; Gauthier, 2020; Harris & Zhao, 2004; Perez et al., 2012; Sandford & McCaslin, 2004; Wallin & Smith, 2005). The findings of this study both validated the existing research, in that it confirmed the importance of peer relationships, and added to it by exploring it from a community college perspective. Intentional mentoring programs in Colorado system schools can take shape in multiple ways, from one-on-one, structured peer mentoring to the establishment of professional learning communities and coaching programs. These types of programs should be non-evaluative and not have an impact on annual performance ratings. The goal of mentoring is to provide a safe space for new faculty to ask the kinds of questions that they are afraid to in other settings, hear from senior colleagues about how to navigate the culture of the college, and have time to experiment with and reflect on different instructional strategies. Based on the findings that some members of the community colleges communicate an attitude of new CTE faculty being less than, based on seniority levels or teaching in vocational disciplines, it is important that individuals engaged in a mentor or coaching role have formal training and guidance on how to support the mentees.

Another important recommendation to come out of this study is the establishment of professional development opportunities that allow new faculty to interact with other new and established faculty across disciplines. Cohorting new faculty, regardless of discipline allows an automatic establishment of a group of colleagues. Even those coming into the college with

experience at other higher education institutions will benefit from learning about the culture of the new institution with others in a similar situation. Setting up a professional cohort in the faculty members' first year is a direct way to intentionally provide space for faculty to build a peer network.

Beyond interacting with colleagues of the same seniority, new faculty also need opportunities to engage with established faculty in other disciplines as well. This can be done through the intentional design of working committees and holding in-person events on campus where colleagues can interact in less formal ways. By intentionally including new CTE faculty on working committees, college leaders communicate their trust in those faculty to effectively contribute to initiatives and the culture at the college. It also demonstrates that the skills and perspectives new CTE faculty bring to the college are valued. These types of working opportunities are a benefit to faculty outside the CTE disciplines because it gives them opportunities to build schema about vocational programs and understand the rigor they have. Having faculty from myriad disciplines collaborate on work projects creates the atmosphere for all involved to both socialize within the culture and help shape it. Additionally, offering opportunities for fun, in-person events, such as end of the semester luncheons or campus-wide celebration ceremonies, can bring together colleagues across disciplines and divisions for relaxed, positive interactions. These events are spaces where administrators can be present in a friendly way, and faculty can interact with divisions outside of academic affairs, creating connections that can help people navigate the bureaucratic red tape.

Finally, faculty need intentional opportunities for connections with administrators. No significant literature is present on this topic in relation to faculty transitions from workforce to community colleges, but it is clear from the interviews in this study that positive relationships

between administrators and faculty help the faculty feel empowered and supported. The findings of this research indicated that more can be done by administrators at the colleges in the Colorado system to assist new CTE faculty transitions. Specifically, faculty in this study expressed a desire to have administrators be a present factor in their development as both a champion and to provide examples of how the faculty themselves can develop as leaders. One way leadership can do this for new faculty is to provide regular access to themselves specifically for new faculty. This should be done not in an evaluative way, such as when leadership visit a class session. Nor should it be done exclusively in a casual way, such as when administrators conduct pop in chat in faculty office areas. Rather there need to be intentional, ongoing opportunities for honest conversations between new faculty and leadership. Such an approach has a two-fold benefit. First it allows leadership to maintain direct content with people who are new to the organization. Seeing the college through the eyes of people new to it can help administrators understand the true culture and contribute to the shared narratives faculty construct about administration. It also allows new faculty to help shape the culture and have influence over the college, which can contribute to their sense of engagement and efficacy.

Building a village is a key strategy for new faculty and one that they should not have to undertake on their own. By putting intentionally planned programming in place such as non-evaluative mentoring, opportunities for cross-disciplinary interactions, and regular access to leadership, the college will provide new faculty with the framework to effectively build the collegial networks identified as a need of this study. It will create an intellectual community to hold the new faculty members up and make them feel like part of the team.

