PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: EMPOWERING

TEACHERS THROUGH CHOICE AND OWNERSHIP OF LEARNING

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

A Doctoral Capstone Project

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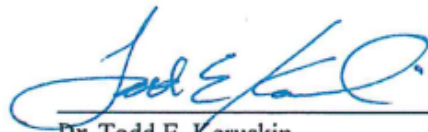California University of Pennsylvania

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wonderful husband Ken, who spent countless hours, including nights and weekends, without me being present so I could pursue my professional goals. I also dedicate this work to my talented daughter, Britnee, who spent many hours reading this paper to fix all of my grammatical and writing errors instead of working on her own writing. Thank you to my stepson, Andrew, for keeping your dad company while I was tucked away occupied in the office trying to stay focused on the task at hand. I appreciate all of the support and love I was given by my friends and family over this process, as I don't know if I could have finished it without your constant encouragement. Without all of you, I know that I would not have reached this point in my career and achieved this goal. Thank you!

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Abstract

In today's educational world, teachers have been asked to acquire skills that support students with a variety of learning needs with little to no professional development to help them be effective. Personalized professional learning is a shift in how educator's traditionally have been provided new learning, from sit-and-get, to a nontraditional format of giving teacher's as much ownership in their learning pathway, which would allow them to be engaged in their own learning process. Professional development plans continue to not meet the diverse needs of all teachers and are not always conscious of financial challenges within the organization. Personalizing professional development for teachers will be a paradigm shift that will positively impact student learning and achievement, as well as teachers' personal growth. Allowing teachers to create a personalized learning pathway through choice in topics and format of learning, presentation of information, and empowering teacher leaders among their colleagues are key characteristics of effective professional development. Through a mixed-method research study, this researcher interviewed and surveyed secondary teachers about their perceptions and experiences with professional development and found that teacher's want to have their learning more personalized and tailored to meet their interests and content taught. Today's administrators should be planning professional development that is personalized to meet each teacher's individual needs to support student achievement and daily instruction.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Typical "old school" traditional professional development sessions have not provided teachers the opportunity to practice and refine new skills or concepts on a consistent basis. Many of these sessions have little chance for implementation of information or collaboration among colleagues (Stacy, 2013). Traditionally, little choice is given to teachers in topic or format of presenting the information during professional development sessions. These days consist of teachers participating in workshop-style training sessions during a school year. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) note that most teachers only experience workshop-based professional development even though research shows it is ineffective. Despite its overall ineffectiveness, research states that the traditional format of professional development is utilized for the majority of all professional learning in schools. These types of sessions often do not change teacher practice and have no effect on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

As a building administrator in a suburban school district in south central Pennsylvania with an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students and 400 professionals, this researcher has recently noticed a decrease in teacher attendance on professional development days across the district. Teacher absenteeism on professional development days has continued to reach the 5% capacity as stated in the Collective Bargaining Agreement, which is about 20 teachers throughout the district, over the past few years. When closely analyzing the data of what professional learning is being offered each of

these days, it can be broken down to which days of professional development have the largest amount of teachers not attending. When specifically looking at the data of the secondary building's least attended days, the breakdown correlates to days that are in conjunction with outside vendors or district-wide administration workshop presentations. Due to the information gained from this data, the researcher decided to begin research and implement different ways to provide teachers with professional development that created more engagement and motivation to attend. Through this exploration and working with instructional coaches, a professional development plan utilizing differentiated personalized learning opportunities was created for the high school to shift from traditional to nontraditional formats.

As the plan was created and implemented, teachers were given multiple chances to provide topics and content that they would like to learn more about or increase their own knowledge or skill, as well as formats of how the information was presented. When teachers became an integral part in the development of the professional learning plan for the high school focusing on building-level initiatives or district goals, teacher engagement and attendance began to increase at the high school. Teachers were able to offer topics and be allowed to personalize their learning by choosing sessions that met their needs or lead sessions to share their own learning with their colleagues. With each professional development day, teachers gave ideas of topics or submitted sessions that they would be willing to lead. The engagement, collaboration, and motivation of the high school teachers became evident in what was happening in classrooms to increase student achievement.

Problem Statement

As the professional development plan continued to grow with more and more personalized learning opportunities, the attendance of teachers increased at the high school on these days. However, attendance in the other buildings within the district that use traditional formats on professional development days continued to be low. The data showed that teachers at the high school attended at a higher rate when their professional development days consisted of personalized learning opportunities that allowed teachers choice in attending sessions that correlated with building-level development. This data made this researcher want to do more research and analysis on utilizing this model to become the norm for all professional learning in the district moving forward. These personalized learning days focused on specific topics associated with teachers' own personal growth and interest. On days that allow teachers little choice in topic or presentation of information through traditional professional development formats, teachers continue to be disengaged in their own professional growth and are not implementing strategies to support student learning.

Research Questions

The researcher created three research questions to begin to narrow down and determine the needs of the teachers within the district for professional development. These three questions have helped to guide the researcher in the focus of what effective professional development entails from the perception of teachers, through other studies, and data collection and analysis. The following three questions are as follows:

1. Does teacher engagement increase during professional development when given choice?

2.   How does giving teachers choice in professional development impact

daily instruction?

3.   What are the perceptions of traditional professional development versus

nontraditional personalized learning professional development opportunities for

secondary teachers (grades 7-12)?

Summary

The district recognizes the need to examine their professional development plan

to ensure that teachers' needs are met through what is being offered. The move from

traditional professional learning to personalized learning and differentiated instruction

models, and the utilization of teacher leaders to help develop and present content

implementing the core elements of personalized learning continuum, is a must to witness

change in teacher attitudes and skills. Teachers need to have opportunities to understand

the new content, work with peers to collaborate, and find methods of learning that make

sense for them individually. Since less than 5% of the school's 65 million dollar district

budget is spent on staff development. With the limited amount of budget set aside for

professional development, it is important that the district creates a plan that is focused on

personalized learning for teachers. This personalized learning model needs to allow

teachers the ability to choose topics, create a pathway of learning, and allows a plethora

of opportunities that support student learning goals, as well as their own personal growth.

The creation and implementation of a district-wide professional development plan that

involves teachers and administration, which moves away from any traditional format and

toward a personalized learning format, allows teachers to feel empowered in their

learning, and in return, increases student achievement. When teachers are given choices,

engaged in their learning, and offered a voice in what they learn and how they learn it,

attendance increases and implementation of content is prevalent in all classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Active Learning –any approach to instruction in which all students are asked to engage in

the learning process (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and

Yoon (2001).

Active Participants – the consistent and simultaneous engagement of the minds of all the

learners with the content of the lesson (George, 2011).

Authentic Learning – a wide variety of educational and instructional techniques focused

on connecting what students are taught in school to real-world issues, problems,

and applications (Guskey, 2014).

Collaboration – a systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to

analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and

collective results (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Community of Practice –a group of people who share a common concern or passion of a

topic they want to deepen their knowledge and expertise in the educational arena

from ongoing interactions with others (Wenger, McDermott, and Synder, 2002).

Digital Badging –a tool that supports the needs of personalized learning using technology

to help increase knowledge in an individualized path. Badges act like portfolios

for teachers to document workplace learning and artifacts that can be shared with

colleagues and supervisors (Gamrat, Toomey, Zimmerman, Dudek, and Peck,

2014).

Gamification of Learning – an educational approach to motivate students to learn by

using video game design and game elements in learning environments (Jennings

& Roome, 2017).

Job-Embedded Professional Learning - a professional development model that identifies

individual performance objectives for each teacher and structures subsequent

professional development sessions to address those objectives is the most

beneficial model for teacher learning. It serves as a way to differentiate

instruction for teachers seeking professional development (Rock, 2002).

Micro-Credentialing - provides teachers with the opportunity to learn and demonstrate

competency in new skills receiving feedback from an outside evaluator to earn

credentials (Demonte, 2017).

Non-Traditional Professional Development – a format that supports educators in

becoming makers of their own learning, as well as creating and implementing

their own plan (Jones-Carey, 2017)

Online Personalized Learning - opportunities for teachers to have flexible learning

environments, have easy access to experts around the world, choose their learning

modules, and work at their own pace (Terrel, 2017).

Peer Observations –a formative process where two peers work together and observe each

other's teaching. The observer offers feedback to the colleague who is doing the

teaching (Desimone, 2009)

Personalized Learning – tailoring learning for each student's strengths, needs and

interests – including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when, and

where they learn – to provide flexibility and support to ensure mastery of the

highest standards possible (Gross, Tuchman, & Patrick, 2018).

Personalized Learning Networks – a way to explore topics and issues of interest to an

individual by giving them tools and assistance to problem-solve complex issues

(Hirschy, 2016).

Professional Development - any type of continuing education effort for educators that can

improve their skills and in turn, boost student achievement (Kampen, 2019).

Professional Learning Communities – an ongoing process in which educators work

collaboratively in collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results

for the students they serve (DuFour, 2014)

Shared Leadership – the practice of governing a school by expanding the number of

people involved in making important decisions related to the school's

organization, operation, and academics, which entails the creation of leadership

roles or decision-making opportunities for teachers, staff members, students,

parents, and community members (Guskey, 2014).

Teacher Empowerment –investing teachers with the right to participate in the

determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment

about what and how to teach (O'Sullivan, 2018).

Traditional Professional Development – generic in nature with a one-size-fits-all

implementation of material in workshops or sessions (Jones-Carey, 2017)

Voice of Learner - involvement and engagement in what and the how of learning

early in the learning process (Rodman, 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate related articles about professional development, personalized learning, and empowering teachers to take ownership in their own learning experiences. This researcher will investigate the key elements that make professional development effective for educators and what educators determine are the characteristics that make professional development effective. Through this investigation, this researcher will determine the components of effective professional development in research and teachers' perspectives. Traditional formats and nontraditional formats of professional development will be analyzed, such as personalized learning formats, professional learning communities, and the power of teachers choosing and leading their own professional development pathways. To that end, the researcher will primarily talk about teachers' perceptions of key components of effective professional development, how personalized learning offers teachers choice in their own learning, and allowing teachers to become leaders among their colleagues to create professional learning that impacts student learning and achievement. In addition, the researcher will review how personalized learning is changing the way educators learn to truly meet their individual needs.

Shift from Industrial to Informational Age in Education

The traditional education system was designed in the Industrial Age of the early 1900s. American schools used a one-size-fits all model for students to ensure everyone developed the foundational skills in numeracy and literacy. In addition, the one-size fits

all model also incorporated very basic professional development for educators, believing

that their learning happened on their time. What the educational system was responsible

for was ensuring that teachers understood the expectations of them in the classroom and

what was needed to teach students basic history, math, writing, and reading. Beyond that,

schools ranked and sorted students to determine which students would be able to move on

to higher education and which would move directly into jobs in factories and farms. The

one-size-fits-all approaches don't work as well as approaches that recognize that students

bring different knowledge, skills and experiences into the classroom, as well as

understanding that each teacher also had their own strengths and weaknesses to bring to

their instructional practices to support students (Sturgis & Casey, 2018).

Rucker (2018) notes that traditional education was bureaucratic. This created a

top down approach that allowed for little opportunity for teachers to have a voice or

choice in anything happening within the district or building. Also, traditional education

focused on covering standardized content, with no variation from curricular expectations.

This created a narrow set of academic outcomes focusing only on math and reading. In

addition, traditional education assumed that peoples' intelligence was carved in stone.

When a student was placed in a "track," he had little chance to move out of that track

during his time in school (Rucker, 2018).

Elliott (2017) reported that teachers had limited amounts of time in the industrial

age for professional development, so administrators often dictated what was going to be

presented or studied. In addition to being told what they needed to learn, professional

development was given in a sit-and-get format where lecturing was the norm, which

made them very passive learners. Also, there was no differentiation of information so

teachers received the same content no matter their experiences. Sessions were usually disconnected from each other and from what was happening in teachers' classrooms. This disconnection prevented teachers from actually placing it into their instructional repertoire. The sessions were given periodically and covered many topics that were not cohesive and usually not supported by anyone once they were given (Elliott, 2017).

