

TRANSFORMING A COMMUNITY COLLEGE: ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY
COLLEGE'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING LEARNING-CENTERED

A Dissertation

by

MYRA BRIDGES JOHNSON

Submitted to the Graduate School

Appalachian State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

August 2004

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Reich College of Education

TRANSFORMING A COMMUNITY COLLEGE: ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY
COLLEGE'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING LEARNING-CENTERED

A Dissertation

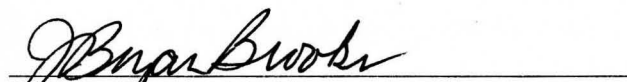
by

MYRA BRIDGES JOHNSON

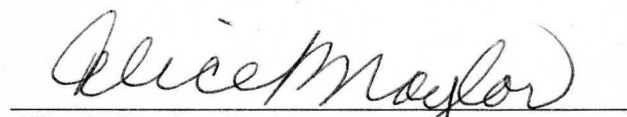
August, 2004


Approved by:


George Olson, Ph. D.
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee


Bryan Brooks, Ed. D.
Member, Dissertation Committee


Stephen White, D. A.
Member, Dissertation Committee


Alice P. Naylor, Ph. D.
Director of Doctoral Program


Judith E. Damer, Ph. D.
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research

ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMING A COMMUNITY COLLEGE: ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING LEARNING-CENTERED (May, 2004)

Myra Bridges Johnson, B.S.B.A. Western Carolina University

M.B.A. Western Carolina University

Ed.S. Appalachian State University

Dissertation Chairperson: George Olson, Ph. D.

Learning emerged as a guiding vision for community colleges in the mid-1990s when an ideology was articulated for a learning-college environment; yet, few colleges have realized the successful implementation of the ideology. A review of the literature suggests that this topic is an organizational issue and is a primary concern of many colleges. Also from the literature review, six key components for organizational transformation emerged: (a) Recognizing the need for change; (b) Articulating a guiding vision that establishes a guide for action; (c) Effective leadership that nurtures transformation; (d) Engaging stakeholders in collaboratively planning and implementing strategies for the transformation; (e) Aligning all practices, programs, policies, and procedures with the vision; and, (f) Allocating resources necessary for transformation. The challenge was to move away from conceptualization to understanding practice.

These identifiable components were contextualized in Isothermal Community College's transformation to a learning-centered college within this study. It is my assertion that these components, taken collectively, are interconnected

and interrelated forming a conceptual framework to guide the transformational process of educational leadership. An empirical qualitative method was used to conduct an in-depth study documenting processes implemented at Isothermal that resulted in the transformation.

At the outset, information gleaned from college documents and from my own participation in the transformation led to identifying areas where additional information was needed. Personal interviews were conducted with stakeholders of the college. The substance of the interviews was determined through the perusal and interpretation of the documents. Participants were selected who would have knowledge of the transformation and had been active during the initiative.

In addition, surveys were distributed to gain perspectives from students and other community colleges. The student survey was intended to collect information from students who attended Isothermal Community College prior to and during the transformation. The respondents reflected on statements concerning elements critical to transformation to a learning-centered college. Presidents and/or chief academic officers of North Carolina Community Colleges were also surveyed. Respondents were asked to share perceptions on the practices used and success of colleges in becoming learning-centered.

Once collected, the information was organized into themes related to the guidelines of organizational transformation. The findings provide insight into how Isothermal became learning-centered through organizational transformation. In addition, the results of this study provide a conceptual framework for other organizations seeking to transform into a learning-centered college.