EXPLORING FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

by

Stacy B. Moore

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. Hilary Dack

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Dr. Chance Lewis

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Dr. Bruce Taylor

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Dr. Mark D'Amico

ABSTRACT

STACY B. MOORE. Exploring Faculty Perceptions of Active and Collaborative Learning in One Community College's Behavioral and Social Science Department. (Under the direction of DR. HILARY DACK)

Behavioral and Social Science (BSS) classes provide students with understandings of human behaviors, motivations, and actions that are crucial to confronting both social and personal problems. Moreover, most community college degrees require that students take at least one BSS class—anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and/or sociology. While BSS classes are important—both from a philosophical as well as a degree-requirement standpoint—without effective student engagement, that importance may be lost. Oftentimes, BSS classes are still taught largely through didactic instruction. Yet, active and collaborative learning has proven to be a more effective instructional approach. Moreover, the need for active and collaborative learning may be even more crucial in community college BSS classes, due to the unique demographics of these institutions. Since previous research suggests that active and collaborative learning in BSS classes is more effective than didactic instruction, the purpose of this study is to better understand BSS instructors' knowledge of active and collaborative learning and to identify the factors that foster this instructional approach and those that present hurdles. By determining these factors, recommendations can be made for how to replicate effective active and collaborative learning that is happening in BSS classrooms and work to minimize the roadblocks to this instructional approach.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is the culmination of over five years of academic commitment as a doctoral student but also nearly three decades as an educator. As someone who experienced struggles in high school, community college offered me a second chance at proving that I could not only succeed but eventually excel academically. While the active and collaborative community college environment addressed in this dissertation is not the one I experienced, it is the one I hope today's students and tomorrow's students will experience. I dedicate this dissertation, in part, to them. I also dedicate this dissertation to community college faculty. Even though I now find myself in the ranks of college administration, my heart will always be in the classroom, and I will profess to my last breath that there is no harder job than teaching, if done with the passion, compassion, and dedication that so many teachers bring into the classroom every day.

I dedicate part of this dissertation to my colleagues who over the past five years have offered encouragement, advice, and support. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Edith McElroy who always believed in me and began calling me "doctor" long before it was earned, advising me to "make it true."

Finally, and most importantly, I dedicate this dissertation to my family. This doctoral journey would not have been possible without the support of my wife Maria, and my sons Trevor, and Spencer. Maria provided me space and kept me grounded. Trevor was my go-to proofreader and favorite editor in the world—I guess that's the benefit of being in college at the same time as your kids. And, finally Spencer, whose kindness and wit always seemed to come to me just when I needed it most. To each of them I say thank you. I could not have made it through this educational journey without you.

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But, most importantly, I want to acknowledge the support, guidance, and encouragement from my dissertation chair, Dr. Hilary Dack. Dr. Dack provided me with advice, suggestions, and direction from the sunsetting of one dissertation topic to the selection of another. She helped me to persevere through the struggles with chapter two, and through the proposal defense, IRB approval, data collection, and data analysis. Without her feedback, redirection, and recommendations, this finished product would not be a reality. She taught me the importance of simultaneously being efficient and being thorough, provided me detailed feedback, and, if she was ever bothered by my multitude of questions, she never showed it. Dr. Dack, your patience, guidance, and support will not be forgotten.

I also need to acknowledge the support of the leadership at my educational institution for approving this study and to the members of its Behavioral and Social Science department who selflessly gave up their time to help this study come to life. Community college instructors are the unsung heroes of higher education, and these fabulous educators are definitely heroes to me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Student engagement is a critical component to student success in higher education. Groccia (2018) found that, for a student to be engaged, "the learner must have some degree of participation or effort" and "must have a level of interest in the experience that results in improved motivation and enjoyment, thus establishing a level of commitment" (pp. 13-14). Moreover, research shows that "the more actively engaged students are—with college faculty and staff, with other students, [and] with the subject matter they are studying—the more likely they are to persist in their college studies and to achieve at higher levels" (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2023j, para. 1). Therefore, it is crucial that students be actively and collaboratively engaged in the learning process. Arguably, this engagement is even more vital at the community college level. Students who choose community college do so for a myriad of reasons—small class sizes, economic affordability, or poor previous academic performance. For those who fall into the latter category, many of whom have graduated from high school but are by no means "college ready," community college serves as a second chance. The "open-door policy" has been a fundamental part of the community college ethos from its inception, and while the concept is laudable, it is also often difficult to navigate. It is therefore even more important in community colleges that proven, research-based educational practices be leveraged to ensure student success.

Yet, recent student survey data revealed that, while active and collaborative learning is happening in community college classrooms, its frequency of use is far below where it could, and many would argue, should be (CCCSE, 2023f). Didactic educational approaches continue to dominate at institutions of higher learning (IHL), both at the university and community college

levels, even though a preponderance of evidence points to the fact that lessons are learned best within a setting where students can *do* instead of just *listen* and be actively and collaboratively involved in the learning process (Davidson & Major, 2014; Doyle & Doyle, 2021; Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Hushman, 2022: Johnson et al., 2014; Kagan, 2014; Kaufman et al., 1997; Keith-Le et al., 2020; Klemenčič, 2021; Love et al., 2014; Marra et al., 2014; Michaelsen et al., 2014; Smith & Burke, 2007; Spoor et al., 2020).

Community college programs that focus on trades have a rich tradition of hands-on learning. While not discounting the reading, discussion, and study that goes into learning a trade, ultimately, welding students learn to weld by welding, automotive technology students learn to replace brake pads by replacing brake pads, and culinary students learn to bake a cake by baking a cake. Yet, there is a persistent perception that just because Behavioral and Social Science (BSS) classes *can* be taught through lecture that they *should* be taught through lecture. Instructors often cling to this approach because it allows for expedited coverage of material. Yet, by doing this, often instructors turn this material into facts to be memorized as opposed to lessons to be learned.

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017), comprehension of human behaviors and actions is an integral skill needed to confront the challenges facing society today, and the behavioral and social sciences play a significant role in resolving vital organizational, societal, and personal issues. If we believe that a deeper understanding of human behavior is paramount to societal problem solving, then, it is incumbent upon community colleges to not only assure that degree-seeking students successfully secure their BSS credits, but that they truly learn the lessons that need to be learned.

At the large urban community college where this study is positioned—referred to using the pseudonym Middle Foothills Community College (MFCC)—there are social/behavioral science requirements for almost all degrees. Per the curriculum standard's general education requirements, degree programs must contain at least one course from social/behavioral sciences (North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges, 2022). Therefore, if a student elects to pursue an Associate of Arts degree for transfer or an Associate in Applied Science degree (AAS) in Welding, and almost everything in between, social/behavioral science classes are required.

In the state where MFCC is located, social/behavioral science courses include the following: anthropology, economics, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. However, on an institutional level, MFCC houses five of these disciplines—anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology—in their BSS department. History, while designated at the state level as a social/behavioral science course, is housed within the humanities department at MFCC. For this reason, as well as ethical concerns that will be addressed in the positionality statement in chapter three, this study will focus only on MFCC's BSS department. History instruction, although under the state-wide social/behavioral science umbrella, will not be addressed in this study.

While students are not required to take courses from each of the BSS disciplines, the intent is that the discipline students select will afford them an opportunity to study human behavior, how it can impact relationships and actions, and how it can influence what happens in their personal lives and community. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC), who accredits MFCC and the state universities to which its students often transfer, posited that these classes are an essential element of higher-education and serve to "introduce a breadth of knowledge and reinforce cognitive skills and effective

learning opportunities for each student" (SACS-COC, 2020, p. 81). The importance of BSS classes is critical, both from a philosophical and degree-requirement standpoint. Without effective student engagement, that importance may be lost on students.

As evidenced in chapter two, while extensive research has been done regarding instructional approaches in baccalaureate degree granting IHLs, much less scholarship is available at the community college level, making the current study all the more relevant. Yet, whether students attend a community college or four-year college or university, oftentimes their classes—BSS and others—are still taught didactically. Edwin Slosson may have expressed it best over 100 years ago when, after visiting a collegiate classroom, he stated, "it would be well if the teachers did not know quite as much, [and] if they knew how to tell what they did know better" (p. 123). As recently as two decades ago, scholars were still lamenting that at colleges and universities "the lecture still seems to be the centerpiece of instruction, where students passively absorb pre-processed information and then regurgitate it in response to periodic multiple-choice exams" (McCarthy & Anderson, 2000, p. 279). Even a decade ago, in his study of instructional practices with undergraduates at La Salle University, Feden (2012) found that "with the emergence of studies from cognitive science has come research suggesting instructional strategies that promise to promote deeper and longer-lasting knowledge among all of the students with whom we work," yet, "direct instruction using lecture continues to dominate in America's college classrooms" (p. 5).

The Center for Community College Student Engagement's (CCCSE) mission, in part, is to change that by providing aid to "institutions and policymakers in using information to promote improvements in student learning, persistence, and attainment" (CCCSE, 2023h, para. 1). This is done through a myriad of publications, grant work, workshops, and most importantly, through

the data collected from the community college survey of student engagement (CCSSE). CCCSE (2023i) described this annual survey as a "well-established tool that helps institutions focus on good educational practice and identify areas in which they can improve their programs and services for students" (para. 1). The CCSSE began in 2001 with the purpose of

> producing new information about community college quality and performance that would provide value to institutions in their efforts to improve student learning and retention, while also providing policymakers and the public with more appropriate ways to view the quality of undergraduate education (CCCSE, 2023a, para. 7).

The current study references the 2022 cohort of CCSSE data collected largely from the U.S., but also some international two-year institutions, between 2020 and 2022. Data collection is focused on the following five benchmarks: (1) active and collaborative learning; (2) student effort; (3) academic challenges; (4) student-faculty interaction; and (5) support of learners (CCCSE, 2023b). While CCSSE student data provides great insight into the community college student experience, data gleaned from the community college faculty survey of student engagement (CCFSSE) is also particularly salient for the current study, as it provides insight concerning instructional practices and instructors' perceptions of student learning (CCCSE, 2023g). While in no way discounting the importance of benchmarks two through five, the focus of the current study was on benchmark one—active and collaborative learning.

If BSS faculty can provide their students with more opportunities for active and collaborative learning, as opposed to didactic instruction, then, perhaps community colleges can help to dislodge the hidden curriculum—the social and cultural rules and principles, that, while not explicitly stated, continue to permeate the classroom (Giroux, 1983). Unfortunately, the all-too-common didactic instructional approach actually serves as the deposit in the allegorical

banking model of education in which the instructor is the banker who controls all transactions. Freire (1970) argued that "those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety. . . abandon the educational goal of deposit-making" and replace this system with a real-world approach to education. A more humanizing approach to education rests in "problem-posing education" where the direction and content being learned is no longer held exclusively by the teacher, but instead is shared by teacher and student—both learning through a two-sided dialogue (Freire, 1970, p. 81). This approach allows students to escape the role of "docile listener" and engage on a more substantive level as "critical co-investigators" with their instructors thus reframing education as "the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (p. 81). By transitioning from a "banking" model to a "problem-posing" model, students "come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades" (p. 124). While Freire was not focused on post-secondary education, these ideas are still applicable at the community college level.

Substantive interactions between community college instructors and their students are crucial to producing positive outcomes, and those interactions can be made more impactful through effective instruction. Teaching and learning is the core mission of American community colleges. Unlike their more research-focused university colleagues, the primary and fundamental objective of community college faculty is instruction (Brubacher, 2017; Swanger, 2016). Therefore, a critical issue for community colleges must be the continual growth and strengthening of faculty teaching skills. While many scholars agree that instructional strategies rooted in active and collaborative learning, as opposed to didactic instruction, are the most effective, there are often roadblocks to an active and collaborative learning approach. Studying

the perceptions of active and collaborative learning within the BSS faculty at MFCC and identifying facilitators of this type of instruction may establish a roadmap for how active and collaborative learning can be more extensively leveraged at this and other IHLs.

Purpose

Since previous research suggests that active and collaborative learning in BSS classes is more effective than didactic instruction, the purpose of this study was to better understand community college BSS instructors' knowledge of active and collaborative learning and to identify the factors that foster this instructional approach and those that present hurdles. By determining these factors, recommendations can be made for how to (1) replicate effective active and collaborative learning that is happening in BSS classrooms and (2) work to minimize the roadblocks to this instructional approach.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this basic interpretive qualitative study:

1. How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?
2. What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?
3. What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

Theoretical Construct

The main theoretical construct for this study was active and collaborative learning. The two terms "active" and "collaborative" have been parsed out and explored independently in some educational research. However, for this study, active and collaborative learning was largely explored as one entity, based on the use of this construct by CCCSE in their first benchmark for

student engagement (CCCSE, 2023b). While CCCSE has not specifically defined active and collaborative learning, it has offered the following description of this construct:

> Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4).

It is through this positive perception of active and collaborative learning that CCCSE designed the relevant survey questions and framed its quantitative results.

The present study also drew upon the additional constructs of thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance. These five constructs were gleaned from the CCCSE-inspired description of active and collaborative learning stated above. They were used during the data analysis process to gain a qualitative understanding of active and collaborative learning within the MFCC BSS department.

Overview of Research Methodology

Qualitative research is an investigative approach focused on unearthing human understandings, interpretations, and experiences (Hammersley, 2013). This study was a basic interpretive qualitative study. This type of study is characterized by the following criteria: "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited that the essence of all qualitative research centers on the construction of meaning and "how people make sense of their lives and their worlds" (p. 25). The fundamental

objective of basic qualitative studies is to "uncover and interpret these meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). Discovery and interpretation related to the understanding and execution of active and collaborative learning was central to this study.

To unearth MFCC BSS instructors' knowledge and operationalization of active and collaborative learning, as well as how varied factors help to foster or hinder the approach, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with seven of the 16 MFCC full-time BSS instructors. In the initial interview (see Appendix A) and the follow-up interview (see Appendix B), I used a semi-structured approach which allowed me to mine for further understanding through follow-up questions in an effort to better "understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and life worlds" (Warren, 2012, p. 83).

Ellinger and McWhorter (2016) stressed the importance of triangulation, arguing that the use of numerous data sources helped to ensure rigor. To that end, when a participant mentioned a related learning activity (i.e., lesson plan, activity instructions, rubrics, images, etc.) during interviews and indicated a willingness to share its contents, I sent a post-interview email requesting the artifact be emailed to me. These artifacts were added to the data corpus in an effort to better understand the instructors' classroom practices.

Following the first round of interviews with all seven faculty members, follow-up interviews were conducted with each. In these interviews, additional questions were posed relating to the provided artifacts and their connection to active and collaborative learning. This allowed for an even deeper understanding of their perspectives on active and collaborative learning, as applied through their own classroom lessons. Follow-up interviews also leveraged CCCSE question items related to the frequency of class discussions, the regularity of students giving class presentations, the amount of time dedicated to both in-class and outside-of-class

student collaboration on projects, service-learning requirement levels, and whether or not they thought their students discussed ideas from classes with others outside of class (CCCSE, 2023f). Finally, individualized follow-up questions were posed to participants in regards to particular responses in the first interview.

Convenience sampling was used in the design of this study due to my employment at MFCC, which made this group of instructors readily accessible. All 16 full-time MFCC BSS faculty were invited to participate in the hope of gathering a comprehensive picture of the instructional decision making within this department. Seven faculty members agreed to participate in the study. First and second round interviews of these seven participants took place via Google Meet.

This basic interpretive qualitative study design is well aligned with the study's theoretical construct of active and collaborative learning. Through the seven initial interviews and the follow-up interviews with each participant, participants were able to share rich qualitative data focused on their instructional preferences and practices. By applying Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) basic interpretive qualitative characteristics, this research approach allowed BSS instructors to expound upon the factors influencing their instructional decision making. It also allowed them to share their classroom practices and discuss the significance they assign to both.

Significance of the Study

As with their university peers, community college faculty must be experts in their field of study—not expert educators. In fact, SACS-COC only requires that community college instructors possess a master's degree in the subject being taught or a master's degree and a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the subject being taught (SACS-COC, 2003). In contrast to many of their university colleagues, community college faculty do not split their time

among service, research, and teaching. Instead, the primary mission of community college instructors is to *teach*. So, it stands to reason that implementing best-practices in the classroom would be of the utmost importance.

Twombly and Townsend (2008) accurately advanced the idea that "to produce good learning outcomes, community colleges must employ effective faculty members" (p. 20). The material addressed in MFCC BSS classrooms is important not only for degree completion but also for life. This study sought to clarify how BSS instructors conceptualize and use active and collaborative learning in their classroom, not only to ensure academic success, but also to help students to retain key concepts that are crucial to social understanding and problem-solving. The study also serves to spotlight both the barriers *to* and facilitators *of* active and collaborative learning in community college classrooms.

CCCSE data provided quantitative insight from both faculty and students on the way community college students spend their class time. However, lacking in the current body of research was a wealth of qualitative data focused on the faculty perceptions of student engagement, particularly related to active and collaborative learning. Moreover, in disciplines as important as those found in BSS, it was important to understand if and how active and collaborative learning was being understood and operationalized in an effort to remove the barriers to expanding this instructional approach. This study provided more data that can be leveraged to that end.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations of this study included the sample size, the focus on exclusively full-time instructors, disclosure of the study's focus to potential participants, and the questionable trustworthiness that accompanies self-reported data. The decision to study only BSS instructors

represents a delimitation of this study. It stemmed from the propensity of instructors in these disciplines to use (or overuse) lectures as a primary means of instruction. There were also two major assumptions underlying the study's design, the first being that data collection from seven participants would yield adequately rich data from which conclusions could be drawn, and the second being that interviewees would provide honest and accurate self-reported data.

Definition of Terms

Active and collaborative learning. Instructional approaches that actively involve students in their education, providing them opportunities to "think about and apply what they are learning in different settings," collaborate "with others to solve problems or master challenging content," and develop "valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives" (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4).

Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE). This center, based in the University of Texas at Austin's department of Educational Leadership and Policy, is dedicated to research and advocacy related to student engagement, learning, and retention at community colleges.

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). A survey administered by CCCSE to community college students focused on five benchmarks: (1) active and collaborative learning; (2) student effort; (3) academic challenges; (4) student-faculty interaction; and (5) support of learners (CCCSE, 2023b).

College ready. A student's academic preparedness to successfully engage with post-secondary education, without the need for remediation as determined through secondary GPA or standardized tests.

Didactic instruction. A teacher centered approach to instruction, in which students receive information deemed important by the instructor, often via live or recorded lecture.

Behavioral and social sciences (BSS). Academic disciplines focused on human behavior and how humans interact or have interacted within societies over time. These disciplines include—anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools - Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC). The accreditation body for institutions of higher education in the American south, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Structural Outline

In Chapter one, an overview of the study has been introduced. The purpose of the study and the research questions have been identified, and a short synopsis of both the theoretical construct and the research methodology have been provided. The significance of the study has been highlighted. Limitations, delimitations, and assumptions have also been shared. In order to aid in accessibility and navigation, a definition section and structural outline has been furnished. In chapter two, the existing literature focused on the purpose of community colleges, community college demographics, the role of instructors in community colleges, and the importance of BSS coursework will briefly be addressed. This will be done to provide a basic understanding of the context in which active and collaborative learning will be studied. Then, an extensive literature review that addresses what active and collaborative learning is, why it matters in IHLs, how it compares to didactic instruction, and what existing research suggests about community college

faculty familiarity and comfort with instructional application of active and collaborative learning will be provided. Finally, an overview of literature related to the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning will be explored.

In chapter three, the theoretical construct of active and collaborative learning will be examined in more detail, as will the methodology that undergirds this study—basic interpretive qualitative research. Chapter four will provide readers with findings and explore both deductive and inductive themes related to each research question. Finally, chapter five will further explore the findings, present connections between existing literature and the findings, discuss the implications of the study, and present recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Community colleges serve as a front-line, open-door solution to an ever-expanding need to provide services that will benefit society at large. While that statement is often quantified in job placements in trades and industry or in transfers to university, the lessons learned in BSS classes can have a much more expansive and philosophical impact. These classes can not only help improve the quality of life for individuals, but also help students to recognize and perhaps address larger societal problems. Indeed, McCarthy and Anderson (2000) described history and political science by saying that "human interaction lies at the heart of the disciplines in these areas," (p. 280), though this statement is equally applicable to all BSS disciplines.

Lessons learned through the study of BSS may be most effective within an active and collaborative setting in which that "human interaction" can be leveraged. Yet, that is not the environment of a typical BSS classroom (Becker, 2000; Higgins & Stamatel, 2015) or IHL classrooms in general (Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Johnson et al., 2014; McGlynn, 2020; Panitz & Panitz, 1998). Continued reliance on a didactic lecture-based approach to instruction can perhaps can be attributed to the fact that, unlike some other subjects outside of BSS, anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology are often conceptualized by instructors as an amalgam of understandings and facts, as opposed to a set of complex skills to be practiced. For example, Becker (2000) extensively cited work from the American Economic Association (AEA) and their efforts to advance economics instruction. While largely centered on baccalaureate granting institutions, AEA added community college representation in the late 1990s (Becker, 2000). Becker (2000) found that "to get students to think like economists," there needs to be a movement away from didactic practices that "typically do not

challenge students beyond a recall cognitive level" (p. 117). This argument could be made for anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology, as well. A significant number of BSS instructors also see lecture as beneficial due to its efficiency—ease of deployment, immediacy, and control of the content (Huggins & Stamatel, 2015). While Huggins and Stamatel's (2015) work focused on upperclassmen at the university level, these findings are also applicable to many community college BSS instructors who are content to operate their classes as spaces where facts are memorized, as opposed to laboratories where skills are done.

One would never find a didactic approach exclusively used in an arts program—music, theatre, or visual arts. These are active, skill-based endeavors. Moreover, someone earning an AAS degree in electrical systems technology would not just *hear* about how to wire a house, but rather would actively practice the process. No nursing degrees can be earned without a practical application and experiential learning component. The thought of a health care professional receiving didactic instruction as their only training is unconscionable. Yet, while the detrimental effects of exclusively passive BSS instructional methods may not be as noticeable in the short term as they would be in an AAS degree, arguably the long-term effects may be profound.

Yet, the push to "cover the material" is strong, and this is not just a struggle in BSS classes. McGlynn (2020) studied university science classes and stated that "covering something merely for the sake of covering it is pointless. Introducing students to a concept, but not taking the time to actually support their learning, rarely does any of them a useful service" (para, 9). But that is what often happens in college classrooms. If it is important for instructors to support student learning through meaningful experiences, then it is important to understand how BSS instructors define and operationalize active and collaborative learning, and to determine any barriers to this approach, so they can be addressed.

Before seeking to understand faculty perceptions of active and collaborative learning in the Middle Foothills Community College (MFCC) BSS department, an explanation of the context in which this study took place is essential. It is important to understand the overall mission and purpose of community colleges, the types of learners that constitute the student-body at a typical community college, and the roles and qualifications for community college faculty.

As previously noted, CCCSE's description of active and collaborative learning as evidenced in their 2022 survey informed the theoretical framework for this study. The following constructs, which were embedded in CCCSE's description, also comprised the theoretical framework: thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance (CCCSE, 2023cc). Existing literature for each of these constructs was explored in order to serve as a guide for the development of themes within this study and to justify and contextualize this study's research findings.

Finally, before delving into the perceptions of active and collaborative learning in MFCC's BSS department, it was necessary to explore existing research addressing faculty familiarity, understanding, and comfort with active and collaborative learning and how (or if) they apply it in their classrooms. While active and collaborative learning is effective, it is often not well understood and not deployed with enough frequency. This gap between established utility and application served as an important impetus for this study. Moreover, it is also important to understand the perceived roadblocks to deploying this instructional approach and the factors that allow it to flourish in similar settings. A summary of the literature focused on each of the aforementioned components is available in Figure 1.

Community College

Purpose (Cohen et al., 2014; Drury, 2003; Heelan & Mellow, 2017; Jurgens, 2010; Kintzer & Bryant, 1998)

Demographics (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020; Armstrong et al., 2021; Beyond the rhetoric, 2010; Dembicki, 2020; Felderman, 2016; Finley & Kinslow, 2016; Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Hanson, 2022; Heelan & Mellow, 2017; Hughes & Edwards, 2012; Iloh, 2018; Ison & Nguyen, 2021; Leeds & Mokher, 2020; Rodrigues, 2015; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Schrynemakers et al., 2019; Spitzig & Renner, 2022; Sullivan, 2017; Utterback, 1998; Wallaert, 2018; Whatley et al., 2022)

Faculty Roles and Qualifications (American association of community colleges, 2023; Beach, 2011; Brubacher, 2017; Dilling et al., 2020; Felderman, 2016; Fugate & Amey, 2000; Holyoke & Larson, 2009; Murry, 2007; Witcher & Sasso, 2022)

Active and Collaborative Learning

Active Learning (Bolliger & Armier, 2013; Dewey, 1916; Doyle & Doyle, 2021; Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Freeman et al., 2014; Freire, 1970; Hushman, 2022; Johnson et al., 2014; Keith-Le et al., 2020; Smith & Burke, 2007; Spoor et al., 2020)

Collaborative Learning (Barkley & Major, 2020; Elliot et al., 2016; Le et al., 2018; Pedersen, 2010; Svanum & Bigatti, 2009; Johnson et al., 2014; Kaufman et al., 1997; Keyser, 2000; Love et al., 2014; Mate et al., 2011; Millis, 2014; Robinson & Kakela, 2006; Tokke, 2020)

Active and Collaborative Learning Based on CCCSE Constructs

Thinking (Brookfield, 2005; Butler et al., 2017; CCCSE, 2023c; CCCSE, 2023f; Choudhuri, 2023; Joseph, 2019; Love et al., 2014; Manalo; 2019; Marra et al., 2014; Poole et al., 2013; Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013)

Application (CCCSE, 2023c; CCCSE, 2023f; Coffey et al., 2011; DiBartolo & Molina, 2010; Joughin, 1998; Kagan, 2014; Kay, 2018; Klemenčič, 2021; Nosek & Goldmen, 2022)

Team/Partner Work (CCCSE, 2023c; CCCSE, 2023f; Burke, 2011; Davidson & Major; 2014; Flaherty, 2022; Freire, 1970; Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019; Laverick, 2018; Michaelsen et al., 2014; Pickell, 2016; Spoor et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2021; Wood, 2020)

Problem Solving (CCCSE, 2023c; CCCSE, 2023f; Brame & Biel, 2015; Marra et al., 2014; Maier, 2010; Robbins & Dowty, 2017; Smirnova, 2016)

Real-World Relevance (CCCSE, 2023c; CCCSE, 2023f; Blouin & Perry, 2009; Choi, 2008; Heelan & Mellow, 2017; Kasworm, 2003; McGoldrick et al., 2000; Munter, 2002; Pearl & Turk, 2021; Prentice, 2011)

Faculty Familiarity, Understanding, Comfort, and Deployment

Faculty Familiarity, Understanding, and Comfort with Active and Collaborative Learning (SACS-COC, 2003; Berrett, 2013; Miller & Metz, 2014; Millis, 2010; Panitz & Panitz, 1998; Storm & Storm, 2002; Witcher & Sasso, 2022)

Faculty Deployment of Active and Collaborative Learning (CCCSE, 2023e; Hoiden & Reusser, 2020; Kramer, 2017; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005; Winter, 2002;)

Figure 1

Community College and Active and Collaborative Learning Literature

Barriers and Facilitators to Deployment
Barriers (Aisha & Ratra, 2022; Auerbach & Andrews, 2018; Bailey et al., 2015; Burke, 2011; Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Clary et al, 2022; Epps, 2022; Gecker, 2023; Grubb, 2002; Harvey et al., 2022; Hollingsworth, 2023; Keyser, 2000; Lewis & Hessen, 2021; Lieberman, 2018; Maier, 2010; Marra et al., 2014; Miller & Metz, 2014; Moyer, 2006; Quinterno, 2020; Reed, 2022; Rogers & Kahne, 2022; Shepard & Culver, 2018; Spoor et al., 2020; Stoian et al., 2022; Tagg, 2012; Walker, 2023; Williams, 2023; Wood, 2002)
Facilitators (Bakutes, 1998; Better, 2013; D'Avanzo, 2009; Gyurko et al., 2016; Karcher et al., 2022; Kim, 2020; Lieberman, 2018; Swanger, 2016; Taylor, 1957; Troller, 2002)

Figure 1
Community College and Active and Collaborative Learning Literature (Continued)

Community College

Purpose

Since the founding of Joliet Junior College just outside of Chicago in 1901, community colleges have operated under "an implicit social contract with America" to prepare its students to enter the middle class (Heelan & Mellow, 2017, p. 19). Yet, as the middle class continues to decline in numbers, the community college has also taken on a social justice role as an essential vehicle for preserving equity through offering affordable education—a stepping stone *into* the middle class (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). Community colleges initially arose out of emerging needs as America became more industrialized, the number of high school graduates increased, and universities began to more closely resemble European research institutions.

Cohen et al. (2014) attributed the rise of the community college at the turn of the twentieth century to several factors, including the increased need to staff America's ever-increasing industrial workforce and the "drive for social equality and greater access to higher education" (p. 1). The creation and funding of these institutions of higher learning (IHL) was not only a way to reduce unemployment through workforce development training, but also a means of reducing university professors' burden of teaching so many freshman and sophomore students

(Cohen et al., 2014; Jurgens, 2010; Kintzer & Bryant, 1998). It is no coincidence that junior colleges emerged around the same time that many American universities were evolving towards a German research-based model. In fact, ancillary to the gravitation towards a German university model was the idea that "the first two years of postsecondary education should be an extension of the high school," much as the six-year German high school structure (Drury, 2003, pp. 1-2).

While this idea did not completely remove underclassmen from the university system, community colleges nonetheless became widespread within the first two decades of the twentieth century, with 37 of the 48 states having at least one within their borders by 1922 (Cohen et al., 2014). This growth continued throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Despite the original motivations for their founding, community colleges have morphed and evolved over the past one hundred years, and today, they serve a diverse swath of learners, including high school graduates in need of remediation, current high school students wanting to get ahead, high school drop-outs looking for a second chance, older students learning the skills needed to change careers, and traditional college students seeking a more affordable start to their baccalaureate degree.

Demographics

Community college students represent a vast array of ages, cultures, nationalities, economic levels, academic abilities, and levels of educational preparedness (Felderman, 2016). These publicly funded IHLs offer both transfer degrees and vocational credentialing (Whatley et al., 2022). In the fall of 2018, they enrolled around 40% of all undergraduate students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2020). The reason for this large percentage is twofold. First, community college is often a much more economical option for students, and second, the criteria for entrance are minimal. In fact, these institutions have an open-door policy,

which essentially means that, “other than paying the application fee,” there are essentially no entrance requirements (Finley & Kinslow, 2016, p. 7).

Despite the fact that many of these students who enter through the “open door” require varying degrees of remediation before being “college ready”; community colleges are still often seen as the most equitable and democratic higher education system in existence (Rodriguez, 2015). Moreover, the students served by these institutions are *from* the community and serve as an investment *in* the community, as opposed to university students who often leave the community upon graduation. Community colleges help students hone the skills needed to confront the challenges facing their communities and society at large—skills that can be strengthened by BSS coursework.

The 1947 Truman Commission Report offered bold, and at the time, quite controversial, recommendations for extending higher education opportunities to the marginalized and underserved, including attempts at ending discrimination towards Black, Jewish, and female degree seekers (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). In fact, it was the Truman Commission Report that was largely responsible for the nomenclature shift from “junior college” to “community college”. Junior college inferred that students would transfer to baccalaureate granting institutions, which, as previously noted, is not always the case (Gilbert & Heller, 2013.) Moreover, the moniker “community college” was intended to further the commission’s desire for these institutions to be “fully integrated into the life of their communities” (Gilbert & Heller, 2013, p. 431). Now, 75 years later, this mix of workforce development students and transfer students, as well as community colleges’ comparative affordability to baccalaureate granting institutions, make them an incredibly diverse environment.

Indeed, the modern community college goes far in trying to realize the goal put forth in the 1947 Truman Commission Report to eliminate roadblocks to education, not only for women and minorities, but also those hindered by the oppressive monetary burden of higher education (Sullivan, 2017). Data shows that a large percentage of community college students come from low-income homes and marginalized groups (Armstrong et al., 2021). Today's community college populations are on average 45% White, 26% Hispanic, and 13% Black (Armstrong et al., 2021). Hispanic and Black students constitute a higher community college enrollment percentage than seen at universities, with the converse being true for white students (Hanson, 2022). This, however, is not just due to the previously referenced open door policy. Black students with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 chose the community college option at a rate nearly 10% higher than their white counterparts (Hanson, 2022). Perhaps this speaks to the still-existing racial economic divide that persists in the United States. Data shows that 55% of community college students come from households with an annual income that is less than half of the approximate $60,000.00 median yearly American household income (Armstrong et al., 2021).

Hanson (2022) found that 66.6% of college students are aged 24 years and under. Yet, on average, community college students are 28 years old (Armstrong et al., 2021, p. 33). This older demographic could be attributed to a number of factors, but must be considered as decisions are made at an institutional level. These adult learners—often designated as "non-traditional" students—are financially independent, often employed full-time, possess diverse cultural and educational experiences, and may even have dependents of their own (Iloh, 2018; SREB, n.d). Indeed, so-called "non-traditional" adult learners constitute a major demographic being served by these institutions. Yet, retention rates for this group are significantly lower than for traditional students (Spitzig & Renner, 2022; Wallaert, 2018). This may be attributed to a multitude of

issues, including attempts to balance the demands of coursework with family and work obligations (Spitzig and Renner, 2022). Playing the roles of "worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver, and community member," in addition to student, can at times serve as a support for adult learners (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). But, more often than not, these multiple roles present challenges (Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Despite the fact that the average age of community college students is 28, there are many who are much younger. There are a growing number of students who are taking advantage of dual enrollment programs through their high schools, and some may be as young as fifteen years old (Finley & Kinslow, 2016). By 2011, over 50% of all institutions of higher learning served dual enrollment students (Finley & Kinslow, 2016), and, by 2018, dual enrollment students constituted 30% of community college enrollments (Dembicki, 2020).

