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How High School Teachers Perceive the Quality of Professional Development

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Walden University

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

How High School Teachers Perceive the Quality of Professional Development

by

Leslie Puente-Ervin

M.S., Walden University, 2007

B.A., Plattsburgh University, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Higher Education and Adult Learning

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Abstract

New Jersey is 1 of 46 states to enroll in President Obama's Race–to–the–Top Initiative. Participating states must adopt national standards, revise teacher evaluation procedures, and administer new state assessments. States are prioritizing quality professional development (PD) to prepare teachers for these rapid shifts. The overall problem studied was how high school teachers perceive the quality of PD in a high school in New Jersey. While substandard PD alone is not enough to lose tenure, it has recently become one of the evaluative measures for teacher performance according to a new tenure law signed in 2012 by Governor Chris Christie. Such added pressures could impact teachers' attitudes toward their professional growth. The study was based on Mezirow and Knowles' theory of adult learning as well as social constructivism. Several questions guided this study, such as how can teachers' perceptions shape the current PD program in the featured high school and if the current shifts in educational reform affect their perception. A case study was used as the research design, and interviews were employed as the main method of gathering qualitative data. Subsequently, 7 educators in various content-specialties were interviewed. Once the interviews were analyzed, transcribed, and coded, 5 significant themes emerged: (a) organized and relevant training, (b) in-class support, (c) continuity and constructive feedback, (d) accountability of transference, and (e) a culture of respectful collaboration and partnership. The implications for social change for this project would be that an effective PD program at the high school might improve the high school teachers' attitudes toward their own professional growth. Improved attitudes might motivate teachers to apply new knowledge, which will increase student performance, faculty morale, and community & family relations.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my husband, Ralph J. Ervin II, whose unconditional love and support made this possible. I love you.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I must thank my Lord and Savior whom without, I would not have had the strength and courage to see this through. I believe that all dreams come from God, and He planted the seed many years ago for me to one day earn a doctorate in Education. It was an unwieldy road, and I wasn't always confident that I was going to finish, but His Word says in Proverbs 3:5-6, to trust in Him even when you don't understand, and let Him guide your paths in all things. I still don't know where this road is going to take me; however, I will continue to trust that this degree is part of a bigger plan that will soon reveal itself.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

For years, reformers of education have grappled with the task of effectively and continuously training teachers in an effort to improve student achievement. President Lyndon Johnson officially capitalized on the need to train all teachers with the inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education (DOE), 2015). The act was designed, fundamentally, to provide an equitable, quality education to students in the nation's education system regardless of socioeconomic background, ethnicity, race, or creed (U.S. DOE, 2015).

In 2002, President George W. Bush revised the ESEA and dubbed it the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), allocating more monies than ever before to teacher training and teacher continual education programs (Meister, 2010; Taylor, Stecher, & O'Day, 2010; U.S. DOE, 2015). The act emphasized the development of "highly qualified" teachers, and stipulated the revision of licensing and tenure requirements (Meister, 2010). President Obama revised the act once more in 2011 before completely reforming it in 2015. President Obama contended the importance of quality teachers to reform education and to improve student performance, agreeing with his predecessors that teachers are the single most important determinant of student achievement (*Education Week Guide*, 2009; Gitomer, 2011).

As a result of his commitment, President Obama instituted the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative in 2011 as part of his stimulus package, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (U.S. DOE, 2014). RTTT is a national contest designed to incite

innovative education reforms in all 50 states (U.S. DOE, 2014). States can earn points that are tied to billions of dollars in funding if they change their educational policies (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011; Bonner, 2012; Church, 2012; Gitomer, 2011). This contest encourages the hiring and retention of "outstanding" teachers who will help school districts provide a high quality education to students (Bonner, 2012; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; U.S. DOE, 2014). Another aspect to President Obama's educational reform plan is to motivate states to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which are national standards that promote career and college readiness (Ezarik, 2011; Gitomer, 2011; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; U.S. DOE, 2014).

RTTT was just the beginning of the Obama Administration's plan to reform education. According to the U.S. DOE, President Obama signed into effect the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on December 10th, 2015 to reauthorize President Johnson's original educational law, ESEA, and to replace President Bush's NCLB Act (U.S. DOE, 2015). Similar to the ESEA, the ESSA intends to protect the rights of all students to access an equitable education that successfully prepares them to be career and college ready after high school in spite of their socio-economic status (U.S. DOE, 2015). Because the law is only a few months old, it is still too early to ascertain how this new law will affect school districts as they begin to transition from NCLB (U.S. DOE, 2015). The new law does, however, prioritize teacher training and professional learning (U.S. DOE, 2015).

While much is yet to be determined by ESSA, RTTT, has been in effect for a few years now. As of 2015, New Jersey is one of 46 states to enroll in President Obama's

RTTT initiative (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013; Ezarik, 2011; Flick & Kuchey, 2010; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Tungate, 2010; U.S. DOE, 2014). Pursuant with the RTTT guidelines, according to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), as of the spring 2015, New Jersey would have adopted the common core standards, a new teacher evaluation process, and a new state assessment to measure students' college and career readiness (NJDOE, 2010).

It is evident that teacher training has been and continues to be one of the nation's top priorities. In particular, the implementation of the CCSS is requiring a significant paradigm shift in instruction; such adjustments in classroom instruction necessitate the development of a sound teacher education program for preservice teachers (Catapano, 2010; Gould, Brimijoin, Alouf, & Mayhew, 2010; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Huisman, Singer, & Catapano, 2010; Miller, 2010; Singer, Catapano, & Huisman, 2010) as well as an effective professional development (PD) program for in-service teachers (Croninger et al., 2012; Dilworth & Knapp, 2010). Moreover, states like New Jersey who adopt the national standards must adequately and properly train teachers to prepare students for new high-stakes assessments, such as the Partnership for Assessment Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC; Abilock, Harada, & Fontichiaro, 2013; Croninger et al., 2012; Dilworth & Knapp, 2010; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Further implications are found in the new ways of evaluating teacher performance and effectiveness. These mounting pressures for performance must, inevitably, impact teacher attitudes regarding their own level of preparedness to meet local and federal mandates.

Definition of the Problem

In 2012, a high school in a suburban K–12 district was classified as a Focus School. For clarity and consistency, the featured high school will be referred to by its pseudonym throughout the rest of this study: Central High School. Under the RTTT initiative, a Focus School is a step above Priority status given to the lowest performing schools in need of intervention (U.S. DOE, 2015). Priority schools have been taken over by the state; however, a Focus School is identified as showing potential for improvement in specific areas such as graduation rates and state assessments (U.S. DOE, 2012). In 2012–2013, while the graduation rate increased to 73% from 67% the year before, according to Central High School's report card, in 2013–2014, it still failed to meet the state minimum of 78%. The high school's most recent performance report card showed that in the 2014–2015 school year, the graduation rate did increase to 78%; however, the school has not met all of the requirements to lift the Focus School status.

Central High School's performance report cards for 2012–2014 show that it has made significant strides in the English language arts High School Proficiency Assessment of New Jersey (HSPA), even though it continued to struggle with improvements in math (NJDOE, 2012). However, by the 2014–2015 school year, the results on the HSPA will be insignificant for it will be replaced by the new state assessment, PARCC. While the HSPA was only administered to Grade 11, the PARCC will be administered to Grades 9–11 by the spring of 2015 (NJDOE, 2012).

Furthermore, as of September 2013, the district has adopted the Danielson framework to meet the RTTT requirements for teacher evaluation. One of the

components of the new teacher evaluation system, under the RTTT program, is that districts will measure teachers' professional growth (NJDOE, 2012). In New Jersey, novice teachers were once required to complete 100 hours of PD within the first 5 years (National Board for Teaching Standards, 2012). After 5 years of teaching, however, there was no additional mandate that required teachers to continue to learn new teaching practices even though districts are under much pressure to continue developing teacher skills (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Meister, 2010; NJDOE, 2010; Range et al., 2011; Sappington, Pacha, & Baker, 2012; Winters, 2012; U.S. DOE, 2012) and PD constitutes a percentage of teacher evaluations according to the Danielson framework (2007a). Recently, New Jersey has revised this mandate, requiring all teachers to complete 20 hours of PD every year (NJDOE, 2014).

The Danielson framework (2007a) was designed to remedy teacher's lack of professional growth, among other things, and is also a vehicle used to measure that growth. This particular framework is divided into four domains: (a) planning and preparation, (b) classroom environment, (c) instruction, and (d) professional responsibilities (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011; Danielson, 2007a, 2012). This evaluative tool was initially intended as a framework for teachers to measure their own effectiveness (Danielson, 2007a). Teachers could use the framework to self-assess and to improve and inform their practice (Danielson, 2007a). However, districts are using this framework as a tool to evaluate teacher effectiveness and hold teachers accountable for student achievement (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011).

The framework calls for evidence that teachers are at least proficient in the four

domains and is equipped with a series of rubrics to assess that proficiency (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011; Danielson, 2007a). In the rubric, teachers are rated as highly effective, effective, partially effective, and ineffective (Danielson, 2007a). According to the new tenure law instituted by Governor Christie in April 2012, New Jersey teachers are at risk of losing tenure if they are rated ineffective 2 years in a row (NJDOE, 2012). Teachers identified as ineffective must be placed on a Corrective Action Plan (CAP), which involves on-going professional training (NJDOE, 2012). Therefore, teachers across the state of New Jersey will need a solid PD program now more than ever in order to meet all of the requirements of the new framework and the state and federal mandates.

According to the 2014–2015 New Jersey's School Performance Report for Central High School, 91.2% of the students are African Americans; enrollment has plummeted from 837 in 2012–2013 to 804 in 2013–2014, and then increased slightly in 2014–2015 to 818. The school has yet to meet the federal targets for career and college readiness, such as the total amount of students taking the SAT or ACT and performing well on either, and the year before, the high school's performance was described as "significantly lagging in comparison" to schools across the state. The most recent performance report (2014–2015) has been revised and no longer provides such a comparative description. However, it does indicate that the featured school performed in the 21st percentile on PARCC compared to other schools in the state (NJDOE, 2015).

Additionally, in 2013–2014, the district spent $36,750,000 on instructional expenditures and $8,005 on teacher and staff support according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. This was the most up-to-date information available; it was unclear

how much of that revenue was specifically allocated to PD and instructional resources, or how much of those funds were reserved for the high school's PD program.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

New Jersey's governor, Chris Christie, has placed education at the forefront of his political agenda contending that there is nothing that impacts student academic achievement more than quality teachers (NJDOE, 2010). Teacher quality is arguably the most influential factor in student achievement (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011; Croninger et al., 2012; Gould et al., 2010; Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Meister, 2010; Winters, 2012). In 2010, Governor Christie, with the full support of both houses of legislature, made public his intent to reform New Jersey's public schools by instituting initiatives that reward effective teaching through merit pay and simplify the termination process of ineffective teachers and the retention of quality ones (NJDOE, 2014).

Governor Christie was one of several governors to apply for President Obama's RTTT campaign. After 2 years of rigorous negotiation with New Jersey's Education Association (NJEA), Christie finally signed a new tenure law, Bill S-1455: Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act, on August 6th, 2012, dubbed TeachNJ (NJDOE, 2012). In pursuant of the new law, teachers deemed effective or highly effective must develop an annual Professional Development Plan (PDP) at the beginning of each school year, while those with lower ratings must adhere to the guidelines of a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) and document evidence of professional growth for 2 years (NJDOE, 2015). Teachers found ineffective for 2 consecutive years

can lose tenure (NJDOE, 2015).

Considering all of the recent shifts in education, the purpose of this study was to closely scrutinize the quality and effectiveness of the current PD program in Central High School according to the teachers' current perceptions and attitudes. Between the common core standards, the Danielson framework, the new tenure law, and new high-stakes state assessments (PARCC), New Jersey teachers will undoubtedly be under more pressure than ever before to improve their instructional practices. They will also be expected to invest in their own professional growth to meet the evolving needs of students (Catapano, 2010; Huisman et al., 2010; Singer et al., 2010).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Other states have restructured their educational plan to ensure that quality teachers are instructing the nation's children (Dilworth & Knapp, 2010; Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Manna & Ryan, 2011). States like Virginia and North Carolina are requiring license renewal every 5 years (U.S. DOE, 2012). In Virginia, teachers must accrue a total of 180 professional development points every 5 years in order to renew their license to teach (U.S. DOE, 2012). Points can be earned in a variety of ways; college credit, PD conferences, or publication of an article or book are among a few options (U.S. DOE, 2012).

Many states like Virginia and Alabama are also partnering with community or local colleges and universities to develop teacher training modules that not only adequately train preservice teachers to put practice into action, but also offers veteran teachers active opportunities to mentor, collaborate, and stay abreast to innovative and

effective trends in education (*Alabama Education News*, 2011; Catapano, 2010; Chorzempa, 2011). In Colorado, teachers lose tenure after receiving two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings (Winters 2012). New Jersey and Florida adjusted their educational plans to reflect similar outcomes for ineffective teaching (Bonner, 2012). In Chicago, Illinois, selective schools participated in a Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) for 4 years, where teachers could earn bonus pay for assuming instructional leadership roles and performance-based pay for improving student academic achievement (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012). An integral part of TAP was providing teachers with resources and adequate PD that is inclusive of organized teacher evaluations to not only improve student academic achievement but also to improve teacher attrition (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012).

Research (Danielson, 2007b, 2012;; Fullan, 1992, 2007; Magnuson & Mota, 2011; Meister, 2010; Pella, 2011; Smith, 2011) has shown that mentoring, collaboration, and leadership opportunities motivate teachers to grow professionally. According to Danielson (2007b), teaching is a "flat profession" (p. 14). Unlike in other professions, teachers are not expected to assume more responsibilities with every year they commit to teaching, even though there is an inherent desire for greater responsibility (Danielson, 2007b; Meister, 2010). Left unfulfilled, teachers can become frustrated with and cynical about the profession (Danielson, 2007b; Meister, 2010). Assuming formal or informal leadership roles empower teachers to continue to adjust and modify their practices (Danielson, 2007b, 2012; Fullan, 1992, 2007; Thorburn, 2011).

To improve instructional practices, all teachers must collaborate with other

professionals in order to compare their practices and develop expertise (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Meister, 2010). Not only does collaborating build confidence in practice, but it also builds morale, allows teachers an opportunity to share and reflect, and encourages teachers to assume leadership roles (Danielson, 2007b, 2012; Fullan, 1992, 2007). Administrators must also take note of the contribution of all teachers across disciplines and not just core subjects. Much of the pressure to perform is concentrated on language arts and math since they are testing subjects, but subjects such as physical education and world language can inadvertently be overlooked in the search for potential leaders as well as setting in place accountability measures across disciplines (Danielson, 2007b; Thorburn, 2011). In the end, the district loses when teachers are disengaged and disinterested because teachers are then doing a mediocre job and are not providing students with quality instruction (Danielson, 2007b; Meister, 2010; West, 2012).

Definition of Terms

The following terminology was used throughout this study when referring to PD:

Professional development: PD is defined as "an ongoing and systematic process that includes activities" (Shagrir, 2012, p. 23). Activities vary, but include any practice that fosters professional growth, such as collaboration with peers and other support staff and self-reflection for a sustained amount of time (Abilock et al., 2013; Guskey, 2009; Pella, 2011; Schechter, 2010; Shagrir, 2012; West, 2012). The NJEA (2012) defined PD as an approach to improving the effectiveness of educators. According to NJEA, such an approach is aligned with the CCSS and the Professional Development Standards for New Jersey educators and fosters collegiality and collaboration between teachers and school

leaders regarding the best instructional practices to improve student achievement. PD can be supported by activities designed to train teachers and develop educational skills (NJEA, 2012). Such activities can include, but are not limited to, courses, workshops, and conferences (NJEA, 2012).

Teacher education program and teacher training: This term refers to how preservice teachers or prospective teachers are educated in postsecondary institutions and are prepared to become in-service teachers to educate in the nation's public schools (Catapano, 2010; Miller, 2010).

Veteran teacher: For the sake of this research, a veteran teacher, is one who has obtained tenure with a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012). Being regarded as a veteran teacher refers to years of teaching experience and does not represent a teacher's effectiveness (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012). A veteran teacher is anyone who may have a wealth of content knowledge, but may lack innovative instructional practices that meet the needs of the 21st century learner, and such a void in applicable strategies is evident through observations and student performance on common assessments (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012).

Significance

Quality PD is essential for promoting collegiality and building trust among faculty; it also encourages self-efficacy in teachers, emphasizes the importance of life-long learning, offers teachers a voice in their own professional growth, energizes them, and impacts student achievement in secondary and postsecondary institutions (Abilock et al., 2013; Huisman et al., 2010; Kenny, 2012; Meister, 2010; Range et al., 2011;

Sappington et al., 2012; Shagrir, 2012). PD also provides educators with the opportunity to remain abreast to current educational trends and serves as a vehicle of accountability for higher and continual learning (Range et al., 2011; Shagrir, 2012). Educators have the daunting responsibility of learning new knowledge and adapting to the diverse needs of the 21st century learner (Garcia et al., 2012). In order to successfully train the future leaders of this global economy, educators must be life-long learners themselves (Huisman et al., 2010; Linn et al., 2010; Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012).