*Learn the College*

Every participant in this study described the importance of figuring out how to navigate the culture and bureaucracy of the college. Nina's second interview gave the name to this process that became the category during the coding process. She told me her first priority when starting as a full-time faculty member was "learning the college." She and other participants described the strategies they employed to figure out the culture and the systems of their institutions. Faculty in this study learned to ask questions, rely on trusted peers for guidance, and create workarounds for bureaucratic red tape. The literature goes in depth on the topic of faculty socialization. However, it primarily addresses the needs of faculty at four-year institutions, what administrators think faculty need during the socialization process, and how faculty fitting in is a benefit to the college (Bickerstaff & Chavrn, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mitic et al., 2024; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wakely, 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). However, this theory is designed to represent the direct perspectives of CTE community college faculty and include ways for those faculty to not only be inducted into the culture of the college but to help shape it as well. Thus, this part of the becoming faculty approach recommends administrators at Colorado Community College System schools make the purpose of onboarding as well as the goals, culture and process of the college explicit to new CTE faculty so they can engage as a full participant in the college.

It is vital new faculty understand the purpose of onboarding and the development requirements in their first years with the institution. This is especially true for new CTE faculty who might be brand new to the culture of higher education. If faculty have clarity about what the expectations are as well as why those expectations matter to their development, it can help move them quickly through the experimentation phase and allow them to build their confidence in the classroom and in the culture early.

Making the goals and values of the college explicit to new faculty is more than presenting a strategic plan or mission statement for them to read through. Rather it means holding direct conversations between faculty and administrators to name the goals and values of the institution, explain why those matter to the college, and how they are evident in the day to day operations of the school. As described in the implications section of this chapter, it is important for administrators to have an honest understanding of the actual culture faculty experience at the college and what gaps exist between that and the aspirational culture. Assuming that the declared, aspirational culture already exists or hoping that declaring it will make it manifest is misguided. Multiple studies identified in the literature review in chapter two articulated that faculty experience shock and disillusionment when the implicit culture does not match the explicit one (O’Meara et al., 2016; Palmer, 2002; Simendiger et al., 2000; Smith- Morest, 2015; Wilson et al., 2014). The findings and recommendations presented in this study confirmed what has already been stated in the scholarship – by being explicit about the challenges an institution faces in its culture, new faculty are better prepared to help address those challenges for the better rather than be overwhelmed by them. This can be accomplished by encouraging senior faculty and employees across divisions to interact with new faculty and share their stories openly. College administrators should also invite regular, honest feedback from new faculty throughout their first years at the college, seeking input on where the new faculty see a mismatch of the declared and implicit culture. Then action needs to be taken to correct that mismatch.

The findings of this study were clear that navigating bureaucracy in higher education is a factor that hinders the transition of new CTE faculty to their institutions. To address this, college administrators should plan onboarding programs that intentionally have new CTE faculty interact with the bureaucracy. Organizational charts should be updated every few months and be easily

accessible to everyone at the institution. In the same location, there should be a regularly updated list of acronyms. Additional information should be provided to new faculty about what job titles on the organizational chart actually mean and what divisions are responsible for which operations. Each division should have identified point positions with job duties that include answering general questions or directing them to the correct person. New CTE faculty should also be explicitly introduced to key employees responsible for the operations and processes that these faculty encounter. There should be explicit training on those processes for new faculty, accessible in synchronous and asynchronous formats. Finally, college administrators should be continually engaged in evaluation of operations, ensuring that processes are mapped for efficiencies and operating procedures are documented. That documentation must be easily accessible and regularly communicated to constituent groups.

By making the culture and bureaucracy explicit in new faculty onboarding and development programs, the faculty are better prepared when coming up against novel situations. They will have a jump start on their schema building which will enable them to make sense of the new information and translate understanding into productive action.

### ***Find Your Voice***

The final subcategory of the becoming faculty theory is find your voice. Tammy articulated this idea when she described the importance of making sure the curriculum she taught was in her voice saying how she was not sure if could effectively teach otherwise. To support faculty finding their voice in the classroom, the findings of this study point to two final recommendations – providing new CTE faculty with explicit instruction in adult learning theory early in their time at the college, with ongoing opportunities for reflection in later years, and allowing them to personalize their curriculum.