Dual enrollment programs began in the 1970s and have experienced significant growth since that time. Today there are over one million high school students who are concurrently enrolled in college classes, representing approximately 8% of high school students nationwide (Ison & Nguyen, 2021). Serving such a large number of high school students within the community college classroom often presents a hurdle in regards to maintaining rigorous standards while also providing the unique supports—emotional validation, student-centered learning, instructional scaffolding, aid outside of the classroom—needed to help foster success (Hughes & Edwards, 2012).

As previously noted, community colleges open their doors to virtually any potential student; however, that opening is significantly narrower when accessing for-credit college courses. Upon entry into community college—based on transcripts, SAT scores, or other mechanisms for academic measurement—students may be recommended or required to take

remedial courses before they can begin most of their for-credit courses (Utterback, 1998). *Beyond the Rhetoric: Improving College Readiness through Coherent State Policy* (2010) published by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) stated that "many students who earn a high school diploma and pass the exit exams are far from being college ready" (p. 3). In fact, this SREB study found that annually nearly 60% of college freshmen learn that, despite successfully graduating from high school, that they are not "academically ready for postsecondary studies" (Beyond, 2010, p. 1). Leeds and Mokher (2020) asserted that "over half of community college students place into developmental education" (p. 87). Moreover, those who will become first generation college students and those who attended high schools designated as "low-performing" often have little concept of what it means to be college-ready (Leeds & Mokher, 2020). Additionally, close to 70% of community college faculty characterized their students' reading and writing abilities as inadequate and would like to see more rigorous placement standards (Schrynemakers et al., 2019).

The demographic composition of community colleges is often very different from that of baccalaureate degree granting IHLs. Heelan and Mellow (2017) asserted that community colleges' service to marginalized groups and "those who are the most in need of support in order to succeed in college" outclasses all other IHLs (p. 20). Data show that community colleges do, in fact, serve a larger minority population and a larger economically disadvantaged population than most baccalaureate degree granting institutions. But they also serve a much more generationally diverse population, with a large adult student population often sitting in the same classrooms as high school teenagers seeking dual enrollment credit. In comparison to most baccalaureate degree granting IHLs, community colleges also serve a larger population of

students who have already been failed by the education system—those students with high school diplomas who are still not "college-ready."

Felderman (2016) asserted that community colleges reflect the demographics of their communities much more than their university counterparts. And, in an effort to serve this heterogeneous group, community colleges often provide options for evening, night, and weekend classes, as well as online and hybrid offerings. These flexible student-friendly schedules are made possible by an often overworked and often underpaid cadre of full-time and part-time faculty.

Faculty Roles and Qualifications

When Joliet Junior college opened its doors to its first six students at the turn of the twentieth century, the role of faculty was much different than it is today. Indeed, the roles of community college faculty have evolved over time, as the general mission of community colleges has morphed and expanded. Simply stated, the skills required to be an effective community college instructor have broadened exponentially over the past 120+ years. It is important to understand these expectations and some of the history behind how faculty roles have evolved since community colleges make up a significant portion of the higher educational landscape in the United States. In fact, at the turn of the 21st century, community colleges accounted for a third of all IHLs and almost half of all undergraduates were enrolled in a community college (AACC, 2023). Each of these students are touched in some way by these faculty members.

Even before the first community college was established, the role of the faculty was already envisioned as much different from that of their baccalaureate degree granting counterparts. As stated earlier, in many ways junior college faculty were initially intended to

transition students from high school to university, and their primary task was to teach. Due to this core mission of teaching, as opposed to research, in many ways junior college faculty had much more in common with secondary teachers than university professors.

This core mission, as envisioned in 1901, remains the core mission today. While not entirely discounting some community college instructors' quest to generate new knowledge through original research, the transmission of knowledge, or teaching, is still their main function (Brubacher, 2017). While this task may appear simplistic on the surface, the diverse socioeconomic, cultural, generational, and academic diversity represented in community college demographics makes this quite a difficult job. In fact, serving large numbers of students who are from marginalized and underserved communities, those who are not college ready, those who struggle to balance academics with "life," and those who have limited knowledge of what it means to be college ready, require that community college faculty become much more than teachers. Fugate and Amey (2000) argue that "mentor, role model, coach, advocate, student facilitator, and guide" are all apt descriptors as well (p. 6).

Middle colleges, early colleges, and dual enrollment programs require that faculty educate adolescent learners as young as 15, while simultaneously addressing the needs of adult learners and traditional (those between 18 and 24 years of age) students in their classes. As Murray (2007) describes it, "at one end is youth and unbridled enthusiasm and, at the other, age and experience" (p. 16). Murray (2007) further found that each of these groups requires a different educational approach. Each generation of students in today's community college classroom—Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, or Gen Zs—bring with them unique experiences and have a "special set of characteristics that tend to influence learning preferences" (Holyoke & Larson, 2009, 14). Holyoke and Larson's (2009) study focused on students in

graduate-level courses found that Baby Boomers prefer material to be delivered more didactically, while Gen Xers thrive on the connections to their classmates, their instructor, and the ability to leverage past experiences. Witcher and Sasso's (2022) case study addressing the impact of generational differences on community college professional development (PD) found that both Millennials and Gen Zs prefer to be actively engaged in the learning process. Yet, they note that Generation Z students—those who have never really known a world without wifi and smartphones— "see the world as both digital and physical" (Witcher & Sasso, 2022, p. 2). While the task of teaching all of these students in one space is daunting, it is not impossible. But community college instructors need the time to get to know their students deeply and understand their needs (Murray, 2007). They also must have the time to plan lessons that can address the myriad of strengths and weaknesses found in their classrooms.

Adequately addressing students' remediation needs, which have grown extensively since the 1980s, has made the role of community college faculty even more difficult (Beach, 2011). Community colleges have, at times, been criticized for their ineffectiveness in meeting the formidable task of remediation. They have been accused of not taking the issues seriously enough to "design effective systems of remedial education" for underprepared students (Beach, 2011). This has been and continues to be a paramount concern for community colleges faculty who are at the vanguard of these attempts. To meet this goal, faculty have been required to add the moniker "remedial educator" to their already existing roles.

The early 1990s ushered in arguably the most significant faculty role augmentation and pedagogical shift in the history of higher education since the invention of the printing press—the advent of online classes and online instruction. Many colleges and universities began adding online classes in the late 20th century, but by 2020, online instruction represented 32% of

enrollments. This is a high figure, considering total community college enrollments represented 36% of the total higher education population in that year (Dilling et al., 2020). Faculty had to adapt, grow, and acquire a new skill set. Faculty roles expanded from an expectation of engagement and success not only in a seated/face-to-face environment but also in a digital environment. While course design, content delivery, and communication with students were not "new" tasks, they had to be approached in a much different manner. As community colleges entered the third decade of the 21st century, the role of their instructors looked far different than what students experienced at Joliet Junior College in 1901.

Community college instructors report putting in more hours planning and teaching than their university peers (Felderman, 2016). These hours are often spent ensuring that their students can grasp difficult material, particularly if these students need additional remediation. They encourage marginalized and first-generation college students to persevere, and they work to bridge the gap between multiple generations. It is through their BSS courses that community college students may gain a better understanding of the underlying issues faced by the Title 1 school from which they graduated when they were not actually "college ready," the psychology behind the systemic racism that still permeates society, or the repercussions of supply-side economics on already-struggling communities. Moreover, if the lessons learned in BSS classrooms are important, they are even more important for community college students. These students deserve to be taught in a manner that promotes not only the accrual of credits but the life-long acquisition of the knowledge that can perhaps bring about change.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Johnson et al. (2014) argued that if a time traveler from the medieval period were to visit the twenty-first century, they would find massive differences in the approach to medicine and

would be astounded by the advances in transportation, communication, and manufacturing. Yet, the medieval professor would feel quite comfortable in today's IHL classrooms where "the same age-old assumptions that teaching is telling, [and] learning is absorbing what the instructor tells," demonstrating the extent to which instructional approaches have remained constant (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 86).

Yet, didactic instruction is not always the rule. In fact, over the past decade, the "sage on the stage" approach to instruction has been further challenged. Some IHLs currently promote the transition of instructors from being the holders and givers of knowledge to the ones responsible for creating "the best opportunities for students to have successful learning experiences" (Doyle & Doyle, 2021, p. 77). Doyle and Doyle (2021) found that by engaging in meaningful learning experiences, university students felt more control in their learning and took more responsibility for the decisions they made, resulting in the creation of "lifelong learning and thinking skills" (p. 77). These meaningful learning experiences—whether they happen at the university or community college—often come from students engaging in active and collaborative learning. While this study utilizes a synthesis of these two terms as its main theoretical construct, before addressing this combined construct, it is useful to isolate and explore each aspect individually.

Active Learning

Finkelstein and Winer (2021) pointed out that university students spend around fifteen hours per week in classrooms. Following what Freire (1970) would have dubbed a banking model of education, in many of these classes, instructors lecture while the students take notes (Finkelstein & Winer, 2021). Often students are passive receivers of "important" information conveyed from the expert instructor, an approach Finkelstein and Winer (2021) found is "quite literally the opposite of what educational research has demonstrated is important for student

learning" (p. 327). Despite John Dewey's advice that educators should provide learners with opportunities to engage with the subject matter (Dewey, 1916), didactic instruction typically plays the leading instructional role in the college classroom (Finkelstein & Winer, 2021). This approach is still extensively used, despite research linking increased knowledge acquisition and cognitive development to the level of active engagement a student has in the learning process (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005 as cited in Johnson et al., 2014). While Finkelstein and Winer's (2021) and Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005 as cited in Johnson et al., 2014) studies both focused on university students, their findings are applicable to all IHLs, including community colleges.

Smith and Burke's (2007) scholarship has focused on active learning in the university classroom. They have contended that learning should not consist of a "passive consumption of lecture material," but instead should leverage "auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile" approaches to enhance student learning (p. 11). This approach is applicable to the community college classroom as well. Essentially, active learning is a way to provide opportunities for students to "actively engage with course content" and learn by doing—whether graduate students (Bolliger & Armier, 2013, p. 201) or students at a community college. As Keith-Le et al. (2020) posited in scholarship focused on instruction at the university level, active learning happens when students are performing tasks or contemplating the things being done.

Research suggested that active learning leads to better student outcomes than didactic instruction in IHLs. In fact, evidence as far back as the 1930s, later corroborated in the 1970s, and buttressed again in the early twenty-first century showed, lectures' inferiority to independent study in terms of information recall (Finkelstein & Winer, 2021). Freeman et al.'s (2014) study of approaches to maximizing bachelor's degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math

(STEM) found that students taught through active strategies had better success rates than their counterparts in comparable course sections taught predominantly through lecture. Smith and Burke (2007) found that active learning in archaeology courses helped students process and retain new information, and that it enhanced problem-solving skills. More recent research on active learning in introductory chemistry geoscience courses among freshmen, sophomore, juniors, and seniors at a baccalaureate degree granting institution also suggested connections between active learning and enhanced student retention (Hushman et al., 2022).

Research in IHLs on active learning instructional approaches and student learning outcomes has repeatedly found improved information recall, success rates, processing of new information, retention of information, and problem-solving skills, leading active learning approaches to gain credibility over the past century. There has been more focus placed on the need for active learning, as evidenced in the laboratory hours that often accompany lecture hours for science classes (Finkelstein & Winer, 2021). However, active learning has yet to permeate the majority of classes that still retain the antiquated "lecture" label. Over one-hundred years after Dewey's work, the ideas of active, hands-on learning in these classes are still often viewed as "radical" (Finkelstein & Winer, 2021), and despite active learning's effectiveness being proven across multiple disciplines at the university level (Spoor et. al, 2020), this approach is still leveraged sparingly in IHL classrooms.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning happens when one or more students work together to accomplish a task or goal. In their study of 19 pre-service teacher education instructors at a university in Vietnam, Le et al. (2018) noted that all participants acknowledged the value of collaborative learning and saw group work as a way to augment problem-solving skills. Interestingly, only

25% of their participants specifically mentioned collaborative goals in their interviews (Le et al., 2018). Nonetheless, collaboration has often been shown to be more effective than lecture, and many scholars have pointed to the value of collaborative learning in IHLs.

In many ways, collaborative learning is the next step in the active learning process. In fact, Keyser (2000) studied active learning techniques in library instruction and found that, while not all active learning has to be collaborative, all collaborative learning is active (Keyser, 2000). When today's students become tomorrow's attorneys, plumbers, doctors, electricians, teachers, and business executives they will not be *passive* but instead *active* players in their success. Their activities will, in most cases, not be a singular pursuit, but will include collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, customers, and/or partners. This collaboration is played out in an academic context when "everyone in the classroom is learning and teaching, with all working together to create a shared body of knowledge" (Pederson, 2010, p. 198). Moreover, Pederson's (2010) study found that students believed that collaborating with their peers was more useful than didactic instruction.

In Love et al.'s (2014) observation of three learning communities at Wagner College (a 4-year private IHL), they found that it was important to provide space for students to have discussions and debate issues with their peers and engage in collaborative academic inquiry. They noted that "Working in groups allows students to reflect on their own perceptions, assumptions, and new understandings, and those of their peers" (Love et al., 2014, p. 177). Moreover, they also found that, just because the faculty member was not the central actor in the instructional process, it did not mean that instructors could not have a profound impact on student learning by providing opportunities for students to work and learn together (Love et al., 2014).

In an era where facts are literally in the palms of students' hands, collaborative learning can help college and university students foster what Millis (2014) called "deep learning." This deep learning—a more extensive understanding of material—is fostered through collaborative interactions that allow students the autonomy to connect previous knowledge to new ideas (Millis, 2014). This also provides students with increased exposure to the perspectives of their classmates, not just their instructor (Millis, 2014). Kuh et al. (2005, 2007, as cited in Johnson et al., 2014), found that at the university level, collaboration is effective, stating that "cooperative learning encourages student engagement and invariably leads to better student learning outcomes regardless of academic discipline" (p. 99).

Roles of Engagement, Knowledge Construction, and Community in Active and Collaborative Learning

Engagement. Engagement can play a significant role in academic success and is defined in a myriad of ways, from assignment completion, to class attendance, to interactions with both peers and instructors (Svanum & Bigatti, 2009). For example, college instructors have described engaged students as those who "really care about what they're learning" and are passionate and excited about their learning (Barkley & Major, 2020, p. 6). Barkley and Major (2020) found that engagement leads to behaviors such as better class attendance, participation, and completion of assignments.

While engagement does not have to come exclusively from collaboration, collaboration can be an effective means of engaging students. Kaufman et al.'s (1997) work, also rooted in university data, found that collaboration was more "potent" when compared with "traditional methods of teaching" (p. 41). These improved, more "potent" outcomes would be manifested at the community college level, as well. Moreover, Millis (2014) found that cooperative learning

helps IHL students to not only learn more deeply but also to actually enjoy themselves more during the process. This enjoyment can have a profound impact on learning. Robinson and Kakela's (2006) observations of undergraduates in university classes revealed that by "creating a space for fun, interaction, and trust, teachers and students together can build a learning environment that promotes engagement, deep learning, and meaning" (p. 202).

Knowledge Construction. Collaboration is also crucial to the creation of new knowledge. As Mate et al. (2011) posited, when learning happens, a student constructs "new knowledge" by building upon "knowledge which he has already available and the mental and material experiences which he is currently going through" (p. 246). Moreover, Mate et al. (2011) found that a "teacher's interpersonal attitudes," particularly their affinity for collaborative learning, can "influence the process of knowledge construction on the part of the students" (p. 245). They noted that the "higher the educator's score was at favoring cooperation, the higher were all the indexes of the learners" (Mate et al., 2011, p. 259). These indexes included "understanding," which is an "indicator of the mental attitudes that favor the construction of new personal knowledge" (Mate et al., 2011, p. 250).

Community. Collaboration is often easier when there is a sense of community in place in the classroom. In fact, Elliot et al. (2016) found that:

> A sense of community is vital to the success of today's college student. Students who report feeling a sense of community in the classroom are more likely to attend class, more likely to participate during class, and more likely to graduate from college. Each of these realities is especially evident among undergraduate students, first generation students, and underrepresented populations. (p. 29)

Tokke (2020) found that “in the urban community college, commuter students do not spend much time on campus,” thus making this a lonely and disconnected place for students (p. 69). This is much different from their university counterparts who often have multiple on-campus community building opportunities outside of the classroom. But, as Tokke (2020) noted, “since commuter students spend most of their time in the classroom,” when instructors leverage collaborative learning, it can help students to “feel more comfortable with one another” and give them the ability to “speak more freely” (p. 69). This approach may help students to better process these BSS lessons, thereby not only better equipping them with knowledge to function in a diverse world but also providing them with the skills needed for success. To achieve this, instructors can seek “a spirit of collaboration among classmates” and offer opportunities for students to work collaboratively on projects, presentations, and activities in order for them to “feel more secure and included within the classroom environment” (Elliot et al., 2016, p. 37).

Active and Collaborative Learning Based on CCCSE Constructs

Despite the propensity of some scholars to treat “active” and “collaborative” learning as separate constructs, for this study, active and collaborative learning was treated as one construct. This was because (1) collaboration is an active process, (2) collaboration is seen as a logical and important extension of active learning, and (3) the CCCSE, a highly respected organization in the field of community college research, treats active and collaborative learning as a single construct, as reflected in their first benchmark for student engagement in their student survey.

CCCSE touts the importance of its survey as a tool to help community colleges measure the effectiveness of innovative strategies and teaching effectiveness in classrooms. It has noted that student engagement is a key factor not only for student learning but also in determining the quality of community colleges themselves (CCCSE, 2023i). To that end, CCCSE has created and

deployed a survey that asks community college students questions about both institutional practices and individual behaviors connected to learning (CCCSE, 2023b). Originating as a project out of the University of Texas at Austin, the CCSSE was first deployed in 2001 (CCCSE, 2023a). Within a few years of the survey's deployment, student engagement became "an increasingly prominent part of the vocabulary of community college discussion about educational practice and student success" (McClenney, 2007, p. 137). This was due in part to CCSSE's accurate assessment of student engagement within the institutional backdrop of community colleges, as well as its methodological rigor (Wang & Bohlig, 2022).

Within a decade of the CCSSE's launch, Nora et al. (2011) noted that the topic of student engagement had largely taken center stage in the quest to better understand "excessively high dropout rates, dismal transfer rates, and disproportionate degree attainment" (p. 105). Student engagement began to be seen as a vehicle for "improving student persistence, achievement, and degree attainment" (Nora et al., 2011, p. 105). Moreover, in a study conducted by Achieving the Dream (ATD), active and collaborative learning was deemed to be the "most influential of the five CCSSE benchmarks in predicting student success" (Nora et al., 2011, p. 112).

Survey data from the 2022 CCSSE cohort was drawn from institutions located in 46 U.S. states, Bermuda, Marshall Islands, and Micronesia. Of these institutions, 231 were described as "small," with enrollment of less than 4,500 students, 103 were designated as "medium," with student populations numbering between 4,500-7,999, 73 were labeled as "large," with 8,000-14,999 students, and 31 were defined as "extra-large," with enrollments exceeding 14,999 (CCCSE, 2023d, para. 1).

As previously noted, CCCSE articulated its perception of active and collaborative learning as follows:

> Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to *think* about and *apply* what they are learning in different settings. Through *collaborating with others* to *solve problems* or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of *situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives* [emphases added] (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4).

CCCSE operationalized this description of active and collaborative learning through six items on the current CCSSE. These six items and corresponding results from 2022 are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

CCSSE Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark Data for the 2022 Cohort

Item	Response	Count	Percent
4a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions [ACTCOLL]	Never	8,593	4.4
	Sometimes	58,415	29.6
	Often	63,744	32.3
	Very Often	66,712	33.8
	Total	197,464	100
4b. Made a class presentation [ACTCOLL]	Never	69,395	35.2
	Sometimes	73,623	37.3
	Often	35,856	18.2
	Very Often	18,307	9.3
	Total	197,181	100

Table 1

CCSSE Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark Data for the 2022 Cohort (continued)

4f. Worked with other students on projects during class [ACTCOLL]	Never	57,794	29.4
	Sometimes	68,298	34.8
	Often	43,610	22.2
	Very Often	26,782	13.6
	Total	196,484	100
4g. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments [ACTCOLL]	Never	97,776	49.7
	Sometimes	59,082	30.0
	Often	25,056	12.7
	Very Often	14,752	7.5
	Total	196,666	100
4i. Participated in a community-based project (service-learning activity) as part of a regular course [ACTCOLL]	Never	152,907	77.8
	Sometimes	29,158	14.8
	Often	9,236	4.7
	Very Often	5,268	2.7
	Total	196,569	100
4q. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.) [ACTCOLL]	Never	34,859	17.7
	Sometimes	72,542	36.9
	Often	50,854	25.9
	Very Often	38,369	19.5
	Total	196,624	100

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2023f). Community college survey of student engagement, 2022 cohort: Benchmark frequency distributions for active and collaborative learning (ACTCOLL).

Taken together, CCCSE's textual description of active and collaborative learning and CCSSE's six survey items, which provided examples of how such instructional approaches may be implemented in a community college setting, offered a comprehensive perspective of CCCSE's conceptualization of active and collaborative learning. As previously noted, this was the definition of active and collaborative learning adopted for the present study.

From the italicized portions of CCCSE's description of active and collaborative learning (included above), the researcher identified five key constructs— thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance. While CCCSE's textual description of active and collaborative learning underscored the importance of these five constructs, the CCCSE items that operationalized active and collaborative learning were framed narrowly and captured only limited aspects of instructional practices related to these constructs.

In fact, only team/partner work appeared to be directly examined in the CCSSE through items that began with phrases such as "worked with other students" (see Table 1, 4f) and "worked with classmates" (see Table 1, 4g). Although thinking, problem solving, and real-world relevance may occur through team/partner work (collaboration), these constructs were not directly measured by CCSSE. Similarly, while application may occur when students make "a class presentation" (see Table 1, 4b), there is no guarantee that students are actually applying knowledge, rather than just repeating facts, while presenting. Therefore, due to their framing, the CCSSE items did not allow the construct of application to be fully examined. Moreover, even the construct that was specifically examined—team/partner work—was only addressed narrowly and did not explore a broad spectrum of potentially useful instructional approaches.

Because CCCSE did not clearly define these five constructs and the CCSSE items were narrowly construed, the current study used CCSSE data as a starting point for a deeper

exploration of thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance in community college instruction. Therefore, in order to better understand the broader construct of active and collaborative learning, it was important to review literature associated with each of the five more specific constructs.

Thinking

The CCCSE posited that a student's comprehension of material is increased when provided "opportunities to *think* about" the material they are learning (CCCSE, 2023c, para. 4). Providing students "opportunities to think" is a logical component to instruction and is often parsed out into two important subtopics—critical thinking and reflective thinking. While these thinking skills are similar and equally important, they are also nuanced in their different purposes.

Critical Thinking. Brookfield (2005) argued that often community college instructors valued critical thinking as a key element to "lifelong learning" and saw it as essential to a student's ability to effectively process the information they consumed (p. 49). In a real-world context, this skill is the lifeblood of democratic institutions. It gives people the ability to question lawmakers and their actions, while also imagining alternative solutions to problems (Brookfield, 2005). Manalo's (2019) book *Deeper learning, dialogic learning, and critical thinking* presented research-based strategies for teachers of all academic levels—including higher education. In this work an argument was made that critical thinking is often broadly described through its relationship to other skills, such as the ability to engage in effective decision making or to problem solve (Manalo, 2019). However, when looked at more expansively, critical thinking consists of a much more comprehensive set of skills including "interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation" (Manalo, 2019, p. 9).

Yet, for students, the transition from "dichotomous, universalistic forms of thinking to multifaceted, contextual forms" is a difficult one (Brookfield, 2005, p. 51). When answers, or solutions to problems, are clearly either right or wrong, students are comfortable. Yet, when the choices become more nuanced, numerous, and contingent on multiple factors and/or conditions, students struggle. This is why affording students an opportunity to think critically is important. Moreover, creating specific opportunities for students to sharpen their critical thinking skills is essential to both their academic and real-world success and can help result in "fewer negative life events" (Butler et al., 2017, p. 40). Butler et al.'s (2017) research sample included community members, university students, and community college students, and concluded that while critical thinking can be taught, "over one-third of college students showed no improvement in critical thinking skills during their time in college" (p. 45). They concluded with a "strong plea for more instruction in and attention to critical thinking skills" (Butler et al., 2017, p. 45).

Reflective Thinking. In many ways, reflective thinking is an extension of critical thinking that allows more personal and emotional connections to be explored. Atkins and Murphy (1993, as cited in Poole et al., 2013) writing for health science educators (presumably from both high schools and IHLs, although not specifically delineated) presented a three-stage reflective process "(1) awareness of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts; (2) critical analysis of feelings and knowledge; [and] (3) the generation of a new perspective" (p. 818). While it is important for students to critically analyze, evaluate, and explain an issue, it is through reflection—juxtaposing critical thought with personal emotion—that new perspectives emerge. Moreover, Marra et al. (2014) who pointed to a collaboration between Itasca Community College (ICC) and Minnesota State University-Mankato as an exemplar for problem-based learning in engineering programs, found that reflective thinkers tend to be more successful students because they frequently

evaluate their understanding of the content and make needed adjustments to learn new material. The need for students to become more reflective is inextricably tied to active and collaborative learning. As college classrooms become more active and collaborative, and "faculty become less oracle and more curator" (Bowen 2012, as cited in Love et al., 2014, p. 47), reflection is critical.

Critical and reflective thinking should be manifested in each of the following: class discussions; individual or group presentations, either done inside or outside of class; and service learning (CCCSE, 2023f). These all require students to evaluate issues and make decisions—whether how to respond to a classmate in a discussion or what content to include or leave out of a presentation. These also allowed opportunities for students to think about what was being learned and reflect upon that information, which may be juxtaposed with past experiences and/or assumptions. Yet, Choudhuri (2023) argued that "communication is considered as the skeletal structure of critical thinking" as students in IHLs—presumably both community college and universities—transition internal thought into structured parlance (para. 3).

Of course, this communication of ideas can be done in a formal academic setting with exchanges between peers or dialogues between students and professors. But it can also be powerful in non-academic settings. Engaging siblings, parents, partners, or other family members in dialogues focused on material learned in class or through readings associated with a class (see 4q. in Table 1) can be a powerful conduit for students to think both critically and reflectively about course content. Interestingly, almost 20% of the 2022 CCSSE student cohort reported that they engaged in these exchanges "very often," while less than 20% said that it "never" happened (CCCSE, 2023f). Although item 4q can serve to inform and perhaps persuade instructors to encourage their students to engage in informal out-of-class discussions as a means

of thinking through course material, none of the CCSSE items directly assess instructional opportunities for critical and reflective thinking.

It is indisputable that thinking is key to learning. Critical and reflective thinking skills are exercised far more frequently in the classroom of an instructor who acts as a "curator" of knowledge versus the classrooms of an "oracle" instructor who is the holder and giver of knowledge (Bowen 2012, as cited in Love et al., 2014, p. 47). Instructors can help grow their students into stronger critical and reflective thinkers in a myriad of ways. But one of the most effective ways is through modeling, utilizing, and asking students to emulate effective questioning strategies. Effective questions can include queries such as: "Can you give me an illustration? Would you give me an example? Will you provide more details? Could you be more specific? [And,] do we need to consider another point of view?" (Joseph, 2019, para., 15). Reznitskaya and Gregory's (2013) work, which cites studies from secondary schools and community colleges, found that this type of approach can "inspire meaningful inquiry" (p. 117). The purpose of open-ended questions such as these is to not simply "test" a student's ability to regurgitate the words of their instructor or the perspectives of the textbook author. It is not a metaphorical withdrawal from the "bank", as previously described by Freire (1970). It is not an attempt to lead students to a "narrow range of answers deemed acceptable to the teacher" (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013, p. 117). Rather, it is a means of promoting critical and reflective thinking and engaging students in a true dialogic—as opposed to didactic—experience. These types of experiences help students to extend and at times reframe their beliefs and ideas. Dialogic instruction is but one way that instructors can serve as curators of learning and foster critical and reflective thinking. Another is through giving their students opportunities to apply what they have learned.

Application

Extending opportunities for students to "apply what they are learning in different settings" is touted by CCCSE as an effective educational approach (CCCSE, 2023c, para. 4). As previously noted, the idea of applying learning to strengthen knowledge has gained traction over the years in lab classes. Kay (2018) identified one community college student in a computer science class who remarked how learning about the "individual pieces" and then "combining and applying them in the lab assignment was helpful" (p. 456), while another student remarked that "some action to break up the lecture is nice" (p. 457). Moreover, Kay's (2018) research indicated that when students were given the opportunity to apply what they had learned in a classroom setting, it not only kept students' attention but also increased their understanding of the material.

One area where an application-based approach to instruction has always existed is in the arts. How can a student learn to paint, sculpt, act, sing, or play an instrument except by doing it? It is counterintuitive to conceive a world in which arts educators would simply use lecture as a means of instruction. But Nosek and Goldmen's (2022) study of students in a 300-level health psychology course at a four-year liberal arts college found that these types of kinesthetic activities can be used in non-arts classes as well, and that by giving students an opportunity to apply knowledge in an active way, retention was increased and learning became more enjoyable. When students were allowed to learn through application they gained agency and became actors, as opposed to listeners. This is what Klemenčič (2021) called the "enhanced actorhood of students" (p. 92). While Klemenčič's (2021) work focused on university students, this scholarship is applicable to community colleges as well. Regardless of context, when there was an established process of doing, the construction of knowledge was often the result.

Kagan (2014) argued that application of knowledge could increase comprehension and retention for students because it "(1) clears working memory, (2) increases long-term memory storage, (3) produces retrograde memory enhancement, (4) creates episodic memories, (5) increases alertness, and (6) activates many brain structures" (p. 119). Simply put, application allowed for information to be processed, and "processing promotes long-term retention" (Kagan, 2014, p. 124). While Kagan's (2014) work was situated at the university level, these findings were applicable to community college students as well. Moreover, instructors can infuse application learning into their classrooms in a plethora of ways and through a myriad of approaches.

The CCCSE questioned students about their experiences with two of these approaches. Asking questions and participating in discussions (see Table 1, 4a) is one potentially effective way for students to apply what they have learned. These discussions afford students opportunities to ask questions, express their views, and engage in a "collective inquiry into a question," requiring them to actively and collaboratively engage with their classmates (McAvoy et al., 2022, p. 1763). Therefore, the fact that a full third of the 2022 CCSSE cohort reported that "asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions" happened "very often" was heartening for proponents of active and collaborative learning (CCCSE, 2023f). While pointing to the positive relationship between discussion and student learning, which partially increased problem-solving ability, Nunn (1996) also spoke of some instructors' lack of comfort with this approach to instruction.

Another potentially high-quality means for students to apply what they have learned is through making class presentations (see Table 1, 4b). More specially defined, oral presentations occur when "speech rather than writing" is the "exclusive, primary or at least a significant mode

of student response" used as a way for students to convey knowledge and understanding, problem solving ability, and communication skills (Joughin, 1998, p. 386). Moreover, Thunreck (2011) noted that "Incorporating student presentations in the college classroom furthers general education goals, promotes student engagement, and provides an opportunity for students to practice an art that will enhance their lives outside of the classroom" (p. 18). Additionally, Roca (2010) citing Fritschner (2000) ranked presentation as the highest level in a faculty perceived hierarchy of in-class student participation. But, despite the value of this instructional technique, over a third of the 2022 CCSSE cohort reported never having "made a class presentation" (CCSSE, 2023f). In the face of overwhelming research supporting the merits of application as a way to increase retention and performance, it is only used in a limited fashion in community college classrooms. There may be several reasons for this. One that should be addressed is the anxiety that presentations may stir in students. DiBartolo and Molina (2010) asserted that "fear of public speaking is the most common social fear experienced by the general population and can have far-reaching academic effects, including lower course grades and even an increased likelihood to drop out of college" (p. 160).

In their student survey, CCCSE did not seek to address other types of application outside the realms of participation and presentation. Yet, there is a rich bank of application based educational approaches that could be queried by CCCSE and utilized by community college instructors. One of those strategies is simulations or "active learning play" (Coffey et al., 2011, p. 15). For example, university political science students learned about election politics by working with mock elections (Coffey et al., 2011). Through employing the knowledge they had previously learned in class and acquiring new knowledge, students were able to accomplish complex tasks and truly apply what they learned (Coffey et al., 2011). Coffey et al. (2011)

reported that during this simulation, student engagement increased and students were provided with an opportunity to make the theoretical frameworks provided in their political science textbooks more memorable. Moreover, over 80% of the students reported having a positive learning experience through this approach (Coffey et al., 2011). Simulations such as this could be done in all BSS classrooms. Moreover, Kagan (2014) presented multiple other suggestions for application in the classroom including "writing summaries, drawing mind-maps, creating graphic organizers," or even just turning to a classmate to discuss recently acquired knowledge (Kagan, 2014, pp. 119, 122). While application can be a solitary endeavor, it is also a key component to team/partner work.

Team/Partner Work

CCCSE stressed that "through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills" (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4). The importance of working with classmates to gain a better understanding of the content, especially challenging content, can be a powerful teaching strategy—whether those collaborations happen in a team of three or more, or simply with another classmate. In fact, Spoor et al. (2020) dubbed team/partner work (or group work) as the "cornerstone of active learning" (p. 14). It was often through collaborating with peers on meaningful assignments designed to further comprehension and retention that true understanding happened. Davidson and Major (2014) found that while content is different, the approach to collaborative learning at all academic levels, including colleges and universities, is essentially the same. They asserted that small group activity participants outperform others in "knowledge development, thinking skills, social skills, and course satisfaction" (Davidson & Major, 2014, p. 7). While the importance of knowledge development and thinking skills have already been discussed, it is hard to understate the importance of social

skills as a necessary tool for post-academic success. While this may not be the primary motivation for team/partner work, it is a powerful ancillary benefit. The important role that team/partner work can have on course satisfaction is also worthy of recognition.

Flaherty (2022) found that knowledge attainment in online university classes rests on three legs: faculty, course material, and community with the latter having profound "emotional, academic, and physical benefits" (Flaherty, 2022, p. 31). Community can be forged through team/partner work—whether that work is online or face-to-face, at a university or a community college. This instructional approach can reshape higher education classrooms at the university and community college levels into "more enjoyable experience for teachers and students alike" (Michaelsen et al., 2014, p.58).

