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Creating Professional Learning Programs that Recognize Teachers as Adult Learners

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

According to recent research, approximately 40-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years, creating a constant need for teachers. There is evidence that creating a supportive working environment through effective professional learning, drawing on adult learning theory, may reduce teacher turnover and increase student performance. This study explored teachers' perceptions about the professional development offerings available to them, how these perceptions influence their decisions to remain at the school, and what types of professional learning experiences teachers want to experience. Fourteen high school teachers participated in individual interviews and 2 focus groups, which were analyzed inductively for themes. Participants revealed that voice, choice, effective professional development, time, collaboration, school climate, and the district's professional development program were instrumental in creating a supportive environment. These results suggest that creating professional learning programs that incorporate the attributes of effective professional learning and encourage teacher participation are important at all points of the process. A professional learning plan project was designed in response to the study findings and recommendations. This study may lead to social change by providing the target school district and its building level administrators with a plan for professional learning based on teacher input, effective practices, and adult learning theory to use as a viable method to retain effective educators that, in turn, may result in improved student performance.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, who always believed in me; to my children who always encouraged me; to my colleagues who always trusted me with their words; and to my mom who is and always has been my biggest fan.

In addition, I dedicate this to all teachers who strive to be better tomorrow than they are today. Your work is not in vain.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Approximately 30-50% of novice teachers leave teaching within the first 5 years in the profession (Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2013). Based on this expected loss of teachers, an estimated 2.2 million to 2.5 million teachers will need to be hired over the next 10 years (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). In the literature, while there has been a focus on retention of novice teachers, researchers have given less attention to the issues within schools that contribute to job satisfaction of all teachers as a means of retention.

Due to the belief of "severe teacher shortages" in the United States, there has been a great deal of attention to attracting and retaining novice teachers (Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003, p.5). Many school systems have instituted mentoring programs to support new teachers (Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kelley, 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Strong, 2005). Focusing on recruitment is not the answer to school staffing issues if 40-50% of teachers leave within 5 years (Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll, 2003; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

One policy that may hold promise for creating better working conditions is effective professional development. A previous, small-scale survey of teachers found most teachers dissatisfied with the professional development offerings. Respondents found little variety in the offerings, as most were related to technology, not content. This lack of content-focused professional development led respondents to note that they

seldom could use the information they learned in their classroom. This reinforced the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC; 2009) findings: when teachers "sense a disconnect between what they are urged to do in a professional development activity and what they are required to do" in their classrooms, there is little impact on teacher practice or student achievement (p. 10). This explains the report's finding of a nearly 50% rate of dissatisfaction by U.S. teachers with their professional learning experiences. Currently, the norm for professional development is experiences that are "unfocused, insufficient, and irrelevant to the day-to-day problems faced by front line educators" (Sparks, 2002, p. 7). A disconnect exists between professional development and *effective* professional development that educators need and desire to be more effective educators.

Creating a supportive working environment for teachers can be done by offering high quality, relevant professional development activities that are integrated in the school's culture and take advantage of the expertise of experienced teachers (Flynt & Morton, 2009; Guiney, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Scribner, 1999; Smith & Rowley, 2005). Other recent research has reinforced the need for and benefit of "job-embedded," on-going professional learning experiences that focus on content, the needs of students *and* teachers, and encourage collaboration (Arnau, Kahrs, & Kruskamp, 2004; Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; DuFour, 2004; Eun, 2008; Fullan & Mascall, 2000; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; King & Newman, 2001; Lee, 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Thibodeau, 2008; Timperley, Parr, & Bertanees, 2009; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, Orphanos, 2009; Yates, 2007).

Effective professional development is an opportunity for districts to invest in their teachers, which may strengthen teachers' commitment and retention (Ladd, 2011; Smith & Rowley, 2005). The professional development of teachers is also "critical to school improvement and increased student achievement" (Payne & Wolfson, 2000, p. 20). Improving the effectiveness and quality of professional development is "a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement" (Wei et al., p. 3). School districts need to adopt the "value that professional development is a serious enterprise, not an option, not an add-on, not dependent on a season of the year" (Hirsh, 2005, p. 5). A recent review of empirical studies on the benefits of induction programs (one highly popular form of professional support and development offered to novice teachers) found that most of the studies showed that students of beginning teachers who participated in some kind of induction had higher scores, or gains, on academic achievement tests (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In this study, I focused on one rural high school in a South Eastern state and sought to capture the voice of the participants as they articulated their professional development experiences and needs.

Definition of the Problem

The problem is that there is turnover at the target school, a rural high school in a South Eastern state. Teaching is a changing, "demanding profession with a steep learning curve, especially in the early years" (Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006, p. 95). The task becomes no less demanding even after years of experience. The role of teacher is constantly changing and evolving. The expectations for teachers are high:

Teachers are required not only to be experts in their content area, but are also

expected to be fluent in child psychology, skilled in communication, execute

brilliant classroom management strategies, and navigate the unrelenting gauntlet

of educational politics . It is an overwhelming undertaking even for the most

skilled teacher. (Beavers, 2009, p. 25)

A focus on teacher recruitment is not sufficient to remedy current school turnover

issues if schools do not examine the role their organization plays in teacher retention

(Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ladd, 2011). Nearly 50% of teacher turnover is

due to "teacher migration"—teachers leaving to go to other schools (Ingersoll, 2001, p.

503). Teachers are not simply leaving teaching; they are leaving their current schools to

work at other schools. If schools want to retain high quality teachers, they need to look at

their organizational structure, methods, and policies to see what part these may play in

teachers leaving (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

The target high school is part of a small, semirural school system of 5 schools that

serves approximately 4,000 students with an academic staff of 253 teachers and 200

support staff members. According to a school administrator, the faculty of approximately

100 teachers and support professionals is relatively inexperienced and unstable, with 39%

of teachers having 5 years or less of experience, 33% having 6-10 years of experience,

and a turnover rate of 16%. This is similar to findings from an analysis of 20 years of

demographic data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which described the

overall field of teaching as less experienced and more unstable (Ingersoll, 2012). By

2008, the most recent cycle of the SASS reviewed, the most common teacher was a first-

year teacher, representing 25% of the workforce with five or less years of experience (Ingersoll, 2012). The target school's percentage exceeds that by 14%. National averages vary for teacher turnover, with estimates between 30- 50% of novice teachers leaving the profession or current school (Ingersoll, 2003; Goldhaber, Gross & Player, 2011; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). A previous small-scale survey noted dissatisfaction with the current professional development opportunities, especially the lack of content-based options.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Teacher retention is an issue for schools in general; it can be a more pressing issue for small and rural districts because rural schools near suburban areas often hire new teachers, only to lose them in a few years to a larger school system (Reeves, 2003). New hires see small school systems as a good stepping-stone before moving to a larger school system for the long term (Reeves, 2003). Sojo (2003) commented that, "The recruitment and retention of teachers in small rural schools are two sides of the same coin" (p. 22).

Small school systems have limited resources and must take steps to retain their high quality teachers. There is a constant need to both attract new teachers to their systems and to ensure that those teachers stay. It is a balancing act faced by all schools: how to keep and invest in their most effective teachers, provide quality instruction to all students, make continuous gains in student achievement, be an effective learning organization, and do it on the funding available. For smaller school systems, making improvements in working conditions may be the most cost-effective measure to

encourage teachers to stay when compared to the cost of higher salaries (Ingersoll, 2003). The target school fits this situation.

In the local context, the target high school has had retention issues over the years and has had a contentious relationship with the professional development program. Teacher salaries were frozen from September 2008 through December 2011. Due to budget constraints and in an effort to lower responsibilities on the staff, professional development became voluntary for the 2010-2011 school year. Beginning in the 2011-2012, teachers and administrators were once again required to meet the 10-hour requirement, as raises went into effect in January 2012. This may be an opportune time to explore the perceptions and needs of the teachers in order to make suggestions for professional development at the target school.

While previous researchers have focused on a variety of working conditions in relation to teacher retention, this study focused on the working conditions of professional development as it relates to teacher perceptions of commitment to the school. Similar to a limited number of studies, it also asked teachers the types of effective professional development that they would like to participate in. Professional development programs need to assess the needs of teachers, students, and the goals of the school for student achievement. Goldhaber, Gross, and Player (2011) found that as teacher effectiveness increases so does the likelihood the teacher would stay in his or her current school or district.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Teacher attrition and retention are two of the most widely researched issues in education due to the startling statistics related to new teachers. Nearly half of novice teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, 2012). Based on this statistic, researchers estimated the hiring of 2.2 million to 2.5 million teachers over the next 10 years (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Ingersoll's recent work documents that hiring for teachers outpaced student growth by a wide margin, 19% versus 48% (Ingersoll, 2012). Yet, the retention issues remain. Ingersoll (2012) notes, "In short, both the numbers and instability of beginning teachers have been increasing in recent years" (p. 49). Recruitment is still only one piece of the solution. While retention is an issue for schools in general, it can be a more pressing issue for small and rural districts.

Reeves (2003) noted that rural schools near suburban areas can often hire new teachers, only to lose them in a few years. There is a constant need to both attract new teachers to their systems and to ensure that those teachers stay. Small school systems have limited resources and must take steps to retain their high quality teachers. "Effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools—one that needs to be treasured and supported" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p.7).

Ingersoll (2001) focusing on teacher turnover from an organizational standpoint found that rather than a teacher shortage, there is an "excess demand, resulting from a revolving door" in some schools; teachers are leaving for other schools and professions, not just retirement (p. 501). According to Ingersoll, teacher recruitment programs are not

the solution to staffing issues if schools as organizations do not determine their role in teacher retention. He noted that nearly 50% of teacher turnover is due to "teacher migration"—teachers leaving to go to other schools (p. 503). Teachers are not simply leaving teaching; they are leaving their current schools to work at other schools. If schools want to retain high quality teachers, they need to look at their organizational structure, methods, and policies to see what part these may play in teachers leaving.

Why do teachers leave? According to recent research, teacher pay, personal factors, (pursuing other jobs, lack of support, lack of autonomy,) student discipline and behavior, and dissatisfaction with conditions are all cited by teachers for either transferring to another school or exiting education (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Flynt & Morton, 2009; Hammer et al., 2005; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; Kelley, 2004; Ladd, 2011; Mihans, 2008; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Strong, 2005, 2006). In their review of literature specifically related to rural schools, Hammer et al. (2005) echoed these findings of the top challenges for teacher retention: lower pay; geographic and social isolation; difficult working conditions, and NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers (p. vii).

Although there are some differences for rural schools, all types of schools shared the salary and working condition issues. Suburban schools seem to benefit from the issues that plague urban and rural schools. In effect, there is a siphoning of highly qualified and effective teachers from urban and rural schools to suburban schools.

Due to the belief of "severe teacher shortages" in the United States, there has been a great deal of attention to attracting and retaining novice teachers (Ingersoll, 2003, p.5).

Many school systems have instituted mentoring programs to support new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kelley, 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Strong, 2005). Recruiting additional teachers cannot solve the problem if the new hires continue to follow the same pattern of the educators they were hired to replace: leaving in the first five years (Ingersoll, 2003). Merrow (1999) noted that there has been a "misdiagnosis" of the problem: it is not a recruitment issue, but a retention issue—an idea echoed by Ingersoll (2001). In 1999, the U. S. schools hired 232,000 new teachers, but in the same year, more than 287,000 left the field of education (NCTAF, 2002). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) compared this to a bucket with holes in the bottom—if the holes are not repaired, pouring more water in will not fix the main problem (p. 33). Based on Ingersoll's (2012) most recent work, the bucket is still leaking.

While there is agreement on the reasons for teachers leaving schools or teaching altogether, there is less agreement on how to retain teachers effectively (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Daley, Guarino, and Santibanez (2006) stated, "More reliable data tied to specific policy interventions are needed" in order to know what works best to retain teachers (p. 202). Teacher retention is a complex issue (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Borko, Liston & Whitcomb, 2008). It is more than knowing teachers are leaving; it is also having an understanding of what can encourage them to stay. In today's economic climate, making improvements in working conditions may be the most cost-effective measure to encourage teachers to stay when compared to the cost of higher salaries (Ingersoll, 2003; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Definitions

Teacher migration: refers to teachers who transfer or move to another school setting (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 503).

Teacher attrition: refers to teachers who leave the profession (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 503).

Experienced teacher: refers to a teacher with five or more years of teaching experience.

Novice teacher: refers to a teacher with less than five years of teaching experience (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009, p. 446).

Traditional professional development: refers to professional development experiences that tend to be short in duration, unrelated to content, unrelated to curriculum guides and goals, shallow, and do not encourage collaboration (Sparks, 2002; Wei et al., 2009).

Effective professional development: refers to professional development that is "intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong relationships among teachers" (Wei et al., 2009, p. 5).

Perception: refers to teachers' "views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 28).

Significance

A study of a school's turnover is important for many reasons. First, in an era of economic uncertainty, rural school systems need to make decisions that put their limited

funds to effective use. The cost of teacher turnover is approximately $12,546 per teacher (Johnson & Kardos, 2007, p. 2084). Losing two to three teachers can become a financial concern for small school systems.

Second, schools may be losing potential student achievement. Current research suggests that the first priority of school districts should be the placement of high-quality teachers in every classroom (Hammer et al., 2005, p. 1). If schools cannot retain their effective teachers, the students' achievement may suffer (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Third, from an organizational standpoint, knowing which characteristics of an organization may encourage retention of staff members could help similar organizations in their retention efforts. Finally, understanding retention from the teachers' perspectives may empower teachers in their classrooms and in their schools.

Guiding/Research Question

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional development offerings available to them?

2. How do these perceptions impact their decision to remain at the school?

3. What types of professional learning experiences do teachers want?

Review of the Literature

I conducted a thorough search of the literature. My literature search included sources from approximately 1999 to the present in which *teacher attrition, turnover,* and *retention* were identified as key terms, as well as literature on *rural and small school systems/districts, teacher job satisfaction and working conditions, autonomy, self-efficacy, adult learning,* and *locus of control*.

For the search on learning communities, I used the terms *learning communities, professional learning communities, PLCs,* and *collaborative learning*. The terms *teacher leadership, collective leadership, distributed leadership,* and *shared leadership* were used for the teacher leadership search. Finally, *professional development, professional learning, professional practice, staff development, effective professional development, job-embedded professional development,* and *teacher development* were all used as search terms for the literature search. The ERIC database, Education Research Complete, Education: a Sage full-text database, ProQuest Central, and Teacher Reference Center databases were the specific databases searched. In addition, reference lists from scholarly works, professional organization websites, and recent books were also searched.

In the first section, I discuss teacher retention and attrition. The second section is focused on working conditions, such as job satisfaction and its related issues of autonomy and self-efficacy, and locus of control. The third section includes information on schools as organizations and how their administration can either help or hinder the organization. In the fourth, and last section, I will review the literature related to teacher leadership, professional learning communities, and professional development.

Teacher Attrition and Retention

Teacher attrition and retention are two of the most widely researched issues in education due to the startling statistics related to new teachers. Nearly half of novice teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, 2012). Based on this statistic, an estimated 2.2 million to 2.5 million teachers will need to be hired over the next 10 years (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). While

an issue for schools in general, it can be a more pressing issue for small and rural districts.

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School districts have responded to a perceived shortage of teachers by focusing attention on hiring and retaining novice (Ingersoll, 2003, p.5). Many school systems have instituted mentoring programs to support new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kelley, 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Strong, 2005). Recruiting additional teachers cannot solve the problem if the new hires continue to follow the same pattern of the educators they were hired to replace: leaving in the first 5 years (Ingersoll, 2003, 2012).

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Working Conditions

There is evidence that creating a supportive working environment for teachers may reduce teacher turnover (Crossman & Harris, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Lussier & Forgione, 2010; Scribner, 1999; Smith & Rowley, 2005). Research has found that working conditions "play a major role in teachers' decisions to switch schools or leave the profession" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 9). When coupled with salaries, working conditions are a more accurate predictor of teacher turnover than student demographics, showing that "working conditions should be one

target for policies" that schools, as learning organizations, focus on to retain teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 9).

While past research and "conventional wisdom" has placed the causes of teacher shortages outside of the school (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005), research by Ingersoll and Smith (2003) suggests that the causes are within the schools and school districts—making these issues "policy-amendable" (p. 32). Thus, districts have it in their power to change the working conditions.

Work Autonomy, Locus of Control, Self-Efficacy, and Adult Learning

As noted previously, a reason for teacher attrition is dissatisfaction with working conditions. Bandura (1997) assessed the situation: "In short, educational systems are strewn with conditions that can easily erode teachers' sense of efficacy and occupational satisfaction" (p. 244). Related to teachers' daily lives are the issues of autonomy, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Work autonomy is "the latitude the individual is allowed in doing his/her work" (Breaugh, 1999, as quoted in Aube, Rousseau, & Morin, 2007, p. 484). Locus of control can be defined as "the degree to which individuals tend to attribute what happens to them to internal factors (e.g. skills, efforts, perseverance) or to external factors (e.g. chance, other people, divine intervention)" (Spector, 1982, as cited in Aube, Rousseau, & Morin, 2007, p. 483). Those who have an internal locus of control tend to be less affected by their organizational environment, while individuals with an external locus of control tend to be more sensitive to support provided by the organization (p. 483). Historically, the teaching profession has been known for a lack of autonomy and

control. Most decisions are made on behalf of teachers by those who do not have direct

contact with students, leaving some to declare: "This is not the stuff of professionalism"

(The National Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001, p. 10). Kukla-Acevedo (2009)

also explored the connection between classroom autonomy and teacher turnover and

found it to be associated with positive teacher outcomes (p. 444). This was similar to

earlier research (Ingersoll, 2001) that found when teachers feel "hindered and

ineffective," they may pursue other employment (p. 444). While this may paint a bleak

picture of the teacher's place in his or her profession, there are other views on the impact

individuals can have on their lives.

A person's perceived self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to

organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments"

(Bandura, 1997, p. 3). These beliefs can influence several areas of an individual's life. In

relation to working conditions, these beliefs can influence what people pursue, the

amount of effort put forth, and the level of perseverance when faced with difficulties and

lack of success (p. 3). While people cannot control all aspects of their lives, their beliefs

can play a vital role. "People who have strong beliefs in their capabilities approach

difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided" (p. 39). This

places a sense of control within the individual; the individual is an actor rather than a

passive bystander. This is especially important in the teaching profession, which can be

fraught with difficult assignments.

Brooks, Hughes, and Brooks (2008) studied the concept of alienation in teachers,

focusing on the sub-constructs of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness,

isolation, and estrangement (p. 45). Their study found most teachers felt powerless and meaningless in school-level decision making, but their sense of power and meaning increased the closer the decisions and activities were to their classrooms, showing that, alienation is, "to some degree, a matter of proximity to the classroom and that teachers feel that their experiences in the classroom are most authentic" (p. 59).

Swars, Meyers, Mays, and Lack (2009) noted a connection between teacher empowerment and teacher retention. Ingersoll (2001) and Ingersoll and May (2011) found a similar connection between schools where teachers had greater autonomy and decision-making and higher retention rates. Sargent (2003) concurred, finding "Teachers who feel connected to a school—who feel that their work is important and recognized—are more likely to remain vital, dynamic, and contributing members of the school community" (p.47).

This is simialr to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy possess an "affirmative orientation [that] fosters interest and engrossing invovlement in activities" (p. 39). They set and pursue rigorous goals, persist in their efforts despite roadblocks, see failure as the need for additonal effort, and are resiliant when failure occurs. This sense of personal empowerment may help teachers to face the challenges that the profession entails. "Verbal persuasion" can be used effectively by school administrators and lead teachers to strengthen people's self-efficacy (p. 101). When someone "significant" verbally expresses faith in a person's capabilties to achieve the task before them, the person is more likely to persevere. This can also "bolster self-change if the positive appraisal is within realistic bounds" (p. 101). Thus, the

words of those important to an individual can have the power to encourage change, including promoting "development of skills" (p. 101).

Williams (2003) found that some teachers, "exemplary" teachers, do not need to derive their power from without; these teachers fulfill their need for autonomy through their daily work (p. 74). This may reinforce the concept of locus of control being different depending on the individual. Despite differences, schools as organizations can affect working conditions, which in turn can affect retention. One such condition districts need to understand is adults as learners and how that can empower teachers.

Adults learn differently than children and their learning experiences should reflect that understanding (Beavers, 2009; Cummings, 2011). While no one theory currently explains everything, districts and schools can inform their PD experiences based on what has been learned (Merriam, 2001). The concept of andragogy is probably the best known. Malcolm Knowles (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) posited six "assumptions" of andragogy that are relevant to adult learners:

- As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being.
- An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.
- The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.

- There is change in time perspective as people mature--from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning.

- The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something. (p. 55)

Recognizing the needs of adult learners allows for greater work autonomy, opportunities to build and reinforce self-efficacy, a sense of control, and a sense of empowerment. When teachers are partners in their learning rather than simply recipients, they feel included in the process as valued professionals. They feel part of a more independent, bottom-up organization of shared knowledge and leadership rather than part of a "culture of dependence on top-down instructional processes" (Steinke, 2012, p. 54).

Teacher Leadership, Professional Learning Communities, and Professional Development

Teacher leadership and professional learning communities are two areas of education that hold promise for education reform and transformation of schools. In an era of high-stakes testing and accountability, now may be the time for the education system to embrace the ideas that leadership is everyone's responsibility and that all teachers are accountable for all students' achievement (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2002; Thornton, 2010). According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), "the need and potential for teacher leadership, as well as results, has probably never been greater" (p. 290). Barth (2001) concludes, "Students learn when teachers lead" (p. 445). In schools with strong teacher leadership, there is higher teacher moral and a greater degree of commitment to

the school (p. 445). In a similar vein, Lambert et al. (2002) noted, "a sense of community is evidenced in a commitment to growth of the faculty as a whole" (p. 22).

Teacher leadership. Muijs and Harris (2003) and York-Barr and Duke (2004) reviewed the literature on teacher leadership. Confusion remains about an exact or standardized definition of the term, due to differences in how leadership is practiced by a variety of teachers, in diverse settings, with differing expectations (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Muijs and Harris (2003) noted "overlapping and competing definitions" for the term" (p. 438), while York-Barr and Duke (2004) deemed it an "umbrella term" and provided their own definition based on their review: "The processes by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (p. 288). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) defined teacher leadership as: "teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (p. 5). Regardless of the different definitions, teacher leadership looks to improve teacher learning and practices and student learning and achievement. As noted by Hord (2008), the "purpose for schools is *student learning"* (p. 10).

Barth (2005) found that teacher leaders have an influence on the individual classroom as well as the school as a whole and that there is a connection between leadership and learning (Laureate Education, 2005). Muijs and Harris (2003) agreed that teacher leadership has an impact on both school and classroom improvement through its

influence on the relationships and teaching in schools. Barth (2001) provided a vision for the future of teacher leadership and its effect on schools: "Yet an opportunity resides within each new teacher and within the veteran as well, to become a school-based leader and reformer (p. 449).

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) echoed this thought as they describe the untapped power of teacher leadership: "Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change" (p. 2).

Despite all of the calls for teacher leadership and its proposed power for change, according to York-Barr and Duke (2004) and Leithwood and Mascall (2008), there is limited empirical evidence from previous studies to justify these claims. York-Barr and Duke (2004) noted that: "The literature is still more robust with argument and rationale than with evidences of effects of teacher leadership" (p. 287). They commented that most of the 140 sources they reviewed tended to be qualitative in nature and on a small-scale, with data being interviews and some surveys (p. 257). Few studies were quantitative in nature.

Based on their review of studies, Leithwood and Mascall (2008), found that there is "enthusiastic optimism" about the multitude of possible benefits of leadership that is distributed over the entire school organization including: (a) a more accurate reflection of the day to day division of labor within an organization; (b) a reduction in the chances for error; (c) greater opportunities for the organization to tap into the capabilities of a larger number of its members; (d) development of a "fuller appreciation" of how each person in

an organization is dependent upon one another and impacts others; (e) a greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies; (f) a reduction in the workload for those in formal leadership roles; (g) an improvement of the work experience; and (h) solutions to problems may emerge (p. 530-531). Yet, most studies they reviewed either did not show a positive relationship between expanded definitions of leadership and student achievement or showed the possibility of a negative relationship (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008, p. 531).

Leithwood and Mascall's (2008) study of 90 schools sought to estimate the impact of what they termed "collective leadership" on teacher variables and on student learning, the influence of school decision making on administrators, individual teachers, groups of teachers, parents, and students, and whether differences in collective leadership impact student achievement (p. 531). The study found that collective leadership had "significant direct effects" on all teacher variables studied, indicating that student achievement was indirectly influenced by teacher motivation and work setting (p. 544). These findings can be seen as "encouragement" for the proposed benefits of teacher leadership in schools (p. 547). They also noted that survey results documented that a traditional hierarchy of power appeared to remain in place despite attempts at shared leadership (p. 551).

Despite findings that support a "significant association" between collective leadership and high student achievement, the authors included a cautionary note of the possible negative results, including an absence of coordination, touches of anarchy, and the amount of time required of those not in formal leadership positions (p. 556).

