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# Towards More Effective Teacher Professional Development Initiatives

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Laura Hooks

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Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and Race to the Top (2009) legislation have forged new school accountability measures and led to a sharp increase in demand for teacher professional development (TPD). However, data revealed that there is a disconnection between the training that teachers receive and its implementation, limiting its impact on student achievement. This qualitative case study's purpose was to reveal major barriers to TPD implementation and provide suggestions for crafting more impactful TPD. Based on the social constructivist foundation, this study sought to address the factors that increase teachers' receptiveness to more effective teaching techniques. It explored middle school teachers' perceptions of TPD, its connection to student achievement, and factors influencing implementation. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions helped to identify emergent themes. Nine participants were purposefully selected to gather data from perspectives across race, gender, and various teaching experiences. This study took an inductive approach using the constant comparison methodology of data analysis. Participants identified influencing factors regarding TPD, such as the inclusion of a follow-up component for accountability and feedback. Also, the participants insisted that TPD must be seen as non-punitive, relevant, engaging, and non-hypocritical; for example, a lecture cannot teach teachers about the ineffectiveness of teaching via lecture. These findings encourage positive social change by providing insight into crafting more impactful TPD. Ultimately, improved TPD encourages better teaching methodologies, increased teacher morale, and higher student achievement.

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Section 1: The Problem

## Introduction

One of the many results of the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was the naming of factors that could impact student success: class size, administration style, technology incorporation, truancy rate, classroom teaching methodologies, the level of teacher education, teacher experience, parental involvement, and community affluence, (Al-Bataineh, 2009). Repeatedly, the strongest link to student success was found to be classroom teaching methodologies, which consequently became the object of heavy scrutiny (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Districts dedicated an unprecedented amount of their budget to instructing teachers in best practices as they sought to meet the demands of annual yearly progress (AYP) (Pascopella, 2006). According to Georgia's 2011 Department of Education report, only 49 out of 181 districts in Georgia could boast that all of its schools made AYP in the 2010-2011 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Each academic school year, the AYP bar is raised a little higher and the pressure on school stakeholders intensifies (Kossar, Mitchem, & Ludlow, 2005). Accordingly, teacher weaknesses are being identified and attendance at training is decreed, with the presumption that teachers will learn everything they need to know and go back to their classrooms to apply the newly acquired knowledge straight away and flawlessly (Shirvani & Garcia, 2010). There is, however, a plethora of factors that have the potential to stymie the process; some issues include identifying teachers who need training, the training itself, and implementation of the training.

Other hurdles relate to the way stakeholders perceive the level of decision-making power the federal government has on how local school systems should operate (Superfine, 2005).

This chapter covers the following topics: the focus of the study, the rationale for the study (including an explanation from the local perspective and from the literature); definitions of the terms, research questions, and significance of the problem. Finally, there is a review of the literature and the implications of the study.

## Definition of the Problem

Providing effective professional development is an important foundation for creating the reforms in education that are in current demand (Sharvashidze & Bryant, 2011). However, mandating attendance at teacher professional development (TPD) sessions does not necessarily equate to improved classroom practices (Lieberman & Wilkins, 2006). There are often barriers to implementation of new strategies, such as dissatisfaction with the presentation itself (Klein & Riordan, 2011) or a clash between the content of the TPD and one's personal teaching philosophy (Towndrow, Aik-Ling, Yung, & Cohen, 2008). This study sought to determine teachers' perceptions about the commonalities among TPD sessions that can improve teacher practice and student achievement.

While TPD initiatives have increased, the urgency to implement TPD has decreased; using the new knowledge may be considered optional (Favennec-Hery, 1996). Even if the information itself is valuable, participants may not see the merit if the trainer lacks adept verbal

and nonverbal communication skills (Myers, 2008). Additionally, if the training was not immediately applied, it was less likely to be used at all (Quinney, Smith, & Galbraith, 2010).

Fiscal responsibility should also be considered. For the 2011-2012 school year, the school district under study had earmarked over $800,000 for TPD, per its 2012 executive budget summary. In light of troubled economic times, expenditures are likely to be examined more closely to determine if they are a valid use of limited resources. If they do not improve teacher practice and thus student achievement, the money should be spent on more worthwhile endeavors (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

This project study has implications for the larger educational realm. In this country, in many areas around the world, and across educational institutions, the complexities of TPD are compounded due to the current economic climate (Odden, & Picus, 2011). Staff development remains essential; however, a tighter budget makes financial prudence paramount and only development measures that improve teaching methodologies on a long-term basis should be offered (Kelly, 2012). In a study by Lutrick and Szabo (2012), instructional leaders agreed that TPD is more effective when it is interest-driven, but admitted that it is typically data-driven (need-based) partially due to economic limitations. Furthermore, expectations for the outcomes of TPD session are sharply inclining as district decision-makers seek to show financial judiciousness. Professional development facilitators are asked to balance strategies that respect both pedagogical and practical tenets in hopes of realizing a lengthy, perhaps unrealistic, list of outcomes (Hannon, 2008).

## Rationale

### Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The target school district study spans across coastal, suburban, and urban areas in Georgia. At the time of this study, Georgia used the Criterion-Referenced Competencies Test (CRCT) as its annual measure of performance of students from third through eighth grade. According to a district report, there were gains in student achievement in almost all areas for students in all grades, and yet there are still significant discrepancies between where the district is and where it should be according to NCLB (2002). For example, gains of between 6 and 7 percentage points were seen in each of the last 4 years and the number of students in eighth grade who met or exceeded standards on the math portion of the CRCT increased from 47% in 2008 to 66% in 2011. However, according to NCLB, 100% of students were to be on-grade-level by 2014. Thus, even though this district was making progress, the gains came too slowly, and the baseline gap was too wide, in order to comply with NCLB in time (Gewertz, 2011).

Changes in legislation add to the complexity of the situation. The Race to the Top grant was announced by President Barack Obama on July 24, 2009, and Georgia was one of 11 states to be awarded federal economic-stimulus money as part of the Race to the Top (RT3) competition (Atkenson & Will, 2014). A maximum of $400 million was earmarked to assist Georgia's efforts to improve its graduation rate and make its students college and career ready, equipped with 21$^{st}$ century skills. In return, Georgia teachers are subjected to an intensive evaluation process (Castillo, 2012) thus intensifying the TPD efforts. The district under study,

identified as one of the state's lowest performing districts, was one of 26 Georgia districts that received funding to execute its RT3 initiatives. Georgia's State Department of Education (GaDOE) holds direct responsible for overseeing the successful implementation of the RT3 goals specified in the application approved by the federal government (Klein, 2014).

One method to speed up the increments of student improvement is to analyze the effectiveness of mandated TPD, as measured by its impact on teacher methodology. Professional development initiatives all have an ultimate common goal: to improve student performance (Morewood, Ankrum, & Bean, 2010). Consequently, the purpose of this study was to better understand the dynamics of teachers putting newly learned best practices into action, starting with their perceptions regarding TPD and the potential connection between TPD and student success. The focus of this study is on non-elective TPD; therefore, higher degree programs, incentive-based training, elective training sessions, or any other voluntary TPD efforts were excluded.

**Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Even with the increased focus on TPD, some states, including Georgia, acknowledged that they were unable to meet the demands of NCLB legislation and an appeals protocol was effected. "Officials in a number of states have praised the idea as an opportunity for badly needed relief from what they see as unrealistic and punitive requirements of the federal law" (Klein & McNeil, 2011, p. 18). However, the RT3 grant stipulations have superseded NCLB compliance as the main priority, and Georgia was named on the list of states who are struggling

to be in compliance with the stipulations attached to RT3 grant money (McNeil & Ujifusa, 2013).

In light of the increased pressure for school districts to perform, training teachers in best practices has become a priority (Klein & Riordan, 2009). Due to the current political climate, under the reign of the changed legislation (from NCLB to RT3) and a recent economic slump, top notch TPD is not just a good idea, it is essential (Balan, Manko, & Phillips, 2011). Furthermore, teachers' perceptions about TPD have changed as the definition of what teachers do has broadened; educating young minds is only one of an increasing number of expectations (Chong, 2011).

Many teachers' pre-service preparation programs were strongly, or even exclusively, focused on pedagogical philosophies and some classroom management tactics (Messer, 2010). Teacher preparation programs do not provide sufficient time for pre-service teachers to learn how to overcome the challenges beyond educating young minds, such as working with parents, colleagues, and administrators (Gardner, 2006). New teachers reported that their teacher education programs were not sufficient in preparing them for the rigors of the profession (Al-Bataineh, 2009). In reaction, accreditation for teacher preparation programs became more aligned with the realities in store for today's teachers (Ingvarson, Beavis, & Kleinhenz, 2007); however, this does not help teachers who completed their education degree programs before these changes took place. Despite the admitted need to fill in the knowledge gaps, teachers'

attitude towards TPD remains generally negative, especially in high-poverty schools (Torff & Sessions, 2009).

## Definitions

Below are the terms that are used throughout the study:

*Annual yearly progress* (AYP), as determined by NCLB legislation, entails the percentage of students who meet or exceed expectations on annual standardized testing for three consecutive years or otherwise face sanctions (Foley & Nelson, 2011).

*Criterion-Referenced Competencies Test* is the standardized test that Georgia students take annually. Students in grades first through eight take the CRCT in math and language arts and beginning in third grade social studies and science are also tested. The CRCT is the basis of measurement for AYP determination as set forth by NCLB law (Duran, 2005).

*No Child Left Behind Act* refers to the law enacted in 2002 that requires school systems to make yearly gains in standardized testing in order to meet AYP standards (Lewis, 2002).

*Race to the Top* or *RT3* is the $4.35 billion dollar federal grant money passed in 2009 for which 47 states applied for a share in order to improve academic outcomes (Lee Colvin, 2012).

*Teacher professional development* for the purposes of this study is defined as workshops, conferences, training sessions, and otherwise designated mandated efforts to train teachers in instructional methodologies aligned with district initiatives (Loeser, 2008).

## Significance

In the light of NCLB (2002) and RT3 (2009), this study is timely and there is strong potential for the findings to be useful at the local level. Affected school districts will be under even heavier investigation to determine if newly ordained educational reform plans are an appropriate use of earmarked monies. In its application for a share of the RT3 funds, contingencies were written and convincing enough that Georgia was approved. Thus, Georgia is under national, perhaps even global, scrutiny to see if that allotment was wisely given. As education reform plans begin with teacher preparedness (in the form of training), TPD efforts will be in the limelight as NCLB and RT3 goals are being compared to the results.

## Guiding Questions

The literature indicates that there is a discrepancy between expectations and reality, known as a *knowing-doing gap* (Griffith & Conrad, 2008). Teachers are receiving training on the latest strategies to improve student learning; however, they are not always implementing those strategies. Relatively few studies have been conducted to uncover why mandatory professional development attendance does not necessarily yield a change in technique and teaching practices. Studies indicate a general resistance to forced change for a variety of reasons that can be generalized into two broad categories: (a) teacher attitude towards TPD, and (b) teacher perceptions of TPD. Regarding attitude, many teachers do not believe that the new technique is better than their current methodology. Regarding perception, a proportion of teachers report that district initiatives are far too transient to embrace.

## Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions of teacher professional development?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of the connection between professional development and student achievement?

RQ3: What do teachers report may motivate them to implement the content of teacher professional development?

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into how middle school teachers perceive mandatory TPD. The findings of this study could help decision-makers craft impactful TPD protocols. Other districts could use the findings in their own quest to improve TPD outcomes.

## Review of the Literature

Literature searches were conducted using ERIC and Education Research Complete databases, along with SAGE full-text. Key terms and phrases used were: *teacher professional development*, *morale*, *implementation, perceptions*, *No Child Left Behind*, *Race to the Top, economy, budget, school improvement, attitude, administration, stakeholders, staff development*, *teacher opinions*, *teacher efficacy,* and *reactions*. Despite the variety of terms and synonyms used in the search, the results largely dealt with a specific teaching scenario, subject area,

voluntarily chosen TPD, or specific types of TPD, rather than a general perception about how to foster better transfer of learning from TPD to the classroom.

This review begins with a presentation of the conceptual framework for this study. It also includes the following: (a) an examination of some common assumptions regarding TPD, (b) changes in TPD approaches due to legislation, (c) a comparison of mandated and voluntary TPD, (d) various types of TPD, (e) barriers to implementation and (f) the relationship between teacher morale and TPD.

**Conceptual Framework**

Constructivism, also known as social constructivism, is the conceptual framework that relates to this study. Each teacher's experience with TPD is both subjective and formed via interactions with others; therefore, the conceptual framework of this project study emerges from social constructivism (Merriam, 2009). Piaget and Inhelder (1969) proposed that, even as children, we assimilate new learning through the viewfinder of our previous experiences. Deng (2004) cited Bruner as going as far as saying that established knowledge distorts the formatting of subsequent information. Constructivism is an epistemology superior to behaviorism in this capacity according to Jonassen (2006) because TPD is among higher cognitive skills that have intentional aims rather than a stimulus-reward relationship. Furthermore, Eun (2008) argued that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is a well-suited framework upon which TPD is to be based because of the real-world setting where the learning takes place, either during the learning session itself or in the application of the learning back in the classroom.