Because participants in this study who came into the faculty role with little or no educational background expressed that they needed time to develop their teaching philosophies and to identify the teaching practices that worked for them. Thus, providing adult learning theory training within the first year of their time at the college will ensure they have a foundation to move through the experimentation phase quickly. However, this explicit instruction in adult learning theory also needs to provide development options for CTE faculty who come from extensive experience facilitating industry training. To make this instruction meaningful to all new CTE faculty, it is recommended that it allows (a) faculty to make connections to their industry experience, (b) differentiation in how participants demonstrate understanding, and (c) opportunities for faculty to reflect on and define their understanding of what it means to teach.

Participants in this study revealed their need to make direct connections between how facilitating formal industry trainings or providing informal on the job training to new employees relates to adult learning theory. Intentionally making space for faculty to connect learning theory to concrete examples from their own workforce experiences will ensure they can build on their established schema and recognize that the skills they bring from industry are an asset to the classroom. Such an approach also communicates to the faculty that administrators at the college have confidence in the new faculty members' ability to teach effectively.

While findings showed thematic similarities in the needs of new CTE faculty in the Colorado system, it is important to acknowledge on an individual level that they come to teaching with various experience regarding teaching. Some already have extensive backgrounds working with adult learners, so any required training in adult learning theory will need to honor this. It is recommended that such training provide new faculty with different ways to engage with the content. For example, someone brand new to adult learning theory might need to learn

fundamental principles and then demonstrate understanding by making adjustments to lesson plans. However, someone who already has an understanding of learning theories might better use their time reading new research and describing how their application of theories in the classroom has evolved over time.

Faculty also need opportunities to explicitly define their understanding of what it means to teach and engaging in continuous refinement of their teaching philosophy. Too often teaching philosophies are only dusted off when individuals are applying for new jobs. Training on adult learning theory needs to incorporate space for faculty to establish the long-term practice of updating their philosophy regularly or at minimum, help faculty become disciplined in regular reflective practice. Such a practice would ensure faculty are able to regularly connect their industry expertise to their instructional strategies.

Finally, faculty should be empowered to personalize their curriculum. This means that administrators should be hesitant to require new CTE faculty to teach courses using only a pre-designed curriculum. While it is helpful to offer course materials from previous instructors who have taught the course, faculty should be encouraged to make adjustments based on what their students need and what they are learning in their development as faculty. Such a philosophy communicates to CTE faculty that they are trusted and encouraged to be the subject matters experts and to embed their voice in their courses.

### **Opportunities For Future Research**

There are multiple opportunities for future research that emerged from this study. As described in the limitations section of chapter three, the use of theoretical sampling procedures meant that participant selection with regard to demographics was not representative. There are opportunities for future research to examine CTE faculty transitions with participants who hold

minoritized identities. For example CTE faculty of color are likely to have significantly different perspectives on the socialization process into the culture of the Colorado Community College System than faculty who hold White identities. Additionally, the use of the Colorado Community College System meant that findings could be specific to that system and cannot be generalized. For example, participant descriptions of navigating bureaucracy might look very different at a college not tied to a bigger system or at different system. Future research could explore how institutional settings impact the transition of new CTE faculty from workforce to community college teaching. It is likely that the experiences would differ at a school in an urban setting versus one in a rural setting.