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) recommend the possibility of utilizing an "intelligent hierarchy" in schools, an approach where the organization takes advantage of the strengths of the majority of it participants, while simultaneously working to coordinate all efforts toward a common goal (p. 553).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) found reason to hopeful for the future of teacher leadership. They noted that when teacher leadership work is focused on implementing instructional practices it is likely to impact student achievement (p. 288). Taking a long-term view of their findings, they predicted an optimistic future for teacher leadership. Others are also hopeful for the benefits of teacher leadership, such as improved practice, gains in student achievement, mentorship, and possible teacher retention (Katzenmeyer &Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2002; Thornton, 2010). Finally, the authors presented a conceptual framework for teacher leadership that can influence student learning. The framework the authors recommend can be seen as a "theory of action for teacher leadership" (p. 289). This framework also demonstrates the connection between teacher leadership, school culture, professional development, and student success.

Professional learning communities (PLC's). A focus on teacher leadership leads to expanded roles for teachers within the school and these roles call for a changed school culture and a focus on professional development that will influence student learning. Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2008) found that positive working conditions for teachers include continuous professional development and a "professional learning culture" (p. 114). According to Scribner (1999), professional development should be "embedded in the culture" of the school (p. 261). The creation of professional learning communities (PLC's) incorporates a focus on teacher leadership, new roles for teachers, and a cycle of continuous, job-embedded professional development in a collaborative setting (Hord, 2008; Magnuson & Mota, 2011; Many & King, 2008; McTighe, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Poekert, 2012; Printy, 2008; Waddell & Lee, 2008; Wells & Feun, 2013).

A professional learning community occurs when the professionals in a school come together in a group setting for the intentional purpose of learning. They come together to answer an important question: "What should we intentionally learn in order to become more effective in our teaching so that our students learn well?" (Hord, 2008, p.12). According to Hord (2004), the characteristics of a successful PLC fall into five themes: (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application of learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared practice (p. 7).

As noted earlier, historically, teaching has been an isolated profession. PLC's are founded on ideals quite the opposite to the past concept of teachers as "sole proprietors"

of the classroom (Hord, 2008, p. 10). Since the 1980s, there have been a series of shifts away from teachers working in isolation to teachers working in teams, collaboratively, as learners, and finally as learning professionals (Hord, 2008, p. 10-12).

This evolution of the role of teachers is tied to a change in school culture. Waddell and Lee (2008) explain that part of this change in culture involves a change in how teachers view themselves. Rather than seeing themselves as teachers only, they must begin "framing themselves as learners, too" (p. 21). A new school culture of collaboration and problem-solving become how the work of school is done. PLCs reinforce the belief that local educators know how to improve their schools (McTighe, 2008, p. 7). PLCs allow for this shared work.

Supportive leadership is important to creating a culture conducive to a PLC (Wells & Feun, 2013). School leadership needs to do more than simply support or sponsor staff efforts, but should participate as both a leader and a learner. Bandura (1997) agreed, finding that "In highly efficacious schools, in addition to serving as administrators, principals are educational leaders who seek ways to improve instruction" (p. 244). Additionally, when leaders promote and participate in teacher learning, there is a strong association with improved student outcomes (Robinson & Rowe, 2008). Graham and Ferriter (2008) found that leadership can promote "meaningful teamwork," requiring teams to come to collaborative decisions about curriculum, assessment, and instruction issues (p. 39). When school leaders focus on the "core business" of teaching and learning, their schools may create an environment for improved student achievement (Robinson &

Rowe, 2008, p. 663). Supportive leadership requires active participation in the process and in a shared vision.

Leithwood and Mascall (2008), Robinson and Rowe (2008), and Waddell and Lee (2008) reinforced the need for a shared vision and goals for an organization. It is important for a school to come to a "critical mass," a point where all teachers buy into the shared vision of how to approach teaching and learning (Waddell & Lee, 2008, p. 21). When a school has a shared focus, it enables the staff to recognize if they become distracted from their purpose and to make a conscious decision to get back on track (Robinson & Rowe, 2008, p. 667). When each member of the team shares an understanding of the purpose and the focus of the team's work, the team will be effective in that work (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008, p. 539). The main focus of a PLC should be student learning.

The basis of a PLC is a focus on teacher learning and student learning and the hope that the two will result in improved student achievement. Hargreaves (2002) highlighted the promise of a successful PLC; effective PLCs can result in "measurable improvements in student learning" while also building "professional skill and the capacity to keep the school progressing" (p. 3).

When teachers participate in a continuous process of reflection, discussion, assessment, and consideration of their teaching practice and student learning, they are involved in the work of a PLC (Hord, 2008, p. 13). Productive PLC members "refine their practice" in collaboration with their colleagues and open themselves and their ideas

to the review of others (Printy, 2008, p. 200). The collaborative culture of a PLC allows

for the embedding of professional learning and the ability to focus on student learning

and the implementation of professional development (Many & King, 2008, p. 30). PLCs

reflect on instruction, asking, "Which practices are most effective with our students?"

This brings the process "full circle back, connecting learning back to teaching" (Graham

& Ferriter, 2008, p. 42). When a school's leadership focuses on the quality of learning,

teaching, and teacher learning, that school is more likely to have a positive impact on

student achievement (Robinson & Rowe, 2008).

A PLC's work centers on student learning and how teacher learning can have a

positive impact. In order to affect student learning, decisions need to be made. Teachers

need to discuss what student should be expected to know, be able to do, and identify

skills all students should develop as a result of instruction (Many & King, 2008, p. 29). In

addition, student data, such as test scores, tallies from observation checklists, and student

work, should be collected and analyzed for patterns, questions, and to create plans for

improvement (Gajda & Koliba, 2008; McTighe, 2008; Waddell & Lee, 2008). Rather

than using student data as a method to assign blame, data improves understanding of

student needs and collective responsibility for student achievement (Waddell & Lee,

2008). Students should be the starting point of the conversation about student learning; it

should a used to "frame the dialogue" of the group (Gajda & Koliba, 2008, p. 147).

While the literature presents many positive possibilities of PLCs, there are

drawbacks and barriers. Hord (2004) admits that organizing a school's staff into a PLC

does not guarantee the elimination of all problems for a poorly performing school (p. 14).

A PLC is not a program or a professional development plan; it is a process of change. As such, there is a commitment of time necessary; it is not a "quick fix" (Hargreaves, 2002, p. 3). For many schools, time is an issue (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001). Lieberman (2005) commented that finding the time for the work of a PLC is a matter of "will and commitment" (Laureate Education, Inc.). If schools make a commitment to the process, they will find the time.

Giles and Hargreaves (2006) document three reasons for a decline or disappearance of innovative structures like PLCs: "envy and anxiety among competing institutions in the surrounding system, the evolutionary process of aging and decline in the organizational life cycle, and the regressive effects of large-scale, standardized reform strategies" (p. 127). The authors close on a note of pessimism, citing the current atmosphere of standardized testing, politics, and micromanagement of the educational process. These practices may inhibit the success of professional learning communities.

Teacher leadership and professional learning communities are natural partners. The goal of both concepts is to promote high quality education and improved student achievement. The National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) (2009) report on professional learning, noted key findings about professional learning and student learning: (a) sustained and intensive professional development for teachers is related to student achievement gains; (b) collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond the individual classroom; and (c) effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching learning of academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds

strong relationships among teachers (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p. 5). Each of these areas is related to teacher leadership, PLCs, or both.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) point out that education research has reached a "near consensus" that teachers need to work collaboratively to improve student learning. Teacher leadership and PLCs share the concepts of shared leadership and shared responsibility for student outcomes and learning, the business of schools (Hord, 2004, 2008; Lambert, 2002). This connection between teacher leadership, professional learning communities, and professional development highlights the interconnectedness of the concepts—each works with the others to create a positive work environment that can benefit not only the teachers, but the students, administration, district, and community.

Professional development. Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2008) found that positive working conditions for teachers included continuous professional development and a creating a "professional learning culture" (p. 114). Quality professional development is an opportunity for districts to invest in their teachers, which may strengthen teachers' commitment and retention (Smith & Rowley, 2005). The professional development of teachers is "critical to school improvement and increased student achievement" (Payne & Wolfson, 2000, p. 20). High quality, relevant professional development activities can be integrated in the school's culture and can take advantage of the expertise of experienced teachers (Scribner, 1999; Guiney, 2001; Smith and Rowley, 2005).

In light of the demands of high-stakes testing, a stable faculty is important. According to Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, and Salgado (2005) "a growing body

of research indicates that the most important thing schools can do to improve student achievement is to ensure there is a high-quality teacher in every classroom" (p. 1). Once a system works hard to attract and hire effective teachers, they must work just as hard to retain and invest in their new and veteran teachers.

Approximately 92-99% of teachers take part in professional development, but it may have additional benefits for teachers, schools, and students—if it is considered *effective* professional development (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Wei et al., 2009). This may be especially true for experienced teachers, who are being asked to change their teaching practices to meet new mandated guidelines for student achievement. Implementing these new guidelines "rests firmly on the shoulders of classroom teachers" and teachers need the proper support to help students reach learning standards (Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006, p. 95). Effective professional learning experiences may assist teachers who are now being asked to teach outside of their "comfort zone" (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005, p. 92). But what is effective professional development?

According to Scribner (1999), professional development should be "embedded in the culture" of the school (p. 261). The National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) (2009) report on professional learning, noted key findings about effective professional development: (a) sustained and intensive professional development for teachers is related to student achievement gains; (b) collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond the individual classroom; and (c) effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the

teaching and learning of academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong relationships among teachers (Wei et al., 2009, p. 5). Additional recent research reinforces the NSDC's findings about effective professional develop practices and qualities. Multiple studies focusing on the qualities of effective professional development agree on the following aspects: long-term, in-depth and on-going, job-embedded and related to teachers' daily practice, content-focused, collaborative, allowing opportunities to practice, receive feedback, reflect on new practices and follow-up, and motivated by improved student performance (Arnau, Kahrs, & Kruskamp, 2004; Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; DuFour, 2004; Eun, 2008; Fullan & Mascall, 2000; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; King & Newman, 2001; Lee, 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Thibodeau, 2008; Timperley, Parr, & Bertanees, 2009; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009; Yates, 2007).

Long-term, in-depth and on-going. One of the deficits of traditional professional development is its lack of depth--whether in time spent, level of coverage, or total time span of the learning experience (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Sparks, 2002; Wei et al., 2009;). "Effective professional development programmes cannot be quick-fix, or surface or skills translation (training) focused. These programmes need to be long term . . . and sustained" (Piggot-Irvine, 2006, p. 483). Piggot-Irvine (2006) also noted in a study of what constitutes an effective professional development program that depth can be reached by adopting a mind-set of "'do a few things well, rather than a lot poorly'" (p. 480). Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005) found that the amount of time for

a professional development endeavor had the largest effect on individual program outcomes. In addition, they also found that contact hours and time span "substantial, though indirect" effects on program outcomes (p. 15).

Johnson, S., Berg, J., & Donaldson, M. (2005) also found that effective professional development needed to be ongoing in order to impact teacher practice. "Professional development must be seen as a process, not an event" (Guskey, 2002, p. 384).

As the NSDC's report found, effective professional learning is an iterative process. Teams participate in a "cycle of continuous improvement" (p 3). The cycle begins with reviewing student data to find the areas of greatest need for both student and teacher learning. Next, professional learning experiences are created or located to meet the learning needs of the teachers based on the data review. Teachers learn to develop lessons and assessments that are more powerful, how to apply additional strategies, and how to reflect on student learning to determine the impact of their instructional practices. This brings the process full circle to student data review and the cycle begins again.

Job-embedded and related to teachers' daily practice. As noted previously, many teachers sense a disconnection between the professional development that are asked to participate in and their everyday practice. In order to correct this issue of traditional professional development, research suggests incorporating professional learning into the daily practice of teachers' work (Boud & Hager, 2012; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman &Yoon, 2001; Hill, 2007; Yates, 2007). School leaders need to

encourage a culture where there is "awareness" that professional learning is part of the daily life of the school and that learning is most effective for adults when it is "focused on practical and relevant issues"(Piggot-Irvine, 2006, p. 479- 480). Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005) also placed responsibility on school administrators to "build conditions" conducive to professional learning as a "routine part of the job" (p. 17). In fact, Hirsh (2009) felt school-based professional development is "*the* best way to ensure that the learning of educators is relevant to the context of their daily work, providing the impetus for them to apply their learning *to* their work" (p. 5-6). DuFour (2004) echoed the same thought, noting that school leaders "must end this distinction between working and learning . . . [and] enable staff to grow and learn as part of their daily or weekly work routines" (p. 63).

Content-focused. Once a professional development program is structured to be on-going, in-depth, and part of daily practice, what to learn is a key decision. Deciding to make professional learning experiences content-focused is supported by extensive research (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman &Yoon, 2001; Hill, 2007; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Lee, 2005; Wei et al., 2009; Yates, 2007). NSDC's report (2009) found that "The content of professional learning matters as much as the process by which it is transmitted" (p. 12). In addition, it is useful for teachers to study the "very material" they will be teaching their students (Wei et al., p. 10). Other research found that "rich content" professional development led to improved teacher practice (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005, p. 95). Similar findings were reported by Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005). In their review of professional development, they found that content focus impacted not

only what teachers learned, but it also had an impact on *how* they taught. In a review of four effective practices, Hirsh (2005), too, highlighted the importance of content being a "core component" of an approach (p. 43). As an example of content-focused professional development, Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005) listed the following characteristics: (a) teachers had the opportunity to focus on the content students would be learning and what problems they might encounter; (b) teachers consulted current research about how students learn content; (c) teachers were able to look at student work together and compare it to standards; (d) teachers were encouraged to reflect on their practice and compare it to standards for professional practice; and (e) teachers identified what they needed to learn in order to plan their professional development (p. 16).

　　Collaborative. Despite research and reports that show collaborative learning is key to school and student success (King & Newmann, 2001; Thibodeau, 2008), "as a nation we have failed to leverage this support and these examples to ensure that every educator and every student benefits from highly effective professional learning" (Wei et al., p. 3). In comparison to other industrialized nations, the United States lags behind in effective use and implementation of collaborative practice. Multiple studies and reviews of studies have agreed that collaboration is one of the hallmarks of effective professional learning; yet "collaboration with colleagues is not often part of the professional development experience for many teachers at the high school level" (Thibodeau, 2008, p.56). Instead, schools' structure and lack of time allotted to collaboration is the norm (Wei et al.).

Garet et al. (2001) found that "collective participation" of groups of teachers resulted in improvements in teacher knowledge, skill, and changes in practice (p. 936). One use of collaborative practice that encourages improvements in teacher skill is collaborative analysis of student work. This allows "teachers to de-privatise their practice and learn from each other. It also leads to deeper understanding of student learning outcomes and greater discrimination about what counts as meeting those objectives" (p. 9). Another practice associated with collaboration is peer observation and constructive feedback. The NSDC (2009) suggested that this type of observation may be "the simplest way to break down professional isolation—but one which rarely occurs in most schools" (p.11).

According to Johnson and Kardos (2007), there is a "link between the sustained interaction about teaching that occurs among colleagues at all experience levels and the retention of new teachers" (p. 2087). This atmosphere benefits both the incoming teacher and the experienced by breaking down the isolation so common to the profession. Historically, the teaching profession has been one of isolation (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Cameron, 2005; Hord, 2008). Teachers enter the school building, sign in, and report to their classrooms; once the classroom door is closed, teachers are alone. Schools have been designed in an "egg crate" fashion—creating a sense of both physical and professional isolation that has dominated the school culture (Hord, 2008, p. 10). This sense of isolation is exacerbated in the high school setting by the physical structure of the schools—"isolated cells, broken into subject groups, and divided by space and by time"

(Cameron, 2005, p. 441). Professional development that encourages collegial interaction could lead to less of a sense of isolation in the teaching profession.

As noted by Cole and Knowles (2000), historically, professional development has been "conceptualized and designed for, and delivered to, not by teachers" (p. 12). Giving teachers collaborative professional development options such as study groups and lesson study would allow teachers something they have not had in the past: a voice in their own development (Buchanan, 2012). The "tremendous expertise of teachers within the school is required to determine their specific learning needs" for professional learning experiences (Hirsh, 2009, p. 16). Participating in a study group allows for teacher-directed learning and the opportunity for '"authentic talk about real work"' that can lead to changes in practice and new understandings of the profession (Lambert, et al., 2002, p. 79). It is relevant to their needs and to the needs of the students (Wei et al., 2009).

Collaboration has a lot to offer educators and researchers suggest it is time to embrace the practice. It is time to encourage and allow educators to learn as other professionals learn, in a continuous process, together, on the job (Wei et al., p. 2). Collaboration is a hallmark of effective PL. Compton (2010) found that, across all experiences levels, teachers selected "the opportunity to connect with other teachers" as an effective professional learning activity (p. 54). Rather than encouraging collaboration and teamwork, PL solely at the individual level may produce isolation instead. It may also limit the connection between student learning needs and teacher learning needs. When teachers collaborate, "they begin to assume responsibility for their own professional development and become both supports and resources for their peers"

(Freidus et al., 2009, p. 186). Educators need the opportunity to work as a team rather than individuals who teach near one another.

   Opportunities to practice, receive feedback, reflect on new practices and follow-up. Related to collaborative practice is the opportunity to practice the skills learned in the collaborative process, receive feedback, reflect on the new practices, and participate in follow-up. This process is part of the continuous cycle of professional learning that makes professional development effective (Eun, 2008; Guskey, 2002; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, 2007; King & Newmann. 2001; Thibodeau, 2008). In Hirsh's (2005) review of effective development practices, a common thread was the each model had a detailed plan for practice and follow up action. Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis (2005) found that the "opportunity to learn or process" had a significant effect on project outcomes (p. 15). The researchers also noted the vital role of follow-up and that "teachers reported a sense of increased knowledge, perhaps reflecting the critical role that 'at the elbow' coaching and support in classrooms plays in learning new skills and putting them into practice" (p. 17). Eun (2008) also noted the need for teachers to have time to reflect on their learning and the availability of follow-up after the learning experience (p. 147). Noting that it takes time "to process what is learned in a professional development experience and to internalize it in order to assimilate it into practice," Johnson (2007) reinforced the process of professional learning. In their study of effective of practices, Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney (2009) found that providing opportunities for modeling, practice and feedback were part of effective programs. Feedback was especially important as it allowed for reinforcement, clarification, or

correction of misconceptions (p. 50). Lee (2005) noted similar findings regarding practice and reflection and their importance in building internal capacity.

Unfortunately, this cycle of professional learning is not the norm: "The time and opportunities essential to intense, sustained professional development with regular follow-up and reinforcement are simply not in place in most contexts, as evidenced by the short duration of most professional development activities" (Wei et al., 2009, p. 27). "But that is exactly what we as teachers need, and what I as a teacher hunger for—*time to think about my behavior*" (Buchanan, 2012, p. 354).

Student achievement. What is the motivation for professional development? According to recent research, most teachers are motivated by the desire to be more effective teachers in order to get better results for their students (Guskey, 2002). Teachers attend professional development sessions to learn "concrete and practical ideas that relate to day-to-day operation of their classrooms" (p. 382). "The challenge, therefore, is to develop teachers' knowledge and skills in ways that respect their professionalism, while ensuring that students benefit" (Timperleya, Parra, & Bertanees, 2009). Lee (2005) pointed out in his project to improve math instruction that teachers need to focus on areas where their students' understanding is weak, as well as their own understandings of content in order to help students achieve. What can schools and districts do?

According to the report, *A Plan to Improve the Quality of Teaching in American Schools* (2007), Haskins and Loeb suggested districts should carefully plan and oversee their professional development activities to ensure that they are contributing to student

achievement because "Teacher quality is the single most important feature of the schools that drives student achievement" (p. 2). Guskey (2002) defines professional development programs as "systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 381). Unlike other views on effective professional development practices, Guskey noted that teachers' attitudes and practices change when they see the practice *work* for their students. Like others, Guskey views teacher learning and change as a process and recommended that administrators: recognize that change is a gradual and difficult process for teachers, ensure that teachers receive regular feedback on student learning progress, and provide continued follow-up, support and pressure (p. 384). The National Staff Development Council (2009) reminds teachers, schools, and districts, that "improving professional learning for educators is a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement" (p. 3).

Connecting the strands. In their study of principals, Brown and Wynn (2009) highlighted the interconnectedness of working conditions, teacher leadership, professional learning communities, and professional development in retaining teachers. Administrators need to provide and promote working conditions and resources that support educators "continuous learning, growth, and professional development" (p. 58). What are the characteristics of this type of working environment? Shared decision-making, working collaboratively, increased teacher leadership, high expectations for all, staff and students, and student-centered learning are hallmarks of the positive working environment. In addition, administrators are visible in the school building rather than

staying in their offices. This "visible presence" allows an administrator to be in touch with teachers, providing opportunities for nurturing and guidance. This type of environment and leadership style can help to "foster unofficial professional learning communities that reduce teacher isolation, increase teacher responsibility and understanding, and improve teacher satisfaction, morale and commitment. As a result, such factors greatly influence teacher retention (58).

But it is not just for *new* teachers. Administrators can help by understanding that it is not that teachers do not want to enhance their teaching practices in order to improve student achievement. The real issue behind teachers' negative attitudes toward professional development stems from "forced participation in weak, didactic, pre-service educational experiences and, subsequently, in low-quality staff development the educators do not find helpful" (Hirsh, 2009, p. 7). So many previous experiences have been the opposite of what educators need. Rather than "formulaic, lifeless, and unconnected" professional learning, teachers need experiences that are individualized to the needs of their students, engaging, and connected to their daily practice. Building level administrators can help to facilitate the environment in which effective professional development and support can take place. There is an "unhelpful gap between the rhetoric of professional development/CPD and the experience of enhanced professional learning" (Boud & Hager, 2012, p. 21).

Implications

Based on the literature review, there are implications for my project study. The information learned from the review and previous survey influenced the initial interviews

in particular as the point of departure for constructing my questions. This literature review also shaped the questions I brought to my focus groups. The review contributed to the analytical lenses I brought to the analysis of all of the data I gathered. The review also influenced the types of professional development I proposed in my professional development plan for the target school.

School districts and their individual schools need to retain effective teachers in order to foster a sense of community and promote student achievement. When an entire learning organization focuses on teachers working collaboratively, rather than in isolation, and concentrates on instruction and professional development to improve instruction, making their work public, a professional community is the result. Teachers learn from one another through sharing their knowledge and expertise, and the school benefits as a whole. Teachers benefit by becoming part of a network of colleagues, administrators benefit by having an engaged faculty of instructional leaders, and the students benefit from improved instructional practices. This ongoing sharing of knowledge fosters and helps to maintain staff cohesiveness and continuity, which will enable the school to be a successful organization. When teachers feel they are a part of a larger community, with a shared purpose and vision, they are more likely to view themselves as effective members of that community.

Finally, I took what was learned based on the literature review and the interaction with the teachers to suggest a professional learning plan for the target school that embodies the qualities, characteristics, and examples of effective professional learning that will aim at creating the working conditions conducive to teacher retention.

Summary

This section reviewed the local problem of ineffective professional development at the target school and background information related to the problem at both the local and national level. Literature reviewed related to teacher attrition and retention, rural school systems, job satisfaction, autonomy, locus of control, organizational characteristics, learning communities, and teacher leadership. Finally, implications were given in relation to the project study of teacher perceptions of professional development at the target school. The next section will present the methodology for the project study including research design and approach, participants, and data collection and analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The literature on professional development, especially *effective* professional

development, has produced several lists of the qualities and characteristics of high-quality

or effective professional learning experiences. Few researchers focused on how effective

professional development contributes to better working conditions for teachers. I

designed this qualitative study to uncover, through semistructured interviews and focus

groups, how teachers perceive the professional development opportunities and the types

of learning experiences they would like access to in order to best reach their students.

According to Seidman (2006), "telling stories is essentially a meaning making

process" (p. 7). The qualitative interview and focus group approaches used in this study

are a means to understanding the stories of professional development as experienced by

the target teachers. For this project, my goal was to learn teachers' perceptions about

professional development offerings and what they would like to learn to better prepare

their students. The qualitative tradition is based on the "assumption that social settings

are unique, dynamic, and complex" (Hatch, 2002, p. 9).

Each school setting is a complex combination of teacher and student needs. My

goal was to produce a "rich, descriptive account" of my findings, which will form the

basis for the suggestions for the professional development plan (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). If a

professional development is to be needs-based, teachers must have a voice. A recent

policy briefing on job-embedded professional development noted: "Therefore, effective

professional development should begin with an analysis of school needs in terms of both student and teacher learning" (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010, p. 8).

Adults learn differently than children and their learning experiences should reflect that understanding (Beavers, 2009; Cummings, 2011). Adult learning theory seeks to give direction to those designing learning experiences for adult learners. While no one theory currently explains everything, districts and schools can inform their PL experiences based on what has been learned. The concept of andragogy is probably the best known. Malcolm Knowles (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) posited six "assumptions" of andragogy that are relevant to adult learners:

- As a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being.

- An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.

- The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.

- There is change in time perspective as people mature--from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning.