Constructivists maintain that people fit new knowledge within the context of what they already believe true based on their previous experiences (Ultanir, 2012). Some constructivists sum up the acquisition of new information by stating, "The learner is actively constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it from the environment. This principle contradicts the traditional learning model where knowledge is simply transmitted from a more knowledgeable person to others" (Chih & Ju, 2010, p. 63). This statement encapsulates both the spirit of and the primary flaw of the customary TPD design. The spirit of TPD is that participants should be interacting with the learning and with their more knowledgeable peers while acquiring new methodologies; however, the primary flaw of many contemporary TPD practices is that TPD participants are typically expected to receive the transmission of that information passively (Bayar, 2014).

Moreover, constructivists are willing to accept that human perception is flawed and can be easily deceived, yet still insist that truth simply cannot be purely objective (Johnson, 2010). Hence, in respecting the individuality of personalities and berth of experience coming together in each TPD session, the social constructive lens is appropriate. It also helped establish this study as worthwhile because changing negative perceptions of TPD is paramount in garnering implementation and ultimately improving its impact on student achievement. Lustick (2011) supported this assertion:

> Teacher learning in these models has not been considered very effective due in part to the extrinsic nature of the activity and the passive process by which teachers are the

> recipients of knowledge and skills as defined by an outside authority such as a principal, visiting expert, or government administrator. The traditional models of professional development are not constructed around any set of common standards or goals for the educators. For the most part, the experiences are isolated, extrinsically motivated, undisciplined, and leave little room to assess the accountability of results. (p. 223)

Taken altogether, the previous knowledge and experiences the teachers come into a TPD session holding provides the lens through which they view the new training (Ultanir, 2012). Positive TPD experiences lead to future TPD experiences being perceived as positive; however, the converse is also true.

The constructivist framework relates to the key research questions because constructivist theory purports that learning is shaped by the learner's previous experiences (Riegler & Steffe, 2014). Therefore, this viewpoint supports the creation of the key research questions that aim to gather teachers' existing perceptions, and then explore the possible connections between those perceptions and their impact on the effectiveness of TPD. Furthermore, constructivism relates to the instrument development because the research questions were extrapolated into the interview protocol questions. Finally, constructivism relates to this study's use of the constant comparison data analysis methodology, which seeks to identify commonalities and sort data into themes, because the various teacher-held perceptions led to determination of the themes themselves.

**Common TPD Assumptions**

According to the literature, it is frequently assumed that teachers are enthusiastic TPD participants. The population at large may hold that teachers naturally seek out opportunities to be the students and automatically embrace the teaching offered if it is relevant to their situation (Scherer, 2006). Schools are learning organizations that should also model effective methods of education. Accordingly, teachers also need to be learners who engaged in high-level, change-evoking educational pursuits (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). However, teachers are not always objective, especially in self-evaluation. Their own perceptions about their level of effectiveness and areas of deficiency may be in sharp conflict with reality (Fessler & Burke, 1987).

Members of the community at large may also assume that teachers defer to the guidance of their principal. Thus, if a principal detects a TPD need, the teachers agree with the deficiency and graciously accept the offer of assistance. However, a study in Nigeria (Nakpodia, 2010) revealed this would only be the case if they feel good about their relationship with their principal. Nakpodia (2010) also reported that teachers' attitudes towards their principals had a significant, positive correlation to their attitude towards TPD. If teachers had confidence in their administrator they were likely to see the benefits of TDP. Moreover, the reverse was also found to be true regardless of the quality of the TPD received.

Another assumption explored by the literature is that many teachers need some incentive, especially a financial one, to implement change in their instructional techniques. This belief is supported by the highly popular notion of pay-for-performance initiatives (Marsh & McCaffrey,

2011). Yet research does not support a positive correlation between an increase in pay and teacher effectiveness (Gratz, 2009). Gratz (2011) followed up with a study that seems to contradict his earlier stand, claiming that pay-for-performance can be effective. However, he warns about its limitations, strict specifications to get it to work, as well as how easily it can fail.

Finally, the literature points out another assumption that graduating with a teaching degree means the individual is qualified to teach. But teacher preparation programs have come under harsh criticism lately, mostly for not keeping up with 21st century realities (Messer, 2010). Institutions that offer teacher preparation are commonly blamed for inadequately ensuring that teacher-hopefuls will be successful in a classroom with the expectations of modern-era youth and the advancements in technology that today's classroom include (Duncan, 2010). Hoewook and Hyunjin (2010) contended that this is there is a "worldwide, strong demand" (p. 354) for reform in teacher preparation programs. Therefore it stands to reason that teachers, especially newly-minted teachers, would welcome TPD suggestions for areas of growth. However, there is a paradox. New teachers who are confident in their abilities are more likely to be effective teachers. Recommending or requiring TPD may serve to undermine a novice's confidence, lessening his or her effectiveness (Chong, 2011).

**Professional Development Evolution Due to Federal Legislation Changes**

Many TPD initiatives were birthed out of the 2002 NCLB legislation, which added a complex layer of accountability measures on teachers. On the surface, NCLB promised to hold teachers more accountable and therefore held the potential to vanquish mediocrity. However, it

had the unfortunate side effects of breeding frustration and stymieing enthusiasm. To teachers, the policy was not a promise but a threat, as teachers often perceived these accountability measures as unfair sanctions (Bunting, 2007). Starting with the 2002-2003 school year, schools needed to see to it that a minimum percentage of its students passed the year-end high-stakes test, and each year that minimum percentage takes another leap higher; hence, schools struggling to meet the minimum one year had an atmosphere of doom going into each subsequent school year (Olson, 2006). Gleiberman (2007) wrote that, as a classroom teacher, he would have to spend 140 hours a week working with his students to ensure that none of them "got left behind" (p. 19).

The Race to the Top (RT3) education reform contends that examination of student performance data needs to be the measure of teacher effectiveness and reflect in their pay (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010; Kyung Eun, 2011). Teachers may be more receptive to TPD if their pay rate correlates to student achievement data. Please note that RT3 legislation was new at the time of this study, so it may be premature to make determinations about its level of impact on teacher attitude towards TPD; however, pay-for-performance incentives have been used and studied in other occupational arenas. Occupations where output can be measured objectively shows a positive correlation to higher pay, but where the output is more complicated to determine, the results are limited and often conflicting (Sojourner, Mykerezi, & West, 2014). School districts receiving RT3 funding have the financial wherewithal to provide more and perhaps better quality TPD (Cavanagh, 2011a). Additionally, proponents of RT3 claim that

increased pressure to improve teaching practices would forge a closer collegiality and teachers would hold each other more accountable, thus enhancing TPD potential (Hourigan, 2011). However, opponents of pay-for-performance for teachers stated that student performance cannot be measured accurately or objectively enough to measure, plus it is illogical to hold teachers responsible for the actions of their students (Glass & Berliner, 2014).

Furthermore, Mizell, Hord, Killion, and Hirsh (2011) reported that there is dichotomy in the findings on the effectiveness of TPD. Many studies credit TPD as having a significant positive influence on student achievement. Shumack and Forde (2011) touted TPD as the basis for improved instruction and teacher effectiveness. However, another body of research finds that TPD had little to no impact. Moon (2004) claimed that the majority of workshops were a waste of money. More recent results show some value in workshops when they are intense, spanning multiple days; however, still less effective than more personalized types of training such as mentoring (Dunst & Raab, 2010).

Recent TPD efforts concern educating teachers to the new teacher evaluation instrument and other facets of RT3. Hence other TPD initiatives were temporarily on hold while baselines were being established. However, once areas of need are identified, teachers and administrators are held accountable for speedy resolution. The new teacher and administrator annual evaluation process demands it (Cavanagh, 2011b). So, TPD promises to be assigned swiftly and teachers are admonished to closely heed it, or their annual evaluation, and possibly their paycheck, could be negatively impacted (Levin, 2011). Moreover, the likelihood exists that TPD, regardless of

quality or teacher perception of it, stands a better chance of implementation than ever before (Gratz, 2011).

**Mandatory versus Voluntary Professional Development**

Through personal experience as a teacher and leader of TPD sessions, obligatory participation in professional development is not always welcomed with open arms. Beavers (2009) found that a majority of educators recognize the importance of ongoing training on new technology, the latest curricular standards, and best teaching practices. But forcing participation in such training sessions can make attendees resentful because they already have an overwhelming number of duties and responsibilities pressing upon them. Bayindir (2009) conducted a candid study of the necessity of professional development for teachers in Turkey. Teachers with over 20 years of experience reported that TPD was unnecessary to them as veteran teachers, as did teachers with fewer than 5 years of experience, stating that their teacher preparation program knowledge was "fresh" enough. An overwhelming majority (81%) indicated that they would be willing to participate in TPD only if they believed it was well qualified and provided them with opportunities to practice; however, the study specified neither how participants defined "well qualified" nor were they explicit about how the practice opportunities should occur.

There is a gap in research on the perceptions of TPD when attendance has been made mandatory. Koster, Dengerink, Korthagen, and Lunenberg (2008) cited several studies that point to a lack of up-to-date professional development research. Studies that do exist were on

professional development attended for a specific learning goal and where the participant rating is given at the conclusion of the session (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Smith, 2003). Other studies concerning TPD are limited in focus to new teachers (Lunenberg, 2002). Additionally, Conway and Christensen (2006) concluded that the results of studies on ineffective TPD strategies are more abundant than strategies that work.

Much of the existing research focused on professional development attendance that is voluntary, either to attain a targeted new skill or financial incentive. Teacher attitude towards voluntarily chosen professional development is positive overall (McKenna, Rosenfield, & Gravois, 2009; Shriner, Schlee, Hamil, & Libler, 2009; Torff & Sessions, 2008; Watt, Huerta, & Mills, 2010). Morewood, Ankrum, and Bean (2010) reported that educators claimed to benefit from TPD participation when it was connected to their previous experience and would help them shore up an area of need. But what happens when professional development does not align with teachers' personal or professional goals? When that is the case, an experimental study by Santagata, Rossella, Kersting, Givvin, and Stigler (2011) found discouraging results. In their study, teachers had the goal of increasing scores on quarterly assessment tests and given TPD on getting students to figure out the process for arriving at an answer. However, teachers believed their methodology sufficient if students were able to get the correct answer (moving towards the goal increasing test scores) without taking the extra step of answer analysis (implementing the TPD goal of developing critical thinking skills in their students).

Teachers rate the sessions' effectiveness highly at the conclusion of the workshop, but does the training shape practice once the teachers return to their classrooms? Or do good intentions give way to old habits when faced with the overwhelming demands on teachers' time? There are many factors that may stall implementation. A lack of time was frequently reported as barrier to implementation (Ali & Magalhaes, 2008; Manspeaker & Van Lunen, 2011; O'Connor & Petigrew, 2009; Sansosti, Telzrow, & Noltemeyer, 2010). Other noted barriers to implementation were lack of resources (Ali & Magahaes, 2008), feelings of powerlessness in decision-making (Pyle, Wade-Woolley, Hutchinson, 2011), fear of the unknown (Pagoto et al., 2007), and the perceived flaws in the new methodologies (Swan, 2009).

**Perceptions Based on the Type of Professional Development**

Lustick (2011) found teachers' perceptions of professional development revealed that in-service workshops and education courses, the mainstays of TPD, were thought to be the least effective methods. Faddish educational developments, public sentiment, and educational buzzwords can often be the mothers of mandated TPD participation. Researchers warn against this. People who plan, conduct, and evaluate TPD activities are admonished not to base decisions on what is trendy, but instead to go with methodologies that have stood the test of time and have a measurable impact on student achievement levels (Gaytan & McEwen, 2010).

There is a growing body of research indicating that embedded TPD tactics, such as mentoring, co-teaching, professional committee meetings, trade book study groups, and self-reflection, are more effective than traditional workshops (Kaiser, Rosenfield, & Gravois, 2009;

Klein & Riordan, 2011). However, the economic climate over last several years has continued to shrink the budgets of school systems, further relegating professional development initiatives into the least costly; namely, large group in-service workshops led by employees willing to do so for a small sum or for free, and are not necessarily the ones best qualified to do so (Nakaoka & von Frank, 2011).

TPD is consistently one of the top five components of school reform (Fischer & Hamer, 2010; Howe, Jacobs, Vukelich, & Recchia, 2012). Vaughan and McLaughlin (2011) wrote that one of the least effective forms of TPD, the one-day workshop, is the most common component of school improvement plans. Regardless of the type offered, getting teachers to believe in the need for and effectiveness of TPD is the essential first step. Belief in the impact of TPD is frequently noted in research as the core of what causes positive, sustainable reforms in teacher methodology (Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011).

