Teaching Effectively: Award Winning Faculty Share Their Views

Lucas D. Maxwell
University of Missouri
Stacy K. Vincent, Assistant Professor
University of Kentucky
Anna L. Ball, Associate Professor
University of Missouri

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the phenomena of effective teaching for award winning faculty instructors at the University of Missouri. Nine university faculty members were selected to participate in this study based on their recognition as award winning instructors and by nomination from their respective college's academic dean. Each participant took part in a semi–structured interview with a member of the research team. After analysis, several themes were identified and fell into two broad categories dealing first with the act of effective teaching and second, the act of becoming and evolving as an effective teacher. One sub–theme was the need to focus on students. While all acknowledged the importance of course content, they noted that if the focus is not on the student, content is of little consequence. Additionally, sub–themes indicated that effective teaching required dialogue, was relevant and led to critical thinking and progression which caused students to think about content in a new way. Further, themes describing teaching as scholarship and teaching and learning being a process of growth emerged. These themes provide valuable insight into how award winning faculty instructors think about their teaching.

Keywords: effective teaching, university faculty, teaching as scholarship, critical teaching

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Higher education in modern times is facing scrutiny from stakeholders regarding not only the value of the curriculum being taught as well as the quality of classroom teaching. Over the past two decades, higher education in general and the college classroom in particular has shifted to a more consumer–oriented, learner centered environment with a focus on accountability (Camblin Jr. & Steger, 2000; Huber & Hutchings, 2005). While it is commonly and often intuitively known among many college teachers that the general culture, needs, and level of preparation of the entering college student has changed (Choy, 2002), shifts have also occurred in the number and nature of subjects taught in higher education (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Sweeping changes in the student population, the content offered, and

general concern for teaching as a serious intellectual endeavor in higher education have been met with a shift in faculty focus and concern about pedagogy (Lindholm, Astin, Sax, & Korn, 2002; Stewart, 2009).

Rosenshine and Furst (1971) identified eleven different performance criteria related to teacher effectiveness and while their results provided insight into many variables related to effective teaching, they incited little direction to those charged with the responsibility of teaching content. While the Rosenshine and Furst literature has been widely utilized in teacher education programs in agriculture as the model of effective teaching, its use in modern teaching and learning environments is widely debated. Additionally, one must question if these traits are applicable nearly 40 years later, particularly in a *university* classroom that is much different than the settings described in the studies that

Rosenshine and Furst used to identify these traits.

More recently, studies have been conducted to identify common practices among highly effective teachers. In one such study, 92 elementary and middle school teachers were followed over the course of a year (Bransford, Darling–Hammond, & Lepage, 2005). While the teachers participating in this study varied greatly on several different variables, the traits and elements of effective teaching that were identified were similar among all participants. Traits such as setting clear expectations for students, working the room while teaching, encouraging communication between student and teacher as well as between students, and having a clear organized plan were some of the key effective teaching characteristics identified (2005). While potentially useful at the postsecondary level, Menges and Austin (2001) argued that there are distinctive differences between education at the K–12 level versus postsecondary education. They noted the differing roles and missions between the two as well as the fact that university faculty, while highly trained in their respective fields, often have little if any training in teaching (2001). These are only two of the numerous distinctions that the authors draw between the two, thus the need for direct inquiry at the postsecondary level regarding effective teaching techniques.

Within the discipline of agricultural education specifically, studies on teaching effectiveness have examined teachers of agriculture at the secondary level (Larsen, 1992; Miller, Kahler, & Rheault, 1989; Newcomb, Warmbrod & McCracken, 1993; Roberts & Dyer, 2004). Additionally, agricultural education provides sound research in the cognitive levels of college teaching (Bowman, & Whittington, 1994; Lopez & Whittington, 2001; Whittington, 2009) and the needs and current levels of critical thinking (Ricketts, Rohs, & Nichols, 2005; Rudd, Baker, & Hoover, 1998) that are possessed at the college level. Yet, missing from the literature is a focus on effective teaching in agricultural sciences and related disciplines at the postsecondary level. This lack of literature, coupled with research priority area three of the Agricultural Education in University and Postsecondary Settings section of the *National Research Agenda: Agricultural Education and Communication 2007–2010*

(Osborne, 2007) helps to create an argument for the need to further investigate effective teaching at the postsecondary level.