- The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something. (p. 55)

In this project, I sought to do just that: analyze the needs of the faculty and their school through the eyes of the professionals involved in the enterprise. The voice of the

teachers drives the plan, which is unusual. "Teacher input is rarely solicited to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding their professional development" (Compton, 2010, p. 54). Finally, adult learning theory informed the project and the project reflects the differing needs of adult learners.

Description of the Qualitative Design

I used Merriam's (2002) "basic interpretive qualitative study" (p. 6), which has four main characteristics. First, the researcher seeks to understand how participants create meaning of a situation; second, the researcher acts as a participant observer and self-reflexive instrument; third, the data collected were analyzed inductively; and finally, the end result is a narrative account that is rich in detail and highly descriptive. This method was appropriate for the purpose of the study, because I aimed to understand the professional development at the school, and calls for inductive data analysis with a final report of descriptive detail.   All of these described the intent of the study.

Using both semistructured individual interviews and focus groups gave me the advantages of both methods while also strengthening the accuracy and depth of the final report (Morgan, 1997). In fact, Morgan (1997) makes the suggestion that focus groups can be used prior to individual interviews to explore the topic, or interviews can be used to generate topics for a focus group. I did both. The initial series of interviews conducted served as a basis to adapt and revise the interview protocols for the two focus groups that followed.

Focus groups offer a researcher the opportunity to observe group interaction on a topic and to gather "direct evidence" about the variety of opinions participants may have

about their experiences (Morgan, 1997, "Compared to Individual Interviews", para. 1). Interviews have advantages as well. They offer the interviewer greater control and each participant may share more information. Employing the two methods takes advantage of these strengths and offers the opportunity to use either method as a starting point for the other method (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In fact, Morgan (1997) suggested that focus groups may be used prior to individual interviews to explore the topic, or interviews can be used to generate topics for a focus group. This study took advantage of both.

Justification of the Research Design

While quantitative data could be used to identify the needs of teachers, in order to formulate meaningful suggestions for a professional development plan for the target school, I needed to work closely with the teachers and interact with them at length to learn, understand, and articulate their professional learning needs. Surveys with preset response choices could not provide the individualized information and data that I hoped to elicit by using qualitative methods as well as my personal interaction with the participants. This type of data could not be "reduced to numbers without distorting the essence of the social meanings they represent" (Hatch, 2002, p. 9). The aim of the research is to capture the voice of the teachers, to tell their experiences with professional development. I wanted to be able to "focus on meaning over measurement" (Holloway & Biley, 2011, p. 969).

Case study and phenomenological, two other qualitative methods, could have been used. A case study focuses on "a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple

sources of information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The results of a case study is a case

description and case-based themes. Case studies can focus on a single-program such as a

school's professional development program.

Case studies call for many sources of data. Yin (2003) suggested six types:

documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations,

and physical artifacts. While a case study was a possibility, the demands would have been

quite an ambitious undertaking for me as a first-time researcher with a full-time job.

Originally, I selected phenomenological as my research design. My plan was to describe

the "meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or

phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Creswell (2007) noted that knowledge of common

experiences can be valuable for groups, including teachers (p. 62). The challenge for me

in following this path involved the related and numerous philosophical assumptions

connected to phenomenological design. Creswell (2007) noted that Moustakas devoted

more than 100 pages to these assumptions (p. 59). This design also seemed an

inappropriate fit for a first-time researcher.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Interviews. The target school has a teacher faculty of approximately 85 teachers

in 10 departments (Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, Career

and Technology, Mathematics, World Languages, Fine Arts, National Junior Reserve

Officer Training Corps, and Health and Physical Education), with an administrative team

of one principal, two assistant principals, and one administrative assistant. Each teacher

and administrator is required to complete 10 hours of professional development per academic year. The division offers technology classes over the summer and after school hours during the school year. Each class is led by an Instructional Technology Liaison (ITL) from one of the schools. The class locations vary, allowing attendees to choose their location. Outside coursework and conferences can be used to satisfy the 10-hour requirement but do require prior approval. Building level principals can also offer approved professional development for their staff members. This study was conducted during the school year while professional development classes were in session.

Those who participate in a study should have a professional interest in the overall purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In addition, they should also have "knowledge about everyday life in the settings being studied" (Hatch, 2002, p. 98). Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommend finding participants who have "relevant, first-hand experience" about the research setting (p. 65). As I sought to understand the perceptions of teachers of the target school, I invited teachers to participate in semistructured individual interviews. The interviews allowed the participants to share their knowledge and experience about professional development at the target school or in previous, similar settings.

A member of each department of the teaching staff received an invitation to participate in the semistructured individual interviews in their physical and electronic mailboxes (see Appendix M for invitation). Each participant experienced professional development either within the current setting of the target school or in previous, similar settings. Both novice and experienced teachers were invited, with 5 of the invitations

going to experienced teachers and 5 invitations to novice teachers. These prospective

participants were "purposely selected" based on their knowledge that could help me to

"understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2003, p. 185). Unlike

random selection used in quantitative research, purposeful selection of a sample allows

the researcher to interact with those who are most likely to have the most interesting and

useful things to say.

Focus groups. There were two focus groups. One focus group was comprised of

all the teacher participants of the first round interviews. The other focus group was

comprised of teacher participants who did not participate in the first round of interviews.

This focus group was by open invitation to those teachers. Seidman (2006) advocated for

a variety of perspectives in participants who share their different, even contradictory

perceptions of the same situations (p. 67). This enabled me to choose participants who

reflected the different experience levels and different subject areas to have a "wide-

ranging panel of knowledgeable" participants (Weiss, 2008, "Panels and Samples," para.

2). Between the interviews and the two focus groups, 7 of the 10 subject area departments

and both experienced and novice teachers were represented in the sample.

Justification for the Number of Participants

Interviews. One member of each department was invited to participate. My goal

was a minimum of 4-6 interviews with teachers. This allowed for those who may not be

available or choose not to accept the invitation to participate. I reached my goal of 4

individual interviews. Interview participants were novice teachers (less than 5 years of

experience) and experienced teachers (5 or more years of experience). Weiss (2008)

advised that fewer interviews are desirable in qualitative studies because "each respondent is expected to provide a great deal of information" ("Survey Interviewing and Qualitative Interviewing," para. 6). This is similar to the recommendation of smaller numbers in focus groups when the participants are knowledgeable and experienced.

Seidman (2006) was reluctant to choose a specific number of participants, noting that time, money, and other resources play a role in the final decision and that each study and researcher must decide what constitutes "enough" (p. 55). Hatch (2002) also noted that the researcher must strike a "balance between breadth and depth" in a study (p. 49). Teachers have full schedules; the smaller number of participants allowed for a balance between the time resources of the participants and me. The 60-minute interviews afforded the opportunity to garner enough depth of information to produce rich description.

Focus groups. The two focus groups were teacher groups of 4-6 participants. While Krueger and Casey (2009) stated the ideal focus group size is 5-8 people, they also noted the advantages of what they term "mini" focus groups, groups of 4-6 people. When are mini groups preferable? When participants have a great to share about the topic, when the purpose of the study is to understand a complex issue or behavior, or the participants are experienced or have a high-level passion about the topic (p. 67-68). Each of these descriptions applied to the participants at the target school.

Krueger and Casey (2009) also noted more practical advantages of smaller focus groups: it is easier to recruit participants and makes for a more comfortable environment (p. 67). If participants are uncomfortable, there will be a negative impact on their interview (Hatch, 2002). Morgan (1997) also advised that small groups work best when

participants are "likely to be both interested in the topic and respectful of each other" ("Determining the Size of Groups," para 1). As professional educators, the participants had an interest in the topic of professional development and as colleagues acted respectfully toward one another.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

The district's superintendent and the building principal granted permission to conduct interviews and focus groups, (see Appendix P for letter of cooperation). Each prospective participant received an invitation to participate both in their physical and electronic mailboxes (see Appendix M for invitation).

Researcher-Participants Working Relationship

As the researcher, I had a current professional role at the target school as a teacher and a past role as a professional development facilitator, and I included this information in the disclosure. I did know teachers chosen for the interviews or focus groups. Being an "internal moderator" did make me more acquainted with the target school and division (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 187). If participants view the internal moderator as someone who is trustworthy and a good listener, it can be viewed as a positive. I have a good reputation within the division and a history of working with professional development. I was clear about asking the focus group members to maintain confidentiality for one another (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 188).

Participants Rights-Ethical Measures

Prospective participants in the target school received a written invitation to participate in the project both in their office mailboxes and by email, which allowed them

to respond either way. Those who agreed to participate received an informed consent form and additional background information about the project, participant confidentiality, procedures for the project, the voluntary nature of the interviews and focus groups, risks and benefits of participation, and contact information (see Appendix M for invitation; Appendix N and O for informed consent). Prior to starting either interviews or focus groups, I reminded participants of the nature of the research, how the audio taped-recorded data would be used, and the steps that were taken to protect their privacy and confidentiality. I assigned each participants a numeric code; no names were on the focus group or interview protocols. All materials related to the study were stored in a secure location. Files on my computer were password protected. All participants signed a consent form.

I returned to Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) with revised focus group protocols based on what emerged from the interviews. I submitted a "Change in Procedures" request form and the revised focus group protocols and waited for approval from IRB before proceeding with further data collection.

Data Collection

Justification of Data Choices

Striving to gain a deep understanding of "the meaning people have constructed about their world and experiences" is a hallmark of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Another important feature of the tradition is that words are the primary means of communicating the research findings rather than numbers.   To reflect accurately the participants' perceptions, ideas, and voices, interviews and focus groups are good

choices. Each type of data is "well suited for locating the *meanings* people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

Appropriateness of Data Collection Method

As the study sought to understand the teachers' perceptions of professional development and needs for specific learning experiences, interviews and focus groups were the primary data collection methods. Both individual interviews and focus groups are accepted methods to "discover if programs and policies are working, for whom they are working, and what could be improved" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 9). Focus groups can also be utilized for "understanding employee concerns," and, as noted by Krueger and Casey (2009), can be instrumental in "understanding the perspectives of staff and also in identifying or testing potential policies or solution strategies" (p. 11). These data collection methods allowed the voices of the teachers and administrators to be heard and to be the basis of suggestions for the professional development plan.

The Plan

After receiving approval from the IRB (approval #12-01-11-0100679), the data were collected through semistructured interviews and focus groups. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes in length and each focus group was approximately 90 minutes in length. The interviews were with teachers with a focus on their previous professional development experiences (see Appendix J for interview guide). Participants were also asked to share a professional development experience that helped them to be a more effective teacher and a professional development experience that did not meet their needs as educators.

After these were analyzed, the two focus groups were held. Teachers who participated in the first round of interviews comprised one focus group. What was learned from the interviews became the basis for this focus group. The second focus group was comprised of teachers who did not take part in the interviews. This basis of this focus group was the guiding research questions, the literature review, and data from the interviews. I returned to Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) with revised focus groups protocols based on what emerged from the interviews. I submitted a "Change in Procedures" request form and the revised focus group protocols and waited for approval from IRB before proceeding with further data collection.

Procedures for Data Collection and Recording

The semistructured interviews took place at the target school. I conducted the interviews either during the teacher's planning period or after school hours. Each 60-minute interview was tape-recorded, with notes taken. I held the focus groups after school to accommodate differing schedules. Like the interviews, the focus groups were tape-recorded, with notes taken. Tape-recording is important because "notes never capture exactly what was said" (Weiss, 2008, "To Tape or Not to Tape," para. 5). Nor can notes capture the "nuances and complexities of speech" like a tape recorder ("To Tape or Not to Tape," para. 9). Tape-recording is also important for accuracy as it shows "care in obtaining, recording, and reporting" the words of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 71). Note taking is also important in case the tape becomes hard to understand due to background noise or distance from the microphone. Notes were recorded on the interview protocol sheets, which included a heading, opening

statements, the research questions the protocol were based on, probes to follow "key" questions related to the research questions, transition cues, and space for notes and comments during the interview as well as reflections after the interview is concluded (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). The semistructured interview protocol is located in Appendix B, p. 176.

The focus groups used a protocol sheet as well, which was based on Krueger and Casey's (2009) suggestions including the name of the study, date, time, type and number of participants, location, moderator, and a diagram of the seating arrangement, using numeric codes for participants. The script was based on the "questioning route," with opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending questions (p. 38-41). The focus group protocols are located in the Appendices K and L.

Data Tracking System

I maintained all documents related to the study. I kept a master list of all data collected and placed it in a binder. The list included the type of data collected, the date of collection, the appropriate numeric code assigned to the participant(s), and any special notes. I copied each interview and focus group protocol sheet and maintained the binder. I kept these sheets in date order. I labeled the audio recording for each interview and focus group according to type of data (interview or focus group), the date of collection, and appropriate numeric code assigned to the participant(s). I kept all data in a secure location (a locked cabinet) in my home. I transcribed recordings from interviews and focus groups. I labeled each transcript according to type of data (interview or focus group), the date of collection, and appropriate numeric code assigned to the

participant(s). I stored transcriptions on my personal laptop, which is password protected. I maintained a printed copy of the final transcriptions (in a secure location) as well. I kept also backup copies of the transcriptions on a flash drive in a secure location.

I also maintained a reflective journal based on my notes made during and after data collection. This was on my personal, password-protected laptop. I also kept a backup copy on a flash drive and kept it in a secure location with the other collected data. All data will be destroyed after 5 years by shredding (paper copies) or erasing (electronic files).

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

The district's superintendent and the building principal granted permission to conduct interviews and focus groups (see Appendix P for letter of cooperation). Prospective participants in the target school received a written invitation to participate in the project both in their office mailboxes and by email, which allowed them to respond either way. Those who agreed to participate received an informed consent form and additional background information about the project, participant confidentiality, procedures for the project, the voluntary nature of the interviews and focus groups, risks and benefits of participation, and contact information (see Appendix M for invitation and Appendix N for informed consent). Prior to starting either interviews or focus groups, participants were reminded of the nature of the research, how the audio taped-recorded data would be used, and the steps that were be taken to protect their privacy and confidentiality. All participants were given a numeric code; no names were used on the focus group or interview protocols. All materials related to the study were stored in a

secure location. Files on my computer were password protected. All participants signed a consent form.

Role of Researcher

As the researcher, I had a current professional role at the target school as a teacher and a past role as a professional development facilitator, and this was disclosed in the information packet. I did know teachers who chose to volunteer for the interviews and focus groups. My roles in the school and relationships with teachers did have an impact on my study. Rubin and Rubin (2005) noted that the role of the researcher as an "insider" does have positives. Interview situations may be less threatening, and when participants know you and your supervisors, they also know how to report any concerns quickly and easily (p. 87-89). Another positive is that they may be more willing to talk to someone they know and trust. My current and previous roles allowed ease of interaction with teachers and familiarity of the program. It was easier to get to the "meat" of the matter and less time, if any, was needed to gain rapport with participants. I did not find that my current role was a detriment, causing participants to not want to share, or possibly fearing their opinions would impact their reputations at work. This was another reason I stressed the confidentiality of the interviews and focus groups—to remind participants that no names would be attached to comments, tapes, or transcripts.

Merriam (2002) noted that the "human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study" (p. 5). Her recommendation is to "identify" and "monitor" these biases because these can affect the collection and interpretation of data. My biases include the professional development experiences that I had facilitated which

were mentioned in the focus groups and interviews, teachers that I had experiences with were a possible bias, personal knowledge of the school was another possible bias as well. To be reflective and aware, I kept a research log and reflective journal as I conducted the study. This allowed me to "continually examine [my] own understandings and reactions" to the data being collected (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 31). I also made sure to focus on what the participants *said—their words—*to underpin the study. According to Weiss (2008), an important hallmark of qualitative study is that the "findings will be supported more by quotations and case descriptions" ("Survey Interviewing and Qualitative Interviewing," para. 6). This reiterates the concept of story—that the goal of a qualitative study is to take the data collected, analyze it, and "knit it into a single coherent story" ("Inclusive Integration," para. 1).

Data Analysis

Coding Procedures for the Interviews and Focus Groups

The data analysis process is individualized based on the researcher and the data. Hatch (2002) notes that data analysis is a "complex and idiosyncratic" process (p. 147). In reviewing the different sources on interviewing and focus groups, differing advice was given on the topic of analysis. While some experts advise that data analysis should begin as soon as data exists (Weiss, 2008; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994), others advise to wait to examine the data as a whole (Seidman, 2006). What all of the sources agree on is that each researcher must have a "systematic, verifiable, sequential, and continuous" (at least once full analysis begins) process for analysis of data collected (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 115). Data analysis occurs in stages that are an "interactive,

cyclical process" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 12). The process includes data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions based on the data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My analysis was patterned after Miles and Huberman (1994) and Krueger and Casey (2009). Because I was completing two different stages of data collection, the recursive overall process offered by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applicable, while Krueger and Casey's (2009) "Classic Analysis Strategy" (p. 118-122) offered a good fit for the specific analysis procedures.

Analysis Schedule

After the transcription of each interview or focus group, I analyzed the data in preparation for the next interview or focus group. Once all interviews and focus groups were completed, I analyzed the collective data. "Data reduction" is "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming that data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Seidman (2006) recommends that data reduction should be an inductive process, not a deductive one (p. 117). For this, I applied Krueger and Casey's (2009) "Classic Analysis Strategy" (p. 118-122). This was the strategy they recommend for researchers doing their first project because it is systematic, breaks the work into "doable chunks," and makes the process both visual and concrete (p. 119). To begin, I required ample space and supplies of paper copies of the transcripts, scissors, colored marking pens, colored paper for copying the transcripts, and flipchart. What follows below is the systematic process employed after each round of data collection.

Classic Analysis Strategy (Conducted for both data sets)

        Step 1: Preparation Work: Number each line of each transcript, and then print on different colors of paper as a method of color-coding by participant. Arrange all transcripts by participant.

        Step 2: Read Transcripts

        Step 3: Transfer Questions to Flipchart: Write each question on a separate flipchart page.

        Step 4: Cutting and Categorizing: (Data reduction): Cut the transcripts of data set into strips by question and response. For each question, read each quote and answer the following questions:

1. Did the participant answer the question that was asked?

    YES → Go to question 3.

    DON'T KNOW→Set aside for later.

    NO→ Go to question 2.

2. Does the comment answer a different question?

    YES → Go to question 3.

    NO→ Put in discard pile (to be kept until all analysis is completed).

3. Does the comment say something important about the topic?

    YES → Tape it to the appropriate question sheet. (Data display)

    NO→ Put in discard pile (to be kept until all analysis is completed).

4. Is this like something that has been said earlier?

YES → Start grouping like quotes together. Now you are creating

categories.

NO→ Start a separate pile (to be kept until all analysis is completed).

Step 5: Specific Question Analysis: (Data reduction/conclusions/verifying):
Verify that all similar quotes are together, rearranging as needed. Now additional

categories, or themes, may emerge or may be combined. I created a list of codes and their

descriptions, as Miles and Huberman (1994) advised due to the importance of keeping an

"explicit record of the "decision rules" followed in selecting data" (p. 242). A log was

suggested.

Step 6: Descriptive Summaries: (Data reduction): Write a descriptive summary

of what each type of participant said in response to each question.

Step 7: Compare and Contrast across Participant Types: (Data

reduction/conclusions/verifying): How are the teachers similar? Different? Write a

description. As I was comparing and contrasting, noting patterns and themes, I wrote text

out as recommended to trace my line of thought and "conclusion-drawing procedures"

(Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 243).

Step 8: Repetition of Themes: (Data reduction/conclusions): Look at all of the

questions and look for which themes repeat across questions.

Step 9: Step Away: Take a break from the data.

Step 10: Return to Conclude Analysis: (Data

reduction/conclusions/verifying): Return to the data analysis and decide how to best

structure and share what was said. Select quotes to use as evidence of the themes that

emerged (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 119-120). I completed the procedural steps

presented above for each of the two data sets: the set generated from the interviews and

the set generated from the focus groups.

Quality Procedures

I used detailed description and member checking to validate the research

(Creswell, 2003, p. 196). I was careful to incorporate the voice of the participants in the

study and include their perspectives on professional learning. At each stage, I checked for

the accuracy of the information. With each participant or focus group, I reviewed the data

shared in the previous interviews and focus groups to check for agreement or dissent

from the current participant(s). I used interviews and focus groups to provide

"corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I looked for repetition of themes

across the focus groups and interviews. To be credible, my research demonstrated

"thoroughness" as defined by Rubin and Rubin (2005): "investigating all relevant options

with care and completeness" (p. 70). I worked to make it evident from my work that I

took care in laying out the process by which I came to my conclusions with "clarity and

understanding that the participants recognize the researcher's description of their

experiences" (p. 71). I followed the procedures that aligned with the qualitative approach

selected for my study. To complete the interviews and focus groups, I spent an extended

time in contact with the participants and the data, which allowed opportunities to gather

sufficient data for the detailed descriptions that are essential to qualitative research

(Merriam, 2002, p. 5).

The individual interviews and then focus groups allowed me to do as Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested: check for accuracy, consistency, and modify conclusions if needed (p. 229). After the first individual interviews, all of the individual participants gathered in a focus group. Part of the discussion involved a review of information learned from the individual interviews and verification of its accuracy. At the close of the individual interview focus group, I reviewed what we discussed to make sure that I had recorded all of the responses correctly. I followed the same procedure in the non-interviewed teacher focus group. I reviewed the information learned from the individual interviews and the previous focus group. At the close of the non-interviewed teacher focus group, I reviewed the discussion to ensure my accurate account of the session. At each step of the process, I repeated member checking to confirm the accuracy of my recording of participant responses and discussions. Since the outcome of the project was a plan based on the needs of the teachers, it seemed logical to share the results to see if their voice had been heard accurately.

Discrepancy Procedures

As recommended by Creswell (2003), discrepant information were documented and presented in the data analysis. The interviews and focus groups were comprised of a variety of "different perspectives that do not always coalesce" (p. 196). In fact, discrepant information is an important piece to answering the guiding research questions and led to topics for further exploration in the later interviews or focus groups. Merriam (2002) went as far to suggest that researchers seek out "variation in the understanding of the phenomenon" being studied (p. 26).

Data Collection and Recording

The data were collected through four semistructured interviews and two focus

groups. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and each focus group was

approximately 90 minutes in length. The interviews were with teachers and focused on

their previous professional development experiences (see Appendix J for interview

guide). Participants were asked to share professional development experiences, their

suggestions for future professional development, and their thoughts on the connection

between effective professional development and teacher commitment.

After the individual interviews analysis, the first of two focus groups was held.

The first focus group comprised of the four teachers who participated in the first round

of interviews. This focus group was based on what was learned from the interviews. The

second focus group comprised of teachers who did not take part in the interviews. That

focus group was based on what was learned from the interviews as well as data from the

first focus group. I returned to Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) with revised

focus groups protocols based on what emerged from the interviews and the first focus

group by submitting a "Change in Procedures" request form and the revised focus group

protocols and waited for approval from IRB before proceeding with further data

collection.

Procedures for Data Collection and Recording

The semistructured interviews were held at the target school and were conducted

during the teacher's planning period or after school hours. Each 60-minute interview

was tape-recorded and notes were taken. Focus groups were held after school to

accommodate differing schedules. Like the interviews, the focus groups were tape-recorded and notes were taken in the event the tape became hard to understand due to background noise or distance from the microphone and were recorded on the interview protocol sheets, which included a heading, opening statements, the research questions the protocol is based on, probes to follow "key" questions related to the research questions, transition cues, and space for notes and comments during the interview as well as reflections after the interview was concluded (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). The semistructured interview protocol is located in Appendix J.

The focus groups used a protocol sheet as well, which was based on Krueger and Casey's (2009) suggestions, which includes the name of the study, date, time, type and number of participants, location, moderator, and a diagram of the seating arrangement, using numeric codes for participants. The script was based on the "questioning route," with opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending questions (p. 38-41). The focus group protocols are located in Appendices K and L.

Data Tracking System

I maintained all documents related to the study. I kept a master list of all data collected and placed it in a binder. The list included the type of data collected, the date of collection, the appropriate alphanumeric code assigned to the participant(s), and any special notes. I copied each interview and focus group protocol sheet and maintained the binder. The sheets were kept in date order. I labeled the audio recording file for each interview and focus group according to type of data (interview or focus group), the date of collection, and appropriate numeric code assigned to the participant(s). I kept all data

in a secure location (a locked cabinet) in my home. I transcribed the recordings from the interviews and focus groups. I labeled each transcript according to type of data (interview or focus group), the date of collection, and appropriate alphanumeric code assigned to the participant(s). I stored transcriptions on my personal laptop, which was password protected. I maintained a printed copy of the final transcriptions (in a secure location) as well. I also backed up copies of the transcriptions on a flash drive in a secure location.

I maintained a reflective journal based on my notes made during and after data collection; it is stored on my personal, password protected laptop, along with a backup copy on a flash drive that is in a secure location with the other collected data.