Alongside mastering the new national standards, teachers must familiarize themselves with new curricula and materials as well as innovative standards-based and research-based instructional practices (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012). Additionally, teachers must receive training on the new state assessments called PARCC, and properly prepare students for these new assessments. PARCC will officially replace the New Jersey HSPA (for Grades 9–11) by the spring of 2015 (NJEA, 2014). With the signing of the new tenure law, teachers and administrators will also need massive training in the Danielson framework (Danielson, 2012) and on how to develop student growth objectives (SGOs): long-term academic goals for students, which, alongside student achievement and PD, comprise a percentage of teacher evaluations (U.S.DOE, 2010).

Training for the Danielson framework (2007a) will prepare teachers in Central High School on the new evaluative tool that will be used by the district. It is imperative that teachers understand how they will be evaluated in order to inform their practice (Danielson, 2012). It will be interesting to see just how many teachers will embrace this

new evaluative tool and adjust their instructional practices to adequately prepare students for PARCC and to meet the CCSS.

Guiding Research Question

With this study, I explored how teachers perceived the quality of the current PD program in Central High School as they prepared to face all of the aforementioned challenges. The central research question that guided this study was:

1. What are the high school teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the current PD program provided at the school?

Past research (Catapano, 2010; Gould et al., 2010; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Huisman et al., 2010; Miller, 2010; Singer et al., 2010; Winters, 2012) has called for a revamping of PD, primarily because of the inadequacy of teacher preparation programs. Those same experts questioned the practicality of some of the undergraduate course requirements and whether teachers are ever really prepared to effectively teach. Another variable impacting teacher education and teacher effectiveness is the lack of sustained and continual professional support available to novice teachers after their first year (Huisman et al., 2010). Without effective and consistent training and instructional support during and after college, novice teachers who commit to teaching become ineffective veteran teachers, perpetuating a long cycle of poor quality instruction (Huisman et al., 2010; Singer et al., 2010).

The teachers in Central High School are not mandated to attend PD; they are only strongly encouraged to do so. The district pays for teachers to attend PD outside the district; however, there is no follow-up process where teachers can report back what they

have learned. There is an application process for out-of-district PD that involves answering a series of complex questions. Submitting the application does not guarantee approval to attend the PD training. There is also a follow-up form accessible from the district's website that must be completed and submitted after the PD; however, submission of this form is not enforced. According to the district's improvement plan, there are no accountability measures that mandate that teachers demonstrate application of new skills even if teachers attend PD sessions provided by the district. Furthermore, there are no opportunities afforded teachers to share new knowledge with peers.

The district's salary guide indicated that teachers with advanced degrees are not offered any further monetary incentives on the salary scale to continue learning beyond a master's degree plus 30 graduate credits. The pay raise between a master's plus 30 and a doctorate is minimal and not worth the added cost or the extra energy. In many cases, advanced degrees are outdated and do not represent current and more appropriate training for the continuously evolving student (Croninger et al., 2012). Teachers without advanced degrees and who are near retirement are at an even higher disadvantage because their formal knowledge of instructional practices can be more than 20 years old.

As a Title I school, Central High School qualifies for monies to fund PD opportunities in and out of the district (Manna & Ryan, 2011). PD programs are funded by 10% of the allocated Title I monies (Taylor, Stecher, & O'Day, 2010). Yet, PD is not an integral part of the instructional climate in the high school even with the newly implemented Danielson framework (2007a), the new national standards, and PARCC.

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

This study was based on Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory that described how adults change or transform their frame of reference, molded by their experiences and core beliefs. According to Mezirow, an adult learner's frame of reference is comprised of two dimensions: the learner's habits of mind and point of view. Habits of mind are how adult learners routinely respond to the world around them (Mezirow, 1997). These habits are usually influenced by the learner's experiences and are expressed through a particular point of view–the learner's belief system or set of judgments that often frame his or her interpretation of new information (Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow's transformational theory (1997) also maintained that adult learners need an opportunity to be autonomous thinkers in social settings in order for them to embrace transforming their thinking. Among other forms of learning, a major proponent of the transformational theory was discourse where adult learners are able to self-reflect, discuss with other professionals, and contribute to their own learning (Mezirow, 1997). Similarly, in order for teachers to willingly assume the role of an adult learner and openly receive and apply new information, they would have to adjust what they have accepted their entire professional career to be true about teaching and learning and be receptive to transforming their frame of reference. Many teachers have comfortably established a method of instruction, a routine of performance, and have developed a point of view or bias toward their circumstance as an educator (Fullan, 2007; Meister, 2010). Those teachers who have lost their vitality for the profession are not inspired to change if they

have nothing to look forward to (Meister, 2010; West, 2012), or if they do not believe that change is necessary (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Meister, 2010; Muhammad & DuFour, 2009).

Adults want to be included in their learning, voice their opinions, and feel like an integral part of the change being made (Chan, 2010; Danielson, 2007b, 2012; Fullan, 2007; Meister, 2010; Miretzky, 2007). Mezirow (1997) also posited that adults learn when they are given the opportunity to critically think about information and be autonomous thinkers. Similarly, teachers should be included in solving real problems and must believe that there is a pressing, emerging problem to solve (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Muhammad & DuFour, 2009). Self-reflection aids in this process (Fullan, 2007; West, 2012). Reflection allows teachers the opportunity to debrief on their growth, analyze student performance, and evaluate instructional strategies (Fullan, 2007). Effective PD affords teachers the opportunity to collaborate, participate, and evaluate their professional growth (Guskey, 2009; Skiffington, Washburn, & Elliott, 2011).

Another foundational framework was Knowles' (1998) andragogy theory, which was also developed as an attempt to explain how adults learn. Knowles asserted six assumptions about adult education. The assumptions were that adult learners (a) are autonomous in their thinking and self-directed in their learning, which means that their motivation to learn stems from their ability to build on what they already know; (b) need to know the value of what they are learning; (c) make sense of new information by connecting to their own experiences; (d) learn when they are ready to acquire new knowledge; (e) learn if they feel the information is relevant and can be applied

immediately; and (f) are motivated more by internal than external, punitive measures (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998).

Several of Knowles' (1998) assumptions on adult education correlated with Mezirow's transformational theory (1997), such as the need to build on prior knowledge and making connections to personal experience in order to make sense of new content. Another assumption researchers made about adult learning was that adults must be self-motivated in order to want to learn (Chan, 2010; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Oftentimes, if morale is low in an educational setting, educators are not motivated to adjust their instructional practices (Huisman et al., 2010). Knowles also contended that learning must be problem centered and relevant to an adult's life. If teachers are unmotivated to continue learning due to poor school conditions, inadequate support, or irrelevant and disconnected training, there may be little hope of transforming their thinking (Linn et al., 2010; Sappington et al., 2012). Teachers need time to work with their colleagues, to examine the data, and to alter their own teaching practices as they see fit (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012).

When adequately trained, teachers have the potential to become expert teachers (Gould et al., 2010; Shagrir, 2012). They are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to continue their education when the learning builds on their own knowledge and professional needs (Abilock et al., 2013). They are also more likely to apply new strategies and continuously modify their practices if they are included in the process, placed in positions of leadership, and rewarded for their efforts (Danielson, 2007b; Fullan, 1999, 2007; Meister, 2010).

In this study, I also drew from the theoretical framework of social constructivism. Social constructivism involves sharing multiple perspectives with the understanding that reality is socially constructed and yields multiple interpretations (Lodico et al., 2010). Social interaction was one proposed method of transforming teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Pella, 2011; Shagrir, 2012; Thorburn, 2011). In the midst of synthesizing information from a variety of perspectives, learners construct meaning from the world around them and transform their own views (Lodico et al., 2010; Pella, 2011). According to Fullan (2007), collegiality is a strong proponent of application of skills. Shagrir (2012) called this "professional communities of practice," or, most commonly referred to as professional learning communities (PLCs; p. 24). When teachers are afforded the opportunity to reflect and share with others, they are more likely to improve upon their instructional practice (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Meister, 2010; Skiffington et al., 2011; West, 2012).

Review of the Broader Problem

Experts (Danielson, 2007b; Magnuson & Mota, 2011; Pella, 2011; Thorburn, 2011) have agreed that one effective way of increasing motivation and participation in veteran teachers is to promote from within. Moreover, teachers are more receptive to continual learning and applying new knowledge when training is collegiate and mentors and/or advisors are promoted from within; this practice also provides consistent and personable coaching to colleagues (Glazerman & Seifullah, 2012; Stevens, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Further, when new knowledge is carefully monitored, assessed, and evaluated, teachers are more likely to apply the new knowledge because the

learning is bridged with the practical application of the learning as opposed to the learning being an independent entity outside of the classroom (Church, 2012; Guskey, 2002, 2009). Training must be relevant and practical if it is going to be effective (Linn et al., 2010).

While there was much research on PD (Gove & Still, 2014; Guskey, 1999, 2002, 2009; Guskey & Sparks, 2002; Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Linn et al., 2010; Magnuson & Mota, 2011; Meister, 2010; Muñoz & Guskey, 2009; Pella, 2011; Sappington et al., 2012; Schechter, 2010; Shagrir, 2012), there was a gap in knowledge regarding secondary teachers' perceptions on PD. There was even less current research within the last 4 years because the national standards, new teacher evaluations, and high-stake assessments are all novelties and laws and regulations continue to change. There was also a paucity of literature on teachers' perceptions about PD as it relates to these recent shifts in educational reform. Hence, a veteran teacher may need just as much support in the classroom as a novice teacher. A novice teacher can be more effective than a veteran teacher by nature of participating in a quality teacher preparation program as experts are also looking to reform the curricula at the university and college level (Catapano, 2010; Gould et al., 2010; Huisman et al., 2010; Singer et al., 2010).

In general, teachers did not feel well-prepared to teach in a standards-based classroom (Davis, 2014; Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012). Teachers were concerned with the lack of resources and PD training they receive with new teacher evaluations looming over their heads, and they did not believe that districts are doing enough to adequately train or support them (Davis, 2014; Sappington, et al., 2012). However, one belief

remains constant: Many teachers wanted a PD program that correlates with their individual professional needs (Meister, 2010; West, 2012) and were dissatisfied with their current PD program (Davis, 2014; Thorburn, 2011).

Implications

One major implication of this study was that PD must align with teachers' current needs and not be deemed as an isolated and disconnected training (Linn et al., 2010). Principals must take responsibility for offering quality training that has purpose and correlates not only with a clear vision, but also the academic needs of the student population as well as teacher inquiry (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2009; Range et al., 2011). Linn et al. (2010) posited that quality PD must be purposeful and inclusive of all stakeholders. In order to impact classroom instruction, PD cannot be a series of out-of-district sessions without substance and relevance to the school district's visions and needs, rather PD must be a meaningful interaction within the district (Linn et al., 2010).

Quality PD is an integral aspect of effective instruction and teacher quality (Catapano, 2010). Quality PD is also contingent upon faculty buy-in (Catapano, 2010). Faculty cooperation can be achieved when they are included in their own professional growth and such inclusiveness can empower teachers to continue growing professionally (Danielson, 2012; Fullan, 2007; Glazerman & Siefallah, 2012). Such empowerment necessitates inclusivity in their own PD, yet, the more disconnected the learning, the more negative their experiences with change (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Linn et al., 2010; Meister, 2010).

Districts have to systematically revamp their PD program to include relevant,

purposeful, meaningful, and inclusive learning that promotes positive change and fosters ongoing professional growth (Glazerman & Seifallah, 2012; Guskey, 2002). Administrators must work with their faculty to bridge the gap in professional learning and the application of skills. Instead of treating PD as an isolated entity and expecting teachers to apply the new knowledge on their own without any systemic follow up, administration must establish a procedure where teachers are responsible for the transfer of knowledge (Linn, et al., 2010; Sappington, et al., 2012) or in class support (Atteberry & Bryck, 2011; Stevens, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010).

While the Danielson framework (2007a) uses artifacts as evidence to distinguish effective and ineffective teachers, it was initially intended as a framework for teachers to measure their own professional growth and not as an evaluative tool (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). Using a reflective tool to evaluate sound teaching practices may indicate that there is a real need to improve the quality of education in this country (Glazerman & Siefallah, 2012; Meister, 2010). Perhaps, with all the new mandates, veteran teachers will either be forced to self-edify or risk losing their tenure for there now appears to be a correlation between applying new knowledge and safeguarding a teaching position (Shagrir, 2012).

Another implication regarding this study was that content specialization is significant in shaping teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the quality of PD. First of all, applying new knowledge for the sake of high stakes assessments may only affect teachers of testing subjects. The perceptions of teachers in other subjects, such as physical education and art may not compare to the perceptions of language arts and math teachers.

Furthermore, the perceptions and attitudes of supportive staff toward professional development may not be influenced at all by either state assessments or teacher evaluations. Transforming the learning culture of a school involves a community effort (Abilock et al., 2013). Therefore, all stakeholders – and not just administrators – should plan PD opportunities in the high school.

According to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, application is a high order skill that is very challenging for many students. Adult learners, typically, approach an educational experience with apprehension if the information being presented does not subscribe to their preconceptions and experiences (Knowles, 1998; Meister, 2010; Mezirow, 1997; West, 2012). This may hold true for the teacher who is faced with the challenge of starting over or acquiring and applying new information. The adult leaner may be more receptive to learning through a shared or communicative learning experience where the interaction between adult learners fosters an appreciation for knowledge development; a growing sense of belonging; an active role in the learning process; and the assurance that they are solving a real, local problem (Fullan, 2007; Meister, 2010; Mezirow, 1997; Pella, 2011; Shagrir, 2012; West, 2012).

Salazar, Aguirre-Muñoz, Fox, and Nuanez-Lucas (2010) asserted that "the extent to which teachers will apply new techniques and practices depends, in part, on the extent to which they have access to a supportive learning and teaching community" (pp. 1–2). Such community can be achieved through PLCs (Shagrir, 2012), and possibly, an instructional coach or mentor who supports struggling teachers by modeling and facilitating one-to-one and group sessions (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Garcia et al., 2011;

Glazerman & Seifallah, 2012; Gove & Still, 2014; Skiffington et al., 2011; Stevens, 2011).

Yet another implication of this study was that an integral part of an effective PD program may include some type of in-class support like a mentor or an instructional coach, one separate from the evaluative process, and, instead, assists teachers in developing lessons, executing those lessons, and bridging the gap between theory and practice (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Garcia et al., 2011; Glazerman & Seifallah, 2012; Shagrir, 2012; Skiffington et al., 2011; Stevens, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). It is not enough, for instance, for a novice teacher to simply have a mentor for the first year and no additional support after obtaining tenure. Moreover, it is not fair for a veteran teacher who is struggling to continue to struggle without support. Even though there was a paucity of research that supports the role of a coach, it was mostly due to the lack of models and not because such a position has been deemed ineffective (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Stevens, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). The literature (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Stevens, 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010) suggested that a PD program rooted in the work of instructional coaches or consistent internal support (Glazerman & Seifallah, 2012; Shagrir, 2012) can help bridge the gap between training from PD opportunities and application in the classroom.

Finally, the literature that I reviewed in this study seemed to suggest that a quality PD program should be modeled after the same desired restructuring of the classroom environment as per the Danielson framework (2007a) used to evaluate teachers. In other words, like students in K – 12, adult learners may also respond well to the various

instructional criteria delineated in the four Danielson domains. There is a parallel between Danielson's framework used to evaluate teachers and how the literature in this study discussed the most effective methods of teacher education and quality PD. Specifically, teachers have different learning preferences and approach new learning with different experiences and biases that affect further learning as designated in domains 1, & 3.

As with pedagogical strategies, teachers may be more receptive to a customize approach to professional development; one that caters to each individual teacher's instructional needs (Chan, 2010; Church, 2012; Schechter, 2010). Teachers may benefit from the same type of differentiation they are expected to provide their students. According to Danielson's framework (2007a), an effective teacher provides continual support and feedback to the evolving student learner, including positive reinforcement that builds on the climate and culture of the classroom environment. Such careful attention to students' emotional growth impacts their willingness to continue learning. The same is implied for the PD of the adult learner. The literature (Klieger & Yakobovitch, 2012; Magnuson & Mota, 2011; Sappington et al., 2012) suggested that a program built on mutual respect could very well break down the walls of resistance and promote healthy collegiate relationships throughout the school that may positively alter the climate and culture of a school. Seemingly, the adult learner also benefits from continual support and feelings of affirmation for their learning and contribution to their own professional growth (domains 2, & 4). The criteria for evaluating effective teaching can also be applied to effective PD, holding all stakeholders responsible for quality

instruction.

Summary

In this doctoral study, I explored the perceptions of teachers in Central High School regarding PD and how those perceptions can shape the current PD program. Research (Fullan, 2007; NJDOE, 2010) has shown that quality teachers are needed to improve student achievement and that quality teachers are produced through effective PD (Croninger et al., 2012; Glazerman & Seifallah, 2012). However, many teachers are not motivated to change and may need a lot of support, as well as effective and meaningful PD in order to modify their thinking and their instructional practices (Catpano, 2010; Meister, 2010).