Bransford et al. (2005) outlined a framework for organizing and understanding teaching and learning, that suggested that to be an effective teacher one must have a solid base and expertise in three broad areas. Effective teachers must have a knowledge of their students development as learners, a sound understanding of the subject being taught, and finally a knowledge of teaching (2005). It can be reasonably assumed that university faculty have a solid understanding of their respective content area. However, most have little or no formal education or training in pedagogy or learning psychology. Despite this, faculty are expected to provide instruction and many do so with great success and are identified by their students and peers as being exemplary teachers. Boyer (1990) stated that "teaching begins with what the teacher knows…Pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subject taught" (Defining SoTL Hand–out, 2008). This process may seem very logical to those with formal training in teaching, however, do effective college teachers describe a similar approach? With this in mind the researchers sought to determine what exemplary teaching means to award winning faculty at The University of Missouri.

This study was conceptualized through the lens of research on teaching, learning, effective teaching, and how teachers learn to teach. It was posited that, while faculty by and large have no formal training in pedagogy, the goal for learning to teach and subsequently becoming an effective teacher, is to develop habits of mind to approach teaching as an intellectual inquiry in both their own teaching effectiveness as well as within the literature on teaching. Four kinds of research bases to support teaching and learning have been noted in the teacher education literature including: research on how people learn, the influences of teaching strategies on what and how people learn, research on teacher professional development that influences student learning, and finally research that examines how teachers learn to teach in ways that support student learning (Darling–Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Specifically, this study posited that to clearly define the phenomenon of

effective teaching at the college level, one must investigate how teachers *successfully* learn to teach in ways that support student learning.

Exemplary teaching is rewarding and acknowledged by some as scholarly (Evans & Tress, 2009; Shulman, 2000). In fact, Shapiro (2006) posits that effective teaching should be taken more seriously in the promotion and tenure process. The academic literature outside the realm of education journals documents the positive results of exemplary teaching, yet it is acknowledged that more guidance toward effective teaching in the areas of faculty development is needed. For example, the literature in the disciplines of medicine (Fincher, 2000); animal science (Buchanan, 2008); and psychology (Marsh & Roche, 1997) all call for a more codified knowledge base on effective teaching as well as faculty development efforts to help faculty implement effective practice. Furthermore, research (Hutchings, 2000) notes that a need is present in the overall profession of college teaching and in the improvement of student learning. An opportunity awaits agricultural educators in filling a need for training and examining the process of effective teaching at the post–secondary level, and faculty members in agricultural education as teacher educators can be positioned to lead the charge, not only their colleges but university wide, in developing faculty for effective practice in teaching.

It can be posited that faculty instructors who are recognized for their teaching are performing at highly effective levels in the classroom. As a result, it is increasingly important that the phenomena of effective teaching be understood from the viewpoint of these award winning instructors to provide direction to current and future faculty as to how they might improve their teaching effectiveness. In fact, researchers claim that some investment in time and attention to developing skills in teaching is likely to have substantial payoffs in self–satisfaction and effectiveness in a career (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). Further, a study of expert and novice teachers found that experts were more likely to be able to identify tasks that were important to the teaching process and were more likely to consider the consequences of their actions in the classroom (Berliner & Carter, 1989). In addition, expert teachers differed from their novice counterparts in their willingness to

share their expertise when the opportunity presented itself (Shim & Roth, 2009). If these clear distinctions exist between expert and novice teachers then should not more research be conducted in regard to what it means to be an exemplary or effective teacher? Additionally, previous study sought to examine effective teaching from the viewpoint of undergraduate students and indicated that these students identified six categorical turning points that define the effective teacher (Docan–Morgan, 2009). While informative in its own right, perhaps the best sources for this inquiry is not undergraduate students but rather, those teachers who have been deemed to be exemplary.

Purpose and Central Question

The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomena of effective teaching for award winning faculty instructors at the University of Missouri. The central question that guided this research was *What does it mean to award winning instructors to be an effective teacher?* Additionally, the following sub–questions were developed to further guide the development of the study and the analysis of the data collected. The sub questions were:

1. How do award winning teachers characterize a person who exemplifies the term effective teacher?
2. What do award winning teachers do inside and outside of the classroom that make them effective? What don't they do?