Findings

Looking from the outside in, professional development (PD) may appear to be a straightforward endeavor—set a topic, assign teachers to attend, give a certificate at the conclusion, and check, it is done. One participant captured this perception: "And so often we look at professional development as something that we show up for . . . and then we move on with our lives" (FG1, Focus Group 2). According to the emergent data from my teacher informants, it may be more accurately characterized as a complex combination of factors that impact not only the experiences that the teacher takes away from the learning situation but also how the teacher perceives his or her job assignment and responsibilities in the school building and district. Rather than being viewed as an extra, professional development might better be viewed as an investment in the teachers and an opportunity to grow them individually and collaboratively. Teachers want to have deep, meaningful PD experiences, especially with their peers, and the time to facilitate and participate in

these types of learning experiences. A simpler, more coordinated process would also enhance the overall PD experience. More than anything else, teachers want a voice in their professional development. As *professionals*, they would like to be welcomed partners in the process, not simply the recipients of the program. A sense of partnership may encourage a greater sense of belonging, a positive school climate, and teacher investment, all of which may create a feeling of loyalty that may prevent a teacher from ever considering going elsewhere to teach.

I set out to answer three research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional development offerings available to them?

2. How do these perceptions impact their decision to remain at the school?

3. What types of professional learning experiences do teachers want?

Teachers found the current professional development offerings too generic and often unrelated to their classroom practice. Despite this characterization, teachers desired to improve their practice by participating in professional development that is interesting, immediate, useful and relevant in the classroom, substantial and credible, collaborative, recursive, and individualized. While teachers had strong feelings about the PD offerings and program, no direct link was found between teacher retention and PD; teachers did see effective PD as part of the school's climate. The analysis further clarified the connection of the data to the research questions.

After analyzing the data, seven themes related to the research questions emerged in the participant responses: Voice, Choice, Effective Professional Development, Time,

Collaboration, School Climate, and District's PD Program. While separated here, the themes are interrelated to each other, each playing a part in the PD process.

- Voice is the need of teachers to have their voices heard and validated in relation to PD issues.

- Choice relates to teachers being able to choose their own PD experiences, suggest topics, and/or to have a selection available from which to choose.

- Effective Professional Development is what the teachers described as either characteristics of positive PD experiences or the type of PD learning opportunities they would like in the future.

- Time is what teachers both requested for PD and noted as an element of effective PD programs.

- Collaboration is the opportunity for teachers to learn with and from one another.

- School Climate refers to the environmental factors that impact PD in a school building.

- District's PD Program refers to the procedures related to the PD program and the manner in which the PD program is managed.

Voice. While professional development experiences are geared to instruct, improve, and even inspire teachers, teachers often have little or no input in the program. This lack of voice was reflected in the participants' perceptions of PD as generally practiced, as well as their characterizations of the school district's efforts in providing learning experiences, which was related to research question 1. While the practice of PD

tended to have a positive connotation, when the term was related to the actual program in the district, the responses took on a less favorable flavor.

When asked what the term "professional development" (PD) brought to mind, participants had a variety of responses. Some looked on PD as an opportunity for professional growth and to learn with and from one another, while others focused on the frustration associated with trying to meet the annual requirements for the division. PD also took on less specific definitions; it could be "anything that helps a teacher become better at the task of teaching" (FG5, Focus Group 2). PD meant opportunities for learning new ideas and expanding what teachers want to know and do in their classrooms. It was also seen as an opportunity for professional growth and to become "more comfortable and effective at teaching" (FG 6, Focus Group 2) and an "opportunity to stay current" (FG 7, Focus Group 2).

It could mean being a part of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and an invitation for personal interaction while meeting people and conversing with peers about instructional matters. PD was also seen as team building, a way to stem the feeling of being segmented into departments, and the chance to network with one's colleagues. It was seen as an avenue to learn new modes of instruction and a time to hear from colleagues, especially those teachers do not see often or from other departments.

The term also brought out negative connotations. The term professional development itself was seen as "stuffy" (P1, interview). Participants suggested a better term would be "lifelong learning" as it would better describe the spirit of what PD *should* be (FG 7, Focus Group 2). Other ideas related to the term were "disconnected," (P4,

interview) unfocused, and not related to what teachers wanted to learn. Often the term

conjures visions of large crowds of people and boring lectures that last one day with little

or no follow-up. Other meaning associations related to PD being "mandatory," (P2,

Focus Group 1) "required," (P4, Focus Group 1) and a "contractual obligation" (FG3,

Focus Group 2). The terms "paperwork," (FG5, Focus Group 2) "accountability," (FG1,

Focus Group 2) and "defiance" (P4, interview) were also related to the fact that teachers

were required to document their activities and were subject to loss of pay if hours were

not met. Frustration was also felt when it was difficult to get credit for what teachers did

to improve themselves professionally. Some terms also reflected frustration with finding

relevant PD for all subject areas and feelings of being "left out" (FG7, Focus Group 2) if

not a teacher of a Standards of Learning (SOL) course.

How does voice relate to these findings? Teachers want to be involved in the PD

process that is meant to make them better educators, but they feel left out (Avargil,

Herscovitz & Dori, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Compton, 2010; Freidus et al, 2009; Jenkins,

Reitano & Taylor, 2011). They want to be surveyed to discover their needs. One

participant made the point that if a program is to be successful, the designers should

consult those who will use the program: "Top-down management has never worked and

it never will because you can't get the commitment from people. You don't get the

commitment; you don't have a good program" (P2, Focus Group 1). Teachers constitute a

missing ingredient: "Teachers should be involved in the process. It should be more

cutting-edge" (FG4, Focus Group 2).

Participants spoke about wanting to be included in the process of PD, especially the ability to have a voice in the PD experiences being offered. As one participant noted, PD should be "driven" by the needs of the teachers (P1, interview). "It should be less test score oriented and more adapted to what teachers need" (P3, interview).

For this to occur, teachers need to be consulted as part of the process, including the planning. A participant echoed this need: "I think it's got to be more bottom up. I think that, yes, having us communicate what we need and what we want for our classrooms is important" (FG 4, Focus Group 2). Teachers want a voice and are ready to share their requests for PD. They just need to be asked. Participants were open to completing surveys for their needs and suggestions. Closely tied to the theme of voice was choice. Not only did participants want an opportunity to be heard, they also desired a greater variety of PD offerings.

Choice. The theme of choice stems from the descriptions of current and past PD offerings as "techy," (P4, interview) "sporadic," (P3, interview) "low-level," (P4, interview) "vanilla," (P2, interview) and "elementary" (P4, interview) In addition to the focus on technology, the characterizations were a reflection of the lack of content-specific PD. There needs to be a choice available in the PL offerings with attention to the different subject areas and specialties (Birman, Desimone, Porter & Garet, 2000). Teachers need the freedom to create their own PL opportunities, whether outside of the district or with other teachers in the district (Tang & Choi, 2009). Current offerings did not meet the needs of the participants who were from small departments, elective subjects, or who were looking for PD specific to their teaching assignment. This theme

closely related to research question 1, regarding teachers' perceptions of current PD offerings. "It's well-intentioned but unevenly executed" (P2, Focus Group 1). This is how one participant characterized the current PD program and its choices. One participant shared, "I wish that some of the opportunities for PD could be more geared to fine arts . . . because I just feel so left out" (FG7, Focus Group 2).

Participants agreed that a majority of the PD choices were technology based. "It's all about technology; technology is wonderful-- if it's applicable to what you're doing" (P4, interview). While there were multiple choices, the choices were for technology classes and did not necessarily fill the needs of the participants. Teachers want their PD to be meaningful, immediate, and useful in the classroom and for most participants, the current offerings were insufficient. "I want something that is directly related to what I do in the classroom" (P1, interview). Another participant shared, "We feel like we've been completely left out" (FG8, Focus Group 2).

Participants offered suggestions to increase choice. Choice took several forms such as number of options, differentiation of options, teacher input, and tapping in-house talents and abilities. Participants wanted a greater number of total choices. Another suggestion involved offering differentiated PD based on years of teaching experience, trying to match offerings to the needs of teachers at various points in their careers. Connected to the voice theme, participants wanted teachers to have input (via a survey) in creating the choices available for PD. Finally, participants felt that there was no real mechanism for utilizing the knowledge of the staff and that some PD needs could be met by other teachers. One participant suggested creating a database of teachers' topics of

strength that other teachers could consult and use when needing assistance. These suggestions reflect responses that answer research question 1 as well as research question 3.

All of the suggestions about creating and offering increased choice were aimed at limiting the negative responses that teachers may have to PD they feel no connection to. When one participant shared about being required to take classes he did not need, he said, "Those classes have no meaning for me. It doesn't apply to me; I don't want to use it. That's why I like having choices—more choices" (P4, interview).

Adult learners are different from children and PD offerings should reflect this (Beavers, 2009; Buchanan, 2012; Cummings, 2011). As people mature, they become more self-directed and this applies to learning as well (Cercone, 2008). Adult learners are problem-centered; their learning is tied to immediate needs, how their learning can be applied to remediate the problem (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). "Rather than waiting to be told what they need to learn, self-directed learners figure out what they need to learn and work towards mastery of skills that are relevant to their positions" (Steinke, 2012, p. 54). Teachers are professionals. They know what they need to learn to serve their students. In order to accomplish this, choices need to be available.

Effective professional development. What makes PD effective? Participant responses reflected what the literature lists as attributes of effective PD. They are long-term, in-depth and on-going, job-embedded and related to teachers' daily practice, content-focused, collaborative, allowing opportunities to practice, receive feedback, reflect on new practices and follow-up, and motivated by improved student performance

(Boud & Hager, 2012; Compton, 2010; Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; Easton, 2008; Eun, 2008; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Lee, 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Tang & Choi, 2009; Thibodeau, 2008; Timperley, Parr, & Bertanees, 2009; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009; Wells & Feun, 2013; Yates, 2007).

When asked about previous PD experiences or what they desired in future offerings that they would characterize as effective, participants shared the following attributes: interesting, immediate, useful and relevant in the classroom, substantial and credible, collaborative, recursive, and individualized. This theme relates directly to research question 3.

Interesting. While PD may be a required, contractual obligation, teachers still want it to be interesting and presented in a positive and enthusiastic manner. Teachers are busy. If they are going to commit their time to a PD experience, they expect it to capture their interest or imagination; otherwise, it is painful. One participant shared the seeming universality of a previous ineffective PD experience, "Everyone in this room has been to one [PD experience] that they had no interest, it wasn't going to be applicable in the classroom, and it literally felt like going to the dentist. So it has to be interesting" (FG3, Focus Group 2).

Currently, the norm for professional learning is experiences that are "unfocused, insufficient, and irrelevant to the day-to-day problems faced by front line educators" (Sparks, 2002, p. 7). A disconnect exists between professional development and *effective* professional learning that educators need and desire to be more effective educators (Boud

& Hager, 2012). When offerings are not interesting, they become obligations rather than opportunities for development. Teachers are going to satisfy a requirement without any expectation of learning anything new or taking away skills or strategies to share with their students or colleagues. A telling example of teachers attending PD simply to accrue hours rather than an experience came as a participant shared taking a similar class multiple times to meet the requirement. "This is the fifth digital camera professional development that I've had because they keep accepting it" (P4, interview). A participant who is responsible for creating a program on her own also felt the pressure to take PD classes simply to meet the requirement, not for actual development: "I've found a lot of PD that I've just gone to because I knew I had to get 10 points and it really didn't relate to anything I was doing" (FG9, Focus Group 2).

Another participant linked teacher interest to the concept of value. "If you don't find value in it, then you shouldn't have to be a part of it-- you shouldn't be forced to be a part of it. That can often be a downfall of PD" (P1, Focus Group 1). Where there is a lack of interest, or value, there is also a lack of commitment to the program, possibly apathy. "I consider these like classes, not so much PD. Because I don't feel that it's creating development in me. It's developing a sense of apathy in me in what they do" (P4, interview). Offering PD that is directly tied to what occurs in the classroom can limit that response.

Immediate, useful, and relevant in the classroom. Participants wanted PD related to what they are doing in their classrooms and ready to be instituted immediately. Teachers' learning experiences should have a direct tie to their daily classroom work and

be characterized by immediacy of use. This encourages teachers to implement new strategies and skills with their students and determine their value and effectiveness. As a participant pointed out, "I don't want things that are, you know, not practical, not things that I can't implement the next day" (FG4, Focus Group 2).

When participants discussed PD that is useful and relevant, being a hands-on experience was a major attribute. The hands-on experiences shared also tended to be content-specific. Participants considered these types of learning experiences effective in the past and wanted to see more of in the future. Another participant echoed the need for being hands-on. Just as students enjoy interactive learning, teachers appreciate it as well. It also helps teachers remember what learning is like for their students. Another participant was excited that she had found (outside of the district) hands-on, content-specific, relevant PD to take during the summer break. The learning would be both hands-on and directly related to her teaching assignment. Yet, this type of experience seemed to be an exception, not the rule.

A first year teacher expressed surprise at the lack of relevant PD offerings. "I thought that I would be learning about things in my field and I'd be enriched more on a literary level, and it really wasn't that way in many instances" (FG3, Focus Group 2). A veteran teacher also lamented the lack of content-specific and hands-on PD available, especially for science teachers. Deciding to make professional learning experiences content-focused is supported by extensive research (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman &Yoon, 2001; Hill, 2007; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Lee, 2005; Wei et al., 2009; Yates, 2007). NSDC's report (2009) found that "The content of professional learning matters as

much as the process by which it is transmitted" (p. 12). In addition, it is useful for teachers to study the "very material" they will be teaching their students (Wei et al., p. 10).

Substantial and credible. Participants wanted PD that is research-based and that has proven successful in other classrooms, which is supported by the characteristics of effective PD (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman &Yoon, 2001; Hill, 2007; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Lee, 2005; Wei et al., 2009; Yates, 2007). Participants want to see "visible results in the classroom" (FG4, Focus Group 2). If it has worked somewhere else or for another teacher, teachers are more open to the offered PD. One participant noted, "I'd want to know that it worked," (FG10, Focus Group 2) when considering a PD experience. Before investing valuable time, teachers want to know that is worth the investment. Whether the evidence comes from an article or from a colleague, teachers feel more confident when they know another educator has met with success.

Some participants were already having this type of PD experience. Some departments were already sharing their strategies and successes in order to address needs in their classrooms. This reinforces adult learners as being problem-centered and desiring learning directly related to their practice (Cercone, 2008). Teachers in her department take turns teaching new concepts and ideas to one another and having conversations about their teaching experiences: "Because it is about best practices, and the more that we share best practices that we know we've tweaked and have helped our kids, I think the better we become" (FG3, Focus Group 2). Teachers are identifying problems and seeking solutions in a collaborative manner.

Collaborative. Compton (2010) found that, across all experiences levels, teachers selected "the opportunity to connect with other teachers" as an effective professional learning activity (p. 54). Effective PD also involves networking of teachers and offers actual materials, resources, and equipment that can be shared with students and colleagues. One participant pointed out that teaching is not done in a vacuum. " Until you've actually put that into practice, either with your students or you've talked about it with somebody, then, it doesn't matter. It's not really doing anything" (FG10, Focus Group 2).

Part of the collaborative PD is the additional information learned from others participating in the experiences. When teachers collaborate, "they begin to assume responsibility for their own professional development and become both supports and resources for their peers" (Freidus et al., 2009, p. 186). When teachers take a class, it is not simply from the instructor or facilitator that knowledge is gained. One participant observed, "The presenter is not the only one with good ideas that work" (P4, Focus Group 1). Rather, "It's what you learn from everyone else around you" (P4, Focus Group 1). Whether it is in a teacher's school or at a conference, it is "the most meaningful stuff" (P2, Focus Group 1) when teachers learn from and with their peers. Collaborative experiences also enabled teachers to consider trying new ideas based on their colleagues' experiences. "I do like to learn from other people and I like to learn from their experiences and hear what they have done and maybe I can use that, too" (FG10, Focus Group 2). Another participant added, "I think working with people within your schools that are doing certain things that you can learn from has been the most useful and helpful

for me and for my kids--as opposed to paying somebody else to teach me how to do it"

(FG6, Focus Group 2).

     Recursive. The recursive nature of effective PD is part of the continuous cycle of

professional learning that makes professional development effective (Eun, 2008; Guskey,

2002; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, 2007; King & Newmann. 2001;

Thibodeau, 2008). PD needs to be a long-term process that builds on other skills and

allows for both individual and collaborative activities. Teachers need the opportunity to

put what they have learned into practice and the time to discuss and review it with their

colleagues. In their study of effective of practices, Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney (2009)

found that providing opportunities for modeling, practice and feedback were part of

effective programs. Feedback was especially important as it allowed for reinforcement,

clarification, or correction of misconceptions (p. 50). Based on these conversations,

teachers' instruction may undergo modification, and the process then begins again.

Teachers return to the classroom, implement the modified instruction and then review the

results with their colleagues.

     Despite participants understanding that experiencing recursive PD is an important

characteristic of teacher learning, time is often a mitigating factor. "Learning how to be a

better teacher is a process and so often we don't feel like we have the time to do that"

(FG1, Focus Group 2). Another participant compared PD's recursive nature to a puzzle.

"There will be another part of it and you'll have to find it, and that's what great about it.

It's always there" (FG5, Focus Group 2). Effective PD encourages this recursive process

of teachers "tweaking" their craft to become more effective (FG4, Focus Group 2). Teachers realize it a constantly moving target, not a stationary goal.

Individualized. Finally, participants added that effective PD allows for individual teachers to seek out and tailor experiences based on their needs and the needs of their students. Sometimes, a teacher may have a very particular need for PD and may need more freedom in meeting the PD requirement than the choices offered by the division or school. Some teachers may be the only person to teach a particular class or subject area. As one participant shared, allowing teachers some latitude in deciding what they need to learn may make the learning more useful and powerful for the teacher. "When I sought out help for types of information that I really intended to use, it was always extremely helpful. And I grew as a teacher that way" (FG10, Focus Group 2). This bottom-up approach of allowing teachers the opportunity of crafting learning experiences on an individual basis rather than on a whole school level was seen as an important characteristic of effective PD. As much as participants wanted to have a collaborative aspect to their PD, they also desired the freedom to follow their individual professional needs and the learning needs of their students. This also reflects the needs of adult learners. Adults need to feel that learning focuses on the issues that directly concern them and what they want to know (Cercone, 2008).

Time. Effective PD requires the unencumbered time to do it--time without students that has been set aside or made available for the purpose of professional learning and discussions to occur. "Professional development that is engaging and beneficial, yet not too time consuming, is a difficult balance to achieve" (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010, p.

42). Adult learners have multiple demands on their time to be considered when creating

PD offerings (Cercone, 2008).

Teachers are busy and have many responsibilities, including earning the required

PD. By the end of the day, teachers are tired and considering their "to-do" lists for the

next day's instruction. As one participant summed up the situation, "We've been teaching

all day and our minds are on the 50 million other things that have to get done—not the

PD that could be valuable" (P1, interview). While teachers understand the importance of

PD, their other classroom responsibilities and personal obligations often are more

pressing than after-school PD, creating stress for teachers. Teachers want to attend PD,

but grades are due or there are 75 papers waiting to be graded. Stebick (2008) agreed,

noting teachers must perceive PD "in their own best interests," or why should they invest

the time (p. 88).

Participants wanted to see more time built into the school day and calendar for PD

similar to its structure in the past--time when students were not present, either in full day

or half-day increments. Participants felt that pre-service days (contracted days before

students arrive) and days earlier in the first semester would be the most effective

placement for additional designated PD days. This placement gives teachers more time to

implement the strategies and analyze their effectiveness. One participant questioned the

division's use of designated PD days. Other divisions include more half-days in their

calendar specifically for PD and she wondered why this division does not.

Collaboration. Peer-to-peer learning was a common element of shared effective

PD experiences. The format of collaborative learning varied. Participants discussed

observing peers delivering instruction, videotaping oneself and discussing it with a peer, participating in a professional learning community, and facilitating a PD class as effective PD experiences. Each of these allowed for interaction between peers and the opportunity for feedback. Participants experienced growth through conversations about teaching. Hearing another educator's perspective on classroom instruction, strategies, and classroom management expanded their knowledge base and repertoire. One participant shared how this type of interaction helped her become a better teacher. "Just constantly talking to them: how do you do this, and what do you do about this and the modeling and giving examples" (FG10, Focus Group 2).

Not only did participants want to learn from members of their departments, but they also wanted to learn from and with other departments. Participants understood that cross-curricular learning could be useful. While the subject areas may differ, teachers could learn together for topics such as classroom management, educational applications, and building student rapport. A participant noted that "there are things that I think we can do as professionals to help each other, to help all of our students to be more successful in all of their classes" (FG9, Focus Group 2). Participants discussed a variety of collaborative learning experiences. The two types of collaborative peer learning mentioned most frequently were learning walks and mentoring.

Originally a tool for administrators, these "informal, brief, focused and non-evaluative" classroom visits are now a suggested learning tool for teachers. Teachers, individually or in groups, observe other teachers, engage in "reflective dialogue" with their peers, and work to adapt their practice based on the observation and dialogue (Allen

& Topolka-Jorissen, 2014, p. 824). Learning walks were a new addition to the PD requirement for the 2011-2012 school year. Each teacher was required to complete three 45 minute learning walks by the required due date. Teachers were expected to observe teachers within and without their departments. After each walk, the teacher completed a summary of the learning walk, noting the strategies practiced in the classroom and how those strategies could be incorporated into the observer's classroom. This summary was sent to the teacher's department chairperson and administrator. While novice teachers saw the walks as a learning opportunity, the discussion from the experienced teachers focused on the lack of planning and execution of the program.

Learning walks afforded the observer the opportunity to observe another teacher's interactions with students, learn new strategies, and then apply them with the observer's students. A participant noted that it allowed him to learn more about his colleagues, especially those he had heard students talk about in his classroom with enthusiasm. Over the course of the three learning walks, teachers were able to answer questions. Why do students enjoy being in this classroom? How does the teacher engage students? What procedures does the teacher have in place to encourage an effective classroom? Teachers could now experience the various teaching styles of their colleagues and see strategies in action in other classrooms. Participants found there were "lots of different options" (FG2, Focus Group 2) in implementing instruction and classroom management. Another participant left the experience with additional techniques for use in the classroom. "I think that's what makes us all better professionals when we share with each other" (FG3, Focus Group 2). One of the strengths of the program was learning from one's peers and

encouraging a collaborative environment and less isolation of teachers (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014).

Just as choice was an important aspect in PD learning experiences, the exposure to a variety of teaching styles and subject area classrooms underscored that teaching is slightly different for each teacher. While teachers need not be copies of one another, it can be helpful to see someone else's approach. "The peer observation—seeing someone else teach a different way—seeing ways you could do things different—from that perspective, it was really, really valuable" (FG10, Focus Group 2). Some teachers selected to observe a teacher whose strength was an area the observer viewed as a weakness. For example, if a teacher had difficulty with transitioning (moving students from one activity to the next activity), he or she could observe another teacher known for that skill. Seeing another teacher modeling a specific strategy or behavior could encourage the observer to take the knowledge to his or her classroom. As one participant shared, "When I saw it done effectively [in another classroom], I was able to then see how it could happen and make it happen in my room" (FG4, Focus Group 2). Another participant noted that the learning walks were "very enlightening. You see them teach a class and think, 'I could do this, too.' That's a really good feeling to know you can learn from each other" (FG10, Focus Group 2).

The aspect participants felt was the most valuable and important was having a reflective conversation with a peer after the observation. Adding a post-walk conversation was seen as an important modification of the current procedure. This would allow both the observer and the teacher to benefit from the experience and encourage

peer-to-peer learning. This reinforced the findings of Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2014). Their study found participating in regular reflective dialogue with colleagues created a more collaborative environment and encouraged teachers to try new strategies in their own classrooms (p. 832).

While participants did learn from the experiences, the program was not without issues. One participant described the learning walk program as "a disaster from the get-go" and "disheartening and disappointing" (P1, Focus Group 1). The participant noted that there were no training, no protocols, and no method for feedback post-walk. Another participant echoed the lack of training and noted, "There was nothing put into this program but a couple of pieces of paper that were mailed out" (P2, Focus Group 1). The lack of preparation was also mentioned in the planning of the program. Two departments had common planning which made it difficult to observe another member of the same department without securing coverage for students. Participants felt "the whole planning process of setting up the program didn't go hand in hand" (P3, Focus Group 1).

Due to this lack of preparation and direct instruction, participants stated that the activity became "people running around" and "something extra to do" rather than a learning opportunity for many teachers (P3, Focus Group 1). Participants shared that some of their colleagues actually fabricated their learning walks because they assumed no one would read their write-ups. It was just a requirement to be fulfilled.

While there was dissatisfaction with the planning and procedures used for the learning walks, participants did not want to see the program dropped. Instead, they made suggestions for its improvement. The primary suggestion was to remove the

"administrative element" and make it a "teacher-to-teacher learning experience" (P2, Focus Group 1). Participants felt comfortable with letting an administrator know that the walk had occurred by signing a paper with the other teacher, but did not want it to be an "evaluative kind of environment" (P1, Focus Group 1). Other participants felt that the term "peer review" should replace the term "observation" (P2, Focus Group 1). An additional suggestion involved grouping teachers with similar annual instructional goals together in learning walk groups. Rather than the administration randomly grouping teachers, teachers could align themselves with colleagues interested in similar issues. Participants felt this change might encourage participation: "And then I feel like everyone would want to do it because you would be reaching or going toward a common goal" (P4, Focus Group 1). These suggestions coincide with the premise that learning walks should be "non-evaluative" and focus on encouraging reflective practice (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014, p. 824).