We need to change the paradigm where a teacher is the key and the main player in carrying out the educational process in the field. We need to move from Industrial Age "factory model schools" to accommodate and reflect Information Age needs and realities (Elliott, 2017). The traditional model of education, born in the industrial age with a one-size-fits-all approach, is not meeting the needs of our Information Age society. We can do much more to personalize educational experiences that equips teachers and students with the skills, values, characteristics and knowledge they need to thrive in our modern society (Sturgis & Casey, 2018).

The social movements of the 1960s and continuing today changed our expectations about the most pressing needs in education (Rucker, 2018). The changes in thought stemmed from efforts by the government to address shortcomings in American education, whether those affected welcomed the changes or not. The issue of ineffective professional development that did not incorporate sound learning theory has existed throughout the history of professional development. Professional development has gone through many evolutions since its beginnings (Elliott, 2017). Teachers need to be engaged in learning to apply academic knowledge and skills to challenging real-life problems. Sitting at a desk, listening to a presenter and taking notes simply won't do the trick any longer (Sturgis & Casey, 2018). It is important that today's educational leaders

understand the needs of our teachers, and change from traditional types of professional development where teachers are passive learners to a nontraditional professional development model that allows teachers to have voice and choice in how, what, and when they are provided the opportunity for learning.

Professional Development in Educational Settings

The importance of effective professional development for improving teacher preparedness, as well as impacting student achievement, has become an important topic worldwide among educators. Professional development opportunities for teachers come in a variety of shapes and sizes, varying greatly in design to meet the needs of the teachers as well as the school district's goals and vision (Bayar, 2014). Kampen (2019) defines professional development as any type of continuing education effort for educators that can improve their skills and in turn, boost student achievement. The very existence of professional development can represent a threat to a teacher's autonomy, independence, and sense of effectiveness if the result feels like it will not have a positive impact on their own learning. However, if the professional development sessions are offered in a variety of formats, prioritize engagement and teacher choice, they can be the most effective experiences to motivate teachers to be better today than they were yesterday (Jones, 2018). Research shows that successful professional development programs typically target specific skills and knowledge that support educators for an average of 49 hours over a course of six months to a year (Pasatta, Hamilton, & DeDoes, 2017).

Traditional versus nontraditional professional development. Professional development activities play a key role in teacher preparation and improvement. These activities include both traditional and non-traditional professional development opportunities, as stated by both Bayar (2014) and Guskey (2014). Traditional professional development activities consist of short workshops, conferences, seminars, study groups, mentoring, coaching, and so on, but non-traditional professional development activities consist of peer observations; face-to-face or online professional learning communities; teacher exchanges; bug in the ear coaching; data teams; individualized improvement plans; and "unconferences" where teachers come together to discuss a similar topic that was chosen by them in an unstructured format (Bayar, 2014; Guskey, 2014). Bayar (2014) emphasizes the duration of a professional development program is a key determinant for deciding if the activity is traditional or non-traditional. Researchers have stated that traditional formats of professional development are shorter in length and time commitment, which makes them less effective in reaching the end goal of their desired outcome. In addition, traditional professional development activities often lack efficiency regarding specific teaching and learning opportunities. These activities are less effective in impacting the skill of the teacher. On the other hand, non-traditional professional development activities tend to be more effective due to the utilization of time on task, which in turn helps teachers acquire the necessary skills of the desired goals of the activity. When teachers have the time to practice the skill, this will influence or change instructional practice (Bayar, 2014).

Teacher professional development is essential in improving our schools and student achievement. Student achievement should be the ultimate goal of any

professional development activity, and when teachers have access to continuous learning opportunities and professional development resources, they are better equipped to become more effective teachers. Professional development can enhance the skills of new and experienced teachers, which can increase their confidence in their instructional abilities, and in turn, boost student academic outcomes and growth. When teachers are active participants in their own learning and are eager to learn, professional development can help teachers shape career-long learning (Kampen, 2019).

Characteristics of effective professional development. Effective professional development is important for any educational system to remain competitive in a global arena. With structured professional learning resulting in changes in teacher practices and enhanced quality of teaching, student learning outcomes and achievement will be impacted positively, resulting in increased success. (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2017; Bayar, 2014).

Darling-Hammond, et al., (2017) have identified seven widely shared characteristics of effective professional development (p. 4).

1. Is content focused

2. Incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory

3. Supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts

4. Uses models and modeling of effective practice

5. Provides coaching and expert support

6. Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection

7. Is of sustained duration

Content focused professional development is job-embedded and matches existing needs of the teacher (6). The overview of the literature states that it is not only about the content that is being taught, but understanding how teachers are learning the content is essential in achieving growth in student successes and understanding the diverse needs of each student. Incorporating active learning enhances engagement of the learners and focuses on using a variety of different ways to learn and respond for both the teacher and student (Kampen, 2019; Bayer, 2014). Darling-Hammond, et al., (2017) state "Collaboration can span a host of configurations—from one-on-one or small-group interactions to whole group collaboration to exchanges with other professionals beyond the school." (p. 9) All collaboration should be set with a purpose and have clear goals (Guskey, 2003).

In addition, when professional development utilizes effective collaborative structures for teachers to problem-solve and learn together, it can positively contribute to student achievement. When professional development utilizes models of effective practice promoting teacher learning and supporting student achievement, professional development has proven successful. Curricular and instructional models and modeling of instruction help teachers to have a vision of practice on which to anchor their own learning and growth. Examples of effective modeling would include peer observation, demonstration lessons, or videos of teaching. Further, using coaches and role experts can help to guide and facilitate teachers' learning in the context of their practice. In their work with educators, experts—educators themselves—often play this critical role by employing types of professional learning strategies such as modeling strong instructional practices or supporting group discussion and collaborative analysis of student work. Such

coaches may also share expertise about content and evidence-based practices (Bayar, 2014; Guskey, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Feedback and reflection are powerful tools within effective professional development. Student gains are associated within professional development when it has built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make changes to their practice by providing intentional time for feedback and/or reflection (Jones, 2018). Finally, the seventh characteristic associated with effective professional development is that it is sustained over time. Professional learning that is developed and revisited over a longer time frame has seen greater changes in practices compared to professional development that is accomplished in short, one-time workshops with no follow-up or implementation. Offering multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices has a greater chance of transforming teaching practices and student learning (Bayar, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Guskey (2003) states that all effective professional development needs to be well organized, carefully structured, and purposefully directed so that it has longevity in its development and learning for educators (p. 750).

Professional development needs to be accessible to be effective. This means that we must move away from traditional formats such as after school sessions or all day presentations on one topic (Jacob & McGovern, 2014; Jones, 2018). Traditional professional development does not always allow teachers to increase their knowledge in content of interest to increase their growth; they are often created as a one size fits all with no choice given in topics or presentation. Professional development can take place during planning, in the classroom, during lunch and even virtually. When flexible formats

match the intended objectives, teachers are able to often complete these sessions at their own time or even at their own pace. Time is not an issue when discussing effective professional development. When teachers are able to personalize their professional learning, they can find options that work best for their own learning styles and are able to access the content in a way that works for them. Through online sessions, face-to-face sessions, book studies, or simply exploring topics in a collaborative setting, teachers are able to participate and feel empowered to learn in a format that makes sense to them, which allows for a more successful learning experience (DuFour, 2014; Jones, 2018).

Impact of teacher's learning styles on effective professional development. An important part of designing professional development is to understand how teachers learn, as well as what teachers learn during the sessions. Darling-Hammond, et al., (2017), through research, developed and identified themes that are important when designing professional development. As teachers come to the table they need to be recognized for their experiences and should be utilized as resources. Teachers need to be able to choose their own learning opportunities based on their interests and their own classroom experiences. Educators need to be involved in sessions where they are actively learning, so professional development needs to move away from traditional learning models that are generic, a "sit-and-get" format, to one that allows for personalized learning opportunities. These types of experiences use authentic learning practices, interactive activities, and are job-embedded into teachers' daily classroom activities. Active learning incorporates collaboration, coaching, feedback, and reflection, which are all part of allowing teachers to create a personalized learning opportunity (p. 7).

Another key to understanding what effective professional development entails is the importance of understanding how teachers learn best. Patricia Scott, principal of St. Edmond's Academy, has had success with a flipped professional development model that embraces the key characteristics of effective professional development. Scott flipped the traditional structure of learning sessions, and allowed teachers to do much of their learning individually at their own pace, and then meet as a group to strengthen the learning and understanding of the session topic. Teachers review sources about a topic on their own time to be able to understand the new content, leaving the face-to-face time to focus on collaboration, discussions, and analysis of the content. This type of flipped professional learning allowed teachers to take learning into their own hands, giving them time to focus on understanding the content prior to discussing and implementation. Using this form of professional development has allowed teachers to feel empowered in their learning because it meets their individual needs of growth and has positively impacted student improvement (Scott, 2014).

Research around learning tells us that one-size-fits-all professional development does not work to change instructional practices. Adult learners want to have professional development that works for their own learning styles, that is differentiated to their skill set and level of understanding, delivered in a timely manner, and done at a pace that allows them to move at the rate of their own mastery (Jones-Carey, 2017). Bray and McClaskey (2013) noted that "differentiation is a kind of personalized instruction, where leaders adjust process, & product, according to a learner's readiness, interest, & learning style." Planning of the learning starts with the content, and the content remains the same for all students. "This personalized learning approach attempts to match the needs,

strengths, and general readiness of the learner to content that is being delivered or discussed." Personalized learning starts with the learner and asks the question, "What does this student need to understand, and how best can that happen?" When learners have a voice and a choice in how they learn, they are more motivated to learn (Bray & McClaskey, 2013).

Actively engaged learners in professional development. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) state that effective professional development is a major factor in the success of teachers when they are actively engaged in their learning. The four dimensions of active learning are areas that are essential to successful learning. Teachers should be given the opportunity to observe other teachers and be observed by other teachers. Through these observations, teachers can engage in reflective discussions about the goals of the lesson, teaching strategies, and student learning. Planning classroom implementation through modeling or simulations during these sessions can help teachers with the implementation of new strategies. Another active learning dimension is to review student work. Allowing teachers to review student work gives them the chance to understand student assumptions, reasoning, and solution strategies. In addition, teachers will have the opportunity to collaborate in developing lessons that meet the needs of all students. Also, teachers need to be given the opportunity to lead presentations, discussions, or modeling a strategy (pp. 925-926). Finally, teachers need to be given opportunities to personalize their learning by having a voice in sessions presented, presenting the sessions, and how it is being delivered to them.

Jones (2018) states that you cannot underestimate the importance of engagement in professional learning. Adult learners have different needs in their learning, such as needing more convincing that the learning objective needs immediate application. In addition, adult learners understand and are good judges of how much support they will need to learn something new. Because of this, teachers need to be presented with differentiated learning options to support their level of learning, as well as their needs to learn the new information. When engaging adult learners, it is essential to create an environment that respects the differences among the teachers' levels of experience and that values learning collaboratively. Teachers need to feel engaged in the learning so it needs to be challenging, but not so challenging to discourage them from wanting to participate or make them feel it is a waste of time to be attending (Jones, 2018).

Increasing teacher motivation and engagement in professional development lends itself to personalized learning experiences for each learner. Educators need to feel that each learning session is designed with their interests and needs in mind, and that they have a voice in what material they learn and how they learn it. This type of personalized learning session creates an opportunity for teachers to feel that the session is designed for their growth in mind rather than a senseless chore (Beus, 2016). Teachers taking ownership of their learning is a critical component of personal mastery of the content or strategy that is being developed. Utilizing peer-to-peer learning can be a game changer for teachers, as this creates an environment of collaboration and sharing of resources and activities that can help teachers differentiate their own choice of learning to create a personalized learning pathway (Kuhlmann, 2018). When teachers are engaged in their learning and teaching and focused on making the best decisions for their instruction,

having a positive attitude will have a tremendous impact on student achievement (Stacy, 2013).