Methods and Procedures

Sample

A purposive sample of nine University of Missouri faculty members (5 male, 4 female) served as the participants for this study. The researchers selected these participants in order to ensure that attempts could be made to represent the various colleges at the university and to have an adequate number of individuals who shared the phenomena. The participants represented five different Colleges with three faculty from the College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences respectfully. The College of Business, College of Education, and the School of Journalism were each represented by one faculty

participant. According to Polkinghorne (1989) it is suggested that between 5 and 25 individuals comprise the sample for a phenomenological study. While demographic characteristics were not a criterion, the following characteristics were observed. The participants represented various disciplines in the bench sciences, social sciences, and liberal arts and all taught at least one undergraduate course. Five of the participants held the rank of full professor with the remaining four holding the associate professor rank.

Research Design

According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 57). In conducting this study the researchers followed the process outlined by Moustakas (1994). Philosophically, the researchers were guided by the four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology as outlined by Stewart and Mickunas (1990).

When completing a phenomenology, the researcher's intent is to gain a deeper understanding of a particular topic. To accomplish this, the researcher must first set aside their own beliefs and experiences with the phenomena of interest. Through a process called bracketing, the researcher acknowledges their current understanding of the phenomena as well as any preconceived notions or biases they may hold in order to be open and receptive to the data collected and the resulting themes identified regarding the phenomena (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2007). As former teachers and current university personnel working in teacher education it was important for the researchers to bracket their experiences. As part of this process the researchers discussed their personal views regarding teaching and the characteristics of an effective teacher. This process served two purposes, first, it allowed each researcher to acknowledge the thoughts and views that they currently held and second, the differences between each researcher's own views helped to highlight the fact that people have different views and different ways of expressing them. This helped to prepare the researchers for the interview process and allowed them to be much more open and receptive to the participant's responses and the resulting themes.

Procedure

Upon receipt of exempt status from the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board, potential participants were contacted by the researchers and asked to participate in the study. The following criteria were used to select those faculty who were potential study participants. First, the researchers did an exhaustive review of faculty members who teach undergraduate courses at the university and had been recognized for the excellence in teaching with multiple teaching awards. Those individuals who had won at least two awards for their teaching beyond the departmental level were considered potential study participants.

Following creation of this list, the researchers contacted the Associate Dean for Academic Programs for each of the University's respective colleges and asked them to nominate faculty members whom they felt were the best undergraduate teachers in their programs. This request resulted in 62 individual faculty from across several disciplines. The researchers then created a list of faculty who met the criteria of being award winning and also received a nomination from their college's academic dean. At this point the researchers generated a list of 20 faculty who met all of the inclusion criteria. Based off of this list a group of ten faculty members was created to serve as the participants for the study. While selecting this list the researchers attempted to select faculty from various colleges and departments representing the bench sciences, social sciences, and the professions.

Those faculty who met all criteria and were selected as the participants for the study were sent an email by the research team briefly explaining the study and asking if they were willing to complete an interview of approximately one to one and one half hours in length. From this initial call six faculty indicated their willingness to participate. For those who declined, the research team selected a replacement from the 20 faculty members who met all of the inclusion criteria and asked them to consider participating. This process was repeated with nine total faculty members agreeing to participate in the study.

For each interview conducted the researchers first obtained informed consent from each faculty participant. After consent was obtained a semi structured interview protocol

was utilized. Although a set of questions were included in the protocol, it was the researchers intent to let the faculty participants drive the interview, only asking specific questions to direct or guide the participating faculty member toward various topics. Each interview was recorded using a digital recording device and then transcribed verbatim. Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to one hour and 40 minutes in length. At the conclusion of each interview the participants were thanked for their time and asked if they were willing to be contacted again if any clarification by the researcher was needed during transcription and data analysis.