However, to make team/partner work a positive experience, it must be deployed effectively. In fact, "many people cringe and groan when told that they will need to work in a group," a phenomenon that Burke (2011) called "grouphate" (p. 87). Burke (2011), focusing on group work in higher education, noted that those feelings can be mitigated if students assigned to do teamwork or partner work are properly instructed (Burke, 2011). Part of this instruction lies in understanding why group work can be advantageous for its participants in the first place. Burke (2011) identified several of these advantages, arguing that working together inspires ingenuity and can aid in the retention of material. Moreover, this approach can be operationalized at the university and community college levels where active involvement fosters a stronger connection and ownership to the products produced or solutions developed, while also helping students to hone their interpersonal skills. Finally, the ability to work in teams is highly valued by potential employers with whom these students will engage in their post-academic lives (Burke, 2011).

Projects are activities that require planning, information gathering, and problem-solving in an effort to complete a designated task (Laverick, 2018). Students working with other students on these projects, whether in or out of the classroom, can be a powerful active and collaborative learning strategy (see Table 1, 4f and 4g). Its academic benefits have been proven, and its potential real-world relevance, as discussed further below, is undeniable. CCSSE 2022 cohort data revealed that over 35% of students reported collaborating "with other students on projects during class" often or very often. Almost 30% indicated that this never happened, with another approximate third saying it happens "sometimes" (CCCSE, 2023f). As with other active and collaborative constructs, team/partner work occurs in some instances, but not at high enough rates.

While the CCCSE survey did not provide examples of these "projects" that students worked on during class, there were a number of examples found in the literature. Ward et al. (2021) discussed several activities that were created and used in a sociology course. One particularly interesting assignment called for students at Brandeis University to select and consider issues such as potholes in a busy street, broken traffic lights, garbage collection, and similar municipal issues (Ward et al., 2021). Outside of class, they researched one of these topics and then entered city policies associated with that topic into an editable online document. During the next class, students were divided into groups based on their chosen topics. These teams that were formed discussed the policies, created illustrations of their findings on flip chart paper, posted them on the wall, and then participated in a gallery walk so each team could see the other's findings (Ward et al., 2021).

Other potential BSS applications abound. In a psychology class, students could partner-up with a classmate to create a brochure focused on stress and health. Or a political science class

may be divided into teams, each representing cabinet level departments such as—state, treasury, defense, education, and homeland security—then given a hypothetical issue to research and discuss before presenting to the President of the United States. The potential for engaging team/partner work is almost limitless.

While these are all strategies that could be used to engage students in class, fostering collaboration is also possible outside of class. However, a marked decrease is seen when comparing item 4f and 4g, which references out-of-class versus in class collaboration. Nearly half of the 2022 cohort indicated never collaborating with a classmate outside of class time to complete an assignment, with only 7.5% indicating that this happened "very often" (CCCSE, 2023f). A legitimate reason for this instructional decision may lay in the fact that so many community college students work. Wood (2020) reported that, not only do the majority of community college students either work part-time or full-time, but also their work schedules frequently interfere with their class schedules. A significant percentage even reported that work obligations have caused them to miss classes (Wood, 2020). Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) similarly found that "a challenge for student engagement at the community college level is that students often have multiple off-campus responsibilities that limit their time for engagement in the college experience" (p. 137).

While this element of active and collaborative learning is not frequently used, if pursued, it could have a positive effect on both skill-building and content acquisition. One example of this is study groups. Pickell (2016) found that for Front Range Community College, of all the useful tools to increase student performance, "study groups have been the most beneficial—hands down" (para., 1). Arguing that study groups can be even more effective than individualized tutoring, Pickell (2016) found that these groups hold students accountable, allow them to hear

difficult material explained in a new way, and provide opportunities for them to talk through hard concepts with others.

Like the other constructs of active and collaborative learning, team/partner work can be introduced through both complex projects or through small yet meaningful interactions between classmates. Burke (2011) aptly quotes the old adage "two heads are better than one" (p. 88). This idea is an essential element of team/partner work. It is also of paramount importance when addressing the next tenet of active and collaborative learning—problem solving.

Problem Solving

CCCSE posited that when team/partner work is leveraged to "solve problems or master challenging content," valuable skills are honed and developed (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4). Indeed, obtaining problem solving skills is paramount to student success in and out of the classroom. In fact, Vygotsky's (1962; 1978 as cited in Brame & Biel, 2015) sociocultural theory of development held that knowledge development was fostered when students engaged in problem solving in a supportive and collaborative environment. Indeed, the importance of students being equipped to recognize and evaluate personal, societal, or economic problems and then conceptualize the way to resolve those issues, is incalculable.

Marra et al. (2014) described problem-based learning as "an instructional method where student learning occurs in the context of solving an authentic problem" (p. 221). This approach was first implemented in medical schools to foster knowledge acquisition and retention while simultaneously honing skills needed for the job (Marra et al., 2014). Yet, this approach can be useful across a broad array of academic disciplines as a way of ensuring the acquisition and retention of knowledge as well as the skills of time management, innovation, and communication.

A problem is “a question raised for inquiry, consideration, or solution” (Problem, n.d.). Problem-solving involves defining a problem, analyzing options to address the problem, and identifying the best resolutions to the problem (Smirnova, 2016). This approach to learning in a cooperative setting was, according to Maier (2016), “particularly well-suited for economics instruction” (p. 157). Maier (2010) provided several examples suited for introductory college economics classes, including a strategy called “Send-a-Problem” (p. 157). In this activity, students were divided into groups, with each receiving a problem to solve. Once a solution was proposed, the problem was sent to another group, and the process started over again, typically resulting in three or four solutions to the same problem being generated before students were asked to compare and evaluate the various approaches each group proposed (Maier, 2010). While this activity lent itself to both small group work and whole-group discussion, all problem-solving pedagogy does not have to be an adjunct to team/partner work. Actually, it is important for students to be afforded opportunities to problem-solve both in groups and independently.

Designed for introductory cultural anthropology instructors wanting to more actively engage undergraduates in the learning process, a wealth of problem-solving examples were provided in Robbins and Dowty’s (2017) textbook *Cultural anthropology: A problem-based approach*. In this book, problem-solving is tackled through high-level questions that are posed at the top of each chapter followed by sub-questions that help students to puzzle through posed topics such as: “how does our economy affect our way of life?” (p. 87), “what do we need to know before we can understand the dynamics of family life in other societies?” (p. 184), or “how do societies give meaning to and justify collective violence?” (p. 317). These are dilemmas with which students can independently grapple or discuss with their peers and posit solutions.

The 2022 CCSSE cohort was not specifically questioned on whether or not problem-solving opportunities were granted in their classes. However, arguably, problem-solving should be an embedded element in effective classroom discussions (4a), student presentations (4b), collaborative projects and other assignments (4f, 4g), and service learning (4i) (CCCSE, 2023f). CCCSE only asks students if these opportunities were extended and does not ask them to evaluate the quality of these activities. However, the data did reveal that the activities in which problem-solving could occur were not happening as frequently as they could, and at times, were not happening at all (CCCSE, 2023f). This was particularly troubling because research showed that, as with other examples of active and collaborative learning, problem solving provided students with skills that not only benefit them in their academic pursuits but also will follow them into the real-world (Marra et al., 2014).

Real-World Relevance

CCCSE stressed the importance of community college students being presented with valuable real-world opportunities to "prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives" (CCCSE, 2023c, para. 4). In other words, coursework needs to have real-world relevance. Students need to either be provided with opportunities to connect the curriculum to their daily lives to gain a better understanding of its applicability or be provided with opportunities to actually engage theoretical classroom learning within relevant venues outside of the traditional academic setting.

Heelan and Mellow (2017) argued that community colleges lay the foundation for their students to become "economically viable, to contribute to society as a whole, and to move away from poverty and inequality" (p. 23). When instructors created space for students to hone their

critical and reflective thinking skills, apply what they have learned, work in teams, and solve problems, they were infusing academics with real-world relevance (Heelan & Mellow, 2017). Kasworm (2003) interviewed adult undergraduates from private colleges, public universities, and community colleges and found the existence of various "knowledge voices" that constitute students' belief structures within the college classroom. One of those voices was the "outside voice" that Kasworm (2003) argued was "anchored in the knowledge of work, family, and personal life" (p. 90). For students drawn to this belief structure, higher education was seen as most valuable when it was "anchored in their worlds and reflects their lived experience" (p. 90). Yet, this was often not the case. That connection between academics and the real-world was, in practice, often "fragmentary" (Kasworm, 2003, p. 90). Those students with one foot in the academic world and another in the real-world– "straddling voice" students–did at times intrinsically realize how the lessons they learned in the classroom could apply to their work lives (Kasworm, 2003).

While it is laudable that these students took it upon themselves to make these connections, these students were also complementary of faculty members who took deliberate steps such as "in classroom discussions, small-group applications, case studies, projects, and other types of activities" to help them grasp the connections between the theoretical and the real-world (Kasworm, 2003, p. 91). Yet, as Choi's (2008) study which analyzed the challenges faced by "a typical college instructor and her students" (p. 26) revealed, already overworked college instructors often found it difficult to create a learning environment that promoted real-world relevance due to a lack of knowledge and tools to make it happen.

A potentially effective method of providing real-world relevance in an academic setting is through service learning. Turk and Pearl (2021) found that service learning at community

colleges “is a pedagogical approach that combines class-room instruction with a volunteer experience to promote greater academic learning and personal development” (p. 93). They found that while service-learning can manifest in a multitude of ways, essentially it provides students a conduit to connect classroom activities to “critical issues and opportunities in their communities” (Turk and Pearl, 2021, p. 91). Notably, Turk and Pearl (2021) stressed that “service-learning is more than providing a service to the community; instead, instructors and students should seek to build authentic, mutually beneficial community/college or university partnerships” (Turk and Pearl, 2021, p. 94).

Munter (2002) found that service learning through IHLs allows for concepts that may seem abstract to students to be “applied in a real-world setting,” thus improving student comprehension (p. 151). Augmenting the curriculum to include “real people and actual situations” is beneficial and arguably applicable to any course of study (Munter, 2002, p. 153), including BSS courses. Blouin and Perry (2009) interviewed subjects from community-based organizations who had past experiences with Indiana University service learning students. Their research revealed that service learning was particularly useful in sociology classes—serving as a dynamic means of not only introducing sociological concepts but also providing opportunities for students to apply them in a real-world context (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

For example, service learning may happen in a sociology class that helps conduct research for the local food bank. It may also happen when economics students volunteer to “teach basic economic concepts such as scarcity, choice, and opportunity cost to grade school students” (McGoldrick et al., 2000, p.45). Service learning may be rooted in a political science class where students’ endeavor to educate their peers about significant governmental policy changes or try to advocate change themselves. Turk and Pearl (2021) discussed students

composing letters to local political leaders asking for reforms in recycling or and the creation of more local food pantries. Service learning happens when a psychology class helps organize and staff a campus-wide mental health awareness campaign or when an anthropology class designs a way to help their campus or community to better understand their unique history and culture as a first step to effecting change.

Effecting change is an essential component of service learning and dovetails with the aforementioned social justice role that community colleges often play. Munter (2002) argued that social justice is the quality that separates service learning from work-based learning opportunities and internships (Munter, 2002). Prentice (2011) concluded, "service learning can be used in virtually any discipline and course as a tool to allow students to discover the connection between the academics of the class and the political and community issues related to that academic discipline" (p. 851).

Since the content studied, and hopefully learned, in BSS classes may hold the keys to unlocking many of the world's larger societal problems, service learning seems to be a logical approach to be leveraged in these classes. Yet, only 4.7% of the students in the 2022 CCSSE cohort (see table 1, 4i) indicated that this was experienced "often" and only 2.7% said that it happened "very often" (CCCSE, 2023f). These statistics take on even more significance when one considers the disproportionate numbers of marginalized and underserved students, as well as those labeled as not "college-ready" who populate the nation's community colleges. Service learning could be leveraged to provide these students, and their more privileged classmates, with a real-world view of how systemic racism is manifested in our communities and the economic repercussions of decisions made by our community leaders. Turk and Pearl (2021) even found that offering more service-learning opportunities to those students labeled as "developmental"

may improve retention help in their “college-ready” transition and improve degree completion rates for this population.

Faculty Familiarity, Understanding, Comfort, and Deployment

Faculty Familiarity, Understanding, and Comfort with Active and Collaborative Learning

The aforementioned tenets of active and collaborative learning and the literature associated with each suggest that active and collaborative learning is an effective teaching philosophy. In fact, Miller and Metz’s (2014) study of one university physiology and biophysics department found that student retention of what is done is 70% higher than what is heard. Because the researchers attributed their findings to the instructional approaches used, rather than the content, these findings are likely transferable to other disciplines, such as BSS. However, many faculty express a general unfamiliarity or a discomfort with this educational approach. This sentiment was expressed a quarter century ago by Panitz and Panitz (1998) when they found that “despite all the studies and anecdotal experiences reported by teachers and researchers, the paradigm remains largely unused” (p. 161). Previously referenced CCSSE 2022 cohort data (see Table 1) suggests this paradigm is still underutilized.

Auerbach and Andrews (2018) investigated pedagogical understandings of active learning in over 70 STEM instructors and noted that “at the core of their thinking, participants evaluated whether instruction provided opportunities for students to generate ideas beyond what was presented to them.” The participants “commonly considered student motivation to engage in this work and how instruction maximized equity among students,” as well as “how instruction prompted metacognition” (p. 1).

Millis (2010) defended the idea that faculty should use collaborative learning in IHL classrooms and noted that faculty recognized the “business as usual” model failed to produce

"significant learning gains" (p. 1). Yet, according to Millis, instructors often lacked the "know-how to successfully adapt the teaching techniques" that could facilitate those educational advances (Millis, 2010, p. 1). This was an observation that has also been recognized by students. Miller and Metz's (2104) study revealed that 35% of students surveyed believed their instructors failed to utilize active learning because of a general lack of awareness. Panitz and Panitz (1998) focused more specifically on faculty unfamiliarity with alternative assessment techniques. These instructors did not know how to "assess group efforts and assign grades to groups," frequently assuming that "only one process is appropriate for assessing student performance" (Panitz & Panitz, 1998, p. 165). Storm and Strom (2002) buttressed this assumption and expressed that "community college faculty often express uncertainty about how to evaluate the team-work skills that their students demonstrate during group work" (p. 315).

Interestingly, none of the instructors polled in Miller and Metz's (2014) survey admitted to being unaware of the method, but 22% did indicate a general lack of training in this educational approach (Miller & Metz, 2014). Even though teaching is the primary role of community college faculty, there is no teacher training requirement in order to be employed as an instructor. In fact, as previously noted, SACS-COC only requires that community college instructors teaching general education transfer courses—such as BSS courses—possess a master's degree in the subject being taught or a master's degree in another field and a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the subject being taught (SACS-COC, 2003). While faculty may be aware of active and collaborative learning, they still may not feel comfortable deploying it in their classrooms. This lack of faculty comfort when it comes to deviating from traditional didactic instructional approaches may stem from several factors, including a lack of confidence in stepping down from the role of expert to that of facilitator (Panitz & Panitz, 1998). The role of

expert has frequently been dubbed the “sage on the stage approach to education” (Morrison, 2014, p. 7). This is a lecture-heavy instructional approach where “knowledge flows in one direction only, from the teacher to the passive student,” and the college instructor serves as the director of learning as opposed to the facilitator (Morrison, 2014, p. 7). Direction, however, could be employed as a necessary precursor to active and collaborative learning opportunities. For example, Auerbach and Andrews (2018) in their study of university STEM instructors noted that:

> Managing active-learning logistics involves setting up a lesson so that students know what is expected of them and have enough time to meet expectations and then monitoring lesson logistics and responding appropriately. Managing the logistics of an active-learning lesson helps students engage more effectively and efficiently during class time and facilitates and prevents barriers to student motivation to work during class time. (p. 10)

This description suggests a need for faculty to serve as directors (or managers) of instruction.

Yet, these authors also discussed the importance of instructors serving as facilitators during “generative work [that] often requires responding in real time to student thinking” (Auerbach and Andrews, 2018, p. 15). Dyson et al. (2004) provided the following definition of the teacher as a facilitator:

> As the facilitator, the teacher sets problems or goals, and students are given an opportunity to seek solutions to these problems. Solutions to the problem are identified through a questioning process and these solutions then become the focus of a situated practice. The teacher also facilitates the practice by either simplifying or challenging based on student abilities. In this way, the teacher is working with the students’ prior

> knowledge to develop new knowledge. The teacher guides the instruction and curriculum as a facilitator of learning. (p. 235)

While the work of Dyson et al. (2004) was focused on sports education (an innately active and collaborative field), this definition is also pertinent to the current study.

Another reason faculty may feel uncomfortable using active and collaborative learning in their classrooms included a fear that they may look "stupid" and not know all the answers to questions asked in more student guided activities (Panitz & Panitz, 1998, p. 164). Additionally, issues related to ego may be at play–"many teachers are wrapped up in their own self-importance and enjoy being the center of attention" (Panitz & Panitz, 1998, p. 165). Ultimately, facilitating active and collaborative learning may create uncomfortable feelings of not being in control.

Recently, more emphasis has been placed on instructors receiving training in effective active and collaborative pedagogy that may increase not only familiarity with, but also comfort in using this approach. If what Witcher and Sasso (2022) found is true, that both Millennials and Generation Z students preferred to be actively engaged in the learning process, then faculty have to become knowledgeable and comfortable with such approaches, and do it soon. Yet, reportedly class time is still frequently used for lectures—time these students often feel could be better spent collaborating with their peers (Witcher & Sasso, 2022).

However, the technology exists to allow for this academic sea change to occur without abandoning the lecture altogether. If a lecture is needed, it could be recorded and received online, an approach particularly appealing to Gen Z learners who "see the world as both digital and physical" (Witcher & Sasso, 2022, p. 2). Seemiller and Grace (2019 as cited in Witcher & Sasso, 2022) suggested that younger students leveraged technology for information acquisition and saw college as a place to contextualize and apply this learning. If instructors employed a flipped

classroom approach, as Berrett (2012) did with his evolutionary biology class at the University of Colorado at Boulder, students could view the pre-recorded lecture "at their own pace and on their own schedule," thus freeing class time for more experiential endeavors (para. 11).

Faculty Deployment of Active and Collaborative Learning

Despite Umbach and Wawrzynski's (2005) study that explored the relationship between student engagement and faculty practices noting a "positive relationship between college environments where faculty used active and collaborative learning techniques and student gains" (p. 165), faculty deployment of active and collaborative learning in the classroom still lags behind other more traditional forms of instruction. Hoidn and Reusser (2020), referencing IHLs in general and not specifically referencing universities, colleges, or community colleges, noted that lecture still dominates the instructional landscape in higher education despite the fact that research has found that "lecturing in the entire class period for example, is a rather ineffective way of teaching because our working memory and concentration span are limited; usually after listening for 10 to 15 minutes to a lecture, students' minds start to drift away" (p. 18).

Kramer (2017) similarly stated that "lecture, somewhat modified over the years, continues to be a main-stay of higher education" (p. 246). While Kramer (2017) directed this statement towards "large classes at large universities," he also held that lecture was "just as common in small classes at smaller institutions," as well (p. 246). Kramer's study was not intended as a criticism of lecture but instead a criticism of ineffective lecture noting "many professors consider themselves to be 'the sage on the stage' in both small and large classes. However, many of them are instead actually 'the bore at the board" (p. 246).

In Winter et al.'s (2002) study focused on novice biology, math, and physics instructors at a baccalaureate degree granting institution noted that there was a "reluctance to facilitate

student learning, and instead to simply convey answers to students" and that "instructors tended to view themselves as lecturers, task managers, or authorities of the knowledge of their discipline" (p. 22). These scholars indicate a continued reliance on lecture as the dominant instructional format in IHLs, but a brief review of CCCSE data gleaned from the 2022 CCFSSE faculty cohort can help provide an even deeper understanding of how instructional efforts are allocated.

As previously noted with the CCSSE student data, the CCFSSE faculty data did not explicitly represent each construct in its questions. While thinking, problem solving, and real-world relevance were embedded in application and team/partner work, these three constructs were not specifically queried. Despite their expressed importance, CCCSE simply did not mine in enough depth for data related to these constructs. Also, it must be noted that CCCSE faculty data, as reported in the CCFSSE, represented perceptions and practices of all faculty from the participating institutions; it did not only represent BSS faculty (CCCSE, 2023g). Nonetheless, a review of this data provided important context to help better understand the current study.

The CCFSSE data indicated that, of the 8,883 faculty members surveyed, over a quarter still employed lecture 50 to 100% of the time, and approximately 15% said they spent half their time focused on teacher-led discussions (CCCSE, 2023e). Table 2 provides data related to how much instructional time was spent on active and collaborative learning.

Table 2

CCSSE Faculty Frequency Distributions Data for the 2022 Cohort

Question	Response	Count	Percent
In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time was spent on discussions or seminars where the responsibilities are shared between the instructor and the students?	Below 49%	6,841	77.9
	40-49%	453	5.2
	50-74%	514	5.9
	75-100%	237	2.7
	N/A	725	8.3
In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time was spent on small group activities?	Below 49%	7,086	80.1
	40-49%	213	2.4
	50-74%	471	5.3
	75-100%	265	3.0
	N/A	589	6.7
In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time was spent on student presentations?	Below 49%	7,541	85.3
	40-49%	21.3	2.4
	50-74%	203	2.3
	75-100%	150	1.7
	N/A	734	8.3
In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time was spent on in-class writing?	Below 49%	7,308	82.7
	40-49%	194	2.2
	50-74%	210	2.4
	75-100%	168	1.9
	N/A	964	10.9

Table 2

CCSSE Faculty Frequency Distributions Data for the 2022 Cohort (Continued)

In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time was spent on experiential learning (labs, clinicals, internships, etc.)	Below 49%	5,964	67.5
	40-49%	332	3.8
	50-74%	464	5.2
	75-100%	392	4.4
	N/A	1,689	19.1
In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time was spent on hands-on practice?	Below 49%	5,344	60.4
	40-49%	566	6.4
	50-74%	942	10.6
	75-100%	1,099	12.4
	N/A	910	10.3

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2023e). Community college faculty survey of student engagement, 2022 cohort: Frequency distributions, faculty-only items.

Table 2 showed that only a minority of instructors spent a significant amount of their time engaging students in active and collaborative learning.

What barriers prevent more community college instructors from utilizing active and collaborative learning? Conversely, what facilitates the use of these research proven strategies? The answer to both of these questions may relate to faculty familiarity and comfort with active and collaborative learning, as well as their willingness to experiment and step out of their comfort zones.

Barriers and Facilitators to Deployment

There are a myriad of barriers hindering the deployment of large scale active and collaborative learning in community college classrooms, but there are also factors that can promote this approach. Current barriers include difficulties associated with navigating a post

pandemic educational environment, the ongoing culture wars, and maintaining equality in group work and differentiating instruction. Too little time also serves as a barrier to active and collaborative learning; conversely, increased time can serve as a facilitator to this approach. Finally, administrative support can promote active and collaborative learning in the classroom through recognition of its value, protection of academic freedom, and support for PD on this topic.

Barriers

COVID-19

The pandemic known as COVID-19 caused the world to largely shut down. Aisha and Ratra (2022) discussed how this shut-down included "all educational institutions," thus prompting a rapid and massive shift to "online education to facilitate students carrying on their learning" (p. 242). As Clary et al. (2022) pointed out, this shift was due to epidemiologists' recommendations of "social distancing to slow its spread" (p. 54). However, when students began coming back to class, a need for social distancing had not completely disappeared. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention in its Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (2021) stated:

> We are still learning how well the COVID-19 vaccines protect people with weakened immune systems, including people who take immunosuppressive medications. Administrators should advise students, faculty, and staff with weakened immune systems on the importance of talking to their healthcare providers to discuss their activities and precautions they may need to keep taking to prevent COVID-19. Currently, CDC recommends continued masking and physical distancing for people with weakened immune systems. (p.3)

Therefore, with the return to the classroom, this need to social distance in an effort to protect certain students presented a sizable barrier to active and collaborative learning. As Lewis and Hessen (2021) noted:

> Even in a hyflex environment, where students alternate between in-person and synchronous online sessions, the COVID-19 restrictions limit interactions. Students have to maintain physical distance and professors need to consider how—or whether—to allow the sharing of materials. Some students may have reservations about being close to others or even being in the classroom at all. All of these restrictions stifle the opportunities for cooperative learning. (para 1)

While conditions have continued to improve since 2021, anxiety around this issue has not disappeared. Epps (2022) discussed how people who, prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, had "never experienced social anxiety in the past may go through re-entry anxiety" as they exit their isolation cocoon and experience "an uneasiness about returning to the old normal of schools" and other social settings (para. 2).

Yet, data showed that getting back to active and collaborative learning in the classroom was important. Williams (2023) study focused on k-12 education reported that "71% of families said the pandemic was negatively affecting their children's mental health, and social isolation topped families' list of unhealthy aspects of the pandemic." (para. 9). Moreover, Williams noted "it was inevitable that kids brought these struggles—and rusty social skills—back to campus as schools reopened" (para 9). While this article did not specifically discuss IHLs, it should be noted that many students concluded their secondary schooling during lock-down and when they went "back to campus," it was a college campus. In a study of Romanian students from Politehnica University of Timisoara, Stoian et al. (2022) also noted this degradation of

interpersonal know-how and argued that “returning to face-to-face education could definitely be one of the solutions for students to regain their social skills.” (p. 4). Just coming back to campus was not the cure; students needed to interact. Reed (2022) discussed the “e-learning fatigue” that emerged from online learning during the pandemic, noting the negatives of limited mobility and a lack of “nonverbal communication” that was “more authentic during in-person interactions, as humans create and interpret gestures and nonverbal cues subconsciously” (pp. 1885-1886). Post-pandemic active and collaborative learning could mitigate these issues, but safety concerns (or perceived safety concerns) of instructors for their students may present a sizable barrier.

Culture Wars

Another sizable barrier to active and collaborative learning has been increased scrutiny regarding perceived hot-button issues being addressed in class. Culture wars is a term used by some to describe the polarizing social and political conflicts dividing conservatives and liberals in the U.S. Discussions of divisive social issues in BSS classes can be interpreted or misconstrued as promoting a liberal ideology, which helps to fuel these divisions. The culture wars have impacted both k-12 and higher education. Discussing k-12 education, Roger et al. (2022) noted that:

> To create a thriving diverse democracy, youth need opportunities to explore the full stories and histories of varied groups to build capacities for respectful evidence-based dialogue and to develop commitments to robust civil liberties and recognition of the dignity of fellow citizens. (p. vii)

However, by teaching these lessons, “public schools increasingly are targets of conservative political groups,” which has caused a “broad chilling effect” resulting in “declines in general support for teaching about race, racism, and racial and ethnic diversity” (Roger et al., 2022, p.

viii). Walker (2023) noted that while many believe in the need to teach tolerance and inclusivity in schools, “teachers feel constantly under attack and their professional decisions are being questioned daily” (para. 21).

Similar ramifications of these culture wars have also been felt in IHLs, including community colleges. Shepard and Culver (2018) studied an incident at Orange Coast College, a community college located in Costa Mesa, California, that started with a secret recording of a professor criticizing a conservative political candidate. When this recording went viral and was picked up by the news media, there were immediate calls for the professor’s employment to be terminated. More worrisome was the fact that this professor’s personal information was published online and threatening messages were sent, including one that called her a “libtard, Marxist, hatemonger, nutcase” which prompted this professor to leave the state (Shepard & Culver, 2018, p. 142).

Attempts to legislatively curtail liberal or perceived liberal thought in the classroom is also a concern, and one that is not new. Moyer (2006) discussed legislative attempts to protect students from the “liberal orthodoxy that pervades college classrooms” from the McCarthy era to the early 2000s (p. 29). This included Ohio Senator Larry Mumper asking fellow legislators in 2005 why they should “fund universities that employ ‘professors who would send some students out into the world to vote against the very public policy that their parents have elected us for’” (Moyer, 2006, p. 39). More recently, the culture wars in education have been centered on the state of Florida and Governor Ron DeSantis’ quest to prevent “instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity” and limit what k-12 schools can “teach about racism and U.S. history” (Gecker, para.2). Even tenured professors in Florida universities are subjected to “regular

reviews, as part of sweeping reforms to police ‘left-wing ideology’ and ‘indoctrination’ in higher education” (Gecker, para 2).

While research showed that IHL faculty, whether at the university, college, or community college level do tend to skew to the left on the political scale (Shepard & Culver, 2018), it must be noted that social justice advocacy can be misconstrued as promoting a liberal ideology. Broćić and Miles (2021) found that higher education “liberalizes moral concerns for most students” with the effect being the “strongest for individuals majoring in the humanities, arts, or social sciences” (p. 857). Yet, they disagreed that “higher education is promoting progressive worldviews at the expense of conservative orthodoxy,” as is sometimes suggested (Broćić & Miles, 2021, p. 857).

Some have advocated the removal of tenure as a way to better regulate the perceived indoctrination of students by faculty at IHLs (Hollingsworth, 2023). But Hollingsworth (2023) reported that the idea of removing the protections of tenure could result in faculty being less likely to allow students the opportunity to discuss difficult topics in the classroom (Hollingsworth, 2023). Playing it safe in this way could mean a curtailment of active and collaborative learning. An instructor can control the flow of information when presented in a didactic fashion and perhaps filter out the more hot-button issues that often emerge in BSS classes, when assuming the role of director of learning. But when active and collaborative learning is employed, and the instructor assumes the role of facilitator of learning, the gates are opened to a variety of questions and concerns being brought to the floor. The potential of this instructional technique presenting threats to an instructor’s employment is a barrier that may be difficult to overcome. This is particularly worrisome in the state where the current study takes place, since community college faculty do not have the tenure protections afforded to their state university counterparts (Quinterno, 2020).

Maintaining Equality in Group Work

Bailey et al. (2015), extensively citing Chapman and Van Auken (2001), found that students have "fewer concerns about the distribution of work and the fairness in grading" when instructors are more involved and accessible during group work activities (p. 180). Yet, even when involved in the process, maintaining equality in conducting and assessing group work can present a barrier to active and collaborative learning. Burk's (2011) work that addressed group work implementation, noted instructor concerns around one group member dominating the team, other team members not pulling their weight, and issues of equality in assessing the group's product. Maier et al. (2010) argued that economics instructors are especially concerned about the issue of "free riding," where some students benefit from the hard work of others without significantly contributing themselves (p. 160). This "free riding" is also referred to as "social loafing," and according to Dommeyer (2007), it is not always a result of a poor work ethic. Instead, Dommeyer (2007) noted that perceived slacking may actually be a result of "unique characteristics of a student," such as "language barriers, cultural differences, learning disabilities, physical or mental problems, personality traits, or time constraints" which present barriers to them fully contributing to a group" (p. 175-176). The 2022 CCSSE cohort data (see Table 1) suggest that these are obstacles many instructors have decided not to hurdle.

Time

A perceived lack of time can also present a barrier to active and collaborative learning. Time in this study referred to both face-to-face class time and planning time for faculty. Miller and Metz (2014) indicated that 89% of faculty surveyed said that the most significant barrier to active learning was not having enough class time. Most college instructors would likely agree that "face-to-face class time is a precious commodity," and that during a term, there is content

that simply cannot be eliminated (Spoor, 2020, p. 8). Indeed, studies of college instructors' instructional decision-making have found that class time was often viewed as sacrosanct, and instructors were often afraid that active collaborative exercises would absorb precious time needed to "cover" course material (Burke, 2011; Keyser, 2000; Miller & Metz, 2014).

Faculty also "may not have the planning time necessary to develop the materials" (Miller & Metz, 2014, p. 246). Keyser (2000) found that while the paradigm may be more engaging and compelling for students than didactic instruction, cooperative learning requires more planning on the part of the instructor. This could be said for other forms of active and collaborative learning as well. Increased preparation time can be a major obstacle for instructors—especially community college instructors—who already carry a large teaching load.

Lack of Knowledge and Comfort

The most profound barriers to active and collaborative learning may be instructors' general lack of understanding of how to integrate these opportunities into their classes and faculty comfort with using this approach. Specifically discussing team/partner work, Spoor et al. (2020) argued that, despite recognizing this approach as "an integral part of student development," many community college instructors viewed the process as difficult to embed into their courses. Indeed, it was frequently the case that faculty supported this pedagogical approach yet "experienced difficulties with the creation or implementation of active learning strategies in a classroom setting" (Miller & Metz, 2014, p. 246).

Lieberman (2018) discussing "faculty buy-in" related to professional development noted that "even at a time when faculty members are more aware than ever that their practices need to undergo change, holdouts remain" (para. 33). While Lieberman's (2018) work was not specifically focused on active and collaborative learning, it does speak to both the need for

pedagogical training and the resistance to that training as two major problems. Grubb's (2002) study concentrated on "describing and interpreting the teaching we have seen in about 260 [community college] classrooms" found that, at an institutional level, community colleges often "pay little attention to teaching" (p. 2). Moreover, the faculty working within these IHLs do not always utilize the tools and resources that are available to them. The result, according to Grubb (2002), is that "good teaching" only emerges in "isolated and idiosyncratic ways" (p. 2).

Facilitators

There are BSS instructors who successfully deploy these strategies on a frequent basis in their classrooms (see Tables 1 and 2). Better (2013), a sociology instructor and author of *Learning from experience: Integrating students' everyday lives into the urban community college sociology classroom*, stated:

> My sociology classes are not the read the book and take some tests classes that students have become accustomed to in their prior education. This is a course where students learn by doing, creating a more permanent knowledge base of material that is useful in their lives at work, at home, and in their neighborhoods. Drawing from a tradition of public sociology and active learning, I have developed a course where students' experiences in their worlds are the central focus for sociological analysis. This way of learning involves students actively and engages them completely into the course from the beginning (p. 386).

It is instructors like this who can provide insights into the facilitators of active and collaborative learning. Such instructors provide an educational environment where students can think, apply, engage in team/partner work, solve problems, and make connections to the real-world. These are the settings where BSS students can begin to understand human behaviors and

actions—understandings central to confronting the challenges facing society today. It is here that students can gain the skills needed to resolve vital organizational and societal issues plaguing our communities.