   Teacher empowerment in professional development. Bolin (O'Sullivan, 2018; Stacy, 2013) has defined teacher empowerment as "investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach." An empowered teacher has access to material and information, and is free to use resources that meet student needs and targets. In addition, teachers are given the encouragement by leaders to take risks and engage in continuous professional learning by collaborating with colleagues and trying new strategies. This is an essential part of growing as an educational leader. Empowered teachers show an increase in motivation, problem solving, and teaching students to become empowered in their own learning choices. Understanding what it means to be an empowered teacher will allow them to take the first step towards improving their own professional and personal growth goals as an educator (O'Sullivan, 2018).

   Professional development can lead teachers to feel empowered; to have the opportunity to influence those around them, and have a professional voice in creating and directing their own professional development (Stacy, 2013; Murray, 2010). Empowerment is the process in which teachers are able to take control of and influence events and learning that affect their own growth. Teachers have the ability to empower themselves if they keep the following traits at the forefront of their career:

- Be proactive, not reactive
- Believe in what you are doing and in yourself
- Be positive

- Be assertive, not aggressive

When teachers feel that they are empowered, they manifest leadership skills. When this happens, their empowerment leads to improvement in student performance, skills, and attitudes. Teachers who encompass some of the traits are able to empower themselves to determine their own needs in professional development and in leading their own course of learning (Murray, 2010).

Empowered teachers are able to make significant input into many of the key areas in educational issues within the school and district. Desimone (Stacy, 2013) states that teachers who are empowered have the ability to create curricula, direct their own professional development, claim ownership in their own work and invest in it accordingly. When teachers are engaged in their learning and teaching and focused on making the best decisions for their instruction, having a positive attitude will have a tremendous impact on student achievement (Stacy, 2013). When school leaders begin to look at professional development, empowered teachers have an impact on understanding the needs of the teachers and working together to create professional learning that impacts teachers' knowledge (p. 41). When educators are empowered to feel engaged in their own learning, they can build creative environments, and learning can go beyond the classroom (Tani & Keane, 2016).

As teachers continue to be more empowered in taking leadership roles, more opportunities for leading professional development arise. Teacher-led professional development creates opportunities to enhance professional autonomy and validates teacher voices in understanding the needs of themselves and their colleagues. When teachers create teacher-led professional development, they recognize the importance of

collaboration and have found ways, working with administration, to create those

activities to improve student learning (Stacy, 2013). Educators must begin to design and

build professional development that is sustainable and job-embedded. Utilizing teachers

as experts in creating learning sessions, these experiences need to be created and viewed

as maker spaces, hands-on learning or active learning, rather than a lecture by an outside

expert. Teachers should play an important part in designing the sessions, which need to

include skillful, learner-centered facilitation with constructed action steps

following. Professional development should be created to match sessions with expert

teachers and empower them to brainstorm approaches and strategies, and to trust in the

abilities of these expert teachers to facilitate high-quality learning that will impact the

instruction of teachers and student learning (Rodman, 2018).

   Effective professional development through teachers' perspectives. Although

researchers have been able to identify effective characteristics of professional

development, teachers continue to have their own views and perspectives on what makes

professional development worthwhile for their own learning. The K-12 Education Team

(2015), from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, contracted with the Boston

Consulting Group in 2014 to gain insights about roadblocks that teachers may face in

professional development, as well as their needs for professional development. Through

this research, teachers value professional development opportunities that help them plan

and improve instruction. Ideal professional learning for teachers consists of some key

characteristics that are similar to what research has also revealed. Teachers state that

professional learning should be relevant and personalized to their content, and be

interactive involving hands-on activities that teachers actually participate in during the

session. It should be delivered by someone who understands what being a teacher entails, and has actually used the strategy within his/her own classroom—or better yet, are still in the classroom currently using it to enhance instruction. As with the previous research, teachers also want professional learning to be sustained over time. Professional development needs to be something that you work on over a year's time, not just a one-time workshop activity. Teachers want to be treated like professionals, and during these sessions, teachers should be treated like adults, rather than students that would be sitting in their own classroom. Teachers are adult learners and need to be treated like adult learners during all professional development. Finally, teachers suggest that ideal professional development experience should focus less on lectures and presentations and more on opportunities to apply the learning through modeling or demonstrations (p. 4).

The K-12 Education Team (2015) from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also reported that many teachers view professional development as a compliance rather than a learning opportunity. Teachers appreciate being given choice in their learning and find that they have a higher level of satisfaction with professional development when this is the case. Teachers who are able to choose their professional development are twice as satisfied with their learning as those who don't get a choice (p. 10). Teachers also recognize the importance of collaboration within an effective professional learning environment. When teachers are placed in an ideal collaborative learning environment they are energized, feel supported by colleagues and administrators, and it is hands-on or scenario based. Having a structured agenda and objectives, accountability for those in the group, all members being invested in the learning, and feedback that helps them grow instructionally are essential in collaborative sessions (p. 7).

Through the research done by the Boston Consulting Group, a clear consensus of the elements needed for effective professional development were established through teacher input. Teachers want professional development that is relevant, hands-on, and sustained over time. Some of the key focus areas that teachers want to see developed within professional learning sessions are times for collaboration and personalized learning opportunities. Also, the use of technology needs to be continued to be incorporated into professional development models to help support any of the barriers that teachers feel potentially could negatively impact personalized learning for their own growth (p. 16).

Professional development and student achievement. Teacher professional development is essential in improving our schools and student achievement. Student achievement should be the ultimate goal of any professional development activity, and when teachers have access to continuous learning opportunities and professional development resources, they are better equipped to become more effective teachers. Professional development can enhance the skills of new and experienced teachers, which can increase their confidence in their instructional abilities, and in turn, boost student academic outcomes and growth. When teachers are active participants in their own learning and are eager to learn, professional development can help teachers shape career-long learning (Kampen, 2019).

Designing effective professional development for teachers creates an environment that has a larger impact on student achievement. Job-embedded professional development allows for teachers to think about how to adapt and apply the learning to fit into their own classroom, and compare outcomes with fellow teachers. Teachers feel

empowered when they are able to direct their own professional growth, and instructional practices will change to meet the needs of their growth by asking specific questions and addressing challenges they face in their classrooms. Professional development that is generic in nature and given to the entire staff does not personalize learning, and often leads teachers dissatisfied with the outcome of the content presented and how it can impact their own career.

Impact of teacher led professional development. Professional development can provide teachers an avenue to network with colleagues inside and outside of their buildings. When teachers lead the learning, it can enhance collaboration, encourage self-reflection on instructional practices, and empower teachers to work together to improve their skills. In the end, teachers who have a role in developing their own professional learning are more compelled to be actively involved in that learning. Also, teachers will be able to identify their own needs and the needs of their students as they continue to collaborate with their peers and are empowered to be part of the decision-making for what is going to be presented, how it is going to be presented, and in what format it will be presented. Through teacher-led professional development, teachers feel empowered and reinvigorated as a professional that is in charge of his/her own learning (Kuhlmann, 2018; Stacy, 2013).

When teachers are able to have collaborative meetings that support their personalized learning goals, it creates opportunities that empower teachers to take on leadership roles by facilitating meetings, creating agendas for professional development, visiting classrooms, and providing feedback. Overall, it is more effective for teachers to learn new strategies or revisit their own instruction with a visit from an expert team

member, who can provide feedback and reflection from the point of view of someone

who has been in that exact learning moment, and can then give expert advice in a non-

evaluative way. Professional development sessions should be where empowered teachers

feel comfortable in sharing resources, activities, and feedback knowing their voice will be

heard, and in contributing to the continued learning happening among the entire staff

(Baum & Krulwich, 2017).

   District and building leaders roles in professional development. As school

leadership teams analyze the needs of teachers through surveys and needs assessments, a

professional development plan is created to focus on school-wide or district-wide

priorities. The information gained will be used to create the core of a professional

development plan (Guskey, 2014). Although a plan is made with an overarching umbrella

of topics, teachers need to be presented with many choices so they can participate in the

sessions they are interested in and be the most beneficial for their own learning and

classrooms. Offering a variety of options that are teacher-led on appealing topics, or

offering work time towards teacher collaboration to personalize learning earning badges

or micro credentialing, increases time to focus on best practices. Sessions need to be

developed based on need, and choices must be given to create the best sessions that meet

the needs of all learners (Jones, 2018).

   Not only do teachers need to feel empowered, administrators need to continue to

find ways to empower teachers to become leaders among their peers, as well as take on

lead roles in professional development opportunities. Administrators need to find ways

to continue to grow as teachers, and empowering teachers is essential for allowing this to

occur. Gardner-Webb University states, "in schools where teachers are empowered to be

leaders, the focus of control changes from the principal to the teachers." In addition, teachers need to have more time to collaborate where they can learn together. When teachers are empowered by leaders in the building, they find ways to improve together as a staff, and there is usually an increase in productivity and reflective practice. As administrators empower teachers to take leadership roles, it shows trust in the ability of teachers to be part of essential decision-making over issues that will directly affect their learning. When designing professional learning, administrators need to understand that true learning for teachers does not happen in a workshop, but actually back in their classrooms where they can refine and apply strategies in authentic experiences and activities. Ultimately, the goal is to support teachers to be able to internalize the process of identifying a problem of practice, theorizing or developing solutions, and expanding their list of strategies and collaborating with expert teachers (Goodwin, Hall, & Simeral, 2019).

Incorporating teacher voice is essential in effective professional development and personalized learning opportunities. Voice of a learner is defined as, "involvement and engagement in the what and the how of learning early in the learning process (Rodman, 2018). Leaders need to listen to their teachers' voices early in the professional learning design process. In addition, leaders need to survey teachers on their needs assessment to help begin the conversation to co-design professional learning that creates personalized learning sessions to impact individual teachers. Teachers need to be able to identify the challenges they are facing with instruction or new skills, and be a part of the process in developing and implementing professional development opportunities. The co-designed experiences need to ensure that teachers are able to reflect on their face-to-face, online, or

collaborative sessions. One way to get teachers to co-design is to match teacher leaders

with sessions they facilitate that showcase their strengths for other colleagues. Rodman

agrees with other researchers that in order to move professional development from

traditional sit-and-get formats to more personalized learning, teachers need to be given

more choice and voice in the development of these experiences. Leaders need to

understand that personalized learning does not happen only during school hours, but goes

beyond the vacuum of the school day. Teachers want to be part of the journey of creating

professional development, and as we continue to move away from traditional to

nontraditional experiences, leaders need to empower them to do just that (Rodman,

2018).

Shared leadership is a powerful path to school improvement because it generates

ownership among teachers and administrators. Administrators need to ensure that

teachers' voices and their expertise are being heard, because they are essential to

improving teaching and learning (Wilhelm, 2013). Beaton (2017) recognizes that teachers

can choose to be leaders by sharing their own wealth to refine instruction, their own and

others. This professional development can begin in a nontraditional space: the

classroom. The learning in the classroom is richer than anything that a teacher can get

just sitting and listening to adults in a professional development session (Beaton, 2017).

Creating opportunities for teachers to participate in instructional rounds, or visit another

teacher and vice versa creates authentic professional learning in a nontraditional format

(Stacy, 2013; Beaton, 2017). Allowing teachers to visit other classrooms to witness

different procedures, policies, classroom environments, and different instructional

activities creates real learning experiences that teachers can take back and reflect upon.

This type of professional development empowers teachers to personalize their own learning and find ways to collaborate with other colleagues on how to learn from that experience. Using these visits to experience activities or strategies supports teacher learning and allows for teachers to own their own learning, as well as find support by collaborating with others (experts) inside and outside of the building (Beaton, 2017).