**Barriers to Implementation of New Initiatives**

There is a lengthy list of reasons that TPD is not the magic cure some district leaders believe it to be. Professional development activities historically have not been properly organized and their implementation is chaotic and messy (Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011). Research has indicated that TPD efforts have the potential for backfiring. The assigning of inappropriate TPD is theorized to be a main reason for veteran teachers choosing a different line of work (Eros, 2011). Another potential barrier exists when teachers do not see the purpose of TPD. Requiring teachers to give up their limited time to learn new strategies is more

productive if the teachers see the value in it. When they see no purpose for it, TPD can be counterproductive as teachers may grow weary and/or overwhelmed (Christ & Wang, 2013). Even when a professional development workshop is well designed and of high quality, it cannot be presumed that the presented material shall be automatically implemented by attending teachers. Teachers commonly complain that they cannot employ new methodologies because they do not have sufficient time to take what they have been taught and fully understand it, practice it, or get pointers to assist them in their progression (Desimone, 2011; Mancabelli, 2011).

Feelings of frustration also contribute to a lack of enthusiasm and/or feelings of unwillingness by teachers towards TPD. A study by Finnigan and Gross (2007) in the wake of NCLB indicated that the motivation teachers feel to increase student standardized test scores cannot be sustained, and the pressure of the ever-increasing demands can lead to low morale. Teachers working with a population of students who are at-risk, low income, immigrant and/or migrant feel NCLB's stress earliest and most acutely (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). A study by Donnelly and Sadler (2009) of high school science teachers revealed that a common reason for teachers leaving or considering leaving the profession was to escape the frustration and anger resulting from the pressure for their students to perform well on high-stakes testing. Donnelly and Sadler (2009) also found that teachers in their study reported frustration by the curriculum's inflexibility that diminished enthusiasm in them and their students.

Additionally, if there is little to no incentive to carry out the wishes of district decision-makers, implementation is far more likely to fail (Hough, 2011). Putman (2010) reinforced the need for strong leadership because weak administrators fail to challenge teachers to grow beyond their comfort zone. The perceived level of administrative support and competence is pivotal in making TPD successful. Ferguson (2006) proposed several factors that make TPD efforts exigent, ranging from gaining teacher buy-in to the ability to recognize the benefits of successful professional development implementation, and found that the perceived amount of involvement and support from leadership was the copestone.

**Teacher Morale and Professional Development**

Willis and Varner (2010) found a positive correlation between teacher morale and student achievement. Accordingly, teachers with low morale are generally far more resistant to professional development initiatives. Additionally, Protheroe (2006) discovered that new teachers are more susceptible to low morale as they tackle the challenges of a demanding job, and that there was a clear difference in first-year teachers' attitudes towards TPD based on their perception of their principals' level of support. New teachers who reported having a supportive principal tended to have higher morale and were more open to TPD initiatives, whereas new teachers who did not feel supported by their administrators saw TPD as more punitive than helpful (Protheroe, 2006). Professional development itself can be perceived as another unwelcomed demand on a teacher's limited time. Increasing pressure for student performance, a

lack of appreciation from administration, and strained relationships among colleagues make for a work environment that takes a toll mentally and physically (Beaudoin, 2011).

Furthermore, the discussion of teacher morale and TPD can be cyclical; teacher morale strongly correlates to job satisfaction, which is largely dependent on student achievement. Thus, teachers with high morale tend already to be highly effective teachers who require less TPD (Hyun-Jun, Ssang-Cheol, & Sung-Soo, 2012). On the other hand, teachers whose morale is low often feel less effective, yet are more resistant to attending TPD (Protheroe, 2006), and are more likely to feel disrespected and act disrespectful towards their students (Beaudoin, 2011). So administrators are challenged with balancing the identification of teachers' development needs with their morale needs. The result is a tightrope for administrators to walk between supporting their teachers and frustrating them (Range, Scherz, Holt, & Young, 2011).

In summary, various factors can affect how TPD is received. While changes in legislation and new accountability measurements are pressing teachers and administrators to showcase data laden with improvements in student performance, the downturned economy forced budget restrictions that undermine TPD initiatives. Additionally, the increased pressure and financial challenges can sap teacher morale, lessening their willingness to extend themselves further with new classroom methodologies.

## Implications

Providing the necessary training is the indispensable first step in bringing educational improvements to fruition. However, teaching does not automatically induce learning or create a

change in behavior, which is especially true when a myriad of district initiatives are enacted in a short span of time, as is currently the case for many school districts. Therefore, it makes sense to design TPD sessions to maximize potential impact on teaching pedagogy, as identified by the teachers who attend these TPD sessions.

Teachers, despite acknowledging the importance of education, do not always make the best students, especially teachers who have a negative perception of TPD. Teachers nudged to attend a TPD session may believe they are being singled out unfairly, receiving a punishment for an unrelated infraction, or are being judged based on an isolated incident. Moreover, teachers tend to respond to TPD differently depending on what teaching phase they are in (Day, 2012) with years of experience being a primary indicator. Respecting differences in teacher perception of TPD, therefore, is an important consideration in making TPD impactful.

The two major pieces of legislation guiding educational decision-making are NCLB (2002) and RT3 (2009). District decision-makers are reacting appropriately to the pressure of NCLB legislation and RT3 grant stipulations in the sense that they are beginning with providing teachers the tools needed to make changes in student achievement. However, teachers who have been subjected to a myriad of TPD efforts concentrated into a short span of time tend to be more resistant to future TPD initiatives, despite their level of relevance (Masuda, 2010).

Additionally, there is the issue of forcing TPD. In general, teachers report satisfaction with TPD they choose (Compton, 2010). However, this study revolved around non-optional TPD. An important but frequently undesired duty of administrators is to identify areas of teacher

weakness and assign those teachers to attend TPD. However, due to limitations on time, administrators may not have an accurate picture of what deficiencies actually exist and/or how to appropriately assign TPD. Hence, mandatory TPD may be viewed by teachers as punitive and/or irrelevant (Munoz & Barber, 2010).

The type of TPD offered makes a difference in how teachers perceive it. While workshops are the overwhelming majority of TPD offerings, they were identified as typically having the least amount of impact and satisfaction from participants. Intensive one-on-one or small cohort training made the firmest and longest lasting impact. But budgetary constraints hold such TPD opportunities to a small percentage (Dunst & Raab, 2010).

There are several barriers to implementation of TPD. Apprehension of change, lack of desire, lack of incentive/motivation, school politicking, lack of time, and a lack of meaningful feedback are repeated reasons teachers give for not implementing TPD tenets (Johnson, 2006). Furthermore, teacher morale correlates to willingness to attend and be affected by TPD. Teachers who feel unvalued, underappreciated, demoralized, or otherwise unfulfilled become increasingly detached from the school and its efforts to improve instruction, including TPD attendance (Mackenzie, 2007).

## Summary

The problem is defined as a discrepancy between the TPD that teachers receive and its implementation. Necessary training sessions can become a waste of resources and a source of discontentment when teachers are unwilling participants. Even teachers who embrace new

methodologies may become disillusioned with a new technique for a variety of reasons. Many assumptions about teachers being enthusiastic students hamper education reform efforts, as do the negative perceptions that many teachers hold about TPD.

The rationale for this study included evidence of the problem at a local level as changes in legislation have had an impact on school district decisions. Evidence of the problem was also given from existing literature. After the terms were defined, the problem's significance was proffered. The guiding questions for the project study were given and a review of the literature further demonstrated its importance. Implications for the significance and usefulness of this study were also discussed.

A need for stronger student performance implementation was identified by the federal government, so districts mandated more TPD. However, implementation of TPD may be stalled, forgotten about, abandoned, or so poorly executed so as to cause more harm than good. It is essential then to determine the qualities that effective TPD sessions have so that future TPD initiatives can be designed accordingly and yield the sought-after effects. The project study sought to do that by gathering and analyzing data yielded from the voices of TPD attendees.

Section 2 will entail discussions concerning the research method of this project study. The discussions will include a justification for the study and the conceptual perspective from which it was formed. Participant selection process and ethical issues will also be considered. The matters of data collection and analysis are also explained.

Section 3 gives the details of the data gathering process and the interviews. Any surprises and the resulting adaptations are given. The data are compiled into common themes. Additionally, the goals of the study are revisited and the implications for social change presented.

Section 4 states the study's strengths and limitations. Possible conclusions will be drawn based on the analysis of the interview data. Moreover, the merits of the study itself get evaluated. The study concludes with a self-reflection by the graduate student in her role as a researcher and agent of positive social change.

# Section 2: The Methodology

## Introduction

Section 2 contains: (a) a justification of the study methodology, including the perspective from which it derives, and the study design choice; (b) a description of the participants; (c) the protection measures that were taken; (d) data collection, coding, and analysis measures; (e) a discussion regarding discrepant cases; and (f) credibility and dependability methods.

## Design and Approach

### Justification of Methodology

Researchers are still largely divided into the philosophical camps of qualitative and quantitative with ample evidence on both sides to argue the superiority of each (Szyjka, 2012). Even quantitative-minded researchers often admit the appropriateness of adding a qualitative component to their study when the complexity of perceptions must be respected (Sims, Le, Emery, & Smith, 2012). Within the qualitative camp, debate revolves around how much data crunching is necessary before the qualitative researcher can stake a conceptual claim (Nolen & Talbert, 2011). Yet there is a preference towards using qualitative research when learning about people's experiences in the natural environments in which these experiences occur (Hunt, 2011). Mertens (2006) identified a shift in the methodology used when conducting research in middle grades education over a 12-year span: quantitative studies dropped from 30% to only 15%, while almost two-thirds of the studies were qualitative studies; the remainder being mixed-methods studies.

Quantitative and qualitative researchers hope to add to the body of knowledge because they believe that people who know better do better. Accordingly, it is important to embrace one's own philosophical bias before deciding upon which approach to take (Merriam, 2009). Researchers wanting results that can be duplicated and generalized should consider quantitative methods. However, researchers who want to include environmental and biographical impacts and a range of perspectives may lean towards qualitative research methods (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Quantitative studies are more concerned with controlling variables and arriving at numeric conclusions than creating a detailed depiction of humans' experiences (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) also explained that quantitative researchers begin with a theory, test it to gather data, and then report the results. Quantitative research takes a deductive, cause-and-effect, objective mindset. The majority of research on TPD that used quantitative approaches were conducted to test the effectiveness of a specific type of session or session component (Knight, Carrese, & Wright, 2007) or to compare groups who had received TPD to those who had not (Kutsyuruba, 2009; Shriner, Schlee, Hamil, & Libler, 2009) which was outside of the scope of this study. Additionally, the district under study routinely uses quantitative surveys completed by the teachers to gather data regarding the effectiveness of TPD initiatives; however, such data could be misleading or misinterpreted (Kramer, 2006). Also, since this district's quantitative surveys are only accessible through district-networked computers which are logged into via individual logons and passwords, I have heard and empathized with concerns regarding the

compromised nature of anonymity and the resulting risk of providing information that would likely be considered unpleasant, harsh, and/or self-incriminating (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Thus, there may be inaccuracies in the data and the resulting conclusions drawn, which would have been counterproductive in satisfying the goals of this study.

On the other hand, qualitative methods rely more on inductive thinking inquiry, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers tend to begin with a problem and then pool the knowledge of informed participants to synthesize data into a theory (Creswell, 2012). . Arriving at a deep understanding of teacher perceptions was imperative for expanding knowledge on the topic, and it was appropriate to accomplish via interviewing attending teachers. Additionally, because of the depth of information aimed for, a qualitative design was more appropriate than a quantitative approach for this study (Lodico, Spaulding, & Dean, 2010). This study determined a defensible explanation via utilization of an inductive process to add to the body of knowledge concerning TPD initiatives and making those initiatives more effective. Also, because the literature indicated that the perceptions and behaviors of participants in this study represented situations studied all over the globe, this study's findings have higher transferability potential (Ong-Dean, Huie-Hofstetter, & Strick, 2011).

One goal of this study was to gather perception data; therefore, this was an explanatory case study. Explanatory (also called instrumental) case studies seek a relationship between an event and the outcomes of it (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This study sought to rethink

generalizations by gaining further insight that refuted or reinforced generally held notions with current data (Glesne, 2011). The topic under study provided the data to understand the true objective of the study better (Merriam, 2009). In the case of this study, the topic of the study, namely the participants' perceptions of TPD, informed the true goal, which was to gain awareness of effective TPD protocols.