Yet, as previously addressed, there is no pedagogical training requirement to become a community college instructor. This begs the question: How can community colleges grow their instructors into active and collaborative practitioners? The answer lies in (1) a strong and substantive PD program and (2) a better understanding of the benefits of active and collaborative learning from college administrators and more support of the process.

Professional Development

Many instructors at IHLs who have been committed to a didactic approach to instruction find it hard, inconvenient, or just unnecessary to change. Millis (2010) argued that in order to change, instructors must not only acknowledge the merits of collaborative learning "but also have access to the tools, pedagogical support, and inspiration— particularly in their own disciplines— that will enable them to implement cooperative approaches" (p. 2). Just as a lack of time served as a barrier to active and collaborative learning, more time can serve as a facilitator. Being uncomfortable with and unknowledgeable about how to implement active and collaborative learning can cost faculty valuable time when trying to implement this approach. IHLs' CTLs may provide the needed support for instructors to transform their teaching practices and embrace active and collaborative learning.

Also referred to as centers for teaching excellence, centers for faculty development, or similar monikers referencing improved instruction, CTLs essentially exist to promote pedagogical innovation (Lieberman, 2018). CTLs offer faculty members opportunities to learn and test out new strategies while serving the larger mission of advancing the college's dedication

to student success (Lieberman, 2018). Growing more effective instructors is the core charge of CTLs. Often, professors or instructors lack the underpinnings of effective pedagogy and are not afforded the resources to acquire the skills to become effective instructors (Fink, 2013; Lieberman, 2005). This, as Gyurko et al. (2016) posited, can result in an IHL's continued adherence to instructional approaches, such as didactic instruction that are misaligned with contemporary research findings on student learning.

CTLs have provided instructors with research proven strategies to increase student success and reduce the barriers of unfamiliarity and discomfort with using active and collaborative learning in the classroom. Research based training, support, and collegial collaboration have served as effective facilitators for expanding the active and collaborative learning paradigm—all of which can be facilitated through high quality CTL PD.

Data suggest CTLs can be effective in transforming instructional approaches. Bakutes (1998) cited data asserting that 73% of the University of Delaware faculty who participated in CTL training significantly altered their instructional approaches due to this work. While this data is not gleaned from community colleges, it is still an important statistic. D'Avanzo (2009) explored the short-term impact that a CTL lead session dedicated to using scientific teaching had on instructor performance at Hampshire College. Findings revealed that a year after engaging with this CTL offering, all faculty members, except one, had incorporated the new teaching techniques into their instruction (D'Avanzo, 2009). Extensive scholarship related to the impact of CTLs on instructor proficiency is lacking. Yet, existing research does suggest CTLs have made a difference in faculty performance. Troller (2002) argued that "a program of professional development nurtures attitudes, skills, and behaviors of individuals and groups toward greater competence and enhanced effectiveness in meeting student needs" (p. 73). As Troller (2002)

observed at the College of DuPage, CTLs can provide a nurturing environment that fosters both individual and institutional evolution. Evidence points to both the need for CTLs and the positive impact CTLs can have on instructor proficiency. These centers are potential effective conduits to advance efforts to provide faculty with the knowledge, tools, practice, and confidence to apply active and collaborative learning on a more frequent basis.

Administrative Support

In order for active and collaborative learning to thrive, there must also be administrative support in dislodging the myth that active and collaborative learning is not academic enough. Many university and college instructors simply avoid recognizing research related to human cognition and resist attempts to examine the teaching practices they employ in their classrooms (Tagg, 2012). In fact, didactic lecture has been the standard approach to teaching higher education since the inception of higher education (Miller & Metz, 2014), and this historical tradition, while not buttressed by the research, has an air of respectability and acceptability.

Conversely, active and collaborative learning is still viewed as new and different, and often there is a lack of faith in its educational merit, despite research to the contrary. In *Simulations in the Political Science Classroom*—a book intended for both high school and college instructors—Harvey et al. (2022) relayed a story of an unnamed innovative professor from a small public university whose career had actually been stalled due to his games-based approach to instruction. This faculty member had experienced great success with active and collaborative learning in his classroom. This approach helped to make difficult concepts more engaging, approachable, and enjoyable for his students. Yet, many of his colleagues saw his efforts as a waste of time (Harvey et al., 2022). In fact, he felt as if his career would only advance if he abandoned this practice for a more traditional teaching approach more aligned with

administrative expectations. Similarly, Karcher et al.'s (2022) study presented the importance of administrative support in transitioning to active learning and how many instructors expressed how taking a more student-centered educational approach may negatively impact their chances for tenure.

Buttressing this argument that active and collaborative learning is still viewed as an outlier in the academic landscape, Marra et al. (2014) found that despite the self-evident benefits of learning while doing, problem-solving as an educational tool is often "in conflict with our public education system, which primarily implements learning only in formal education settings" (p. 221). This is why college and university administrators must embrace the idea that teaching and learning is central to an IHL's mission (Kim, 2020).

This is especially true for community colleges where teaching and learning has always been and continues to be the core mission. Moreover, in a world where there is an ever-increasing move to make community colleges as well as universities more accountable for outcomes related to student learning (Swanger, 2016), an increased focus on effective teaching and learning is key. Some argue that "if colleges were more innovative, outcomes would improve" (Swanger, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, it is critical for community college administrators to support the use of innovative strategies in the classroom.

It is also critical for administrators to support the instructors who teach their curriculum in an active and collaborative manner without fear of reprisal if culturally sensitive topics are discussed. The President of Sarah Lawrence College, Howard Taylor (1957), speaking on academic freedom and the duty of administrators to protect that freedom, stated that administrators must create situations where faculty "feel free to do their best work" (p. 450). He further noted that "the administrator has his prime duty as guardian of freedom for his teachers.

He must insist that no matter how great the public pressures or how violent the public objections, the regular procedures of faculty judgment must be applied" (p. 452). While these words were stated over 65 years ago and within a different political climate, they still ring true today. Administrative support is a key facilitator of innovative teaching.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a basic understanding of the purpose of community colleges, the students that attend these IHLs, and roles played by faculty within those institutions. This study contends that BSS coursework supplies students with the requisite acumen to confront societal problems and that it is most effective when instructors leverage active and collaborative learning rather than didactic instruction. This chapter has shown that student-centered active and collaborative community college classrooms, where instructors serve as facilitators of learning, can bolster learning and student engagement (Marra et al. 2014; Spoor et al., 2020). This was done by first looking at active and collaborative learning as separate entities and then looking at the two collectively as presented in the first benchmark of the CCSSE—active and collaborative learning. Finally, this chapter explored the multifaceted nature of active and collaborative learning as explained by CCSSE by examining (1) thinking, (2) application, (3) team/partner work, (4) problem solving, and (5) real-world relevance to gain a qualitative understanding of this theoretical construct.

The intent of this study is not to argue that lecture should be eliminated from the community college classroom in its entirety. Lecture can and should remain a piece of the larger puzzle. However, evidence shows that when it is leveraged extensively without an integration with active and collaborative learning, it can have negative effects on student learning outcomes. Yet, it must also be acknowledged that migrating from didactic instruction to active and

collaborative learning can leave instructors feeling overwhelmed (Spoor et al., 2020). Recommendations for how to mitigate the stressful effects of this shift will be addressed in chapter five. Chapter 3 will address the methodology used to explore how BSS instructors at MFCC perceived active and collaborative learning in their classrooms and the factors that served as both the facilitators of and barriers to that use.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter provides the purpose for this study, followed by a positionality statement, the research design that was employed, a description of the setting where the research took place, and an explanation of the sampling process. Next, a detailed explanation of data collection and analysis are discussed. This is followed by an examination of the strategies for quality, risks, benefits, and ethical considerations; and study limitations, delimitations, and assumptions.

Purpose with Research Questions

BSS classes are required for most programs at MFCC. They also serve to "introduce a breadth of knowledge and reinforce cognitive skills and effective learning opportunities for each student" (SACS-COC, 2020, p. 81). Moreover, it can be argued that BSS coursework can play a significant role in resolving vital organizational, societal, as well as personal issues (National Academies, 2017). Yet, at the turn of the 21st century and even into the first three decades of the century, scholars still bemoaned the fact that the lecture, notes, and summative assessment approach to education still dominated the educational landscape (Feden, 2012; Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Huggins & Stamatel, 2015; McCarthy & Anderson, 2000). Moreover, CCFSSE data (2022) revealed that instructors still spend a disproportionate amount of time dedicated to lecture than to group work or student-led discussions.

As previously noted, perhaps the propensity of BSS faculty to rely heavily on didactic instruction, as opposed to engaging their students in more active and collaborative opportunities, lies in the fact that these classes often do not have a lab component as would be in place for many science classes, skilled trades classes, and visual and performing arts classes. While community colleges have a rich tradition of hands-on learning—the spotlight for these endeavors

have rarely shone most brightly on BSS departments. Indeed, BSS instructors often cling to didactic instruction to address a breadth of information deemed by them or others to be essential. While lecture is not inherently bad, research has revealed that "long-term memory storage" is increased and "retrograde memory enhancement" is increased when students are provided time to process "lecture content" (Kagan, 2014, p. 119). While facts can be memorized, unless students can operationalize that material, it is often lost—hence the importance of active and collaborative learning.

The purpose of this study was to uncover and interpret faculty perceptions of active and collaborative learning in MFCC's BSS department by learning how they define active and collaborative learning, how (or if) they employ active and collaborative learning in the classroom, and what they describe as the barriers to and facilitators of this paradigm in their classrooms. This is important because BSS classes allow students to better understand why individuals, groups, and societies make the decisions they make and engage in actions they take, while also providing the skills to evaluate the consequences of those actions. BSS classes better prepare students to live in a culturally diverse world and become equipped to potentially solve some of the problems of that world. This, combined with the knowledge that instructional strategies rooted in active and collaborative learning are more effective than didactic instruction (Davidson et al., 2014; Doyle & Doyle, 2021; Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Hushman, 2022: Johnson et al., 2014; Kagan, 2014; Kaufman et al., 1997; Keith-Le et al., 2020; Klemenčič, 2021; Love et al., 2014; Marra et al., 2014; Michaelsen et al., 2014; Smith & Burke, 2007; Spoor et al., 2020), begs the question, why is collegiate education so often something "done *to* students" as opposed to "something students themselves *do* ?" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 3).

Active and collaborative learning was seen as a benchmark for effective instruction by CCCSE (2023b). Moreover, Kolb and Kolb's (2005) work with Case Western Reserve University students led them to conclude that creating knowledge through experience was an effective instructional approach in IHLs. Active and collaborative learning can help instructors transition away from what Freire (1970) called the "banking" educational approach to a teaching and learning process shared by teacher and student. Again, this study's purpose was to explore faculty perceptions of active and collaborative learning in MFCC's BSS department. It was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?
2. What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?
3. What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

Positionality Statement

I began my career as an educator in 1996, 27 years before the production of this study. I worked as an adjunct history instructor in a community college to the west of MFCC. In the fall of 1997, I joined the social studies faculty of a large urban high school situated in the same county as MFCC, while also continuing my work with various community colleges on a part-time basis. Having one foot in the k-12 world and another in the community college world allowed me to observe the differences. Those differences were most noticeable, not in the students but in the instructional delivery methods.

As someone who had received a bachelor's degree in history and followed by a master's degree in history before ever teaching a class myself, I was convinced that didactic instruction

was not just the best way to teach at the collegiate level, but the only way. However, noting the disengagement and boredom on the faces of my students in my community college three-hour lecture classes that meet once a week versus the engagement and love of learning I saw in my public-school classes where active and collaborative learning was more accepted, I began to experiment. I began requiring presentations from my community college students and tried asking more questions during my lectures—transitioning to a more dialogic approach.

However, it was when I left the high school classroom and became the social studies curriculum specialist for a district just to the east of MFCC that I truly began to see the benefits of active and collaborative learning versus lecture. I was tasked on several occasions with coaching high school teachers on how to make their lessons more engaging and interactive. To gain a degree of authority and credibility, I began employing a larger variety of active and collaborative lessons with my community college students, essentially using my community college classroom as a laboratory to try out these techniques. Not only did this help me become a better instructional coach to these high school teachers, but I found that my community college students were more engaged in the learning process as well.

I brought this belief in active and collaborative learning into my community college classroom on a more extensive basis when I joined the history faculty of MFCC. As I moved into a supervisory role over the BSS department at MFCC, I was able to advocate for active and collaborative learning with my faculty as well. However, my observations at the time revealed that didactic instruction, while not used exclusively, was used frequently in classrooms.

I have witnessed the utility of active and collaborative learning and, when possible, have advocated for its use. Through my work with students and teachers, at both the high school and

community college levels, I have come to believe that active and collaborative learning is superior to didactic instruction. Moreover, the scholarship substantiates my observations.

In 2020, due to a reorganization within Academic Affairs at MFCC, the history department became a part of the humanities division. This humanities division, along with the English division, and the arts and communication division were organized under the large academic area called Arts and Humanities. At the time participants were consented and data were collected and analyzed, I was serving as the Dean for that academic area. While I am acquainted with the instructional techniques of many BSS faculty due to my former role, I was no longer a direct supervisor over that area at the time the study was conducted. This minimized potential ethical dilemmas connected to this research.

I interviewed seven of the 16 instructors from the BSS division in an effort to answer the posed research questions, and even though no undue power dynamic existed, I must acknowledge that previous relationships *did* and *do* exist with all study participants. Therefore, during the interview process, as their former supervisor and someone who openly advocates for active and collaborative learning, I understood the potential for answers to be unwittingly influenced and the threat that responses to questions *could be* less than candid. Therefore, I made sure to (1) emphasize the need for open and honest answers and stressed the fact that I had no evaluative role over them. (2) I also sought to avoid any verbal or physical affirmation of what I see as best practices associated with active and collaborative learning, so as not to unduly influence the data being collected. Both steps helped to minimize potential bias.

Research Design

Qualitative research is an investigative approach focused on unearthing human understandings, interpretations, and experiences (Hammersley, 2013). This was a basic

interpretive qualitative study—arguably the most common of all qualitative approaches in educational research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As previously noted, basic interpretive qualitative studies are characterized by the interpretation and significance people place on their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Essentially, the essence of all qualitative research centers on the construction of meaning and "how people make sense of their lives and their worlds" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). Basic qualitative studies seek to expose and explain these meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). Specifically, the purpose of this study was to uncover and interpret faculty perceptions of active and collaborative learning in MFCC's BSS department by learning how they defined active and collaborative learning, if and how they employed active and collaborative learning in their classrooms, and what they saw as the facilitators of and the barriers to collaborative learning in their classrooms.

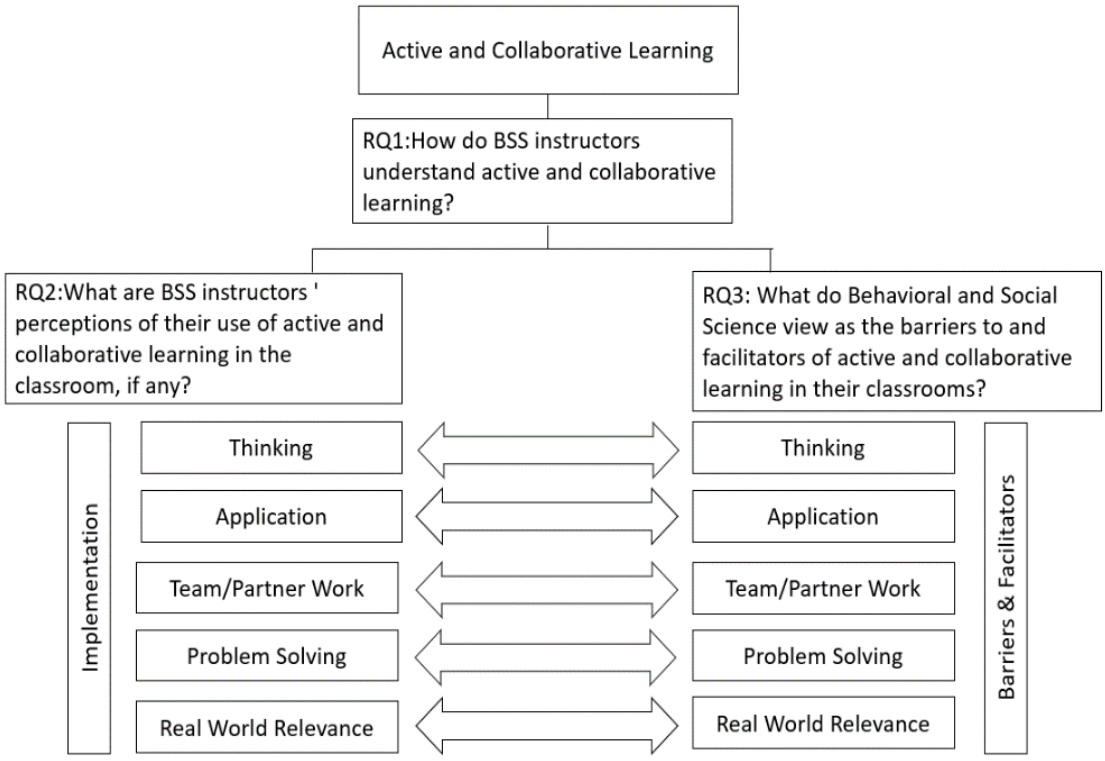

Figure 2

Theoretical Framework Research Design Flow Chart

Figure 2 illustrates the flow of this research study. RQ1 was inductive and meant to glean emergent data related to instructors' understandings of active and collaborative learning. However, RQ2 was much more deductive. Through using the CCCSE described tenets of active and collaborative learning (thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance) and the CCCSE question items embedded within these tenets (see Table 1), a better understanding of how each of these approaches was (or was not) applied in the classroom (RQ2) was unearthed. Dialogue elicited from RQ2 served as a means of allowing participants to make connections between their classroom practices and the barriers and facilitators connected to that implementation (RQ3).

Research Site

MFCC boasts a majority minority student population and an unduplicated headcount slightly exceeding 38,000. This diverse urban community college is located in the mid-Atlantic region and as of October 2021, employed 346 full-time and 453 adjunct curriculum faculty members. The rationale for selecting this site was based on several criteria. (1) MFCC is a large urban community college that serves a large student population. (2) MFCC has 16 full-time BSS instructors, thus providing a potentially large sample. MFCC has a larger BSS faculty than most of the other community colleges in the region. (3) Finally, as discussed further below, convenience for the researcher was a major factor.

Sample Description

Convenience sampling of all 16 full-time BSS instructors at MFCC was used in the design of this study. A degree of convenience existed due to my employment at MFCC. This group of instructors were readily accessible to me, easily contacted, and due to the collegiality that already existed, potentially willing to participate in this study. I extended interview

invitations to all 16 full-time MFCC BSS faculty, regardless of my pre-existing knowledge of which instructors may have an affinity for active and collaborative learning, in an attempt to capture the broadest possible range of perspectives in relation to the research questions. However, only one recruitment email was sent so as to not appear coercive in light of my administrative position, as discussed further below. Of the 16 BSS faculty, seven responded to my query resulting in a sample size of seven participants. Participants' years of experience teaching in a community college context ranged from 8 to 30, with the average being 17.

The rationale for including only full-time BSS instructors centered on (1) the number of students taught, and (2) access to PD experiences. Most full-time BSS instructors at MFCC teach six to eight classes of 25-30 students in each section. The sheer volume of students may influence pedagogical decisions. As a result, equating a full-time faculty member's instructional decision making to that of a part-time instructor, teaching one or two class sections, would have presented a disparate comparison. While arguably the adjunct instructor perspective may provide an informative layer to this research if this study were to be extended, they were not an initial study focus. Also, PD experiences, which could potentially influence pedagogical decisions, are more uniform for full-time faculty members who are required to accrue PD hours each year. Mixing full-time and part-time faculty data on this topic could have potentially yielded results that were too divergent. Moreover, if the data collected from this study can serve to facilitate a future instructional paradigm shift, full-time instructors need to be at the vanguard of this change. Knowledge that full-time data was sourced to inform changes will be important.

Data Collection Methods

By applying Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) basic interpretive qualitative characteristics, this research approach allowed BSS instructors to expound upon the factors influencing their

instructional decision making, but also their classroom practices and the significance they have assigned to both. Written consent was secured from each participant selected for this study. Moreover, confidentiality of each participants' identity has been protected with pseudonyms for both participant names and the name of the institution where this study took place. Data collection consisted of interviews and document collection. Data collection involved one-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting 20-60 minutes conducted via Google Meet. All participants were interviewed twice. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and conducted outside of participants' instructional time. First and second round interviews were conducted using semi-structured protocols, including a number of questions aligned to the broader research questions. First round interview questions (see Appendix A) focused on participants' typical instructional practices before delving into active and collaborative practices. Second round interview questions focused almost exclusively on tenets of active and collaborative learning and related barriers and facilitators to this instructional approach. More specifically, second round interviews were conducted (1) to pose follow-up questions about the unique artifacts participants shared and how they aligned to the aforementioned CCCSE inspired tenets of active and collaborative learning, (2) to determine frequency and types of active and collaborative learning being employed in the classroom, (3) for member checking (e.g., transcripts of initial interview shared for accuracy, emerging themes from first interview shared for participant reaction), and (4) to pose follow-up questions to participants' particular responses in the first interview. An established semi-structured protocol was used (see Appendix B), yet, due to the required individualized nature of this second round of interviews, some of the questions were unique to each participant.

Hammersley and Atkins (2019, as cited in Saldaña, 2021) asserted that documents mirror the perspectives of the person who produced them and therefore require critical examination. Artifacts such as lecture notes, lesson plans, lesson directions, rubrics, or other exemplars are beneficial in gaining a better understanding of instructional practices. Therefore, during the initial interview when a related instructional activity was mentioned, interviewees were asked if they were willing to provide the artifact for further review and discussion in the second-round interview. If amenable to this request, the artifact was formally requested in a post-interview email. This additional data source helped to triangulate participants' recollections as expressed in the interviews and provided insight into their instructional design. Please note, all participants were informed that the sharing of artifacts was voluntary, not a requirement for study participation, and would not be evaluated. However, each of the participants elected to share an artifact, resulting in a total of seven artifacts being collected.

Data Analysis Methods

Merriam and Grenier (2019) posited that with basic interpretive qualitative studies, "the researcher is first and foremost interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon" (p. 7). Lim (2011) asserted that generic qualitative research (also called basic interpretive qualitative research) is often rooted in interview transcripts and document data. Therefore, "a rich description and/or identification of recurring patterns across multiple individuals or cases is usually expected as the outcome of the research" (Lim, 2011, p. 52). To that end, data analysis of the seven first-round interviews and seven follow-up interviews consisted of generating a series of codes, categories, and then themes that were leveraged to find "recurring patterns and core elements in data" (Lim, 2011, p. 47). The first stage of data analysis was deductive, followed by a second stage which was inductive. During the analysis process, I

worked to identify and detect themes to gain an "understanding of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25).

As a precursor to coding my data with NVivo software, I engaged in a first cycle coding process consisting of multiple readings of first-round and second-round interviews as well as the collected artifacts. As the basis for my initial code list, I first employed a deductive approach and utilized the key constructs—thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance—of active and collaborative learning as gleaned from the CCCSE inspired definition that grounds this study. In addition, I leveraged the following criteria that factors prominently into CCCSE question items (see Table 1): asked questions and contributed to class discussions, made a class presentation, worked with other students on projects during class, worked with other students on projects outside of class, participated in service-learning as a part of a regular course, and discussed ideas from classes with others outside of class (CCCSE, 2023f).

I also made sure that I remained "open to all possible theoretical directions" as the data was interpreted (Charmaz, 2014 as cited in Saldaña, 2021, p. 148). To that end, inductive coding was employed where I read all the interview transcripts again, this time focusing on each instructor's unique experiences and the meaning they assigned to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During this process, I sought to explore emergent patterns from the interviewees. This process yielded in vivo codes that reflected the participants' understandings as expressed in their own vocabulary. Finally, I read the transcripts a third time where I identified additional categories and merged seldom used codes (both deductive and inductive) into existing larger categories as I determined the initial code list.

Saldaña (2021) noted that “first cycle coding is analysis—taking things apart” (p. 6). After “taking things apart” I then moved to second cycle coding which is “synthesis—putting things together into new assemblages of meaning” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 6). Utilizing NVivo software, the second cycle of coding—selective coding—allowed me to aggregate data into “categories or ‘families’” that share similar attributes in order to identify emergent patterns (Saldaña, 2021, p. 13). Saldaña (2021) advanced the idea that selective coding serves as an “umbrella that covers and accounts for all other codes” (p. 314). These selective codes served as the central or core categories to identify “the major conflict, obstacle, problem, issue, or concern to participants” (Stern & Porr as cited in Saldaña 2021, p. 314). During the process, some codes were discharged or merged with other codes and other codes were added. For example, during second cycle coding, it became obvious that the theme of “knowledge construction” needed to be added and the codes of “time” and “energy” could be merged. It also became evident that while CCCSE conceptualized “active and collaborative” learning as one entity, participants often conceptualized them as two thus requiring the addition of an “active” code, as well as a “collaborative” code to better capture participants’ understandings of the practice. These, and other code modifications resulted in the creation of my final code list, which I expanded into a code book by adding definitions for each code based on the literature (see Appendix C).

After completing my coding, I ran queries on every code in NVivo and reviewed the results of each query. Next, I wrote analytic memos for the identified codes (see Appendix D for an analytic note exemplar). Saldaña (2021) maintained that writing analytic memos is a crucial element to coding. However, these memos should not only define and describe the codes but their connections to other codes as well as significance to the overall analysis of the study (Glaser, 2014 as cited in Saldaña, 2021). Essentially, these analytical memos served as notes as I

reflected on thoughts and questions that emerged during the coding process. These memos allowed me to better analyze emergent patterns and derive a richer understanding of the data. Finally, the codebook was expanded to include a sample quotation that demonstrated how each code was applied during data analysis (see Appendix C).

Strategies for Quality

Quality—often used interchangeably with rigor, validity, and trustworthiness—is paramount when designing any research study. Essentially, quality "refers to the ways that researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants' experiences" (Ravitch and Carl, 2021, p. 166). Quality in this study was assured though adhering to my established research question and avoiding mission creep and any deviation away from my primary focus. This was accomplished in part by creating reliable semi-structured interview protocols (Appendix A; Appendix B) for both rounds of interviews that allowed for flexibility but also created research boundaries. Triangulation is paramount in helping to safeguard thoroughness and accuracy. Therefore, when interviewees agreed to provide me with instructional artifacts after their initial interview, this helped in the triangulation process. These artifacts served as an additional referenceable data point to ensure reliability and served to frame specific second-round interview questions related to active and collaborative learning.

I also consistently adhered to the generic qualitative analysis approach as described by Percy et al. (2015). This allowed me to move between deductive reflections on active and collaborative learning and inductive themes that emerged from the data being collected. Being reflexive and continuously assessing my personal subjectivity and the influence that past experiences and my current role had on the research being conducted was important in assuring quality. As an admitted proponent of active and collaborative learning, I remained vigilantly

cognizant of my research bias. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) posit, “social location and positionality cannot be overstated” (p. 375). Recognizing the benefit in substantive conversations with colleagues, mentors, and fellow researchers through the research process—from the planning, through the collection, analysis, and reporting phases, I also employed what Ravitch and Carl (2021) called dialogic engagement to systematically and intentionally discuss the research process with others, while always maintaining the confidentiality of my participants.

Arguably, “rigor is best achieved through thoughtful and deliberate planning, diligent and ongoing application of researcher reflexivity, and honest communication between the researcher and the audience regarding the study and its results” (Johnson, 2020, p. 145). Therefore, I was thorough in both my research design and execution, maintained an awareness of how my role as researcher may be influenced by my prior experiences, and remained open to the findings, as they emerged, regardless of presuppositions. I adhered to these strategies throughout this process to help maintain and ensure quality.

Risks, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

Despite the history department’s inclusion under the state-wide social/behavioral science banner, I elected to not include them in this study for two reasons. First, they are not a part of the BSS division as organized by MFCC and second, my supervisory role over history department faculty presented an ethical dilemma. However, in the past I have served as the direct supervisor for all of the participants in this study. Therefore, there was limited concern about how this former power-dynamic could impact the validity of the data being collected. To mitigate this impact, I took numerous precautions to ensure participants that participation was not evaluative, particularly since they all opted to submit an artifact of their work. Participants were informed in the recruitment email, the consent document, and/or reminded during the introduction to the

initial interview and follow-up interview: (1) that participation in this study is voluntary, non-evaluative, and will have no effect on their status at work; (2) that their identities will never be disclosed and their perspectives will not be described in ways that would be identifiable such as connecting their statements to their disciplines; (3) that pseudonyms will be used for the institution as well as for each participant; (4) that audio recordings will be destroyed after data analysis; and (5) that data will be stored in secure cloud storage, with the master list connecting participant names to participant pseudonyms being stored in a locked file cabinet within a locked office.

Furthermore, I stressed that this study was being conducted in my role as a university doctoral candidate and not as a MFCC administrator. To that end, all communications were sent through my university email address and not my MFCC email address. I also sought to mask my support for an active and collaborative approach to learning, especially in the initial interview (see Appendix A), through carefully selecting the wording of my questions and maintaining an awareness of any implicit suggestions relayed by my tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language, as to avoid undue influence over the interviewees. These steps helped to create an open environment with participants for data collection and were key to ensuring that the data collected were reliable.

The benefits of this study are threefold. It provides a better understanding of how active and collaborative learning is perceived by BSS instructors, if or how it is operationalized in their classrooms, and the perceived barriers and facilitators connected to its implementation. There were no risks to participants. However, there were also no immediate, concrete benefits such as a stipend, honorarium, or even PD credit for their participation in this study. Yet, it can be argued that the benefits to them as well as their present and future students are incalculable as the

community college BSS instructors were provided an opportunity to reflect upon their pedagogy.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Limitations of this study included (1) the sample size. Data was collected from participants at one large, urban community college, MFCC. This provided a rather narrow perspective that may present differently at a smaller, more rural community college. (2) All of the participants were full-time BSS instructors. The decreased class-load of part-time instructors and the fact they are not required to participate in PD creates a significant difference between them and their full-time colleges. However, part-timers may have provided an informative layer to the research, especially considering that over half of the total faculty at MFCC serve in an adjunct capacity. Future research may be needed to expand the scope. (3) Disclosure of the study's focus to potential participants. Since potential participants were aware (via the consent to participate in a research study) that the focus of this study was instructor use of active and collaborative learning, it is possible that instructors who were aware that this instructional approach was a best practice, yet chose not to us it, opted to not participate for that reason. Similarly, those who utilized this approach may have self-selected into the study. (4) It must be noted that much of this study is rooted in faculty perceptions through self-reported, not observational, data. Chan (2009) stated that "despite the prevalent use of self-report data in empirical studies" that many scholars see this approach to research as presenting "severe threats to its validity which serve to weaken the intended substantive inferences to be drawn from such data" (p. 309).

A delimitation of this study is evidenced in the decision to just study BSS instructors. Many of the issues related to the frequency at which active and collaborative work is

operationalized in community college classrooms is evident in a multitude of other disciplines and programs in addition to BSS classes. Yet, the decision was made to look specifically at BSS teachers because of the propensity for many of these instructors to still leverage lecture-based methods at a much higher rate than active and collaborative methods.

Two assumptions were made in this study. First, there was an assumption that interviewing seven of the 16 BSS instructors invited to participate would provide sufficient representation to draw conclusions. Second, there was an assumption that participants would not feel encumbered, would answer candidly, and would provide honest and accurate self-reported data.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the research design used to address the research questions. These research questions were designed to gain a better understanding of how BSS instructors define and use active and collaborative learning in their classrooms and the factors that aid or hinder that deployment. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how and when active and collaborative learning strategies are used to promote this approach to BSS community college instruction. Arguing that BSS classes serve, not only as requirement benchmarks towards degree or program completion, but also as the provider of crucial life skills needed for personal and societal decision making, a study of this nature is not only warranted but truly needed. By using a basic interpretive qualitative approach to this study, a better understanding of how BSS instructors interpret their experiences was unearthed. Moreover, lessons were learned not only about how BSS instructors "construct their worlds" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24) but about the meaning they construct in relation to active and collaborative learning. Interviewing and reviewing documents from the seven participating MFCC BSS

instructors provided rich qualitative data focused on thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance and other emergent themes which will be analyzed extensively in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to better understand community college BSS instructors' knowledge of active and collaborative learning and to identify the factors that foster this instructional approach and those that presented hurdles. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?
2. What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?
3. What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

Utilizing the methodology described in Chapter 3, all data were collected and thoroughly analyzed in relation to these questions. This chapter presents findings and explores both the deductive and inductive themes as related to each research question.

Findings / Themes by Research Question

CCCSE chose to conceptualize "active and collaborative" together as represented in their first CCSSE benchmark. Yet, participants conceptualized these terms very differently and tended to separate the two. They also saw their roles as effective facilitators of active and collaborative learning as pivotal in the process, while not negating the importance of didactic instruction. Participants provided insight into when it was appropriate for instructors to step into a director versus a facilitator role. Moreover, understandings of active and collaborative learning were often centered on the need for students to be meaningfully engaged in work, their ability to construct knowledge, and the role of community *in* the process and as a result *of* the process.

Participants' understandings of active and collaborative learning, while differing in some respects, were largely in alignment with one another and focused around the prospect of learning by doing. Yet, their reported use of active and collaborative learning, while presenting some similarities, also varied from participant to participant. Identified barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning also illustrated both commonalities and differences in perception.

Data analysis focused initially on a deductive approach and utilized: (1) the key active and collaborative learning constructs (as gleaned from the CCCSE inspired definition) of thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance; and (2) criteria found in CCCSE question items (see Table 1); asked questions and contributed to class discussions, made a class presentation, worked with other students on projects during class, worked with other students on projects outside of class, participated in service-learning as a part of a regular course, and discussed ideas from classes with others outside of class (CCCSE, 2023f). However, data analysis was also inductive, and by focusing on each instructors' unique experiences and the meaning they assigned to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), emergent patterns and themes were explored. The sections that follow spotlight multiple themes as well as their relevant sub-themes.

RQ1: How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?