Personalizing Professional Development Models and Formats

Personalized professional development opportunities for teachers are sweeping into schools and becoming more prevalent among administrators' comprehensive learning plans. Personalized learning formats and models will support teachers to find ways to engage with colleagues in their own building, as well as networking globally with other educators. In addition, personalized professional development will help teachers learn how to support their own learning to implement new strategies or instructional tools that will in turn increase student achievement that can be measured. To allow teachers the chance to create professional learning that supports their needs and goals, school districts are beginning to create opportunities that include a variety of formats and methods that promote choice in learning pathways, pace of the learning, and topics of interest. Teachers' paths of personalized learning might involve in-person coaching, online courses, social network of badging, social media, and professional learning communities and networks. Empowered teachers are engaged teachers, and engaged teachers are motivated teachers. When teachers are empowered, engaged, and motivated student achievement increases and the culture of learning is prevalent (Terrell, 2017; Baum & Krulwich, 2017).

Professional learning communities. A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is an example of a professional development model that incorporates several of these effective elements and supports student-learning gains in a non-traditional format. This collaborative and job-embedded professional development can be a source of usefulness and confidence for teachers, and can result in widespread improvement within and beyond the school level. DuFour (2014) states, " The best professional development builds staff capacity to function as members of a high-performing PLC." A Professional Learning Community is an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional Learning Communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). The elements of a Professional Learning Community correspond with the seven characteristics of effective professional development. DuFour et al. (2006), stated that a "PLC focuses on committing to understanding how each student learns, as well as the educator. It has a clear understanding of the purpose or vision of what the goal is for the PLC." In addition, it is collaborative in nature, action-oriented, and has shared goals of collective inquiry as well as teachers modeling learning. There is continuous learning and improvement of teaching and they analyze and reflect on their teaching and feedback given. Finally, the success of the Professional Learning Community is assessed through results that are gained over a long time frame of implementation and learning. All of these characteristics correspond with effective professional development for continuous personal growth (p. 3).

In Stacy's (2013) research, she found that embedding professional learning into informal learning communities would also lead to teacher empowerment. This type of learning would involve teachers in book studies, group discussions, co-teaching, or working with teachers to continually reflect on student learning. Empowering teachers to create these groups allows teachers to develop communities that reflect on similar topics that are of interest to them and create professional development that supports their specific learning needs. In addition, teacher-led professional development provides teachers with a voice in the decision-making process regarding topics such as curricula development, assessing student achievement, classroom management, blended learning activities, and numerous others. When teachers embed their professional learning, it can help to alleviate the pressures of a meeting time set within the school day, and empowers them to find a way that best supports them in their learning. This could look very different from online learning platforms, to face-to-face discussions, to social media outlets (Stacy, 2013).

Overall, the research on professional learning communities in the educational realm focuses solely on enhancing personal knowledge to positively impact student achievement. DuFour (2014) noted an authentic professional learning community has a concentrated focus on learning rather than on teaching, and it emphasizes collaboration and accountability as keys to successful PLCs. In the research of Caine and Caine (2010), professional learning communities were further defined as a "group of committed educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process resulting in better student achievement." When collaboration among teachers is strong, professional learning communities are effective. Teachers are borrowing and generating ideas from each other,

developing new ways to see things, and acquiring new skills when collaboration is

present. Teachers that are able to have these collaborative experiences often end up

changing their attitudes and beliefs in being willing to take risks and try new ideas or

concepts. Seeing teachers take risks means that this type of professional learning has

been effective (DuFour, 2014).

     Community of practice. Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002) define a

community of practice as "a group of people who share a common concern or passion of

a topic they want to deepen their knowledge and expertise in the educational arena from

ongoing interactions with others." Effective professional learning opportunities include

the importance of teachers collaborating with each other on a topic of their choice and

interest. A community of practice is a form of professional learning that allows teachers

to foster relationships that are based on mutual trust and respect, based around a common

ground and a sense of common identity. Within the community of practice, a framework

is set using tools, information, language, stories, activities, and documents that are shared

by members (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002). Skalicky and West (2008) have

studied the use of community of practice in the educational field and have determined

that this application of professional development provides teachers and administrators

access to multiple colleagues in a way that is relevant to their educational content. Using

this approach changes the way learning is achieved and creates opportunities for deeper

transformation within the educational setting by allowing authentic collaboration and

sharing of knowledge.

     Wenger et al.'s (2002) concept of community of practice and professional

development includes teachers' diverse backgrounds, expertise and experiences, and

offers teachers the ability to create their own learning through choice in common topics. Learning communities place participants in situations to learn together in a collaborative environment. This environment allows for expert teachers to support novice teachers and novice teachers to share new fresh ideas with expert teachers. In addition, this form of collaborative professional development allows teachers to be able to share their commonalities within their teaching practices and create authentic tasks together that are linked to student achievement.

Instructional coaches. Instructional coaches have been instrumental in making the shift to personalized learning in professional development. Using instructional coaches as leaders in a nontraditional format for professional development is a shift for teachers to cultivate a growth mindset in personalizing learning to meet their specific needs (Kuhlmann, 2018). Instructional coaches encompass some of the key elements for effective professional development in that they keep sessions content-focused, create active learning opportunities, work with teachers over a long period of time with constant feedback and reflection, are collaborative in nature, and are coherent (Kampen, 2019). Coaches often work together with teachers on lesson planning and assessing students' activities where the focus is on the content being taught and assessed. Coaches help teachers navigate the tricky world of aligning the design of their lessons and performance tasks with academic standards while also helping them base their instructional decisions on student diagnostic information (Desimone, 2009). Although there are certainly times when modeling, encouragement, and explicit direction are necessary practices, coaches should build multiple opportunities for active engagement and teacher leadership in their own professional development (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001). Using instructional

coaches to help teachers personalize learning is a form of active learning, which is a key element that increases the effectiveness of professional development. The expectation for active learning is built into instructional coaching as a form of PD (Jones-Carey, 2017). Unlike sitting in a classroom and listening to a lecture, teachers engage with their coach in a variety of ways. The most common type of coaching involves face-to-face, one-on-one interactions, or group or team coaching. This professional development allows teachers to receive real-time, ongoing feedback of their newly attempted teaching practice, which is embedded into their daily instruction. Instructional coaches can support teachers observing expert teachers or being observed, followed by interactive feedback and discussion; reviewing student work in the topic areas being covered; and leading discussions ((Desimone, 2009). Coaching is usually an activity that is ongoing throughout the school year, and involves continuous cycles of reflection and action to foster teacher growth. The research clearly shows that when professional development is integrated explicitly into teachers' daily instructional routines, it is more likely to be effective. Overall, the literature states that using instructional coaching personalizes teachers' goals that are directly generated from their needs, and is an effective form of professional development.

Personalized learning in professional development. iNOCAL defines personalized learning as, "tailoring learning for each student's strengths, needs and interests – including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when, and where they learn – to provide flexibility and support to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible" (Gross, Tuchman, & Patrick, 2018). The National Center of Learning Disabilities recognizes that personalized learning is valuable because it allows learners to

customize their own learning experiences. In addition, it allows teachers to learn at their own pace with built-in support and structure through colleagues, expert teachers, or outside resources. The key to what makes personalized learning such a powerful tool for professional development is that it aligns learning with the interests, needs, and skills of each learner. This form of learning, personalized and meaningful to each individual, takes place in an engaging environment that allows for better understanding of each learner's strengths and areas of growth. These environments are created by the learner and for the learner. Many of these environments consist of collaborative spaces where teachers are able to get one-on-one support or small group workspaces (Johns & Wolking, 2018).

Using a personalized learning approach for professional development for teachers, just as teachers would use in their classroom for students, can optimize the learning, motivation, and engagement in their learning opportunities. Gross et al (2018) call on teachers to be choice-makers in how and what they learn, co-creating their learning pathways and experiences that allow them to progress through content at their own pace, showing competencies along the way in the content. Personalized learning allows administrators and teachers to differentiate their learning to meet the needs of each individual on each topic.

LEAP learning framework approach. Closely tied to the iNACOL's definition of personalized learning, the LEAP Learning Framework was developed utilizing information gained by leading experts, school leaders, and teachers to help provide educators with a clear definition of personalized learning and strategies to put into practice. Gross et al (2018) shared that the LEAP Learning Framework features the following principles:

- Learner Centered – Learning transcends location and relevant and valued ways, connected to families, educators, communities, and networks.

- Learner Focused- Empower learners to understand their needs, strengths, interests, and approaches in learning.

- Learner Demonstrated – Enable learners to progress at their own pace based on demonstrated competencies.

- Learner Led – Entrust learners to take ownership of their learning so that it can dynamically adjust to their skills, curiosity, and goals

These principles are woven into many personalized learning models and are used to enhance professional development opportunities that support the needs of learners. Personalized learning empowers educators to determine the best format for them to learn the content, how long they need to master the content, where they want to get the content from, and the choice of the content that meets their goals of learning. All of these principles are the key to having teachers use personalized learning as professional learning to support student improvement and achievement.

Personalized learning is reshaping professional development for educators. Terrell (2017) interviewed districts all over the United States that now incorporate personalized learning within professional development plans. She found districts that design trainings, which allow teachers to decide what they want to learn, when they want to learn it, and how they learn it. These trainings have made significant changes in teacher instruction and student achievement.

Personalized learning networks. Creating a Personalized Learning Network (PLN) allows teachers to find ways to embed their own learning through resources,

information, and groups of people. Hirschy (2016) defines a Personalized Learning Network as a way to explore topics and issues of interest to an individual by giving them tools and assistance to problem-solve complex issues. A Personalized Learning Network provides professional development the way an educator needs it to be done to fulfill their specific requirements. An educator can develop a network of people through social media resources and professional resources. A Personalized Learning Network lets the educator explore and decide upon the topic he/she wants to learn more about and the depth of how much he/she wants to learn. In addition, a Personalized Learning Network allows for networking though multiple avenues that include social media platforms, web resources, blogs, and professional communities extend beyond your school. A Personalized Learning Network creates an opportunity for educators to build a platform that individually fits their needs, and finds the resources that will allow them to explore in formats that provide information to expand their knowledge to support their own instruction and student achievement (Hirschy, 2016).

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allows for networking through multiple avenues that include social media platforms, web resources, blogs, and professional communities extending far beyond one's school. A Personalized Learning Network creates an opportunity for educators to build a platform that individually fits their needs, and finds the resources that will allow them to explore in formats that provide information to expand their knowledge to support their own instruction and student achievement (Hirschy, 2016).

Student-centered personalized learning. Education Elements, a company that is focused on creating student-centered personalized learning models, has worked with more than 750 schools and 140 districts on implementing personalized learning successfully to support individualized learning opportunities for students. The founders of this company have developed the Core Four Elements of Personalized Learning to assist administrators and teachers in creating specific ways that instruction will change in a personalized learning environment. As districts create professional development using a personalized learning format, some key elements need to be incorporated to support the growth of teachers, which then impacts student achievement. The four core elements are (1) flexible content and tools; (2) targeted instruction; (3) reflection and ownership; and (4) data driven decisions. Teachers need to be able to utilize material that allows for differentiated paths, pace, and performance of tasks based on their own needs and interests. The content within professional learning is aligned to specific needs and learning goals of the teachers in support of district initiatives. Throughout this process, teachers need to be able to reflect to promote ownership in their learning to create authentic choices to improve their own learning outcomes and student achievement. Finally, opportunities must be given to allow for review of data and make

learning decisions based on that information to better enhance instructional practices and student achievement (Johns & Wolking, 2018). Teachers can continually improve in their expertise through the elements of personalized learning as they hone skills through their own differentiated path for learning and collaborating with colleagues.