There are many characteristics of quality PD, most importantly, that it teaches how to meet the diverse needs of students through a variety of strategies; be evaluated periodically to demonstrate the effects of the training on instruction and learning, encourages and empowers educators to continue to grow professionally (Guskey, 2002, 1999; NJDOE, 2010); and offers ongoing support to account for new knowledge being applied, but also to demonstrate how new knowledge is integrated in a lesson, and, ultimately, affects student achievement (Atteberry & Bryk, 2011; Garcia et al., 2011; Skiffington et al., 2011; Stevens, 2011). Effective PD is a proponent of teacher quality (Croninger et al., 2011; Glazerman & Seifallah, 2012) and builds confidence in teachers to contribute to student achievement (Gould et al., 2010; NJDOE, 2010).

I used a case study design in this study in order to yield immediate results. This approach was founded on the principles of Mezirow's transformational theory (1997),

Knowles' andragogy theory (1998), and social constructivism. Interviews were the primary data collection methods that I employed in this study. Therefore, a qualitative design was most appropriate. In section 2, I will introduce the methodology and describe the participants and data collection methods used for this study. I also will discuss the data analysis process and share my interpretations of the data.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

I made the determination that a case study design was the most appropriate for this type of study. This design focuses on a single unit of analysis for a sustainable sum of time (Creswell, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012). A case study analyzes a particular person, group, event, program, or situation and is designed to explore a problem, issue, or concern (Creswell, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012). A case study is also best suited to answer why a phenomenon occurs or how one variable influences another (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012), specifically, observable themes and patterns of behavior (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011) using many investigative methods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012).

In this study, I investigated how the current PD program of Central High School located in the northeast United States, affected teachers' perceptions on the quality of that program and how those perceptions can shape the current program. I interviewed a group of teachers and analyzed a variety of data for emerging themes and patterns to shed light on how to improve the current PD program and possibly develop a comprehensive PD program that motivates teachers to apply new knowledge, and subsequently, will impact student achievement. While there are many strategies of inquiries, a qualitative strategy was the most effective method of inquiry for this study because, unlike quantitative strategies, it does not prove relationships, test hypotheses, or yield results that can be generalized to a larger population (Creswell, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011;

Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012). Quantitative inquiries, such as a survey research or an experimental research, also rely mostly on numerical data to track emerging trends and patterns (Creswell, 2009), none of which served my purpose in this study.

In this study, a small group of teachers shared their perceptions on how the PD program offered at Central High School influenced their decision to apply new knowledge in the classroom. While all qualitative inquiries are founded on the human experience (Merriam, 2009), not all were appropriate for this study. The study was bound by time, which eliminated qualitative methods such as an ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009). The aforementioned studies are better suited for the study of groups during a prolonged time period (Creswell, 2009).

Participants

Setting and Sample

The population under study was comprised of high school teachers and support staff for Grades 9–12 with at least 1 year of experience with the PD program in Central High School. I purposefully selected 14 educators who represented various grades and content-specialty areas and who had voiced strong opinions about PD in training sessions or in informal conversations. Creswell (2012) described purposeful sampling as an approach where the researcher intentionally selects a group of participants from a site who can best expound on the phenomenon being studied. According to experts (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, et al., 2010), there are several purposeful sampling techniques; an intensity sampling coupled with a purposeful random sampling, however, were the most appropriate techniques for this study. An intensity sampling calls for a group of

participants with strong opinions on a subject, while the purposeful random sampling allows the sampling to still be random by sampling a fraction of the intensity sampling group (Lodico, et al., 2010).

While I wanted the sampling to be random, I also wanted every grade level and a variety of subjects represented to see if either variable impacted teachers' perceptions of PD. I also wanted participants who had an opinion on the topic and had been expressive, articulate, and candid. The subjects represented in this study were English language arts, math, social studies, science, world language, and career and technical education. I selected two representatives from each content area as well as one support staff member. Out of the 14 prospective participants identified in the study, I randomly selected seven and reserved the remaining seven as substitutes in the event one of the invitees did not submit a signed consent form in a timely manner or dropped out during the process. The final sample comprised of seven teachers.

In this study, I did not aim to generalize the results to a larger population, and the study was restricted by time and resources as teachers were not available year round, which provided me with a short window of opportunity to gather sufficient data. The participants were also limited by their teaching schedules, which affected the number of willing participants who had to sacrifice their free time in order to participate. In any case, the data collected were designed to shed light on how to improve the high school's current PD program.

I invited prospective candidates to participate via e-mail (see Appendix E), and those who volunteered their time were interviewed face-to-face. While I had to procure

permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research, I also needed consent (see Appendix F) from participants to proceed with the study. The IRB approval number is 03-16-16-0039639.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

To establish a researcher-participant working relationship, the researcher must gain the participant's trust and support (Creswell, 2012). One method of gaining trust and support is through reciprocity. Reciprocity ensures that participants and researchers are partners in the research process (Creswell, 2012). A partnership can be forged by complete transparency through involving the participant in every aspect of the process (Creswell, 2012). From the start, I, as the researcher, made the purpose of the study clear to participants and reviewed every measure and precaution taken to ensure confidentiality with them. During the process, I readily consulted the participants to promote collegiality and collaboration. As a result, the participants were more likely to feel comfortable in my presence, and in the end, I will share the results of the study with the participants as further evidence of our partnership.

Ethical Considerations

I made ethical considerations throughout the research process. First, the participants provided informed consent. As both investigator in this study and a teacher at Central High School, I minimized bias by not participating in the research, ensuring that any decisions made were collective and that participants' ideas truly influenced the direction of the research. I did not use any actual names for this study. Participants were assigned a letter from A to G and addressed by that letter throughout the study. I believed

that letter coding was more inconspicuous than number coding when dealing with such a small sampling. I stored this information in a password safe location where only I have access to the password.

Ensuring confidentiality is an invaluable component of the research as confidentiality guarantees safety and security (Lodico et al., 2010). Participants are likely to be more genuine and honest about their professional climate if they know that there are no punitive outcomes to their candor and that their identity will be protected (Lodico et al., 2010; Winters, 2012). I ensured confidentiality by not using participants' real names in the report and not discussing aspects of the study with administrators or other participants during the data collection process.

I also made other ethical considerations in the study. The analyzed data will be stored in a safe-deposit box for 5 years, at which time it will be properly discarded. Also, throughout the study I used language that is unbiased and nondiscriminatory. I also did not falsify information or mislead the participants to skew the data. Finally, I was mindful of the participants' time and effort by continuously sharing the data and my interpretations of the data with them for accuracy.

Data Collection

I collected and analyzed the data from a variety of sources: interviews, observations, archival records, and other relevant public documents, which were the most appropriate data collection procedures for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). Most of the data were derived from my one-to-one interviews with staff from Central High School who volunteered to participate in the study. The information obtained from these

interviews was triangulated with the other methods to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Interviews

Interviews were most appropriate for this research because they suit small samples of participants and are best for collecting complex data on personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes on a topic (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2012). A focused interview, specifically, lends itself to an inclusion of multiple perspectives in a short period of time (Yin, 2012). By employing this method, the researcher can conduct a series of 60 minute interviews, asking semi structured open-ended questions (Yin, 2012).

According to Lodico et al. (2010), semi structured interviews allow investigators the opportunity to traverse beyond the interview protocol. While questions were prepared ahead of time, a semi structured interview allowed me the flexibility to ask follow-up questions and delve deeper into the interviewee's responses (see Appendices B and C). For convenience and accuracy, I conducted 60 minute interviews, which were recorded for accuracy, transcribed, analyzed for emerging patterns, and then coded for easy access and future reference. Each interview began with a brief script introducing me as researcher, explaining the purpose of the study and the process of the interview, and reminding the participants of their rights to confidentiality. To further ensure the anonymity of the participants, I conducted the interviews off-site. When I scheduled each 60 minute interview, the participant and I agreed on the location of the interview based on their preference.

Observations

In this case study, direct observation enhanced the study by providing a clear description of all the environmental challenges that may have affected teachers' perceptions of the PD opportunities offered by the school and their decision to apply newly acquired knowledge, including the condition of the school, amount of available resources, class sizes, demographics of schools, and status of interviewees. Direct observations helped to shed light on the varying conditions teachers are expected to work in and how these conditions affected teacher perception on PD. During the interview process, I used an observational guide to record details about the setting, the specific behavior of the participants, and my feelings or thoughts about what was being observed (see Appendix D).

As an insider who has established a rapport with many administrators, teachers, and other types of educators, such as program specialists, I was able to freely avail myself to data from different locations and sources. I was able to manipulate certain events and control the environment as an integral member of such an environment. I not only know my way around the school as an 11-year veteran teacher, but I also know how the school functions, all the protocols, and who would be an asset to the study. Consequently, I assumed the role of observer-as-participant as I was a stakeholder in the school district and directly affected by the quality of PD in the school; however, I did not participate in the study. Creswell (2012) defined an observer-as-Participant as one with membership into the group being studied who does not participate in the group activities, so in this case, the interviews.

Unobtrusive Data

Relevant news editorials can corroborate emerging facts in a study (Yin, 2012). Therefore, I consulted news articles to substantiate data. Archival records were also used in this case study. Public files, such as educational bills and state assessment scores, and organizational records, like monies allocated to PD and continual learning initiatives and incentives, added to the validity of the study. Additionally, any demographical information from the U.S. Census of 2010, the National Education Statistics, and the school's performance report card added to the overall picture of the conditions and pressures teachers perform in.

Data Analysis

Evidence of Quality and Procedures

The data I gathered throughout the study were stored in electronic files: a USB drive, a folder on my computer's safekeeping, and my Google drive–all were and are password protected. An online filing program, NVivo, optimized the security of the data collected and was also used to triangulate the data. I transcribed the interview data onto a Google document, then shared the transcripts with the participants for review as to avoid any misrepresentation of the information they provided. Using member checks, where participants review the data collected and any conclusions drawn by the researcher, is an effective approach to balancing perspectives, minimizing bias, and ensuring credibility (Lodico et al., 2010).

Coding Procedures and Software Applications

There are several methods of record keeping that were employed. Field notes were appropriate (Creswell, 2012). To record my field notes, I used an observational recording guide (see Appendix D) stored in my Google Drive. A recording apparatus, Voice Memo on my Smartphone, was used to accurately report interview details that were later transcribed and triangulated in NVivo with other data. While an effective tool for storing and triangulating data, NVivo did not analyze the data for me (Yin, 2012). As patterns emerged, I systematically coded them and tracked the codes by labeling them. After all the data were collected and analyzed, I discovered how teachers described the current PD program offered by Central High School. Moreover, I gained insight on possible reform methods to improving the quality of PD in the school, and proposed a comprehensive professional development program that will not only promote professional growth, but will, ultimately, impact classroom instruction and, hopefully, improve student achievement.

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases

Creswell (2009) wrote that presenting discrepant information adds validity to a research. Discrepant information counters the themes that emerge in a study, and validates the results by providing a different, yet realistic perspective that is equally viable to the researcher's findings (Creswell, 2009). I anticipated alternative perspectives of the data to more forcefully support my findings. During my data collection, I considered other variables besides the teacher interviews that could influence my interpretation of the data, such as public documents accessible from the district and state

websites. The study did not lend itself to rival propositions (Yin, 2009) since the study focused on a specific group and the groups' experience with the PD program offered by the high school. Even so, to avoid bias and one-sidedness, I consulted several objective resources that corroborated my findings. In the event of discrepancies, I was prepared to collect more data and continue to triangulate the data as to reject any contradicting theories.

Data Interpretation

Data from various sources were gathered, analyzed, and, subsequently, triangulated. After triangulating the data, the following five themes emerged: (a) organized and relevant training, (b) in-class support, (c) accountability of transference, (d) continuity and constructive feedback, and (e) a culture of respectful collaboration and partnership.

Theme 1: Organized and Relevant Training

The respondents commented on how oftentimes they feel as if their time is being wasted. Many PD sessions, according to research participants, were either disorganized or irrelevant. The information received from PD was either not applicable to their content area or it did not relate to the demographics of students. All of the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the current PD program because it seldom addressed their individual needs, causing them to oftentimes seek training on their own.

Participant F stated:

"They should be more specific instead of lumping all the teachers together" and

"The professional development is not tailored to specific disciplines. They sort of

> lump all the teachers into one group and they say ‘okay you're going to do this or that.’ The students that I see are not directly affected by the professional development that I receive from the district. If a professional development were more specific to my field then it would be more helpful to the students.”

Participant C communicated: “I have not applied any new knowledge because I haven't received any new knowledge.” Similarly, Participant D shared, “Some of the development that we are doing is irrelevant just because of the fact that we can't apply it to our kids.” Participant D also commented, “I have been able to take some off-site professional development where I have gotten some good information, and I was able to bring it back and use it and share it.”

Participant B communicated: “Everything my students learn is not due to the professional development. It’s due more to myself finding resources outside of the high school.” Participant E stated:

> “Even when we come together they don’t seem to know how to organize us” and “Someone came in and did a training on differentiated learning and it was almost a waste of time because they did not focus on what their audience needed. I also find that the monthly meetings that we are supposed to have with administration, I thought they were supposed to be professional development. I'm finding that those are also becoming a waste of time.”

The data suggested that teachers perceive a lack of consideration when administrators plan for PD. Administrators can remedy the assumption that they are insensitive to teachers’ needs by communicating with teachers and listening to their

recommendations on how to solve some of their pressing concerns. Thoughtful planning of PD can not only lead to the makings of a comprehensive program from which all teachers can benefit, but also a culture of shared responsibility for student learning (Duncan, Magnuson, & Murnane, 2016).

Theme 2: In-Class Support

Templeton, Willis, and Hendricks (2016) asserted that administrators must support teachers' learning. Several respondents addressed the need of some form of in-class support to enhance their content knowledge as well as develop their skills. Most of the respondents admitted feeling isolated in their classroom and expressed a desire to open communication with others that could inform their practice. Participant A stated:

> "There is almost no support from administration as far as discipline and follow up in that regard and very little parental support" and "Throughout the years I think I may have applied a skill or two somewhere in there, but I feel like I've just taught myself so many things that I have to rely on myself or my colleagues, especially, for tips."

Participant B shared: "I had a supervisor who took the time to kind of help me through the 'walk' if I may say so. The 'walk' through my curriculum and everything that had to do with my content area." Participant C communicated: "[PD] does not relate directly to the students - that does not give us any ideas or suggestions for being a better teacher" and "Sometimes I feel like I am not accomplishing as much as I would like to accomplish." Participant D said: "I don't feel like we are able to use a lot of the professional development that we do get because they're all technology-based."

Participant E noted:

> "The very thing they want us to do, which is model behavior, they never model the behavior. As a teacher, I was told to always model the behavior" and "I felt like a lone wolf trying to do something. And the only ones who would listen were the kids." The participant also recalled a successful professional development experience in a previous school assignment: "I thought she meant literally come into my classroom and show me, but what she did was have a professional teacher take me to another classroom that was not her classroom."

All of the participants described a sense of isolation in the classroom, which is not atypical in the teaching profession (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). They expressed a desire for continual support and some form of supplement to their instruction. Whether it is more technology, as Participant D mentioned, parental support, or actual assistance with curriculum and content, as Participant B described, all of the participants lamented not having enough support to facilitate their learning and guide their instructional practices. Participants A and E both suggested establishing some type of a peer system where teachers are able to "share tips" and observe exemplary teaching. Ultimately, they all voiced feeling isolated and often times unsure of how to apply the new knowledge to improve student achievement. Providing teachers with consistent support may temper the feelings of isolation (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Onsrud, 2015) and impact their perception that a supportive system is inaccessible.

Theme 3: Accountability of Transference

The term "follow-up" was used several times in describing the dissatisfaction with the PD program at the high school. The participants mentioned how the training sessions were fragmented and that there was no follow through after the PD has been completed. No one is "checking" to see if the new knowledge was applied, according to the participant data, and so the lack of accountability highly affects teachers' decisions to apply new information. It also influenced participant perception of the PD's importance to administration. Participant A stated: "There isn't any follow up" and "There's often not even administration that come by and check whether people are even attending these things, so frequently a lot of people are absent and there are very few opportunities for applying the skills that you learn." Participant F said: "Someone overseeing the program would be a good idea."

There appears to be a gap between theory and practice that can be solved by consistent accountability in part of both teachers and administrators. Many of the participants expressed their willingness to apply new knowledge if consistent accountability measures were applied after every professional development training session. In other words, addressing attendance to PD sessions and establishing a system where application of new knowledge is also supervised and assessed communicates to the staff that the information is valuable and worthy of application.

Theme 4: Continuity and Constructive Feedback

Aside from desiring some form of in-class support to bridge the learning from PD sessions and the classroom, the respondents also mentioned a desire to return to the

learning and discuss the implementation and effectiveness of the learning with colleagues and administrators. Participant A commented: "[Administration is] really not transferring the feedback where you could say where we got together at a faculty meeting and said I tried what we learned last week in the training and it went like this."

Participant F communicated:

> "It would be helpful if we had a centralized program that was continuous" and "I think the feedback would be good if we could get feedback on what's working and what isn't. And if the administrators would listen to that and maybe adjust it, I don't know if they're doing that or not. I would hope that they are."

Participant E communicated: "I've been to some training where the take away was minimal;" however, this participant shared a successful experience with PD where the participant attended several PD sessions on the same topic. The participant recalled, "So we were always building and building and building."