Through reflecting on their typical face-to-face lessons and thinking about why they used the teaching practices they most commonly deployed, each participant revealed how they conceptualized active and collaborative learning. They saw their roles as directors and facilitators as central to active and collaborative learning. They also saw active and collaborative learning as a way to get students engaged, knowledge construction as an outcome of that

engagement, and community as both a prerequisite for effective active and collaborative learning to happen, as well as a result of its implementation.

Participants' Conceptualizations of Active and Collaborative Learning

Participants conceptualized active and collaborative learning in very different ways. Active and collaborative learning was often defined as two separate entities. Some participants stressed collaboration as the most important of the two, while others viewed active learning as the main pedagogical goal and collaboration as one possible method for achieving that goal.

Julia's definition of active and collaborative learning is the clearest example of a segmented understanding. When answering the question, "What is your understanding of active and collaborative learning?" Julia responded, "My understanding of active and collaborative learning is. . ." and then immediately broke the concept down into two terms. She defined active learning as students being "participants in their learning experience," noting "It's not just a passive lecture style of learning." Then, she turned to collaborative learning, which she explained as "working with their peers, um, as well as working with the instructor. So that is, it is a kind of group, uh, environment where there is more community versus individual." Despite the fact that Julia was the participant most inclined to speak of "active and collaborative" together (there were seven different instances where she framed her answers using this amalgamated terminology), her description showed her understandings of "active" and "collaborative" were separate.

Bryce's definition, however, avoided the use of "active" altogether. Instead, he elected to focus exclusively on the "collaborative" portion of the concept. Notably, Bryce even inverted the "active and collaborative" terminology to reflect the importance he placed on collaboration. When asked to describe how he understood active and collaborative learning, he stated

"collaborative and active learning where you're learning with each other is, is so much more important and valuable than learning from one person sitting in the front of the room." Bryce argued that students "have to, you know, be working together," further noting "There have to be spaces where they can learn from each other." He continued this explanation by theorizing the positive impact that "seeing each other's point of view" can have for students. While later comments from Bryce would also extol the virtues of students being active, his understanding of active and collaborative learning was more often viewed through a collaborative lens.

While all participants spoke, some at length, about the team/partner work activities they employed in their classrooms, most did not extensively use the word "collaborative" in their explanations. At times collaboration was simply perceived as a tool or strategy to make students active learners. Josh stated:

> When I say active learning, I really think about taking the basic information that they had to learn and trying to do something with it. And this really ties into the collaboration too, because I do a lot of small group work and small group conversations.

The need for students to be "doing something," according to Josh, could be realized through collaboration. He viewed "small group conversations" as a tool to make active learning happen. While Josh also had a segmented understanding of "active and collaborative," he saw a causal connection between the two, with collaboration being used to create action.

Participants' understanding of active and collaborative learning were in no way monolithic. While at times they used the terminology collectively, their descriptions showed their true segmented understandings. Some stressed the importance of collaboration, while others visualized active learning as the end goal and collaboration as the means to that end.

Participants' Conceptualizations of the Role of Instructors

Participants also conceptualized the role of instructors in active and collaborative learning in a variety of ways. All participants saw the instructional roles of director and facilitator as important. Yet, some believed that instructors *could not* serve as facilitators without first serving as directors. Others touted the benefits of using technology for direct instruction and preserving class time for active and collaborative learning. While others saw more benefits in ceding class control to students and the need for instructors to facilitate more than they direct.

Amy most clearly exhibited an affinity for instructor generated direction as a precursor to active and collaborative learning. She asserted that it was important for students to realize the importance of "learning the foundations from the giants that came before them." Making an auto mechanics comparison, she argued that it would be disastrous for an instructor to "hand a student an engine and say, 'have at it.' That's not going to go well, you know, they have to learn basic concepts first." These basics, according to Amy, could be didactically provided in class as the groundwork for an active and collaborative experience. Or, perhaps these "basic concepts" may have been achieved through previous coursework. Amy viewed the students in more advanced classes as having gained that prerequisite knowledge and advocated they be granted more control of their learning. Conversely, she saw the necessity for introductory classes to be more "lecture heavy" at times. Amy could envision an effective lesson in which the instructor only served as the director of learning, but not one in which the instructor only served as the facilitator of learning.

Bryce and Josh valued active and collaborative learning, yet also saw the benefits of didactic instruction. Both advocated an instructional approach that leveraged lecture as a prelude to active and collaborative learning. Their positive perception of active and collaborative learning, coupled with their continued support of didactic instruction, caused both to advocate a

flipped classroom instructional approach. This approach allowed direct instruction to, as Josh stated, be leveraged through "narrated lectures" provided to students "ahead of time." Bryce similarly touted the benefits of moving "lecture information" online. Contextualizing and explaining his understandings through a personal lens, he said "I can't really move the active learning online. You know, ... I just do more of that when we're face to face." Bryce and Josh advocated for the preservation lecture through modern technology, thereby freeing space for active and collaborative learning to happen in the brick-and-mortar classroom.

Diana, while not deriding lecture, did not present it a precursor to active and collaborative learning. She posited, "I think learning in the community college should be student-centered and part of that student-centered means sometimes it needs to be student-led." She saw offering active and collaborative opportunities as a way to energize student learning, noting, "If you can catch students on a wave of learning on their own, that is what we all want." Essentially, Diana advocated the need for instructors to direct less and facilitate more.

All participants acknowledged the necessity of periodically playing the role of director and facilitator, but some argued that instructors must play the director role more frequently, whether that be through in-class or online direct instruction, in order to provide students with core content. Others, however, so valued the benefits of active and collaborative learning that they advocated empowering students to lead most of the time, while encouraging instructors to guide from the side.

Constructs Related to Participant Conceptualizations of Active and Collaborative Learning

Engagement, knowledge construction, and community were all constructs that participants lauded as important to their understandings of active and collaborative learning. Active and collaborative learning was seen as a way to capture student interest—to engage them.

Participants understood that this cognitive engagement could be leveraged to elicit the construction of new knowledge. Moreover, while participants argued that this learning could happen more easily within an established community, they also saw community building as a fortuitous result of active and collaborative learning—resulting in far reaching consequences.

Role of Engagement. Participants saw the benefit of students being personally involved in the learning process and viewed engagement as the result of active and collaborative learning. Some focused on student-to-student engagement, others on engagement with the content, and still others on engagement with the instructor. But all touted the benefits of students being interested and involved.

One of the ways Diana explained active and collaborative learning was through stressing the importance of student-to-student engagement. She felt that active and collaborative learning helped students stay "actively engaged in the learning process as a participant and not an observer." But, she also advanced the importance of students understanding that "individual thinking and behavior is a culmination of all of our experiences." Forming her hands into an imaginary tube, closing one eye, and looking into it, she stated:

> I'm looking at the world from this one little, tiny view, this is all I see. But if I take my hands down, I can see a whole big world that is full of different individuals, right? And I have a broader view of the world. And so, in order to do that, you have to have students engage with each other.

Student-to-student engagement was viewed as crucial by Diana, and active and collaborative learning was a way to make that happen.

Josh's understanding of engagement was framed through a student-to-content lens and explained through looking at his "budgeting" assignment. In this assignment students were given

certain economic parameters and asked to create a budget to sustain them and their imaginary families. Josh posited that students should be provided with opportunities like this to "really engage with the material in a way that, um, they're applying information." Moreover, he understood active and collaborative assignments such as this one as a way for students to develop "a little more empathy for what people might go through" in regard to difficult financial decisions. Josh saw how providing opportunities to engage with complex concepts on a personal level can help make abstract concepts more concrete.

The third form of engagement, engagement with the instructor, was also highly regarded by some. Julia mentioned the importance of instructors posing questions that are "interesting" and that will "engage the students." She continued, "I believe that starting a lesson with a profound or engaging question can really help the students to apply the concepts that they might be learning." Julia, while wanting to make sure students were engaged, saw the instructor as the primary engagement catalyst. By using the active and collaborative approach of posing questions and eliciting answers, she sought to engage her students.

Students making a connection to the work and demonstrating enthusiasm and interest in what is happening through participation was highly regarded by all participants. They saw active and collaborative learning—whether designed as a student-to-student, student-to-content, or student-to-instructor opportunity—as a means to reach that end.

Role of Knowledge Construction. Another major theme related to participants' understandings of active and collaborative learning was its linkage to knowledge creation. Participants saw active and collaborative learning as a way for instructors to tear down barriers inhibiting divergent thought, thus allowing students to construct knowledge and move beyond the simple regurgitation of definitions and data. Some viewed knowledge construction through a

collaborative lens, focusing on the understanding generated through engagement with peers. Others, however, saw it as cognition through individual student actions.

Diana advocated the importance of using active and collaborative learning as a means of removing the confines that are sometimes created through didactic instruction. By doing this, according to Diana, students were freed to build new understandings. She stated that students needed the freedom to "go on their own and build whatever they can build, because if you sometimes don't give limitations, they return with something beyond what you even expected." This removal of limitations and celebration of new, different, and unique ideas and students moving past mere recall was key to Diana's understanding of knowledge construction. While other participants agreed that knowledge construction was an important repercussion of active and collaborative learning, their views were somewhat different.

Bryce placed the role of knowledge construction firmly in the "collaborative" camp of active and collaborative learning. He stated, "You sit down in a group, small group or a circle and you say, all right, here's the problem. You know, let's figure it out collectively. Let's construct the knowledge" with the intent of "trying to figure out the best way to do this." To Bryce, knowledge construction was not a solitary act. Knowledge, according to him, was best built through a collaborative exchange of ideas and problem solving.

Amy's perception was much different. While Amy also saw the worth of collaborative knowledge construction with peers, she focused more on the personal, yet active, acquisition of knowledge and resulting cognitive growth. She stated:

> The goal is to get the students to come to the knowledge core themselves, rather than being told. . . And I think it's a lot more meaningful when it happens that way because

> they can reason out and logic out why the statement exists, rather than just why the rule exists.

Using a "hot stove" example, she stated:

> So, if I just tell my kids, "don't touch the hot stove," they won't know why. They'll just know the hot stove is scary. Maybe it will be anxiety producing. Maybe they just won't believe me. Maybe they'll think it's just my own opinion about stoves. Um, but if they touch it, they'll know why and they'll hold the belief of "don't touch the hot stove." And I think that's the same as active learning.

Continuing, Amy explained the importance of instructors providing opportunities for students to "come to the knowledge themselves," noting that students can "reason through some of the 'why' more effectively" if they construct the knowledge themselves as opposed to just being told something.

Providing students with opportunities to produce new meaning out of content learned in class was important to many of the participants. They saw active and collaborative learning as a means to facilitate this occurrence. Whether these opportunities for building new understandings came from collaboration with peers or solidary endeavors, the end result was lauded as beneficial to students.

Role of Community. The role of community and the formation of social connections was an important component in how participants understood active and collaborative learning. Some participants viewed community as a necessary prerequisite to active and collaborative learning. Others saw it as both a fortuitous result of active and collaborative learning in the classroom and a catalyst for more active and collaborative engagement. Yet, the impact of an active and

collaborative inspired community was also heralded as a change-maker far beyond the classroom walls.

Amy, discussing her "communication" assignment, posited that one of the most important results of the assignment was the sense of community that it helped to build. She stated, "it forces them to have a more personal conversation and it starts that framework of, in this class we're going to be friendly to each other, we're going to make friends." She noted that early in her teaching career she "internalized" community building as one of her instructional objectives noting "one of my jobs is to help you make friends to give you a community here at this place."

Diana's explanation best illustrates the perspective that community is a necessary condition for effective active and collaborative learning to occur. In fact, Diana extolled the importance of "building that community. . . by starting the class with students engaging with one another, whether it's talking about their introduction or what they hope to learn in the class." Moreover, she discussed "starting that relationship and community building from the first day." She explained that community building can result in "a different outcome when you're talking about students being invested" and "working towards a shared goal." Diana equated a student's "commitment to their group" to the depth of relationships that they began to foster on that first day of class. Her conceptualization of effective active and collaborative learning was largely dependent upon creating a community prior to beginning a project.

While Julia also saw community as important, she understood it initially as the result of active and collaborative learning. She also pointed out that active and collaborative learning was beneficial in that:

> It creates a community. It creates a safe place for students to ask questions. It, um, creates a place where students feel like they're heard, where they are not afraid to, uh, jump in and be a participant in the information that they're actually receiving. And, I think it also helps them to take ownership of this information and this content.

So, not only did Julia see active and collaborative learning as a tool for creating community, she also viewed that new community as a place to foster more active and collaborative learning. She conceived the active and collaborative "environment" as one in which "there is more community versus individual practice." This described symbiotic relationship between active and collaborative learning helped to illustrate the worth of both, and advance the understanding that one is not as effective without the other.

Josh similarly conceived the creation of community as something that could be aided by active and collaborative learning. Yet, he perceived the impact as being much more far reaching than a single class or a single course. He saw it as beneficial because "it forms a connection that makes [students] feel more closely tied to the school," noting that this is especially important at a community college because:

> At a university. . . you might go back on campus, and you get to know people, and you're kind of tied to the environment there. People might just come here [referencing community college in general and specifically MFCC], go to their classes, and then go straight home. But, if they have a stronger reason to stick around or to feel a stronger connection to the campus, maybe it will help them complete the degree. Maybe it will help them get through a class that otherwise they would have dropped. Maybe it will make them feel more welcome in the spot where, um, you know, the attrition rates are high, the graduation rates are going to be low in general, depending on how we're

> looking at the data. But, I think it really is a good way to, um, help people kind of just feel connected to the classroom, to the campus and the college.

Josh posited that the commuter students at a community college have less opportunities for community building than their university counterparts. Moreover, he noted that opportunities for community building are often confined to the classroom for these students. But, when community *is* created (which can be done effectively through active and collaborative learning), it can serve a much larger purpose for community college students, such as continued matriculation and academic completion.

While participants often conceptualized active and collaborative learning in unique ways, they each placed value on this approach to instruction. They often saw the need for instructors to play the role of director (to varying degrees) before stepping in the facilitator role. While they valued the autonomy associated with student agency, it was often only granted after the perceived necessary groundwork was laid through didactic instruction. They also saw active and collaborative learning as a way to get students engaged, and this engagement was seen to foster knowledge construction. Finally, it was understood that engagement and knowledge construction was easier if done within the milieu of an established classroom community. However, community was also seen as a result of active and collaborative learning with impacts reaching far beyond the classroom walls.

RQ2: What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?

All participants reported frequently using active and collaborative learning. Because CCSSE policy suggests that active and collaborative learning is the most effective pedagogical structure for creating a learning setting in which students think critically and reflectively, apply

their understanding to new contexts, work effectively with teams or with partners, solve complex problems, and attend to real-world issues with relevance to their lives, those five constructs were used to analyze data and are used here to organize findings related to research question two.

Thinking

The act of thinking is arguably the most essential part of learning and, for the purpose of this study, was subdivided into critical thinking and reflective thinking—each important yet each characterized by unique qualities. Participants provided students with active and collaborative opportunities to analyze, evaluate, and make judgements regarding newly acquired information, thus honing their critical thinking skills. However, they also provided students opportunities to analyze and reflect on content through a more personal lens. Analysis of participants' classroom artifacts suggested these thinking opportunities were more effective when done actively and collaboratively, as opposed to through more passive educational approaches.

Critical Thinking. Through active and collaborative instruction, participants allowed students to utilize examination and explanation as a means of critically thinking about course content—a feat more difficult to achieve through didactic instruction. While some participants focused on rudimentary analysis—the "what"—others had students dig deeper into the "why." But, not all attempts at eliciting critical thinking were shown to be successful, thus unearthing the pedagogical difficulty that can be associated with this instructional approach.

Beverly saw the active and collaborative exercise of whole-class data analysis as an easy way to engage students in critical thinking and stressed question asking as a key to this process. She spoke of placing statistical data on the board and then asking students what the information meant. Beverly stated, "I put the numbers up, and I asked them to explain the numbers to me." Acknowledging that this was "low hanging fruit" on the critical thinking spectrum, she

argued that her students *were* being asked to dissect and assess the information and to recognize the need to request more data as required. This activity enlisted question-asking as students thought critically about what story the data was conveying and tried to make meaning from it. Beverly, as if speaking to her students, said:

> So, you're asking the right questions, you know, and as long as you continue to ask the right questions, you'll get to an answer, but you'll never get to a good answer if you're not asking the right questions.

To Beverly, asking good questions was an important component to critical thinking, noting that the process begins when students start "asking questions and thinking about what they think." She stressed that the process, not the end product or end thought, was her paramount concern and noted that as an instructor, part of her role was to "support their questioning and their inquiry." Beverly made data analysis an experiential and collective class process and leveraged question-asking to help students hone their critical thinking skills as they evaluated information.

While Bryce also prompted students to ask questions, his questions were more complex in that they focused on the "why" more than the "what." Through an active and collaborative activity couched in a science fiction context, Bryce provided a space for his students to think critically as they explained "some of the basic things about Earth's society," especially "the division between the sexes." Bryce reassured students that "they may veer into stereotypes" during their discussions but encouraged them to think about the "why" and directed them to look at "cultural norms and values, role of government, economic and educational philosophies, religious ideologies, technological advancements, etc." This assignment "promotes critical thinking," said Bryce, because students are asking "those larger questions." Bryce highly valued the power of effective question asking and its role in critical thinking. He created situations

where students had to think and "figure out the best way" to solve a problem, noting that this can be "much more effective in creating critical thinkers" than other more didactic educational approaches. Bryce's focus on eliciting the "why" from his students served as a catalyst for them to analyze and evaluate, to critically think on a higher level.

While Beverly and Bryce found success in their critical thinking activities, Amy did not. While Amy provided a unique understanding of critical thinking, stating that it was "questioning what an authority figure has told you," she lamented that while she tried to spark that kind of thinking with her "communication" assignment, that attempt largely failed. This assignment heading stated: "Perception refers to the way an individual makes sense of their internal and external experiences." The first part of Amy's assignment was focused on a viral photo of a dress that some perceived as white and gold but others saw as blue and black. This, along with an accompanying *New York Times* article, provided the stimulus material for Amy to ask her students, "Does the description of the *New York Times* article match how you would say that you experienced this image?" Amy asserted, "That's my attempt at pulling out critical thinking, where I'm asking them like, would you argue that your experience matches what perceptual researchers say you should be experiencing?" But, she professed with a laugh and an air of frustration, "Students' answers historically have not really pulled out critical thinking there. A lot of them don't really know what I'm trying to say. . . no matter how many times I recraft that question." While Amy could have provided students with a lecture detailing findings related to this topic, she instead wanted students to come to the "why" themselves through comparing their analysis to the analysis of others. While this activity was active, it was not collaborative. Also, it failed to achieve the outcome for which Amy had hoped.

While participants created assignments and activities that called for students to critically think by examining and evaluating content, some experiences were more complex than others. While some required students to ask questions about things, others asked students to consider the explanation of things—the "what" versus the "why." Yet, not all critical thinking activities discussed by participants resulted in success.

Reflective Thinking. Through active and collaborative instruction, participants provided opportunities for their students to reflect on how course content personally impacted them and their communities in order to generate new and unique perspectives, not as effectively obtained through didactic instruction. Whether prompted to evaluate feelings of inadequacy, construct new personal understandings of difficult issues, or better understand the lives of others, reflective thinking served as a powerful pedagogical tool for study participants.

Amy's "communication" assignment best exemplified how active and collaborative learning can be leveraged to elicit reflective thinking. This collaborative component to Amy's "communication" assignment required students to sit back to back, one student verbally explaining images while the other attempted to draw those images from the descriptions provided. This exercise was done in order to convey the importance and difficulties associated with effective communication. Amy, explaining the reflective qualities of this assignment noted that students were:

> forced into this uncomfortable scenario where they realize "I can't do something that I thought was simple. This is more complex than I realized it was going to be. Um, there is more of a barrier to effective communication and part of it has to do with how I see the world, right?" Like, they are, they are forced into that uncomfortable experience. And I think, I think that definitely, um, I think that discomfort creates a demand for reflective

> thinking where they have to kind of sit there and go, "well, when was I wrong, was I wrong at the beginning, when I thought this would be easy? Or, am I wrong now that it was hard?"

Amy valued the insight gained by students as they felt the discomfort with their inability to successfully complete a seemingly simple task. She noted the benefits of her students analyzing and evaluating the situation from a personal perspective. This active and collaborative learning assignment activated reflection which could be leveraged as students were further immersed in the research associated with effective communication.

Bryce also saw his spotlighted assignment as an active and collaborative way for his students to contextualize the larger issue of gender through the lens of their own experiences. Commenting on the cognitive journey that students take from one form of thinking to another, Bryce noted, "While critically thinking about this [referring to issues of gender] at a macro level, um, it's almost inevitable that they're going to think about it at that micro level" as well. He argued that is a natural progression for them to begin "reflecting on their own lives or their parents' lives" in relation to gender norms and gender roles. Bryce noted that the reflective aspects of this assignment were particularly salient for "students who grow up in very traditionally gendered households." He noted that "some students go into the world thinking that their gender role limits the type of careers or things that they could actually do." Through active and collaborative learning, he provided students the opportunity to reflect on their own lives and experiences regarding issues of gender and gender norms in the hopes of generating new understandings.

In addition to self-awareness, reflective learning can also promote a better understanding of the struggles that others may go through. Diana, discussing one of her student's "daycare

center" projects, remembered a student approaching her in astonishment after reflecting on the fact that the daycare center she and her group had created would be out of that student's price range. "That was truly an eye-opening moment for them," Diana posited. She viewed this reflection as a way to start meaningful conversations around existing economic disparity and how to solve it. But, she also noted that this was a "latent issue that came up that we didn't even discuss in advance. So that showed me that they were thinking further than the assignment in front of them." The reflective qualities of Diana's assignment helped to promote empathy and broaden the scope of student understanding to consider the community at large.

Active and collaborative instruction that elicits reflective thinking is a powerful tool for increasing cognitive performance and memory. However, it can also provide students with the skills to understand themselves and their communities on a deeper level. This extension of critical thinking allowed for personal and emotional connections to be explored and can lead to an evolution in student understandings of complex ideas.

Application. When students are able to apply what they have learned through active and collaborative activities as opposed to didactic instruction, deeper understanding can be achieved. Moreover, students can apply what they have learned through a myriad of active and collaborative opportunities. However, presentations and discussions were the most prominent approaches taken by participants.

Presentations. Presentations as a form of active and collaborative application was one strategy participants used to increase knowledge comprehension. Yet, participant application of this strategy was in no way monolithic. Some operationalized presentations as an informal way for students to apply knowledge. Others saw presentations as a more formal summative

endeavor. Still others disavowed the use of presentations, noting their potentially negative effects.

Laverne defined presentations as an informal formative exercise that allowed students to practice newly acquired skills. When asked to describe student presentations in her classes, she relayed that often, right after she had taught something,

> I will have students come up to the board and work a problem. . . solve a problem. . . explain a concept. . . I'll ask a student to come up and present it to the class. I'll say, does everyone understand the difference between financial investment and investment spending? Everyone says "Absolutely." I say, "okay, you come on up, explain it."

She said, "it keeps them on their toes" but also acknowledged that "I always reassure them, I'm right here." She continued, as if speaking to her students, "You know, if you get confused, ask me a question." That help however does not always have to come from the instructor. Laverne revealed that at times students "teach each other." Laverne's formative approach allowed for the important display of knowledge comprehension, but also allowed students to actively and collaboratively practice their skills.

Diana's definition of "presentation" was two pronged, recognizing the benefits of both informal and formal presentations. But, she offered an illustrative example of a formal summative presentation that leveraged an active and collaborative approach. The presentation component to her "childcare center" project called for students to present, not once, but multiple times in a "job fair" type atmosphere where outside evaluators (faculty and staff assuming the roles of parents/would-be customers of these daycare centers) would listen and be able to ask questions to glean "all the information that a parent would need to make the decision about whether that was the childcare center for them and their children." This active and collaborative

summative assessment allowed students to illustrate not only their content knowledge but also their skill in defending and promoting their created product.

The daunting and somewhat intimidating nature of presentations account for Amy's abandonment of formal presentation as a practice in her classroom. She indicated that although she had done it in the past, having students do in-class presentations was not one of her current instructional strategies. She stated:

> The ratio of what they were extracting versus the amount of stress they told me they felt . . . did not outweigh what I was trying to extract from them. And, I could extract from them the same content in less traumatic ways. So, I just opted to [not use it].

Buttressing this pedagogical decision, she stated,

> Never. . . do I claim that public speaking is one of the skills they're learning, nor do I find myself to be a public speaking expert. So, I was like, look, "if public speaking is freaking you guys out, I'd much rather you make me like a pamphlet on this topic or write me an essay." Right. . . we don't have to do it in this traumatic way.

Amy, while not completely disavowing the pedagogical worth of presentations, decided that in her classes the potential harm outweighed the good. She perceived this active and collaborative strategy as anxiety producing and discontinued its use.

Presentations can be used as a means for students to demonstrate their understanding of material; these demonstrations can happen in a myriad of ways—informally as well as formally. And while this can serve as an effective active and collaborative instructional approach, it can be stressful for some students. While most acknowledged having their students do in-class presentations, they were done at relatively lower frequencies than discussions.

Discussions. Discussion was an active and collaborative strategy used by all participants that allowed their students to verbalize thoughts and engage in academic conversations in order to process and evaluate course material. Participating in discussions was one means for students to apply what they learned and verbally articulate those understandings, while also creating new understandings. Participants described both in-class discussion and out-of-class discussion. In class discussions were often directed and facilitated by the instructors but at times were reported to be student-led. Out-of-class discussions happened much more organically, were usually not required, but were often seen as positive reinforcement to in-class learning.

In-class discussion factored heavily into all of the participants' instructional repertoires. Josh took a more instructor led approach to this active and collaborative enterprise in an effort to elicit participation from a broader range of students. He noted that discussions in his class are played out in two major formats—small group and large group. Josh recalled at times "standing in front of the class and we're all talking," but he likes to precede this by having students "break into small groups" to begin these conversations. Considering that some of his students are "shy talking in front of an entire class," he created "groups of two, three, four people," which allowed students to "talk in that group" before topics were discussed "as a broader class." Josh noted that, in order to get the desired participation in his large-class discussions, he has to "kind of work around certain barriers that might be there," such as the aforementioned introverted dispositions of some students who "have information they'd like to share" but are reluctant. Scaffolding the discussions into levels made the large-group dialogue and intellectual exchange more accessible and palatable to these "shy" students but required more instructor direction.

Diana prided herself in advancing a more student-led approach to discussions in her class. She pointed out that "discussions play a huge part" in her overall class design "each class they

have something, a pair-share, turn and talk" or larger discussion. Moreover, she expressed a comfort in allowing students to "guide the conversation." Diana argued that these student-led discussions are important because they allow "students to share their perspectives and understanding of the content through their experiences as well as see and hear others' perspectives and application of the content to their experiences." As an advocate for a student-centered/student-led approach to education, student leadership in discussions was paramount to Diana.

Although participants viewed out-of-class discussions as active and collaborative dialogues that could support students in processing and evaluating course material, participants rarely required students to participate in them. Yet, these dinner table discussions could, according to Josh, serve to facilitate increased generational understanding. He hypothesized that students were discussing classroom topics such as "racial inequality, gender inequality, sexual orientation, transgender issues, um, challenges in the education system" outside the classroom. He noted that out-of-class discussions could serve to:

> bridge some of those, maybe, generational gaps with social issues where traditionally you might have different perspectives on topics related to the generation that somebody's in. But, if you can talk about it in a more academic sense, it takes away some of the emotion that might be there.

While his class contained no out-of-class discussion requirement, Josh noted that he tried to contextualize these topics for his students and provided them "an academic framework for understanding these different things." Josh saw the worth in out-of-class discussions as a powerful active and collaborative tool. Interestingly, this was not a requirement in his class, although reasons for this were not provided.

While the frequency at which out-of-class discussions happened is hard to quantify, in-class discussion was the most operationalized of all active and collaborative strategies used by participants. These academic conversations were valued as ways for students to apply and express what they learned while also learning from the unique perspective exposed by their peers. Whether instructor led, student led, or organically emerging in areas outside the classroom, this active and collaborative strategy was lauded above all others as an effective tool for instruction.

Team/Partner Work. While all participants acknowledged providing opportunities for students to work with one another actively and collaboratively during instructional time to gain a better understanding of content, the ways in which they achieved this varied significantly from participant to participant. Some team/partner work opportunities were impromptu, while others were painstakingly arranged in advance. Moreover, out-of-class team/partner work was objectionable to participants due to their perceptions of community college life outside of class.

Beverly's group work seemed to manifest on a needs basis. She stated, "If I'm not feeling them being engaged, I will stop whatever I'm doing and come up with something and go, okay, find a partner." She saw team/partner work as something that could be used to energize the students and re-engage them. Through connecting with each other, they could reconnect with the content. She stated:

> That's one of those spur of the moment things you gotta be ready to do with a dead class. You can't let them be dead, right? You gotta get in there and then, you know, that becomes the collaborative part. . . . I might have X, Y, and Z group, um, come up with the pros for something A, B, and C groups have to come up with the cons of something, right? And then they have to debate each other.

Beverly leveraged the active and collaborative practice of group work in an ad hoc fashion when it was needed. She saw the power of working collaboratively and the benefit of leveraging this to get her students reengaged in the learning process.

Diana's "daycare center" activity, however, required much planning and forethought. Yet, Diana viewed the time she spent on planning and implementation of this complex collaborative activity as important, because it provided students an "opportunity to work with others who were similar or different from them" and to make collaborative decisions. Diana's description of student requirements for this project spotlights its complexity. Students had to determine "the name of the daycare center" and identify "what activities or resources that would be needed and used at the daycare center." They had to determine "the age of the children that [they] accepted in the center," as well as "what types of physical, cognitive and social activities must be included" in instruction. All of these had to be tied to newly acquired knowledge on child development. Moreover, as discussed in an earlier section, the summative assessment of this work was a complex but effective "job fair" style presentation. Diana stated of her project, "It definitely does promote teamwork and partner work." This long term, well planned, summative project was an active and collaborative means of assessing student learning but also a chance for students to hone their teamwork skills over an extended period.

Notably, student collaboration facilitated by this study's participants largely stopped at the classroom door. Required out-of-class team/partner work was overwhelmingly sparse for all study participants. One of the major reasons for this was the perception that community college students often have family, work, or other responsibilities that make it difficult for them to align schedules with other classmates. These challenges were exhibited best through the words of

Amy. When asked how often her students work together outside of regularly scheduled class time stated, “very little” before explaining:

> I know that some of my students are doing their homework in the library at three in the afternoon and an equal number, if not more, are doing their homework at 4:30 in the morning when their kid’s asleep. . . . If you’re going to do collaborative work outside of the classroom, there has to be some way that acknowledges those very different needs.

Amy expressed “I don’t want one person to be punished for another person’s needs.” Amy’s perception of her students’ lives outside of class precluded her assigning out-of-class active and collaborative activities.

Similarly, Julia acknowledged only having her students collaborate outside of class a “small amount” of time. She argued that her students often had unique needs, specifically around “flexibility and their availability.” The difficultly in trying to “ensure that [she was] setting them up for success to actually meet, um, as a group” presented a significant dilemma.

Beverly and Josh, also found that group work outside of class presented a difficult, and perhaps, an unobtainable goal for their students. Beverly answered with an emphatic “zero” when queried about the frequency at which she required out-of-class collaboration. Likewise, Josh explained that for his students, any out-of-class team/partner work was infrequent and “not the norm” and that “trying to expect them to be able to be getting together outside of class can be challenging.”

While not discounting the worth of working together in pairs or groups, participants did not see it a reasonable request to ask their students to do this outside of established classroom hours. While providing students opportunities to work together was something that all participants valued on some level and implemented on some level, largely this was within the

physical classroom. Some of these opportunities were more regimented and spanned several class periods, while others were generated in the moment to re-capture student attention. But, they all ultimately had the same goal—cognitive development.

Problem Solving. Through active and collaborative opportunities for problem solving, participants provided their students with a means to increase the acquisition and retention of knowledge, as well offering opportunities to be innovative and to work towards a goal. However, some participants saw "problem solving" as limiting for students in that it implies the quest for *the* correct answer.

Bryce, like most of the participants, saw problem-posing as a pivotal action in the active and collaborative instructional process. Ergo, he viewed his students as potential problem solvers, and he encouraged them to be innovative thinkers in this process. Bryce, specifically citing his "gender" project, talked about its problem-solving elements, positing, "What they're doing is they're trying to think of the best way, the most functional way for a society's work to be done." Indicating a need for students to become innovative thinkers, he postulated that in order for this problem-solving endeavor to be effective, students must first break out of the binary perceptions of gender. He stated the need for students to suppress the presuppositions that "the squares are going to do this, and the circles are going to do that, because men do this, and women do that." Through this active and collaborative endeavor, his students were encouraged to abandon the status quo and instead to be innovative. Bryce noted "It allows them to kind of think of the best way" that a society can function, instead of just working within the gender confines that actually exist in society. This active and collaborative assignment prompted Bryce's students to escape existing confines and think of innovative answers to difficult questions.

The idea that students are best motivated if working towards a goal inspired the active and collaborative problem-solving opportunities Diana extended to her students. While acknowledging that a significant portion of the community college population is made up of adolescent dual enrollment students, Diana nonetheless embraced the ideas of adult learning theory and the maxim that mature learners are motivated by "problem solving" and "driven to a goal or, or a reason." Consequently, goal oriented problem-solving was a major piece of her instructional repertoire. Her "daycare center" activity allowed students to "work to solve problems and understand or master the content." Diana said that students had to "work from an idea to implementation"—they had to "problem solve" and "identify what resources they needed." Week after week, her students were working towards achieving short-term and long-term goals "not only for the childcare center, but resources they needed to even develop the project." Students had to establish short-term goals related to what "would they need to prepare for the following week." They also had to make sure that "everybody knew what they were doing," and "they had to manage their time," so they could ultimately reach their long-term goal of creating and presenting their fictional daycare centers. Diana leveraged her knowledge of adult learning theory and used active and collaborative learning to foster a goal-oriented approach to teaching and learning.