Figure 1

Education Elements (Johns & Wolking, 2018)
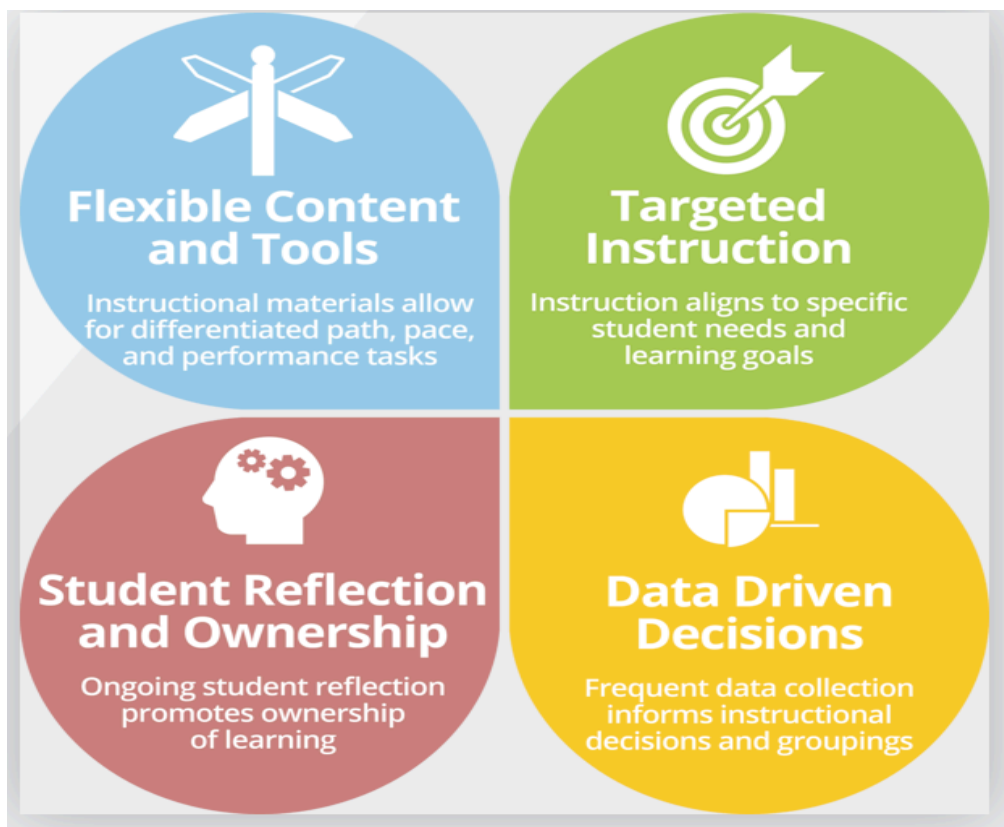
Utilizing technology to personalize professional development. Many districts have new technology platforms that are helping to begin the implementation of online personalized learning. Online personalized learning creates opportunities for teachers to have flexible learning environments, have easy access to experts around the world,

choose their learning modules, and work at their own pace. Terrell states, "Research is showing that utilizing technology platforms are increasing teachers' skills" (p. 40). In addition, it is important that as districts transform professional development, they recognize the importance of identifying the different skills that each teacher needs to improve instruction. Beginning teachers need different skills than veteran teachers, and teachers in rural areas need different skills than teachers in urban areas. Terrell found that some districts have teachers using resources like #EdCamp, Twitter Math Camps, Google Play Learning Communities, Pinterest, and Facebook groups. Teachers want to have hands-on opportunities to experience new apps, and classroom technology to help to increase their own professional learning, so they can grow as instructors. Teachers need to carefully select topics and/or courses that align to the larger district goals as they begin to create their own personalized learning pathway to meet their specific needs to support student achievement (Terrell, 2017). Most personalized professional development will consist of teacher observations and feedback, professional learning communities, and increased use of online digital learning.

Gamification in professional development. Educators know that students don't learn in a sit-and-get environment, so why would administrators give teachers that same type of professional development? Personalization of professional development opportunities for educators is becoming more popular in districts. One type of personalized learning is an individually paced gamified personalized development (Powell, 2016). A form of gamifying professional development is using digital badging. Badging has arrived on the scene as a leading contender to help provide teachers with a clear path to professional growth, and giving them the micro-credentials

to prove it (Jennings & Roome, 2017). Jennings and Roome (2017) recognize that badges help teachers focus on relevant professional development opportunities because they support personalized learning. Rather than the traditional model in which professional development is offered in a seminar or lecture setting, teachers can choose the learning they want to pursue based on what will be most relevant to them and their students. Teachers earn badges by displaying competencies throughout their careers. Badges are earned by what they learned, not the amount of seat time. Teachers are able to track their own learning and create their own pathways of personalized learning by earning badges showcasing mastery on the topic they choose due their interest and need (p. 1).

Gamrat, Toomey, Zimmerman, Dudek, and Peck (2014) researched the use of digital badging in personalized professional development for educators. Badges act like portfolios for teachers to document workplace learning and artifacts that can be shared with colleagues and supervisors. Digital badging is a tool that supports the needs of personalized learning using technology to help increase knowledge in an individualized path. Gamrat et al. (2014) specifically looked at the Teacher Learning Journeys (TLJ) badging system, which was designed collaboratively by three partners—Penn State University, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA). TLJ is dedicated to supporting implementation of personalized PD through micro-credentialing and digital badging. The key to this program is that teachers can receive expert feedback as they complete the activities and activity logs from a local mentor. In the logs, teachers reflected on what they learned and had to articulate their understanding of the content learned. Through their research,

Gamrat et al. (2014) found that personalized learning, through digital badging, had to consist of flexible online professional development to be effective. The districts that used this type of learning needed to be able to allow for flexible goal-setting, the delivery of content and forms of assessments, and how to share artifacts for future learning. In this format of learning, the authors found that there is value in utilizing digital badging if the organization is willing to create professional development opportunities that are nontraditional, and give teachers choice in topics and content based on their interests and needs.

Micro-credentialing. Micro-credentials were developed as a way to support professional learning that provides teachers with the opportunity to learn and demonstrate competency in new skills receiving feedback from an outside evaluator to earn credentials. Micro-credentialing began after the introduction of digital badging for personalizing professional learning for teachers, and it allows teachers to expand and validate their learning and to receive recognition as they achieve milestones in their professional learning trajectories. One reason micro-credentials are appealing is that they break down complex instructional skills into fundamental parts. Teachers are able to have choices in their own learning pathway to then be able to demonstrate their competencies by providing evidence through the program. Demonte (2017) noted that a 2016 report by Teaching Matters stated that teachers like using micro-credentials because they felt their learning through this format would lead to greater student achievement.

> "Teachers earning micro-credentials use what they have learned in their teaching, and the design and online platform have an effect on the experience of users. The report included examples of the artifacts provided by teachers as evidence of their

competency related to the instructional skill laid out in the micro-credential" (p. 8).

As school districts begin to use micro-credentials for professional development, leaders must do the following: (1) decide on the intended use and goals, (2) articulate the purpose, (3) collect and interpret information from use of micro-credentialing, (4) give voice and choice to teachers (Demonte, 2017). When districts use these, the implementation of micro-credentialing has a much better chance of finding success among teachers to have an impact in their own learning and the achievement of their students.

Bloomboard is one of the leading platforms that are providing districts with meaningful professional development experiences through micro-credentialing. Bloomboard can provide a place for educators to build new competencies and earn certifications through micro-credentialing. All micro-credentialing offered on Bloomboard have the purpose to improve educator's instructional practice to support student achievement and grow and advance their careers. Bloomboard states that micro-credentials are:

- Competency-based

- Personalized and Self-directed

- Demonstration of New or Existing Expertise

- Available On-demand

- Job Embedded

- Learning By Doing

In addition, Bloomboard's current research shows that traditional seat-time based professional development has very little impact on change in instructional practice or student outcomes. Micro-credentials focus on the application of professional learning in the classroom, and implementing micro-credentials as an organization is a scalable way to improve instructional practice that is aligned to educators' content and needs (Bloomboard, 2019).

Summary

In summary, Baum and Krulwich (2017) recognize that research states that professional development has to look different in today's learning environment. Teachers need to be empowered to be integral in developing these experiences and giving feedback on what is working and what is not working. Education leaders need to begin to eliminate traditional professional development and use that time for teachers to collaborate daily in teams that empower their own learning needs. Within that team, a teacher needs to be an expert in the content being discussed, so that others within their collaborative group can have an apprenticeship experience and learn from the expert in the group (p. 64). This creates teacher-led professional development opportunities among many different collaborative groups within a school or district. With this philosophy in place, personalized learning becomes the model that continues to empower teachers in choice and voice in their own learning and learning path (Powell, 2019).

Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, and Evans (2003), through a systematic review of literature on collaborative, continuing professional development and its effect on teaching and learning, concluded that teacher collaboration improves learners' achievement. Research shows that teacher-learning communities that are the most productive and

sustainable are those not mandated by someone outside the group or formed around imposed tasks. The communities that are formed organically, motivated by both social and professional forces, are the ones that truly improve student achievement and teacher instructional practices (National Councils of Teachers of English, 2010).

Finally, research supports the need to provide personalized learning opportunities for teachers to increase their motivation, engagement, attitudes, and bring about a change in their classroom practices (Guskey, 2003). Changing the traditional professional format of sit-and-get to a more nontraditional personalized learning format supports educators in becoming makers of their own learning, as well as creating and implementing their own plan. Allowing teachers the choice to determine what topic they want to learn, the format that works for their learning style, and at a pace that allows them the time needed to fully understand the content is what personalized professional development comprises. In addition, this learning format allows for collaboration with coaches, expert teachers, or outside networks to increase a teacher's reach for their own professional development. When teachers create a blueprint for their learning, that navigates and empowers them to have ownership and choice in personalizing learning experiences, engagement becomes evident and student achievement increases. This blueprint implements learning in a gradual fashion, and a hierarchy of learning to support each educator's change in mindset from traditional to nontraditional professional development (Jones-Carey, 2017).

Conclusion

Across the country, districts and schools face many challenges in creating and delivering high quality personalized professional development learning opportunities for their staff. Guskey (2003) noted the major goals of effective professional development

are: "change in classroom practices of teachers, change in their attitude and beliefs, and change in their learning outcomes of students." Teachers need to be involved in the planning and design of professional learning sessions, utilizing data from needs surveys to ensure that new practices or strategies are aligned with what teachers want. When creating experiences that are personalized to an educator's own learning styles, teachers become more engaged and invested in their learning that in turn impacts student achievement. Teachers need to feel empowered in being able to have a voice in what they are learning, how they are learning it, and when they are learning it. Using online platforms; creating micro-credentialing opportunities to earn badges; capitalizing a personalized learning network; and leveraging social media networking are all examples of experiences that teachers can use to create opportunities for professional development that makes sense for them. Allowing teachers to pave their own learning path is a paradigm shift in district leadership that is changing the landscape of professional development from the traditional format of seminars, workshops, and outside presenters to one that creates personalized learning experiences impacting student learning. Using personalized learning to enhance professional development increases the motivation and engagement of teachers, which empowers them to brainstorm approaches and strategies, and be involved in high-quality learning experiences that impact their instruction and student learning. In all, teachers need to be empowered to personalize their professional development experiences to meet their interests and needs, not be told what they should be learning from leaders (Powell, 2019; Guskey, 2003; Stacy, 2013; Terrell, 2017; Rodman, 2018; Dallas, 2018).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

With the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States, teachers have been tasked with additional responsibilities that incorporate techniques that support student academics and behavioral needs. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that teachers implement new learning standards, use student data to inform instruction, improve student literacy and increase rigorous and relevant coursework, and create a positive and inclusive learning environment. As a result of this Act, teachers have been asked to acquire skills that support students with little to no professional development to help them be effective in this task (ESSA, 2015). When creating professional development to meet the diverse needs of all teachers and continue to be conscious of financial challenges within the organization, districts are looking at ways to create new meaningful and cost-effective methods of professional development. With credit courses, workshops, and online options ranging from $300 to $500 per person and one day coaching sessions ranging from $3,500 to $5,000 professional development can become very expensive for a district, and not necessarily effective learning for educators (Powell, 2016). Nontraditional cost-effective methods need to be created to support teacher growth in preparing them to continue finding best practices to incorporate in their instruction to meet the needs of all students. Teachers need to have multiple avenues as a way to enhance their learning through professional

development that allow choice of topics and interests, formats, pace, and use of a wide variety of resources.