This study consisted of individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. This design was a logical derivation from the issue because it came from a social constructivist perspective. The crux of this study was teacher perception, which assumes multiple realities (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Furthermore, existing research on teacher perceptions frequently employed qualitative methods using focus group sessions and/or individual interviews (Klein & Riordan, 2011; Lebec & Luft, 2007; Overbaugh & Lu, 2008; Steyn, 2010).

A case study is among qualitative design options. Eckstein (2002) described the case study as one that uses analytic induction to learn about the phenomenon. Previous studies demonstrated the appropriateness of using a case study. Wheeler and Yeats (2009) conducted an explanatory case study to look at the use of e-portfolios, whereas the larger objective was to find out the impact of incorporating e-portfolios to becoming life-long learners. Another exploratory case study was performed by Atwater, Freeman, Butler, and Draper-Morris (2010) wherein teachers' interaction level with non-mainstream students was measured; however, the overarching goal of the study was to explore the need to improve cultural sensitivity training in teacher preparation programs. Woodside-Jiron and Gehsmann (2009) used the explanatory case

study method to look at teachers in high poverty yet effective schools with the purpose of examining possible shortcomings in school reform plans. My study was comparable to the afore-mentioned studies in the respect that the data under investigation were teacher perceptions of TDP to help inform TPD procedures.

As this study centered on gaining a better understanding of teacher perceptions of TPD, an explanatory, multiple-participant single case study fit the study's purpose. While data from multiple participants' descriptions were gathered, this study concerned a singular focus: gaining a better understanding of TPD. Therefore, a multiple-participant, single case study design was appropriate (Bragard, Schelstraete, Snyers, & James, 2012). For this study, my role as the researcher was to craft the interview protocol, facilitate the interview sessions, and listen objectively, free from any biases that could have led to misinterpretations or hasty assumptions. A clear analysis was, therefore, able to be conducted.

**Description and Justification of the Selection of Participants**

Teachers were purposefully selected and recruited based on their expertise in the realm of TPD (Merriam, 2009). Also candidates were chosen to reflect a variety of viewpoints from both males and females, as well as across subjects taught, years of teaching experience, ethnicities, and education levels. The participant criteria were developed to reduce the possible bias of a homogenous pool. The target participant sample size was 8-10, and my recruiting efforts resulted in 9 participants.

Additionally, Merriam (2009) urged qualitative researchers to establish the criteria participants are to meet and then match the selection of participants accordingly. The participant criteria included males and females who (a) are currently employed at a middle school, (b) have been a teacher for at least three years, (c) are representative of the total demographics onsite, and (d) have been a participant in a minimum of six TPD activities over the last three years.

To identify the pool of eligible candidates, some level of document analysis occurred. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission website was used (http://www.gapsc.com/Certification/Lookup.aspx) to determine potential candidates' length of service and area(s) of certification. Additionally, administration was asked to provide a copy of the sign-in sheets from TPD initiatives to determine who attended a sufficient number of TPD activities to be considered a qualified participant. Once those documents were examined, a list of potential candidates was generated. From the list, four to five men and four to five women were selected. For each gender group, a representation of subject areas, number of years of experience, and race were selected and invited to participate. When a candidate declined, another person was selected who matched the original as closely as possible.

All invitations were extended in person, either face-to-face or over the phone. An informed consent form was given to interviewees who accepted the offer to participate. The consent form showed Walden University's approval number for this study: 12-05-13-0187773. The consent form also explained the purpose and methods of the study, as well as reiterated the voluntary nature of participation.

**Protection of Participants**

The scope of this study did not encompass participants identified as vulnerable by the definitions provided by the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). Additionally, all OHRP protocols for participants were heeded. Participant confidentiality was preserved by using a password-protected data storage device, and numerically coding so names can be removed. Participants were provided informed consent notices so they knew that their participation was strictly voluntary, which means they could have terminated participation at any time without any repercussion; however, no participant chose to terminate his/her participation. Furthermore, participants were at a low risk of harm due to the nature of the study and the employment of anonymity.

In order to gain access to participants, the study was explained to the school administrators who granted me permission to conduct the study. Assurances were made and upheld to insure that the study did not interfere with the day-to-day business of the school, the monitoring of students, instructional time, or the preparation of instruction. My role was one of gathering, verifying, interpreting data, and reporting the findings to add to the body of knowledge on the topic. My current positions are as a teacher of regular-school-day students, a teacher of students in an after-school program, the coordinator of a Saturday school program, a department chair, administrative liaison, and mentor/exemplar teacher. I have held a previous position as an academic coach. The participants of this study were colleagues only; no superiors or subordinates, nor any teachers for whom I serve as a mentor/exemplar teacher. As such, my

current position held little to no influence on the collection of data. As a former academic coach, charged with leading many TPD sessions, I acknowledge that my bias is towards the beneficial nature of TPD.

**Data Collection**

The social constructive tradition is concerned with how humans create their reality in their interactions with others (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the questions were framed with this in mind. The data collected was in accordance with the conceptual framework and the inductive tradition of qualitative methodology. The interview protocol was reviewed by an expert in qualitative research to assure the appropriateness of each question, thus adding to the validity of this study.

Data collection entailed an interview protocol with two sets of questions. The first set of questions concerned background information on the participant, such as total years of experience, years at their current school, and post-graduate education level. The reason for these questions was to make transparent a variety of experience sets of the teacher population of the middle schools under study. The second set of questions pertained to participants' opinions, attitudes, and perceptions about TPD and how it could be improved in order to encourage implementation. Collecting background data was justified by giving the reader as accurate a picture of who the participants were. Collecting data on the perceptions of TPD was justified so that the objectives of the study were realized.

Appendix C provides the interview protocol. The interview questions link to the research questions that concern gaining teachers' perceptions of TPD, the connection between TPD and student achievement, and the factors that motivate teachers to implement changes. The questions were designed to cull teacher insights without leading them to answer in a particular way or with a particular suggestion for response. In addition, the questions were open-ended to promote honesty and a more thorough response, along with providing opportunities to follow up with probes (Merriam, 2009). In addition to the prepared interview protocol, further probing questions were added when the occasion arose in order to gain clarity and depth of information (Willis, 2005).

The length of each interview ranged from 45-75 minutes. Less time was spent gathering participant background data, 5-10 minutes, with the remaining time gathering perception data. Interviews were held outside of work hours at mutually agreed upon locations. Upon participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. Additionally, notes were kept on participants' non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and body language whenever it seemed pertinent, such as when the literal interpretation conflicted with the participant's intended meaning. A clean copy of the interview questions were brought to each session so that notes were easily added to the questions that provoked the reaction(s). Accuracy of participant responses was held as a high priority.

In order to track changes, I kept a reflective journal and personal impressions about the interview were notated during and/or immediately afterward. These notations were not meant to

augment or taint the data but simply to keep a record of what transpired to assist in remembering the discourse accurately. This journal was used to notate of the need for clarification or further explanation. To maintain confidentiality, participants were referred to by their initials in the notations. Additionally, when not in use, the journal was stored in a locked drawer as a security measure.

**Data Coding**

The assignment of codes to data must be done logically and thoughtfully (Stalp & Grant, 2001). As this research was inductive, the data determined the codes that emerged. The coding procedure used both *emic* and *etic* respects (Gough & Scott, 2000). The *emic* approach considers cultural differences (Niblo & Jackson, 2004), so the participants' answers were considered in light of their various backgrounds. To illustrate, while coding using the *emic* approach, the responses from teachers who have a similar number of years of teaching experience or have the same education level would be compared. In contrast, the *etic* approach compares answers across common experiences. Examples are: how all teachers must complete a minimum number of TPD hours, are evaluated annually using the same instrument, and are expected to follow district protocols. Accordingly, using the *etic* approach, all answers were considered collectively.

**Data Analysis**

To begin the analysis of data, the audio-recordings of all interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Qualitative data analysis was conducted including presenting a thick

and detailed description, transcribing, and data coding (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Ostovar-Namaghi, 2011). The constant comparison data analysis technique was utilized because this type of study requires ongoing scrutiny and interpretation of the interview data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Based in grounded theory research, the constant comparison method aids the researcher in developing prevailing themes (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011). After the first two interviews were transcribed, I began utilizing the constant comparison method during the transcription of all subsequent interviews. The study was inductive in analytical thought which made the constant comparison method appropriate because it entailed looking back at the previous interview data and determining what commonalities and contrasts the new interview data showed (Merriam, 2009).

As themes emerged, each new interview data were assigned to the previously determined themes and the need for new themes was considered. There were some anticipated themes, based on my own experiences and conversations with other TPD participants. For instance, non-feasibility was an expected theme. Data coded under this theme would include responses that point out a lack of time, resources, support, and/or confidence to implement the new training.

Regarding discrepant cases, due to the highly subjective nature of TPD experiences, responses were expected to be widely ranged. A planned technique was to uncover underlying particularities about the participant(s) whose responses vary from the norm (Glesne, 2011, p. 188). For example, if a participant led a TPD initiative there would be a responsibility to notate

this fact because that participant would likely have held stronger opinions on various facets of TPD.

Furthermore, information that seems contradictory suggests the need to synthesize data further into generalizations (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). To explain using a hypothetical situation, a participant may have said that there is a clear link between TPD and student achievement. If that participant later reported that he or she saw no value in TPD initiatives, this would have been considered a contradiction from his/her earlier statement. Further questioning could have revealed how veteran teachers believe that TPD helps new teachers grow whereas they see no value in it for themselves. So for that example, the contradictory information could be generalized into "applies to others but not to me." Clarification of seemingly contradictory information further validated the use of a semi-structured interview protocol so that follow-up questions were added as the need arose. Therefore, when analyzing data, I could be reasonably certain that coding took place accurately, leading into credibility and dependability measures.

**Credibility and Dependability Measures**

Due diligence was given to every aspect of this study to yield trustworthy findings. One credibility and dependability measure included the careful documenting of the steps taken in each phase of this study (Yin, 2003) further validating the use of a reflective journal. Another technique employed was member checks (Creswell, 2012; Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011). After the information had been coded and analyzed, participants were invited to review the conclusions drawn so any misinterpretations could be corrected (Creswell, 2009).

Furthermore, the data from multiple sources was triangulated by comparing the interview data, previous literature, and personal experience together (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The data were also triangulated by conducting short, follow-up interviews with all willing participants to gain their feedback on the study's findings, in order to eliminate interpretation mistakes (Gibbs, 2007). I conducted follow-up interviews with seven of the nine participants; one participant did not respond to my messages and another declined in agreeable way, relaying confidence in the results of the initial interview. The follow-up interviews were expected to last 10-15 minutes; however, each was conducted in less than ten minutes because no misinterpretations were reported. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was kept to document any changes made along the course of the study, thereby adding to its reliability and validity (Jiang & Cao, 2011). The audit trail was where I documented notes about how I went through the interview protocol. For example, in the results section there is a description of one of the interview questions yielding redundant answers with another question. So I made a notation of the redundancy beside the question, "Describe a TPD experience (real or imagined) that was positive. What made it (or would make it) a positive experience?" Other items I notated on the audit trail were probing questions that I found useful so that I had a reminder in case they became relevant in future interviews. Additionally I wrote down minor revisions to questions to avoid confusion. For example, I needed to add an explanation to the interview question, "Thinking back to your mandatory TPD experiences over the past couple of years, what stands out to you as noteworthy? What was noteworthy about it?" I had chosen the word *noteworthy* because it seemed to be

neutral, referring to experiences that made a memorable impression for any number of reasons. However, I noted that participants interpreted *noteworthy* as having a positive connotation. I added "It could be noteworthy because it was particularly good, bad, novel, timely, meaningful to you, or any reason it stands out in your mind." The addition of that explanation and why it was necessary were written on my audit trail. Hence, I can claim that due process was given to ensure an accurate disclosure of the research proceedings. Finally, the explicit details of the research process were documented and described, as much as would be relevant to further establish validity and reliability (Chongwon & Hye-won, 2010).

This study took a reflexive look at the findings based on the suggestions of Hollway and Jefferson (as cited by Glesne, 2011) who stated that trustworthiness is ascertained by determining what the observer noticed versus what was not noticed, the subjectivity that led to this heightened awareness, and possible alternatives to the interpretations drawn. As the data were looked at initially, there were trends noticed immediately whereas others were not noticed until subsequent analysis. Therefore, it is important to be aware of biases held that would heighten perceptiveness to certain viewpoints. Also, it is good practice to look back open-mindedly for what may have been missed before, and explore reasons for why these things were overlooked initially. With confidence that I had exhausted every avenue to collecting, analyzing, and coding data purely, I began the process of detailing the outcomes of the research project.

## Research Outcomes

### The Research Questions

This study sought to uncover truths concerning TPD with the goal of improving it and the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions of teacher professional development?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of the connection between professional development and student achievement?

RQ3: What do teachers report may motivate them to implement the content of teacher professional development?