Data Analysis

Recurring statements were identified after several readings of the interview transcripts. Based off of these reoccurring statements, themes were developed and transcripts were coded by hand using highlighter markers with each theme coded by a different color. Throughout the process, the researcher adhered to the phenomenological method, making every effort to maintain rigor by completing a thorough review of the literature, bracketing personal views and experiences, conducting interviews that resulted in data saturation, and then utilizing member checks to confirm the identified themes (Creswell, 2007). All participants were provided with copies of the interview transcripts and were asked to confirm their accuracy. The researchers also provided each participant with the finished manuscript and asked them for confirmation and approval of the stated findings. Additionally, an audit trail, reflexive journals, and peer debriefing were utilized to maintain trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative data analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). While every effort was made to maintain the trustworthiness and credibility of the study, it should be noted that the findings are limited to the nine faculty members studied and readers should use caution when transferring these findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

A thorough review of the data collected during the interview process resulted in the identification of two major themes and several common subthemes. The two major themes

identified helped to categorize the participant's responses into subthemes connected to the act of effective teaching and the act of becoming and evolving as an effective teacher. These themes and subthemes emerged after repeated readings of the interview transcripts and are not presented in any particular order.

The Act of Effective Teaching

The first major theme that was identified dealt with subthemes centered on the actual act of being an effective teacher. Common across all participants was the need to focus on students. Additionally, participants indicated that effective teaching required dialogue and was relevant. Finally, effective teaching meant helping students develop thinking skills and causing them progress from their current level of knowing to some new level of understanding.

Focus on students.

Participants in this study were adamant that in order to be effective, a teacher must place the student as the central focal point in thinking about teaching. Faculty suggested that one of the biggest mistakes that ineffective teachers make is that they focus on the content first rather than first focusing on the students. This does not mean that faculty deemed the content as unimportant; rather it meant that regardless of how important the message, if one has not first considered the students' needs, a teacher has little chance of reaching the student in the first place. According to one participant, "If you are not thinking in terms of how can I help the students understand the material you've got a huge barrier to get over."

In placing students as a central focal point in thinking about teaching, the teacher must have an understanding of the student audience. Faculty members indicated that they must have some idea about who the student body is as a whole, and at the same time recognize that the group is changing, and that students are very likely much different from the kinds of learners they were in college. One participant described the differences between how today's students learn versus how the participant learned. They stated:

> … when they are thinking about learning they are usually thinking about learning with some little electronic device and most of these electronic devices provide you with

menus. So, it's a more of a menu driven form of learning than what my generation came up with. Basically we weren't…we didn't have menus.

By first focusing on the student, this instructor recognized the differences between how today's students approach learning and then develop approaches that will help students be successful.

Focusing on the student is perhaps the first step to creating an environment where a student is willing to engage in the learning process. When the central focus of instruction is placed on a student, it sends a message to the student that they are important and are an integral component of the learning process. Instructors further indicated that in classroom it is important to create an environment where learning is a two way street. Focusing on the student was implemented directly in the classroom in often simple ways. One example was faculty members making an effort to know students' names. "I appreciate someone who knows my name and so I kind of go that other people do to." This same participant indicated that even in a class of more than 200 students it was still possible to learn 80 – 90% of their names. This simple act can have an extraordinary effect in terms of care for students and an emphasis on them and their learning as the focal point of effective teaching.

Effective teaching requires dialogue and is relevant.

By first focusing on students and making sure that their needs were understood, faculty were then able to create a dialogue between themselves and the students. This dialogue fostered a situation where students feel that they are active participants in the learning process. When a student is actively engaged in the process of learning then faculty members are more than willing to meet them half way, or in some cases beyond that. As one participant explained:

…there's that old adage…something like a student or a child…isn't a vessel to be filled but a light to be turned on or something like that. I don't want to cram stuff down into the mouth or the brain of an unwilling student, but, you know, if the student is

there and wants to learn, then you know, I'll play, I will play as far as you want to go.

This was a common theme among all participants. Exemplary teachers stressed the notion that students have a responsibility in the learning process. As a teacher, you must recognize this and hold not only yourself accountable but also the student. To further make this point one participant stated:

Part of college is taking responsibility for your own learning…Can I force someone to learn who doesn't want to learn? I don't think so. Can I force them to memorize a bunch of stuff and regurgitate it on a exam and then give them a grade? Yeah, but that is not really learning and this is not really teaching either.

By creating dialogue with students they become much more engaged in the learning process. The exemplary teacher did everything within their power to plan for, deliver, and reflect on effective teaching. They recognized that it was their responsibility to create an environment where students are more likely to engage in the learning process, but they acknowledge that ultimately the students must do their part as well.