Participant D articulated:

> "A lot of professional development is one and done. But there's no follow-up. There's no continuation of it. There's no 'let's come back and see how is this done.' It's never 'here is a trial. I'm going to come back another day.' Or, 'let's see if this is working.'"

The benefit of continuity is that it affords teachers the opportunity to build on knowledge and skill (Abilock et al., 2013; Carpenter & Linton, 2015; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Onsrud, 2015). When training is "one and done," there is no room for mastery. Subsequently, the benefits of returning to the knowledge after application seem attractive

to the participants because it is another opportunity to modify and adjust their practices based on real experience. Teachers are able to reflect on their practice and share those experiences with others, adding value to the learning and the training itself (ACT, 2015; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016). The data supports the implication that teachers perceive PD as fragmented and lacking substance, which also affects their decision to apply new knowledge and adjust their practices accordingly.

Theme 5: A Culture of Respectful Collaboration and Partnership

The most fervor was expressed in the lack of professionalism across the district. Many of the respondents felt as if they were not treated as stakeholders and integral parts of the educational community. Participant F stated:

> "It would help us as a district if we collaborated with one another," and "Collaboration among professionals is always a good thing. Each of the schools right now I think they're doing their own thing. I don't know what their curriculum looks like. So when they come to me from the middle school, I don't know what they've learned." Participant F continued: "I think my role has been diminished."
>
> Participant G communicated:
>
> "If they would have an informational session where someone is really listening to the teachers. I know we've filled out surveys before. Not sure if they were read, but that kind of thing to connect to the pulse of the teachers or even better what teachers need. I think that that would help."
>
> Participant A shared:

> "I never feel like any of the things that I write down on that [survey] and submit it back to them ever makes it to someone's desk and that they actually consider what we wanted and what we put down as a faculty. Instead, it seems like everything is already decided either before the year begins or last minute."

Participant A also commented:

> "I think at this point the PD is so disorganized and ineffective that you would almost need a team. I would say combine faculty and administration, a team that would put together and help organize and collaborate on professional development and especially on feedback and application" and "I'm sure a lot feel the way I do and would be willing to participate in some kind of group setting where we feel like our voices are heard."

Participant C reported: "One of the workshops that I went to, one of the teachers from the school actually spearheaded that workshop, and it was good." Participant E shared:

> "But I think even as a new person anybody who came on can ask the teachers what they wanted. No one's ever really done that so they never brought us together and asked us what we wanted in the process. So ultimately we end up with nothing."

The data suggested that teachers feel disrespected as professionals in their fields. It appears that they do not feel valued and as if they are an integral member of a team. Teachers want to be included in their own PD as well as in the improvement of the school (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Onsrud, 2015). Many recommendations were offered:

allowing peers to present information to one another; engage in a collaborative setting; opening communication among schools to vertically articulate curriculum; include teachers in the decision process; surveying what teachers already know or providing options as to not "diminish anyone's role" or present information that teachers may already know. The goal is to transform the climate in to one where there is mutual respect for professionalism and this includes teachers' opinions, needs, and support.

Conclusion

Research (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Meister, 2010; Miretzky, 2007; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2010; NJDOE, 2010; Pella, 2011; Sappington et al., 2012; U.S. DOE, 2012; West, 2012) has shown that quality and effective professional development increases the probability that newly acquired skills will be applied in the classroom, hence, affecting instructional practices and student achievement (Onsrud, 2015). Academic readiness affects all teachers as students are promoted and eventually enter post-secondary institutions. Research (Dilworth & Knapp, 2010; Winters, 2012) has also shown that poor academic performance is ascribed partly to ineffective instructional strategies.

To improve teacher effectiveness in Central High School, data suggested that there needs to be a consistent investment in PD and continual learning (Guskey, 2009, 2002, 1999; Guskey & Sparks, 2002). With the constant evolving educational trends, advancements in technology, overwhelming federal and local government mandates, and the developing needs of diverse learners, teachers, old and new, must remain abreast to new knowledge and sound instructional practices that will facilitate their effectiveness in

the classroom (Church, 2012). With the lack of faith in teacher preparation programs (Catapano, 2010; Huisman et al., 2010; Singer et al., 2010), both novice and veteran teachers benefit from quality PD. In staying current, teachers must be willing and motivated to continue learning and applying newly acquired skills. However, if teachers feel passionately about the quality of professional development at the high school, their perceptions and attitudes may affect their decision to apply new knowledge (Fullan, 2007; Meister, 2010).

This doctoral study aimed to explain how teachers viewed PD in Central High School and what variables influenced their decisions to apply newly acquired knowledge. As a result, the best course of action was a case study which lends itself to observable patterns in teacher behavior (Creswell, 2012, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012). Yin (2012) stated that answering why and how is an explanatory design common in case studies. A case study lent itself to triangulating multiple sources of evidence to explain the phenomenon of establishing a systematic and effective PD program at the secondary level.

Qualitative data were collected and subsequently analyzed to learn how teachers, with at least 1 year of teaching experience, felt about the PD program at the high school. Once the sample was identified, respondents participated in a focused interview of no more than 60 minutes. The interviews were immediately transcribed and analyzed for common themes and patterns. That data were subsequently triangulated with archival records and other relevant documents.

There are many factors that impacted this study. One very important variable was asking the best questions. Ineffective questions are a waste of time and energy, especially since so much time is dedicated to analyzing data (Yin, 2012). Straying from the purpose of the case study investigation can also impact the results. I continually interpreted the data as to identify any contradictory source of information, eliminate repetitious or unfocused information, and not overlook any relevant clues that could alter any developing theories (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012), in which case, more evidence would need to be collected (Yin, 2012). Another factor is eliminating research bias. Since case studies are often derived from a personal interest (Yin, 2012), it can be difficult to remain objective. Yin (2012) wrote that "all of the preceding conditions will be negated if an investigator seeks only to substantiate a preconceived notion" (p. 72). Therefore, in order to not compromise the data, I separated subjectivity from the facts. In section 3, I will introduce the project, discuss the goals of the project, and reflect on the results.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this section, I will introduce my project, a policy recommendation with detail (position paper), for an effective PD program at Central High School. The project will provide administrators with a road map of how to revamp their current PD program (see Appendix A). After collecting data and analyzing emerging themes, it was clear that teachers truly care about their professional growth and student achievement, yet were overall dissatisfied with the support they receive. Many teachers who participated in the study expressed their desire to participate in organized and relevant training. Participants also shared the need for a program that is consistent and continuous, one that extends into the classroom through way of additional support and evaluation of its effectiveness. This section will include a description of the project, the rationale for selecting the project, and a review of the literature explaining why this plan is an appropriate response to the teachers' feelings and attitudes toward their current PD program. This section will also include an implementation plan for the proposed PD program.

Description and Goals

In this study, I examined high school teachers' perceptions of the current PD program offered by a suburban K–12 school district located in the northeastern United States. Seven educators from various disciplines were interviewed about their perceptions and attitudes on the PD training offered at their high school. The study initiated from a real need for an effective PD program. The responses from participants in the study showed that they all want to participate in an ongoing and effective PD program;

however, in their collective view, such professional learning was lacking at the high school level. Since I was not able to procure permission from the superintendent to conduct research at the high school, the participants met with me off-site and during their personal time. Participants' eagerness to share their experiences with PD and their willingness to give of their personal time outside of school was not only an indication of how desperately a PD program was needed, but also a testament to how much each participant values professional growth. Their passion for education was evident as they shared their feelings about PD, their desires for change, and their recommendations for improvement.

Since Central High School lacks a systematic and structured PD program, according to participants, the goal of the research was to determine ways of creating an effective program that would motivate high school teachers to apply new knowledge. Chorzempa (2011) communicated that the single most determining factor of student achievement is quality teachers. Moreover, quality instruction is obtained by way of ongoing, sustainable, quality PD (Okere, 2011; Shaha, Glassett, & Ellsworth, 2015). According to the district's 2015–2016 calendar, there were 3 staff orientation days, offered 3 days before the first day of school, and 2 PD days intermittently planned throughout the year: one in February and another one in June. There were also monthly faculty and department meetings where teachers met and collaborated with other teachers. In the interviews, participants made recommendations on how best to use this time allotted to PD training and opined on methods of improving current practices and

possible strategies for establishing a structured PD program that would be effective and efficient.

Rationale

Yin (2009) posited that "interviews are an essential source of case-study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events" (p. 108). I chose interviews for this project study because I wanted to hear first-hand how teachers felt about their own professional growth in the midst of new national standards (CCSS), new teacher evaluations (Danielson framework), and new state assessments (PARCC). An interview is the most effective way of capturing a person's feelings and attitude toward a subject (Yin, 2009). Carpenter and Linton (2016) supported the imminent need for quality teacher training. Mezirow (1997) and Knowles (1998) both agreed that adults are self-motivated to learn if the learning is relevant to their lives. Mezirow further argued that adults learn best if they are included in their own learning. Therefore, I believed that interviewing teachers was the most effective way of obtaining valuable and authentic data that can drive the development of a comprehensive PD program.

My experience as a high school teacher also showed me that educators in my field had a lot to say about their own professional growth and how they felt inadequate and unprepared to teach students to perform well on the PARCC. As a high school teacher, I also understand how the challenge to improve academic achievement is compounded by the pressures of teacher evaluations. Teachers, for the first time, are being held accountable for student performance on state assessments, yet they are not receiving ample and ongoing support to prepare them for this challenge (Tatto et al., 2016).

By interviewing high school teachers, teachers had the opportunity to share how they felt about the PD program being offered to them and how they felt about their preparedness. Participants' candor not only shed light on how to develop an effective PD program but also elucidated the current challenges that teachers may face in a high school setting that only a high school teacher can describe. While the results of this study were not intended to be generalized, the teachers may represent the attitudes and perceptions of teachers in a similar high school setting who face the same external and internal challenges.

Furthermore, Central High School was deemed by the state as a Focus School, and based on the recent PARCC scores for Grades 9–11, it was evident that this school needed to improve the level of PD and instruction to improve student academic achievement. Table 1 shows that the majority of students in Grades 9–11 performed below expectations on the ELA PARCC. The data showed that 80% of overall students in Grades 9–11 performed below expectations. A nominal 17% performed on expected level, while only 3% exceeded expectations. These results suggested that the majority of students in Grades 9–11 who attended Central High School were not career and college ready, which is what this assessment is supposed to measure. If these results are a true indication of the skills that students lack, then students are not being adequately prepared for postsecondary life.

Table 1 New Jersey State Grades 9–11 ELA PARCC Scores, 2014–2015

Grade	Below Expectations	Met Expectations	Exceeded Expectations
9	82%	16%	2%
10	73%	20%	6%
11	86%	17%	0%

The argument can also be made that if students are not being adequately prepared for life after high school, that the teachers charged with the responsibility of preparing students are also inadequately prepared to do so (Tatto et al., 2016). During the interviews, it was evident that factors such as low scores on state assessments were variables that impacted some teachers' decision to seek and apply new knowledge. The recent PARCC scores, as well as Central High School's Focus School status, impacted how teachers viewed their level of preparedness and how they felt about their students' inability to perform well on an assessment.

I surmised that teachers had to have a reaction to the new impending pressures of not only PARCC, but mastering the CCSS, and clearly understanding the new teacher evaluation tool by which they are being evaluated (the Danielson framework); these are inevitably important factors that teachers consider when conceptualizing a structured PD program. Teachers would need a PD program that would assist in better preparing students to meet the state standards and master the skills that they will be tested on in PARCC. The interviews provided invaluable information on not only how the teachers felt about their current PD program, but also on ways of constructing a program that

would inspire teacher buy-in and motivate teachers to collaborate and apply newly acquired knowledge in their classrooms.

Review of the Literature

While there was sufficient research on PD and on teacher perception of PD, there really was not as much on recent PD as it pertains to PARCC, CCSS, and the Danielson framework and their impact on secondary education. In fact, there was a paucity of research on improving PD in secondary schools, but much of the research on secondary education had been conducted outside of the United States. There was a fair amount of research that concentrated on primary education in the United States; however, such research did not meet my needs as this study focused on effective PD in a high school setting. Also, there was very little literature on how these fairly recent environmental pressures affected high school teachers' instruction and perception. In spite of the paucity in research, I focused my attention on teacher perception of PD and quality teacher instruction at the high school level. I also reviewed sources on the Danielson framework and effective PD.

Mezirow's transformational theory (1997) and Knowles' andragogy theory (1998) informed the content of this project. Studying adults' learning preferences was foundational in understanding how to construct an effective PD program that benefits both teachers and students. Similar to both Mezirow and Knowles' theory on adult learning, Clark and Gökmenoğlu (2015) reported that teachers enjoy their PD training if the training considered their personal experiences.

Because the school district used Danielson's framework to evaluate teachers and PD is one of the components by which teacher effectiveness is measured, Danielson (2007a) was the leading research informing my project on teacher quality; however, there were also other authorities on the subject of teacher training. Guskey (1999, 2002, 2009) is most notable in developing an effective PD program that other scholars have cited in their research. Guskey's work elucidated a modeled framework for developing, evaluating, and maintaining a quality program. Much recent research (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Holm & Kajander, 2015; Shaha et al., 2015) has argued that quality PD has a long term and lasting impact on teachers, students, and the school. Therefore, my use of interviews as the primary data collection approach was intended to gather firsthand data on whether teacher perceptions supported previous research in terms of how teachers prefer to learn and what impacts a teacher's decision to seek and apply new knowledge.

Moreover, I reviewed literature that directly related to PD and how an effective program affected high school teachers' decision to apply new knowledge. I accessed several books from authors who have successfully implemented systems in their schools as principals, such as Kenney's (2012) *Born to Rise*, Dr. Muhammad and DuFour's (2009) *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division*, and Winters' (2012) *Teachers Matter*. I also accessed a number of scholarly journals from the Teachers College Record and various other sources from the Walden University Library such as: EBSCO, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, Education Source, ERIC, and Teacher Reference Center. In conducting my research, I used the following search terms: *effective professional development, professional development and*

secondary schools, high school and collaboration, teacher preparation programs, instructional coaching, professional learning communities, teacher learning, teacher training, teacher evaluations, quality teaching, and *teacher education.* In this literature review, I will discuss the components of an effective PD program that promotes collaboration and cooperation from all stakeholders in the district.

Professional Development

Carpenter and Linton (2016) communicated that quality PD is a worldwide quandary. In spite of this fact, quality PD is considered the most effective method of improving instruction. Effective PD not only provides teachers with the extended support they need to continue to grow professionally (Holm & Kajander, 2015), but it also cultivates pedagogical skills in educators as well as develops their content knowledge (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). PD has been criticized for being superficial and individualistic and for lacking substance, relevance, and transference (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Shaha, Glassett, & Elsworth, 2015). On the other hand, research (Clark & Gökmenoğlu, 2015) has shown that the success or failure of national educational reform efforts is contingent upon the quality and quantity of support provided to teachers through a sustainable PD program. In other words, quality PD is critical in successfully reforming education.

Lane and Hayes (2015) noted that while preservice and in-service teachers lack the training to apply evidence-based strategies to improve instructional practices, PD still serves as a medium for teachers to obtain a wealth of knowledge and experience. A group of lead teachers in California (2015) developed a study on teacher quality. The group was

referred to as the Accomplished California Teachers (ACT) group, and according to their findings, effective PD improves teacher quality. Moreover, Clark and Gökmenoğlu (2015) found a correlation between quality PD and highly effective teachers. They further posited that quality PD improves education. Steinberg and Sartain (2015) found a correlation between quality teachers and student academic improvement. In fact, Bannister (2015) asserted that a quality PD program is an investment in teachers and students.

Jeon, Buettner, and Hur (2015) communicated that teacher motivation to apply new knowledge is correlated to their feelings of satisfaction with the job. Clark and Gökmenoğlu (2015) further posited that effective PD is also rooted in the needs of teachers. Callahan and Sadeghi (2015) agreed that when teachers' input informs the planning of PD training that the transfer of knowledge is more effective than if the PD were disconnected from the teachers' needs. Moreover, teachers are motivated to apply new knowledge when they feel as if they are in control of their learning (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). Holm and Kajander (2015) communicated that a "one-size fits all" approach to PD simply does not work. Existing research (ACT, 2015; Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015) has shown that an effective PD program is one which is comprehensive and continuous.

PD should first begin with a solid teacher preparation program. Schramm-Possinger (2016) conveyed that teacher preparation programs highly influence a preservice teacher's beliefs and pedagogical approaches once they become in–service teachers. In spite of this truth, many post–secondary institutions offer inadequate

coursework and field experience to properly prepare teachers to enter the profession as effective classroom instructors (Bryant, Maarouf, Burcham, & Greer, 2016). Oftentimes, student–teaching and field experience consist of theories and methodologies that do not transfer over into the real life classroom experience. Tatto et al. (2016) discussed the recent federal initiatives to reform teacher education programs in undergraduate institutions. They concluded that such reform in education is necessary in improving student academic performance as well as addressing the disparity and unequal training provided by institutions across the nation. They further posited that preservice teachers are not adequately prepared to serve high risk districts where quality teachers are needed the most, and, yet, underprepared teachers are being hired. Indubitably, novice teachers positioned in such districts also lack the cultural knowledge to effectively teach and relate to students (Ebersole, Kanahele-Mossman, & Kawakami, 2016).