All participants voiced concerns regarding TPD. Many of the teachers indicated that their willingness to participate in my study stemmed from wanting to do their part improving TPD practices which validated the need for this study as one step towards bringing about changes in TPD practices.

Data produced the theme of non-feasibility as a foremost theme. A lack of time to implement new expectations was mentioned by every participant. Some remarked that the training was too brief to allow for ample, or any, practice so they needed extra lesson preparation time to feel confident trying a new teaching style, which often made experimenting with it tedious and/or intimidating. Others stated that the training itself was partially responsible for the time shortage because many trainings are held during teachers' planning period, pushing back what they could have otherwise used that time to accomplish. Another expected theme was the

ever-changing expectations. Participants quoted or indicated a "this too shall pass" mentality and named "non-negotiable" district initiatives that were replaced by something else a short time later. Furthermore, I reviewed my plan to handle any discrepant cases; however, there were none to report.

Prior to beginning the study, I had considered the possibility of receiving contradictory responses, but no blatant contradictions emerged. One example of a seeming contradiction occurred at the beginning of my first interview. As we were sitting down, I reminded the participant that the study concerned teacher professional development. The participant muttered, "waste of time" in a semi-joking way. Later in the interview I asked the participant about any beneficial TPD attended. The participant described a series of math trainings that transformed classroom teaching techniques. I remarked that the positive recollection surprised me after the initial comment. The participant explained that the "waste of time" comment referred to TPD attended in Georgia, whereas the beneficial series of trainings were attended while living in another state.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question was: What are teachers' perceptions of teacher professional development? The interview protocol included questions designed to determine baseline perceptions regarding TPD. After asking questions about the participant's background, I began asking the interview questions to satisfy the goals of the study. I asked participants, "What is typically the first thought that pops into your head when you are told you must attend mandatory

teacher professional development?" All nine participants initially responded with a negative reaction, some of which were non-verbal, such as heaving a heavy sigh, exaggerated shoulder sag, or eye-rolling. Other responses were verbal; for example, one participant asked, "Because one more workshop is just the thing to magically fix all the problems of the education system?" Seven of the nine followed up quickly with a positive or neutral comment such as, "Well, it can be good/helpful sometimes," or "It really depends on what the training is on and who is leading it." Two participants added anecdotal statements. Participant 5 described receiving an email and "shuttered" upon learning of a workshop that had to be attended during planning time. Participant 5 was even more discouraged upon discovering who the session leader was since it was someone who had made disparaging comments about some of Participant 5's colleagues on several previous occasions. In another interview, Participant 2 was unhappy when the assistant principal made teachers aware of an upcoming TPD session, but Participant 2 decided would be "a good thing." When I asked why, Participant 2 responded, "It was a chance to sit there and grade essays." I did not think to ask at that time if essays were graded during the TPD session, but during the follow-up interview I did ask. Participant 2 replied, "Yeah some, but I actually did pay attention to most of it [the TPD]." Having gained sufficient data for the first research question, I proceeded to the next interview protocol question.

I received a variety of responses to the question, "Thinking back to your mandatory TPD experiences over the past couple of years, what stands out to you as noteworthy?" Although I choose the word *noteworthy* in the question as a neutral term that could bring to mind positive or

negative experiences, and added an explanation to clarify the question's intent, responses were that of positive experiences. Several participants described specific TPD sessions, most commonly those regarding the new teaching standards. The district under study recently changed to a more rigorous curriculum; hence, many TPD efforts focused on that topic, which the participants felt were necessary and relevant. Some participants described favorable elements of TPD sessions such as hands-on practice, opportunity for peer collaboration, and the creation or examination of a useful teaching tool. The answers regarding positive aspects of TPD were expected and consistent with my own TPD experiences, so I moved forward.

I did not ask the question, "How would you describe the amount of TPD that this school requires; too much, too little, or about right?" because participants had already made it clear that they thought there has been too much TPD. Eight of the nine participants made a comment to that effect when I asked the question about what first pops into their heads; most commonly, a weary sounding, "Another one?" Additionally, answers to the question, "Describe a TPD experience (real or imagined) that was positive. What made it (or would make it) a positive experience?" became redundant with what they already described as noteworthy. Having gathered data regarding research question 1, I moved on to the portion of the interview protocol designed to satisfy research question 2.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question identified the purpose of TPD: What are teachers' perceptions of the connection between professional development and student achievement? This

research question sought to unveil what level of importance teachers place on TPD to do their jobs more effectively. I asked participants, "What is your perception of the connection between professional development and student achievement?" There was little variation in the answers. While two participants immediately replied that there is no connection between TPD and student achievement, they both immediately added comments to show that their initial response was not an absolute, but more of a hyperbolical comment. All nine participants said that it depended on what the TPD is regarding. Complaints were made about TPD that increased teacher workload. Participant 1 and Participant 2 talked about the new expectations regarding writing instruction and lamented the amount of time they need to spend grading the additional number and length of papers required.

On the other hand, there was more positivity towards TPD sessions that changed current practice to a specific methodology. For example, Participant 3 explained that Social Studies teachers have always been required to assign a five paragraph expository essay. Last year, Social Studies teachers were trained on the Document-Based Questioning (D.B.Q.) format. In this format, the students are given several excerpts by different authors on the same topic, often featuring differing or opposing viewpoints. Students are asked to compare and contrast the opinions of the authors, then decide which one makes the strongest case and write a thesis statement to that effect. Students then compose an essay that uses evidence from the texts to explain and justify their choice. Immediately after being trained on the DBQ format, Participant 3 admitted being unhappy, thinking that it would be more work (something in addition to the five

paragraph essays already required). But then Participant 3 realized that it was just a different, more uniform approach to teaching writing that increases the rigor for students. Participant 3 said that, in many ways, using the D.B.Q. format made teaching writing easier because it is a "specific, step-by-step writing procedure" that shows students how to critically evaluate and use evidence to create and support their thesis statements. Participant 3 also liked that Social Studies and ELA teachers now use the same writing terminology so "students feel more comfortable and confident" when they create a piece of writing. Overall, participants indicated that when TPD called for an increase in teacher workload, there was negativity and resistance; on the other hand, student achievement is positively impacted via TPD when TPD provided a more efficient and/or effective method of providing instruction. This question produced the most positive responses regarding TPD. However, participant responses became somewhat more negative when I moved forward in the interview.

The next interview question was, "The School Improvement Plan includes TPD as a part of every indicator regarding student achievement. In your opinion, is this appropriate? Why or why not?" Participant 4 responded that it is appropriate to include TPD, but the TPD needs to be more appropriate. I asked for an explanation and the response was that teachers are forced to sit in TPD sessions, listening to a lengthy lecture about how lecturing is an ineffective teaching medium. Participant 4 added, "They preach to us about differentiating for our students, but don't differentiate for us. We all sit through the same thing [TPD], whether we need it or not." That sentiment was echoed by five other participants. Participant 6 noted that it is "unfair to force

good, capable teachers to go to these things just because it looks good to have it [TPD] listed on the some piece of paper [the school improvement plan]." The general feeling seemed to be that TPD was included on the school improvement plan more so because it is an expectation of a quality document, not necessarily a quality practice. Participants noted that TPD is good when needed, but should not be forced upon teachers because it was written into a document that would be lacking without a mention of school-wide TPD initiatives. Participants spoke at length on the subject, so feeling as if I had sufficient data for that interview question, I moved on to the following one.

Next I asked, "In general, how much impact does mandated TPD have in improving student performance?" The most common sentiment was that TPD is the only way for new, ineffective, and/or struggling teachers to improve practice; however, there are several factors that interfere. The most commonly, and hesitantly, named interference factor was a lack of accountability. Participants indicated that they put a new methodology into place when there is a follow-up measure of some sort. The most compelling follow-up measure mentioned was requiring the submission of student work samples demonstrating that the new strategy was implemented and to what level of effectiveness. Having an administrator or Board of Education member showing up unannounced was also given as a motivator, but less so. When I asked Participant 1 why, the response was:

> Well, not that I would ever do this of course (with a facial expression and tone of voice that indicated the contrary), but if someone comes to my class expecting to observe

> whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing now that I've been trained, and I'm not at that very moment, I can come up with any number of reasons to explain why. "We ran behind because of yesterday's fire drill," or "You should have been here yesterday," or what have you. On the other hand, if I have to submit something, I have been given umpteen opportunities to use the new way, so I can't really worm my way out of that.

There was a general consensus among participants that follow-up components are bothersome, but effective in gaining implementation. The interviews continued with the next question.

In answer to, "What could impact the connection between TPD and student achievement?" participants told me that making the TPD relevant to their teaching situation was key. Participant 7 said, "I went to an Economics workshop and it was wonderful because they gave us lesson plans and materials we could really use. And I have used them, and the kids learned a lot." Participant 3 also spoke about an Economics workshop (possibly the same one) and how the workshop leader took historic events, such as the Civil War, and explained their development from an economic standpoint. Participant 3 said it was, "neat to learn how to teach the kids about the same events through a fresh perspective, and they 'get it' when you talk about money." Additionally, most participants warmed up to a new initiative much quicker if there was a promise of a plausible upside for them. They wanted to be told, and be able to see, how the new way would save them time and/or from having to do something tedious. Participant 6 spoke about attending training on the CPS© Student Response System (https://www.turningtechnologies.com) when the district purchased it many years ago. When the

trainer demonstrated how much time and effort would be saved by having students use the clickers, Participant 6 remembered thinking, "I don't have to collect and grade quizzes by hand anymore. This is the coolest thing ever!" Again, the general perception was that including TPD in the school improvement plan increases student achievement when an initiative makes teachers' jobs more efficient, but otherwise was unsupported. Since I felt as if the goals of research question 2 were satisfied, I sought to gather data to answer the final research question.

**Research Question 3**

The final research question was: What do teachers report may motivate them to implement the content of teacher professional development? This question was crafted to determine the commonalities of productive TPD sessions. This was the crucial question to answer so that this project could go from a way to satisfy my curiosity to being an agent of positive social change. Knowing that changes need to be made, via research questions 1 and 2, earns greater importance when the blueprints for change are established, via research question 3.

I asked participants, "What do you report may motivate you to implement the content of teacher professional development?" Instead of discussing TPD methodologies that inspire implementation, participants admitted a level of anxiety that not implementing new strategies would be reflected on their annual evaluation. Participants also reiterated that having a follow-up component makes them more likely to incorporate new strategies. They explained that being made to show proof of implementation makes them try the new method sooner, which adds the advantage of applying the new skill while the training is still fresh. It also validates that they

learned something valuable, rather than wasting the time being trained on something they probably would not have ever used otherwise.

After probing further, I was able to gain insight regarding what facets of the training itself they found most effective. Eight out of nine participants mentioned hands-on activities, either throughout the presentation or as an opportunity to practice what was just learned. Four participants said they were relieved when there was no accompanying lengthy PowerPoint presentation; one called it "death by PowerPoint." Four said they wanted to leave with materials they could use in their classrooms, such as a rubric, workbook, graphic organizer, or quick resource. They noted that using the resource made them reflect back to the session in a positive way and also reminded them to put the training into use. I moved further into the interview protocol.

The next question was, "Describe a situation (real or hypothetical) in which a teacher would benefit from being told to attend a TPD session." Participants took their time formulating replies. All nine mentioned new teachers. Six participants followed up with a personal anecdote from their own experience or a colleague's. The most commonly mentioned topic was classroom management for new teachers; whereas it was the incorporation of technology, differentiation, and group work for "old school" teachers. Participant 4 was quick to note that being an *old school* teacher is different from a *veteran* teacher. An old school teacher, the participant explained, uses teacher-focused teaching methodologies, such as giving lectures to students sitting in straight, quiet rows; methodologies commonly considered outdated and less

effective according to newer research. Veteran teachers, on the other hand, have been teaching for many years, but stay current with best practices. I went on to the last interview question.

The final scripted question was, "In your opinion, how much does teacher professional development influence teacher methodology?" and the answers were neatly divided into thirds. Three participants said TPD has a moderate to strong influence; three indicated that TPD has some influence depending on the situation; three said it has very little influence. Teachers noted that some training has been necessary. Our district switched to the Common Core Teaching Standards and changed its teacher evaluation process, so training was needed to cover new expectations. Additionally, Georgia raised sales tax by one penny to generate money for technology in its schools, so over the last several years the district has been able to purchase Promethean boards, iPad carts, and new online learning programs, necessitating training on the new resources. However, all participants, even the "strong influence" group, opined that there has been too much TPD and that too many initiatives are here-today-gone-tomorrow so they are hesitant to embrace them. Having gathered the data to satisfy the goals of the study, I thanked participants for their time and willingness to be an agent of positive social change.