With regard to the findings, future research is open to multiple possibilities. Curriculum personalization was a thematic outcome of this study not represented in the literature. Yet, when teaching a course for the first time new faculty often rely on a syllabus or course structure designed by someone who taught the class before. More research could be done to uncover the strategies people use to personalize inherited curriculum and how they use that to develop as faculty. Other areas of potential future research include the development of supervisors and administrators to support new faculty and a look at how new general education faculty develop understandings of what it means to teach at community colleges. The participant experiences captured in this study illustrate the importance of supervisors and administrators on CTE faculty development. More research can be done on how supervisors and administrators develop the skills necessary to effectively support new faculty. Additionally, although this study demonstrated that faculty in CTE programs have unique needs, some of the findings could be applied to new general education faculty at community colleges. For example, while new general education faculty might have more classroom experience than CTE faculty coming from

industry, it is assumptive to think teaching while in graduate school at a university translates an automatic understanding of what good teaching looks like at a two year college where different populations are served. Finally, a longitudinal study, where CTE faculty can describe their development over time, could illustrate how understandings of teaching roles and professional development needs evolve.

### **Personal Reflections and Conclusion**

To engage in constructivist grounded theory research is to acknowledge the role of the researcher as a co-architect of the final theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). As acknowledged in the positionality statement in chapter one, I am a former CTE faculty member and current academic dean at a community college within the Colorado system. This means I personally made the transition studied in this dissertation and I am now responsible for helping new CTE faculty at my institution do the same. As a constructionist, I acknowledge that my own schema influenced the process of this research from the conceptualization of the topic to the final theory construction. This dissertation provided me with a way to make sense of my own transition from industry to higher education and how to be a better leader to those experiencing it. The co-constructed becoming faculty theory solidified through a process where I both centered the participant voices and made meaning about ways to support their experiences.

As I completed the literature review for this study, I was struck by how much of it centered administrator perceptions of what faculty need when transitioning to higher education and how taking the time to intentionally support faculty was a benefit to the institution (Bickerstaff & Chavín, 2018; Johnson, 2001; Larocco & Bruns, 2006; Mitic et al., 2024; Simendiger et al., 2000; Thomsen & Gustafson, 1997; Wakely, 2021; Wilson et al., 2014). I was also struck by how little scholarship there was that centered on vocational faculty experiences at

community colleges (Murray, 2013). I sought to close this gap by focusing specifically on community college CTE faculty and centering the experiences of the faculty themselves as the guide for what needed to be included in the final theory. By studying faculty in the Colorado Community College System, I was able to co-construct the becoming faculty grounded theory, which can be applied directly to practice with the recommendations articulated earlier in this chapter. It was important to me that the becoming faculty theory was constructed with participant voices at the center with the actionable recommendations focused on what the administrators should do for the faculty. In this way, I sought to address not only how to help new CTE faculty in the Colorado system become thriving members of their college, but also to help them influence the institution and help improve it. This study showed how the institution and faculty can create mutually beneficial relationships where faculty can both socialize into the institution and help shape the institution.

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APPENDIX A  
COMMUNICATION TO CCCS' DEANS COUNCIL

**SUBJECT:** CTE Faculty Study

Hello Fellow CCCS Deans,

I hope this email finds you all well! For those of you I have not met in person yet, my name is Anne Marie Jacobson, and I am one of the academic deans at Front Range Community College. I am also a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University in the Higher Education Leadership program.

I have reached the point in my PhD journey where I am recruiting participants for my study. The topic of my dissertation is From Industry to the Classroom: Career and Technical Education Faculty Experiences in the Colorado Community College System. The purpose of my study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of CTE faculty in our system to better understand their transitions from workforce experts to classroom practitioners. I am specifically seeking participants who are full time faculty have 1-7 years' experience in the classroom.

If you have faculty at your institution that meet this description and are potentially interested in being interviewed for this research, would you please either send me their name or facilitate an introduction between me and them?

Thank you in advance for your help with this project! I am passionately committed to supporting the faculty who support our students, and I hope this research will contribute of enhanced understanding of faculty experiences.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Anne Marie Jacobson

APPENDIX B  
COMMUNICATIOPN TO CCCS' VP COUNCIL

**SUBJECT:** CTE Faculty Study

Hello CCCS VP Council Members,

I hope this email finds you all well! My name is Anne Marie Jacobson, and I am one of the academic deans at Front Range Community College. I am also a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University in the Higher Education Leadership program.