On average, preservice teachers do not feel confident enough in their training to teach math (Colwell & Enderson, 2016) or reading (Clark, 2016). These are the two content areas assessed on state assessments such as the PARCC. Research (Hao & Lee, 2016) has shown that overall, preservice teachers have issues with self-efficacy as it relates to teaching the 21st century student. Dorel, Kearney, and Garza (2016) proposed that preservice teachers be exposed to more field experience during their practicum, or student-teaching experience. They learned that the more time prospective teachers spent in the field studying and responding to real life stimuli, the more their self–efficacy for classroom instruction increased. Ebersole et al. (2016) suggested integrating a cultural education course to deepen preservice teachers' perspective of diversity in the classroom.

Ronfeldt (2015) communicated that placing preservice teachers in an instructional setting where teachers successfully collaborate with one another offers a more effective field experience and training.

Quality PD for in–service teachers is persistent, inclusive, and has a clear, specific focus (ACT, 2015). Callahan and Sadeghi (2015) asserted that effective PD is one that is "sustained over time, centers on active learning, and focuses on student outcomes" (p. 50). The ACT (2015) reported that effective PD promotes continual improvement, which consists of self-assessment, building new knowledge, and reflecting on their own quality of work. Ciullo et al. (2016) characterized effective PD as one that provides explicit modeling as well as opportunities to apply new knowledge. In Florida, for instance, 7,000 educators, including administrators, participated in an extensive Reading Academy in the summer as well as follow-up activities throughout the year (Lane & Hayes, 2015, p. 19). Korelich and Maxwell (2015) supported the novelty of even training local school board members in educational policies as to better inform their decisions.

Collaboration is an integral component of effective PD as well. In fact, ongoing, structured, well-organized, and amply-resourced collaboration in small teams of educators has shown to improve student academic achievement in math and reading (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). Professional learning communities (PLCs) is a form of collaboration where teachers can work with one another in areas of specific needs (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; DuFour, 2014; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Onsrud, 2015). To be most effective, teachers have to meet with other teachers with a common grade or subject in order to make the training useful and

engaging (Clark & Gökmenoğlu, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Ermeling and Yarbo (2016) posited that teacher–expert collaborations can also impact quality classroom instruction if such a relationship stems from teacher inquiry and is fostered through an extended period of time. In other words, both external consultants combined with purposeful internal training can benefit a PD program if they meet teachers' needs. Furthermore, teachers should collaborate with administrators to set authentic growth indicators based on student outcomes (ACT, 2015).

Research also supported active communication with post–secondary institutions (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). Active means that the partnership is based on clear and relevant goals that are developed by participants from both sides, and where participants are able to consistently reflect and modify those goals (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). Another factor in collaboration essential to the conversation of quality PD are families. Families are stakeholders in the education of the students and garnering their support adds value to a teacher's instruction. Epstein and Willhite (2015) recognized that in order to build impactful relationships that teachers and parents alike need proper training. They also communicated the effectiveness of a trained mentor to facilitate and support the professional growth of novice teachers beyond the first year. These specific features of collaboration promotes shared accountability and a sense of community learning (ACT, 2015).

More and more research has supported the role of a coach to follow up with the training and assist teachers who may struggle with the transfer of new knowledge (ACT, 2015; Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Duncan, Magnuson, & Murnane, 2016; Taylor & Tyler,

2012). Clark and Gökmenoğlu (2015) maintained that effective training includes modeling, time for practice, feedback, and classroom application. These features are best provided by an un-obtrusive party who is not evaluating the teacher (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015). Duncan et al. (2016) concluded that a coach helps teachers and school leaders improve their skills as well as provides a system of shared accountability for student learning. Templeton et al. (2016) supported the belief that coaching reduces teacher attrition, and instead retains educators. They further posited that coaching reduces teacher isolation and promotes an environment of trust. Teachers who receive coaching reported shifts in their thinking as well as in their interaction with students (Patti, Holzer, Brackett, & Stern, 2015). One-on-one coaching also increases teachers' classroom management skills, which, in turn, reduces the number of classroom infractions and student suspensions (Flynn, Lissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay, 2016). Research (Jeon et al., 2016) has also shown that a coach can assist teachers with managing their emotional intelligence as it relates to their self-efficacy as effective instructors and classroom managers.

Finally, schools must use multiple methods to measure the effectiveness of teacher practices (ACT, 2015; Evans & Moretti, 2015). As of 2013, TeachNJ stipulated that all districts in New Jersey will evaluate teachers through a new teacher evaluation tool designed to identify quality instruction and "highly effective" teachers (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015). Twenty-percent of the teacher evaluation is based on student academic achievement, or as the federal government refers to as student growth objectives (SGO's), while 80% of the teacher evaluation is based on teacher practices, including PD.

Steinberg and Sartain (2015) posited that teacher quality is the most important indicator of student achievement, yet, current evaluative tools have not been able to successfully identify effective teachers who actually improve student learning. In fact, Steinberg and Sartain (2015) highlighted the imbalance and inequity of the entire evaluative process among teachers. Teachers of testing subjects are under much more pressure than teachers who are not teaching subjects such as language arts and math (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015). Moreover, language arts and math teachers in states who are enrolled in President Obama's RTTT have been rated on how well students perform on state assessments, receiving a "value-added" score to their overall rating, while other teachers are not evaluated the same. Evaluations are not sophisticated enough to capture effective teaching (Evans, 2015). Evaluations should also not be viewed as punitive, but as a tool for measuring growth (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015) and initiating a collaborative conversation on best instructional practices (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Furthermore, teacher evaluations should inform the planning of professional development training (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015). The assessors should be knowledgeable themselves in the strategies teachers are being evaluated on, perhaps, receiving their own intensive training first (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015).

Currently, the Danielson framework is a widely recognized tool used to evaluate teacher effectiveness (Evans, 2015). Teachers no longer receive a binary rating for their performance. Instead, teachers are now evaluated on four domains of performance and can receive one of four ratings (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015). One of the four domains is professional responsibility, one of the elements being PD (Danielson, 2007a).

Project Description

After completing this project, I was able to determine the key elements of a comprehensive and effective PD program. Because I did not procure district level approval to conduct this doctoral study on site, I am not certain if I would be able to share my findings with anyone other than the participants; however, the findings of this study will yield suggestions on how to develop a sustainable, quality program at the high school level. It would also highlight how best to bridge the gap between preservice and in–service training. It is my desire to continue my research beyond this study to extend the conversation of what a structured teacher training program looks like, partnering with post–secondary institutions that are training teachers.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Because Central High School is a Focus School and serves many students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch, the school qualifies for federal Title I monies. A portion of these funds can be allocated for retaining external consultants and paying teachers the hourly rate for attending professional development sessions during the summer. The school could create a "Teacher's Academy" that offers courses, similar to a college or university. Teachers could register to take whichever courses they are interested in; providing ample and consistent PD training rooted in teachers' needs and interests is an innovative way of increasing participation and teacher buy-in.

The district publishes an annual calendar where five PD days are reserved for full-day training. Outside of these PD days, teachers are contractually required to stay after school once a month for an hour to attend faculty meetings, and teachers meet biweekly,

or monthly, within their department. These are all opportunities to train teachers in a systematic and professional way.

Currently, there are two specialists in the district who plan PD. Even though they focus much of their efforts to grades K–8, they still can assist in developing a district-wide program that vertically articulates skills for K–12. There is an administrator at the high school who facilitates the planning of PD for the entire school; however, there would need to be collaboration among all administrators as well as teachers. Teachers should be surveyed to determine what they want to learn (Carpenter & Linton, 2016); they should be empowered to peer–teach and peer–coach (Flynn, Lissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay, 2016); they should evaluate their training and on–going improvements should be made based on their feedback (Guskey, 1999; Tatto et al., 2016); and an instructional coach could assist struggling teachers with the application of new knowledge (Flynn et al., 2016; Patti, Holzer, Brackett, & Stern, 2016; Templeton et al., 2016). This position can be assumed by a peer or a supervisor.

In-class support is even more essential for novice teachers (Tatto et al., 2016). I proposed and research supports that mentors work closely with non – tenure teachers for at least four years and a day, which is how long they must demonstrate effectiveness as a teacher before procuring tenure, per the new tenure law (NJDOE, 2014). Novice teachers and teachers who are struggling to adjust to changes in instructional practices should receive the most support from a coach (Patti et al., 2016), particularly teachers with a CAP. Teachers should also constantly self–reflect on their progress as well as engage in consistent dialogue with administrators and peers about their instructional practices and

their impact on student achievement (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Patti et al., 2016). Finally, teacher evaluations should be informative and should drive professional development planning (ACT, 2015).

Potential Barriers

There are a few potential barriers to implementing a new PD program at Central High School. The first barrier is resistance to change (Clark & Gökmenoğlu, 2015; Colwell & Enderson, 2016). Resistance can occur for a variety of reasons. One reason could be that teachers struggle with self–efficacy when expected to apply new knowledge and improve student academic skills (Colwell & Enderson, 2016). Another reason teachers may resist applying new knowledge is if they are not included in the planning of PD (ACT, 2015).

Another potential barrier is consistent accountability from both staff and administrators. Participation and cooperation from all stakeholders is key in promoting a culture and climate shift (Ronfeldt, 2015). Teachers may feel reluctant to collaborate after feeling isolated. They may also resist change for fear of failure or being exposed (Onsrud, 2015). Equally important is administrators being consistent (Bryant, Maarouf, Burcham, & Greer, 2016). Consistency emphasizes the importance of professional growth and stakeholders are liable to take it more seriously. One of the recurring themes that emerged from the data collected for this study was the lack of consistency, and so this may continue to be a problem if not properly addressed. The most anticipated challenge is administrative cooperation. As I mentioned earlier, without official approval from the

superintendent, it will be difficult to share the findings of this study and convince administration to revise the current PD program at all.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The present project delineated the components of an effective PD program. For starters, the administrative team would have to meet to develop a clear professional vision (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015). The planning should be based, in part, on teacher surveys (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Doing so, would give administration ample time during the summer to carefully and thoughtfully plan out the PD training sessions throughout the year. The PD schedule can offer several options that are not limited to the five PD days already reserved on the 2016–2017 scholastic calendar. The program guidelines and vision can be clearly written and communicated to the faculty on the first day of orientation, which is two days before the first day of school with the students.

Once the vision for the year is clear, administrators can develop a PD calendar based on teacher feedback, the results of teacher evaluations, and the anticipated needs of the school. All of the tentative dates and available PD sessions for the year can be printed and shared with the faculty prior to the first faculty meeting, so teachers know what to expect and can plan and prepare accordingly. After a sustainable timeframe of consistent and continuous PD with embedded effective program evaluation and teacher feedback, teacher morale should improve substantially (Guskey, 2009).

There are a total of five PD days reserved on the 2016–2017 district calendar for full day training without students. Administrators can plan meaningful PD sessions facilitated by administrators, consultants, and lead teachers. These dates can be available

from the very beginning. At least a week before the PD session, teachers can register online using a web tool such as tinyurl.com. For monthly meetings, teachers will not be expected to register for a one hour session; although, on full day PD's, they will register for three one hour sessions, two sessions if they are a presenter.

Novice and non–tenured teachers will receive even more support with this program. They will meet monthly during their preparatory period. The meeting can be facilitated by an administrator, a coach, or lead teacher. In fact, this should be a shared responsibility (Cochran-Smith, Ell, Grudnoff, Haigh, Hill, & Ludlow, 2016; Duncan et al., 2016). During this time, novice and non–tenured teachers would have an opportunity to learn about administrative responsibilities, such as maintaining an accurate grade book, classroom management strategies, and collaborate with a network of teachers to generate practical strategies to address the needs of the students. In addition, they would also meet weekly with a mentor or coach to discuss individual challenges and instructional practices.

Tenured teachers should also participate in weekly or bi–weekly PLC's during their preparatory period (Holm & Kajander, 2015; Onsrud, 2015). These periods should be common among grade levels to make the learning more engaging and applicable to the teams (Clark & Gökmenoğlu, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In high school, this can be a bit polarizing (Mandel, 2015) since there are so many different courses offered, and the schedule can complicate the facilitation of such planning, making a grade-level team difficult to establish (Carpenter & Linton, 2015). It is not impossible, however. The teams can be fluid and can change from year to year, or semester to semester. Teachers

with challenging schedules can also collaborate online (Carpenter, 2016). Central High School uses TeachScape as its platform to organize and file teacher evaluations and teacher artifacts. There is also a learning function where teachers can access professional videos and courses as well as engage in an online discussion forum with their colleagues. With a little ingenuity and a lot of planning, administrators can integrate this tool into the program to improve PD effectiveness.

Roles and Responsibilities

While there is one administrator at the high school responsible for planning and preparing the PD sessions, that administrator cannot be the only one making the decisions (Onsrud, 2015). The administrator in charge of the PD can administer a survey developed by the administrative team using an online tool such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms. The results would be immediate, which is very beneficial when attempting to plan PD for the upcoming school year. A school improvement team would analyze the data and decide what the focus of the PD will be. Again, once the plan has been written and shared with the faculty, all the presenters have been identified, and teachers can register for sessions that interest them, everyone then has to be accountable for applying that new knowledge. The school could benefit from an instructional coach or peer coach who does not evaluate teachers (ACT, 2015). This person is designated solely to support teachers in the classroom (Duncan et al., 2016). A coach would meet with individual teachers and groups to plan lessons and share strategies. The coach would also be expected to model lessons, assist in analyzing data for professional growth, and facilitate teacher reflections (Patti et al., 2015).

Teachers will be responsible for recording their training sessions in an online evaluative forum such as TeachScape, meet with the coaches, and demonstrate application of new knowledge during informal walkthroughs and formal observations. The administrators doing the evaluations can then hold teachers accountable for the knowledge because professional growth has been integrated in a systematic and clear way. While the coaches will not report to the administrators, or submit any information regarding their coaching assignments, the administrators can enter an observation with some level of expectancy because the on–going support and sustainable training has been available.

Project Evaluation

The purpose of this project was to develop a quality teacher training program that could motivate teachers to apply knew knowledge to improve student academic achievement. To achieve this goal, teachers would evaluate the PD program often to provide administrators with feedback on how to improve the program and more consistently meet the needs of teachers. Guskey (1999, 2009) posited that evaluations should be planned well before an activity. The evaluation of the PD should be just as systemic as the activity. In other words, it should be intentional and meaningful. It should also be as objective as possible. The evaluation can guide the future planning of the PD sessions. Guskey (1999, 2009) further suggested engaging in formative evaluations throughout the year. Formative assessments can be used as measures of success as well as indicators of improvements for each activity within the program. After completing the project, administrators can assess the overall value of the program by administering a

summative evaluation. Unlike a formative assessment, a summative assessment would evaluate the program itself and provide managers of the program with insight on how to improve the program (Guskey, 1999). These evaluations can be accessed through an online program such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms for immediate feedback.

The project is also designed to determine if quality instruction improves student achievement. In order to determine if the training is actually impacting student achievement, the teachers would have to administer meaningful beginning, mid, and end of the year benchmark assessments to students. Administration would analyze data to see any trends from the beginning of the year to the end. Data can also be used to drive the PLCs throughout the school year (DuFour, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Implications Including Social Change

All stakeholders benefit from this comprehensive PD program. The most important targeted group is the students. Improving scores on PARCC as well as in-class achievement, improving classroom behavior, and increasing student engagement are the ultimate desired outcomes; however, teachers will benefit from this program because they are immersed in an all-year PD program that is not only cost–effective but has the potential to be profitable for teachers. If sessions are offered during the summer and weekends, teachers can earn an hourly rate for attending. Some of the interview participants of this study admitted paying for off-site PD, and it is not uncommon for teachers to earn degrees and certificates to pursue higher paying positions.

Provided with a research based PD program, administrators benefit as well, for they would have shifted the climate and the culture of the school. A sustainable PD

program rooted in the specific needs of teachers and students will, inevitably, improve morale and establish mutual respect (Onsrud, 2015). Administrators should see less resistance for change, and more cooperation from teachers to fulfill a common vision (Templeton et al., 2016). A comprehensive PD program would also provide administrators with opportunities to grow in their respective fields.

Once a PD program has been established for teachers, it can be extended to include the community. Parents and other stakeholders, such as school board members and central administrators, can participate in the on–going PD. PD should be available for support and custodial staff as well (Onsrud, 2015). The school can serve as a model for the rest of the district, and, ultimately, the program can be adopted to fulfill the needs of other schools.

Conclusion

In section 3, I outlined the elements of a comprehensive PD program for high school teachers. First, I described the project goals and the rationale for developing such a project. I also discussed a review of the literature, a proposed implementation and evaluation plan, and the implications of this project on social change. In the final section of this study, section 4, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the study as well as make recommendations for future research.