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in teacher learning, opportunities available for professional development of teachers, and teachers' beliefs regarding effective professional learning. To ensure a coherent professional development plan is designed and implemented, it is essential that professional learning should link teachers' experiences, knowledge, skills, and competencies as part of the program structure. Teachers need to have a voice in the creation and development of the types of professional development being offered to them and for them. In addition, it should also allow teachers to take on leadership opportunities that ensure a comprehensive system is developed focused on the growth and development of their peers, as well as their own learning (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Continuous effective professional development is a process that requires teachers to perform activities that aim to increase their quality of teaching and allows active learning opportunities that support their growth and student achievement. Teachers personalizing their own professional learning allows them to find the best pathways to support their own growth and enhance student achievement. They are truly engaged in learning the content and are able to see how it impacts daily instruction immediately and long term. Personalizing professional development encourages educators to customize their learning paths that encompass their individual learning styles, delivered in a timely fashion, and fully supported in the implementation of learning. Teachers do not want professional learning that is a "one-shot" approach and is driven as a compliance of learning, but rather meeting their own personalized learning needs. It is hard to change the paradigm of the traditional sit and

get professional learning to a personalized learning approach, but educators actively want this type of professional development and research shows it is the most effective way to increase teacher engagement, motivation, and continuous growth (Jones-Carey, 2017; Beus, 2016).

Purpose

Classroom teachers currently struggle to balance their work schedule, personal life, and extensive teaching obligations, making it challenging for them to regularly engage in long-term, effective professional development. Guskey (2002) notes that professional development plans fail when teachers are not motivated by what they are learning and do not see how it connects to their own need for growth to support student achievement outcomes. In addition, teachers need to be able to create a blueprint for their learning, allowing them to navigate and empower ownership and choice in personalizing learning experiences, at which point engagement becomes evident and student achievement increases (Jones-Carey, 2017). Garet et al. (2001) has stated through research that to improve professional development it is important to focus on content, active learning, and coherence rather than the type.

The purpose of the study was for the researcher to investigate how a set of secondary teachers feel about the effectiveness of their current professional development plan in the district, specifically at the building level. Through the review of literature, it is clear to the researcher that personalizing learning for teachers is an effective way to ensure that teachers have the best resources to enhance their own growth and create a pathway that supports how they learn best, what content they need to know to support student growth, and the pace at which they are able to complete the tasks. All the

information the researcher studied stated that teachers want to have ownership in the professional learning opportunities that they need to complete yearly. Although the research showed teachers often do not feel they have the voice to create the professional learning content, teachers are asking for that very thing—voice, choice, and format of learning. This study aims to review how teachers perceive the effectiveness of what they learn through the professional learning opportunities presented to them that contribute to the implementation of changes and improvements to their classroom practice. In addition, the study will review how much voice and choice teachers feel they have in creating the learning experiences presented to them and in the format that works for their adult-learning styles. Finally, the study will analyze the secondary teachers' beliefs within one district about the learning experiences they are involved in currently within the district, and the overall effectiveness of impacting teachers' growth and meeting their needs.

Using an inquiry data method to collect information from participants allowed the researcher to gather information through an anonymous survey and a structured interview. Using this form of inquiry data collection allowed the researcher to ensure that the research questions could be answered with little bias in the interpretation of the responses (Hendricks, 2017). The researcher will answer the following research questions to be able to support the belief that personalizing learning and giving teachers choice will create a better professional development plan that engages teachers in their own growth and learning blueprint. The researcher created questions that support the study in determining what teachers feel effective professional development entails by looking at the engagement within the activities, impact of instruction and lesson development, and

perception of what traditional and nontraditional personalized learning looks like at the secondary level.

1.   Does teacher engagement increase during professional development when given choice?

2.   How does giving teachers choice in professional development impact daily instruction?

3.   What are the perceptions of traditional professional development versus nontraditional personalized learning professional development opportunities for secondary teachers (grades 7-12)?

Through this study, the researcher desired to understand how a nontraditional format of professional development, focusing on personalization for each teacher, creates a culture of strong engagement and interest in their own learning. This researcher documented the attitudes, skills, and beliefs of the participants and noted the changes they would like to see moving forward in the development of professional learning through personalization of content.

Participant Descriptions

Through purposeful sampling, the researcher focused this study on secondary teachers as part of a learning group representing two secondary schools within a suburban district in south central Pennsylvania. These professional staff members work in the district's middle and high schools. Within the last three years, the high school staff has been part of a pilot group that has been allowed to create some personalized learning opportunities for building-level professional development, while the teachers in the middle school have been exposed to mostly traditional professional development. The

high school staff, grades nine through twelve, has approximately 90 teachers that range

from first year educators to those that have been at the high school for over 40 years. The

middle school staff, grades seven and eight, comprises approximately 45 teachers that

range from first year teachers to teachers that have been at that school for 30 plus years.

This part of the research was conducted within an inquiry data analysis using an

anonymous survey, which focused on answering or finding themes within the first two

research questions about teacher engagement and having choice in their learning content

and format of learning environment. The anonymous survey was to allow the researcher

to collect data from the 135 secondary teachers working at the middle and high schools

during the spring of 2020 through a Google form prepared by the researcher and

disseminated over email. These participants were selected to be part of a quantitative case

study utilizing an anonymous survey that will provide the researcher an opportunity to

gain an overall understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding the current

implementation of the professional development plan; the impact to their own

engagement during professional development; and the impact on their daily instruction.

From the 135 teachers at the secondary level, six teachers were selected to be part

of a smaller qualitative case study focusing on specific structured interview questions

about their own personal experiences, perceptions, and assumptions of current

professional development plans and how professional learning has impacted their

classroom instruction and student achievement. The six participants will consist of two

secondary teachers that have only been teaching one to five years and are new to the

district; two have taught in the district between six to fifteen years; and two have taught

in the district over 20 years. The interview questions were focused on helping the

researcher to analyze data to support the third research question focusing on the effectiveness of the current trends in the implementation of professional learning opportunities. These participants will allow the researcher to focus on their personal perspective and views of the effectiveness of the professional development opportunities currently offered to them at this time. In addition, this research will document the effectiveness of traditional versus nontraditional professional learning and focus on the similarities and differences of the perspectives from the newest to most veteran teachers in the current format presented within the district.

Setting Description

This study took place in the middle and high schools in a suburban district located in south central Pennsylvania where the researcher was employed. This district housed one middle school, grades seven and eight, and one high school, grades nine through twelve. Although the middle and high school is one complex separated by double doors, they run as two separate buildings. The middle school had two administrators, both new to the building for the 2019/2020 school year, and the high school had four administrators, all having been in their roles for three or more years. The middle school had approximately 410 students and 45 teachers, while the high school had approximately 1250 students with 90 teachers. Out of the 140 teachers in the secondary complex, a total of 10 teachers were shared between the two buildings, but were normally associated with the high school staff. Even though the buildings were connected, the professional development plan for both buildings had been very different in format with the previous administration at the middle school.

The high school administration has piloted, for the last two years, a more nontraditional personalized learning professional development approach, while the middle school has had a more traditional professional development of sit and get with little to no choice or voice in what the teachers were learning. The high school administration created opportunities, within the professional development plan, allowing teachers to have a voice in the topics that were being offered for learning. The professional learning sessions were developed from these topics and teachers were then given choices on what sessions they wanted to attend, as well as times within the day to create or rework current instruction to support what they had just learned. In addition, teacher leaders created the sessions off of content or activities they had created within their own classrooms that met the needs of topic requests from teachers. Some teachers chose to utilize the independent learning opportunities created by teachers through how-to videos and step-by-step instructions for implementation or creation of content. With a new administration at the middle school, a more uniformed approach to the secondary level for professional development has been discussed and has begun to be developed specifically looking at what the researcher has found through this study and teachers' perceptions of what has been working and/or needs to be changed for better engagement or implementation of content. A double door should not be a barrier to collaboration and should allow all secondary teachers to use personalized learning as the format for professional development that supports their needs and growth of students.

Research Design and Rationale

Hendricks wrote that Lyons states that "…inquiry is the heart of action research, can professionalize the work of educators by encouraging them to collaborate, by finding

a voice to those who engage in the practice, and by providing educators with opportunities to examine the professional purposes and possibilities of their work" (Hendricks, 2017). This researcher realized the importance of allowing teachers to have a voice in designing a professional development plan that meets their individual needs and interests to create opportunities that give purpose in what they are learning. To allow this to occur, this research study primarily utilized a quantitative methods approach with a qualitative inquiry as a small, secondary focus to create the ability to get a larger overall understanding using numerical data to create an analysis of the effectiveness of current practices.

This researcher chose to use Mixed Methods Research (MMR), which integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data is gathered in a numerical form, which can be put into categories, or in rank of order, or measured in units of measurement. Questionnaires can be used to collect quantitative data and the use of statistics can help turn this data into useful information to help with decisions that could impact interventions to support the needs of the district. Qualitative data involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. The researcher was able to allow participants to feel comfortable or study things in their natural settings, which allowed for a more honest observation or interpretation of what the information means to the participant. The information gained from qualitative data suggested possible relationships, causes, effects, and perceptions from the participants. This research used a descriptive and narrative style (McLeod, 2019). Using both of these methods created an opportunity for the researcher to have a more credible and dependable way to disseminate

the information through the triangulation of data where multiple forms of data can be collected and analyzed (Hendricks, 2017).

The researcher implemented the mixed-method research study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collected from two data collection instruments, survey and interview. The participants who were identified in this study were all professional secondary level staff members who worked in the district and were assigned in either the middle or high schools. Following the IRB approval (see Appendix E), the research was conducted in March 2020 and continued through April 2020. The researcher sent an electronic invitation to the participants, formally requesting their participation in this research study. The email introduced the researcher, explained the study, clarified the expectations of the study and provided the necessary safeguards for the potential participants. Within this email, a link to the survey was given to the participants to complete if they agreed to be part of the research study. The participants agreed to participate in the study by completing the anonymous survey through the link provided. In addition, the researcher also sent out an electronic to six participants to complete the structured interview questions. Within that email, the researcher was introduced, the study explained, clarification of expectations of the interview and the necessary safeguards were explained. The participants responded to the email that they would be willing to participate in the interview and a date was set up to meet to complete the interview.

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Since the researcher was the administrator of the high school, additional

permission was obtained for the study from the district's Superintendent through a formal

letter of request. Upon receipt of permissions from the Superintendent and participants,

the entire study was conducted at the participants' work site as well as in an online

environment. The research methods included a Google form survey and structured

interviews. The participants were interviewed to determine their perceptions and beliefs

about the current professional development plan and opportunities that were currently

offered within the district. Also, the participants were surveyed to determine the amount

of engagement they experienced during our current professional learning opportunities and how much choice they felt they had in creating these opportunities and topics. In collecting and analyzing the data, the goal of this research was to effectively answer the three research questions of the study. All of the information gathered was coded, triangulated, and analyzed to ensure validity of the content.

Description of Methods

The researcher elected to use a mixed-method data collection to gain greater insights from the participants about the professional development opportunities currently offered at the secondary level in the district. Using inquiry data to gather the information from the participants allowed the researcher to acquire a larger amount of details about their knowledge, beliefs, feelings, and opinions about their participation in professional learning. In addition, this data collection also allows the researcher to understand more about the participants opinions, attitudes, and perceptions about their past experience with the professional development sessions offered from the district. Having that information will establish an overall understanding of how impactful and effective the current professional learning is for our teachers. It will also allow the researcher to utilize the study to find effective interventions to support the teachers' needs for better engagement and instructional outcomes from their professional learning.