I have reached the point in my PhD journey where I am recruiting participants for my study. The topic of my dissertation is From Industry to the Classroom: Career and Technical Education Faculty Experiences in the Colorado Community College System. The purpose of my study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of CTE faculty in our system to better understand their transitions from workforce experts to classroom practitioners. I am specifically seeking participants who are full time faculty have 1-7 years' experience in the classroom.

I have reached out to my colleagues on the CCCS Deans' Council to ask their help in recruiting participants. I hope the VPs across our system will also be able to share this opportunity with faculty at our schools. If you have faculty at your institution that meet this description and are potentially interested in being interviewed for this research, would you please either send me their name or facilitate an introduction between me and them?

Thank you in advance for your help with this project! I am passionately committed to supporting the faculty who support our students, and I hope this research will contribute of enhanced understanding of faculty experiences.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Anne Marie Jacobson

APPENDIX C  
COMMUNICATION TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

**SUBJECT:** CTE Faculty Study

Hello [insert name of potential participant],

I hope this email finds you well! My name is Anne Marie Jacobson, and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University in the Higher Education Leadership program. Additionally, I am one of the academic deans at Front Range Community College, where I also served as a full-time faculty member in the Early Childhood Education CTE program for almost 10 years.

I have reached the point in my PhD journey where I am recruiting participants for my dissertation study. The title of my research is From Industry to the Classroom: Career and Technical Education Faculty Experiences in the Colorado Community College System. The purpose of my study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of CTE faculty in our system to better understand their transitions from workforce experts to classroom practitioners.

As a new CTE faculty member in CCCS, you might be interested in being interviewed for this research. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and has the potential to improve how CTE faculty are supported in their early years as teachers.

I will be conducting interviews with participants during the fall 2024 semester. Initial interviews are anticipated to take 60-90 minutes with the potential for a follow up interview of 45-60 minutes. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym and all identifying information, including your home college within CCCS, will be removed. Names and identifying information will be known only to me to the maximum legal extent. You will also have the opportunity to review the transcript of our interview to ensure accuracy and provide your thoughts on the initial data analysis in a follow up meeting. You will also receive a copy of the full dissertation once completed. At the end of the study, all participants will be entered into a raffle to win one of three \$100 Amazon gift cards as a thank you.

I would like to meet with you via zoom or in person if appropriate to share the full details of what your participation would involve.

If you are interested, please let me know some days and times in the next week when we can connect.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Anne Marie Jacobson

APPENDIX D  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Interview questions addressing research question one: Developing understandings of what it means to be a teacher when transitioning from industry**

1. How would you describe your transition from being a workforce expert to a community college faculty member? [Potentially insert the specific industry the participant came from to personalize the question.]
2. Please describe the perceptions you held about higher education teachers before you became one and how they have changed since.
3. How would you describe the role of a community college teacher? Please share how you developed this description.
4. Describe a time when you encountered a confusing situation as a new faculty member and what you did to navigate it. How did you make sense of it? What was the result?
5. Which experiences during your first year(s) as a community college faculty stand out to you the most? How come those experiences stand out for you?
6. Describe how your early experiences as a faculty member either surprised you or matched your expectations of the role.

**Interview questions addressing research question two: Hindering and supporting factors when making the transition to higher education**

7. Please describe the experiences you had (or are having) that you find helpful in your transition to a faculty member.
8. Please describe the experiences you had (or are having) that you found unhelpful or even hindering in your transition to a faculty member.
9. How would you describe the ways colleagues (such as other faculty members and administrators) have influenced your transition?
10. How would you describe the relationship between the administration at your school and new CTE faculty?
11. How would you describe the power dynamics and hierarchies at your college? How would you describe your place within those power dynamics and hierarchies?

**Interview questions addressing research question two: Hindering and supporting factors when making the transition to higher education**

12. Tell me about your experiences with the culture of higher education versus the workforce culture you came from.
13. How would you describe your process of learning the job and culture of higher education? Please share the strategies you used.