Section 4**:** Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I will provide my reflections on this project and offer some conclusions. More specifically, I will discuss the strengths of the project and offer recommendations for remediation of the study's limitations. I will also share an analysis of me as a scholar–practitioner and project developer. This section will conclude with the project's potential impact on social change, implications, and applications as well as my recommendations for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

A major strength of this project is the potential to establish a community of shared responsibility and accountability for student achievement (Duncan et al., 2016; Onsrud, 2015). During the interviews, the participants were passionate about their responses. It was evident that they had a thirst for knowledge, but were also dissatisfied and disappointed with the current PD program because it lacked relevance, continuity, and transference. Freire (1998b) posited that adult learning should stem from the adult learner's critical view of the world they live in, an idea that Freire called "transforming reality" (p. 499). In the theory of conscientization, Freire (1998b) proposed that adult learners be active agents of their learning. In other words, that adults' learning is influenced by the world they live in and what they perceive as important. More simply, what adult learners perceive as their reality is what dictates how they relate, and hence, interact with others in the world, and subsequently, learn. Therefore, collaboration and communication are at the heart of a quality and well–conceived PD program (Carpenter

& Linton, 2016; Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). This culminating project has the potential to transform relationships, the classroom experience, and self-efficacy in teachers (Onsrud, 2015). A comprehensive program is a way to develop teacher competence, promote a sense of community, and improve morale among all stakeholders (Onsrud, 2015).

One limitation of this project was that according to the budget approved by the school board, Central High School alone contended with a substantial amount of staff reductions due to budgetary constraints. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Central High School can afford a literacy and math coach to support teachers with transference of new PD knowledge. One of the recurring complaints of the study participants was that administrators do not ever "check" to see if new knowledge was being applied. One can conclude that not even the administrators in Central High School can provide the in–class support that teachers consistently need. To remedy the absence of in–class support, the principal can assign peer coaches to assist and support one another in the classroom, eliminating the pressures of being evaluated (ACT, 2015; Bannister, 2016; Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Flynn et al., 2016).

Another limitation was proper planning and preparation for training sessions throughout the year. According to the 2016–2017 school calendar, there are two faculty orientation days before the first official day of school in September; however, the next full day of training is not until October 10th. There are two more training days on the calendar, one on January 30th and the other on June 6th. An alternative solution to this problem is to plan for a plethora of training throughout the year, during monthly faculty

meetings, and during weekly PLCs. Teachers need scheduled time to meet on a consistent basis and they also need time to reflect on their own professional growth to identify areas that need improvement (Onsrud, 2015). A final recommendation to supplement the PD program was to use an online platform to engage in professional learning (Carpenter, 2016; Carpenter & Linton, 2015). Teachscape, for instance, offers teachers and administrators an online forum to manage teacher evaluations as well as to access professional learning resources, such as tutorials and discussion boards, for teacher collaboration.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

In my research, I discovered alternative approaches to developing effective and quality teaching besides teacher training sessions, PLCs, and coaching. While participants of the study expressed their need for collaboration with peers and administrators, one other approach to collaborating is social networking. Twitter and Edmodo, for instance, are platforms for staying current with trendy educational topics and sharing instructional strategies with other educators (Carpenter, 2016). Google has now expanded its purview of education to include Google+, a virtual platform for educators (https://plus.google.com). In Google+, educators can create Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) tailored to their specific needs and interests (Carpenter, 2016). These PLNs can be within a school or in and out of district (Carpenter, 2016). There are many websites and online sites that offer free webinars on a multitude of teaching topics, such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development or EdWeb.net. There are also one day events called EdCamps where teachers can virtually assemble to

collaborate with other educators across the globe (Carpenter, 2016; Carpenter & Linton, 2015). Throughout this study, I have learned that the definition of PD and how it is structured is constantly evolving in the wave of advancing technology.

Scholarship

The most impactful theme that emerged from this study was that scholarship varies from learner to learner. Multiple data sources showed me how the participants, intrinsically, want to learn and grow. Such ardent desire for learning, becoming better educators, and helping students succeed was evident in the teachers that I interviewed; however, much of what they were expected to do is foreign to some, causing them to resort to survival tactics instead of effective instructional strategies. As administrators expect teachers to differentiate learning for students, they should also differentiate learning for teachers (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016). Teachers process information differently and should be respected and valued enough to provide them with an education that is authentic and needs-specific (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

As a scholar, I have also learned the value of life–long learning through this study. In the wake of many federal mandates, information is often changing in the education field. It has amazed me how much information on standards, teacher evaluations, and standardized assessments has changed in the last 4 years alone. The local and federal governments have disseminated so much information to teachers (and the public) all at once that it has been quite difficult to sift through it all and process the entire scope of intended reform in education. Furthermore, educational laws have changed, and with them, guidelines for professional learning and student outcomes;

however, this research process has made me more knowledgeable and has assisted me in understanding my role as a teacher and as a prospective instructional leader. This journey has afforded me the opportunity to closely examine policies; it has challenged me to scrutinize my own professional growth and how it impacts my students. Being a scholar is not just about acquiring knowledge. It is also about applying that knowledge, reflecting on the effectiveness of that knowledge, and modifying that knowledge to fit your individual needs (Clark & Gökmenoğlu, 2015). I have discovered that such a process is continuous and never–ending.

Finally, this process taught me that a scholar does not learn in isolation. I could not have gained all the knowledge I obtained through this research alone. In fact, the countless sources I consulted inspired me to have fruitful conversations with other educators and experts in the field of education. I sought out passionate professionals who have been active in educational reform and those interactions helped mold my perspective and philosophy of education – that teachers are the biggest asset any school has, and in order to obtain the quality of instruction that each student deserves, school leaders must begin with their teachers. I often hear educators say that students should be "put first." While this is fundamentally true, I have come to adjust my belief slightly by contending that putting teachers first means putting students first. I have found that when communities value their teachers, they take care of them, provide them with the resources that they need to be effective, support them, and facilitate their professional growth. Once community leaders demonstrate that teachers are an invaluable resource, students will

inevitably benefit. It really requires a community of teacher learners to build student learners (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Onsrud, 2015).

Project Development and Evaluation

Developing this doctoral project was time consuming and labor intensive. The most arduous aspect of the process was the literature review. There was a constant turnover of new information, and to stay current, I had to access countless sources. The research, however, supported the integration of a comprehensive PD program to improve instructional practices and student academic achievement. The interview process was also daunting in that I felt underprepared to interview participants. There were a few participants who did not need any prompting from me because they had a lot to say and they seemed eager to just have someone listen to them. However, most participants needed scaffolding, and it was often difficult to elicit more information from the respondents.

I found that the most essential elements of a quality PD program was needs–based training, continuity, and support with application. After triangulating all the data from interviews, archival records, and public documents, I was able to conceptualize a comprehensive program that begins with teacher preparation programs and spans an educator's entire career in a school setting. Such a program builds up leaders who will train others to be effective teachers, and to ultimately, become leaders themselves. Considering my findings, I concluded that an effective, quality PD program would be a systemic way of transforming the climate and culture of schools. When morale is high and teachers are properly trained, I imagine an effectual domino effect. Inevitably,

changing the culture and climate could affect teacher attitudes and their decisions to adjust instructional strategies, which could improve student engagement, impact academic achievement, and, affect teacher evaluations (Ronfeldt, 2016).

Leadership and Change

While change is not easy for everyone, I learned that it is possible when teachers are empowered to impact their own learning. Leaders of a school need to change their own frame of mind and treat teachers as the professionals they are by providing them with the quality education that they expect teachers to provide to their students (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In fact, leaders should be courageous and evaluate their own effectiveness as educators using a similar framework to Danielson's. Self–reflection, coupled with teacher feedback, is a method of promoting collegiality and mutual respect (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). Administrators should also be held accountable for teacher learning and their performance evaluated based on teacher improvement (NJDOE, 2014).

Leadership is not easy. A leader is charged with making tough decisions every day, much to the dismay of some who might be displeased with those decisions; however, an effective leader is unafraid to make whatever changes are necessary. I learned that making tough decisions is not necessarily "the problem." I believe that as a leader, one can make difficult decisions if they partner with teachers and other stakeholders and establish a culture of mutual respect and partnership. Effective leaders are secure enough to admit when they do not have all the answers and are brave enough to openly ask for help. Finally, I found that a leader too, never stops learning (Patti et al., 2015). Leaders must always model the behavior they expect from their staff. Therefore, I believe that it is

critical for leaders to be transparent and to share when they are growing and when they make mistakes. Change can be difficult, but effective leaders are sensitive to how change impacts staff and to the best approaches to tackling change. I learned that effective leaders listen to their staff and adjust their own practices based on their needs (Patti et al., 2015).

Analysis of Self as Scholar

This process taught me that cultivating authentic relationships with all stakeholders is optimal for effectuating real change in the classroom and school. Researchers agreed that teaching is traditionally an isolating profession (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Onsrud, 2015); however, it does not have to be. Administrators can promote a culture of learning by providing teachers with ample PD opportunities throughout the year, partnering with teachers to afford them unique learning experiences, and providing on–going class support to bridge the learning from theory to practice (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015).

This project has also enlightened me to the notion that quality PD is not endemic in struggling schools. As a matter of fact, the need for a systemic PD program is problematic worldwide (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). The fact that so many schools struggle with creating a sustainable and quality PD program has increased my awareness to the dire need of developing a framework for teacher training. On an even greater scope, this process has challenged me to reflect on how to close the gap between teacher preparation programs in post–secondary institutions and actual classroom application. The issue of teacher training is so expansive that it requires collaboration and

communication even with colleges and universities responsible for preparing teachers (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015).

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a self–practitioner, I feel encouraged to build on this research and continue the conversation of national education reform as it pertains to transforming PD in secondary and post–secondary schools. My interactions with colleagues have helped me to grow as a teacher as well as a researcher. Not only has this study forced me to question my own practices as a teacher, but it has motivated me to envision a program that I could implement when I become an administrator. While resistance from people in authority might be a setback, it will not deter me from continuing this important work. All educators can benefit from shared expertise (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016), and I believe that once we are empowered to share knowledge that the culture will shift and a community of learners will emerge.

Throughout this process, I also learned to appreciate the value of personal reflection. As a researcher, I found myself reflecting on my own practices, beliefs, and level of efficacy as I gathered data. It is amazing what one can discover when they are willing and able to take a step back and examine themselves as a practitioner in their field. I have always been a self–edifier; my inherent pursuit of knowledge is what inspired me to enroll in a doctorate program in the first place; however, I realized that there is power in focusing on one area of expertise. There is so much to learn about PD and how to foster a program that teachers can buy into that I am excited to continue this work. I found that practitioners continue to practice their craft and I am determined to

learn as much as I can about developing teachers in a way that truly transforms instruction and student academic achievement.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As a project developer, I learned that reading is key. Information is constantly changing and there are various perspectives and theories in the field of education. Developing a successful doctoral project required staying abreast to trending topics in education. Whether through social media or online educational platforms, networking and connecting with other teacher–practitioners is essential in developing one's own expertise.

In order to develop a project successfully, I also discovered that a project developer cannot do it unilaterally. The planning, implementation, and maintenance of an effective program requires a team of stakeholders who share in the vision of change and growth (Onsrud, 2015). Moreover, the success of a program is contingent upon how much the developer considers the needs and contributions of the staff (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2016).

Reflection on the Importance of the Work and its Potential for Social Change

The solution to ineffective PD seems simple enough; however, proper implementation of a viable and systemic PD program that effectively trains teachers continues to be an evolving science. Fundamentally, training has to be relevant and specific to teachers' needs and it must be continuous and inclusive (ACT, 2015). The more administrators communicate their goals and align those goals with teacher feedback, the more successful they will be in establishing a culture of shared leadership

(Bannister, 2015). What I learned from this study is that teachers want to be heard. Teachers have much knowledge to share and sharing helps them feel valued as professionals. Teachers want to feel as if their contribution is essential for the overall improvement of the school. By regarding teachers as partners, administrators can change the culture and climate of a school and effectuate genuine change in the classroom (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016).

Another reason this work is important is because of its potential impact on social change. This project will improve collaboration among stakeholders and promote a culture of shared leadership (Bannister, 2015). Collaboration has the potential to increase morale and improve participation in PD training sessions (Onsrud, 2015). Collaboration can also add value to the PD training themselves because they would be needs–specific, relevant, and timely (Onsrud, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In adding value to the training, teachers might be more likely to apply the new knowledge and it has already been determined that when teachers participate in quality PD that it improves student academic achievement (Onsrud, 2015). Student academic achievement, as stated earlier, constitutes a percentage of certain teacher evaluations. Evidence in student improvement also impacts teacher ratings and in some areas may even impact incentives and monetary rewards.

The most notable social change that can come from this project is encouraging collegiality across disciplines. Shared leadership signifies that everyone, not just testing subjects, takes responsibility for the academic success of students (Duncan et al., 2016). This project is important because it can potentially improve relations among all teachers,

where even those teachers in non–testing subjects would be willing and able to support the language arts and math teachers. Shouldering some of the pressure that the language arts and math teachers face benefits everyone in a school community.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

For over 50 years, the United States has made countless attempts to reform education. Reform efforts have one goal in common: to provide an equitable education to our nation's students (U.S. DOE, 2015). The solution may seem quite simple: Train teachers to be highly effective, and inevitably, student achievement would improve. Obtaining such goals, however, has been more challenging than expected (Carpenter & Linton, 2016).

Even though the solution to America's education problem appears simple enough, school districts across the country cannot seem to successfully make that leap from theory to practice (Tatto et al., 2016). The reason for this could be that teachers are just not being empowered to lead their own professional growth. Just like they are expected to establish a culture of respect for their students, teachers also want to feel respected and valued; they want to feel that their opinions are being considered in the planning of their own professional growth (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). Furthermore, as they are expected to differentiate learning for their students, teachers also want PD that caters to their learning needs (ACT, 2015). It is appropriate to sometimes treat teachers as students, for the administrators are supposed to be instructional leaders who model the behavior they want performed.

I also learned that simply offering PD is not enough. Administrators need to support teachers after the training and throughout the year (Templeton et al., 2016). The majority of the participants of this study described the need for some form of "follow-up." Some participants mentioned returning to the same training to evaluate the effectiveness of the new knowledge and to share experiences in the classroom. Other participants desired in–class support to facilitate the application of the new knowledge.

For future research, I would be interested in learning how other disciplines feel about PD. I only focused on seven disciplines: six teachers and one support staff. I wanted to learn if content was a variable that affected teachers' perceptions of the current PD program and their decision to apply new knowledge. I learned that content-specific PD does influence teachers' decision to apply new knowledge; however, there are many more perspectives that could add value to this research in order to truly develop a comprehensive and inclusive program. An effective PD program should include communication among all stakeholders (Hao & Lee, 2016). Everyone in the building should be engaged in relevant professional training, even the administration (Onsrud, 2015). Also, only a few participants mentioned the PARCC, the common core, and the new teacher evaluations, which I found very interesting. In my data collections, I did not directly ask about these new environmental pressures, because I wanted to see if these topics naturally emerged as patterns and if they were other variables that affected teacher attitudes. What I discovered was that the PARCC and common core mattered most to the language arts and math teachers. I expected this since these are both testing subjects. The one support staff that I interviewed also mentioned these variables, for this professional

wanted to learn how to effectively and efficiently support language arts and math teachers. Overall, the participants focused on their inherent desire to grow professionally in spite of mandates requiring them to do so. Therefore, further research on how these environmental pressures specifically impact content-specific teachers would enhance this study.

Conclusion

In this section, I reflected on my experience throughout my project study. After interviewing seven professionals from a high school about their perceptions of the current PD program, I determined that there is a dire need for a quality PD program that is relevant and continuous. I further reflected on the strengths and limitations of the project and on my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. This section concluded with my thoughts on the project's potential to impact social change and my recommendations for future research.

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Appendix A: The Project

Background of Existing Problem

Since 1965, education reform has been a priority in the United States (U.S. DOE, 2015). Reauthorizing President Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, President Obama signed a new law on December 10th, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; U.S. DOE, 2015). ESSA officially replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, and was intended to return to the core issue: providing an equitable education to all students regardless of socio economic status by prioritizing professional learning and student outcomes (U.S. DOE, 2015).

It is still too early to discern the effects of ESSA on professional learning and student outcomes as districts begin to transition from NCLB regulations. Before ESSA, however, there was President Obama's Race to the Top (RTTT) Initiative, which he signed into effect in 2011. Through RTTT, billions of dollars in funding have been allocated for districts who adopt the CCSS, reshape their teacher evaluation programs, and change the state assessments to one that measure college and career readiness (U.S. DOE, 2015).

New Jersey is one of 46 states to join RTTT (NJDOE, 2012). In doing so, Governor Christie has also made significant changes in laws to qualify for RTTT monies. In 2012, he signed a new tenure law which changed how teachers earn and maintain their tenure status. The new law is referred to as its acronym, TeachNJ, and it too prioritizes professional learning in an effort to improve student academic achievement (NJDOE, 2015). Furthermore, the state has adopted the CCSS, which are national standards that are

more rigorous than ever before, and a new state assessment: PARCC. While every district has to adhere to these two state-wide regulations, districts, however, have autonomy in choosing a teacher evaluation tool to measure teacher effectiveness.

As of 2012, the featured district adopted the Danielson framework (2007a) to evaluate teachers. The framework has four ratings: highly effective, effective, partially ineffective, and ineffective (Danielson, 2007a). As per the new tenure law signed by Governor Christie, teachers who receive two unsatisfactory ratings 2 years in a row are now at risk of losing their tenure (NJDOE, 2012). After the first unsatisfactory rating, teachers are placed on a CAP. In this CAP, teachers must prove on–going professional learning to improve their teaching. Before TeachNJ, filing tenure charges against a teacher for incompetence led to a long court process that was tedious and costly (NJDOE, 2012). The new law, however, assigns arbitrators outside of the courts who make the final decision on tenure status, expediting the process of identifying and eliminating ineffective teachers (NJDOE, 2012).