Interestingly, Beverly shied away from acknowledging the use of a problem-solving approach in her classroom, suggesting that problem solving denoted the need to find the correct answer. Beverly felt her class was not intrinsically focused on students solving problems, but instead students honing their "questioning and inquiry" skills. She professed to avoid saying things like "this is the right way, or this is the wrong way." Instead, Beverly labeled the act of discovery and the ability to ask effective questions—as opposed to finding answers—as the true

take-away. Yet, despite this anti-problem-solving posture, Beverly's focus on questioning and inquiry did have a problem-solving quality which was operationalized through active and collaborative learning opportunities.

Problem solving opportunities created and applied by these problem-posing educators were done in ways that both encouraged innovation and leveraged the type of goal-oriented approach to education that is preferable to adult students. Correct answers were not the key impetus for these active and collaborative activities, but instead, the goal was to inspire a quest for knowledge acquisition and the honing of important soft skills through collectively figuring out possible solutions to a difficult problem.

Real World Relevance. Active and collaborative instruction rooted in real-world examples was employed in a variety of ways by all instructors and provided students opportunities to contextualize curricular understandings in a relatable manner. Participants often employed active and collaborative strategies to draw parallels between a student's daily life and the material being covered in class in an effort to maximize learning. Participants contextualized content in a way that could provide long-term benefits to students in both their personal and work lives. Yet, none of the participants leveraged the strategy of service learning, which can impart real world knowledge. Although participants viewed service learning as a strategy that increased academic attainment and deepened curricular understandings, none of the seven participants indicated that they were currently using service learning as a part of their instructional repertoire.

Using active and collaborative learning to help draw parallels between a student's personal life and the material being covered in class can serve as both a powerful instructional tool and provide students with valuable life skills. Amy effectively leveraged active and

collaborative learning in the hopes of helping students come to a profoundly important lesson regarding communication—what is being said by one person is not always understood by the other. Her "communication" assignment, which was discussed earlier, was based on a strategy used in couples counseling. In discussing the real-world relevance of this assignment, Amy stated (as if she is speaking to her students), "Why the hell would I do this on the first or second day of a couples counseling program?" She explained:

> Because you and your partner might be having an argument where neither of you are necessarily wrong, you're just seeing it from different perspectives, or you're trying desperately to explain your feelings and your partner's just not understanding when you say, "I'm sad," what that, what that really means.

Then, she contextualized this for the students by explaining that often "we just talk at each other and do not communicate." This explanation provided students with a way to connect the coursework to their lives—potentially helping them in their personal lives by making them more effective or at least more knowledgeable communicators.

Julia saw active and collaborative learning as a means of inculcating useful workplace skills into the classroom. She speculated that once her students left her classroom, they would, in their work lives, be asked to accomplish tasks that are new and daunting—"They might be unfamiliar with how to tackle it, but they need to find what way works best for them." She viewed the tasks accomplished in her classes as helping students to hone these skills. She posited that work such as her "infographic" assignment (an assignment requiring student to access and compress content, visually represent that information, and then present it to their classmates) helped students to sharpen skills related to decision making and communication, and she expressed that being able to "share or present information" in verbal or written form was an

essential skill for the workplace. Julia further noted that oftentimes in general education courses, "Students just try to muddle through and they don't try to realize how that material can actually apply to their future career goals or their current life." She posited that students often fail to realize the "long-term" importance "versus just trying to earn a grade." But, through active and collaborative lessons that encourage the development of these soft skills, students were not only learning the material but also developing employable competencies.

Service learning was not currently being used by any of this study's participants. Josh provided the most compelling reason for having students engage in service learning, yet he did not disclose why he discontinued using this powerful active and collaborative learning tool. When he did have his students engage in this process in the past, they did it "collectively as a group" and in collaboration with an English class. He explained that the locations where his students volunteered, including food banks and food donation centers, were all "centered on the idea of basic needs and helping people, um, in need." While the service learning experience itself was not graded, students were required to "write a paper related to what they had done" which was graded. These papers, written in the English class, were "related to basic needs and poverty and things of that nature." Josh noted that while it is hard to quantify the impact of his student's service learning, he posited that it likely "helped open their eyes" to the "magnitude of the challenges that we face in our communities." He remarked that these challenges become "a little bit more personal once you go and actually volunteer in those circumstances." Yet, while service learning seems to hold much potential, Josh and others have discontinued its use.

Real-world examples and experiences provided through active and collaborative learning not only enhanced comprehension but also provided opportunities for deep learning and skill building beneficial to both personal and professional endeavors. Unfortunately, the immersive

experiences afforded through service learning were not utilized by any of the instructors interviewed.

RQ3: What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

This study's finding revealed that, while the participants saw the worth in active and collaborative learning and had all utilized active and collaborative learning in their instruction, there were factors that hindered the implementation of this instructional approach, as well as factors that supported it.

Barriers to Active and Collaborative Learning

Participants saw the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-cultural climate (the culture wars) as barriers to active and collaborative learning implementation. The pressure to maintain equality in group work and address differentiated instruction also presented difficult hurdles due to the pedagogical complexities created by this instructional approach. Finally, a perceived lack of time was widely regarded as a major obstacle to active and collaborative instructional implementation.

Aftermath of COVID-19. COVID-19 was an illness that emerged in late 2019 and resulted in massive and long-term closure of most educational entities in the United States by March of 2020. Upon the partial resumption of classes in the fall of 2020, the contagious nature of this virus necessitated a move away from collaborative learning in the face-to-face classroom. Fear of close interaction with peers created a long-term fear in some instructors and students in regard to their comfort with collaborative learning.

Amy seemed to have gravitated away from active and collaborative learning more than any other study participant due to COVID-19. The anxiety associated with the interactive nature

of this instructional approach definitely presented a barrier to its use for her. She noted, “What I used to do pre-pandemic looks very different than what I do now,” noting that when face-to-face instruction resumed during the 2020-2021 academic year, she “didn’t feel super comfortable having my kids [students] do small group work.” Amy’s pre-pandemic approach had heavily leveraged the flipped classroom model. In order for that model to work, attendance was much more heavily mandated. However, this approach in a post-COVID-19 world was, to Amy, untenable. She noted:

> COVID does still exist. The flu still exists, the superbugs of our children, the RSV flu combos exist, and I just don’t feel comfortable forcing attendance and simultaneously urging them to care for themselves. Maybe one day we'll get back to it, um, but right now, yeah, I think there’s a massive just social barrier to active learning in the classroom.

She explained that she also still felt “deeply uncomfortable forcing them [students] into small group work and pair work when they have to be within six feet of another person,” arguing “there’s still anxiety—particularly with immunocompromised individuals—about spreading illness.”

Bryce observed the anxiety connected to COVID-19 in his classes as well. Whereas he used to allow students to pick their own groups for projects, he now does this for them. He noted that:

> After the pandemic, there’s a lot of social anxiety. And, when you say “get into groups of four,”a lot of the students are anxious about even getting in groups when they're in control. So, if I am in control of putting them into groups, they feel much more comfortable because they don’t have a choice over the matter.

Bryce did not, however, explain *why* he believed removing students from the grouping process made them more comfortable. However, having adequate personal space while working together was indicated by some as being important. Julia referenced the need for and importance of adequate classroom space, noting, “We want them [students] to feel comfortable. Um, you know, since COVID, some students still don't want to sit right next to each other.”

Julia also explained that, “Prior to the pandemic, I would. . . strongly encourage group work in the classroom, right? I would say, ‘hey, you know, you're going to learn better if you're in a big group,’ but now it’s optional.” While she still strongly encourages this, she noted that she still has “students who will wear masks in the classroom,” and “out of respect for them,” she has altered her assignments where they can be done individually *or* in a group. Repeating what she would say to a class, she stated, “Hey, if you’d rather do this by yourself, that’s no problem. Um, of course when you mix it up with other people” it will result in “a more dynamic and engaging” class.

This ability to, as Julia stated, “mix it up with other people” is something that Laverne noted as a major loss during the pandemic. She stated, “There’s a hunger” for “human connection” in the post-pandemic classroom—students “need that connection.” However, while most participants have reinstated active and collaborative learning into their classrooms, they all remain dedicated to respecting students who still perceive working closely with one another in groups to be dangerous.

Culture Wars. Several participants spoke of the perceived hot-button issues discussed in their classes and how they deal with the potential fall-out from this in the face of the current culture war climate. Culture wars is a term used by some to describe the existing socio-political divisions and conflicts. While exploring issues deemed by many to be culturally sensitive within

BSS classes is in alignment with the curriculum, some have misinterpreted these explorations as liberal indoctrination.

Diana noted that, due to the nature of her class, a lot of the topics she teaches can be contentious and asserted, “So, I put it out there from the beginning, we’re going to talk about a lot of controversial topics.” Diana saw these controversial topics as a great way to address the ideological divisions existing in the world today. She explained, “So we start off talking about our differences, and then we work backwards to our similarities.”

But, discussing these issues collectively can present barriers to active and collaborative learning. As Josh stated, “It just presents more challenges than it would be if it's a straight up lecture. If you’re just giving information to somebody, you’re not having to deal with that.” He posited, if you open these controversial topics up for discussion, students may present:

> competing claims that are out there, how it’s covered differently by different media outlets, what policies do we see being proposed by people, how we measure the public opinion, and then what kind of things have been changed as a result of that.

Josh supposed, “Some topics are so controversial that people don’t want to touch them.”

Specifically citing white privilege and sexual orientation, Josh discussed some of the difficulties that have surfaced when addressing these topics in an open-ended active and collaborative instructional format. He relayed that there were times when students would “use outdated language that is not socially appropriate in the classroom,” noting that this was a result of a “lack of knowledge about some of these different types of issues and how we’re supposed to talk about certain things.” But, he also conceded that it was at times difficult to address “why those things are inappropriate, but also try not to call somebody out for their behavior.”

Moreover, Josh explained that providing a venue for these discussions can be interpreted by some as indoctrination. “Look at what’s happening in Florida” he stated, addressing the challenges related to what teachers can and cannot teach in their classrooms. While currently centered in k-12 education, Josh expressed that he was concerned that similar efforts may be embraced by the legislature in his state and that lawmakers may start targeting community colleges “which then will impact what [he] can do in the classroom.”

Describing an incident at another college where he adjuncts, Josh paraphrased one student’s end-of-semester evaluation as saying, “I could see his political, um, ideology starting to come through more in the lectures. And I believe it impacted how my assignments were graded.” Josh noted, “Not only did someone interpret those things and try to see a certain political perspective, they thought that it impacted the way that I assessed their work.” He emphatically stressed that this was not something that he did and explained “I try to be as neutral as I possibly can.” However, he posited that the very nature of his courses and discipline calls for students to look at the “inequality within society,” and, therefore, is unfairly “pegged as being, like liberal indoctrination or something like that.” Josh stressed that, even though issues were explored through the lens of data, he was still “pointing out inequality.” Despite the fact that he was not “trying to change anything” or “tell them who to vote for,” Josh conceded that these discussions were still seen as “politically charged.”

Beverly stated, “I teach [DISCIPLINE], so you know, I could go on, uh, a social justice warfront, but that’s not part of my learning outcomes,” noting that, “I think that’s something, now with cultural wars, that we really need to think about and be more considerate of.” Suggesting that there may be temptation at times for some instructors to venture outside the

bounds of unbiased instruction, Beverly stressed the need to be extremely careful that “we're not overstepping” into that realm of indoctrination. To this end, Josh stated:

> We’re right in the middle of culture wars, and I talk about this stuff all day and um, I try to choose my words incredibly carefully because I don’t want to end up on some, some uh, social media site, conservative media. . . accusing me of trying to indoctrinate students and things of that nature.

Being labeled as someone trying to instill biased/partisan perspectives, as opposed to providing a balanced and impartial venue for open discussion, was a worrisome concern for some instructors.

Maintaining Equality in Group Work. The need to deal with students equally in active and collaborative activities was a barrier that emerged from some of the participants. This concern was expressed when discussing team/partner work that was done inside and outside of class.

The ability to assess individual student participation and effort on collaborative projects equally weighed heavily on both Bryce and Josh. But, for Bryce, the barrier of equally assessing collaborative work done outside of class was so insurmountable that he abandoned out-of-class team/partner work altogether. This abandonment was due to the difficulty in evaluating the work being done—the obstacle of assigning fair and appropriate grades. The fear of some students doing the bulk of the work and others doing very little or nothing at all was a concern, particularly because the work was taking place outside of Bryce’s watchful eye. Bryce admitted that he was still searching for a better way to evaluate these interactions because he wanted to discern “how they work in groups outside of class,” lamenting “all I see is the presentation.”

Assessing student work equally was also a barrier for Josh, but one that he was able to overcome. Josh posited that his students really did not like group work because of their perception that "not everyone's going to pull their weight." Josh referred to this as "social loafing" and speculated that "the more people that are added to a task, the less responsibility each person feels." This is why Josh tried to keep groups to three to four students.

But, accountability in these group activities was also important to Josh. Therefore, at the conclusion of large group-work projects Josh's students were required to rate the members of their teams. Josh, as if talking directly to his students, stated, "I want you to tell me specifically what they [referring to the other students in the group] did and why they should deserve that score" positing that this was a way to avoid groups claiming "oh, everyone did a great job, or no one did a great job." Social loafing was a barrier that Bryce and Josh navigated in different ways but both in an effort to maintain equality in assessing group work.

But, at times assessing equally was less important than assessing equitably. This quest for equity was something valued by participants, but at times difficult to always provide while executing active and collaborative lessons. Julia noted that she relied "heavily on differentiated instruction" and suggested that "Learners have a preferred way of receiving information and having a varied or differentiated approach is an ideal way of engaging students." Similarly, Laverne described how important it was to remember that "All students are in different places and they're all at different levels and they're all different types of learners." She asserted that "As an instructor, we have to be very malleable." She said that one of the first things she learned upon coming to MFCC was "You have to meet students, uh, where they're at" and explained:

> Some students are kinesthetic learners, some students, you know, can understand written words much better than any other type of learning experience. So, I think we have to

> consider that in our classrooms. So, we have to be flexible as instructors, we evolve with our classes, and every class is different.

Concluding, Laverne stated, “It’s not a, a one size fits all.”

This desire to equitably address all learners was also expressed by Amy, who discussed her flexibility in accepting assignments in a multitude of formats, noting, “One of my students did their signature assignment in a PowerPoint [as opposed to the assigned essay] because that’s just where his brain worked. And like, I don’t particularly, I don’t care. The content came out well for that student.” This is a part of building what Beverly called a “non-threatening, safe environment for them [students] to learn however they best learn.”

However, creating such an environment can be a difficult and time-consuming endeavor. Beverly, the mother of a son who has autism, is keenly aware of the needs of neurodivergent students. Speaking of her son she stated “active and collaborative learning is personally, psychologically, not a good fit.” Continuing and reorienting to the classroom she stated:

> I had a, a class this past semester, and I know that at least three individuals in the class were on the spectrum. Them talking to a partner in the spur of the moment was not good for them. And when they didn’t do it, I didn’t bring it out. I didn’t point to them, I didn't, and they did well in the class, but it, that, was not good for them.

Beverly also noted that active and collaborative learning is not always a good fit for:

> some of our students with a different cultural background, because they have been taught via their cultural norms and values that you don’t ask questions, you don’t talk, you go in the classroom and, uh, the teachers the authority, and you sit there and you be quiet.

She noted, “I have to remember that and not hold it against them. . . . This is just not comfortable for them, who am I to judge?” With all this in mind, Beverly has strived to create a “learning

environment that safely allows students to bring in what they know, to be weaved in, quilted, with other ways of knowing." Active and collaborative learning is a part of that quilt, but it has to be incorporated thoughtfully.

Yet, Julia expressed, "If you have a group of introverts in your class or students that just do not want to have an in-person conversation," it can present a real barrier to active and collaborative learning. While Julia posited that "personality types" are really out of the control of the instructor, Diana expressed a contradictory view, arguing that at times those students who are reluctant to participate in an active and collaborative way at the beginning of a term "are the very ones who are standing up in front of the class, uh, sharing on a group project" at the end of the term. Indeed, some instructors see it as a part of their job to help students step into a space that may be uncomfortable in order to help them grow.

Laverne talked about the need to "be deliberate to involve everybody" including those "passive learners"—the students who are "listening, but they're not engaging." She spoke of the need to "find the person who's silent, who has an opinion, who has a voice, but is not sharing that voice" and encouraging them to do so. Similarly, Diana has sought to facilitate personal growth by "letting them [students] know that [she] can help them get from now [beginning of the term], until the end of the course, and that they're going to be fine."

The need to assess students equally was a struggle that resulted in the abandonment of an activity by one instructor and timely modifications by another. However, the need to differentiate instruction to suit the needs of neurodivergent students, students from different cultural backgrounds, or students who are introverted or just a little intimidated, was something embraced by all participants. Despite the fact that this presented a hurdle that had to be jumped, these participants were willing to take the leap.

Time. Participants perceived that a lack of time required to successfully deploy active and collaborative learning could also present a barrier. Time was largely defined in two ways. First, face-to-face class time was often viewed as sacred and something to be cautiously apportioned. While active and collaborative learning was seen as an effective instructional approach, it also consumed the limited class time needed to "cover" important material. Time also referred to the planning time needed to develop the engaging and interactive activities associated with active and collaborative learning.

While neither Josh nor Laverne cited time as a barrier to active and collaborative learning, all other study participants did. One of the recurring issues related to time was centered around the aforementioned transition at MFCC from a 16-week traditional format to an eight-week blended approach, where time was divided between in-class and asynchronous online instruction.

Diana cited the modality shift as a challenge, explaining that with the reduced face-to-face interaction, often a class was half-way over before students were comfortable enough to really begin to engage with one another. She noted:

> In a 16-week course, you can afford to take the first three weeks to really weave those students together, like as one fabric. But, in an eight-week class, three weeks is almost half of the class. And, if you go through half of the class and you don't have that community, it minimizes or it can impact how much active engagement you have between students and with the instructor because they haven't had an opportunity to become familiar or comfortable.

Diana saw that peer-to-peer and instructor-to-student familiarity as extremely important but something that needs time to mature.

Amy also commented on the struggles with moving instruction to an eight-week format, pointing out that one of her classes only "met twice a week for 45 minutes. That's all I had with them." Continuing, she stated, "when you only have them for an hour and a half a week, a lot of that hour and a half gets spent on content." She noted that, due to this limited amount of time, she felt that she "can't spend 75 minutes doing a flipped classroom assignment when I get them for 90." She posited, "You just have to do, kind of a cost analysis of, what do my students need the most right now to be successful?" She argued that oftentimes that need was for further explanation of the content, which came at the expense of active and collaborative learning.

When Julia talked about time as a barrier, it was related to the time needed for lesson construction. She noted, "It can be time consuming, uh, to create those types of lessons." She stated that faculty "have a certain amount of office hours. We have a certain amount of class time," and while you may have a great idea for a "collaborative assignment that you think is going to be amazing," you have to consider those time limitations when deciding if and when it can be done. She further explained that, even after these assignments were created, they could not simply be taken off the figurative shelf each semester, noting that:

> You can only use these, some of these, active and collaborative strategies for so long because they might become outdated if they're, you know, um, specific to the culture or the students that you're teaching or the time that you're teaching, um, you'll have to go back in and refresh it. . . . Active and collaborative learning is a process and it is really high touch. So, it can just be a little bit, uh, more time consuming on the faculty side of it.

Participants viewed the "high-touch" nature of active and collaborative learning as exacerbated further when considering that most MFCC instructors teach at least 18 credit hours per semester.

Reduced in-class time was seen as a significant barrier to most participants. While some opted to eliminate active and collaborative activities to accommodate for MFCC's eight-week instructional term format, others modified their instructional approaches to keep these activities. However, the time-consuming nature of planning active and collaborative assessments also presented an omnipresent barrier for instructors to traverse.

Facilitators of Active and Collaborative Learning

While a lack of time was seen as a barrier to active and collaborative learning, time was also conceptualized as a necessary tool to facilitate active and collaborative learning. MFCC's administrative support for active and collaborative learning, support of instructors to teach topics that are perceived as controversial through this approach, as well as the utility of professional development were all seen as facilitators as well .

Time. A lack of time can be a barrier to active and collaborative learning. However, more time can serve as a facilitator. Participants acknowledge that MFCC's shift to an eight-week blended approach, where time was divided between in-class and asynchronous online instruction, called for a shift in how in-class time was allocated. Time needed to be maximized in class and some instruction had to move online.

Earlier, it was explained that Diana saw the move to eight-week blended classes as a challenge to active and collaborative learning due to the amount of time it takes to develop the community for this type of learning to effectively take place. But instead of abandoning the active and collaborative approach, she advised, "You need to do multiple things to make sure that you are building that community on the first day." She also spoke of leveraging online interactions to maximize time in class and noted, "maybe you give them a discussion online that also helps to further the discussion in the community building." Diana, did not use the reduced

face-to-face time as a justification for moving away from active and collaborative learning. Instead she commented, “it’s not impossible, it just requires a little bit more intention.” Time, no matter how much, was understood by Diana as a necessary tool to facilitate active and collaborative learning.

Similarly, Bryce’s creative approach to the reduced face-to-face instructional time was to place a lot of his lectures online. He expressed that while the move to eight-week blended instruction did cut into his lecture time, it did not detract from his active and collaborative time, which “I guess was the goal,” remarked Bryce. While Bryce found a way to continue implementing active and collaborative learning into a reduced face-to-face time frame, he did acknowledge that in-class time was a factor, noting “a 75-minute class is better than a 50-minute class for active learning. I’ll just say that.”

Indeed, more time can help facilitate more active and collaborative learning, and most participants saw time as a commodity that had to be used wisely. While some looked at MFCC’s new eight-week terms through a “glass half-empty” lens, others looked at it through a “glass half-full” lens and maximized in class time to facilitate active and collaborative endeavors.

Administrative Support and Professional Development. Administrative support was noted as a key facilitator of active and collaborative learning. This support can be manifested through supporting this instructional approach but also through supporting instructors who use this approach to teach topics that are perceived to be controversial. Additionally, professional development was seen as a tool to help facilitate more active and collaborative learning.

Amy labeled the active and collaborative approach as “one of the quantitative best practices, and so there’s kind of universal support for it,” relaying that she has “never felt unsupported as far as requiring student attendance or anything like that, that does make active

learning more conducive." She further expressed, "I've always felt the full support of my administration" in regards using active and collaborative learning in the classroom.

As a preface to his statement about the importance of administrative support of active and collaborative learning, Josh provided this scenario concerning critical race theory and noted:

> I feel it's important. . . to discuss topics in the classroom that are relevant to the content and that are relevant to what's being talked about in the news, right? So, I want to make sure I can have those conversations where someone doesn't go to administration and say they're talking about critical race theory in [DISCIPLINE], and then someone in, in higher in the administration's like, oh, well we don't want to touch anything like that.

Then Josh stated, "I think it's easy in today's climate for faculty to be a little bit more tentative about not knowing if someone is going to support you." He continued, "I want to make sure that it's not, um, held against me as like my own personal ideology as opposed to trying to teach them what the content basically says." Josh expressed wanting to be supported by administration and for administration to understand that these are concepts being taught and not an instructor trying to "push some agenda."

The fact that BSS classes tend to focus heavily on social issues that may be viewed as divisive by some, caused some participants to view administrative support as important. However, it was not indicated whether this support was being received or not.

But administrative support can also manifest itself in less obvious ways, such as in the form of professional growth opportunities that support active and collaborative learning. Laverne mentioned the administrative support for programs coming from the MFCC's CTL. Noting one particular CTL program, Laverne stated, "They gave us the opportunity to share our concerns"

and how to "promote student learning at the college." She further noted, "So yeah, I do think the school, um, does support us in that way."

Support of active and collaborative learning can be manifested in a variety of ways. Time can serve as a facilitator, yet as participants intimated, time was a limited resource that must be used wisely. Administrative support was also key, not only supporting the use of innovative strategies, namely active and collaborative learning, but also supporting a more active and collaborative approach to addressing sensitive topics. Finally, one participant acknowledged that professional development can serve as a way to promote and support instructors as they try to become more innovative in their classrooms.

Summary

This chapter explored MFCC's BSS instructors' knowledge of active and collaborative learning and served to identify the factors that present barriers to this type of instruction and the agents that help promote and foster it. Two rounds of qualitative interviews with seven MFCC BSS instructors showed that these instructors' understandings of active and collaborative learning were comparable. They stressed the need for both an instructional director and facilitator of learning. They touted the importance of engagement, knowledge construction, and community. Yet, how they deployed, and how often they deployed, active and collaborative learning varied considerably. This variation was present not only from instructor to instructor, but also within the careers of individual instructors who expanded and contracted their use of active and collaborative learning due to internal and external influences. Moreover, while all participants shared an affinity for active and collaborative learning, each identified factors that hindered the approach, such as repercussions from COVID-19, fallout from the culture wars, the perceived need to maintain equality in group work, difficulties associated with differentiating

instruction, as well as a perceived lack of time. Interestingly, time was also noted as a facilitator of active and collaborative learning. In addition, several identified administrative support for active and collaborative learning, as well as professional development as agents that helped to advance this pedagogical approach.

Using the CCCSE inspired key active and collaborative learning constructs, as well as major themes taken from the CCCSE student survey, rich descriptions related to instructional practices were gleaned from the seven participants. Deductive and inductive analysis of interview and artifact data allowed for CCCSE inspired themes to be explored while remaining open to unique and emergent themes. Implications of these findings are explored in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter five further explores the findings presented in chapter four. Connections are presented between the existing literature and the findings for each of the three research questions. The remainder of the chapter discusses the implications of the study and finally presents recommendations for further research.

Comprehension of human behaviors and actions is an integral skill needed to confront the challenges facing society today, and the behavioral and social sciences play a significant role in resolving vital organizational, societal, and personal issues (National Academies, 2017). If an understanding of these behaviors is accepted as a key element to personal, local, or global problem solving, then degree granting institutions, including but not limited to community colleges, must not only require the completion of classes such as anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology, but also assure that these students truly learn the lessons that need to be learned in those classes. Students learn best by doing and retain more when engaged in the learning process with their peers. Therefore, if BSS instructors want to instill in their students lessons that they will retain long after classes are over, then active and collaborative learning must be utilized.

This study was therefore essential to better understand community college BSS instructors' knowledge of active and collaborative learning and to identify the factors that foster this instructional approach and present hurdles. This chapter was focused, in part, on exploring the implications of the findings in hopes of expanding the active and collaborative learning happening in BSS classrooms and addressing existing pedagogical barriers.

This study sought to expand the literature focused on community college pedagogy in general, instructional practices utilized in BSS classrooms, and active and collaborative learning

in IHLs. Despite the literature that spotlighted the propensity of BSS faculty to rely more heavily on didactic instruction, as opposed to engaging their students in active and collaborative learning opportunities, the instructional practices this study's participants reported using seemed to contradict this assumption. Study findings indicated that the participants possessed unique understandings of active and collaborative learning and valued the worth of this instructional approach. While accounts of how and when they deployed active and collaborative learning in participants' classrooms differed, there were commonalities identified in factors that served to hinder or support this approach to teaching and learning.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?

Participants' understandings of active and collaborative learning suggested they tended to view the concept as two separate entities as opposed to a singular construct. They also believed in the necessity of instructors playing the role of both director of learning and facilitator of learning. Additionally, they viewed engagement as a result of active and collaborative learning that could lead to the construction of knowledge. Finally, they saw the creation of community as both a prerequisite for active and collaborative learning and a fortuitous outcome of the process.

Participants' Conceptualizations of Active and Collaborative Learning

Participants conceptualized active and collaborative learning differently, often defining it as two separate entities—"active" and "collaborative." Collaboration was considered the more important of the two by some, but others viewed active learning as the end goal and saw collaboration as a way of reaching that goal. There were numerous connections between this study's findings and the existing literature.

Similar to this study's participants, scholars in the field have frequently parsed "active" and "collaborative" into two separate and distinct constructs. For example, Auerbach and Andrew (2018) examined instructor understandings of active, not collaborative, learning in IHL biology classrooms. Additionally, Smith and Burke (2017) and Hushman (2022) examined the impact of active, not collaborative, learning in university archeology and chemistry classes, respectively. Among the current study's participants, the term "active" alone was used more frequently than it was used in conjunction with "collaborative." Participants' conceptualizations of the term mirrored Bolliger and Armier's (2013) findings that active learning gives students opportunities to "actively engage with course content" and learn by doing (p. 201). Active learning happens when students are performing tasks or scrutinizing the tasks being completed (Keith-Le et al., 2020), and this study's participants' understandings of active learning were in alignment with this scholarship.

Collaboration was discussed by all participants, who often separated it from active learning and notably saw it as one way to actively engage students. This propensity to separate collaborative from active learning and specifically discuss collaborative learning as a singular entity echoes much of the existing literature (Bailey et al., 2015; Love, 2014; Millis, 2014; Tokke, 2020). Pederson's (2010) explanation of collaborative learning as something that happens when "everyone in the classroom is learning and teaching, with all working together to create a shared body of knowledge" (p. 198) aligned with participant views. Like Pederson (2010), participants valued the importance of students "working together" in order to "create a shared body of knowledge" (p. 198) and understood collaboration as a key element to effective instruction. Le et al. (2018) characterized instructors' understandings about student learning through small group collaboration as positive and noted that "working in groups students can

improve problem-solving" (Le et al., 2018, p. 122). However, of the 19 participants from Le et al.'s (2018) study, "only five teachers explicitly mentioned collaborative goals" (p. 122). Similarly, the current study's participants mentioned collaboration less often than they did active learning and at times viewed collaboration as a tool to make activity happen.

Participants' Conceptualizations of the Role of Instructors

The current study's participants all perceived the necessity of instructors being both directors and facilitators of learning in the classroom. Moreover, some saw the director role as a necessary prequel to the role of facilitator. Others spoke of utilizing a flipped classroom approach through utilizing technology for direct instruction outside of the classroom as a means of freeing up class time for the facilitation of active and collaborative learning. Still others saw the advantages of yielding a portion of class control to students and facilitating more than directing. Linkages between findings and the literature are evident.

A director of learning takes on the role of expert and embraces the "sage on the stage approach to education" with a lecture-heavy instructional approach where information "flows" from "teacher to the passive student" (Morrison, 2014, p. 7). This was an approach adopted by most participants as a part of their instructional repertoire. However, study participants often framed this didactic instruction as a precursor to active and collaborative learning. The college biology instructors studied by Auerbach and Andrews (2018) had a similar perception and noted that "managing active-learning logistics involves setting up a lesson so that students know what is expected of them" which "helps students engage more effectively and efficiently during class time" (p. 10). This statement denoted the need for faculty direction if effective student engagement is to occur.

Similar to the current study's participants, Auerbach and Andrews (2018) discussed the importance of facilitating discussions, the benefits of questioning as a means to facilitate student learning, and the fact that "facilitating opportunities for generative work often requires responding in real time to student thinking" (Auerbach and Andrews, 2018, p. 15). While facilitation was important to the participants in Auerbach and Andrew's (2018) study and the current study, both saw it as a sequel to direction.

Dyson et al. (2004) found that when instructors operate in the role of facilitator, they present students with "problems or goals" and then provide students an "opportunity to seek solutions to these problems," while the instructor facilitates the process (p. 235). The current study's participants similarly understood facilitation and provided those opportunities to their students. However, often (although not always), they felt the need to first serve as directors of learning (to provide students with information perceived to be pertinent to their active and collaborative success) and then as facilitators of learning.

Constructs Related to Participant Conceptualizations of Active and Collaborative Learning

Role of Engagement. Engagement factored heavily into participants' understandings of active and collaborative learning. They viewed engagement as a necessary strategy to move past the banking model of deposit and retrieval of information (Freire, 1970) and saw active and collaborative learning as a way to engage students in the learning process. Their views on the significance of engagement were largely aligned to the literature.

The participants in Auerbach and Andrews' (2018) study noted that they "commonly considered student motivation to engage" in classwork as important (p. 1); the current study's participants did as well. Nora et al. (2011) argued that "improving student persistence, achievement, and degree attainment" can all be repercussions of student engagement (p. 105).

Echoing this sentiment, the current study's participants often equated student success with student engagement and saw it as the first step to learning. Similarly, Svanum and Bigatti (2009) found that student engagement can play a large role in academic success and noted that this engagement can be defined in a myriad of ways including task-management and assignment completion, interactions with both peers and instructors, and class attendance. But that engagement often begins in the classroom, and much like Robinson and Kakela's (2006) findings that "by creating a space for fun, interaction, and trust, teachers and students together can build a learning environment that promotes engagement, deep learning, and meaning" (p. 202), the current study's participants felt the same. For example, Bryce operationalized his understating of engagement when he sought to capture the interest of students through leveraging the popular literary genre of science fiction. He felt that by engaging his students, he had created a space for major societal problems to be discussed and debated and for knowledge to be created. Similar to Bryce's understandings, Barkley and Major (2020) found that college faculty often "affirm the feeling aspect of engagement," and that they often describe their understanding of engagement through phrases such as "engaged students really care about what they're learning; they want to learn," or "engagement to me is passion and excitement" (p.6). Moreover, Barkley and Major (2020) posited that they do not see "behaviors as a type of engagement but rather as the outcome of engagement," and they "believe that student engagement leads to some specific learning behaviors" (pp. 10-11). The current study's participants saw the specific learning behaviors of knowledge construction and community building as the outcome of engagement. They understood engagement as opening the door to cognitive growth.

Role of Knowledge Construction. Knowledge construction similarly loomed large in participants' understandings of active and collaborative learning. Participants viewed knowledge

construction as one of the most important outcomes of active and collaborative learning. Essentially, participants viewed active and collaborative learning as an effective way for students to construct knowledge. Whether they referred to "knowledge construction" by name or just expressed the importance of students having opportunities to generate new knowledge through *doing*, participants' understandings were largely in alignment with the existing literature.

These opportunities allowed students to feel more academic control and responsibility, resulting in the creation of "lifelong learning and thinking skills" (Doyle and Doyle, 2021, p. 77), something also valued by the current study's participants and partially noted by Julia and Beverly, who saw in-class work as influencing students' future endeavors. Research suggested that the most effective instructors are more than just content experts. They are facilitators of the "social construction of knowledge" who work to provide opportunities for students to come together and collectively explore the material (Love et al., 2014, p. 178), or as Bryce stated, to let them "figure it out collectively."