Mentoring. Many school systems have instituted mentoring programs to support new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kelley, 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Strong, 2005). In the non-interviewed teacher focus group, there were 5 novice teachers, who shared their thoughts on mentoring. One participant characterized her mentoring experiences as "horrible" (FG9, Focus Group 2). Her assigned mentor did not participate in any of the school-wide mentoring activities, failed to meet with her, and gave the mentee the impression she was bothering her when she sought advice and assistance. Therefore, the participant did not take part in any of the activities either and felt like she was "in a closet" for her first year

(FG9, Focus Group 2). She never felt she had become a part of the "educational community and knowing what to do and how to do it" (FG9, Focus Group 2).

Another participant had the opposite experience. Her mentor was very helpful, always available to answer her questions and to show her how to do the everyday tasks expected of a teacher. This was especially needed because she was not part of a large department where there would be a larger pool of help. In larger departments, novice teachers have the advantage of multiple teachers to assist them in acclimation process.

Meeting other teachers and key staff members was an important part of the initiation process in the school for one participant. She noted that her mentor made it a point to introduce her to other faculty members so she would feel like part of the school community. A teacher with three years' experience remembered meeting the new teacher, sharing that it was "critical" to know your colleagues, especially in a physically large building (FG2, Focus Group 2).

While new teachers are assigned a mentor, participants suggested that a single mentor has limitations and that it may "take a village" to mentor new teachers (FG6, Focus Group 2). Some felt that one person cannot "possibly provide" all of a new teacher's needs (FG6, Focus Group 2). Participants shared how different colleagues filled the variety of needs they had as new teachers. Rather than being limited to the knowledge of one person, teachers may need to reach out to many sources for information. One participant discussed feeling "restricted" by the perceived expectation she should go only to her mentor with questions and issues (FG3, Focus Group 2).

Another topic of discussion related to mentoring was the structure of the program. Participants expressed concerns about the related monthly activities. Each month, meetings mentors and mentees met, but there was a lack of interaction between teachers. The format consisted of lecture-style for the monthly topic rather than a free exchange of ideas. In the past, each monthly meeting involved food and a more relaxed atmosphere which one participant felt resulted in teachers being "happier and talk[ing] longer and wasn't like checking it off" (P3, Focus Group 1). Now, the program is seen as having "gone to the wayside" where the "only thing you see people doing is texting" (P4, Focus Group 1). The previous mentor program was a "place for peer to peer development—a place for open dialog--where novice and veteran teachers could talk about the challenges and experiences of being a teacher" (P3, Focus Group 1). Participants would like to see some revamping of the program to make it more useful to novice teachers. For example, there should be a return to a teacher-centered format where novice teachers' needs are the basis for the discussions. Again, this reflects the needs of adult learners. Adults need dialogue and social interaction. They need to the opportunity to collaborate and reflect on their practice (Cercone, 2008).

School Climate. While the participants saw no direct bearing between the PD offered and teachers' decisions to stay or leave a school, they did see PD as part of the "climate" of the school. These responses directly relate to research question 2. Participants felt that the type and quality of the PD would neither "keep nor send people away," (P3, interview) but it could prevent teachers from considering the possibility of leaving. As one participant stated, PD provided by the district or the school "shows that

I'm valued as a professional, that I'm seen as a professional and that they [the district] do want to invest in you as a professional." It creates a "sense of loyalty' between the teacher and the school district (P1, interview).

Another participant noted that climate could "trump" money and the PD offered as a part of that climate, community, and team building were important parts of focusing more time on the "human issue" rather than just on standardized test scores (P3, interview). It helps teachers to feel valued and feel important. It is an opportunity to talk and communicate with peers, to be a part of a community. When there is a lack of investment or feeling a part of a community, "people feel disenfranchised and disarticulated" (P3, interview). Being part of a professional learning community can have the opposite effect; it creates a "sense of collective purpose" in the school and the "shared view that everyone has an important role in the school" (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014, p. 832-833).

Creating a sense of community is important for all teachers, but given the attrition rate of novice teachers, it may be vital for new teachers. The first weeks and months a novice teacher's career are important to creating opportunities for connection to the school community. One participant commented, "Teachers are blank slates and we can either poison or support them" P3, interview). Providing support, including PD as part of the climate, shows that teachers are valued and creates a "team atmosphere" and a "more nurturing and less hostile" environment P3, interview).

District's PD Program. The district's efforts at PD were characterized in a negative light and similar to participants' connotations to the term PD. Words such as

"weak" and "poor" (P2, Focus Group 1) described their assessment of district efforts to provide PD. Much of the conversation centered on the divide between the intentions of what PD and the reality of the program. One participant described the district's efforts as "well-intentioned but unevenly executed" (P2, Focus Group 1). This uneven execution was attributed to a lack of coordination between grade levels and buildings in the district, changing of staff at the division level of the district, different visions of the types and purposes of PD, and a perceived lack of financial investment in the program by the district. This theme was related to research questions 1 and 3.

As mentioned in the discussion of effective PD experiences, the district previously offered opportunities for countywide networking and collaboration across buildings and grade levels. This was particularly important to the science teachers who viewed it as an opportunity to engage in learning as a larger team of science teachers. One science teacher shared, "We could exchange information and equipment and things like that, and I don't even know who works there anymore. So it was a networking, a networking--there was a networking component that's evaporated—it's gone" (P4, interview). "A sense of connection and engagement, the value of networking and the pleasure of meeting like-minded people" are the benefits of collaborative learning (Steinert et al., 2010, p. 906).

Other participants were interested in going beyond their own subject areas and school buildings. They wanted to have the opportunity to learn from their elementary and middle school colleagues. Participants noted a lack of multi-leveled interaction between grade levels and buildings and a focus on technology-based classes, which the

participants questioned as "real development" (P1, interview). Participants linked the lack of coordination between the teachers and the type and quality of PD offered to the delivery of PD as a "top-down" system, where teachers are recipients of PD rather than active participants. Teachers should be the first ones surveyed and consulted when designing PD instead of those who are "too far removed" from the daily activities of the classroom (Avargil, Herscovitz, & Dori, 2012, p. 54). A focused PD goal for the district and individual schools was also viewed as missing. Efforts were described as having "eyes bigger than our stomachs," where too many ideas were trying to be implemented without any priority goal setting taking place first (P2, Focus Group 1). There appeared to be no district-wide vision of what PD should look like. Tang and Choi (2009) recommended that divisions reduce the "overload of initiatives" and focus on creating time and space for collaborative teacher interaction (p. 16). A lack of investment was also an issue.

There was a perception that it was more important to talk about PD's value rather than actually invest in it. Another participant noted that the level of investment differed from surrounding counties. "I talk to other teachers in other counties and what they do for PD –sometimes you are at the same things with them. Other counties put a lot more into it that we do here" (P4, interview). The level of investment was related to the lack of staffing at the district. While some larger divisions have a dedicated staff for PD, the target division does not. Each member of the division staff is responsible for multiple areas including PD. With division office personnel covering so many areas, it gave the perception that teachers did not have strong support at the division level.

Changes in PD procedures were also suggested. Participants shared their frustration in understanding procedures for meeting their PD requirements. Confusion existed about what constituted acceptable PD experiences and how to obtain approval and credit for outside PD. Participants requested a better, easier to understand procedure, especially to receive credit for teachers' personalized PD. Novice and veteran teachers found the process difficult to understand and navigate.

Evidence of Quality

I used detailed description and member checking to validate the research (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). I was careful to incorporate the voice of the participants in the study and include their perspectives on professional learning. At each stage, I checked for the accuracy of the information. With each participant or focus group, I reviewed the data shared in the previous interviews and focus groups to check for agreement or dissent from the current participant(s). The interviews and focus groups provided "corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I looked for repetition of themes across the focus groups and interviews. In order to be credible, my research demonstrates "thoroughness" as defined by Rubin and Rubin (2005): "investigating all relevant options with care and completeness" (p. 70). I took care in laying out the data analysis process by which I came to my conclusions with "clarity and understanding that the participants recognize the researcher's description of their experiences" (p. 71). To complete the interviews and focus groups, I spent an extended time in contact with the participants (60-minutes per interview and 90-minutes per focus group) and the data, allowing opportunities to collect sufficient data for the detailed descriptions that are essential to qualitative research

(Merriam, 2002, p. 5).). I followed the procedures that aligned with the qualitative approach selected for my study.

Individual interviews followed by the focus groups allowed me to do as Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested. I checked for accuracy and consistency as I analyzed the interviews and focus groups. This process allowed me to modify my conclusions if needed as I learned new information from each interview and focus groups (p. 229). After the first individual interviews, all of the individual participants gathered in a focus group. Part of the discussion involved a review of information learned from the individual interviews and verification of its accuracy. At the close of the individual interview focus group, I reviewed what we discussed to make sure that I had recorded all of the responses correctly. I followed the same procedure in the non-interviewed teacher focus group. I reviewed the information learned from the individual interviews and the previous focus group. At the close of the non-interviewed teacher focus group, I reviewed the discussion to ensure my accurate account of the session. At each step of the process, I repeated member checking to confirm the accuracy of my recording of participant responses and discussions. Since the outcome of the study was a professional learning plan based on the needs of the teachers, it was logical to share the results in the focus groups to ensure an accurate depiction of their voices.

Conclusion

"Professional development must be seen as a process, not an event" (Guskey, 2002, p. 384). Just as student learning should not be one-size-fits-all; teacher PD should not be totally homogenized. While it may seem counterintuitive to focus on PD during a

time of shrinking budgets and economic uncertainty, now is the time to review PD

programs to ensure that money is being used in the most effective manner. Districts need

to know if teacher and student needs are being met. How will districts know what is

needed? Ask the teachers. Begin the conversation and use the results to build a PD

program that offers voice, collaboration, choice, subject-specific learning, time to learn,

and an easy to understand and navigate process.

Teachers want a voice in their PD; they want ownership of their professional

learning. They are in the classrooms on a daily basis and know better than anyone else

what they and their students need. Districts need to reach out to their teachers and make

them a part of the PD process from the beginning rather than only at the end.

The worlds of education and the workplace are rapidly becoming collaborative

environments. That level of collaboration should be reflected in the learning experiences

offered to teachers. Schools need to be a community of learners and those learners

include the teachers. Teachers want to be able to learn with and from one another and

build on one another's knowledge.

Choice: our society is inundated with choice. Just as teachers are encouraged to

offer choices to students in their learning to highlight differing learning styles, PD

programs should include an element of choice. Educators, too, have different learning

styles and would like options that reflect those differences. Closely related to choice are

subject-specific learning experiences.

In order for teachers to feel like all subject areas are important, PD choices should

reflect subject-specific learning experiences. If PD cannot be directly linked to what the

teacher does in the classroom, it may become an exercise in completion of requirements, not learning. It may become a numbers game. "In order to connect professional learning and practice, school should stop just counting the hours or programs that a teacher participates in professional development" (Lee, 2005, p. 47). Teachers want more than hours. Teachers generally feel more valued when PD choices reflect a variety of subject areas and show that the choices will be useful in the classroom.

"It takes time, hard work and a robust sense of efficacy to build the broad-based support needed to transform ineffectual schools into successful ones" (Bandura, 1997, p. 256). Learning takes practice. Learning is recursive. Learning takes time. In such a fast-paced world, it may seem silly to point out that learning requires time, but time is what many teachers already feel a lack of. Teachers are an integral part of the process of change. Everyone benefits from more effective, successful schools. If districts and schools do not make an effort, with the help of teachers, to carve out the needed time for the important work of PD and honor that time commitment, when will it happen? If PD is important, time must be set aside for that purpose. Yes, teachers have the summer and most do PD then as well, but they want to do their learning with their colleagues because that is where they do their teaching. "Professional development that is engaging and beneficial, yet not too time consuming, is a difficult balance to achieve" (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010, p. 42). Despite the difficulty, schools need to make the effort to carve out time for teacher learning.

Finally, make it easy. While the learning may be challenging, the process for PD should not be. If the goal is effective learning experiences for teachers, the process should

not be a hurdle. It should not be so difficult to know the requirements and the process for obtaining credit that some teachers simply throw up their hands in dismay. Ensure that the process is clearly communicated in a variety of mediums and that teachers understand the process.

"People do not live in social isolation, nor can they exercise control over major aspects of their lives entirely on their own" (Bandura, 1997, 477). Educating young people is not a solitary task; it happens through relationship. Teachers work in relationship with one another, students, parents, and with the school and district administration. These relationships are an opportunity for collaboration, professional growth, and retention. Teachers feel little control over the decisions that impact their daily work lives, but at the same time, they are untapped storehouses of ideas and strategies for improving their work lives and better serving their students. Giving teachers a voice in their PD is a step towards ownership of the program and the process. It recognizes their professional expertise, the role they play in making schools work effectively, and an investment in their continuous quality. When teachers are active in all facets of the PD cycle rather than simply receivers of information and attendees of classes, that ownership of the program extends beyond professional learning and pays dividends in their classrooms, their buildings, and their communities:

Teachers are not simply beneficiaries of PD who serve as a mediating link to student learning; rather, teachers are change agents seeking, considering, and adapting PD experiences through the lens of experts on their own school and classroom contexts. (Duzor, 2011, p 372)

Teachers are ready for the challenge of effective PD and the opportunity to become full partners in the success of their schools as a whole, not just their classrooms.

As a result of my findings, I have designed a professional learning plan (PLP) for the target school. In addition to the findings, the plan is informed by a second literature review. The PLP is a logical extension of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action.

This section presented the methodology choice and design of the study, including the justification for the methodology choice and study design. How data was collected and analyzed was explained. Finally, the findings and conclusions were shared. In Section 3, the project's description, goals, and rationale will be explained. In addition, the section will include a literature review related to the project. Finally, the implementation, evaluation, and implications for social change will be discussed.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

What do teachers face on a daily basis? They are "distracted by an ever-changing, fast-paced, standards-driven world of education" (Stebick, 2008, p. 88). Today's teachers have a challenging job and need learning opportunities that support them. They have the "unenviable position of frontline pressure to perform" (Smardon & Charteris, 2012, p. 28). Based on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action of the study, I propose a Professional Learning Plan (PLP) for a target school that reflects the suggestions and needs shared by the participants. The plan incorporates information related to the study themes of Voice, Choice, Effective Professional Development, Time, Collaboration, School Climate, and District's PD Program.

The PLP includes the shift from using the term "professional development" to the term "professional *learning*". Learningforward (formally the National Staff Development Council) explained the importance of this shift: "The decision to call these Standards for Professional Learning rather than Standards for Professional Development signals the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous development and places emphasis on their learning" (Standards, para. 3). Easton (2008) also noted the change and explained, "Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must become learners, and they must be self-developing" (p. 756). A change has occurred in the perception of PL and the PLP reflects that change.

Description and Goals

The PLP is a suggested plan for one school year of professional learning (PL) for the target school. Organized as a timeline for an academic year, each month includes tasks to be accomplished, indicates who is responsible for the tasks, and the outcome or documents for the tasks. I designed the PLP to address the problem of the target school, ineffective PL. Interviews, focus groups, and insights from a literature review inform the PLP. I aim to offer a plan that is learner-centered and inclusive of teachers at all points of the process. In short the design empowers teachers to take control of their own professional learning program in the setting in which their professional work takes place.

Rationale

The PLP is a direct result of the interviews and focus groups and the findings that emerged from them. The teacher participants openly shared their PL experiences and the types of PL they need and would like to take part in. They also shared the desire to play an integral, personal role in the PL process. A proposed local PLP is a natural extension of this project study. Its design integrates teachers at all phases of the process and allows for collaboration with colleagues and individualized opportunities for PL. The project tackles the issues of offering a range of effective professional learning choices, opportunities for collaboration, individualization, and gives teachers a voice. Finally, the proposed PLP attempts to simplify and streamline the PL process, another concern that came out of the interviews and focus groups.

Review of the Literature

The PLP incorporates the research on what constitutes effective professional learning as well as examples of best practices and suggestions for creating a professional learning program. The Standards for Professional Learning and the theories of adult learning also informed the plan. I developed the project based on the definition of effective professional learning as "intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong relationships among teachers" (Wei et al., 2009, p. 5).

The results of the study echoed these aspects. I used the following search terms for the literature review: *effective professional development, effective professional learning, collaborative professional learning, standards of professional learning, professional development plans, professional learning plans, professional development design, professional development assessment, professional development evaluation, adult learning, adult learning theory, teacher involvement, teacher learning, teachers as learners, self-efficacy,* and *self-directed learning*. The ERIC database, Education Research Complete, Education: a Sage full-text database, ProQuest Central, and Teacher Reference Center databases were the specific databases searched.

Seven themes related to the research questions emerged: voice, choice, effective professional development, time, collaboration, school climate, and district's pd program. Teachers want to have PL experiences that are meaningful, allow for collaboration with their peers, and the time to facilitate and participate in these types of learning experiences. In addition, a simpler, more coordinated PL process would enhance the

learning experience. Of highest importance, teachers want a voice in their professional development. As *professionals*, they would like to be active planners, participants, and facilitators rather than relegated solely to the role of attendees.

Adult Learning Theories

Adults learn differently than children and their learning experiences should reflect that understanding (Beavers, 2009; Cummings, 2011). Despite this understanding and decades of research, there is single theory that can give all the answers (Merriam, 2001). While no one theory currently explains everything, districts and schools can inform their PL experiences based on what has been learned. The concept of andragogy is probably the best known. Malcolm Knowles (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) posited six "assumptions" of andragogy that are relevant to adult learners:

- As a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being.

- An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning.

- The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.

- There is change in time perspective as people mature--from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem centered than subject centered in learning.

- The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something. (p. 55)

Recognizing the needs of adult learners allows for greater work autonomy, opportunities to build and reinforce self-efficacy, a sense of control, and a sense of empowerment. Treating teachers as partners in their learning, rather than simply as recipients, makes teachers feel included in the process as valued professionals. They feel part of a more independent, bottom-up organization of shared knowledge and leadership rather than part of a "culture of dependence on top-down instructional processes" (Steinke, 2012, p. 54). The PLP acknowledges the needs of teachers as adult learners and that their learning is problem-centered. Once teachers are surveyed, the choices will reflect learning experiences based on their needs and the needs of their students.

Voice

According to Avargil, Herscovitz, and Dori (2012):

Teachers must be the first ones consulted when assessing what is needed to improve the classroom and learning. Unfortunately, teachers seem to be a late addition, consulted only after decisions about professional development and program implementations have already determined by administrators or curriculum specialists who are too far removed from the daily interactions of the classroom. (p. 54)

The PLP gives teachers a voice in their PL by surveying them about their learning needs. Teachers have felt locked out of the process and the project seeks to remedy this lack of voice. "Teachers want to be asked what they need to improve student learning and their suggestions must be used when planning professional development experiences" (p. 73).

Teachers need a sense of ownership in the program. Bandura (1997) suggested that schools allow teachers to "help themselves rather than imposing new practices on them" (p. 258). When teachers have a voice and are active in deciding how new development will happen, teachers will "work harder at implementing innovations and derive a greater sense of efficacy and satisfaction from their accomplishments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 258).

What do the teachers want and need to learn? Rather than trying to make guesses and present teachers with others think they need, make teachers a part of the process (Avargil, Herscovitz & Dori, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Compton, 2010; Freidus et al, 2009; Jenkins, Reitano & Taylor, 2011). Poll teachers for their needs, give them the opportunity to vote on the choices, and invite them to be facilitators of PL themselves.

Historically, the teaching profession has been known for a lack of autonomy and control: those who do not have direct contact with students make most decisions on behalf of teachers, which "is not the stuff of professionalism" (The National Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001, p. 10). Teachers want to be part of the process. The "tremendous expertise of teachers within the school is required to determine their specific learning needs" for professional learning experiences (Hirsh, 2009, p. 16). "Employees need some control over matters that affect their work life and give them a sense of ownership for what they produce" (Bandura, 1997, p. 467). This lack of control and ownership, demonstrated by little choice and voice in learning experiences, led some teachers to participate in ineffective or repetitive classes simply to fulfill a requirement, not to actually learn anything of value.

In their study of the Sunshine School Experience, Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) identified the importance of teacher involvement in the PL process. The teachers in this study:

> identified their needs, planned the activities, and participated in the implementation and follow-up without administrative oversight. They were integrally involved in the planning of the professional development, and the activities were tailored to address specific needs identified by teachers, not administrators. (p. 42)

The PLP not only surveys teachers regarding their needs, but it invites teacher participation at each step of the process, including offering a wide range of choices in PL.

Choice

Adult learners are different from children and PD offerings should reflect this (Beavers, 2009; Buchanan, 2012; Cummings, 2011). As people mature, they become more self-directed and this applies to learning as well (Cercone, 2008). Adult learners are problem-centered; their learning is tied to immediate needs, how their learning can be applied to remediate the problem (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). "Rather than waiting to be told what they need to learn, self-directed learners figure out what they need to learn and work towards mastery of skills that are relevant to their positions" (Steinke, 2012, p. 54). Teachers are professionals. They know what they need to learn to serve their students. In order to accomplish this, choices need to be available.

There needs to be a choice available in the PL offerings with attention to the different subject areas and specialties (Birman, Desimone, Porter & Garet, 2000).

Teachers need the freedom to create their own PL opportunities, whether outside of the district or with other teachers in the district (Tang & Choi, 2009). This will create learning experiences that are meaningful and useful in the classrooms of more teachers. This will also create a sense of ownership. "Creative solutions to the challenges of decreased funding can help schools and districts build internal capacity by allowing staff to recognize their own potential for leadership and self-directed, collaborative learning" (Chapman, 2012, p. 37). Choice also extends to experiences that are district-wide, school-wide, subject or grade level, collaborative, and individual (Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006).

Participants described PL offerings as "techy," (P4, interview) "sporadic," (P3, interview) "low-level," (P4, interview) "vanilla," (P2, interview) and "elementary" (P4, interview). In addition to the focus on technology, there was a lack of content-specific PL; current offerings did not meet the needs of teachers from small departments, elective subjects, or those who were looking for PL specific to their teaching assignment. The real issue behind teachers' negative attitudes toward professional learning stems from "forced participation in weak, didactic, preservice educational experiences and, subsequently, in low-quality staff development the educators do not find helpful" (Hirsh, 2009, p. 7). Rather than "formulaic, lifeless, and unconnected" professional learning, teachers need engaging experiences individualized to the needs of their students, and connected to their daily practice. Currently, the norm for professional learning is experiences that are "unfocused, insufficient, and irrelevant to the day-to-day problems faced by front line educators" (Sparks, 2002, p. 7). A disconnect exists between professional development

and *effective* professional learning that educators need and desire to be more effective educators (Boud & Hager, 2012).

Effective Professional Learning

Teachers want PL learning experiences that are interesting, immediate, useful and relevant in the classroom, substantial and credible, collaborative, recursive, and individualized. This corroborates what the previous research has found. Effective PL experiences share characteristics. They are long-term, in-depth and on-going, job-embedded and related to teachers' daily practice, content-focused, collaborative, allowing opportunities to practice, receive feedback, reflect on new practices and follow-up, and motivated by improved student performance (Boud & Hager, 2012; Compton, 2010; Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; Easton, 2008; Eun, 2008; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Lee, 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Tang & Choi, 2009; Thibodeau, 2008; Timperley, Parr, & Bertanees, 2009; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009; Wells & Feun, 2013; Yates, 2007). Teachers want to take advantage of PL to become better, more effective teachers, but the learning experiences must be just that—learning experiences related to what actually takes place in their classrooms and the content that they teach and the time to participate in them. Otherwise, they will tend to reject and resist the experiences (Beavers, 2009).

School leaders need to encourage a culture where there is "awareness" that professional learning is part of the daily life of the school and that learning is most effective for adults when it is "focused on practical and relevant issues"(Piggot-Irvine,

2006, p. 479- 480). It is part of the process of teaching (Boud & Hager, 2012).

Administrators play "a vital role in the adoption and continuance of new educational

practices" (Bandura, 1997, p. 256). Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005) also placed

responsibility on school administrators to "build conditions" conducive to professional

learning as a "routine part of the job" (p. 17). In fact, Hirsh (2009) felt school-based

professional development is "*the* best way to ensure that the learning of educators is

relevant to the context of their daily work, providing the impetus for them to apply their

learning *to* their work" (p. 5-6).

  "Effective professional development programmes cannot be quick-fix, or surface

or skills translation (training) focused. These programmes need to be long term . . . and

sustained" (Piggot-Irvine, 2006, p. 483). Piggot-Irvine (2006) also noted in a study of

what constitutes an effective professional development program that depth can be

reached by adopting a mind-set of "'do a few things well, rather than a lot poorly'" (p.

480).

Time

  "It takes time, hard work and a robust sense of efficacy to build the broad-based

support needed to transform ineffectual schools into successful ones" (Bandura, 1997, p.