When talking about their teaching, award winning faculty instructors stressed the need to make the content relevant to the students. Through their actions, they tried to address issues that were authentic and connected to real life or current topics. Often, faculty used a more problems–based approach to their teaching and incorporated opportunities for their students to actually do some project or task that would allow the students to experience the topic being taught. Additionally, it was noted that learning experiences often extended well beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. To help illustrate this theme one faculty member shared the following:

We have an advisory board that assists us with this [mentoring] so my first thought was rather than have faculty or alumni do the mentoring program why not have students do it… they will form their own committee, they will put this together but when they go out looking for a job they will

be talking about all the people they interacted with, how they did it, you know, so to me, boy, that is the kind of stuff that I think is as is important as what people do in the class.

In this case, the faculty member viewed the opportunity for the student to apply the skills they were discussing in class to a real life situation as vital to the students' learning experience.

Effective teaching is thinking and progression.
Participants all indicated how much they enjoyed their respective content areas and sharing their knowledge and love for their discipline with their students. However, all indicated that more important than simply teaching students' content, they strove to cause students to think about the content in a new way and critically analyze what they were being taught. More than simply sharing content, award winning instructors had the goal of creating critical thinkers and teaching students critical thinking skills that would be relevant to other aspects of their life. One faculty member explained this desire to help students become critical thinkers as follows:

They may forget that William the Conqueror came into England in 1066 and took over and something like that, but I hope that they kind of begin to, they use the skills of, of the critical thinking, of learning not to take something at face value, but, that they dig a little deeper, that they sometimes, they need to do this throughout life.

By encouraging students to discover and utilize their critical thinking skills effective teachers focused on helping a student progress from where they currently are in their learning to some new point. This progression seemed to be their ultimate goal. In fact, effective teachers noted that they enjoyed watching students progress through the specific course they were teaching but were also motivated by watching the students grow and progress throughout their career at the University. Effective teachers took a lot of pride in watching their students be successful. According to one faculty member, "you know the students don't realize this but when our students succeed, we are ecstatic. I

mean this is cool man!" One participant explained this notion of progression when asked to describe an effective teacher by stating:

I think it's somebody who is able to take a young person sitting in a class and help them undergo this transformation from thinking of themselves as a student to thinking of themselves as a practitioner of that discipline. For example, there's a difference in thinking of yourself as a student in an animal science class as opposed to I'm an animal scientist. I really think that the really, really outstanding teachers are those who are able to get young people to put themselves in the position of being practitioners.

The above quote helps to explain this notion of effective teaching. Effective teachers cause their students to think about issues in a different way than they had previously. By causing this shift in thinking, effective teachers create a situation where students progress from being simply students in a class to practitioners of a particular discipline.

The Act of Becoming and Evolving as an Effective Teacher

The second main theme that was identified dealt with the actual act of becoming and evolving as an effective teacher. Subthemes were identified that helped to explain how effective teachers viewed the process of effective teaching. First, participants discussed their views of teaching in terms of it being a form of Scholarship. Secondly, they viewed the entire teaching and learning process as a process of growth, not only for the teacher but also for the students.

Teaching as scholarship.
Exemplary teachers all agreed that teaching was a valid form of scholarship and that it was part of their professional responsibility to provide effective instruction. In describing the similarities between teaching and research one participant stated "it could be that they draw from the same skill set." They went on to explain the two activities by stating:

I mean ultimately what is empirical research which is what I do. It's what do we know about a field, what don't we know? How

can I design a study to learn something that we don't know that would be interesting and then executing the plan and doing it? Ok, what's a lecture? You know, teaching, uhm, what do we know about this area, what's important to know for the student? How am I going to communicate it? So, you know, both of them are some level of just thinking.

The above view of scholarly teaching was consistent among participants. All indicated that they used this approach when planning for their teaching.

Additionally, participants agreed that their scholarship complimented their teaching. According to one faculty member "what I read to do my research is uhm, I can incorporate in my classroom in a variety of ways. So yeah, definitely, I think it is best when those [teaching and research] go together." In fact, participants indicated that often teaching was an outlet for them to share their scholarship, perhaps with more people than would view it when published in a journal. One participant explained:

I think I am to the point where I get to decide where I am making the most impact. I have rationally thought about this and I love doing research and have four undergraduates in the lab doing research and I am never going to give that up, but I also think that spending ten thousand dollars on chemicals and however much time publishing something that only three people are going to read in the world is not making a big impact.