Auerbach and Andrews (2018) noted that, "at the core of their thinking, participants evaluated whether instruction provided opportunities for students to generate ideas beyond what was presented to them" (p. 1), an act mentioned by several of the current study's participants. Mate et al. (2011) asserted that learning happens when an individual "constructs new knowledge," building on the "interaction between the knowledge which he has already available and the mental and material experiences which he is currently going through" (p. 246), a point stressed by Bryce. Moreover, a "teacher's interpersonal attitudes influence the process of knowledge construction on the part of the participants," particularly their affinity for collaborative learning (Mate et al. ,2011, p. 245). This affinity for both collaboration and

knowledge construction expressed by this study's participants helped them provide unique experiences to their students.

Role of Community. Finally, participants expressed that community was an important piece in understanding the puzzle of active and collaborative learning. Some participants expressed that community was needed for effective active and collaborative learning to take place, and that they, as instructors, were responsible for building such a space. Others perceived community as a serendipitous outcome of active and collaborative learning.

The benefits of active and collaborative learning in community building expressed by the current study's participants is also seen in the literature. While the need for community building to help strengthen cognitive development and aid in degree completion is not exclusive to the community college, it is arguably needed more in a commuter community college setting than at a residential college or university. This is in alignment with Tokke's (2020) findings that community college students, in comparison to their university counterparts, spent the majority of their time on campus in a classroom. Tokke (2020) found that the use of collaborative learning could help mitigate the loneliness and disconnection that these students often feel. While all participants acknowledge the importance of community, Josh, in alignment with Tokke (2020), noted that active and collaborative learning can help students feel "connected to the classroom, to the campus and the college."

Similarly, Amy noted the importance of helping her students to forge friendships in class and recognized community building as one of her instructional objectives. This importance was echoed in the work of Elliot et al. (2016) who found that:

> a sense of community is vital to the success of today's college student. Students who report feeling a sense of community in the classroom are more likely to attend class, more

> likely to participate during class, and more likely to graduate from college. Each of these realities is especially evident among undergraduate students, first generation students, and underrepresented populations" (p. 29).

This, was also noted as important to participants who saw the classroom as the major point of community connection for community college students, many of whom are among the ranks of undergraduate, first generation, and underrepresented populations that Elliot et al. (2016) spotlighted.

Diana's sense of community and the urgency with which she believed it needed to be created within the classroom also echoed Elliot et al. (2016), who posited that to achieve a sense of community, instructors should seek "a spirit of collaboration among classmates" which could be fostered through "teamwork and group projects: reading presentations, in-class activities, collaborative writing assignments, and so on." Much like Diana, these scholars saw the power of in-class community building and how it could help "students to learn one another's names, to delineate clear roles within a smaller group structure, and—ultimately—to feel more secure and included within the classroom environment" (Elliot et al., 2016, pp. 37-38). Again, while community may be important to all students, its importance (as described by both this study's participants and scholars in the field) is paramount to student success at the community college level.

Notably, like the faculty polled in the Miller and Metz (2014) survey, none of the MFCC faculty interviewed for this study admitted to being unaware of the active and collaborative learning as an instructional method. Adherence to the "business as usual" didactic instructional model that fails to produce "significant learning gains" (Millis, 2010, p. 1) was not the norm for this study's participants, and unlike those in the Millis (2010) study, the current study's

participants did not indicate a lack of "know-how to successfully adapt the teaching techniques" that could produce cognitive gains (p. 1). The current study's participants understood active and collaborative learning through a very positive and productive lens, and as the following section will show, they professed to operationalizing active and collaborative learning in their classrooms on a frequent basis and in a variety of ways.

RQ2: What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?

Gyurko et al. (2016) noted that IHLs' continued adherence to instructional approaches, such as didactic instruction is misaligned with contemporary research findings on student learning. This study's participants maintained that they frequently used active and collaborative learning in their classrooms in a variety of ways. This stood in contrast to much of the literature espousing IHL instructors' dogged allegiance to didactic instruction. CCFSSE 2022 cohort data revealed that over 25% still employed lecture 50 to 100% of the time, while only approximately 15% said they spent half their time focused on teacher-led discussions (CCCSE, 2023e). This is not hard to understand since lecture has represented the instructional standard since higher education began, though its effectiveness is not supported by research (Miller & Metz, 2014). Yet while multiple scholars within the first three decades of the 21st century have asserted that lecture, note taking, and traditional summative assessment still dominate IHL classrooms (Feden, 2012; Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Huggins & Stamatel, 2015; McCarthy & Anderson, 2000), the contrary was described by this study's participants. While they all acknowledge that they do lecture, they, like Kagan (2014), understood the worth of allowing students time to process "lecture content" and secure it in their "long-term memory storage" (p. 119) through active and collaborative means.

Participants professed to frequently using active and collaborative learning in their classrooms in a variety of ways, and the CCCSE inspired codes of thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance were used as a framework to examine these instructors' perceptions of its use. Participants provided students with active and collaborative opportunities to sharpen both their critical and reflective thinking skills. They provide space for students to apply acquired knowledge through discussions, and to a lesser extent, presentations. Opportunities for students to work with one another actively and collaboratively during instructional time were also provided as were problem solving opportunities. Finally, active and collaborative instruction based in a real-world context was used by all instructors to contextualize content in a manner more accessible to students.

Thinking

Thinking is essential to learning and can be parsed into critical thinking and reflective thinking, each important in their own right. Participants believed that being active and collaborative allowed their students to critically think about course content. Participants expressed the benefit of allowing students to examine and explain content themselves as opposed to simply hearing about it. Moreover, participants perceived reflection as a means of developing new perspectives on important topics. These perceptions were supported by related scholarship.

CCCSE held that a student's comprehension of material was increased when provided "opportunities to *think* about" the material they were learning (CCCSE, 2023c, para. 4). Brookfield (2005) discussed critical thinking in ways that were similar to this study's participants and referenced the use of "interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation" in the process. Brookfield (2005) noted that other community college instructors similarly placed a high premium on critical thinking as a key element to a

student's processing ability and "lifelong learning" (p. 49). Butler et al.'s (2017) research noted the worth of teaching critical thinking skills in IHL classrooms, yet also noted that "over one-third of college students showed no improvement in critical thinking skills during their time in college," making a "strong plea for more instruction in and attention to critical thinking skills" (Butler et al., 2017, p. 45). This plea was seemingly heard by the current study's participants, who offered multiple opportunities to their students for this type of thinking.

Reflective thinking was often viewed by participants as a personal and emotional extension of critical thinking and a way for students to evolve in their perceptions of certain topics. Atkins and Murphy (1993, as cited in Poole et al., 2013) similarly addressed this "analysis of feelings and knowledge," as well as "the generation of a new perspective" (p. 818) resulting from reflective thinking. Participants used active and collaborative learning to provide opportunities for their students to reflect because they saw the benefits of this practice. However, the worth of reflective thinking according to Marra et al. (2014) was far more important than just on a class by class basis. They found that reflective thinkers tend to be more successful students because they frequently evaluate their understanding of the content and make needed adjustments to learn new material (Marra et al., 2014).

Reznitskaya and Gregory's (2013) work argued that giving students opportunities to be critical and reflective thinkers can "inspire meaningful inquiry" (p. 117). The instructors interviewed for this study provided those opportunities. Through active and collaborative opportunities, they moved their students away from the banking system of deposit and withdrawal as described by Freire (1970) to a system that allowed students to expand ideas and shape new understandings.

Application. Extending opportunities for students to "*apply* what they are learning in different settings" was touted by CCCSE as an effective educational approach (CCCSE, 2023c, para. 4), and using active and collaborative activities to apply knowledge may allow for greater cognitive growth in students. All participants valued certain aspects of application and reported that their students applied knowledge through a variety of active and collaborative opportunities—most frequently, through presentations and discussions. However, neither of these instructional approaches were fully embraced by all participants. Both participants' valuing of these approaches and hesitancy to use them are aligned to the literature.

Students can use presentations to convey their understandings of content or concepts and leverage "speech rather than writing" as the "exclusive, primary or at least a significant mode of student response" (Joughin, 1998, p. 386). Some participants saw presentations as informal ways for students to practice skills and exhibit a command of the material; others saw presentations as a more formal summative endeavor. These perceptions were echoed by Rocca (2010) who, referencing Fritschner (2000), discussed the six levels of class participation as perceived by faculty which culminated with "giving oral presentations" (p. 187). Some participants, similar to Thurneck (2011), talked about the long-term real-world impact of presentations. Thurneck (2011) found that presentations allow students to "practice an art that will enhance their lives outside of the classroom" (p. 18). Moreover, while not speaking exclusively of presentations, Kagan (2014) found that the application of knowledge can increase "long-term memory storage" as well as "episodic memories" (Kagan, 2014, p. 124). These episodic memories can be attached to an active and collaborative learning experience such as a presentation.

However, having students do presentations was not an active and collaborative strategy employed by all participants. Some participants perceived student stress related to this practice as

outweighing its potential benefits. This perception is present in the work of DiBartolo and Molina (2010), who argued that "fear of public speaking," a key component to presentation, "is the most common social fear experienced by the general population" (p. 160). Moreover, from an educational standpoint, they found that requiring students to engage in public speaking "can have far-reaching academic effects, including lower course grades and even an increased likelihood to drop out of college" (DiBartolo & Molina, 2010, p. 160).

Discussion was an active and collaborative mechanism used by all participants as a way for their students to apply knowledge. Having students engage in academic conversations with peers, evaluate and articulate ideas, and, in the process, create new understanding of the material was important to all participants. In fact, participants expressed that they leveraged this active and collaborative strategy more than any other. Again, these approaches to discussion were largely in alignment with the existing literature.

Discussion was highly valued by all participants, and, as McAvoy et al. (2022) expressed, gave students space to engage in "collective inquiry" and engage with peers (McAvoy et al., 2022, p. 1763). This reliance on discussion as a major component of active and collaborative learning was in alignment with CCCSE 2022 cohort findings. A full third of the 2022 CCSSE cohort reported that "asking questions in class or contributing to class discussions" happened "very often," with under 5% saying it "never" happened (CCCSE, 2023f). Nunn (1996) pointed out "a positive relationship between student participation in classroom discussion and learning, motivation, and problem-solving ability" has long existed (p. 243), but also noted that, in their study, "teachers perceived themselves as less skilled at leading discussions than at teaching in general" (p. 260). However, this was not perceived by the current study's participants. They all

viewed discussion as an integral part of their instructional repertoire and expressed no hesitation with deploying it in class.

Klemenčič (2021) referred to the "enhanced actorhood of students" (p. 92), which is essentially the process of students actively and often collaboratively applying what they have learned. The participants in this study believed in the "actorhood of students" and understood that knowledge can be created when students are *doing* instead of just listening. Participants described giving students opportunities to apply knowledge though both discussions and, to a lesser extent, presentations.

Team/Partner Work. Team/partner work was also valued and used by all participants for in class work. Touted by CCCSE as a way for students to "develop valuable skills" (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4) team/partner work was also acknowledged by scholars in the field as being extremely important.

Davidson and Major (2014) found that students who participated in small group activities outperformed their non-collaborative peers in "knowledge development, thinking skills, social skills, and course satisfaction" (Davidson & Major, 2014, p. 7). Perhaps this is why some participants were predisposed to insert an impromptu collaborative activity into their classes when they saw student engagement start to wane. Spoor et al. (2020) called group work the "cornerstone of active learning" (p. 14), and Burke (2011) argued that group work can promote creativity. To engage that activity and creative mindset, some participants reported students participating in elaborate group projects that, as Laverick (2018) noted, required research and planning to reach the intended goal.

Yet, out of class team/partner work was not widely employed by study participants. This was in alignment with CCCSE 2022 cohort data indicating almost half of the students had never

collaborated with a classmate outside of class time to complete an assignment (CCCSE, 2023f). Participants noted an awareness of the busy schedules kept by community college students and felt that out of class work may present an undue strain on them. Interestingly, participants conceptualized their diverse community college populations as somewhat homogeneous when it came to their perceived lack of capacity to collaborate outside of class time. While expressed by participants as a genuine concern for the perceived struggles with which their students deal, it is possible that some instructors' decisions not to assign out-of-class collaborative opportunities could reflect the stigmatization of community college students, in addition to the perceived inability of students to successfully complete these tasks.

Yet, participants' concerns were in alignment with Wood's (2020) work which held that community college students, more often than not, work full-time or part-time jobs that have even caused them to miss classes (Wood, 2020). Similarly, Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) found that "a challenge for student engagement at the community college level is that students often have multiple off-campus responsibilities that limit their time for engagement in the college experience" (p. 137). With a realization of these situations, many instructors opted not to place an additional time constraint on their students. Therefore, out-of-class active and collaborative assignments were used sparingly.

Problem Solving. Providing students space to "solve problems or master challenging content" was something touted by CCCSE as a valuable skill (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4). Many of the participants valued problem solving and provided their students with opportunities to solve problems as a way to increase and retain knowledge. These perceptions were supported by related scholarship.

In Marra et al.'s (2014) study, problem-based learning was described as "an instructional method where student learning occurs in the context of solving an authentic problem" (p. 221). Marra et al. (2014) noted that medical schools were the first to extensively leverage this approach. However, this study's participants showed that this approach can effectively be used in BSS classrooms, as well. Illustrative of this was Bryce's "gender" project, where students were prompted to be innovative and come up with solutions to age old and authentic problems associated with the gender stereotypes.

Smirnova (2016) held that problem-solving is three-pronged and included (1) defining a problem, (2) analyzing options to address the problem, and (3) identifying the best resolutions to the problem. Some of the participants in the current study, particularly Diana, noted how this structured and goal-oriented approach to instruction was appealing to mature learners. Diana's "daycare center" assignment brilliantly captured this three-pronged approach discussed by Smirnova (2016) as her students worked from idea to implementation.

Finally, Robbins and Dowty's (2017) work extensively leveraged a problem-based approach to anthropology, addressing high level questions about societal issues and problems. This was an approach that was also used by many of the current study's participants. Whether it was through assignments or simply asking provocative and discussion generating questions related to BSS content, this study's participants saw the value in having their students think about and solve problems on both a small and large scale.

Real World Relevance. Participants employed active and collaborative instruction rooted in real-world examples in a myriad of ways (excluding service learning) to afford their students opportunities to better relate to and understand content. This was done through activities and examples that allowed not only for new material to be addressed but also to potentially

benefit students in their personal and work lives. There were numerous connections between this study's findings and the existing literature.

Opportunities that prepare students to "deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives" was valued by CCCSE (2023c, para. 4). Kasworm (2003) found that a significant portion of students in private colleges, public universities, and community colleges favor instruction "anchored in the knowledge of work, family, and personal life" and see higher education as most effective when it "reflects their lived experience" (p. 90). While Kasworm (2003) noted that, oftentimes, this linkage between academics and the real-world is "fragmentary" (p. 90), this finding was contrary to the experiences of the current study's participants, who frequently integrated real-world learning into their classrooms.

However, while Turk and Pearl (2021) lauded service learning as an instructional tool "that combines class-room instruction with a volunteer experience to promote greater academic learning and personal development" (p. 93), none of the participants in this study currently leveraged this approach. While Munter (2002) saw service learning in IHLs as a way for abstract concepts to be "applied in a real-world setting" (p. 151), this was missing from all participants' current pedagogical repertoire. While some participants had experimented with service learning in the past and none minimized its utility, a general lack of participation in optional opportunities and an opposition to potential scheduling issues this type of requirement would cause resulted in its lack of deployment. Service-learning excepted, participants often took steps in their classes to make real-world connections and to use real-world examples. These efforts provided the dual benefit of increased content retention and acquisition of knowledge and skills applicable to personal and work lives.

All participants embraced the worth of using active and collaborative learning in their classrooms. This is in contrast to Tagg's (2012) study, which found that university and community college faculty often ignore human cognition research regarding their teaching practices. Instead, this study's participants expressed providing active and collaborative opportunities for their students to think, apply, work with partners or in groups, problem solve, and delve into real-world scenarios. While the application of these opportunities was not universal and not always approached in a uniform fashion, there did exist extensive linkages between participant actions and existing literature from the field. In the next section, barriers and facilitators to active and collaborative learning will be explored.

RQ3: What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

While all recognizing the worth of active and collaborative learning, participants all identified factors that served as roadblocks to this approach and others that helped to facilitate its use.

Barriers to Active and Collaborative Learning

Problems presented by the post-pandemic return to campus, fallout from the culture wars, and pressures to maintain equality in group work and address differentiated instruction all made active and collaborative learning more difficult. But, the issue of time was the most ubiquitous of the barriers identified by participants.

Aftermath of COVID-19. Fear of close interactions with peers created a barrier to active and collaborative learning in a post-pandemic world. While pandemic status of the COVID-19 virus was no longer in effect, the impact of the need to social distance persisted, especially for those who are immunocompromised. This caution stymied active and collaborative instruction

for some study participants and impacted deployment for others. Linkages between findings and the literature are clear.

Clary et al. (2022), like a multitude of others, described how “social distancing” was employed to “slow its [COVID-19] spread” (p. 54), and this need to social distance was a major concern as students reentered the classroom in the fall of 2020. As late as fall 2021, the CDC was still advocating “continued masking and physical distancing for people with weakened immune systems at IHLs” (National Center, 2021, p.3). The current study’s participants, who extensively leveraged active and collaborative learning in the pre-pandemic classroom, were at times reluctant to place students in what they believed to be dangerous collaborative situations upon their return. Echoing this sentiment, Lewis and Hessen (2021) noted that some students also had “reservations about being close to others or even being in the classroom at all” and noted that “all of these restrictions stifle the opportunities for cooperative learning” (para 1). Moreover, Epps (2022) noted that many students were returning to the classroom with “re-entry anxiety” (para 2) similar to what Amy, Bryce, and Julia reported to observe. In addition, there was a need to rebuild some of the social skills that were lost during lock-down (Stoian, 2022; Williams, 2023). In an attempt to ease this reentry, the current study’s participants offered other options to students uncomfortable with close-contact collaboration and even removed the hurdle of self-grouping, perhaps a repercussion of social skill loss.

Participants faced with the barrier of social distancing in the aftermath of a pandemic pivoted in an effort to do what they saw was appropriate for students. At times, that meant the elimination of active and collaborative learning, while, in other cases, it was making these opportunities optional and removing some of the social stressors associated with the process. Some participants saw the desire for students to have that human connection again and

differentiated instruction to make that happen, while protecting students who were still uncomfortable with a return to active and collaborative learning.

Culture Wars. The current study's participants also discussed the barriers presented by the current socio-cultural climate to active and collaborative learning. While some specifically used the terminology "culture wars," others simply acknowledged the potential difficulties associated with discussing topics that, while a part of the curriculum, could be viewed by some as controversial. Brońić and Miles (2021) addressed this concern and noted that, while data shows that higher education "liberalizes moral concerns for most students"—particularly in the social sciences, the mission of higher education is not to promote "progressive worldviews," as is often espoused (p. 857). This was a concern stressed by Beverly, who admonished her colleagues not to stray into the realm of indoctrination.

Being viewed as a liberal crusader in the culture wars and subsequently exploited in the media was a concern for another participant—Josh. This fear seemed substantiated by an incident at Orange Coast College reported by Shepard and Culver (2018). A recording of an instructor criticizing a conservative politician was picked up by the news media and resulted in the harassment of an instructor, as well as calls for their dismissal. Additionally, threats of legislative action curtailing topics seen as crucial to BSS instruction by state legislators was also a concern that emerged from this study. Such attempts are well documented by scholars, including Moyer (2006), who relayed governmental attempts to shield students from the so-called "liberal orthodoxy that pervades college classrooms" (p. 29) that has existed since the 1950, and Gecker (2023), who documented more recent attempts to control instruction perceived as liberal orthodoxy on a secondary and collegiate level in Florida.

Additionally, the “broad chilling effect” reported by Roger et al. (2002) that has resulted in a decrease in addressing critical issues including “racism, and racial and ethnic diversity” (p. viii) was also a participant concern. While agreeing with Roger et al. (2022) that this type of instruction was necessary for the health of the democracy, Josh also echoed the sentiment expressed by Hollingsworth (2023) that addressing these subjects didactically, as opposed to dialogically, was a safer alternative. This was particularly true in a state where community college instructors are not protected by tenure (Quinterno, 2020).

The fall-out from the culture wars has given some instructors pause regarding their willingness to open up sensitive topics to general discussion. While topics revolving around gender and race are crucial to the BSS curriculum, these so-called hot-button issues have the potential to place instructors under scrutiny within and outside of their institutions.

Maintaining Equality in Group Work. Another barrier to active and collaborative learning expressed by participants was the perceived need to maintain equality related to group work. The perceived need to divide work equally and assess students fairly through active and collaborative assignments with partners or teams was a concern expressed by some participants. Although this was a barrier, it was an obstacle that most participants were eager to climb. Parallels that can be drawn to existing literature in regards to this concern.

Bryce and Josh both grappled with how to equitably grade group work. Bryce became so disenchanted with scoring out of class collaborations that he abandoned them all together. Josh, while discussing in-class collaborative activities, was similarly vexed, yet he responded by developing a scoring tool for group work to overcome this hurdle.

This obstacle was evident in the existing literature as well. Storm and Strom (2002) held that “community college faculty often express uncertainty about how to evaluate the team-work

skills that their students demonstrate during group work" (p. 315). More specifically, Panitz and Panitz (1998) found instructors' difficulty in assessing "group efforts" and assigning "grades to groups" (p. 165). This lack of understanding is often rooted in the assumption that "only one process is appropriate for assessing student performance" (Panitz & Panitz, 1998, p. 165), which may have accounted for Bryce's frustration while only focusing on the final product, rather than the process.

Bailey et al.'s (2015) study focused on collaboration in upper level psychology classes. The researchers noted that instructors who were "highly involved" during group activities were better able to "communicate the expectations and benefits of group projects [and] provide advice on group dynamics" and were "accessible if problems occur[ed] during the project." Such approaches promoted "positive attitudes toward group projects" among students and resulted in "fewer concerns about the distribution of work and the fairness in grading" (p. 180). Part of the concern surrounding equality in assessing group projects is found in the fear of what Josh called "freeriding." Maier et al. (2010) also talked about this idea of "free riding," or "social loafing" (Dommeyer, 2007), which happened when some students do a large percentage of the work in a group, while others (the free riders or the social loafers) do little or nothing.

However, Dommeyer (2007) held that what could be perceived as social loafing could instead be "language barriers, cultural differences, learning disabilities, physical or mental problems, personality traits, or time constraints" hindering full participation. Participants in the current study were largely cognizant of these potential differences among learners, and instead of penalizing students for not fully engaging in active and collaborative learning, made accommodations. Community colleges have, at times, been criticized for their ineffectiveness in meeting the formidable task of remediation. They have been accused of not taking the issues

seriously enough to “design effective systems of remedial education” for underprepared students (Beach, 2011). But, this study’s participants also spoke of students with cultural barriers, those who were neurodivergent, those who had anxiety, or other limitations that prevented them fully participating. While active and collaborative learning was available, often there was no penalty for non-participation.

Maintaining equality in group work presented a barrier to active and collaborative learning for some participants. But, this seemed to be rooted out of a desire to best serve the needs of students and maintain a standard of fairness.

Time. A perceived lack of time was the most widely discussed barrier to active and collaborative learning discussed by participants. An adequate amount of face-to-face class time was viewed as paramount to active and collaborative learning, and for many, the amount of allocated class time impacted the frequency with which it occurred. To a lesser extent, time barriers also referred to the planning time needed to develop active and collaborative learning opportunities for students. This mirrored similar findings in the literature.

Similarly to this study’s participants, Miller and Metz (2014) reported that 89% of faculty surveyed named a lack of class time as the most significant barrier to active learning. In alignments with Spoor’s (2020) findings, participants all saw “face-to-face class time is a precious commodity” (Spoor, 2020, p. 8). Moreover, the fear that active collaborative exercises would consume class time needed to “cover” course material (Burke, 2011; Keyser, 2000; Miller & Metz, 2014) caused some participants to make decisions to eliminate active and collaborative assignments.

Community college instructors reported putting in more hours planning and teaching compared to their university peers (Felderman, 2016). Moreover, Keyser (2000) asserted that

cooperative learning required more planning on the part of the instructor than traditional forms of instruction. Julia argued the same and stressed that planning and revamping active and collaborative activities was difficult and time consuming. Similarly, Miller and Metz (2014) found that, regarding active and collaborative learning, faculty "may not have the planning time necessary to develop the materials" (p. 246).

Participants saw time as a precious commodity. They valued the time they had in class and made important pedagogical decisions related to active and collaborative learning based on the amount of time they had. However, the time consumed by planning active and collaborative learning, noted to take longer than planning for a lecture, had a similar impact on the frequency at which this strategy was deployed.

Facilitators of Active and Collaborative Learning

As stated above, time was conceptualized as a necessary tool to facilitate active and collaborative learning, and while a lack of time was seen as a barrier, more time was perceived as a facilitator. Additionally, administrative support for active and collaborative learning was seen as a facilitator—support related to recognition of the pedagogical worth of the instructional approach, support when addressing controversial topics, and support of instructors' professional development opportunities.

Time. Participants recognized the time constraints that MFCC's move to a largely eight-week instructional calendar created. Some, seeing the need to preserve class time for active and collaborative learning, pivoted to a flipped-classroom approach to accommodate this new calendar. In these instances, didactic instruction moved online while class time was used to facilitate active and collaborative learning.

MFCC's instructional calendar shift resulted in both Bryce and Josh leveraging technology for direct instruction in an effort to preserve in-class time for active and collaborative learning. Witcher and Sasso's (2022) study revealed that students felt that class time was better spent collaborating with their peers. Moreover, despite the fact that community college campuses are multigenerational, Generation Z students "see the world as both digital and physical" (Witcher & Sasso, 2022, p. 2), making a flipped classroom approach more accessible to them. Berrett (2012) provided an example of students viewing pre-recorded lectures "at their own pace and on their own schedule" (para., 11), so class time could be more collaborative and experiential, much as Bryce and Josh did.

Josh and Bryce chose to view time as a facilitator of active and collaborative learning and leveraged technology to create time in their classes to devote to active and collaborative learning. Their efforts were not only pragmatic but also aligned to research asserting the pedagogical benefits of this approach.

Administrative Support and Professional Development. Some participants discussed the merit of administrators who understand and value the benefits of active and collaborative learning and support faculty who use this strategy. Others spoke of the importance of administrators who support using this instructional approach, even when addressing topics perceived as controversial. Finally, professional development was mentioned as a support that helped to facilitate active and collaborative learning.

Amy spoke of always feeling supported by administrators in her use of active and collaborative activities in the classroom. While studies showed that IHL instructors often disregard research related to effective teaching (Tagg, 2012), so do administrators. Miller and Metz (2014) noted that lecture has been the hallmark instruction approach in higher education

since there has been higher education. In contrast, the use of active and collaborative learning is newer in many IHL contexts, and, arguably, there is a lack of faith in this approach. This lack of faith is notable in Harvey et al.'s (2022) study of an innovative professor from a small public university who used active and collaborative strategies to make class more enjoyable and make the material more approachable for his students. Yet, he felt that this deviation away from the more traditional approach of didactic instruction had stalled his career, which he felt would only advance if he abandoned innovative teaching for a more traditional approach (Harvey et al., 2022). Karcher et al. (2022) similarly mentioned that "additional departmental support is one way to demonstrate the department's commitment" to instructors transitioning to active learning. Moreover, while instructors in this study reported "feeling comfortable teaching with traditional teacher-centered pedagogies," they believed that moving to a more student-centered approach may impact course evaluations and job security (Karcher, 2022, p. 2). While Amy specifically mentioned that she felt supported in these endeavors, it is important to note that none of the participants pointed to a lack of administrative support regarding their use of active and collaborative learning. Some have argued that "if colleges were more innovative, outcomes would improve" (Swanger, 2016, p. 3). Moreover, Kim (2020) noted IHL administrators must embrace the idea that teaching and learning is central to an IHL's mission (Kim, 2020). Participants seemed to perceive administrative support for active and collaborative learning to be present at MFCC.

Josh noted the need for administrators to support an active and collaborative approach to teaching what could be perceived as hot-button issues in class. While he noted that it would be much safer to teach these topics via lecture, it was not the most effective approach. If there is a perception that the administration will not support these more open format endeavors, instructors

are more likely to “play it safe when it comes time to have a classroom discussion about a difficult topic,” said Irene Mulvey, President of the American Association of University Professors (Hollingsworth, 2023, para. 8). Josh noted that, in the current climate, it is hard to know if the administrative support for this issue is present, expressing the need to be supported by the administration and for administrators to understand that it is course content, not a political agenda, being presented. Several participants discussed the nature of BSS topics and how they can be considered by some to be controversial. Some even noted that there may be a temptation at times for instructors to venture outside the bounds of unbiased instruction. But none said that they did not feel supported by the administration on the front lines of the culture wars.

The emphasis that Josh placed on this need for administrative support echoed Taylor’s (1957) statement, over a half-century ago and during a time of different socio-political struggles, that IHLs must create environments where an instructor has the freedom to “do their best work” facilitated by administrators whose main responsibility is to serve as the “guardian of freedom for his teachers. . . no matter how great the public pressures or how violent the public objections” (pp. 450-452).

Administrative support for active and collaborative learning can also be exhibited through support of professional growth opportunities that advocate the benefits of this approach and provide instructors with the tools to implement it. Notably, only one participant discussed this important support, mentioning the MFCC’s CTL and the instructional support coming from that institution. Millis (2010) stated that instructors “must have access to the tools, pedagogical support, and inspiration— particularly in their own disciplines— that will enable them to implement cooperative approaches” (p. 2). CTLs, such as the one at MFCC mentioned by Laverne, exist to promote pedagogical innovation and offer faculty members opportunities to

learn new strategies (Lieberman, 2018). Troller (2002) found that "professional development nurtures attitudes, skills, and behaviors of individuals and groups toward greater competence and enhanced effectiveness in meeting student needs" (p. 73), and this can happen out of CTLs. Notably, even though MFCC has a CTL, only one of this study's participants noted this as a facilitator of active and collaborative learning.

Administrative support of active and collaborative approaches to instruction was noted by Amy. While others did not specifically say they felt supported in this regard, none said that they felt unsupported in this area. Similarly, while administrative support for using active and collaborative learning to teach topics perceived as culturally sensitive was stressed by Josh, he or the others never spoke of a circumstance where he had not felt supported. Professional development was only mentioned by Laverne as a support that helped to facilitate active and collaborative learning. But her limited acknowledgement of this did underscore that a CTL was in place at MFCC and available to instructors.

Although the unique nature of community college did factor heavily into the participants' narrower conceptualization of community building and out-of-class team/partner work, the conceptualization of participants' students as "community college students" did not factor heavily into their broader understandings of active and collaborative learning. It was noted that the creation of community was paramount to student success at community college due to the non-residential nature of its students. Also, there was an over simplification of community college demographics which lead to some generalization about community college students' inability to collaborate with one another outside of class time. However, in other areas of this study, participants viewed their students as just students—not community college students. When addressing questions related to thinking, application, problem solving, and real world-

relevance, participant data did not indicate inherent bias towards community college students in comparison to their university peers. Participants referenced "my students" and their associated achievements and struggles without the stigma that is sometimes present in discussions centered on community college.

Implications

Success in higher education can hinge on student engagement. One method of harnessing student engagement is through active and collaborative learning. Engagement can result in higher retention and achievement levels (CCCSE, 2023j). While prior research suggested that didactic educational approaches still dominate the instructional landscape, that was not the experience of this study's participants. Due in part to this contrast, these participants' understandings and implementation of active and collaborative learning can have implications for multiple stakeholders in the field. Moreover, the barriers and facilitators mentioned by participants can arm these stakeholders with information that may help remove obstacles to this educational approach and provide the necessary support to expand its use. Stakeholders who may find value in these findings include community college instructors, administrators, and CTL staff, as well as professional organizations. Implications are discussed for each group of stakeholders.

Community College Instructors

The practical implications of this study for BSS instructors are multifold. First, this study illustrates that active and collaborative learning is taking place in BSS classrooms and that it is perceived to be important by the study participants. This study shows that active and collaborative pedagogy is a viable approach being used by practitioners in the field and perhaps could embolden other instructors to try it themselves. It may be useful for would-be practitioners

to know how their colleagues understand this practice, in order to better understand the practice themselves.

Participant impressions of the instructor's role as director of learning did not fully align with research findings about the inefficiencies of didactic learning. However, it may be helpful for other community college instructors to understand that many faculty overestimate the importance and benefits of this form of instruction, and that direction is not always a prerequisite for facilitation. It is important for reluctant facilitators to know that some instructors have, at times, successfully ceded classroom control over to their students with impressive results. Moreover, the strategy of serving as the director of learning in a prerecorded online lecture—the flipped classroom approach—could serve as a template for expanding active and collaborative learning while also maintaining didactic instruction.

Also, an exploration of engagement and knowledge construction, as potential results from active and collaborative learning, may be useful for instructors who have perhaps tried unsuccessfully to reach these goals through more traditional instructional means. Additionally, understanding the importance that participants placed on community, as both a prerequisite to active and collaborative learning and a subsequent result, could be useful to emerging practitioners. These constructs of engagement, knowledge construction, and community are related to the "why" and "how" of active and collaborative learning—why it is important and how it can be achieved. Instructors may be more likely to implement active and collaborative learning if they can understand its potential benefits and prerequisites.

Moreover, the breakdown of active and collaborative learning into the constructs of thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance may provide a template for future practitioners to use. Additionally, the assignments spotlighted by

participants serve as examples for replication. The brief descriptions of these activities could help spark emerging active and collaborative learning practitioners to try similar strategies.

Instructors may also perceive the present study's findings about barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning to be useful. Of particular importance may be the need to be flexible with students suffering from anxiety, those who are neurodivergent, and those from other cultures who may not as easily embrace active and collaborative learning. Also, a better understanding of how the culture wars may influence BSS faculty's instructional decision-making could prove useful to other instructors attempting to navigate and teach hot-button issues via an active and collaborative approach.

The hope is that instructors who are not currently using active and collaborative learning will seek out those at their institutions who are utilizing this approach. By engaging in candid conversations around active and collaborative learning strategies and observing active and collaborative lessons in action, perhaps this instructional approach can one day displace lecture as the dominate instructional vehicle in community college classrooms. Finally, interested instructors should reach out to their CTLs, or other internal or external professional development sources, to learn more about becoming an active and collaborative learning practitioner.