Questionnaire. One method used by the researcher was to send out an electronic link to an online questionnaire to each participant through an email address. Although the link was sent out to the participants' work email addresses, the electronic link was to a Google Form, which allowed for anonymity due to the fact that no email addresses were collected or names given on the form. When participants clicked on the link, they were

taken to the form where they received a message from the researcher that indicated the purpose of the survey, as well as the length of time it would take to complete. In addition, the message also mentioned the risks and benefits, if any, of taking the survey and how confidentiality would be maintained. Finally, the message stated the participation to complete the survey was voluntary and that a participant could withdraw his response at any time, or to not participate. The last part of the message was the contact information for the researcher if there were any questions. The questionnaire, consisting of 13 questions, took approximately 10 minutes to complete (see Appendix C). The information that was requested about professional development was categorized into four main areas relating to personalizing professional learning opportunities: choice in personalizing topics, engagement in learning, collaboration among colleagues, and impact of instruction. Based upon their responses from the questionnaire, participants answered most of the questions on a four point Likert Scale reflecting their level of agreement with the statement: never implemented, occasionally implemented, frequently implemented, regularly implemented. A few of the questions participants answered on a 10-point Likert Scale from no collaboration/implementation to complete satisfaction with collaboration/implementation. The last question afforded the participants an opportunity to provide further insight through an open-ended question to elaborate on what effective professional development consists of for their own learning. The survey was constructed using a forced-choice model to eliminate neutral responses. Additionally, the survey collected basic demographic data to allow for the identification of trends or gaps among the participants. Utilizing this form of data research allowed for honest answers from participants due to their anonymity and aligned with the research questions

established. The scales, within the questionnaire, were created to focus on how participants feel about certain characteristics within professional development, specifically measuring attitudes and perceptions of each participant.

Interviews. The second method utilized in this study was the use of structured interviews. "Interviewing is a common means of collecting qualitative data. It is a person to person encounter in which one person elicits information from another" (Merriam, 2009). The nine interview questions were prepared ahead of time by the researcher and designed to gain more insight and understanding of the perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about the professional development currently offered at the district (see Appendix C). Three of the nine questions focused specifically on the use of Community of Practice (CoP) utilized at the district as part of the comprehensive professional development plan at the secondary level. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) defines a community of practice as "a group of people who share a common concern or passion of a topic they want to deepen their knowledge and expertise in the educational arena from ongoing interactions with others." A community of practice is a form of professional learning that allows teachers to foster relationships based on mutual trust and respect, based around a common ground and a sense of common identity. The questions allowed the participants to share their understanding of how the Community of Practice impacted their learning and collaboration opportunities with their colleagues (Skalicky & West, 2008).

The interviews were conducted around the participants' schedules and given flexibility to complete the questions at a time that was convenient to them so they had ample time to answer the questions. Participants were sent an email to set up a time for

the interview that was conducive to their schedules and allowed them to not feel rushed to answer the questions. The interview took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. In addition to note taking, the researcher also had some of the participants answer the interview questions in writing with a follow up phone call due to a time restraint of having the Federal and State Educational System school shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher was not able to meet with all participants prior to school closures, so participants were asked to answer the interview questions in writing with a follow up call to review their answers. The researcher placed all notes into HyperBundle software (ResearchWARE, Inc., 2019) for coding of the interview process. The software allowed the researcher to code, retrieve data, build theories, and provide analysis of the data collected.

The feedback gained from the research questions allowed for participants to share both positive and negative aspects of the current professional development offerings at the secondary level schools. The interviews enabled the researcher to reveal attitudes and perceptions about the ongoing professional development and analyze the data to provide overall themes and build theories on how to provide interventions to continue to make the professional learning more personalized and meaningful. In addition, using interviews to collect data adds richness to the study to investigate why the professional development plan is successful or not, and what the participants perceive would enhance their engagement in the entire process. During the interview, it is essential that the researcher kept the interviewees on topic and remained focused on the question, listened carefully to each answer, and did not ask leading questions. Although conducting interviews reveals many aspects about the participant's feelings on the topic, it can be time consuming and

at times hard for the researcher to feel personally offended. This researcher had to ensure that each participant felt at ease to be honest with his or her answers and perceptions, and understood their answers were helping to build a professional development program that truly met the needs of all the teachers through personalization. Through this structured interview, the researcher was able to speak to six participants and reiterate the confidentiality of their answers for this study (Hendricks, 2017). The purpose of the interview questions was to gain a much deeper understanding and insight to the questionnaire responses by the researcher from the participants' knowledge and needs of professional development opportunities offered. The researcher will be able to use this knowledge to recommend changes or ways to enhance more personalization within our professional development program and have teachers become more engaged in the development of sessions/topics and in the format and pace needed for their adult-learning style.

Financial Impact

Through this study, the researcher was able to continue to discuss how powerful it is to utilize teacher leaders to help create and deliver content to colleagues. When teachers lead the learning, it can enhance collaboration, encourage self-reflection on instructional practices, and empower teachers to work together to improve their skills. In the end, teachers who have a role in developing their own professional learning are more compelled to be actively involved in that learning (Kuhlmann, 2018). Allowing teachers to have a voice in what they learn is empowering for teachers. Voice of a learner is defined as, "involvement and engagement in the what and the how of learning early in the learning process (Rodman, 2018). Utilizing teachers within the district to present

professional learning will not only increase engagement, but also decrease the financial

impact associated with professional development. Having teacher leaders be the experts

and create the learning sessions for their colleagues does not cost the district anything

financially; it allows the district to inspire those from within to shine among their

peers. Killeen, Monk, and Plecki (2002) findings reveal that districts devote

approximately three percent of total general expenditures to professional development

activities, which equates to approximately $200 per pupil, and would equate to $800,000

a year for this district.

Oftentimes a district will spend $3500-$5000 for an outside vendor to come in for

professional development, however using teachers, instructional coaches, and technology

teachers to support the needs of the staff can reduce the financial impact professional

development can have on a district substantially (Guskey, 2014) and build internal

capacity for systemic change. Saving hundreds of thousands of dollars of personalizing

learning for professional development through in-house sessions and training is a bonus

to the positive impact it has on teacher instruction and engagement in learning.

Ethical Considerations

Validity in action research is described as the trustworthiness of the

study. Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criterion consists of credibility,

transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility refers to the plausibility of

the research findings and transferability refers to the extent in which results of the study

are applicable to other individuals. Dependability is the degree to which the results could

be replicated with the same or similar participants and conformability are the results that

actually occurred and not the results of the researcher's bias, motivation, or interests

(Hendricks, 2017). The researcher designed the study to minimize and anticipate risks to all participants involved. Accuracy of facts and findings were kept, interpretations were made, and correct conclusions were reached. Confidentiality of all participants' responses from the questionnaire and interviews were maintained throughout the entire research and reporting process. Coding was specific to the interviewee and will be identified as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc. as well as referencing the years of experience within the educational field. Understanding the limitations and assumptions associated with this research, the researcher noted that all participants were public school employees and not private school educators, as well as the participants may have been impacted by the quality and quantity of professional learning experiences they have participated in in the past. In addition, the researcher assumed the 76 participants that responded to the questionnaire were honest in their ratings of perceptions of effective professional development and were able to differentiate between their own personal preferences versus the true impact of the professional development experiences.

To ensure validity in this study, the researcher also considered any biases that may need to be considered. Bias is defined as any preconceived ideas about participants, setting, interventions, or the research process itself (Merriam, 2009). Although bias can have a negative connotation, bias can be part of the research process if the researcher believes that the intervention or plan that comes out of the research will be successful. This researcher believes strongly that providing personalized learning opportunities for teachers will have a bigger impact on their own growth and student achievement, so as data is collected and analyzed the researcher will need to keep the biases in check. Also, to ensure validity the researcher needs to ensure the data is

recorded accurately and to utilize all data sources to corroborate findings. Finally, the researcher needs to continue to reflect on the planning for data collection and make sure all participants feel at ease. Using these steps has created trustworthiness within the study to increase the validity of the study (Hendricks, 2017).

Given the researcher was the principal of the high school of some of the participants; the researcher obtained the appropriate permission to conduct the study at the middle and high schools by the superintendent of the district. This allowed for transparency of the intent of the study and what the researcher was asking of the participants and understanding that everything they said in their answers would be confidential and not be held against them in any negative way. The information gathered could impact positive changes to our professional development program and support the opportunities created or developed to meet the needs of each teacher. The first part of the questionnaire and interview had part of the following statement to ensure participants new that all ethical considerations were taken:

> You are being invited to participate in a research study about using personalized learning opportunities for professional development. The objective of this research project is to attempt to understand if teachers are more engaged with personalized learning opportunities for professional development than "traditional" opportunities. This is a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences concerning effective professional development that impacts your own personal growth. It is being conducted in the secondary schools in the district. The survey is being given to current teachers in the district.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study, nor are there any costs for participating in the study. The information you provide will help the researcher understand how best to satisfy the needs of the district for professional development. The information collected may benefit you directly, and what the researcher learns from this study should provide general benefits to the entire district.

This survey is anonymous. If you choose to participate, do not put your name on the survey. No one will be able to identify you, nor will anyone be able to determine which school building you work in. No one will know whether you participated in this study. Nothing you say on the survey will in any way influence your present or future employment with the district.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, please submit your responses electronically. No one will have access to your responses other than the researcher. By returning the survey you are giving consent to the researcher to use the data as part of her research.

By conducting a mixed-method research study, the research is able to tell the story of the secondary teachers' perceptions about the impact of personalizing professional development and making the "mindshift" from traditional to non-traditional professional development opportunities.

Conclusion

As districts continue to revisit the effectiveness of their professional development programs or plans, it is noteworthy to recognize that approximately three percent of their annual budget is set aside for professional development activities. Most of that budgeted

money comes from local tax dollars, and taxpayers want to see the teachers continue to

grow academically to support the growth of their children in all areas. Setting that

amount of money in the budget ensures that teachers have opportunities to learn, but is

the money being used to effectively impact teacher instruction and student

achievement? Finally, research supports the need to provide personalized learning

opportunities for teachers to increase their motivation, engagement, attitudes, and bring

about a change in their classroom practices (Guskey, 2003).

Changing the traditional professional development format from a sit-and-get to a

more nontraditional personalized learning format supports educators in becoming makers

of their own learning, as well as creating and implementing their own plan. A traditional

professional development format utilizes many outside vendors to provide learning

opportunities through training or online software that cost money. However, looking

within the district and finding those teacher leaders and/or instructional coaches that can

provide on-hand learning of true and tried activities could be the cost savings that many

districts are looking to find. These activities do not cost the district, but highlight the

excellence happening already within the buildings and align with the overwhelming need

for personalized learning opportunities from the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the convergent parallel mixed-method research

design, methodology, and sampling procedures used in this research study. The

researcher is using this form of research design to converge the results of both the

qualitative and quantitative data to allow for themes to emerge or comparisons to be

made among the data analyzed. The data was collected at the same time, but analyzed

separately to allow for all information to be analyzed and then interpreted into one overall

analysis of results. This chapter provides an analysis of the survey data and interview

data. It also provides answers to the three research questions posed at the beginning of

this study. The analysis of the research questions sought to identify the impact of utilizing

personalized learning choices for professional development, and which type of learning

had the largest impact on teachers' daily instruction. It also looked to identify which type

of personalized learning better engaged them in learning to have the greatest impact on

their own growth. A researcher-designed survey instrument featuring questions with

Likert scale choices was used to measure the perceptions of 76 secondary education

professionals working in public school settings located in south central Pennsylvania.