## Summary

This section began by justifying the choice of qualitative methodologies, the purposeful selection of participants, and how those participants were protected from harm. The research questions were reiterated. The social constructivist conceptual framework guided the creation of the data collection procedures (interviews). The data were coded as common themes emerged

and the data were analyzed via the constant comparison method. The study's quality was supported by the credibility and dependability measures taken, such as the triangulation of data, the use of a semi-structured interview protocol, and follow-up interviews.

The use of interview questions, and the questions themselves, were provided and categorized by the research question they were crafted to satisfy. The first research question sought to determine teachers' perceptions of TPD, which participants indicated was necessary for new/struggling teachers. Participants also included a need for sufficient opportunities to practice the new skill and found it more helpful when they walked away holding something concrete and immediately useful to them.

The second research question sought teachers' perceptions regarding the connection between TPD and student achievement. Participants said the connection was weakened due to the overwhelming number of initiatives enacted in a short timeframe, but helpful when they felt respected their professionalism and expertise. They also held positive opinions about TPD that refined practice rather than increased workload.

The third research question sought to identify the factors that motivate teachers to implement TPD. Participants wanted the TPD to be engaging by using hands-on methodologies and/or the incorporation of technology. Participants also indicated the need for a follow-up component, such as the submission of student work samples demonstrating the adoption of the new methodology.

Section 3 provides the following information: (a) a description of the project; (b) the study's goals and rationale; (c) a review of the literature and how it compared to the findings; (d) implementation implications regarding potential resources and barriers; (e) an evaluation of the project; and most importantly, (f) implications for social change, both local and far-reaching.

Section 3: The Project

## Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into how middle school teachers perceive TPD. The purpose of this section was to accomplish the following: (a) a reiteration of the project and its goals, (b) a definition of the problem, (c) the rationale behind why this project was an appropriate measure towards resolving the problem, (d) a literature review providing theoretical support for the study's genre, (e) a plan for implementation, (f) existing resources, (g) potential barriers, (h) an evaluation plan, and (i) a discussion of the implications for social change.

## Description and Goals

This project identified typical TPD practices at the middle school level and sought to discover the perceptions that middle school teachers hold of TPD, with the goal of providing stakeholders some insights that could improve TPD efforts. The district targeted for this study included schools whose demographics were wide-ranged, including inner-city, suburban, and somewhat rural. Due to the range of demographic representation, there is a heightened possibility that its findings will be generalizable and relevant to other schools and districts.

The problem identified was that districts are allocating some of their limited budgets to provide TPD in hopes of raising student performance to the levels demanded by legislation. However, there may be a *knowing-doing* gap insomuch as teachers are given the training, but it is uncertain that the training is causing the desired changes in teachers' practices. This project

addressed the problem by gathering teachers' perceptions of TPD, especially regarding its connection to student achievement. This project also sought to uncover what motivates teachers to change their methodology.

One of the project's goals was to improve TPD efforts so they have a stronger impact on teacher methodology. The hope was that improved teaching practices lead to higher levels of student achievement. In order to determine how to improve TPD, the flaws and highlights must be uncovered; therefore, another goal of this study was to determine what teachers claim made TPD more engaging and meaningful to them, as well as what TPD practices should be avoided. The overarching goal was to provide guidance for creators of TPD sessions to maximize their impact and increase the chance of improving student achievement.

## Rationale

This project was designed to delve into the psyche of teachers and understand of how they perceive TPD sessions, how much of an impact these TPD sessions have on their job performance and, in turn, on student achievement. Since this project revolved around perceptions rather than truth or falsity, an inductive data analysis was appropriate. The case study genre was selected because case studies center around events and the reactions of the people involved. Therefore, it fit the project: TPD events and the attending teachers' reactions to them. The problem was addressed through the interview protocol questions, coding the responses, and analyzing the resulting data. The conclusions that were able to be drawn were compiled so that they can be part of the solution to the problem because they add to the body of

knowledge regarding TPD and the results can be utilized to improve TPD efforts. People who design research-based TPD sessions have the information that this study yielded available to assist them. Although the district of this study has a unique set of challenges, the perception data and recommendations are worthy of consideration regardless of location.

## Review of the Literature

A second review of the literature was conducted in the ERIC and Education Research Complete databases. Search terms were: *case study results*, *constructivism*, *social constructivism, qualitative research*, *qualitative study results*, *quantitative research*, *quantitative study results, mixed-study methods, teacher professional development*, *staff development*, *constant comparison*, and *teacher perception*. Additionally searched was the Dissertation and Thesis at Walden University database. Search terms were *teacher professional development*, *case study, staff development*, *study limitations, constructivism, social constructivism, quantitative results* and *qualitative results*.

The legitimacy of using qualitative methodology for studies that aim to derive meaning from human experiences was proposed decades ago when Patton (1975) helped establish the qualitative methodology as a valid research format. In those days, quantitative methods were favored. Patton proposed that numerical data was preferred for gathering concrete evidence, but less appropriate when the research calls for complex interpretations of an event or experience. Since the latter better aligned with the intentions of my study, the qualitative methodology proved favorable.

Qualitative methods have evolved, gaining respect and popularity over the last four decades (Pierre, 2014). Qualitative procedures were frequently selected when gathering current-practice data along with participants' opinions for improvement, which fit nicely with the aims of this study. For example, Orr (2013) suggested using open-ended questioning regarding a program's strengths, weaknesses, outside opportunities, and threats that need to be diffused; open-ended questions encouraged participants to think deeply about the issues and formulate more comprehensive answers.

Both quantitate and qualitative methodologies have been applied effectively to study TPD. However, the scope of quantitative studies may be narrower than qualitative, especially regarding perceptions and/or opinions. Karagiorgi, Kalogirou, Theodosiou, Theophanous, and Kendeou (2008) admitted that their use of a closed-ended questionnaire limited the parameters of their study to objective statements that required inference to interpret.

Quantitative methodologies have also been used when a correlative or cause/effect relationship was being analyzed. For example, Smaby, Maddux, Richmond, Lepkowski, and Packman (2005) conducted a quantitative study to establish the extent that graduate admission test results indicated the graduate student's grade point average. Researchers have also employed quantitative techniques as a preview of the viability and/or usefulness of a new TPD initiative, such as Knowlton, Fogleman, Reichsman, and de Oliveira (2015) who organized a small-scale collaboration of middle and high school teachers with higher education faculty members. At the conclusion of the collaborative session, the researchers collected evaluative

survey data so they could give a knowledgeable recommendation to stakeholders regarding implementation of this TPD initiative on a larger scale.

Quantitative studies have also been utilized to look at the same issue from a different perspective. For instance, Ross and Bruce (2012) conducted a quantitative study to complement their earlier qualitative study (2007) regarding the same TPD issue. Finally, sometimes quantitative measures are chosen due to factors outside of the researchers' control. Hilton, Assunção-Flores, and Niklasson (2013) conducted a quantitative study involving 12 countries across Europe. They specified that qualitative methods would have been preferred but were impractical due to language barriers as their study involved many different countries.

Relatively few studies regarding TPD used quantitative methodology, and of those that exist, they are generally surveys used to get baseline information. Surveys can provide a wealth of information; however, without the ability to explain the answers chosen, the data are left to assumption and interpretation. A study conducted by Syh-Jong (2011) admitted the use of a questionnaire as the data collection instrument did not allow for a "deep investigation" of the contributing factors that led participants to their chosen answers (p. 674). Similarly, Yuejin, Patmor and Mills (2012) utilized a survey to collect data, but listed the lack of open-ended questions in their limitations section. A study by Steyn (2010) went as far as to suggest that TPD designed from the findings of quantitative research led to ineffective or otherwise unsatisfactory TPD efforts, due to the amount of assuming that quantitative methods entail.

Deeper consideration of the various facets of a program is important for revealing avenues for improvement (Alderton, 2008). Furthermore, McKeown and Fitzpatrick (2014) utilized qualitative methodologies to complement two earlier program evaluation studies that used quantitative methods; the researchers wanted to move from project evaluation (as determined via the earlier quantitative studies) to project improvement (as determined by the qualitative study). Parylo (2012) found that qualitative methods were preferred when studying professional development for principals. Beach and Willows (2014) stated that their use of qualitative methodology was effective because participants had the liberty to talk freely about their experiences. Hence, the qualitative method was preferred for my study because it aimed to improve current practices and to gain a deep understanding of teachers' perceptions, free from assumption and blind interpretations. All considerations taken together, my literature review indicated that qualitative methodologies were the better choice for attaining the goals of my study.

Furthermore, under the qualitative umbrella, a case study has been shown to be an appropriate study format. Gu, Jiao, Wang, Qin, and Lindberg (2012) conducted a case study to compare TPD efforts in China with those in Sweden to reveal the current state of technology use in TPD. Their study sought to determine the quality of TPD and used a case study format to collect their data to allow for a thorough examination of all areas of interest. Additionally, Spelman and Rohlwing (2013) conducted a case study because they purported that quantitative methods could not tell a complete story; a numeric-based approach would fail to take into

account the complexities of interactions of the participants with the TPD session itself and between one another. Therefore, they chose a case study so they could fully explore the intricacies of human perceptions. Another example is De Oliveira Souza, Lopes, and Pfannkuch (2015) who conducted a case study as a means to improve teaching practices, with notable success. Overall, the literature justified my selection of the case study format for my study.

The results of this study align with, and are triangulated by, the results of similar studies. Masuda, Ebersole, and Barrett (2012) conducted a qualitative study of 16 teachers to determine their level of willingness to engage in TPD in relationship to their number of years of experience. They found that teachers were more receptive to TPD when (a) they were engaged in the content delivery, (b) the TPD had a clear application to their teaching situation, and (c) they could take something away from the TPD session that they could incorporate immediately. Also, their study found that teachers had accountability and time-constraint concerns. Jao and McDougall (2015) found that teachers appreciated time to collaborate with each other and that TPD measures were effective when aligned with the stated goals for school improvement. Borg (2012) conducted a study concerned with TPD via teacher learning communities and found several factors contributed to the level of success, many of which were echoed by my study, including teacher buy-in and administrative support. Although the scopes of the previously-mentioned studies were different than mine, my results were analogous to theirs.

The genre of this project was that of professional development/training, which was appropriate as an opportunity to illustrate the results of this study on TDP. Current research was

informative in this project's design, in which much attention was placed upon the outcomes of TPD. My study was similar in some respects to that of Letiţia (2015) in that both studies were developed with the perspective that teachers who reflected on TPD would become better TPD participants and, in turn, more effective educators. Additionally, Beswick (2014) found that asking teachers to identify their own TPD needs, both in terms of content and delivery, made them more receptive towards TPD initiatives when they felt as if their input had been properly considered. Like Beswick, I wanted to measure the correlation of the teachers' perception of personal control over TPD to their level of investment they put forth. My study incorporated the tenets of Beswick's results because my interview questions included probes such as, "To what extent does having input into the TPD process impact your willingness to participate actively in the TPD session?" My results tended to agree with Beswick's; the teachers who I interviewed expressed that when they have some measure of control in the TPD they have a more positive attitude towards it and are more willing to implement new methodologies. Furthermore, Collinson (2012) explored the sources of teachers' values as a way to create meaningful TPD. In her study, the data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. My study was informed by Collinson's coding procedures. Like Collinson, I reduced the data by their commonalities into various codes. Then, as new data were added, I refined and then further reduced them as well. Having reviewed the literature, I began to consider implementation possibilities.

## Implementation

The first step in implementation was to develop a short TPD session that took as much of the participants' collective advice into account as possible. That mini-session was sent to the participants via email and feedback was requested and implemented. Next, a presentation was crafted that gave a description of the rationale, methodology, and importance of the study. The presentation also included and focused on the results, and suggestions for using those results. Another portion of the presentation was the TPD session that the study's participants were asked to view and provide commentary regarding.

The next step was to share the presentation and example mini-lesson with district decision-makers, such as the school superintendent's designee and the cooperating principals who accepted the invitation to this presentation. These men and women engaged in the example mini-lesson received first-hand experience which may have helped them better connect with the results. This connection, if indeed forged, likely made the material more meaningful and aided retention. These procedures sought to assist TPD decision-makers both at the district and the school level to better match teacher expectations to future TPD offerings, according to the study's findings. During the creation of the implementation plan, the potential resources and existing supports also were examined.

### Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The primary potential resource is the existing portion of the district's budget already designated for TPD. Also, the district that this study involved qualified for Race to the Top

(2009) grant monies. So in addition to the extra money, there is a more conducive atmosphere towards resources that support reaching student achievement goals. When the superintendent's designee met with me regarding this study's results, she expressed a heightened interest in hearing what the teachers indicated would make them more likely to attune to and implement training in best practices in light of the extra pressure that came with the grant money. These resources have a substantial upside; however, it is also wise to consider potential barriers.