Community College Administrators

In order for instructors to successfully implement active and collaborative learning in their classrooms, they need to be supported by college administration. One way for college administrators to better support active and collaborative learning is to understand what it is and how instructors should use it in their classrooms. This study provided a review of the literature on this topic and the perceptions of faculty that could help administrators grow in this understanding.

In an educational climate increasingly focused on retention and completion, administrators need to be aware of the positive impact that active and collaborative learning can have—not only on the lives of individual students but the collective success of the college. This instructional approach, as illustrated by this study, is essential to student success in the classroom and for long term retention. However, administrators also must understand that active and collaborative learning may look chaotic to the unknowing eye. This is why building a base of knowledge within community college administration is also important.

Notably, this study has positioned administrators as pivotal in the facilitation of this instructional approach, both through recognizing its pedagogical worth and supporting instructors who use this approach to teach sensitive topics. It is critical for administrators to understand that active and collaborative learning is a more effective instructional approach than didactic instruction and that it needs to be fostered and cultivated. Open and frequent dialogues need to take place between administrators and instructors in an effort for administrators to both acknowledge concerns and work to help instructors navigate around those potential barriers.

The general lack of discussion from participants regarding the CTL at MFCC is telling of the need for professional development offerings relating to proven instructional approaches to be advertised, encouraged, supported, and perhaps even required by administrators. Administrators should not only embrace and promote the use of active and collaborative learning with their instructors, but also work with college CTLs to ensure related professional development opportunities are available.

Finally, if administrators come to value active and collaborative learning, then they need to make it part of the system by which faculty are evaluated. If faculty are being directed to implement more active and collaborative learning in their classrooms then it is incumbent upon

administrators to provide instructors with guidelines and rubrics detailing what should be seen during an observation. These guidelines and rubrics should serve as coaching tools to increase proficiency in active and collaborative instructional practices.

Centers for Teaching and Learning Directors and Staff

This study provides practical implications that can be operationalized by CTL directors and their staffs to foster the application of more active and collaborative learning in community college classrooms—especially in those that are more inclined towards didactic instruction. Before CTLs can effectively implement training related to active and collaborative learning, however, they must understand it themselves. This study provides not only the research to buttress the worth of this instructional approach, but examples of practical application along with the struggles related to making this approach a reality.

This study found that the BSS instructors who participated saw the utility of active and collaborative learning through a lens of "why" and "how." CTL programming should be structured to answer the questions of "why is this important" and "how can it be achieved" to ensure the training is effective. Conveying and clarifying the benefits of active and collaborative learning are important, and this study provides that theoretical basis. However, for instructors, understanding how to implement a new instructional approach is even more important, as is an understanding of how it can impact student success. CTLs serve as the perfect conduit to make this happen.

Community was seen as both a prerequisite for active and collaborative learning but also a result of it. CTLs should place community building at the forefront of any active and collaborative training due to its unique importance. CTLs could help instructors understand why community building is particularly important in a community college setting and learn how to

make these communities a reality in their classrooms. These understandings could be realized through effectively designed and implemented professional development opportunities.

This study can also help equip CTL staff with knowledge of the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning, allowing them to weave these concerns into professional development offerings. Of particular importance is the need for CTLs to provide training specific to active and collaborative instruction in a post-pandemic classroom, where anxiety still persists with some students and instructors. Presenting strategies that will foster the use of this essential instructional approach, while also validating the concerns of all stakeholders is important.

Similarly important is for CTL staff to understand that much of the BSS curriculum focuses on what some would call hot-button sociocultural issues. If students are to gain a true understanding of important issues such as race, racism, gender, gender inequality, and sexual orientation, they need to be able to discuss them. However, as this study has shown, this open dialogue can present barriers for instructors. CTL programing around how to successfully teach these topics, which are perceived by some to be controversial, would be helpful.

Active and collaborative learning is expansive and worthy of multiple professional development opportunities. Leveraging a multi-session professional development opportunity, perhaps spanning the course of an academic year, that allows participants to individually explore, practice, implement, and reflect upon each of the CCCSE inspired constructs—thinking, application, team/partner work, problem solving, and real-world relevance—through a practice-based teacher education approach could build deeper understandings of these practices.

Moreover, specific professional development opportunities need to be designed by CTLs to help administrators better understand the merits of active and collaborative learning, how to

recognize its effective use in the classroom (again, active classroom may look chaotic to the untrained eye), and what they can do to support it. If active and collaborative learning is going to become an expectation for faculty, then administration and CTL staff need to be in alignment on how these strategies look, how to assess them, and how to appropriately coach faculty to successfully teach in this way.

Professional Organizations

This study is important for any professional organization dedicated to exploring the impact of active and collaborative learning on community college student performance, as it helps to provide additional understandings of active and collaborative learning through the eyes of practitioners. While this study used “active and collaborative learning” as a singular construct, as does the leading professional organization in the field, participants understood this term as plural, not singular. Professional organizations may want to consider the worth of treating “active learning” and “collaborative learning" as separate constructs. Collaboration is an active process and often seen as a logical and important extension of active learning. Yet, active learning can take place in solitary situations in the absence of collaboration, and such active learning experiences are also worthy of exploration. Although the two constructs are related, they are not inextricably linked. Moreover, this study shows the need for survey items that seek to evaluate the use of active and collaborative learning to be framed more granularly. While application and collaboration are paramount to understanding active and collaborative learning, more direct questions need to be asked regarding thinking, problem solving, and real-world relevance which *may* be happening through collaboration and application activities but are not specifically explored in enough depth.

Recommendations for Future Research and Conclusion

While a wealth of evidence points to the pedagogical benefits of students being actively and collaboratively involved in the learning process (Davidson & Major, 2014; Doyle & Doyle, 2021; Finkelstein & Winer, 2021; Hushman, 2022: Johnson et al., 2014; Kagan, 2014; Kaufman et al., 1997; Keith-Le et al., 2020; Klemenčič, 2021; Love et al., 2014; Marra et al., 2014; Michaelsen et al., 2014; Smith & Burke, 2007; Spoor et al., 2020), there is a need for more research to be done specifically within the community college arena. Moreover, very little research has specifically focused on the use and impact of active and collaborative learning in the behavioral and social sciences at all instructional levels, particularly community college. While this study serves to help fill that gap, its exclusive focus on full-time instructors may paint an incomplete picture. Adjunct faculty may provide an informative layer to the research, especially considering that over half of the total faculty at MFCC serve in an adjunct capacity. Additionally, while this study looked at instructor understandings of active and collaborative learning and how they perceived their use in the classroom, no observations were conducted. Observational data could provide an important layer regarding student involvement and engagement versus relying on self-reported data. Finally, while participants clearly valued the worth of active and collaborative learning and employed it because they believed it to be beneficial to their students, research needs to be done to study that benefit. Is this approach really effective in regards to deep learning and long-term retention of material by community college students? This question deserves more study, particularly in regard to this population of students, who often face different struggles than their university counterparts. Also, this question deserves more study within BSS classes at all educational levels, which are integral to

confronting the challenges facing society today and to resolving vital organizational, societal, and personal issues (National Academies, 2017).

However, looking more deeply into the barriers and facilitators to active and collaboration may serve to scale up its use. Research regarding the impact of COVID-19 on IHL student learning, as well as instructors' instructional decision-making, is particularly needed. While there is a wealth of information available concerning the pivot to online instruction, very little research has examined the effects of the return to face-to-face instruction, lingering anxiety over social distancing, and how that impacts active and collaborative learning. Finally, more research needs to explore the pressures placed on instructors at all educational levels who, by the nature of their disciplines such as those found in BSS, are tasked with addressing sensitive cultural topics in their classrooms. What impact are the culture wars that are raging outside of the classroom having on instruction and instructors?

This study arose out of an interest in active and collaborative learning from both an instructor perspective and the perspective of an administrator. In classes that I taught, as well as those I observed, I saw active and collaborative instruction as more engaging and more interesting to the students. From this, I developed the desire to see how other instructors understood this pedagogical approach and deployed it in their classrooms. Moreover, I wanted to understand what, if anything, prevented instructors from using this approach.

Findings revealed that participants often conceptualized active and collaborative learning differently from prominent professional organizations, frequently defining it as two separate entities while also perceiving the director role as a necessary prequel to the role of facilitator. And, while participants viewed active and collaborative learning as a means to engage students

and elicit knowledge construction, they also saw community as an important precursor to and result of this instructional practice.

Notably, contrary to the findings of many previous studies, participants all espoused the importance and application of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms by providing students with opportunities to think, apply, work with classmates, problem solve, and often do so through a real-world context or through examples relevant to the real world. Yet, they all expressed that there were existing barriers to this instructional approach, including dealing with lingering insecurities surrounding social distancing, fall-out from the culture wars, difficulties associated with using group work equitably, and a perceived lack of time. While time was also framed as a commodity to help facilitate active and collaborative learning, so was administrative support, and to a lesser degree, professional development.

This study helped to bridge a gap in the literature regarding understandings and perceptions of pedagogical decision making by community college instructors and BSS instructors in IHLs. By exploring the theoretical construct of active and collaborative learning, this study provided a better understanding of how BSS instructors conceptualized active and collaborative learning, how they perceived their own use of active and collaborative learning, and what they perceived to be the barriers to and facilitators of this instructional approach. While quantitative CCCSE data has provided insight into both faculty and students' perspectives regarding how community college students spend time in class, the current study supplied qualitative data focused on the faculty perceptions of classroom activities, particularly related to active and collaborative learning. While the sample size for the current study was relatively small and the data self-reported data, implications were significant. Implications included understandings that could help community college instructors who are using active and

collaborative learning to leverage it more often and for those who are not using it to begin using it. They also offered suggestions for administrators who need to support this pedagogical approach. Additionally, implications for CTLs surrounding how they could provide more focused training specific to active and collaborative learning were offered. And finally, suggestions for how professional organizations could better frame and measure this pedagogical approach were posed.

While there is a need for additional research on this topic, this study served to stress the importance of active and collaborative learning as a better alternative to didactic instruction—one that can be leveraged to get students engaged in the learning process, thinking about and building knowledge, building community through collaboration, collectively problem-solving, and honing skills that may serve them for a lifetime. Additionally, this study emphasized that active and collaborative learning is critical in BSS classes in which the retention of lessons learned may hold the key to personal, community, and global change. Finally, community college students have unique needs and concerns that may potentially make the utilization of active and collaborative learning even more important than it is for their university peers.

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APPENDIX A: FIRST SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions:

1. How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?
2. What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?
3. What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

Interviewee Eligibility Criteria

Interviewees must be full time faculty members at MFCC and teach in one of the following disciplines: anthropology, economics, psychology, sociology, or political science.

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview. The purpose of the study I'm conducting is to gain an understanding of how BSS instructors in community colleges make decisions about how to structure their face-to-face lessons and which teaching practices or instructional strategies they use on a regular basis.

In this interview, I'll ask you some questions about your typical face-to-face instruction. There are no right or wrong answers. Instead, I'd like to learn about your individual perspectives and experiences as a community college instructor. When you answer my questions, please think about your teaching practice in your face-to-face courses, not in online courses you may teach.

This interview is intended to be a non-evaluative experience. Your answers will have no bearing on any aspect of your work within your institution. When I report findings, I will protect confidentiality by using pseudonyms and removing any other identifiable information from what I report, including your discipline.

I'll be recording this interview to make sure that I capture all of your answers accurately. If you'd prefer not to answer any of the questions I ask, just let me know you'd like to pass on that question. If you'd like to stop the interview at any time for any reason, just let me know, and we'll stop. Do you have any questions?

Warm up / General questions:

4. How long have you taught _____ (insert BSS discipline here) in a community college setting?
5. I'd like to start by getting a sense of what a typical lesson in one of your face-to-face courses looks like. Can you describe the teaching practices that you use most often? Please discuss specific lessons, if possible. (If specific lesson plans are mentioned during this or other answers, I will take the opportunity to request that the lesson plan, activity instructions, rubrics, images, etc.) be shared.
6. In your answer to the last question, you mentioned teaching practices that you frequently use. Why do you use those teaching practices so often?
7. Are there any specific theories or philosophies that influence your decisions about which teaching practices to use on a regular basis?

8. Would you describe yourself as more of a facilitator of learning or a director of learning? Why?

Active and Collaborative Constructs questions:
Community college instructors often have a variety of different opinions and perspectives on the most effective teaching practices for face-to-face courses. A number of national initiatives focused on improving the educational quality of community colleges, such as the Center for Community College Student Engagement, advocate that community college instructors use teaching practices that foster active and collaborative student learning. The next set of questions is about active and collaborative student learning in community colleges.

9. What is your understanding of active and collaborative learning?
10. Do you feel that you provide active and collaborative learning opportunities for your students? If so, how?
11. What do you see as the benefits to active and collaborative learning?
12. What do you see as the drawbacks to active and collaborative learning?

Barriers and Facilitators questions

13. Do you feel that there are any barriers to using active and collaborative learning in your classroom? If so, what are they?
14. Are there any conditions or circumstances that help make using active and collaborative learning in your classroom more possible—facilitators of active and collaborative learning? If so, what are they?
15. Would you like to use more active and collaborative learning in your classroom? If so, what resources do you need to make this happen?

Wrapping Up question
16. Is there any additional information you would like to share?

That is the last question. Thank you for your time today. If you think of any additional information that you'd like to share with me, please email me to let me know. Again, I really appreciate your time. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

APPENDIX B: SECOND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

1. How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?
2. What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?
3. What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

Interviewee Eligibility Criteria

Interviewees must be full time faculty members at MFCC and teach in one of the following disciplines: anthropology, economics, psychology, sociology, or political science. Interviewees must have participated in the first round of interviews, expressed an affinity for using active and collaborative learning in their classrooms, and provided an artifact for discussion.

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this follow up interview. Again, the purpose of the study I'm conducting is to gain an understanding of how BSS instructors in community colleges make decisions about how to structure their face-to-face lessons and which teaching practices or instructional strategies they use on a regular basis.

In the last interview, I asked you some questions about your typical face-to-face instruction. I also asked you specifically about Active and Collaborative learning. In this second interview I would like to delve deeper into that instructional approach specifically using the instructional artifact you provided to me.

As in the first interview, there are no right or wrong answers. Instead, I'd like to learn about your individual perspectives and experiences as a community college instructor. When you answer my questions, please think about your teaching practice in your face-to-face courses, not in online courses you may teach.

This interview is intended to be a non-evaluative experience. Your answers will have no bearing on any aspect of your work within your institution. When I report findings, I will protect confidentiality by using pseudonyms and removing any other identifiable information from what I report, including your discipline.

I'll be recording this interview to make sure that I capture all of your answers accurately. If you'd prefer not to answer any of the questions I ask, just let me know you'd like to pass on that question. If you'd like to stop the interview at any time for any reason, just let me know, and we'll stop. Do you have any questions?

Active and Collaborative Constructs Questions:

Relying heavily on the Center for Community College Student Engagement the following definition of active and collaborative learning is used to guide this study:

Active and collaborative learning is an instructional approach that actively involves students in their education and provides them opportunities to "think about and apply what they are

learning in different settings" and to collaborate "with others to solve problems or master challenging content" thereby developing "valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives" (CCCSE, 2023cc, para. 4).

From this definition I have extracted 5 major constructs of active and collaborative learning:

- Thinking
- Application
- Team/Partner Work
- Problem Solving
- Real World Relevance

The next set of questions addresses these constructs in relation to the assignment artifact you submitted after the initial interview:

4. Providing students "opportunities to think" is a logical component to instruction and is often parsed out into two important subgroups—critical thinking and reflective thinking. Does this assignment help promote critical thinking and reflective thinking? If so, how?
5. Extending opportunities for students to "*apply* what they are learning in different settings" is noted by many to be an effective instructional approach. Does this assignment allow students to apply what they have learned? If so, how?
6. Leaders in community college instructional practices have noted that "through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills." Does this assignment promote team/partner work? If so, how?
7. This team/partner work discussed in the last question can be leveraged to "solve problems or master challenging content." Does this assignment allow students to hone their problem-solving skills? If so, how?
8. It is important for college students to "develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives." Does this assignment have a real-world relevance? If so, how?

Benefits, Drawbacks, Facilitators, and Barriers Questions

9. Overall, what do you see as the benefits of this activity?
10. Are there any drawbacks to using this activity? If so, what are they?

Follow-up Questions from Initial Interview

Questions will differ for each interviewee.

CCSSE Questions

The next set of questions are largely based on questions asked to students who participated in the Community College Survey for Student Engagement conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement.

11. How prominently would you say that class discussions factor into your in-class instruction, if at all?
12. How prominently would you say that class presentations factor into your in-class instruction, if at all?

13. How often would you say that students work together during class time on projects, if at all?
14. How often would you say that students work together outside of class time on projects, if at all?
15. Have you ever required your students to participate in service learning?
16. How often do you think your students discuss ideas from readings or class work with others outside of the class (family members, co-workers, other students who are not in the class)?

Wrapping Up Question

17. Is there any additional information you would like to share?

That is the last question. Thank you for your time today. If you think of any additional information that you'd like to share with me, please email me to let me know. Again, I really appreciate your time. I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

APPENDIX C: CODES, DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES

RQ1. How do BSS instructors understand active and collaborative learning?

1.1 Active learning
1.2 Collaborative learning
1.3 Instructor as facilitator of learning
1.4 Instructor as director of learning
1.5 Engagement
1.6 Knowledge construction
1.7 Community

Code	Definition	Example
1.1. Active learning	Active learning leverages "auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile" approaches to enhance student comprehension and should not consist of a "passive consumption of lecture material" (Smith & Burke, 2007, p. 11).	"We're student students are actively engaged in the learning process as a participant and not an observer, or not as just a passive receiver of information"—Diana
1.2 Collaborative learning	Collaborative learning happens when "everyone in the classroom is learning and teaching, with all working together to create a shared body of knowledge" (Pederson, 2010, p. 198).	"Collaborative also means that they're working with their peers, um, as well as working with the instructor. So that is, it is a kind of group, uh, environment where there is more community versus individual, um, uh, individual practice." —Julia
1.3 Instructor as facilitator of learning	"As the facilitator, the teacher sets problems or goals, and students are given an opportunity to seek solutions to these problems" (Dyson et al. (2004, p. 235).	"The best classes, I would argue, is when I'm able to step back and, just going back to the idea facilitator, facilitate what they're doing and give them ownership of their own learning."—Beverly
1.4 Instructor as director of learning	A director of learning takes on the role of expert and embraces the "sage on the stage approach to education" (Morrison, 2014, p. 7). This is a lecture-heavy instructional approach where "knowledge flows in one direction only, from the teacher to the passive student" and the instructor serves as the director of learning as opposed to the facilitator (Morrison, 2014, p. 7).	"I'm a director in my intro level, I have to give them the map, I have to get in the taxi with them, I have to drive them to their stops. I have to kick them out. I have to tell them what they're supposed to do at this stop, what they're supposed to buy, what they need, and then corral them and make sure they get back in the taxi. Um, yeah, I'm the director in my intro courses."—Amy

1.5 Engagement	Engagement refers to a pedagogical act where "the learner must have some degree of participation or effort" and "must have a level of interest in the experience" (Garcia, 2018, pp. 13-14).	"Students are actively engaged in the learning process as a participant and not an observer, or not as just a passive receiver of information. . . . There should be engagement between students, engagement between the student and the faculty member, and engagement between the student and the content." —Diana
1.6 Knowledge construction	Knowledge construction happens when students actively build their own understandings of the material. Instructors serve as conduits for the "social construction of knowledge" when they establish a process of *doing* in their classrooms instead of just serving as content experts (Love et al., 2014, p. 178).	"You sit down in a group, small group or a circle and you say, all right, here's the problem. You know, let's figure it out collectively. Let's construct the knowledge, trying to figure out the best way to do this."—Bryce
1.7 Community	A group of students who create a connection with one another and with their instructor resulting in the creation of a safe space for students to more effectively work together, discuss ideas, and learn from one another due to a shared bond and mutual goals.	"It creates a community, it creates a safe place for students to ask questions. It, um, creates a place where students feel like they're heard, where they are not afraid to, uh, jump in and be a participant in the information that they're actually receiving." —Julia

RQ2. What are BSS instructors' perceptions of their use of active and collaborative learning in the classroom, if any?

- 2.1 Critical thinking
- 2.2 Reflective thinking
- 2.3 Application
  - 2.3.a Presentation (as application)
  - 2.3.b In-class discussions (as application)
  - 2.3.c Out-of-class discussion (as application)
- 2.4 Collaboration
  - 2.4.a In-class team/partner work
  - 2.4.b Out-of-class team/partner work
- 2.5 Problem solving
- 2.6 Real-world relevance
  - 2.6.a Connecting coursework to life
  - 2.6.b Service learning

Code	Definition	Example
2.1 Critical thinking	Critical thinking is often broadly described through its relationship to other skills, such as the ability to engage in effective decision making or to problem solve (Manalo, 2019). However, when looked at more expansively, critical thinking consists of a much more comprehensive set of skills including "interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation" (Manalo, 2019, p. 9).	"I think the infographic assignment definitely tackles the critical thinking aspect because it forces the students to take the information that they've learned and apply it in some way that could be communicated to a community member or another student who is not as familiar. So, it forces them to, kind of, pair down the information, and to engage with it in a different way."—Julia
2.2 Reflective thinking	Reflective thinking consists of an "(1) awareness of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts; (2) critical analysis of feelings and knowledge; [and] (3) the generation of a new perspective" (Atkins and Murphy, 1993, as cited in Poole et al., 2013, p. 818). This is an extension of critical thinking that allows more personal and emotional connections to be explored and happens when an individual applies critical analysis through a lens of personal experience.	"While critically thinking about this at a macro level, um, it's almost inevitable that they're going to think about it at that micro level. . . reflecting on their own lives or their parents' lives."—Bryce
2.3 Application	Application is learning through doing and when students are allowed to learn through *doing* they gain agency and become actors, as opposed to listeners. This is what Klemenčič (2021) calls the "enhanced actorhood of students" (p. 92).	"It is just creating the opportunities for students to engage with you, the content or with their classmates. It, it can be done in a multitude of ways. It can be discussions, projects, assignments, um, it can be simply, uh, you know, come in, draw a picture up on the board and then let's talk about what that image means to all of us. It, it can be really low level or it can be really complex like a project."—Diana

2.3.a Presentation (as application)	Presentations more specially defined are oral presentations where "speech rather than writing" is the "exclusive, primary or at least a significant mode of student response" used as a way to for students to convey knowledge and understanding, problem solving ability, and communication skills (Joughin, 1998, p. 386).	"I will have students come up to the board and work a problem. . . solve a problem. . . explain a concept. . . I'll ask a student to come up and present it to the class."—Laverne
2.3.b In-class discussions (as application)	In-class discussions are activities in which "students are sharing their views with each other about a question that is open to interpretation" (McAvoy et al., 2022, p. 1763).	"I'll put 'em in a group and . . . the other students in their group raise perspectives that they are not, you know, used to, or, or they're different from theirs. And like, that's excellent. Like, if I get four students in a group that have four different opinions on a topic that we're talking about, I think that's a good thing. You know, and, and like they're, they're kind of seeing each other's point of view." —Bryce
2.3.c Out-of-class discussion (as application)	Engaging siblings, parents, partners, or other family members *outside* of class, in dialogues focused on material learned *in* class or through readings associated with a class (CCCSE, 2023f).	"Students tell me they talk with their family members. A lot of students will, you know, explain different conversations with different friends. They'll help students that aren't in my classes understand the concepts. Um, and, and so I know they're talking about what they're learning in class and explaining it to other people, whether it be their parents or their friends." —Laverne
2.4 Collaboration	Collaboration is cooperative learning where students work in pairs or teams to develop a product and/or explore a topic. Collaborative learning is an extension of active learning—while not all active learning has to be	"I think the collaborative element allows that active learning to happen faster because it allows different people to come at the question in different ways in a, in a way that happens more organically, faster than an

	collaborative, all collaborative learning is active (Keyser, 2000).	independent individual would." —Amy
2.4.a In-class team/partner work	In-class collaborative projects (large or small) require students to work with a partner or in a team within regularly scheduled class times. Projects are activities that require planning, information gathering, and problem-solving in an effort to complete a designated task (Laverick, 2018).	"I do a lot of small group work and small group conversations. . . . So, I might have them break into groups of 2, 3, 4 people, talk in that group, and then maybe have people come up to the board and write something on the board and then we can discuss it as a broader class." —Josh
2.4.b Out-of-class team/partner work	Out-of-class collaborative projects require students to work with a partner or in a team outside of regularly scheduled class times.	"For some of our students in particular, trying to expect them to be able to be getting together outside of class can be challenging." —Josh
2.5 Problem solving	Problem-solving involves defining a problem, analyzing options to address the problem, and identifying the best resolutions to the problem (Smirnova, 2016). A problem is defined as "a question raised for inquiry, consideration, or solution" (Problem, n.d.).	"I need you to basically problem solve, make your budget, go from that middle-class income and shift it down to live on what the government says you should be able to live on. That's where the problem solving really comes in." —Josh
2.6 Real-world relevance	Real-world relevance refers to the valuable and applicable opportunities to help prepare students "to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives" (CCCSE, 2023c, para. 4).	"They're going to have a job where they're going to be asked to do something. They might be unfamiliar with how to tackle it, but they need to find what way works best for them. . . . And if they have to ever, like, share or present information, that's an essential skill, um, for the workplace. So, yes, I think this assignment definitely has real world relevancy." —Julia
2.6.a Connecting coursework to life	Connecting coursework to life is the process by which instructors attach authentic experiences to curriculum. For some students, higher education is seen as most valuable when it is "anchored in	"I do try to also include, like, examples that I think are, like culturally relevant for the students. So, um, if I have a class that's in the morning and it's more traditional students, right? Who

	their worlds and reflects their lived experience" (Kasworm, 2003, p. 90).	are, you know, 17, 18, 20, 21, you know, they probably don't have children, they're probably not married, you know, so I try not to use examples that they don't care about."—Julia
2.6.b Service learning	Service learning at community colleges "is a pedagogical approach that combines class-room instruction with a volunteer experience to promote greater academic learning and personal development" (Turk and Pearl, 2021, p. 93).	"We've done a couple different things that are really. . . all centered on the idea of basic needs and helping people, um, in need. . . . The service learning itself, in terms of like going there, was not like a graded activity, but they would write a paper related to what they had done."—Josh

RQ3. What do BSS instructors view as the barriers to and facilitators of active and collaborative learning in their classrooms?

3.1. COVID-19 as a barrier
3.2 Cultural wars as a barrier
3.3 Maintaining Equality and Addressing Differentiated Instruction
3.4 Time as a barrier and promoter
3.5 Administrative support as a promoter

Code	Definition	Example
3.1 COVID-19 as a barrier to active collaborative learning	COVD-19 is a contagious disease that emerged in late 2019 and resulted in massive and long-term closure of most educational entities in the United States by March of 2020. This pandemic necessitated a move away from collaborative learning in the face-to-face classroom upon the partial resumption of classes in the fall of 2020. Conditioned fear of close interaction with peers has impacted both instructor and student comfort with collaborative learning.	"We still live in a world where COVID does still exist. The flu still exists, the super superbugs of our children, the RSV flu combos exist, and I just don't feel comfortable forcing attendance and simultaneously urging them to care for themselves. Maybe one day we'll get back to it, um, but right now, yeah, I think there's a massive just social barrier to active learning in the classroom.—Amy
3.2 Culture wars as a barrier to active	Culture wars is a term used by some to describe the polarizing social and political conflicts dividing conservatives and	"We're right in the middle of culture wars and I talk about this stuff all day and um, I try

collaborative learning	liberals. Discussions of social issues in BSS classes can be misconstrued as promoting a liberal ideology which helps to fuel these divisions.	to choose my words incredibly carefully because I don't want to end up on some, some uh, social media site, conservative media. . . accusing me of trying to indoctrinate students and things of that nature."—Josh
3.3 Maintaining Equality in Group Work	Maintaining equality denotes the desire to treat and assess all students in a similar fashion. This also concerns addressing issues of equivalence in educational outcomes, regardless of "unique characteristics" such as "language barriers, cultural differences, learning disabilities, physical or mental problems, personality traits, or time constraints" which present barriers to them fully contributing to a group" (Dommeyer, 2007, p. 175-176).	"Some students are kinesthetic learners, some students, you know, can understand written words much better than any other type of learning experience. So I think we have to consider that in our classrooms. So we have to be flexible as instructors, we evolve with our classes, and every class is different. . . it's not a, a one size fits all."—Laverne "I started to feel really uncomfortable with the disparity between the face-to-face experience and the online experience, and I sought to make them more similar to each other. And, unfortunately, I do think that meant my face-to-face students lost things rather than my online students gaining."—Amy
3.4 Time as a barrier and time as a promoter of active and collaborative learning	Time refers to (1) face-to-face class time which is often viewed as sacrosanct. Instructors are often afraid that active collaborative exercises will absorb precious time needed to "cover" course material (Burke, 2011; Keyser, 2000; Miller & Metz, 2014). Time also refers to the (2) "planning time necessary to develop the [teaching] materials" (Miller & Metz, 2014, p. 246). Energy refers to	"In a 16-week course, you can afford to take the first three weeks to really weave those students together, like as one fabric. But, in an eight-week class, three weeks is almost half of the class. And if you go through half of the class and you don't have that community, it minimizes or it

	the effort exerted before and during class to execute this type of instruction.	can impact how much active engagement you have." — Diana "Faculty, you know, we have a certain amount of office hours, we have a certain amount of class time. And when you have a collaborative assignment that you think is going to be amazing, but it can take a certain amount of hours, you almost have to make decisions for when that can be done."—Julia
3.5 Administrative support as a promoter of active and collaborative learning	Administrative support denotes college leaderships' encouragement and reinforcement of active and collaborative learning techniques and support of instructors who use them. These administrators actively seek to foster active and collaborative learning despite the fact that didactic lecture has been the standard approach to teaching higher education since the inception of higher education (Miller & Metz, 2014).	"I want to make sure I can have those conversations where someone doesn't go to administration and say they're talking about critical race theory in [DISCIPLINE], and then someone in, in higher in the administration's like, 'oh, well we don't want to touch anything like that. That's too, too hot to handle, so you really shouldn't talk about that'. . . . I think it's easy in today's climate for faculty to be a little bit more tentative about not knowing if someone is going to support you." — Josh

APPENDIX D: ANALYTIC MEMO EXAMPLE

This analytic memo details direct and indirect references to out-of-class team/partner work as defined in the codes, definitions, and examples (see code 2.4.b., Appendix D). However, out-of-class team/partner work, as a part of these instructors' overall collaborative strategy, was overwhelmingly scant. One of the major reasons for this was the perception that community college students often have family, work, or other responsibilities that make it difficult for them to align schedules with other classmates to make this type of collaboration a reality. These challenges are exhibited best through the words of Amy and Julia. Amy stated,

> I know that some of my students are doing their homework in the library at three in the afternoon and an equal number, if not more, are doing their homework at 4:30 in the morning when their kid's asleep. . . . If you're going to do collaborative work outside of the classroom, there has to be some way that acknowledges those very different needs. . . . I don't want one person to be punished for another person's needs.

Julia, furthering Amy's argument and acknowledging these "different needs" said,

> students are just so different now, like with their flexibility and their availability, and I feel like I'd have to take some additional steps to say, okay, maybe do like a survey. 'What times are you available to meet with the group?' And then I would need to group them together with folks that have similar availability. . . . I would have to find a way to be creative to ensure that I'm setting them up for success to actually meet, um, as a group.

Similarly, Beverly argued that students at MFCC have a multitude of responsibilities such as families and jobs when they are not at school. Therefore, the idea of coordinating group work outside of class would present an onerous and perhaps, in cases, an unobtainable expectation.

Josh, likewise, expressed that out-of-class team/partner work was “not the norm” noting that “trying to expect them to be able to be getting together outside of class can be challenging”

For others, the disdain for out-of-class team/partner work stemmed from an inability to monitor the work taking place. Bryce noted that his students no longer engage in team/partner work outside of class because it is difficult to evaluate and assign grades to the work being done. There is a worry that one or two individuals in the group will do all the work—what Josh referred to as “social loafing.” Bryce currently counts the final presentations as the only gradable data but admits that he is still searching for a better way to evaluate these interactions in order to discern “how they work in groups outside of class.”

Diana, citing her “daycare” assignment example, speculated that there *was* out-of-class collaboration, even though it was not specifically required. Likewise, although Laverne does not assign work that requires out-of-class team/partner work she acknowledged that she has witnessed her students coming together to collaborate outside of class nothing “when they work together, I love it.” Giving an example, she described her elation at a synchronous online session where “three young men showed up on the same computer and they were working together. . . . When I saw their three faces, it was like my heart just exploded.”

The sentiment expressed by many of these instructors can be correlated to the existing literature in the field. Comparing CCCSE items 4f and 4g, which references in-class and out-of-class and class collaboration, respectively, there is a significant decline in collaboration once students leave the classroom. In fact, almost 50% of surveyed students revealed that they had never collaborated with a classmate outside of class time (CCCSE, 2023f).

Amy, Julia, and Beverly all stressed that community college students’ obligations outside the classroom made requiring out-of-class team/partner work difficult to schedule and perhaps

even impossible for some students to enact. Wood's (2020) work buttresses these claims reporting that most community college students hold full-time or part-time jobs. With a considerable number of community college students even missing classes due to work obligations (Wood, 2020), it stands to reason that scheduling additional out-of-class collaborative time would be burdensome. This may explain in part the sparse usage of out-of-class active and collaborative assignments.

Laverne's joy when the "three young men showed up on the same computer and they were working together" unknowingly underscored one of the most powerful and meaningful aspects of out-of-class team/partner work—study groups. Pickell (2016) found that study groups can be even more effective than individualized tutoring. These out-of-class opportunities allow students to talk through hard concepts with classmates and participation may even work to increase student accountability (Pickell, 2016). While there was no indication that formalized study-groups was an initiative publicized at MFCC both Laverne and Diana saw this happen organically and acknowledged its worth.