256). Learning takes practice. Learning is recursive. Learning takes time. In such a fast-

paced world, it may seem silly to point out that learning requires time, but time is what

many teachers are already lacking. Teachers are an integral part of the process of change.

Everyone benefits from more effective, successful schools. If districts and schools do not

make an effort, with the help of teachers, to carve out the needed time for the important

work of PL and honor that time commitment, when will it happen? If PL is important, time must be reserved for that purpose. Yes, teachers have the summer and most do PL then as well, but they want to do their learning with their colleagues because that is where they do their teaching. "Professional development that is engaging and beneficial, yet not too time consuming, is a difficult balance to achieve" (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010, p. 42).

The PLP reflects that PL takes place at a variety of times, not just on specified days, and that creating time is a challenge. "Lack of time is the greatest challenge to effective professional teacher development" (Avargil, Herscovitz & Dori, 2012, p. 55). The reality? Effective PL takes time and teachers would like some of that time to be scheduled into the school year and day when possible. "Most professional learning---such as coaching, mentoring, observing, looking at student work, examining teacher practice, participating in critical friends groups, facilitating learning--happens at a variety of times in different schools" (Easton, 2008, p. 758). Teachers need this time to "think, analyze, and talk about the specifics of what is going on in classrooms and what students are doing and learning" (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005, p. 17).

This means allowing some flexibility in when and how PL takes place. "Schools do not typically allow time to consult or observe colleagues or engage in professional research, learning and practicing new skills, developing curriculum, or reading professional literature" (Avargil, Herscovitz & Dori, 2012, p. 55.) Teachers need time to learn and to put that learning into action and to see what results from that learning in their classrooms (Lee, 2005). These activities need recognition as PL. District and school

administrators also need to work to protect the created time (Avargil, Herscovitz & Dori, 2012; Bound & Hager, 2012; Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005; Tang & Choi, 2009). The time needs to be respected for its original purpose—professional learning.

Collaboration

"People do not live in social isolation, nor can they exercise control over major aspects of their lives entirely on their own" (Bandura, 1997, 477). Educating young people is not a solitary task; it happens through relationship. Teachers work in relationship with one another, students, parents, and with the school and district administration. These relationships are an opportunity for collaboration, professional growth, and retention. Teachers feel little control over the decisions that affect their daily work lives, but at the same time, they are untapped storehouses of ideas and strategies for improving their work lives and better serving their students. Their learning experiences should reflect the need for relationships. The PLP includes opportunities for collaborative learning such as mentoring, learning walks, and PLCs as well as curriculum planning and impromptu collaboration.

"Many of the challenges of life center on common problems that require people to work together with a collective voice to change their lives for the better" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477.) Teacher, student, parent, school, and community goals are tied to one another. Students are faced with demanding standardized tests and a highly competitive job market. In an era of high-stakes testing and ever-increasing scrutiny of teacher quality, school and districts need to maximize their PL efforts. An effective PL program can have a positive impact on teachers, who, in turn, can positively influence student

achievement. In *A Plan to Improve the Quality of Teaching in American Schools* (2007), Haskins and Loeb suggested districts should carefully plan and oversee their professional development activities to ensure that they are contributing to student achievement because "Teacher quality is the single most important feature of the schools that drives student achievement" (p. 2). The success of students, schools, and communities may hinge on teachers who are constantly improving themselves.

School Climate

While the PL offered may not "keep nor send people away," (P3, interview) it could help deter teachers from considering the possibility of leaving. Offering effective PL could be an investment in teachers and create a sense that school districts and divisions value their teachers (Lussier & Forgione, 2010). The PLP invites teachers to be a part of the process, to have their voices heard and reflected in the choices, and to work together and share their expertise with one another.

Bandura (1997) noted that "people do things that give them self-satisfaction and a sense of self-worth" (p. 8). Part of that self-worth and self-efficacy comes from a person's occupation. "The work we do determines whether a substantial part of our lives is repetitively boring, burdensome, and distressing or lastingly challenging and self-fulfilling" (p. 422). In a school setting, self-efficacy can be defined as "a teacher's desire to implement the teaching strategies he/she believes to be appropriate and efficacious and, perhaps more importantly, the tenacity with which he/she will persist in trying to do so given the academic "climate" of the their school" (Overbaugh & Lu, 2008, p. 45).

Access to effective PL may lead teachers to feel valued and important, providing an opportunity to talk and communicate with peers, to be a part of a community. Viewing "faculty development as a social practice, which included a perception of reward and recognition, a sense of connection and engagement, the value of networking and the pleasure of meeting like-minded people" encourages educators to participate in PL (Steinert, Macdonald, Boillat, Elizov, Meterissian, Razack, & McLeod, 2010, p. 906). When there is a lack of investment or feeling a part of a community, "people feel disenfranchised and disarticulated." If teachers lack self-efficacy and feel they have no power to help their students, they may not even attempt (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Sargent (2003) found "Teachers who feel connected to a school—who feel that their work is important and recognized—are more likely to remain vital, dynamic, and contributing members of the school community" (p.47).

Providing support, including PL as part of the climate, shows teachers are valued by the school and the district and creates a "team atmosphere" and a "more nurturing and less hostile" environment where learning is important for all members of the school, not just students. Providing effective PL to teachers not only will contribute to the teachers' occupational self-efficacy, it may also result in increased job satisfaction.

District Level Professional Learning Planning

The PLP presents a more integrated process for PL, a process that connects individual, department level, building level, and district level experiences. From signing up for the classes to the time to attend them and the opportunity to get credit for learning experiences that teachers craft for themselves, the process needs to be teacher-friendly

and based on the goal of teacher learning rather than simply a requirement to be completed. This reinforces that when goals, in this case PL goals, are set by others, people do not always accept or feel obligated to truly reach them, but when individuals are involved in the goal-setting process, "they hold themselves responsible for fulfilling them and thereby engage in self-evaluative motivators in the process" (Bandura, 1997, p. 462).

As noted previously, offering an effective PL program may forge an important connection between teachers and their schools and divisions, a sense of belonging and investment. "Policy makers and school administrators need to give equal attention to building the conditions that will enable schools to provide fertile ground for professional learning on an ongoing basis and as a routine part of the job" (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005, p. 17). When teachers perceive their work is valued, this may create a workplace environment that is conducive to the challenging work of teaching and a team atmosphere. A positive cycle of collaborative learning, centered on student *and* teacher needs, where teachers have a voice in their professional learning is a source of empowerment for educators. Teachers are active as teachers in their classrooms but also as lifelong learners in their field. "Categorically, teachers are problem solvers: questioning, challenging, and adapting to actively meet the needs of their students" (Beavers, 2009, p. 26). Teachers are ready to meet the challenges not only for their students, but for their schools as well.

Implementation

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Potential resources would include the teaching staff of the target school. Teachers have previously acted as facilitators of professional learning sessions and it is reasonable that teachers would be willing to act as facilitators again. The teachers are also accustomed to analyzing data to plan instruction and this will be helpful in analyzing the student data to plan for professional learning sessions. The director of curriculum and instruction is also a potential resource whose expertise will be useful in the process as well. Existing supports include the professional learning opportunities offered by the state department of education for specific subject areas and the professional learning communities that already exist in the school. The usual academic calendar is also a support. It normally allows for professional learning time in the pre-service days and on the Election Day student holiday. The current teacher evaluation may also serve as a support. It requires teachers to create a SMART goal each year using student data. Teachers are very aware of student needs and gaps of instruction.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers to the project include teacher participation, time, and funding. Despite the fact that teachers are required to complete 10 hours of professional learning per school year, some still fail to do so. This can occur for a variety of reasons from lack of time due to family and second job commitments to simple apathy. Some teachers have had poor experiences in the past and have an unfavorable view of professional learning. Another possible teacher participation issue could be having enough teacher facilitators.

Teachers' time is stretched and this is another demand on it. Even though professional learning hours would be issued, some may also shy away due to fears of presenting or facilitating in front of colleagues.

Time and funding are two related potential barriers. Even with days in the calendar, teachers still need the time to complete the surveys, to attend planning meetings, to attend the sessions they select, to participate in the focus groups, and to create and facilitate sessions, if they volunteer. In addition to professional learning hours, some teachers may expect payment for the planning work done during the summer months. The availability of funding may not allow for this. The district needs to budget money and protect it for this purpose, which may be difficult in the current economic climate.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The project would span approximately one academic year. The planning would begin in July and the evaluation would finish in June of the following year. The table below (Figure 1) shows the project activities month by month.

Month	Activity	Responsible Party	Document/Outcome
Early July	Collaborative review of SOL test results, student work, and benchmark results to determine areas of need for professional learning.	Classroom teachers from each department, department chairpersons, and director of curriculum and instruction	A list of areas of need for each department.
Late July	Survey creation based on the list compiled in the collaborative review.	Director of curriculum and instruction and department chairpersons	A brief survey to send electronically to the teachers.
Early August	Survey sent to teachers.	All teachers will receive the survey.	Results will provide an indication of the topics with the most interest and an invitation to facilitate a session.

Mid-August	Survey results review and collaborative professional learning idea brainstorming.	Director of curriculum and instruction and department chairpersons	A preliminary list of professional learning topics and offerings for the upcoming school year and a list of willing teachers members.
Mid-August	Creation of the Professional Learning Offerings, Facilitators, and Session Evaluation	Director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and all teachers who volunteered to facilitate sessions	A finalized list of Professional Learning Offerings and the facilitators who will oversee the sessions.
Late August	Professional Learning Offerings posted online and via school email.	Director of curriculum and instruction and director of technology	Teachers have access to the PL offerings.
Late August (Pre-Service Days)	Professional Learning Offerings Meeting	Director of curriculum and instruction, all teachers, and administrators	Meeting Agenda Teachers will have the opportunity to ask questions about the offerings and the program and how to fulfill the requirements
Late August	Professional Learning Sign-Ups	All teachers	Teachers will sign up for their PL for the upcoming year.
September - November	PL sessions held	Teachers and facilitators	Teachers will work collaboratively and attend sessions at a variety of times.
Late October	Creation of break-out session protocol sheet	Director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and all teachers who have facilitated sessions	Break-out session protocol sheet
November- Election Day Staff Development Day	Break-out PL sessions held to discuss and assess the PL sessions held thus far	Teachers and facilitators	Teachers will discuss and assess what they have learned so far and how it has influenced the needs of their students. Break-out session protocol sheet
Mid-November	Review of break-out sessions	Director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and all teachers who have facilitated sessions	Summary of breakout sessions and any suggestions for future sessions. Summary of sessions and suggestions
November-May	PL sessions held	Teachers and facilitators	Teachers will work collaboratively and attend

			sessions at a variety of times.
Late May	Survey and focus group protocol will be created to assess the Professional Learning Offerings	Director of curriculum and instruction and department chairpersons	A brief survey to send electronically to the teachers.

A focus group protocol. |
| Early June | Survey sent to teachers. | All teachers will receive the survey. | Results will provide an assessment of the Professional Learning Offerings. |
| Early June | Teacher Focus Groups | Teachers and facilitators | Teachers will be able to participate in small group sessions to discuss their experiences with the Professional Learning Offerings and suggestions for future offerings. |
| Mid-June | Survey and focus groups results review. | Director of curriculum and instruction and department chairpersons | Results will provide an indication of the effectiveness of the sessions and suggestions for changes/adjustments/impr ovements for the upcoming school year.

Survey summary and focus group summary and suggestions for next year's program |

Figure 1. Timeline.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The main roles and responsibilities in the project involve the teachers, the director of curriculum and instruction, and the director of technology. The teachers are involved at all the points of the project. They are involved in data analysis, areas of need identification, survey construction, session facilitation, session participation, formative assessment, and summative assessment. Classroom teachers would be involved in all phases.

The director of curriculum and instruction would also be involved in all stages of the process. This position has access to information, expertise, and possible funding that would be needed and helpful. The director's position exists to help teachers to provide the best instruction to meet the needs of the students.

The director of technology would upload information to the appropriate webpages for teachers to access. This will assist with streamlining the process of session sign-ups and record keeping. This position has the knowledge and expertise needed to reach that goal of the project.

I would be involved in the process as a department chairperson. I have also facilitated professional learning sessions in the past. I would be able to share my knowledge and experience as well what I have learned in my research of professional learning.

Project Evaluation

The project evaluation will be both formative and summative. There will be small group sessions early in the project to gauge how the professional learning plan is working and if there are any problems that need correction. Doing it early in the project will allow for teachers to have a greater voice in the process and for issues to be dealt with quickly. There will also be a short online survey at the end of each experience to evaluate the experience in relation to teacher and student needs as well as time and format evaluation. There will be a summative assessment consisting of an online survey and small group focus sessions. The online survey will allow for the gathering of a large amount of information in a systematic manner and allow for confidentiality. The small group focus

sessions will allow for more in-depth discussion. It will also allow teachers to have their voices heard, a goal of the project. Refer to Appendices D, F, and I for evaluation documents.

The overall goals of the Professional Learning Plan are to offer a plan that is inclusive of teachers at all points of the process, learner-centered, offers choice, collaborative, provides time for learning to occur, and an easier to navigate process. Therefore, the survey questions and the focus group protocols are based on those goals. The evaluation of the project asks teachers to assess whether the Professional Learning Plan addressed the areas uncovered in the study's interviews and focus groups in.

The key stakeholders are the teachers, the students, and the director of curriculum and instruction. Did the project meet the needs of the teachers and the students? Did the sessions have any impact on student performance? Did the experiences influence teacher instruction?

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

According to the *Standards for Professional Learning (2012),* "Increasing the effectiveness of professional learning is the leverage point with the greatest potential for strengthening and refining the day-to-day performance of educators"(para. 1). When employees develop a higher sense of efficacy in their profession, they have better coping skills, higher job satisfaction, a stronger commitment to the profession and organization, and a reduction in quitting (Bandura, 1997, p. 446). The professional learning of teachers is also "critical to school improvement and increased student achievement" (Payne &

Wolfson, 2000, p. 20). Improving the effectiveness and quality of professional learning is "a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement" (Wei et al., 2009, p. 3). Schools districts need to adopt the "value that professional development is a serious enterprise, not an option, not an add-on, not dependent on a season of the year" (Hirsh, 2005, p. 5). In addition, PL needs to be viewed as more than external to teachers' daily work" (Crockett, 2007, p. 262). Providing effective PL is vital because it can make a difference in the daily lives of teachers and students as schools strive for academic improvement.

Schools are also a center of the community, especially in small communities. Schools can be the heart of a community; when a school is truly a place of learning for all staff and students, it benefits the community as a whole. A sense of pride can be felt in the building and the surrounding community, a sense that good things are happening in the school and that students are being prepared for the future. When teachers have a strong sense of self-efficacy due to the workplace environment and the support of the administration and district through effective PL, the schools become efficacious. Efficacious schools have strong leadership, high academic standards, good classroom management, and involved parents (Bandura, 1997, p. 244).

Far-Reaching

One of the cornerstones of the American educational system is the public school system. The idea that a high-quality education can make successful life a possibility for any citizen. Teachers play a pivotal role in providing this high-quality education. Why? "In reality, any reform effort has to go through the teacher and cannot be accomplished

without the teacher. It is the teacher who will ultimately determine what is introduced, attempted, and included in the classroom experience"(Lucilio, 2009, p. 53).

If our schools are to provide the education that students need to be successful, their professional learning must reflect the needs of the teachers and the students. Their success is tied together. Teachers are asking for a voice in their professional learning, to be able to guide their learning in partnership with their schools and districts for the joint success of themselves and their students.

Conclusion

This section discussed the project's description, goals, and rationale. In addition, the section included a literature review related to the project. Finally, it discussed the implementation, evaluation, and implications for social change. Section 4 will review the project's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for remediation. The section also includes scholarship, project development, leadership and change, and self-analysis. Finally, I will discuss implications for social change and applications for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

As an educator, I ask and expect my students to reflect on their learning just as I practice reflecting on my instruction. In order to learn what works for student success, I must constantly reflect, revise, and return. Teaching is a reiterative process. Just as I do this on an individual basis, I also participate in group reflection with my department. My doctoral journey has both benefited from and contributed this process. I am not the same professional educator I was when I embarked on this path. I have learned about my practice, my process, and myself.

In this section, I review the strengths of the project and the recommendations for addressing limitations in the project. In addition, I examine what I have learned about scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change. I analyze myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, I consider the project's potential impact for social change, its implications, applications, and directions for future research, and recommendations for further study.

Project Strengths

I addressed the problem of providing effective professional learning experiences. I have identified five strengths from my project. The primary strength lies in the importance of providing effective professional learning experiences to educators. Teachers seek PL that strikes the balance between their individual needs as educators and the needs of their students, PL that recognizes their expertise and autonomy in the classroom. Brooks, Hughes, and Brooks (2008) found that most teachers felt powerless

and meaningless in school-level decision making, but their sense of power and meaning increased the closer the decisions and activities were to their classrooms, showing that, "teachers feel that their experiences in the classroom are most authentic" (p. 59). If PL decisions include teachers and allow them to utilize their knowledge and expertise, teachers may come to view their PL as "authentic" as well. My project provides a template for this timely and important issue.

Second, I based the project on the results of the interviews and focus groups conducted with the teachers of the target school. The qualitative approach allowed for an extended time with the teachers and the opportunity to make their voices heard—voices sorely lacking in the field of professional learning for most of its history. According to Avargil, Herscovitz, and Dori (2012):

> Teachers must be the first ones consulted when assessing what is needed to improve the classroom and learning. Unfortunately, teachers seem to be a late addition, consulted only after decisions about professional development and program implementations have already determined by administrators or curriculum specialists who are too far removed from the daily interactions of the classroom. (p. 54)

I spent a great deal of time with the teachers and listened as they discussed their experiences with PL and what they would like to change and incorporated that into the project.

Third, my project actively includes teachers at each point of the process. The teachers I interviewed asked for voice in the process, choice of effective professional

learning opportunities, time for the learning to occur, and opportunities for collaboration. In the project, I seek to provide all of these for the teachers while also providing a key role for teachers to play in planning and facilitating the sessions. Tailor professional learning experiences to the audiences; audiences should not need to tailor themselves to the learning.

My project is a good starting point for schools looking to implement or revisit their PL program. Research suggests that the first priority of school districts should be the placement of high-quality teachers in every classroom (Hammer et al., 2005, p. 1). Providing effective PL is an important piece in the puzzle. School administrators should "build conditions" conducive to professional learning as a "routine part of the job" (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005, p. 17). In fact, Hirsh (2009) felt school-based professional development is "*the* best way to ensure that the learning of educators is relevant to the context of their daily work, providing the impetus for them to apply their learning *to* their work" (pp. 5-6). The project incorporates PL throughout the year and encourages teachers to seek out experiences that will benefit their teaching.

Finally, the plan would be useful for smaller school systems or districts looking to optimize their PL expenditures. Smaller school districts most likely do not have an office devoted solely to teacher learning. Most are lucky to have *a* person who does this *in addition* to his or her other duties. For schools and districts in this position, the proposed plan offers a template for creating a PL plan. Similarly, if schools need to trim their PL expenses, this plan may be a place to begin, allowing schools to utilize in-house expertise. "Creative solutions to the challenges of decreased funding can help schools and

districts build internal capacity by allowing staff to recognize their own potential for leadership and self-directed, collaborative learning" (Chapman, 2012, p. 37). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) echoed this thought as they describe the untapped power of teacher leadership: "Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change" (p. 2). Schools and districts can use the plan as starting point and adapt it to suit their needs.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

While project has strengths, it also has limitations. An academic year only allows for a limited number of topics, teacher buy-in to a new system, and adaptability and relevance to other schools settings. Although teachers have the opportunity to suggest topics for the professional learning plan, there is a limit to topic coverage that can be fit into one school year. This frustration in teachers could lead to an issue of teacher buy-in. Perceived underrepresentation or absence in the offerings may equal the perception of teacher silence, the antithesis of the project's goal.

One remedy for the limitation of topic coverage is emphasis on the ability of teachers to create their own professional learning experiences. When teachers are knowledgeable of the process for earning credit for their self-crafted experiences, another avenue to pursue relevant PL is available. They do not need to wait for experiences created by others; they can follow their own path. Another option is reminding teachers that each year would allow different topics to be covered. Discussions that stem from trying to cover many topics may also function as a solution. When teachers feel led to reach out to one another, they may be able to hone down topics that truly interest them.

This allows teachers to be ready with topics to suggest or to create their own experiences to meet the need. Either way, the conversation is started and that may be the most important result. Getting teachers to be actively engaged in process begins with the conversation.

As for teacher buy-in, actively encouraging and inviting teachers to act as facilitators and to serve on planning committees may remedy that. This would allow teachers to voice their needs and concerns clearly. It may take some time for teachers to adjust to a different learning culture, a culture where they are not simply recipients of the process, but active planners, presenters, and problem-solvers. As this plan is a recursive process, more than one cycle of the plan may need to occur for increased teacher buy-in. Once teachers experience the plan, they should act as encouragers for those who are more hesitant to become more involved.

Since this project is a response to the needs and requests of one high school, it not intended to meet the needs of all high schools or all schools in general. Larger schools may already have highly effective plans in place. Many school systems have district-level office devoted to professional learning and staff education. For schools and districts in this position, the proposed plan may be unnecessary or would require adaptation. Moreover, teacher involvement and self-determination lie at the core of my plan. These values suggest that different solutions will arise in different settings.

Some options to provide PL to teachers would not require as much time or staff involvement my plan does. Premade professional learning programs created by outside experts can bring new approaches and insights. But they often limit the voice of the

teachers, and precisely for this reason, they can be less time-consuming and require fewer personnel. Yet, research demonstrates teachers want a voice in their PL (Avargil, Herscovitz, & Dori, 2012; Duzor, 2011; Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010; Lucilio, 2009). Another option requires that teachers create their own professional learning plans. This approach removes the programming burden on PL leaders and places it squarely on the teachers. The school and district become responsible for monitoring the PL, not providing it. Teachers are in control of their professional learning, only needing to provide evidence of the learning. This gives teachers voice, but it also creates separation rather than collaboration between teachers and their schools. Collaboration is a hallmark of effective PL. Compton (2010) found that, across all experiences levels, teachers selected "the opportunity to connect with other teachers" as an effective professional learning activity (p. 54). Rather than encouraging collaboration and teamwork, PL solely at the individual level may produce isolation instead. It may also limit the connection between student learning needs and teacher learning needs. When teachers collaborate, "they begin to assume responsibility for their own professional development and become both supports and resources for their peers" (Freidus et al., 2009, p. 186). The proposed project allows for both collaboration within the school and for individualized PL experiences.

While each of these options would be easier for the schools and districts, they may not meet the needs of the teachers and may create a disconnect between the teachers and the school, which are more effective when working as partners.

Scholarship

When I began the doctoral process in 2008, my primary concern was teacher retention, especially its effects on rural school districts. My investigation of the literature took me in the direction of seeking to understand if professional development could be a piece of the puzzle of teacher retention. Over the subsequent years, my path has turned to focus on the topic of how professional development can act as a form of support for teachers. It became clear that this issue matters deeply to teachers and that is sufficient for the purpose of this study. While I remain interested in teacher retention, I will reserve connecting these two topics more explicitly to work, that others including myself, may undertake subsequent to this study

Scholarship is important when linked to a real-world issue in need of change or remedy. During this process, I have discovered that my scholarship and work can add to the support available to educators now and in the future, especially as I am able to apply my learning to enabling teacher involvement and determination in their own collaborative professional development. I take that seriously; my work becomes part of the line of work done for and by other educators to assist educators. My work is only a part of the process, work for those who follow me in their own journeys to build upon.

During this journey, my new knowledge has informed my practice. As I researched what constituted effective PL, I was able to incorporate my learning into my teaching and my position as department chairperson. My department formed a professional learning community. Before my research, I knew little about PLC's, what

they were or could accomplish. Due to my doctoral classes, I learned about PLC's and was excited to put my learning into action.

As the department chairperson, I had an advantage. I had the ability to make this our new meeting format. We would form the English PLC and use our monthly department meetings more effectively. Our meetings would use only the first 15 minutes for the normal announcements and reminders and the remainder of the time would be devoted to the PLC. Thus, we were using time already allotted for a new purpose, but not adding any new time to teachers' schedules.

We started by examining the results of the Reading and Writing Standards of Learning (SOL) tests from the previous year. In order to serve our students better, we needed to know our areas of weakness. Each teacher received a copy of the overall score report. We looked for areas of less than 60% achievement. After our analysis, we created a list of areas and formed partners or small groups to explore strategies to remediate those areas. We organized a schedule for the upcoming year. Each month, the partners or small group shared their findings and a lesson for the area. We also decided on focus areas for each of the four grade levels. What did each grade level need to know in order to be successful in the next?

The result? Our scores have continued to rise. Recently, the state department of education updated the two SOL tests for English. Although our scores did dip, we still met or exceeded the new state goals for the Reading and Writing tests. In comparison to other subject areas, we fared better on the new tests. However, the challenge remains and research continues to advance thinking on this matter. Each year, we have new students

and we need to continue to add to our strategies and knowledge. Our current challenge is reaching our students with special needs. These students must pass the same tests and it is our goal to have the same success.