Through the lens of effective teachers, teaching was not viewed as more important than research but rather, both possessed the potential to incite a great deal of impact and both deserved to have time devoted to doing them well.

Teaching and learning as growth.
Exemplary teachers viewed the process of teaching and learning as a process of growth. Nearly all of the participants indicated that they did not view themselves as being experts but rather they were constantly striving to improve the quality of their teaching. Participants were asked if they felt that exemplary teachers were born or made. While all acknowledged that people are all born with certain talents and aptitudes, to be an effective teacher you must work very hard. All agreed that exemplary teachers are made. On participant used the following example:

Albert Pujols is the best hitter on the planet. However, was he born a great hitter or did he make himself a great hitter. No matter what your natural talents are, how athletically capable you are, unless you work at hitting you're not going to be a great hitter.

Exemplary teachers stressed the need for teachers to constantly work at improving their teaching skills. Several participants indicated that they felt that it was vital that they participate in professional development activities that related to teaching not only at their own universities but also at regional and national professional development programs. The Wakonse program, an annual teaching conference, was mentioned on several occasions with participants indicating that they felt that participating in the program and hearing about how others approach teaching helped to shape their own practice. Further, exemplary teachers indicated that they often implemented strategies that they adapted from other teachers.

Equally important according to participants was the need to reflect on the teaching and learning process. One participant told the following story about a junior faculty member concerned by how her classes were going. This story perfectly describes the importance of reflection but also ties in many of the all of the other themes that emerged from the data collected. The participant stated:

A little bit of reflection is often very good, which is one of the things I tell other faculty. You will hear new faculty a lot of time go, God, class isn't going well, I am going to go get the book and I am going to read through this chapter again so I know exactly what…and I am immediately like, time out, stop, do not go do that. You already know way more than the students, the issue is not in the book. Your problem, if it's not going well, is your interaction with the students. You're not connecting with them, you're not engaging them; you need to do something

different. Reading the book is not, ever, going to be the answer to your question.

And, we had a young faculty member a few years ago go, I mean, almost verbatim that's what she said, and I said don't you dare do that and if I find out you did it, it's going to be hard getting me out of your office for awhile. And I said, how long would it take you to read that chapter, an hour? And she said, yeah that probably I could do it in an hour. Alright, here is what I want you to do, you take a pad of paper, a pencil, you go somewhere for an hour and what you think about is what could I do to get these students to actually physically do something that would relate to the topic that you are trying to talk about. That hour will be substantially more valuable to you than anything you are going to get out of the book and I would stand by that.

This quote illustrated the essence of the manner in which exemplary teachers viewed teaching. First, they recognized that they already know more than their students and as a result really need to focus on them before they ever worry about the content. Second, it exemplified the need for finding ways to create a dialogue with the students and make the information being taught relevant. Finally, it helps to illustrate the importance of reflection and the need to always search for ways to grow as a teacher.

Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations

From the findings in this study, it was concluded that teaching and being an excellent teacher are complex issues. While the individual nuances of teaching may vary from individual to individual and may work in one situation while not in another, there are some common themes that emerged when award–winning teachers were asked to describe effective teaching. This study was consistent with prior literature that identified common traits of effective teachers across different disciplines and different levels of teachers (Bransford et al., 2005). Different in this study, however, was the fact that the essence of effective teaching in the experience of the participants in this study was not a focus on

specific teaching skills or traits, but rather a description of particular habits of mind or ways of thinking about teaching. In broad terms these themes centered on the act of effective teaching and the process of becoming and evolving as an effective teacher.

The implication of this conclusion for teaching at the university level seems to suggest that while faculty may have little or no formal training or education in teaching, exemplary teachers talk about teaching and learning much like those who have studied the topic. While the terminology used may be different, the underlying themes are very similar. If this is the case, what can be done to better assist faculty who are struggling with their teaching so that they can become more effective in the classroom?

Perhaps one of the most important recommendations for future practice would be to help struggling faculty recognize the importance of focusing first on the students. When a faculty researcher begins a project, one of the first things that is completed is a thorough review of the related literature. Every effort is made to learn about the topic of interest and to ensure it is understood before progressing. Perhaps a more scholarly approach to teaching should be emphasized. Before entering a classroom a faculty instructor should make every effort to learn about the students they will be teaching. What are their backgrounds? How have they been trained to learn? What expectations do they have from the class and the instructor and how do those expectations align with those of the faculty instructor? By first focusing on the students the faculty instructor is taking an important step toward ensuring an effective teaching and learning experience.