All of the aforementioned shifts in education have been rapid, and administrators and teachers alike are still figuring out the system as rules and regulations continue to change. TeachNJ has also changed the PD requirements. Before 2014, teachers were mandated to complete 100 hours within the first 5 years of teaching (NJDOE, 2012). Now, however, teachers have to complete 20 hours of PD every year and develop an annual PDP, which is archived as a part of the teacher's annual review (NJDOE, 2012).

Considering all of these recent shifts in education and the emphasis on quality teaching, it was appropriate for me to investigate how teachers perceived the quality of

their own professional learning. Student outcomes are an added value to a teacher's overall rating, and so a comprehensive PD program is necessary in order to effectively prepare teachers to improve student skills. I focused my research, specifically, on PD in secondary education because not only is it familiar to me as a 15 year secondary school teacher, but also because there was such a paucity in secondary education research. The lack in research might be the result of high schools observing scheduling conflicts, which impedes full teacher participation in research and in professional development (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015). In spite of any foreseeable scheduling challenges, I aimed to investigate the effective PD practices that best suited a high school setting. After triangulating all the data, I concluded that the teachers in the featured high school did not feel adequately prepared to teach students in part because of the lack of a sustainable and continuous professional development program.

Summary of Analysis

I interviewed six teachers and one support staff (a total of seven participants) for this project study. Because I was not able to procure permission from the superintendent to conduct my research on–site, the participants volunteered their personal time, off–site, to meet with me. The interviews lasted less than an hour. I asked participants six open-ended questions, three of which included ratings. I was more interested in the justification of their ratings than the ratings themselves, for their justifications yielded fruitful data. I also analyzed countless scholarly journals, archived documents, and public records. After triangulating all the data, five themes emerged regarding professional development: (a) organized and relevant training, (b) in-class support, (c) accountability of transference,

(d) continuity and constructive feedback, & (e) a culture of respectful collaboration and partnership.

The data showed that teachers were more likely to apply new knowledge from professional development training if it were organized and relevant. Many of the participants of the study shared their experiences with the PD program at the high school and most agreed that oftentimes the sessions appeared thrown together and poorly planned. According to research participants, PD training was also considered irrelevant to either the teacher's content-specialty or to the demographic of students in their classrooms. Professional Development was described as a "one-size fits all" approach, which does very little to improve the skills of teachers (ACT, 2015; Holm & Kajander, 2015).

Another theme that emerged from the data was providing teachers with constant in–class support. Research (Flynn et al., 2016; Patti et al., 2015; Templeton et al., 2016) supported the integration of a coach into the staff, one who would work closely with the staff to transfer knowledge from theory to practice. Participants of the study did not exactly mention a coach, but most of them voiced their desire to have someone with them in the classroom assisting them with the application of new knowledge. It was also important to the participants that administration follow up with the learning. Participants communicated that oftentimes PD is "one and done." No one is ever following-up with staff to see if the new knowledge is being applied. This sends the message that the new knowledge is not important, and with all the overwhelming responsibilities teachers have

today, many are not willing to dedicate time to implementing new ideas that are not being monitored or evaluated for effectiveness (ACT, 2015; Onsrud, 2015; Shaha et, al., 2015).

Returning to training was also important to several of the study participants. Participants voiced concerns about the lack of continuity when it pertains to PD. Many communicated wanting the opportunity to try new strategies and then sharing with colleagues their experiences with application. Participants stated that they preferred to build on knowledge as opposed to attending a series of superficial and fragmented training. Participants indicated that they did not feel as if they were afforded enough time to master any strategies before they were asked to move to something else. Building on knowledge is essential in constructing and sustaining a quality PD program (ACT, 2015; Carpenter & Linton, 2015; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Onsrud, 2015).

Finally, participants expressed their desire to be included in the planning of their own professional growth. The data supported adult learners' inherent need to build on their own knowledge, learn through discourse, apply needs-specific learning, and be autonomous in their thinking (Mezirow, 1997; Knowles, 1998). The results from the interviews supported these findings. Participants reported feeling that PD excluded their voice and they would be more likely to attend training and apply new knowledge from training if administration collaborated with teachers and considered their input. Participants shared their desire to also collaborate more with peers. Research (ACT, 2015; Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; Carpenter & Linton, 2015; DuFour, 2014; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Onsrud, 2015; Ronfeldt, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Shaha et al., 2015) supported the integration of PLCs as an effective method of

peer collaboration and an integral component of a comprehensive PD program. The PLCs are separate from administrative–planned professional learning and conducting school business. They are small teams that engage in job-embedded learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). By participating in effective PLCs, teachers determine the relevant training to best suit their needs, and they are in control of their own professional growth.

The data also supported the need for a solid teacher preparation program as an integral part of a comprehensive professional development plan. Research (Dorel et al., 2016; Hao & Lee, 2015; Schramm-Possinger, 2016) posited that teachers are not being properly trained to meet the needs of the 21st century student. Coupled with the ineffectiveness of PD programs, preservice teachers, inevitably, become veteran teachers with inadequate skills and self–efficacy issues (Dorel et al., 2016). There has to be a bridge between teacher preparation programs and the continual, quality professional development received once teachers obtain a teaching assignment (Bryant et al., 2016; Hao & Lee, 2015).

Recommendations

Revising or developing a new professional development program is contingent upon three important elements: nurturing partnerships, structured planning, and supporting conditions. Conceptualizing a comprehensive program necessitates the support of many; it may combine elements of traditional PD with innovative professional learning methods (Carpenter, 2016).

Partnerships. One important partnership that is gaining more popularity among states is the one with local universities and colleges (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). The

high school can contact a local post–secondary institution that offers a teacher preparation program and inquire if instructors would be interested in joining a committee, working alongside high school teachers and possibly other stakeholders in the district. This committee would be responsible for gathering valuable data on how to bridge the gap between pedagogy and real-life teaching. Both institutions gain from this concerted effort: The post–secondary institution can revise its curriculum to properly prepare preservice teachers for real–life teaching, while also sustaining that experience with quality student–teacher relationships. The preservice teacher can also make an informed decision on whether teaching is really the right profession. Such a decision can impact the high turnover of teachers who leave the profession early in their careers (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). The in–service teachers participating in the committee would be able to inform their instruction accordingly and share their findings with their peers and colleagues. Such a partnership will yield valuable data on college–level expectations to inform high school instruction, as well as, real–life teaching expectations to inform teacher preparation programs (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015).

To develop a successful relationship with a local post–secondary institution, both institutions must agree on a shared goal and be willing to share power (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). The committee members, for example, can work on devising a PD plan to pair preservice teachers with expert teachers at the high school and discuss ways of forging a more current and sustainable cooperating teacher–student relationship as well as discuss ways of addressing the emotional and academic needs of high school students and how to better prepare them with the transition after high school. Whatever is decided,

the committee must establish a clear goal from the beginning, develop a plan to reach that goal, and ensure that the goal is shared among members; if not, the meetings will be aimless and non–productive (Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015).

Another partnership that is critical for transforming any PD program is between administrators and staff. Begin by surveying staff on their needs and wants (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Utilize this information to devise a program for the year replete with various learning options and opportunities to collaborate with peers in an organized and structured way. For example, use the scheduled professional development days for structured and relevant PD that all staff can enjoy. Be creative (ACT, 2016; Carpenter & Linton, 2015; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). In the featured high school, there are small departments with only one or two teachers. It is common practice to assign these teachers to other departments during PD sessions, providing irrelevant PD to this small group of teachers. Instead, administrators can arrange for teachers to access free webinars, online communities, and online training courses that teachers can participate in if there are no other options. Another alternative is to partner with other high schools and collaborate through FaceTime or Skype (DuFour, 2014; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016). The school can even arrange a visit to another school where teachers might be able to meet with larger departments with the same content-specialty. It is equally important to partner with other schools within the district (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016). Very small departments and even support staff can benefit from meeting with peers with the same content-specialty in another building to vertically articulate their program.

Yet another important partnership that must subsist in a quality PD program is the one among peers and colleagues within the high school. Research (DuFour, 2014; Onsrud, 2015) showed that PLCs is one of the most valuable partnerships any school can foster. Mezirow (1997) and Knowles' (1998) foundational research has argued that adults learn best when they are autonomous and can participate in and contribute to a learning community. Similarly, effective PLCs provide teachers such freedoms to explore job-embedded issues grounded in their own practice and to work with others to collectively solve those issues (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Quebec Fuentes & Spice, 2015). PLCs also promote collective responsibility for student learning and shared leadership for making important decisions about professional learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Teacher collaboration has been shown to also improve student achievement (Onsrud, 2015). In order for PLCs to be effective, however, they must be structured in such a way that they yield measurable results in student outcomes and in professional learning (DuFour, 2014). The following are essentials for facilitating successful PLCs:

1. Accurately define PLCs: PLC meetings are not designated times to tell "war stories" (DuFour, 2014; DuFour & Reeves, 2016). In other words, this is not the time to complain about school conditions and personal injustices. PLCs are teams who meet to discuss methods and strategies on how to improve student achievement, not to conduct school business or participate in disconnected professional learning already pre–determined by administration (DuFour &

Reeves, 2016). Successful PLCs are teacher-directed teams that serve five purposes: Analyze, Access, Apply, Assess, and Adjust:

a. Members of PLCs *analyze* data to determine a starting point. Data can be test scores, curriculum, or any resource that informs the team's instructional preparation (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Teams, for instance, can analyze state scores to identify patterns in student learning.
b. Teams can isolate the skills and then *access* research-based strategies to teach the skills. Consulting research-based practices has been proven to be the most effective approach in developing professional learning and student achievement (Duncan et al., 2016; Tatto et al., 2016). Research-based may require teachers to read articles, journals, even books with current and innovative instructional approaches. The team can also analyze the current curriculum and compare the skills teachers are asked to teach with the skills students are expected to learn as per the CCSS (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The team might then decide to revise the curriculum to better align with the CCSS. As the team continues to meet, their experiences with data–driven instruction and their research based conversations on obtaining the best student results consistently drives their learning (Onsrud, 2015).
c. Once the data is analyzed and skills and best practices for teaching those skills have been identified and *applied*, the team develops a common assessment to measure mastery of the skills (DuFour, 2014; DuFour &

Reeves, 2016). The formative assessment can be an exam, performance-based assessment, or any assessment that allows students to demonstrate their learning (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Whatever the assessment, a standardized grading procedure has to also be established. Teachers can collectively evaluate assessments to minimize bias and yield the most reliable results of student learning (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

d. After skills have been *assessed* for mastery, the teachers discuss any adjustments that need to be made based on the new data (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The team may have to discuss how to *adjust* their approach to teaching the featured skills if an overwhelming number of students performed poorly on the common assessment. If the results are favorable with a few exceptions, the team can devise a plan for those exceptions and implement some type of intervention for those students who did not meet the standards. Teachers need to be cautious, however, not to fall into a pattern of simply analyzing results to identify students who need interventions (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). From the data, teams can also identify students who may benefit from enrichment. Teachers use the new data to adjust their practices to meet the needs of all students.

The 5A's of effective planning for PLCs is a cyclical process. When PLCs are organized and structured in such a way, the teams are more likely to be productive (DuFour, 2014). The learning in PLCs will emerge naturally and be guided by the teachers' intrinsic interests and motivations to improve their own students'

learning (Onsrud, 2015). PLC time is an opportunity for teachers to be active agents in their own learning (Carpenter, 2016); however, teachers may need clear instruction and direction as to what is expected of them when they meet in PLCs. Simply telling teachers to collaborate is not enough, for teachers may not know how to effectively work with others (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). In a profession that is traditionally isolating (Rosenfeldt et al., 2015), without guidance, teachers will resent the imposition on their time (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

2. Empower teachers (Carpenter, 2016): While defined roles is an effective method of ensuring that the team is organized, stays on-task, and meets their objectives, PLCs are most successful when the team shares responsibilities and there is a sense of shared leadership (DuFour, 2016). Administrators can form meaningful and purposeful teams that share a common characteristic (i.e.: grade, content, etc.). Administration is encouraged to join PLCs as members and not as leaders (ACT, 2015; DuFour, 2014); however, administrators should be cautioned not to micromanage or overpower the team. Members of the team are then left to their own recognizances to direct their learning, maintaining student outcomes at the forefront of the meetings (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Administrators tend to have pre–conceived beliefs about teacher collaboration, which may mold their biases about how PLCs should be run and just how much freedom teachers should be given (Carpenter & Linton, 2015). Nonetheless, the success of PLCs is predicated on teacher autonomy (Carpenter & Linton, 2015). Assuming leadership roles

motivates teachers to modify their instructional practices (Danielson, 2012; Thorburn, 2011).

3. Schedule time for PLCs: Teachers need time to meet with teachers (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). Scheduled common planning time within the school day presents teachers with a fixed time to meet with peers and form small teams (Bannister, 2015). When time is allotted in the teacher's schedule for PLCs, the pressure of adding to a teacher's already busy schedule is diminished (Carpenter & Linton, 2015). Moreover, teachers can be held accountable for professional learning because a pre–determined time has been reserved for teachers to collaborate (Duncan et al., 2016).
4. Establish norms and goal–setting procedures (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Onsrud, 2015): Norms are a set of agreements compiled by the team that guide the team's behavior (Onsrud, 2015). Establishing norms from the beginning on processes and protocols (i.e.: attendance, decision-making procedures, preparedness, tone, roles, etc.), elucidates the expectations of each team member and holds the team accountable for honoring the rules. Once the norms have been set, the team develops common goals, explores research based strategies to meet those goals, and analyzes the outcomes of those goals (Onsrud, 2015). Teachers, for example, can discuss strategies on how to teach certain skills based on a viable curriculum and, subsequently, develop common assessments to assess mastery of those skills (DuFour, 2016; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). The team can then use the results of these assessments to identify students who

would benefit from intervention or enrichment. Teams can also use the results to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, relying on the team to build on pedagogical strategies that improve skills (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

5. Be patient with the process (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012): Chemistry among team members may be a slow process. It will take some time for personalities to gel and for the team to effectively flow in productivity. Traditionally, teaching is an isolating profession (Rosenfeldt et al., 2015). If teachers are accustomed to working alone or working in groups that are called PLCs but are not, they might resist change at first (Onsrud, 2015).
6. Expand horizons: Advancing technologies have transformed conventional professional development to one that is more teacher–centered and teacher–directed than ever before (Carpenter, 2016). A myriad of social media outlets offer educators expansive access to educators across the globe. There is Twitter, Edmodo, and EdCamps, where educators can join discussions and access on–demand and personalized learning (Carpenter, 2016). PLNs such as Google+ is yet another medium for educators to reflect on strategies and share expertise (DuFour, 2014). This is a particularly useful alternative for small departments that may not have any commonalities with other departments in the building or district. Discuss these options with the district Technology Coordinator and see what is available and feasible to implement.
7. Hold teams accountable: Monitoring and supervising teams is not as valuable in eliciting genuine collaboration as asking teams to submit agendas and results of

their work (DuFour, 2014). Another strategy for holding teams accountable for their work is establishing reporting–out procedures where teams can share their work with the rest of the school or district (DuFour, 2014). Teams should always work toward an end goal. As the team works to meet that goal, they should be setting benchmarks along the way that are recorded and shared with the administrative team and the rest of the school. Sharing results is particularly powerful because everyone can share in the growth of the staff as well as the successes of student achievement (DuFour, 2014; Duncan et al., 2016).

Planning. Notwithstanding the PLCs, which are solely planned and directed by the PLC team members, use teacher input to draft a PD calendar for the year. Scheduled PD days on the school calendar, faculty meetings, and summer institutes are all opportunities to develop professional learning (Carpenter & Linton, 2015). The planning includes identifying the experts facilitating the PD sessions. External consultants are effective, but do not discount the professionals already working in the building (DuFour, 2014). Identify those teachers who have multiple degrees and specialized expertise, such as in technology. Or, administration can rely on their own prior knowledge from previous evaluations or walk–throughs to identify strategies that teachers can present to the staff during formal PD sessions. Identify those lead teachers and empower them to professionally grow the staff (DuFour, 2014).

Also, provide options, so teachers can choose training that they feel meet their specific needs (Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016). Teachers can register for sessions ahead of time using online tools such as tinyurl or Google Forms. Registering for sessions ahead

of time includes teachers in the decision–making process and promotes a culture of planning and learning. Administrators would know ahead of time how many staff to expect and the staff would be expected to commit. Plan for formative assessments for all the training; then report back the results to show the staff that their feedback is reviewed and considered in on–going planning (Guskey, 2009). Make adjustments to the PD calendar as needed to honor staff's concerns and give validity to their input (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015; DuFour, 2014; Guskey, 2002). End the year with a summative evaluation of the overall program, and use that information to plan for next year's PD (Guskey, 2009). Planning for quality PD year–round, shifts the focus from teaching to learning, promoting the idea that schools are learning institutions for the adults as well as for students (Onsrud, 2015)

Supporting Conditions. The principal, as the instructional leader of the school, has to support all the elements of a PD program if it is going to work successfully (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; DuFour, 2014; Templeton et al., 2016). It is not so much what the principal says as much as what the principal does that in the end will make a difference in transforming the professional learning culture of the school. The principal can support the school's PD program by:

1. Communicating that professional learning is a priority. The principal can communicate to staff the school's commitment to professional learning by abandoning traditional PD practices and adopting more creative approaches to PD (Carpenter & Linton, 2016; Onsrud, 2015). Expectations from each teacher can be clearly expressed at the onset of the year and repeated constantly to firmly

asseverate the impact quality PD has on student achievement. Share with staff why PD is an integral component of a teacher's professional responsibility (Danielson, 2007a). Rally teachers to "buy" into the reform efforts the principal is attempting to make by being honest and transparent about the impending changes the principal hopes to see in instruction to improve student achievement and how none of it is possible without quality professional development (Onsrud, 2015).