Above all, I learned that scholarship is a reiterative process, similar to what I tell my students: The more you learn, the more you need to know. It seems the more I learn about professional learning and its importance to teachers and students, the more there is to know. The job of teaching constantly changes. There are new tests that students must pass, new teacher evaluations, and standards that are more rigorous. The need for effective teacher learning will continue and the PL research will need to continue in order to keep pace with teacher and student needs. As an individual, I will continue to use the research of others and my own to hone continually my teaching craft. As a department, we will continue to seek out research that can help us improve our skills and knowledge. Teaching is not a static profession; learning is not a static activity. There is constant movement and change.

Project Development and Evaluation

Project development and evaluation is a long, arduous process. Developing a program of professional learning is different from attending sessions that are the results of someone else's planning. As an attendee, you are experiencing the results of someone else's thoughts and ideas about professional learning. In contrast, as I worked to create my project for Appendix A, I realized the work involved in creating a program from the bottom up.

Despite the criticism that I have given to past learning experiences, I realized that these classes were still the creations of someone who worked hard to provide the information deemed necessary for teachers. It is difficult, if not impossible to make all people happy. I had not considered what it must be like to create a plan and then hear so many complaints. It may be like when I have created a lesson that I believe students will really enjoy and it will cover a skill they need and then the lesson flops. That feeling is awful. Maybe I had been a bit harsh in my criticisms. Now that I have created a plan, I understand the amount of time, thought, effort, and research that goes into it. Yes, being on the other side of a presentation is different.

Creating a program involves thinking in a long-term manner, considering all of the possible eventualities, but also realizing that it is only a plan that may well change once put into practice. Creating an evaluation plan is similar. It, too, requires thought about affects and outcomes. What will matter at the end? Will the program be successful? Who will decide its success? What seemed vital at the outset may be supplanted by another issue altogether by the end of the program. The evaluation does not end with the surveys and the focus groups. It does not end with the analysis of the surveys and groups. In truth, the direction the program takes *after* the evaluation is the end. If nothing changes based on the evaluation, the whole point of doing an evaluation is lost. The next reiteration of the program should reflect what was learned from the evaluation. That may be the most difficult part of the evaluation because it requires change and possibly letting go of a piece or part of the program the designers thought vital, but that does not land with the participants.

Leadership and Change

I have learned that leadership is not simply one person telling others what to do and how to do it. Leadership involves being a part of a community with shared goals and purpose. If you are going to lead and create positive change, you must know what the people you are leading are experiencing on a daily basis, what their strengths and weaknesses are, the resources available to them, and the additional resources needed. All of this requires relationship with the community. In order to create change, first you must know and understand the current situation. Then you can work with the community to make a difference.

Leadership is not limited to traditional certain roles. In a school setting, leadership is not limited to administrators and department chairpersons. There is room for leadership in every classroom and department. Some teachers find it for themselves and others need to be invited or offered the opportunities. Each teacher is a part of the puzzle and needs to find his or her place. Leadership is an opportunity to share your voice and to hear the voices and ideas of those around you, to collaborate and find solutions to the problems in your organization.

Leadership is required for changes that improve practice. Change is often scary and sometimes involves stepping into the unknown. Without leadership, change may happen in a haphazard fashion. Whether the leadership comes from a principal, a teacher, or a group, leaders act as a guiding force and a resource for positive change to occur. Principals must be able to oversee their schools and articulate the goals and mission of their schools. However, they cannot do it alone—they need teachers to act in concert with

them to be effective in creating sustainable change. Positive change can happen, but is it sustainable? A more communal style of leadership, one where multiple people have a part to place and a stake in the results, that may be the key to creating lasting change in schools. I want to be a part of that type of change, and I believe I have started that process in my school.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

I learned that being a scholar calls for time, tenacity, and support. Time is an important element to a scholar's success. Time always seemed to be in short supply. As I worked, I had multiple responsibilities. Not only was I a student, but I was also a full-time teacher, wife, mother, and daughter. Carving out the time to do my work was always a struggle; I always felt I was ignoring one or several responsibilities in order to give myself time to my study.

While online learning does give greater flexibility, it also is sold as a panacea. So many commercials for online learning extol the ease of going back to school online. You can keep our job, you can still be there for your family, and you can get a great education. To an extent, all of these claims are true. However, time is still finite. There is no more time available to you. I had to make tough choices over the years I have been in this program and most of them dealt with time.

Tenacity is vital. I have learned that I need to be willing to keep going even when the way proves difficult. I have had issues along the way both as a student and in my personal life, but there was always a sense that the work must continue. There may have

been lulls in the work, but I knew it *had* to be finished. I did not want to walk away, leaving the work unfinished, wondering if I *could* have done it.

Being tenacious includes being tough as well. I have had to go back and start again more than once. I have cried in the process because there is a level of vulnerability in sharing your work for critique and criticism at this level. To feel like you have done it all wrong *again,* that requires developing a tough skin. Otherwise, you will walk away.

Finally, a scholar needs support. My support system came from multiple sources. My professors in the early classes were supportive, as is Dr. Keen now. My family has been supportive from the beginning; although I am not sure they fully understood what I was undertaking and how it would affect them. There is still guilt over time missed in order to complete this work. Friends also played an important role. They always asked about my work and lent a willing ear to listen to what I was doing. My work colleagues were a part of my system. Many were part of my work, sharing their voices, experiences, and knowledge of professional learning with me.

I am thankful for all of the support given to me throughout this process. While many may view scholars as individuals working alone with their data and books, my experience differs from that, as I have benefitted from a network of people, making my success possible.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As an educator, I have discovered my passion: professional learning. Learning new methods, ideas, and strategies that assist me in better reaching my students is exciting. Sharing the information I have learned is a gratifying experience. I have always

wanted to be a teacher, and I understand the power of a quality education. I work with a school of educators who share this understanding.

I see my work in professional development as a natural extension of my role as an educator. Just as I share knowledge with my students, I do the same with my colleagues. We work collaboratively to meet the needs of our students by identifying the gaps in their knowledge, as well as our own, and then seek to create learning experiences to close those gaps.

I have been in my current position for 15 years. Only a handful of teachers who were at the school when I started remain. I am a veteran teacher now. I feel a sense of pride in that. I do not see myself as better or smarter than novice teachers, but I do have a wide range of experiences and knowledge of the profession that I can share. There is power in sharing and collaborating. For so many years, teachers have felt they needed to have all of the answers. Now, I know that I do not have all of the answers, but a colleague down the hall may or even a colleague a world away may have the answers I need. As a teacher, I have found my voice and I hope to share that with others. If every teacher finds his or her voice, powerful learning and change will follow.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As noted previously, project development is not a simple task. It required considering a problem from multiple perspectives. Trying to place myself in the mindsets of a variety of people was a challenge. My biggest concern was developing an inclusive program rather than an exclusive program. I wanted to develop a program that offered a

starting place for professional learning for teachers of all experience levels and that could be adapted to different schools and districts.

Another challenge was thinking through each step that needed to be taken to create the program of professional learning. Several times, I needed to go back and add another step in the process, which would have a domino effect on the process. This is reminiscent of the research process itself. Each time you find a new idea or piece, you have another direction to follow.

In trying to include teachers at each step of the process, I realized how much easier it would be if teachers were less involved in the process. Teachers' time is precious. In order to include them, takes some effort, but I believe the effort pays off. As I found in my interviews and focus groups, teachers want to share their ideas and experiences, their voices. Teachers want to be a part of the process of their own learning. By including them you offer them an opportunity to buy into shared ownership and responsibility for the programs in which they are obligated to participate.

While one of the main goals of the project was to be inclusive, I see how difficult that can be and I have a better understanding of the struggle the district has had in creating learning experiences for all teachers in the time available. My research showed time to be an issue in professional learning and that was true in project development as well. Schools are expected to accomplish a multitude of tasks in a small timeframe each year. Time is a finite resource: teachers need more time for professional learning and more time to teach their students. Possibly, with more teacher involvement, creative solutions to the time issue can be found.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The news is replete with stories of school failure. Several states have allowed private companies to take over schools and run them like businesses. The public and politicians scapegoat teachers as the reason for failure. Is the American public school system doomed to extinction? Is the right of a quality public education a ghost of the past? No. We can rewrite the story. Where do we begin? The main characters: teachers, students, schools, and communities.

"Effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools—one that needs to be treasured and supported" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p.7). A professional learning plan that includes teachers at all points in the process is one method to "treasure and support" teachers. Providing effective PL is vital because it can make a difference in the daily lives of teachers and students, especially for student achievement and to effect change in schools (Payne & Wolfson, 2000; Wei et al., 2009). The day-to-day life of a teacher is stressful. Teachers at the secondary level have a large number of students, each with different needs. Teachers want to meet these needs, but they require help to be successful. It requires the school and community.

Schools can be the heart of a community. When a school is truly a place of learning for all staff and students that benefits the community as a whole. When teachers have a strong sense of self-efficacy due to the workplace environment and the support of the administration and district through effective PL, the schools become efficacious. Characteristics of efficacious schools are strong leadership, high academic standards,

good classroom management, and involved parents (Bandura, 1997, p. 244). All schools should have these characteristics; they are the seeds of the American dream.

One of the cornerstones of the American dream is the public school education, featuring the idea that a high-quality education can make successful life a possibility for any citizen. Teachers play a pivotal role in providing this high-quality education. Why? "In reality, any reform effort has to go through the teacher and cannot be accomplished without the teacher. It is the teacher who will ultimately determine what is introduced, attempted, and included in the classroom experience"(Lucilio, 2009, p. 53). Teachers matter. Therefore, base professional learning programs on what matters to them and their students.

If our schools are to provide the education that students need to be successful, their professional learning must reflect the needs of the teachers and the students. Their success is tied together. Teachers are asking for a voice in their professional learning, to be able to guide their learning in partnership with their schools and districts for the joint success of themselves and their students. Teacher success leads to student success. When students are successful, their communities benefit. It is time to begin rewriting the story.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

"Teachers must be the first ones consulted when assessing what is needed to improve the classroom and learning" (Avargil, Herscovitz & Dori, 2012, p. 54). While this appears to be an obvious statement, it has not been the norm for American educators. Not only do teachers want to be asked, they want to be involved in the process as a

whole. Teachers view ownership of their professional learning experiences as part of being professionals. It is time for the responsibility to be passed to the educators.

The project could a pattern for other individual schools looking to base their professional learning program on teacher-identified needs. As schools are making difficult budgetary decisions, this type of program could be a method of cutting costs while inviting more teachers to be a part of the professional learning that happens in schools. Teachers want to be involved in the process. While the level of involvement may differ for individual teachers, the opportunity is an offer of ownership in their professional learning.

While this study applies to the PL needs of the target school, further study would determine whether these needs mirror those of similar schools or all schools in general. Further study could determine the impact of school size, demographics, and other factors on PL plans. Another area that requires further study is the possible connection between professional learning as a part of school climate and teacher retention. This study has found a possible connection between PL and school climate, but not a direction connection with teacher retention. However, this topic merits additional exploration and study. How to create time effectively for PL within the school day and calendar is a final area for further study. Looking for best practices and creative ways to carve out time for PL in daily schedules that are already full is a topic that all school districts and teachers could benefit from. Time as an issue and a hindrance to PL was a come factor in the literature, the interviews, focus groups, and in project creation.

Conclusion

In Section 4, I reviewed the project's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for remediation. I discussed scholarship, project development, leadership and change, and self-analysis. Finally, I addressed the implications for social change and applications for future research related to the study.

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Appendix A: A Professional Learning Plan for King George High School

Introduction

This professional learning plan (PLP), founded on meeting teachers' perceived needs and the perceived needs of their students, offers teachers opportunities to learn collaboratively with and from one another. Teachers play active roles in the planning, facilitating, and assessing of the program. Teachers are central to the plan rather than simply participants.

This PLP reflects a change that has occurred in the perception of professional learning and by shifting from the term "professional development" to the term "professional *learning*". Learningforward (formally the National Staff Development Council) explained the importance of the shift:

> The decision to call these Standards for Professional Learning rather than Standards for Professional Development signals the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous development and places emphasis on their learning. The professional learning that occurs when these standards are fully implemented enrolls educators as active partners in determining the content of their learning, how their learning occurs, and how they evaluate its effectiveness. (Standards, Paragraph 3)

Purpose

The purpose of the PLP is to provide an annual cycle of professional learning that encourages teachers to be active participants at all stages of the PL process. The PLP

provides a timeline, specific activities, materials needed, an evaluation plan and its related materials and runs on a recursive cycle from July through June.

Goals

The goals of the PLP are to offer a plan that is inclusive of teachers at all points of the process, learner-centered, offers choice, collaborative, provides time for learning to occur, and an easy to navigate process.

Learning outcomes

Teachers will take an active role in the planning, implementation, facilitation, and evaluation of professional learning. Study participants shared their desire for a more active role in the PL process. This aligned with previous research that found teachers benefited from playing an active role in their learning. "Categorically, teachers are problem solvers: questioning, challenging, and adapting to actively meet the needs of their students" (Beavers, 2009, p. 26). These same characteristics serve teachers as they direct their professional learning. Ask teachers what they need. Teachers are adult learners and able to self-advocate given the opportunity. They can advise what topics they would like to study, how they would like to approach the topics, and even lead the implementation of the learning experience. They can also be trusted to evaluate their experiences.

The Professional Pathways Development Model (2006) suggested the following steps for developing a professional learning program: assess the needs, chose the pathways, reflect, and begin the process again (Lieberman & Wilkins, p. 127). This

approach reinforces that planning must begin with an assessment of need which leads to the data review and the survey. Teachers should be included in reviewing Standards of Learning test results and reports, student work samples, and benchmark testing in order to assess needs and create a teacher need survey. Teachers will complete an initial survey to share the topics and types of learning experiences in which they would like to participate.

Teachers will choose professional learning choices from a variety of choices. The studying findings included the issue that many of the previous PL choices did not relate to participants' daily work in the classroom. Participants described these PL offerings as "techy," "sporadic," "low-level," "vanilla," and "elementary." In addition to the focus on technology, there was a lack of content-specific PL. The offerings did not meet the needs of small departments, elective subjects, or highly specific choices. Instead, some teachers participated in classes just to comply. When one participant shared being required to take classes he deemed unnecessary, he said, "Those classes have no meaning for me. It doesn't apply to me; I don't want to use it. That's why I like having choices—more choices."

The PLP draws on teachers' needs as shared in the collaborative planning sessions and the survey results. The resulting PL opportunities should reflect their needs and input. In addition to topic choices, there are also format choices, from group to individual and in-person to online.

Teachers will work collaboratively. The research in my Project study indicated that teachers wanted to work collaboratively with members of their departments as well as other departments. "I like the idea of sharing things even between like content areas.

Literacy is a cross-content area. The ability to read is critical to all areas. There are things

that I think we can do as professionals to help each other, to help all of our students to be

more successful in all of their classes."

Teachers will participate in a variety of professional learning experiences. As

noted previously, teachers would like the opportunity to choose their PL experiences

from a variety of options.

Teachers will have the opportunity to facilitate and/or lead professional

learning experiences. Teachers are often an untapped resource of professional learning.

"By rethinking the use of existing resources, educators may be able to find creative

means of sustaining learning initiatives on diminishing budgets. Creative solutions to the

challenges of decreased funding can help schools and districts build internal capacity by

allowing staff to recognize their own potential for leadership and self-directed,

collaborative learning" (Chapman, 2012, p. 37). Encouraging teachers to act as

facilitators of PL gives the opportunity for leadership and active participation in the

process. Teachers could "present, lead, and write--for example, present a demonstration,

lead a discussion, or write a report" (Birman, Dismone, Porter &Garet, 2000, p. 31).

Teachers will have the opportunity to create individual learning experiences

or small group experience. While the PLP will include several options, resource

limitations do not permit the covering of every topic or issue for all teachers in one

academic year. Thus, the plan includes the option for teachers to create their own

individual learning experiences or to create small group experiences with other teachers

who wish to explore a similar topic. These may include but are not limited to a college-level class, book study, PLC, topic driven blog, collaborative lesson creation and observation, and conferences. This option may prove especially important to teachers of more specialized content areas or small departments. As noted in the study findings, some non-core class teachers felt "left out" of the PL process. The offerings did not target their needs or reinforce the importance of all classes, not just core subject classes.

Teachers will evaluate their learning experiences. Teachers will have opportunities to evaluate and assess their PL experiences on a formative and summative level. Early into the academic year, teachers will evaluate their experiences (thus far in the current school year) in focus group sessions. Near the end of the academic year, teachers will assess the program as a whole in a survey. Each session will also include an evaluation.

Audience

The intended audience for the PLP includes the teachers, administrators, and district level staff—all those involved in the professional learning process. This includes those who plan, implement, and assess the program.

Timeline

The process will span approximately one academic year. The planning would begin in July and the evaluation would finish in June of the following year. Refer to Appendix B: Timeline PowerPoint for activities month by month.

Activities

Collaborative Review of SOL testing results, student work, and benchmark testing results. In early July, classroom teachers, department chairpersons, and the director of curriculum and instruction will meet to review the student data from the previous year. SOL testing data and benchmark testing results can be used for core classes (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies). Student work and benchmark testing can be used for non-SOL classes.

Teachers will work collaboratively to review the data and compose a list of student needs and teacher needs for professional learning. The SOL report (Analysis by Question) will be helpful in identifying the areas of need (areas with scores less than 60%) for the core classes, while student work and department-created benchmark testing results will be helpful for non-SOL classes.

Once the lists are created in each department, the group will review the list and prioritize the areas. Groups will write a rationale for the priorities. Groups will present their lists to the whole group.

A meeting date will be set for late July to create the teacher survey that will be sent electronically in early August.

Survey creation. The director of curriculum and instruction and department chairpersons will meet to compose survey questions based on the lists created in the data review session. Department chairpersons will work collaboratively to compose the survey questions. The questions will cover the topic lists created in the collaborative session and

include questions allowing for additional topics. The survey will also ask teachers if they would like to facilitate a session. The director of technology will be tasked with creating the survey based on the questions composed and sending it out to the teachers. Refer to Appendix C for the sample survey.

Survey review and results. In mid-August, department chairpersons and the director of curriculum and instruction will meet to review the survey results. A preliminary list of professional learning topics and offerings for the upcoming school year and a list of willing teachers members will be compiled based on the results of survey.

Professional learning offerings list created. In a collaborative session, the director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and all teachers who expressed willingness to facilitate professional learning sessions will create the slate of professional learning experiences for the upcoming school year. The session will use the survey results and the list of willing teachers from the previous meeting to create the offerings, working to meet the majority of the needs with the teacher facilitators available. Attention will also be given to the times and types of sessions that will be offered, based on the survey results. The final list will reflect the different subject area needs offered at a variety of times in a variety of session types.

Session evaluation creation. In a collaborative session, the director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and all teachers who expressed willingness to facilitate professional learning sessions will craft a session evaluation to be completed for

each PL session. This will be done online so that results can be tabulated immediately. Refer to Appendix D for the Professional Learning Session Evaluation document.

Professional learning offerings posted online. With the final list of offerings and facilitators completed, the list will be given to the director of technology to post to the school's staff page. Staff will be notified that the offerings are posted via staff email.

Professional learning offerings teacher meeting. During the pre-service days, a meeting will be held with teachers to go over the professional learning offerings and to answer questions teachers have about the program. The offerings will be reviewed as well as how to sign up for the sessions. Computers will be available so teachers can enroll in classes immediately after the meeting. Refer to Appendix E for Meeting Agenda.

Professional learning offering sign-ups. Teachers will have the opportunity to sign up for professional learning online.

Break-out session protocol sheet creation (Late October). The director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and teacher facilitators will meet to compose the breakout session protocol sheet to assess the professional learning session held thus far. Refer to Appendix F for Break-Out Session Protocol.

Professional learning sessions (Late September – Early November). PL sessions will begin in late September. This will allow time for teachers to complete sign-ups and for facilitators to prepare for sessions. Sessions will take place after school, before school, on-line, and during planning periods.

Professional learning break-out sessions. On Election Day, a student holiday, teachers will participate in breakout sessions to discuss the professional learning sessions held thus far. Teachers will meet in small groups to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning offerings. Breakout sessions will focus on how the PL sessions have influenced student learning. Refer to Appendix G for the Facilitator Training PowerPoint.

Break-out sessions review. In a collaborative session, the director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and teacher facilitators will review the breakout sessions protocol notes for suggestions and assessments of the sessions thus far.

Professional learning session (November – May). Sessions will continue. Based on the breakout sessions, adjustments will be made.

End of year survey and focus group protocol creation (Late May).
Department chairpersons, facilitators, and the director of curriculum and instruction will meet to compose the end of year survey to assess the professional learning sessions and to compose the focus group protocol for small group assessment of professional learning. The survey will be administered online. Teachers who acted as facilitators of professional learning sessions will oversee the focus groups. The survey and protocol will focus on teachers' experiences and their assessment of the effectiveness of the learning experiences and the extent to which the learning helped their students' learning. Refer to Appendix G: for the End of Year Survey.

Survey sent and focus groups (Early June). The director of technology will email the survey link to teachers through the school email system. Teacher facilitators will meet in small groups with teachers to discuss their professional learning experiences.

Review of survey, focus groups, and student data (Mid-June). The director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and teacher facilitators will meet to review the survey results and the focus group results. Student data for the year will also be analyzed, especially in comparison to the previous year's data and the areas of need that were addressed by professional learning sessions. Was there any change in student performance? Was there any change in teacher behavior? Based on the results, a list of suggestions and adjustments for the following school year will be created.

The process will begin again with the analysis of the student data, the results of the end of year survey, and the suggestions for changes and adjustments. The director of curriculum and instruction, department chairpersons, and teachers will work collaboratively to plan the upcoming school year's PLP and institute the suggested changes.

Conclusion

Creating an effective PLP is a complex task. A plan is expected to meet the needs of the many teachers it serves while working within the confines of the academic calendar. In addition, the negative connotations and experiences connected to the concept of professional learning can be daunting hurdles to clear. For many teachers, professional learning has been anything but professional. "Sadly, teachers often admit that the

professional development they receive provides limited application to their everyday world of teaching and learning" (Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006, p. 125). Yet, it seems doubtful that the crafters of these plans and experiences set out to create a program that would elicit that response. Creating a plan that meets the needs of all teachers may not be possible. "Needless to say, the professional development designer's challenge is to assemble a combination of learning activities that best meet the teachers' needs, goals and context" (Lee, 2005, p. 46).

The PLP seeks to create a balance between teacher needs and the time parameters by creating a process the is inclusive of teachers at all points, reflects teachers' voices, centers on learners, offers choice, encourages collaboration, provides time for learning to occur, and includes an easier to navigate process. As suggested by Lee (2005), the plan begins "with the ends (outcomes) in mind" (p. 46).

Finally, the PLP recognizes the pivotal role played by classroom teachers in student learning and school growth. "Teachers are not simply beneficiaries of PD who serve as a mediating link to student learning; rather, teachers are change agents seeking, considering, and adapting PD experiences through the lens of experts on their own school and classroom contexts" (Duzor, 2011, p. 372). Teachers are agents of change and professionals ready to undertake the direction of their professional learning, allowing them to serve their students and communities more effectively.

Appendix B: Timeline PowerPoint
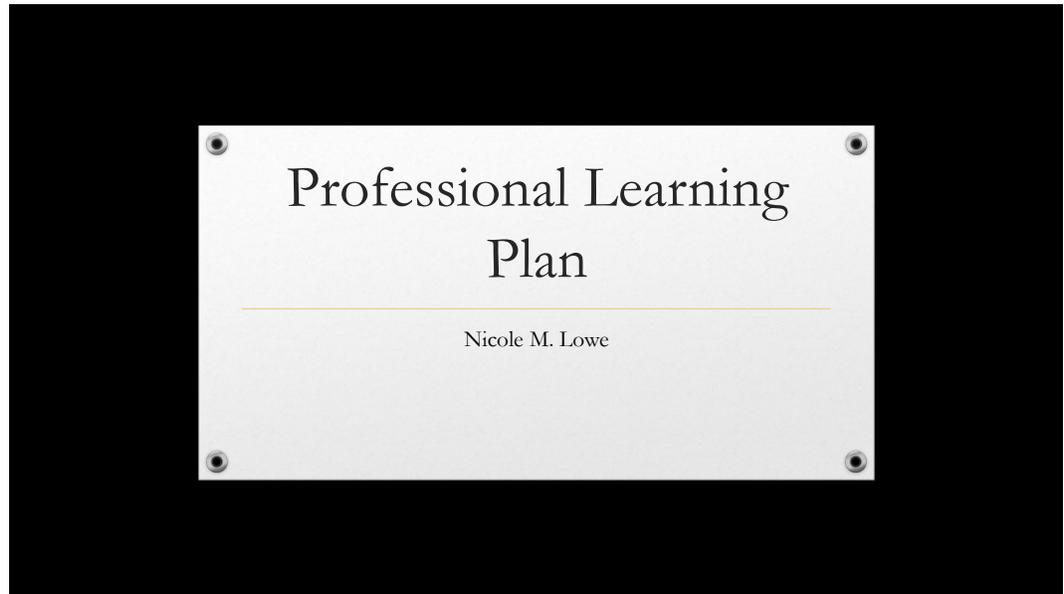
Appendix C: Sample Survey Questions

Survey Directions:

In an effort to create professional learning experiences that meet the needs of our students and teachers, the following survey was created based on a review of SOL data, benchmark data, and student work samples done by your colleagues and the director of curriculum and instruction.