**Potential Barriers**

The largest expected barrier is finding time to see these presentations to fruition, which entails arranging a time to meet with principals and/or other stakeholders who want the information but were unable to attend the presentation with the superintendent's designee. At her behest, I made all the principals in the district aware that I have these results and I would arrange time to meet with them on their schedule if they wish to meet with me. The superintendent's designee said she would make people aware at the district level. These meetings may prove challenging to arrange because everyone has a tight schedule. Another potential barrier is that some decision-makers may be resistant to change current protocols due to the red tape entailed. Furthermore, some teachers may not respond to new methodologies, either because they fear new ways or because they would not be swayed to change their current teaching methodologies regardless of how the TPD is presented. However, those are not unconquerable obstacles, so it was worthwhile to create the proposal and timetable for implementation.

**Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The proposal for implementation would depend upon district decision-makers, if they choose to use this study's findings at all. Part of the presentation given to the superintendent's designee suggested the following two-part proposal for implementation and timetable. Part 1: For any TPD sessions already developed for the 2015-2016 school year, presenters are to look over the suggestions of my study and make any small changes possible. Two changes are strongly recommended for immediate addition: (a) Teachers identified for mandatory attendance are to be given a reason and (b) have at least one follow-up session. These ideas were strongly identified by the study's participants as necessary for fostering implementation. Teachers must feel as if there is some logical reason why they must be there; otherwise they are likely to be resistant before they even arrive to the TPD session. Additionally, once the session ends, they need to know that there would be a follow-up session, both for accountability and support purposes. Part 2: Beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, TPD should use the rest of the findings of this study to guide the crafting of TPD sessions from inception. One of the remaining recommendations based on this study's findings was to teach TPD sessions in a manner that reflects the topic of the TPD session, if possible or, if not, by utilizing best teaching practices. To explain, if the TPD session is concerning the use of technology in the classroom, the attending teachers should learn through using technology hands-on rather than watching a PowerPoint or hearing a lecture. If the TPD topic is not regarding a teaching methodology, the sessions should be designed using best teaching practices utilizing more learner-led rather than

instructor-led activities. Another recommendation based on the results of this study would be to prioritize district initiatives and any resulting TPD these initiatives require, then spread the TPD sessions over time, beginning with the highest priority initiatives and continuing forward after time for mastery has elapsed. Participants indicated that they felt overwhelmed by the amount of TPD and expressed that the new initiatives came too quickly one after another, making initiatives sometimes seem transitive and, therefore, ignorable. The data indicated that TPD would be better received when teachers are given one new technique to learn at a time. Another recommendation based on the results of this study is, whenever plausible, let the new initiative and its corresponding TPD replace or streamline current teaching methodologies, rather than initiatives that increase teacher workload. Increasing teacher workload may be unavoidable at times, depending on the needs of the students. However, when initiatives are meant to update former methodologies, I recommend that the TPD session make it clear which expectation is being replaced so teachers know that it is a change in, rather than an addition to, current practice. For example, participants talked about TPD regarding teaching students how to create online portfolios; teachers were unclear if the online portfolio was in addition to, or a replacement for, the current use of student writing folders. Teachers who perceived the online portfolios as a change were more receptive to learning about it than teachers who thought that both the online portfolios and the writing folders were expected. That surmises the recommendations this study produced. Moving forward, in order to gain implementation, the roles and responsibilities must be considered.

### Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The primary roles of the student researcher included: (a) due diligence in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to draw accurate conclusions; (b) presenting the findings of the study to district decision-makers; and (c) being available for assistance in clarification and/or implementation. The role of TPD presenters would be to use the guidance this study yielded to make more effective TPD sessions. The role of district decision-makers was hearing the results of this study and deciding to what extent they wish to incorporate its findings. The role of principals would be to oversee TPD sessions to measure if the TPD sessions conform to the new TPD protocols (assuming this study leads to new TPD protocols), and to determine if/how the new TPD protocols impact teacher engagement and incorporation.

## Project Evaluation

At the conclusion of the presentation, there would be a formative evaluation. Attendees would be asked to complete a questionnaire indicating: (a) how valid they found the results of the study, (b) how useful they found the example lesson, and (c) the level of impact this information had on their perceptions on TPD. Ultimately, however, the project would be evaluated by the teachers who participate in future mandatory TPD sessions. A formal evaluation of teachers participating in future TPD session once recommended changes are made (if changes are made based on my research) would be the best measure of the effectiveness of this project, but such an evaluation is outside the scope of this study. However, if this study brings about the anticipated changes, the level of engagement that teachers show in TPD should

increase, which in turn would boost the likelihood of implementation. It is expected that student achievement will rise when teachers are willing to abandon less effective teaching practices in favor of the more effective ones they learn in TPD sessions. There are also some outcomes based indications. One outcomes based indication would be in teacher engagement and willingness to implement new methodologies. Another outcomes based indication would be in rising student achievement levels. These types of evaluations are ongoing and reiterative, so if more TPD efforts align with the findings of this study and student achievements rise, district decision-makers are likely to compile successful TPD methodologies into protocol. These potential impacts may be a provocative source for future research development questions and projects of study.

## Implications Including Social Change

### Local Community

There are implications for positive social change at the local level. This project addressed the needs of the teachers in this district because using TPD methodologies that the teachers themselves have identified as effective would make TPD more meaningful to them. Additionally, this project addressed the needs of district stakeholders because it would help them meet student learning outcomes and goals. It also addressed the needs of the students in this district in encouraging teachers to be more open to learn and adopt best teaching practices. Finally, it addressed the needs of the families of the students because their children would be

learning at higher levels, which could lead to more and improved opportunities for college scholarships and/or more marketable skills when seeking a career.

### Far-Reaching

This project also has the potential for far-reaching desirable outcomes because a better educated populous positively correlates with young people having higher confidence levels and marketability, leading to a higher income base. Students who achieve better in secondary school are more likely to be admitted to college and be successful there. Even for students who move away from this geographical region, they take their higher skill levels with them to improve another community. Additionally, teacher leaders and/or district leaders who relocate can spread best TPD practices across to other districts.

## Conclusion

This section began by revisiting the goals and rationale of the study. The literature was reviewed to provide further guidance and justifications of various aspects of the study. A plan for implementation was discussed, including the existing supports, potential barriers, and suggested timetable. The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders were given, and a project evaluation process was described. Finally, the implications for positive social change were proposed, both local and far-reaching.

Section 4 contains the following (a) a reflection of the project, (b) the strengths and limitations of the study, (c) a detailed analysis of the project, (d) a detailed analysis of the

student's capacities as a researcher, (e) implications for positive social change, and (f) future research suggestions.

# Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect teachers' perception data regarding TPD across a large, diverse school district; this information would be provided to district stakeholders and others interested in wanting to craft more effective TPD. A review of the literature, both prior to and after the collection of data, support three conclusions: (a) TPD is more likely to be implemented when it includes a follow-up component, (b) TPD is better received when there is a justifiable reason for mandatory attendance, and (c) TPD is better received when the instruction itself models effective teaching methodologies.

This section will include the following: (a) the strengths, limitations, and potential recommendations of the study; (b) project development and analysis; (c) my reflections on the entire research process as I analyze how this project study has benefitted me as a teacher-leader and student researcher; (d) a discussion of the potential for positive social change; and (e) the ideas for future research for related areas of concern.

## Project Strengths and Limitations

This project had several strengths. Its primary strength was that it yielded the data needed to answer the research questions. The semi-structured interview protocol provided the structure of set questions with the flexibility of follow-up questions and probes. The study's next strength was the utilization of the social constructivist perspective to craft a case study design which yielded in-depth analysis of perception data. Merriam (2009) would agree with my choice

of qualitative case study rather than a quantitative method because she contended that a qualitative case studies are used when the researcher is interested in "insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (p. 42). Furthermore, Sudzina (2000) stated that the use of the social constructivist case study is an effective method of problem-solving. The problem under scrutiny was that of determining the level and source of negativity towards TPD. Additionally, use of a qualitative study granted me the freedom to seek explanations and clarity, and to ask follow-up questions to minimalize reporting and analysis error. There were, however, some limitations.

The two main limitations of this study were narrowness and lack of generalizability. The primary limitation of this study was the narrowness of its scope. The goal of the study was to provide a deep understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding TPD, which was met; however, no data could be yielded to determine the benefits, if any, of incorporating the conclusions the study purported. This study did spark interest in studies on related topics that I would like to pursue if the future provides me an opportunity; for example, various program evaluations for recent district initiatives. The other limitation was its lack generalizability. Its population was a nonrandom sample. I used purposeful sampling to make sure a variety of perceptions were voiced. However, in order to have confidence that the results can be duplicated, the participant population would need to have been randomly selected. Also, the number of participants was kept to nine, which on one hand, preserved the in-depth examination of data; but on the other hand, limited the study's applicability to other situations. Limitations occur with every study,

though, and I was willing to accept the afore-mentioned ones to be able to craft some viable recommendations.

## Recommendations Based on the Study

The interview data analysis netted many opportunities to reevaluate current practices and make improvements. The primary recommendation is to change current TPD presentation protocols in the following ways: (a) provide opportunities for hands-on practice before the session ends, (b) avoid the "do as I say not as I do" approach, and (b) add a follow-up component.

For starters, participants voiced the desire to get an opportunity to put the newly-acquired skill into action before the training session ended. They wanted a safe arena, where they can receive feedback and guidance, before trying something new with their students. Practice opportunities were valued even more by novice teachers who tend to feel increased pressure to look and feel confident in front of their students. Secondly, participants indicated that they get discouraged and annoyed when they must sit through a workshop where the presenters *tell* about more effective methodologies, but *use* ones they claim to be less effective, making the training seem hypocritical and even demeaning. The third change the data recommend was to add a follow-up component to every TPD session. Although the participants did not like having to provide some documentation of implementation, they admitted that doing so made them take the TPD more seriously. Follow-up measures also pushed teachers to implement the new procedure more quickly, which had the added benefit of keeping the information fresher in their memories.

Furthermore, the follow-up measure that participants indicated as the best was the submission of student work samples which give a fairly accurate picture of how well implementation went, and cause no added work for the teachers, who are already under so many time constraints. Moving on from the conclusions of the study, I also wish to report on the changes that this process had on me personally.

## Scholarship

I became interested in improving TPD after personal experiences, ranging from those that were phenomenal, career-changing, and positive, to those that were terrible. I have also had the pleasure and opportunity to lead various sessions and I learned a plethora of valuable insights once I was on the other side of the lectern. In my years of interacting with other teachers, I have consistently found that we want to learn, improve, and help our students be successful. Although I have heard a myriad of complaints about TPD, I have never heard that TPD should be done away with altogether. While it seems as if teachers view TPD with exaggerated negativity, they also know and respect its value. Thus, I feel passionate about improving TPD and chose this study as one step in that process.

Part of my rationale for choosing to attend Walden University is the strong commitment to being agents of positive social change. My courses at Walden University prepared me well for the intricacies of the research process. Moreover, the instruction and guidance of my former and current committee chairs have been of primary importance in the successful completion of this project study. Throughout my time as a Walden student, I have steadily grown personally,

intellectually, and professionally. I have deep gratitude to Walden University for all of its support along this journey full of both demands and rewards. I am pleased to say that I have added to Walden's legacy of positive social change, which leads to me to a discussion of how I developed and evaluated my project study.

**Project Development and Evaluation**

I have been involved in the development of many projects that involved collaboration, dedication, and mental stamina; projects that felt weighty of importance at the time, but have paled in comparison to this project study. However, those numerous smaller projects helped me develop the problem-solving skills I needed to bring this project study to fruition. My past experience, including my graduate school tenure, taught me how to use collaboration effectively, as well as how to be flexible as the project grows and develops. Drawing wisdom from my background, and the preparation I received through Walden, gave me the confidence to conceive and nurture this project study with realistic objectives, theoretically sound methodologies, and outcomes supported by reason and previous literature. The project was a win-win in that I have added scholarly information to the body of research on the topic of TPD (beneficial to others), and I have grown as an educator, scholar, and professional (beneficial to self). Additionally, benefits were manifested in the form of leadership and change.

**Leadership and Change**

As a youngest child with six older brothers and sisters, and the youngest grandchild of fourteen, I was not accustomed to or comfortable with being the leader in my family

relationships. I began my educational path days as a shy, quiet girl throughout elementary and middle school. However, as a curious and intelligent young lady, I eventually outgrew my shyness and fell naturally into leadership roles beginning in high school and continuing throughout college. Today, my professional experiences are filled with leadership roles and titles, and I consistently meet the expectations for them all. Therefore, taking on a challenging academic task such as pursuing a Doctorate degree from a highly-regarded university came as no surprise to anyone who knows me. Although my leadership ability was above par before I enrolled at Walden, my participation in this endeavor has further honed my leadership skills by adding theoretical knowledge, first-hand research experience, and a certain degree of moxie that comes with questioning the protocols determined by one's superiors. Furthermore, I have many positive feelings when analyzing myself as a scholar.