2. Planning organized, structured, and relevant PD that meets the needs of teachers. Principals cannot accomplish such a feat unilaterally. Planning PD is a task that necessitates the contribution of all stakeholders in the building (ACT, 2016). Survey teachers to learn what their needs and wants are, then use that data to plan PD for an entire year. Principals must be bold and take risks (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). Fearless leaders are not intimidated by innovative and unconventional approaches to learning, such as social networking and online learning forums (i.e.: EdCamps and webinars). For too long teachers have been forced to attend irrelevant PD (Shaha et al., 2015). The Principal can demonstrate support of all teachers' professional needs when teachers are given access to resources that satiate their personal appetite for learning even if it means turning to unconventional methods (Carpenter & Linton, 2016).
3. Allotting time for teachers to return to the previous learning. Quality PD is continuous and builds on previous knowledge and experience (ACT, 2015; Carpenter & Linton, 2015; Ermeling & Yarbo, 2016; Onsrud, 2015). Therefore, the principal would show support for professional learning by reserving time for

teachers to share their experiences with the new knowledge that was previously taught. Adult learners need to communicate with other adults in order to make sense of their learning (Mezirow, 1997; Knowles, 1998). Honoring professionals' inherent need to share with others, is another effective method of supporting teachers and respecting their learning preferences.

4. Allowing teachers to be autonomous in their learning (Carpenter & Linton, 2016). PLCs are the most effective strategy for fostering independent learning (Onsrud, 2015); however, they are often run incorrectly and ineffectively (DuFour & Reeves, 2015). Once the principal understands the true nature of PLCs, shows confidence in teachers' abilities to successfully run PLCs, and is immersed in PLCs as an active member and not a leader, professional learning will occur (DuFour, 2014).

Research (Bannister, 2015; Flynn et al., 2015; Patti et al., 2015; Templeton et al., 2015) showed that in–class support is another valuable supplement to professional development. Either hire a literacy and math coach to assist struggling teachers with application of new knowledge or assign peer coaches (Callahan & Sadeghi, 2015). Beginning teachers and teachers on a CAP would be priorities, but any teacher can request to work with a coach. The coaches would not evaluate, instead, they assist teachers with lesson and project planning, analyzing data to drive instruction, modeling effective strategies, and monitoring self–reflections (Bannister, 2015; Flynn et al., 2015; Patti et al., 2015; Templeton et al., 2015).

Another method of providing staff support is through a digital database (Vorensky, 2016). The media specialist [or another designee] can compile resources for teachers and post them on the school's website or in a shareable Google file. Teachers can also contribute to these resources and participate in the collective sharing with peers and colleagues, building on the climate of on–going learning. A centralized location where teachers can rely on finding innovative strategies they can trust facilitates and supports the professional learning of each teacher (Carpenter & Linton, 2015).

In summation, a comprehensive professional development program consists of nurturing partnerships, structured planning, and supporting conditions. The most essential partnership schools can nurture is the one achieved by PLCs (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). PLCs empower teachers (Onsrud, 2015) and promotes a sense of shared responsibility for student learning (Duncan et al., 2016). Thoughtful planning and meaningful evaluations sustain the program by continually soliciting teacher feedback and addressing timely and relevant needs (Guskey, 2009). Finally, without support, the PD cannot subsist (Onsrud, 2015). By applying equitable accountability measures for professional growth and providing the support teachers need to continuously adjust their instructional practices, administrators can positively transform the climate and culture of their school (Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interviews will consist of six questions: three survey questions and three open-ended questions. For the survey questions, respondents will be asked to rate their responses on a scale from 1 to 4: 1 meaning *dissatisfied*; 2 is *somewhat dissatisfied*; 3 is *somewhat satisfied*; and 4 is *completely satisfied*. The respondents will also be asked to expound on their rating to add more context to their attitudes toward professional development. Below are the interview questions that will be used to collect teacher input. The first three are the survey questions, followed by the open-ended questions:

1. In the past year, how satisfied are you with the knowledge and/or skills that you have gained from the professional development program at the high school? Explain your rating.
2. How satisfied are you with your ability to use the knowledge and/or skills that you have gained in professional development sessions? Explain your rating.
3. How strong of a positive influence do you think that the professional development program has had on your students' achievement? Explain your rating.
4. How would you describe your current instructional setting? Include any variables that may impact your performance and your decision to apply newly acquired knowledge from professional development training.
5. What positive attributes does the current professional development program at the high school have?

6. What improvements need to be made to the current professional development program offered by the high school?

Appendix C: Sample Interview Transcript

Participant's Coding Letter: A
Date: 3/18/16
Time interview begins: 11:08 AM Time interview ends: 11:27
Setting: XXXXXXXXXX
Position: XXXXXXXXXX

SPEAKER ONE: It is March 18, exactly 11:08 a.m. and this is interview respondent A. Question number one: In the past year, how satisfied are you with the knowledge and/or skills that you have gained from the Professional Development Program at the high school? Rate your satisfaction from a scale of one to four, and explain your rating.

SPEAKER TWO: I would have to say a one, dissatisfied. I'm tempted to give a two but seeing as I can't remember at this point in March even what I did learn from the PD that I received in August, I thought was decent, or at least okay. It was just kind of forced upon me last minute which I will get to later on, but I have to say one and as far as the skills gained, I really can't say. The PD was about ELL training, how to work with ELL students in your classroom, but I don't actually have that many. In particular I probably have fewer than most other teachers seeing as I teach a lot of XXX classes and none of that was given any consideration. I was contacted maybe a day before the PD to be; they told me I was selected to go to a different PD and I wouldn't be attending the normal training and opening services that go on in high school before school started and that I would be attending this three day, which ended up being a two day workshop, training just before school started and I would learn about this ELL thing. When I got there, the books were not there and so we were unable to even do a lot of the activities for the first maybe, three-quarters of the first day and the person did the best that they could. This woman from Pearson but it just seemed very disorganized and I have to say that while I did pick up a couple of skills there, I am definitely dissatisfied.

SPEAKER ONE: Just to clarify a point, can you elaborate on your overall satisfaction of the Professional Development Program at the school? Aside from the PD that you attended in August?

SPEAKER TWO: Yeah, definitely a one. I think that PD is representative of so many experiences that I've had with PD at the building at the school and they all seem to be kind of following the same pattern. You're given notice on the day of or the day before, about what's going to be happening, very little background information, maybe just a title of what's going to be happening the next day, or a schedule, and then you show up and often the materials are missing and the person is sort of confused who has been told that they're supposed to teach you something and then you get there and they're like oh, I, you know, I didn't realize the faculty was this way or that way, or I didn't realize the

school was this sort of demographic or socio economic level or whatever it was that makes the school unique or makes a certain set of students challenging or makes a PD more applicable in some areas and not others, and they get there and they're confused and I have to say, yeah, I've gone through a lot of PDs where you just walk out with the feeling of a one.

SPEAKER ONE: Question number two. How satisfied are you from a scale of one to four with your ability to use the knowledge and/or skills that you have gained in Professional Development sessions? And explain your rating.

SPEAKER TWO: Once again, I have to say a one here. I'm trying and leaning towards this two rating only because occasionally I think throughout the years, I've been there 13 years, and throughout the years I think may have applied a skill or two somewhere in there, but I feel like I've just taught myself so many things that I have to rely on myself or my colleagues especially, for tips. It's so easy for me to say that I've learned so much more from them than from my administration or any Professional Development training and as far as being able to apply the skills, I'm trying right now but I can't remember a single PD where we were given specific tools for application in our classrooms at our high school in particular. It was more like here it is, what people do in other schools around the nation or here is what we think should work for you but there isn't any follow up and they're really not transferring the feedback where you could say where we got together at a faculty meeting and said I tried what we learned last week in the training and it went like this. It was pretty much like you just sit there, they tell you something, and it becomes time for lunch and you run and then you come back, and you go through the same thing in the afternoon. There is never any follow up. There's often not even administration that come by and check whether people are even attending these things, so frequently a lot of people are absent and there are very few opportunities for applying the skills that you learn; so I have to say one.

SPEAKER ONE: Question number three: How strong of a positive influence do you think that the Professional Development Program has had on your student's achievement? Explain your rating.

SPEAKER TWO: I don't want to be too harsh here, but I don't think it has had any effect on my student's achievement or it's so negligible that I can't even put a rating on it. It would be a one; I'm definitely dissatisfied, but yeah, I can't think of any effect that it's had on my student's achievement. As I mentioned previously, most of the skills that I think a lot of teachers pick up in our building are similar to what I'm talking about here which is that you end up relying on your colleagues for so much or finding your own PDs out of district and occasionally I'll go to a content oriented PD that I definitely find interesting where I learn something about an area of history but it's usually not always how to apply it or anything like that, it's just some more background knowledge on what you teach and that's up to you to find ways to use it. I have to go with a one.

SPEAKER ONE: The following questions do not require a rating. So question number four; how would you describe your current instructional setting? Include any variables that may impact your performance and your decision to apply newly acquired knowledge from Professional Development training.

SPEAKER TWO: If I were to try and characterize or describe my instructional setting in one word, or just a few, I would start with chaotic and as I think about my day and what goes into an instructional block. There are so many disruptions to the block that it often feels like survival and that the last thing I am trying to do is apply some new tool that I've learned at a PD and instead I'm trying to make sure that I can get my lesson through without any more disruptions from the PA announcement, the door opening and closing, with students wandering in disrupting my class or in class disruptions. There is almost no support from administration as far as discipline and follow up in that regard and very little parental support. You're often left doing whatever you can do to try and reach students that works that you've discovered over the years and you stick to that and so applying tools from Professional Development would be deviating from that and risking more chaos, adding something else to the stack that already exists and so I have to say that it's very hard, it's difficult, to apply any newly acquired training and I think that unfortunate, sometimes, when I have my honors class I get a chance to try things in there but usually it's things I picked up on my own or thought of on my own and not something that I've acquired in training; it's just a different way that I want to do a project or different way I want to present something or just some new way I wanted to share information or talk about a chapter or discuss an event and not actually something that was taught to me by anything in Professional Development.

SPEAKER ONE: You mentioned how specific variables impact your decision to apply new knowledge. Can you elaborate just a little bit more on how it impacts your performance as a teacher?

SPEAKER TWO: My performance is impacted by my inability to complete an entire instructional block without disruption and whether that be inside the classroom or out of the classroom, but often times it's our own building administration - an example that's coming to me right now, say they just mismanaged the schedule or you show up and you already go with the lesson and it turns out there's an assembly you've been notified of 10 minutes before and/or you actually don't know the schedule; you just know there is an assembly and you have been waiting for how long that period is going to be and whether you're going to be able to apply the new thing you wanted to do with that class today; should you even go forward with the lesson or you should just wait and try something old and whatever works to survive until you find out how long that lesson is going to be in fact. As far as other variables; everything from the lack of technology- I think that is a big one That's really huge. I can't use a lot of the things that would probably work in other places only because I don't have access to technology that is reliable that often. I

would say, once a week, the internet is down and that makes it really difficult to count on having any lesson which many of them are tied to being able to get online. I mean it is 2016 and not being able to count on that, yeah, once again, it puts you back in that feeling of survival mode where you're not going to try anything new when you're just trying to do the old thing and get it to work. Yeah, so as far as variables, lack of technology, all the way to discipline and even so far as functional items like heating and lighting where electricity might just go out in the middle of your lesson and now you're in the dark or the heat is off in the building or heat is on pumping at 95 degrees. I mean, I've been through so many different disruptions from a physical nature all the way to just structural as far as administration and even the classroom of students although those are usually manageable, so I would say some of those variables can be controlled. The students are probably the least of my concerns.

SPEAKER ONE: Question number five: What positive attributes does the current Professional Development Program at the high school have?

SPEAKER TWO: Hmm. Positive attributes. I would say that what should be a positive attribute is they ask you sometimes, they ask the staff, the faculty; administration does ask what would you be interested in seeing coming up this year for professional development? They don't do it every year but they do ask us sometimes. What's not positive about it is I never feel like any of the things that I write down on that paper and submit it back to them ever makes it to someone's desk and that they actually consider what we wanted and what we put down as a faculty. Instead, it seems like everything is already decided either before the year begins or last minute. Someone is controlling it somewhere and it's already set in place, or it could just be we don't have anything in tomorrow's PD, you know let's grab somebody and just make this thing into a PD. Positive attributes, I really can't think, I would have to say the one thing they let us do is our building administration, because of the chaotic nature of the building and the lack of support for PD, when a Professional Development does occur, if you have something that is more important that you need to get done, I think this is not supposed to be positive, but they will let you do that so if that's more important to your week as a teacher, you have to get, you know there's a PD occurring and you have to get something done and they know they've just decided on this PD last minute and it doesn't even make sense or isn't relevant to what's going on in the building right now or is only applicable to half the staff and you're not half that staff, they'll just let you sort of do whatever you have to do while the PD is going on and I don't think that's very positive but it reflects that way sometimes.

SPEAKER ONE: Okay, final question. What improvements need to be made to the current Professional Development Program offered by the high school?

SPEAKER TWO: I think at this point the PD is so disorganized and ineffective that you would almost need a team, I would say combine faculty and administration, a team that

would put together and help organize and collaborate on Professional Development and especially on feedback and application. This would have to be something; we're so far from this at this point, we're, I would just love to see one good PD day anyway, but yeah, I would say at least start with a team and some kind of structure to it, organization maybe by the principal or even the assistant principal could handle it and you could even reach out to teachers and have them; I'm sure a lot feel the way I do and would be willing to participate in some kind of group setting where we feel like our voices are heard and we're able to build even a schedule for a year, to start with one year, make that change right away and say we'll build a year of effective PD with application and feedback and see how it goes.

Appendix D: Observational Recording Guide

Date of observation: _____

Time of observation: _____

Setting: _____

Participant's Coding Letter: _____

Observable Behaviors	**Clarifying Points**
Observer's Reflections:	

Appendix E: Recruitment E-mail for Participants

Greetings.

My name is Leslie Puente-Ervin and I am currently enrolled in Walden University's EdD program for Higher Education and Adult Learning. I am interested in conducting a research study about the quality of our high school's professional development program. I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in the study. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be anonymous.

As a fellow teacher, I understand and respect your busy schedule. I am only asking for an hour of your time. Your feedback will be an invaluable asset to this study, for it may shed light on ways to improve the current professional development program that is available to us. This is a great opportunity to be an integral part of change in our school.

If you are interested, please respond to this email with a time that suits you best. I will then schedule an interview with you. Remember that your participation is strictly confidential. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Leslie Puente-Ervin
EdD Candidate
Walden University

Appendix F: Adult Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the quality of professional development in your school. The researcher is inviting teachers with at least 1 year of experience with the current professional development program to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Leslie Puente-Ervin, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as an English teacher in the high school, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to closely scrutinize the quality and effectiveness of the current professional development program in the high school according to the teachers' current perceptions and attitudes.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a one hour interview, which will be audio-recorded. Interviews will be conducted in a public location, such as the public library. Phone interviews are also available as an option.
- Review the transcript of the interview for accuracy within a week of receiving the transcript. The transcript will be emailed to you and the review process should take approximately 20 minutes.
- Attend a one hour follow-up meeting either in-person or by phone to review the researcher's findings.

Here are some sample questions:

7. How would you describe your current instructional setting? Include any variables that may impact your performance and your decision to apply newly acquired knowledge from professional development training.
8. What positive attributes does the current professional development program at the high school have?
9. What improvements need to be made to the current professional development program offered by the high school?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. The researcher will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Please note that not all volunteers will be selected to take part. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study. Declining or discontinuing participation in the study will not negatively impact the participant's relationship with the researcher.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety

or wellbeing. The study may yield some potential benefits for the individual participant and the larger community. The results of the study could potentially highlight ways of improving the current professional development program at the high school.

Payment:
As to not perceive payment as a form of coercion or impropriety in the part of the researcher, no payment will be given to participants who volunteer their time. Your input is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. The researcher will utilize an observation guide during the interview to record observable behavior, personal reflections, and any point that needs to be clarified. Data collected from the interview will be kept secure in a password protected location where only the researcher can access. Participants' name and identity will be kept confidential by using letters in place of names. The name of participants and their assigned letter will be stored in a password protected place where only the researcher can access. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, in a safe deposit box, then will be destroyed in a shredding receptacle.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at leslie.puente-ervin@waldenu.edu. Please do not use the researcher's work email when referring to the study as she must separate her role as teacher from that of researcher. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **03-16-16-0039639** and it expires on **March 15, 2017.** Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, "I consent." Keep/print a copy of the consent form for your records.