Read the questions carefully. Some questions are addressed to all teachers and some are addressed to a particular department. There are also open-ended questions that ask for an individual response.

Thank you for taking the time to respond thoughtfully to the survey.

1.   What subject area do you teach? (Open-ended response).

2.   For English teachers: Please rate the following professional learning topics from 1 (being most important) to 5 (being least important):

    1.   Context Clues

    2.   Writing Assessment

    3.   Author's Purpose

    4.   Main Idea

    5.   Literary Devices

3.   Are there other topics or issues you would like to learn about? (Open-ended response)

4.   When would you like to participate in professional learning? Rate the times from 1(being your first choice) to 5 (being your last choice):

    1.   Over summer break

    2.   Pre-service days

    3.   After school

    4.   Professional Learning days built into the calendar

    5.   During planning period

6. Before school

5. Are there other times you would like to participate in professional learning? (Open-ended response)

6. What type of professional learning experiences would you like to have? Rate the types from 1(being your first choice) to 5 (being your last choice):

1. Small group, in person

2. Small group, online

3. Individual

4. Book study

5. Professional learning group (long-term small group)

7. Are there other learning settings you would be interested in? (Open-ended response)

8. Would you be willing to facilitate a professional learning experience? Professional learning hours would be issued for your time, including your preparation time. If so, what topic(s) would you be willing to facilitate? (Open-ended response)

Appendix D: Professional Learning Session Evaluation

1. Title of Session: This will have a drop-down menu from which to select the experience.

2. I am satisfied with the alignment of this professional learning experience to my daily classroom needs.

    a) Strongly Disagree

    b) Disagree

    c) Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

    d) Agree

    e) Strongly Agree

3. I am satisfied that my professional learning experience will result in improved student learning.

    a) Strongly Disagree

    b) Disagree

    c) Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

    d) Agree

    e) Strongly Agree

4. I am satisfied that the information learned in this experience will be easy to incorporate into my classroom.

    a) Strongly Disagree

    b) Disagree

    c) Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

d) Agree

e) Strongly Agree

5. I am satisfied with format of this learning experience.

    a) Strongly Disagree

    b) Disagree

    c) Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

    d) Agree

    e) Strongly Agree

6. I am satisfied with the time this learning experience was offered.

    a) Strongly Disagree

    b) Disagree

    c) Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

    d) Agree

    e) Strongly Agree

Appendix E: Meeting Agenda

Meeting Agenda

Welcome

Professional Learning Offerings 2014-2015

    FAQs:

- Where to find the offerings

- Teacher Facilitators

- How to sign-up

- Program Schedule

Questions?

Opportunity to sign-up

Appendix F: Break-out Session Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Guiding questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional learning offerings available to them?

2. What suggestions do teachers have regarding the professional learning experiences?

3. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional learning process (notification, explanation meeting, and sign-up process)?

FG Date: _____ FG Time: _____

FG Location: _____

Questioning based on Krueger and Casey's "Questioning Route" (2009, p. 35-61).

Welcome: Thank you for agreeing to take time to talk with me to discuss your professional learning experiences. My name is _____ and I am a teacher facilitator at King George High School.

Overview of topic: I am interested in learning about your experiences with professional learning and your suggestions for future professional learning.

Reminders: As was laid out in the information about the process, our discussion is being tape recorded so I do not miss any of your comments. If you feel stressed during the session, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this program. I will destroy the tape after I have analyzed the contents for program assessment. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the session. I also ask that you would maintain the confidentiality of your fellow group members when you leave here today.

Ground Rules: There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I expect that you will have differing thoughts and points of view. Please share your thoughts even if they differ from what other group members have shared.

Don't feel like you have to respond only to me. If you want to follow up on something another group member has said, you want to agree or disagree, or give an example of something someone else has said, feel free to do that.

I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has the chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. If you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others the opportunity to share with the group. Or the opposite, if you are not saying much, I may call on you for your input. I just want to make sure each of you has a chance to share your ideas.

If you have a cell phone, please put it on quiet mode, and if you need to answer it, please step out to do so.

Let's begin by learning about each of you:

1. Tell me about yourself—where you are from, how you first came to be in education, and how long you have been with the district. **(Opening question)**

Listing question activity (p. 42)

I have provided each of you a sheet of paper and a pen. On the paper, jot down words or phrases that come to mind when you think about the professional learning you have participated in this year.

Allow time for thinking and writing.

2. Now let's share what you wrote. When you think about the professional learning you have participated in this year, what comes to mind for you?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

Now I would like to think back over the professional learning experiences. **Wait time.**

3. Share with me a professional learning experience that you feel really helped you to meet the needs of your students.

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

4. Share with me a professional learning experience that you feel did not meet your needs or the needs of your students.

Follow-up: How would you describe the problem with that experience?

Follow-up: How can this kind of issue be best avoided?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

5. How would you characterize the school's efforts to provide professional learning to its teachers?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

6. Describe your experience with professional learning process (notification of offerings, program explanation meeting, and sign-up process).

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

7. What suggestions for professional learning would you make?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

I am going to give a brief summary of what was discussed today.

8. Is this an adequate summary? **(Ending question)**

9. As we come to a close, is there anything else that you would like to share with me about professional learning or the other related topics discussed today? Is there any I missed? **(Final question)**

   Thank you for taking the time to share today. I know that your time is

valuable and I appreciate you spending it to discuss professional development.

Notes:

Reflections:

Appendix G: Facilitator Training PowerPoint

Appendix H: End of Year Survey

Survey Directions:

In an effort to offer professional learning experiences that meet the needs of our students and teachers, the following survey has been created to assess your experiences with professional learning this year and to give you the opportunity to offer suggestions for improvement.

Read the questions carefully. Some questions are open-ended response questions and some are multiple-choice questions.

Thank you for taking the time to respond thoughtfully to the survey.

1. What subject area do you teach?
2. I am satisfied with the investment my school makes in my training and education.
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Agree
   e. Strongly Agree
3. I am satisfied that I have the opportunities to apply my talents and expertise.
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree

  c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

  d. Agree

  e. Strongly Agree

4. I am satisfied that my voice and opinions are heard and taken into account.

  a. Strongly Disagree

  b. Disagree

  c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

  d. Agree

  e. Strongly Agree

5. I am satisfied with the subject-specific professional learning experiences offered.

  a. Strongly Disagree

  b. Disagree

  c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

  d. Agree

  e. Strongly Agree

6. I am satisfied that my professional learning experiences improved student learning.

  a. Strongly Disagree

  b. Disagree

  c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

  d. Agree

  e. Strongly Agree

7. I am satisfied with the times professional learning experiences were offered.

  a. Strongly Disagree

  b. Disagree

  c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

  d. Agree

  e. Strongly Agree

8. Which times for professional learning were most effective? (Open-ended response)

7. I am satisfied with the types of professional learning offered (small group, in person, small group, online, individual, book study, professional learning group (long-term small group).

  a. Strongly Disagree

  b. Disagree

  c. Neutral/Neither agree nor disagree

  d. Agree

  e. Strongly Agree

9. Which type of professional learning did you find most effective? (Open-ended response)

What suggestions do you have for future professional learning? (Open-ended

response)

Appendix I: End of Year Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Guiding questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional learning offerings they participated in?

2. What suggestions do teachers have regarding future professional learning experiences?

3. What are teachers' suggestions about improving the professional learning process (notification, explanation meeting, and sign-up process)?

FG Date: _____ FG Time: _____

FG Location: _____

Questioning based on Krueger and Casey's "Questioning Route" (2009, p. 35-61).

Welcome: Thank you for agreeing to take time to talk with me to discuss your

professional learning experiences. My name is _____ and I am a

teacher facilitator at King George High School.

Overview of topic: I am interested in learning about your experiences with

professional learning and your suggestions for future professional learning and the

process.

Reminders: As was laid out in the information about the process, our discussion
is being tape recorded so I do not miss any of your comments. If you feel stressed during
the session, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too
personal.

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. I will not use your
information for any purposes outside of this program. I will destroy the tape after I have
analyzed the contents for program assessment. Also, I will not include your name or
anything else that could identify you in any reports of the session. I also ask that you
would maintain the confidentiality of your fellow group members when you leave here
today.

Ground Rules: There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I expect that you will
have differing thoughts and points of view. Please share your thoughts even if they differ
from what other group members have shared.

Don't feel like you have to respond only to me. If you want to follow up
on something another group member has said, you want to agree or disagree, or give an
example of something someone else has said, feel free to do that.

I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has the chance
to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. If you are talking a lot, I may ask
you to give others the opportunity to share with the group. Or the opposite, if you are not

saying much, I may call on you for your input. I just want to make sure each of you has a chance to share your ideas.

If you have a cell phone, please put it on quiet mode, and if you need to answer it, please step out to do so.

Let's begin by learning about each of you:

1. Tell me about yourself—where you are from, how you first came to be in education, and how long you have been with the district. **(Opening question)**

2. How closely aligned to your students' needs were the professional learning offerings?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

Now I would like to think back over the professional learning experiences you participated in this year. **Wait time.**

3. Share with me a professional learning experience that you feel really helped you to meet the needs of your students. How did it help meet the needs of your students?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

4. Share with me a professional learning experience that you feel did not meet your needs or the needs of your students.

Follow-up: How would you describe the problem with that experience?

Follow-up: How can this kind of issue be best avoided?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

5. How would you characterize the school's efforts to provide professional learning to its teachers?

> **Follow-up:** How could it be improved?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

6. Were there opportunities to work collaboratively with your colleagues?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

7. Describe your experience with professional learning process (notification of offerings, program explanation meeting, and sign-up process).

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

8. What suggestions for professional learning would you make?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

I am going to give a brief summary of what was discussed today.

9. Is this an adequate summary? **(Ending question)**

10. As we come to a close, is there anything else that you would like to share with me about professional learning or the other related topics discussed today? Is there any I missed? **(Final question)**

Thank you for taking the time to share today. I know that your time is valuable and I appreciate you spending it to discuss professional development.

Notes:

Reflections:

Appendix J: Interview Guide: Teacher

Interview Guide: Teacher

Guiding research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional development offerings

    available to them? (GRQ1)

2. How do these perceptions impact their decision to remain at the school? (GRQ2)

3. What types of professional learning experiences do teachers want? (GRQ3)

Study Name: An Effective Use of Professional Development

Interviewer's Name: Nicole Lowe

Interviewee #: _____

Interview Date: _____

Interview Time: _____

Interview Location:

_____

Questioning based on Krueger and Casey's "Questioning Route" (2009, p. 35-61).

Welcome: Thank you for agreeing to take time to talk with me to discuss professional development. My name is Nicole Lowe and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am also a teacher at King George High School.

Overview of topic: I am interested in learning about your experiences with professional development and your suggestions for future professional development.

Reminders: As was laid out in the information about the process, our discussion is being tape recorded so I do not miss any of your comments. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

1. Tell me about yourself—where you are from, how you first came to be in education, and how long you have been with the district. **(Opening question)**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

2. When you hear the term "professional development" what comes to mind for you? **(GRQ1) (Introductory question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

3. What do you think makes professional development effective? **(GRQ3) (Introductory question) [effective professional development characteristics, staff development]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification. For

example, "Could you describe what you mean?"

Transition: Now I would like to think back over your past

professional development experiences.

4. Share with me a professional development experience that you feel really helped you to be a more effective teacher. **(GRQ1) (Key question) (Positive before negative question) [effective professional development characteristics, adult learning, job satisfaction, student achievement]**

   Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification. For

example, **"How did that experience help your effectiveness?"**

5. Share with me a professional development experience that you feel was not worth your time as an educator. **(GRQ1) (Key question) [effective professional development characteristics, adult learning, job satisfaction]**

   Follow-up: How would you describe the problem with that experience?

   Follow-up: How can this kind of issue be best avoided?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

6. What types of professional development experiences would best help you to meet the needs of your students now? **(GRQ3) (Key question) [professional development characteristics, student achievement, adult learning, teacher control/choice of professional development]**

   Follow-up: How would this meet the needs of your students?

   Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

7. Is professional development related to teacher retention? **(GRQ2) (Key question) [teacher retention/attrition, professional development, working conditions]**

   Follow-up: If so, how is it connected?

Follow-up: If not, can you explain?

8. As we come to a close, is there anything else that you would like to share with me about professional development or the other related topics discussed today? Is there any other question I should have asked? **(Final question)**

Closing/Thank you

    Notes:

    Post-Interview Reflections:

Appendix K: Focus Group Guide: Non-Interviewed Teachers

Focus Group Guide: Non-Interviewed Teachers

Guiding research questions:

4. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional development offerings

   available to them? (GRQ1)

5. How do these perceptions impact their decision to remain at the school? (GRQ2)

6. What types of professional learning experiences do teachers want? (GRQ3)

Study Name: An Effective Use of Professional Development

Participant #s: _____

FG Date: _____ FG Time: _____

FG Location: _____

Questioning based on Krueger and Casey's "Questioning Route" (2009, p. 35-61).

Welcome: Thank you for agreeing to take time to talk with me to discuss professional development. My name is Nicole Lowe and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am also a teacher at King George High School.

Overview of topic: I am interested in learning about your experiences with professional development and your suggestions for future professional development.

Reminders: As was laid out in the information about the process, our discussion is being tape recorded so I do not miss any of your comments. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. I will destroy the tape after I have analyzed the contents for my project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. I also ask that you would maintain the confidentiality of your fellow group members when you leave here today.

Ground Rules: There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I expect that you will have differing thoughts and points of view. Please share your thoughts even if they differ from what other group members have shared.

Don't feel like you have to respond only to me. If you want to follow up on something another group member has said, you want to agree or disagree, or give an example of something someone else has said, feel free to do that.

I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has the chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. If you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others the opportunity to share with the group. Or the opposite, if you are not saying much, I may call on you for your input. I just want to make sure each of you has a chance to share your ideas.

If you have a cell phone, please put it on quiet mode, and if you need to answer it, please step out to do so.

Let's begin by learning about each of you:

1. Tell me about yourself—where you are from, how you first came to be in education, and how long you have been with the district. **(Opening question)**

Listing question activity (p. 42)

I have provided each of you a sheet of paper and a pen. On the paper, jot down words or phrases that come to mind when you hear the term "professional development."

Allow time for thinking and writing.

2. Now let's share what you wrote. When you hear the term "professional development" what comes to mind for you? **(GRQ1) (Key question) [staff development, adult learning, professional development characteristics, working conditions]**

   Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

3. What do you think makes professional development effective? **(GRQ1) (Key question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development characteristics]**

   Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

Now I would like to think back over previous professional development

experiences. **Wait time.**

4. Share with me a professional development experience that you feel really helped
   you to be a more effective teacher. **(GRQ1) (Key question) (Positive before
   negative) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional
   development characteristics, working conditions, student achievement]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the

question above.

5. Share with me a professional development experience that you feel was not
    worth your time as an educator. **(GRQ1) (Key question) [staff development,
    adult learning, effective professional development characteristics, working
    conditions]**

Follow-up: How would you describe the problem with that experience?

Follow-up: How can this kind of issue be best avoided?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

6. How would you characterize the district's efforts to provide professional development to its teachers? **(GRQ1) (Key question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development, working conditions]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

7. In my discussions with other teachers, the topic of peer-to-peer learning was discussed at length. In particular, the mentoring program and learning walks were mentioned. What are your thoughts on learning from your peers? **(GRQ1) (Key question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development, peer-to-peer learning]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

8. If you had the opportunity, what suggestions for professional development would you make? **(GRQ3) (Ending question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development, teacher control/choice of professional development]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification for the question above.

I am going to give a brief summary of what was discussed today.

9. Is this an adequate summary? **(Ending question)**

10. As we come to a close, is there anything else that you would like to share with me about professional development or the other related topics discussed today? Is there any I missed? **(Final question)**

Thank you for taking the time to share today. I know that your time is valuable and I appreciate you spending it to discuss professional development.

Notes:

Reflections:

Appendix L: Focus Group Guide: Interviewed Teachers

Focus Group Guide: Interviewed Teachers

Guiding research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions about the professional development offerings
   available to them? (GRQ1)

2. How do these perceptions impact their decision to remain at the school? (GRQ2)

3. What types of professional learning experiences do teachers want? (GRQ3)

Study Name: An Effective Use of Professional Development

Participant #s: _____

FG Date: _____ FG Time: _____

FG Location: _____

Questioning based on Krueger and Casey's "Questioning Route" (2009, p. 35-61).

Welcome: Thank you for agreeing to take time to talk with me to discuss professional development. My name is Nicole Lowe and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am also a teacher at King George High School.

Overview of topic: I have interviewed each of individually and have learned about your experiences with professional development and your suggestions for future professional development. In today's group, I would like to build upon those discussions.

Reminders: As was laid out in the information about the process, our discussion is being tape recorded so I do not miss any of your comments. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. I also ask that you would maintain the confidentiality of your fellow group members when you leave here today.

Ground Rules: There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I expect that you will have differing thoughts and points of view. Please share your thoughts even if they differ from what other group members have shared.

Don't feel like you have to respond only to me. If you want to follow up on something another group member has said, you want to agree or disagree, or give an example of something someone else has said, feel free to do that.

I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has the chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. If you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others the opportunity to share with the group. Or the opposite, if you are not saying much, I may call on you for your input. I just want to make sure each of you has a chance to share your ideas.

If you have a cell phone, please put it on quiet mode, and if you need to answer it, please step out to do so.

Let's begin by learning about each of you:

1. Tell me about yourself—where you are from, how you first came to be in education, and how long you have been with the district. **(Opening question)**

2. Based on our previous conversations, I would like to delve deeper in what professional development means to you. **(Transition) This will be influenced by the first round of interviews. I will be able to share some of the ideas associated with the terms and ask the participants to elaborate on the topic. [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development]**

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

3. We also discussed what makes professional development effective? **(GRQ1) (Key question). This will be influenced by the first round of interviews. I will be able to share some of the ideas associated with the term and ask the participants to elaborate on the topic. [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development characteristics]**

   Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

4. How would you characterize the district's efforts to provide professional development to its teachers? **(GRQ1) (Key question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development, working conditions]**

   Follow-up: What has been best in the past? **(Positive question first)**

Follow-up: What has been most lacking?

5. What connection is there, if any, between the professional development offered and teacher retention? **(GRQ2) (Key question)** **[staff development, adult learning, effective professional development, working conditions, teacher retention/attrition]**

Follow-up: Would changes or improvements to the offerings make a difference if

you were considering going to either another school or position?

Impromptu probes as needed for additional information/clarification.

6. If you had one minute to talk to the director of professional development, what would you say? **(GRQ3) (Ending question) [staff development, adult learning, effective professional development, teacher control/choice of professional development]**

I am going to give a brief summary of what was discussed today.

7. Is this an adequate summary? **(Ending question)**

8. As we come to a close, is there anything else that you would like to share with me about professional development or the other related topics discussed today? Is there any I missed? **(Final question)**

Thank you for taking the time to share today. I know that your time is valuable and I appreciate you spending it to discuss professional development.

Notes:

Reflections:

Appendix M: Invitation to Participate

Good morning,

My name is Nicole M. Lowe. I am a doctoral student at Walden University and an English teacher at XXXX XXXXXX XXXX XXXXXXX. I am conducting a research study, **Creating a Supportive Environment for Teachers: An Effective Use of Professional Development,** as part of the requirements of my degree in Education, and I would like to invite you to participate. I am studying teachers' perspectives on professional development.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to do the following: participate in 1 audio-recorded interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes, and participate in 1 audio-taped focus group, lasting approximately 90 minutes. In particular, you will be asked questions about your experiences with professional development and we will discuss your ideas about professional development.

The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 60 minutes. The focus groups will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 90 minutes. The interviews and focus groups will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by me and I will transcribe and analyze them. All documents and audio tapes will be kept in a secure location.

You will be notified via email and in person of the date, time, and location of the interview and focus group. Most interviews will be scheduled during planning periods, while focus groups will take place after school hours due to the differing schedules of participants.

If you feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. You may benefit directly from participating in this study by making your voice heard and giving suggestions for future professional development. I hope that others in the community/society in general will

benefit by understanding how to better serve the needs of teachers and students through professional development.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Others in the focus group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because you may be talking in a group (focus group), I cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but I will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. If you begin the study and later decide to withdraw, you are free to do so.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx.xxx@xxx.xxx or my faculty advisor, Dr. James Keen at xxx.xxx@xxx.xxx if you have study related questions or problems. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-xxx-xxxx, extension xxxx

Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-01-11-0100679** and it expires on **November 30, 2012.**

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number or email address listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

 Nicole M. Lowe

Appendix N: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of professional development. You were

chosen for the study because you are a teacher at King George High School who has

experience with professional development either at King George High School or in a

previous setting. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to

understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Nicole M. Lowe, who is a doctoral

student at Walden University.   Nicole M. Lowe is also a teacher at King George High

School. In addition, she has participated in professional development at the school and

she has been a facilitator of professional development sessions.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to discover teachers' perspectives

about the professional learning opportunities available to them and their suggestions for

future professional development.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

participate in 1 audio-recorded interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes and

participate in 1 audio-taped focus group, lasting approximately 90 minutes

Scheduling of interviews and focus groups: You will be notified via email and in person

of the date, time, and location of the interview or focus group. Most interviews will be

scheduled during planning periods, while focus groups will take place after school hours

due to the differing schedules of participants.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means

that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No

one at King George County Schools or King George High School will treat you

differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you

can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may

stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: There is the minimal risk of psychological

stress during this study. If you feel stressed during the interview or focus group, you may

stop at any time. The benefits to you for participating in this study are sharing your

experiences and suggestions for professional development. The interviewer will benefit

by being able to complete the study and earn a doctoral degree.

Focus group members will be asked to keep the information provided in the groups

confidential; however, a potential risk that might exist for some would be that

information about your workplace might be discussed outside the group by other

participants and be traced back to you.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher

will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the

researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any

reports of the study.

If you choose to participate, you will not be asked your name at the focus group or

individual interview. You will not need to use your name in the focus groups or

individual interviews. If by chance, you or someone you know addresses you by name in the sessions, the researcher will delete all names from the transcription.

Focus group members will be asked to keep the information provided in the groups confidential; however, a potential risk that might exist for some would be that information about your workplace might be discussed outside the group by other participants and be traced back to you.

Others in the focus group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because you may be talking in a group (focus group), the researcher cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Contacts and Questions: You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx.xxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call xx. xxxxxxx xxxxxxxx. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is x-xxx-xxx-xxxx, extension xxxx. Walden University's approval number for this study is 12-01-11-0100679 and it expires on November 30, 2012.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

This has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of as acceptable documentation of the informed consent process and is valid for one year after the stamped date.

Appendix O: Non-Interviewed Teachers Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of professional development. You were chosen for the study because you are a teacher at King George High School who has experience with professional development either at King George High School or in a previous setting. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named **Nicole M. Lowe**, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.   Nicole M. Lowe is also a teacher at King George High School. In addition, she has participated in professional development at the school and she has been a facilitator of professional development sessions.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to discover teachers' perspectives about the professional learning opportunities available to them and their suggestions for future professional development.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- participate in 1 audio-taped focus group, lasting approximately 90 minutes

Scheduling of focus groups:

You will be notified via email and in person of the date, time, and location of the focus group. Focus groups will take place after school hours due to the differing schedules of participants.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at King George County Schools or King George High School will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed

during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this study. If you feel stressed during the focus group, you may stop at any time. The benefits to you for participating in this study are sharing your experiences and suggestions for professional development. The interviewer will benefit by being able to complete the study and earn a doctoral degree.

Focus group members will be asked to keep the information provided in the groups confidential; however, a potential risk that might exist for some would be that information about your workplace might be discussed outside the group by other participants and be traced back to you.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

If you choose to participate, you will not be asked your name at the focus group. You will not need to use your name in the focus groups. If by chance, you or someone you know addresses you by name in the session, the researcher will delete all names from the transcription.

Focus group members will be asked to keep the information provided in the groups confidential; however, a potential risk that might exist for some would be that information about your workplace might be discussed outside the group by other participants and be traced back to you.

Others in the focus group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because you may be talking in a group (focus group), the researcher cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx.xxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call xx. xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxx. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is x-xxx-xxx-xxxx, extension xxxx. Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-01-11-0100679** and it expires on **November 30, 2012.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By <u>signing below</u>, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix P: Letter of Cooperation

Letter of Cooperation from a Community Research Partner

XXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXXX

XX. XXXXXXX XXXXXX, Superintendent

February 16, 2011

Dear Ms. Lowe,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled: Creating a Supportive Environment for Teachers: An Effective Use of Professional Development within the XXXXX XXXXXXX XXXX XXXXXX. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct individual interviews and focus groups. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

XX. XXXXXXX XXXXXX, Superintendent