**Analysis of Self as Scholar**

I have always been a solid writer; from short stories to poetry to plays, I have pleased different types of audiences and gained accolades for my writing. It was with no small shock, therefore, when my first proposal draft was returned with a great deal of necessary corrections and suggestions for significant changes. There were so many red track changes across its page that my draft looked like it was bleeding, cut by a thousand tiny blades. Although I did not have much appreciation at the time for such detailed feedback, I see now that it was exactly the type of honing I needed, trimming off unnecessary bits so that the message, without embellishment or convolution, could be transmitted to the reader. Over time, I realized that the feedback was not

meant as a personal attack against me, but was directed to make me a better writer and scholar. Due to this intense, recursive writing process, my writing has grown tremendously; but not just my academic writing. My every day correspondence has become succinct, with little chance for misinterpretation. Additionally, my creative writing has also improved with the higher attention I pay to details, especially in more precise word choice. I cannot pinpoint the moment when I went from frustration with the red track changes to being grateful for them; however, I know that the transformation did take place. Track changes meant that people were reading my work and helping me to improve. Moving forward, my self-reflection continues with my role as a practitioner.

**Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

Educators pride themselves in having subject-area expertise coupled with a knack for sharing their knowledge in such a way that others can learn. Having both qualifications, the subject-area expertise and the ability to teach, are equally important. Although that observation may seem obvious, it was not something I thought about until recently when I got a unique opportunity to go to a workshop to learn how to do some basic computer programming. The presenters had an impressive amount of skill and knowledge about writing computer code; however, they did not have the knack for communicating it effectively to their pupils. The tension was growing on both sides of the lectern. Although it was somewhat frustrating, I am glad I attended because I gained some neat information and skills, but more so because it made me reflect on effective teaching practices. The hidden learning opportunity (the importance of

effective teaching practices) may have been lost on me if I was not creating this project study at the time. So again, my Walden experiences have helped me notice and analyze better.

Another benefit of my tenure at Walden is that I have become more reflective about my own experiences and more readily draw parallels to those of my colleagues and students. I have had many struggling students throughout the years. And I have heard the complaints about students who do not learn because they are not motivated. I knew that is rarely the case, of course. But now I had first-hand proof because I was in that computer lab, crammed with teachers on a Saturday of summer break, with no incentive other than to learn some geek jargon and nifty computer tricks. We were willing and motivated, but the information was simply inaccessible to us. That experience, due to my increased analytical skills, made me reflect on TPD practices. The attendees at TPD are college-educated, intelligent people; however, they may not have the aptitude, previous experience, or any number of other qualifiers to leave from the TPD session with 100 percent ability to implement their newly-acquired methodologies. TPD leaders must consider that their audience is going to consist of intelligent, educated professionals. On the other hand, the TPD leaders must also acknowledge that even intelligent, educated professionals are unlikely to automatically absorb the information and return to the classrooms able to implement perfectly. As I gathered data for this study, I reflected on the balance of TPD: (a) being brief to respect the time of busy individuals, (b) including enough elaboration to be clear, (c) staying relatable to people of varying backgrounds and aptitudes, and (d) being engaging. My own TPD protocols have changed due my participation in this project

study now that I have further insight into teachers' perceptions regarding TPD. I used to err more on the side of brevity and respect of my audience's intellect. Now I better understand the frustrations of TPD that does not include sufficient practice time. Additionally, I previously viewed a follow-up component as seeming punitive or as a lack of confidence in my colleagues' professionalism, ability, and/or willingness to implement new methodologies. Now, I see the follow-up component as essential. Once follow-up components become routine, negativity towards them would diminish. Therefore, participation in this project study and the reflections it required has had a tremendous impact on me as a practitioner. More importantly, this project has great potential for positive social change.

## The Project's Implications for Social Change

The immediate impact of this project has been opening my eyes to how participants perceive TPD so that I can best meet their needs when I am presenting and/or creating TPD sessions. In addition, due to my tenure as a student researcher, I have grown in knowledge and confidence, which has made me a better TPD session leader. Furthermore, an unexpected benefit of leading this study is that I have become a better *participant* in TPD. Now that I have had an inside look into the perceptions of my colleagues, I am more enthusiastic and positive towards TPD and do what I can to counteract any negativity I encounter from others.

An anticipated change is that TPD offered by others at my school should improve. My principal reviewed the project's outcomes and suggestions, and promptly changed our school's TPD protocols to (a) always include a follow-up component, (b) include a written justification of

the participants mandated to attend, and (c) include at least one opportunity for hands-on practice. Additionally, after reviewing the outcomes and recommendations with the superintendent's designee, district TPD protocols are changing to include a follow-up component and hands-on practice. The site district has also agreed to look at the other recommendations and decide upon their feasibility and appropriateness.

In the near future as TPD protocols change, my expectation is that TPD shall be more meaningful and implemented with more fidelity. Additionally, with the requirement of a follow-up component, inadequacies in implementation can be identified and addressed quickly. Ultimately, these changes will lead to improved teaching practices, which yield higher student achievement. Another benefit of all of this is that teacher morale would improve as teachers see their students being more successful. This leads me to a discussion of this project's implications and applications, as well as potential future projects.

## Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Districts hoping to establish effective TPD protocols or improve their TPD practices should consider what the participants of this study had to say. Also, TPD leaders would benefit from being made aware of these perceptions so they can prepare a more engaging, meaningful session. Administrators would benefit from knowing what teachers are saying about TPD to heighten their sensitivity to potential barriers their teachers may have in implementing TPD. And teachers should know how their counterparts perceive TPD so that they can help each other

defeat any negativity and focus instead on the overarching goal of increased student achievement.

One compelling possibility for future research would be to identify to what extent the changes in TPD protocol affected perceptions towards TPD. Another provocative study would be a comparative analysis with TPD sessions; one created using the tenets purported from this study and one lacking such considerations, to compare and contrast teachers' perceptions of each. A longitudinal study could demonstrate how improved TPD protocols correlate with student achievement. As scholars look at current practice and become passionate about the need for improvement in education, I hope that my project study can be useful in some capacity. Additionally, I plan to identify suitable publication outlets and professional organizations to disseminate the research to further the body of knowledge in the area of TPD.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers have a difficult job. They are under tight scrutiny. They are often heavily criticized and sometimes deemed to be little more than overpaid babysitters who enjoy work-free summers. When students are successful, the credit goes to the students and the parents; when students are not successful, the blame goes to the teachers. It stands to reason, therefore, that an occupation so demanding would provide plenty of support through TPD that is held to as high a standard as teachers are.

In this section, I began by considering this project study's strengths and limitations. The recommendations that this study yielded were reported. Then I moved onto the scholarship that

went into the study. I explained the project development and evaluation. Next, I gave more personal impacts of the study, such as its impact on my leadership and change, as well as analyses of myself as a scholar and a practitioner. The next topic was the project's potential impact on social change. This section ends with implications, applications, and directions for future research.

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# Appendix A: The Project

## Timeline

- February-June 2014: Gathered and analyzed teacher perception data on Teacher Professional Development (TPD).
- July-November 2014: Using analyzed data, created a presentation for the Board of Education (BOE) members and stakeholders.
- January 2015: Scheduled presentation and sent invitations.
- February 2015: Met with Principal and District Superintendent Designee to present findings and discuss the viability of implementing the study's recommendations.
- June 2015: Met with Principals and District Educational Director to discuss the study's findings. At the request of the District Educational Director, I made all the principals in the district aware that the study was conducted and made myself available to meet with them to provide the information at their request. Also, the District Educational Director made her colleagues aware and extended the offer of providing the information to them.

Presentation Agenda – *Towards More Effective TPD* – Laura Hooks

| | |
|---|---|
| 3-5 minutes | Introduction of myself, my credentials, and the perceived need for change regarding TPD. |
| 5-8 minutes | Expression of gratitude for attendance and willingness to hear with an open-mind. Explanation my research questions and what led to their development (establishment of the purpose of the study). |
| 10 minutes | Explanation of the collection and analysis of data. Introduction of a TPD session created using the methodologies wrought from the study's data. |
| 20 minutes | Hands-on activity: exemplar TPD session. |
| 10 minutes | Discussion regarding how the exemplar TPD is different from current TPD practice. Request participant thoughts and feedback. |
| 5 minutes | Participants asked to complete a session questionnaire. |

## Handout 1 – The Basic Components of the Study – Laura Hooks

- Participants were selected and invited to represent both genders and to include a variety of personalities and teaching experiences.
- Nine teachers agreed to participate and were interviewed for around 90 minutes by Ms. Hooks using open-ended questions regarding their perceptions regarding Teacher Professional Development (TPD).
- After the data were gathered, transcribed, and analyzed, Ms. Hooks conducted short follow-up interviews to make sure there were no misinterpretations.
- Analysis of the data led to these conclusions:
    - Teachers agree that TPD is necessary, especially for new and/or struggling teachers.
    - Teachers perceive that our district is taking on too many initiatives in too short of a time. Teachers feel overwhelmed and somewhat frustrated because they report that the training is often transient.
    - Although teachers were not fond of this practice, having a follow-up component is a valuable tool for encouraging speedy implementation and checking for deficiencies.

- Teachers ask that the presentations model effective teaching strategies. If possible, use the session to demonstrate the strategy being taught. If not, use participant-driven methods, rather than instructor-driven.
- When feasible, allow teachers to opt-out if they can demonstrate that they already have proficiency in the TPD's subject matter. Proof of mastery can be taken from teacher evaluations, student satisfaction survey results, parent satisfaction survey results, or another source deemed suitable by the school administrator.

**Handout 2 – Exemplar Lesson**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher professional development topic – **The use of novelty to spark interest and real-world application**. | Teacher: Okay class, as you know, today is Business World Day! You were to have chosen an outfit as if you are working in an office building. | Teacher: I see you have all remembered and followed "suit." Okay, here are the group options. Choose one based on your interests:<br><br>Group 1=Financial Institutions.<br>Group 2=Auto Production.<br>Group 3=Care of Animals.<br>Group 4=Art Galleries.<br>Group 5=Music Production.<br>Group 6=Performing Arts. |
| Teacher circulates while the students complete the assignment. Once they are all done, students report their group's profession and the credentials needed to get a job in that field. | Students come get the packet with various professional careers given. Each career has various websites listed that the students can go to in order to get the information they need. | Teacher: One member of each group comes up to get a laptop. The other members are to get the instruction packet. Your goal is to find out what credentials you will need to qualify for the position your group is assigned. |

**Reflection on the Project Presentation and Exemplar TPD Session**

Please complete this anonymously and honestly:

1. To what extent do you find the study's findings to be valid?
    a. Not at all or very little.
    b. Some of it was valid.
    c. Most of it was valid.
    d. Almost all of it.

    If you would like to be more specific, please explain your choice here:

2. To what extent did you find the example lesson useful?
    a. Not at all or very little.
    b. Somewhat useful.
    c. Mostly useful.
    d. Very useful.

    If you would like to be more specific, please explain your choice here:

3. To what extent will this presentation (the results of the study and/or the example lesson) change your perceptions about teacher professional development?

    a. Not at all or very little because I already saw the need for change.

    b. Not at all or very little because I did not agree with the information presented.

    c. Some change in my perception are likely to take place.

    d. Many changes in my perception are likely to take place.

    e. Changes in my perception are likely to take place, but not based on the information contained in this presentation.

    f. Other.

    If you would like to be more specific, please explain your choice here:

Any Additional Comments are Valued:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND YOUR FEEDBACK!

# Appendix B: Interview Protocol

I. Regarding Participant Background:

   a. Tell me a little about your background (number of years teaching, number of years at this school, education level, etc.).

   b. What from your background/experience, if anything, do you think has had an impact on your opinions about TPD? What impact does it have?

II. Regarding Research Question 1:

   a. What is your perception of teacher professional development?

   b. What is your perception of mandatory teacher professional development?

   c. What is typically the first thought that pops in your mind when you are told you must attend TPD?

   d. Thinking back to your mandatory TPD experiences over the past couple of years, what stands out to you as noteworthy? What was noteworthy about it?

   e. How would you describe the amount of TPD that this school requires; too much, too little, or about right? What makes you say that?

   f. Describe a TPD experience (real or imagined) that was positive. What made it (or would make it) a positive experience?

III. Regarding Research Question 2:

a. What is your perception of the connection between professional development and student achievement?

b. The School Improvement Plan includes TPD as a part of every indicator regarding student achievement. In your opinion, is this appropriate? Why or why not?

c. In general, how much impact does mandated TPD have in improving student performance?

d. What could impact the connection between TPD and student achievement?

IV. Regarding Research Question 3:

a. What do you report may motivate you to implement the content of teacher professional development?

b. Describe a situation (real or hypothetical) in which a teacher would benefit from being told to attend a TPD session.

c. In your opinion, how much does TPD influence teacher methodology?