14. What types of professional development experiences have you engaged in since becoming a community college faculty member?
15. Can you describe how your professional development experiences were helpful to your transition or not?
16. How would you describe your growth as a classroom teacher since becoming a faculty member?

**Final interview question**

17. Are there any other questions about your transition that you wished I asked you or anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E  
SECOND-ROUND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How well prepared did you feel to enter the classroom and serve the students you see in your program when you first started as faculty? How well prepared do you feel now? What changed? (Research question 1)
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher and why? (Research question 1)
3. How did you learn to balance service and teaching requirements? What strategies do you use? (Research question 2)
4. What were the things you focused on first when you started? Why did you prioritize those and how have your prioritizations strategies changed? (Research question 2)
5. What kind of access to or support for do you have for career advancement at your college? (Research question 3)
6. What have been the most important factors for your success and why? (Research question 2)
7. What would you change or keep about the onboarding and development process for CTE faculty at your college? Why? (Research questions 2 and 3)

APPENDIX F  
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Investigator: Anne Marie Jacobson, doctoral candidate at Colorado State University, under the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Johnson

Title of study: FROM INDUSTRY TO THE CLASSROOM: CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FACULTY EXPERIENCES IN THE COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Please read this form, and if you have any questions about the study, you may reach out to Anne Marie Jacobson at [AnneMarie.Jacobson@colostate.edu](mailto:AnneMarie.Jacobson@colostate.edu). If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant you may reach out to [insert IRB contact here].

This study explores the workforce to teaching transition experiences of new, full-time career and technical education faculty in the Colorado Community College System (CCCS). Your participation in this research will consist of being interviewed by the investigator about your experiences transitioning from your initial career in industry to a career in higher education. Initial interviews are expected to take 60-90 minutes. It is possible a follow up interview of 45-60 mins will be needed. Interviews are expected to take place from August to December, 2024. During interviews the investigator will ask a series of open-ended questions designed to capture your perspectives about how you conceptualize the role of teacher, your socialization experiences into higher education, your attitudes toward professional development opportunities, and your beliefs about instructional practices. Initial interview questions will be provided in advance. Follow up interview questions will be generated after the initial round of interviews. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and recorded. Recordings from the interview will be stored on a password-protected computer and deleted after they are transcribed. Transcripts, investigator notes, and all materials related to the project will also be stored on a password-protected computer on password-protected documents while the dissertation is being completed. All materials will also be backed up on a password-protected external hard drive that will be stored in a locked container when not in use. After completion of the dissertation all materials will be stored on the external hard drive and destroyed three years later.

Completed consent forms will be kept separate from interview data. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms for all participants will be used and all identifying information, including your home college within CCCS, will be removed. Names and identifying information will be known only to the investigator to the maximum legal extent.

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. You might feel uncomfortable describing your experiences during the interview process. You may opt to skip questions or end your participation in the study at any time.

Participation in this study is not anticipated to have a guaranteed, direct benefit to you. All participants will be entered into a raffle at the conclusion of the study. The three participants chosen through the raffle will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card. Additionally, participants can opt to request that their participation in this study be counted toward service expectations at their home college. To do so, participants will need to disclose their participation in the study to their supervisor and make this request through their line of supervision. The investigator intends to share results within CCCS, which could contribute to an improved understanding of how to effectively support new CTE faculty within the system.

There are no costs to or compensation of participants in association with this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without losing any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your ink or electronic signature on this form indicates that you:

- Have had adequate time to read the document
- Have received satisfactory answers to any questions you had
- Have received a satisfactory explanation of the study
- Voluntarily agree to participate in the study

Additionally, your ink or electronic signature on this form indicates your agreement with one of the options below (please select the option that you prefer):

I agree to allow the investigator to use direct quotes from my interview(s) in the final dissertation, provided all identifying information has been removed.

I do not agree to allow the investigator to use direct quotes from my interview(s) in the final dissertation. I understand my responses will contribute to the findings and discussion in the dissertation, but will not be quoted directly.

Participant's Name (typed or printed)\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature (ink or electronic)\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_