Additionally, it is recommended that more resources be provided for faculty interested in improving their teaching. It is very easy to suggest that faculty need to create dialogue with their students and ensure that students understand the relevance of the material being taught. However, this is easier said than done. Many universities have implemented faculty orientation programs to assist new faculty instructors in developing their teaching skills. The findings from this study suggest that these programs should focus on providing participants with training in teaching techniques and

methods and should be made available to faculty regardless of their career stage.

Because teaching and learning effectively requires such an investment of time and effort, perhaps promotion and tenure processes should be evaluated (Shapiro, 2006). If institutions truly value teaching, then faculty, especially those in the beginning stages of their career, must be rewarded for their teaching and not placed in a situation where they feel forced to choose between teaching and research. Participants in the study indicated both research and teaching draw from the same skill set. If this is the case and if both teaching and research are necessary and vital to the success of an institution, then faculty professional development programs and performance review

systems should help faculty realize the parallels between teaching and research and provide equal rewards for efforts in both areas.

To help better understand the themes identified through this study the researchers developed a Framework for Effective College Teaching (Figure 1). It was concluded from the results in this study that this framework served as a way that the exemplary teaching faculty conceptualized effective teaching. According to the way in which faculty members in this study thought about and thus talked about their teaching, at the core of effective teaching are two major themes dealing with the teaching and learning process. These two themes are further supported and reinforced by five subthemes.
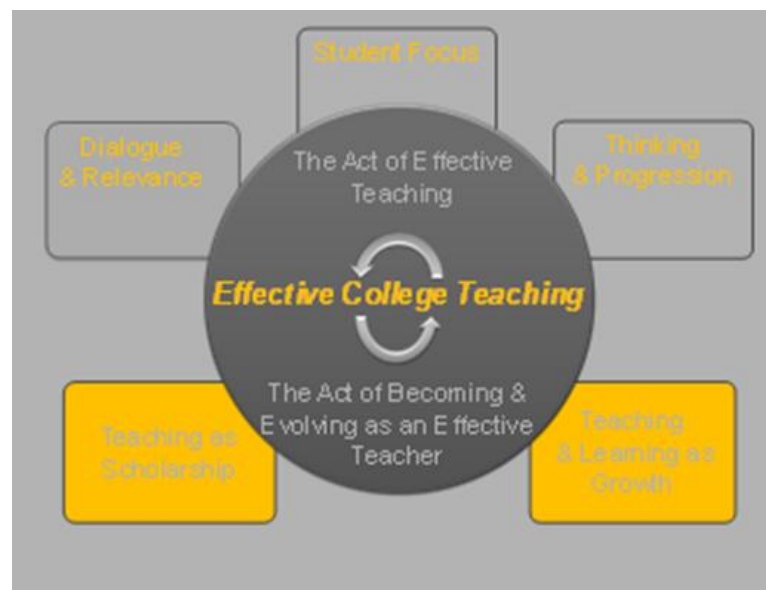

Figure 1. Framework for effective college teaching

It is important to note that this framework is merely a visual representation of how the participants in this study conceptualized teaching.   It is recommended that this framework be used to develop a questionnaire for use with a quantitative research approach to explore and further validate the findings of this study. While this study provided some insight

into how some faculty members think about teaching and learning, more in depth investigation is warranted. It is recommended that further quantitative and qualitative research be conducted on how university students view effective teaching and the connections or disconnect between faculty members' and students' views of effective teaching.

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LUCAS D. MAXWELL is a graduate of the doctoral program in the Department of Agricultural Education at the University of Missouri, 121 Gentry Hall, Columbia, MO 65211, ldmrkb@mail.mizzou.edu

STACY K. VINCENT is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education in the Department of Community and Leadership Development at the University of Kentucky, 505 Garrigus Building, Lexington, KY 40546, stacy.vincent@uky.edu

ANNA L. BALL is an Associate Professor of Agricultural Education in the Department of Agricultural Education at the University of Missouri, 122 Gentry Hall, Columbia, MO 65211, ballan@missouri.edu