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**A Phenomenological Study: Exploring College Students' Experiences and Perceptions  
About Adjuncts' Teaching Styles**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study using the phenomenological approach was to explore students' lived experiences through their perceptions of the effectiveness of adjuncts' teaching styles in one community college located in the Northeastern United States. This study used interviews to explore how college students describe how they learn most effectively, the teaching styles their adjunct instructors use in the classroom, and how they characterize an effective adjunct. Recommendations for further research include exploring teaching styles of adjuncts from specific academic programs, four-year institutions, as well as full time professors' teaching styles.

**Problem**

The problem in this phenomenological study was the need to explore and understand students' perceptions of adjunct instructors' pedagogical teaching skills to enhance adjuncts' ability to use 21st century teaching skills as a tool to transfer their knowledge to their students. While many colleges and universities gather data through end of course evaluations that provide quantitative data, this study provided a deeper understanding about the students' experiences and perceptions of adjuncts' teaching styles. The number of courses adjuncts teach continues to increase, yet professional development opportunities for these educators continues to be scarce. Adjuncts teach about 58% of the courses in community colleges in the United States (JBL Associates, 2008). This research is important because "those who do most of the teaching don't know all that much about how their students actually learn" (Noone & Swenson, 2001, p. 24). An exploration of college students' experiences with adjunct instructors provided an increased understanding of college students' perceptions of adjuncts' teaching styles.

**Aim**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore students' lived experiences through their perceptions of the effectiveness of adjuncts' teaching styles in one community college located in the Northeastern United States.

**Methodology**

A three-part, one-on-one, face-to-face, in-depth interview was conducted with five student participants. The researcher met each participant at the site at a time and date that

accommodated the participants' schedules. Each interview lasted between 7 and 49 minutes and was recorded. The interview protocol included 11 open-ended questions and used a semi-structured design to allow for probing questions. The interview protocol was divided into three parts and each part was administered to each participant on a different date. In congruence with Bevan's (2014) phenomenological approach to interviewing, part one of each interview asked a total of four descriptive and narrative questions about the participants' experiences with teaching. Part two of the interview protocol asked five descriptive questions to the participants about their interpretations of adjuncts' teaching styles to apprehend the phenomenon. Part three of the interview protocol clarified the phenomenon by asking two questions about how to change the pedagogical skills in the classroom to enhance the effectiveness of adjuncts' teaching.

### **Research Findings**

The findings of this study are organized by four themes and supported through a number of relative sub-themes. The first theme, effective learning, explores the ways participants describe how they learn most effectively. Sub-themes include varied teaching approaches, open lines of communication, approachability, and application. The second theme, unfavorable adjunct teaching styles, describes the participants' experiences through five sub-themes: lecture, storytelling, one-size-fits-all approach, lack of structure, and communication barriers. The third theme explores the participants' favorable adjuncts' teaching styles in the four sub-themes of adaptability, application, caring, and content knowledge. The fourth and last theme explores effective adjunct teaching through five sub-themes: student-focused, organization, communication, content knowledge, and application.

### **Conclusion**

#### *Results Identified in the Data*

Result	Perception
1	Students perceive real world application methods to be an effective learning and teaching style they experienced with adjuncts.
2	Students perceive content knowledge to be a characteristic of effective adjunct teaching that they have experienced with adjuncts.
3	Students perceive communication to be a characteristic of effective learning and teaching styles, however they have experienced communication barriers with adjuncts.
4	Students perceive student focused and varied teaching approaches to be effective learning and teaching styles, however they describe their experiences as being instructor focused.
5	While students have experienced both adaptable and "one size fits all" teaching styles, they favor the adaptable approach to teaching.

### **Research Implications**

This phenomenological study allowed for meaningful learning through interviews with five college students that provided this researcher with an understanding of how college students perceive their experiences with adjuncts' teaching styles. As with all studies the limitations of this study provide opportunities for further research. The student perspective on teaching styles in higher education using the phenomenological approach can be explored further through studying specific program adjuncts' teaching styles, adjuncts' teaching styles at four-year institutions, and studying full time professors' teaching styles.

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#### Author Biography

Nicolette DiPietro defended her dissertation at Drexel University in May 2018 and earned her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management with a concentration in adult education and organization development. Nicolette is currently the program coordinator of the hospitality and tourism management program at Rowan College at Burlington County (RCBC). In addition to leading the academic program at the college, she is also in her seventh year of teaching hospitality courses at RCBC. Most recently, Nicolette also began teaching in Drexel's hospitality management program as an adjunct instructor.