Through the investigation of effective professional development and

personalizing professional development for educators, the researcher documented how

participants engaged in professional development opportunities that were both

personalized and traditional formats. The participants had opportunities to share their

knowledge, perspectives, and understanding of what effective professional development

looked like, sounded like, and consisted of for their own personal learning. Through

purposeful sampling, the researcher focused the survey on the secondary teachers (grades

7-12) within the public school in south central Pennsylvania to gather data to answer the

three research questions. In addition, the researcher interviewed six secondary teachers,

ranging from first year to 28th year in the school district. These six teachers, who were

the focus of the interviews, were among the 76 teachers who answered the survey

questions.

Presentation of Data

The central question addressed in this study was focused on using personalized

learning formats for professional development to increase teacher engagement and

instruction allowing for positive impact in student achievement. This chapter presents

findings based upon data gathered from an online survey and structured interviews. All of

the participants were selected due to currently working in the public secondary schools,

high and middle school, in the south central Pennsylvania school district. To commence

the study, the researcher created and used a Personalized Learning in Professional

Development survey that was sent out to all 135 teachers in grades 7-12. The researcher

had 76 teachers complete the survey, which is about 57% participation. The online

questionnaire assessed participants' perceptions about how well the secondary level is

achieving their goal of implementing effective professional development using

personalized learning options. Teachers were also asked to assess the amount of choice in

topics, collaboration time with colleagues, time for professional learning, engagement in

the learning, impact on daily instruction, and change in their own professional growth by meeting their needs as a learner.

The data was categorized into four main sections relating to the key elements of personalizing learning in professional development: choice in topics in professional development sessions, control of choosing the topics to present in professional development sessions, meeting the needs of each learner, and the impact of a teacher's daily instruction through content. Based upon the statements in the questionnaire, participants chose their responses on a 10-point Likert scale reflecting their level of agreement, satisfaction, or control: no control/satisfaction/agreement (0) to complete control/satisfaction/agreement (10). In addition, participants chose their responses to a 4-point Likert scale reflecting their agreement with the statement: never implemented (1), occasionally implemented (2), frequently implemented (3), regularly implemented (4).

At the end of the survey, participants were afforded an opportunity to provide further insight through an open-ended comment section. All information was collected through Google Form and the data was collected and saved in a tab-delimited format. Because of the nature of the data gathered, the researcher employed quantitative methods to analyze the data. Information from the survey was used to compare the participants' beliefs both individually and within the group of secondary teachers.

In analyzing the results of the questionnaire, it was clear to the researcher that the majority of teachers in the survey felt that they were given choice in the topics for their professional development shown in Figure 1. 53 out of the 76 teachers who responded marked that they were satisfied to completely satisfied with the level of control they were given in choosing the professional development topic sessions for the building.

However, there were 23 out of 76 teachers who did not feel that they had control, and one teacher marked they felt they had no control over the topics provided for professional development sessions.

Figure 2

Control of Choice in Topics for Professional Development

Note. The secondary teachers surveyed totaled 76.
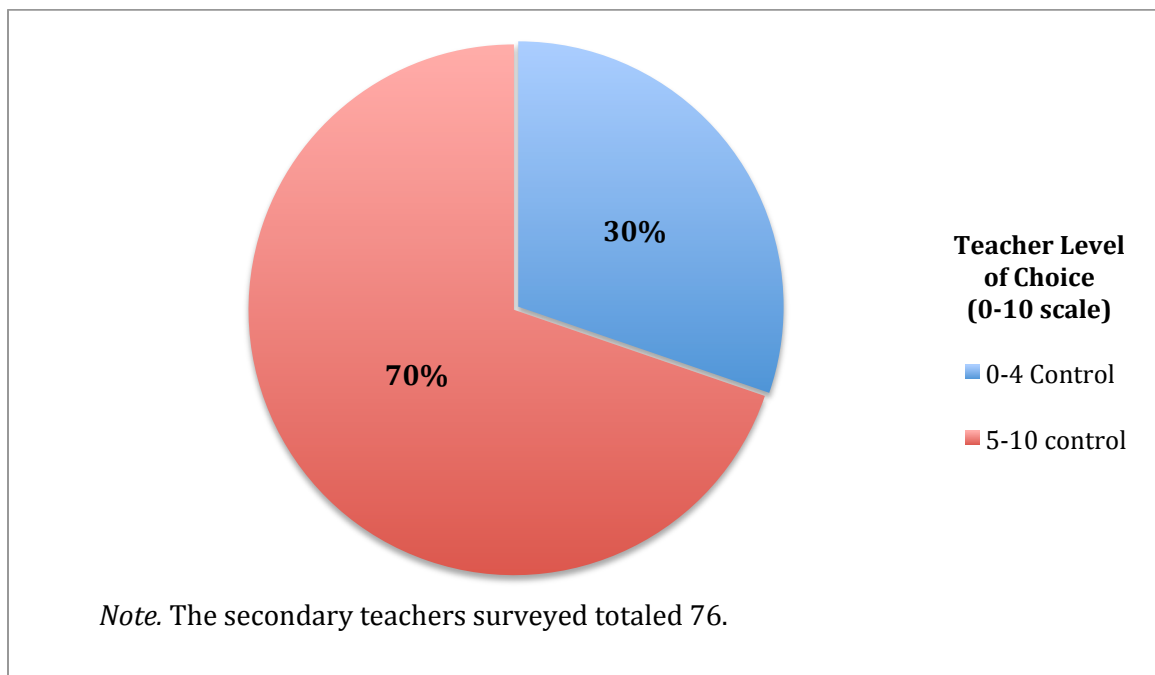
As indicated in the chart above, participant responses ranged from no control to almost complete control, with zero participants stating they felt they had complete control of choices in topic of session. This data implies that most of the teachers are satisfied with the amount of choices they have to help to personalize their learning that will then support their needs for growth.

In the open-ended response section of the survey, many participants wrote additional comments specifically about the control of choice given to teachers for their

own personalized learning. One teacher wrote, "Being able to choose from topics that you feel will assist you in your instruction is why I like personalized learning. Using this method allows me the opportunity to work with what suits my abilities, but also having the opportunity to try something new has value." Another participant commented, "I like the freedom to choose what works best for me and my classroom. If I already know how to do something or a topic, I do not want to sit through training about it. I like to explore new options that can better my instruction and also what strategies would fit my content best." Finally, one teacher stated, "I am able to select topics of the highest interest and relevance to my classroom. I am also able to bring those ideas back to my classroom and have control over the pace of implementation." In summary, teachers feel that having access to choice and pace for their own learning allows for the opportunity to experiment and take risks in the classroom more easily than a sit-and-get traditional format where you are not always getting content that meets your individual needs.

Reviewing the data collected in the questionnaire, the researcher could see that it clearly reflected the importance of ensuring that teachers feel they are given voice and choice in what they are learning during professional development days to continue to support their own needs. The data also shows that teachers feel that the building-level professional development has listened to their voice and created choices that met their individual needs to support their instruction and student achievement. When participants were asked to reflect on how satisfied they were with the extent of choice in topics provided to them for professional learning, 80% (n=61/76) stated they were satisfied to completely satisfied with what topics the building level is providing them.

Figure 3 reflects that 5% (n=4/76) felt that they were completely satisfied with the choice in topics while 1% (n=1/76) felt that they were completely unsatisfied with the choice of topics provided.

Figure 3

Choice of Personalized Professional Development Activities at Building Level

Note. The number of participants surveyed totaled 76
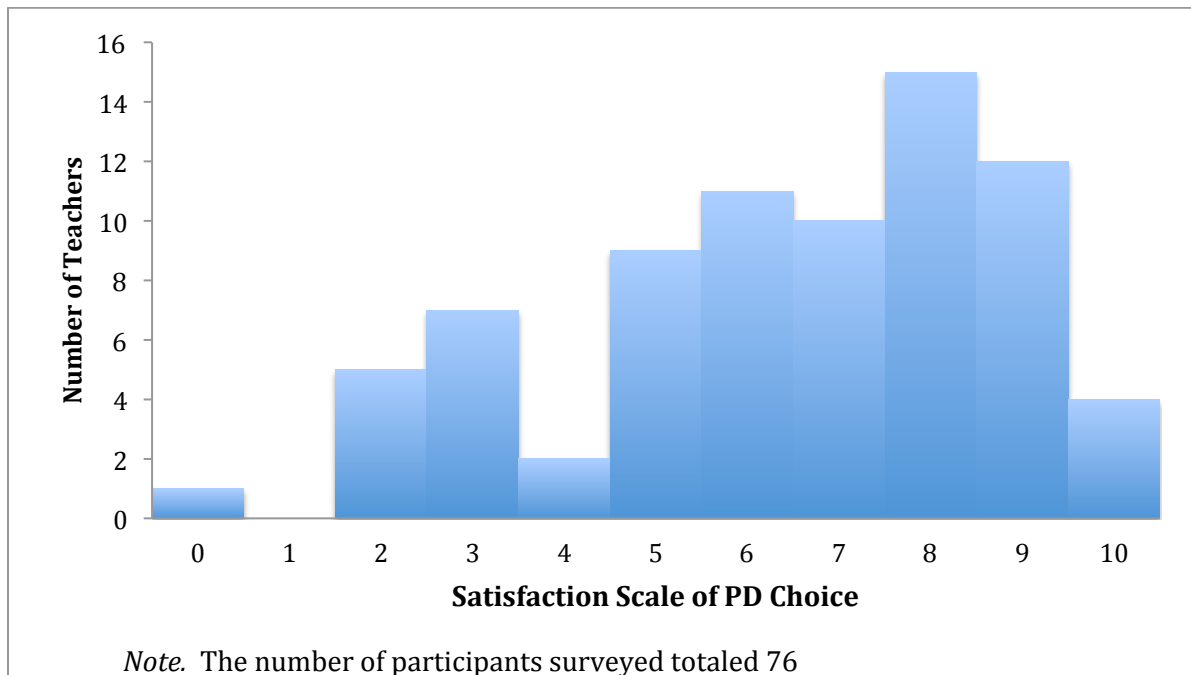
Many participants commented in the open-ended section of the questionnaire with their opinions about the choices offered. One participant stated, "Personalized learning where new practices and tools are demonstrated and used as part of the presentation for me to experience coupled with freedom to choose, play and try the practices & tools that best fit my subject matter, lesson content, and current students." Another teacher commented, "CoP (Community of Practice) because I am granted an opportunity to work and interact with teachers in different disciplines. This "forced" choice allows for many personalized learning opportunities." CoP has continued to be a focus of a personalized

learning format where the building has allowed for multiple choices in the topic of choice to research and delve into the process and in what format: group, face-to-face, or independently. Another teacher noted, "Our CoP training and collaboration with instructional coaches on things we directly use in our classroom," as an example of the satisfaction of choice in topics that are provided to teachers at the secondary building-level.

When considering the data in Table 1, the researcher focused on some of the main strategies used within personalizing learning for instruction: choice, delivery, pace, customized, and independent practice. Analyzing the data, the results show that although participants feel that they are given choice in topics and that, at the building level, the choices given are relevant to their needs, it is evident that the teachers feel that most of the strategies used within personalizing learning only occasionally support their own learning and mastering the content of the session. While some participants marked that they frequently feel that the professional development has supported their own learning, few marked that they regularly feel they can implement the strategy. One area the researcher noted as an area that would need to be reviewed is the amount of time given, lack of or too much, for professional development. 49% (n=37/76) of the participants marked that they occasionally felt this is implemented into the practice of the professional development opportunities. Looking at offering different pacing or time restraints on finishing professional learning modules or sessions would be an area that would be reviewed at the building level and/or district level. Knowing that teachers feel this is an area that they do not believe supports their own learning or content mastery is a concern that is noted by the researcher. Personalized learning supports differentiating

pacing as a key strategy that makes teachers feel more engaged and empowered in their own learning. Noting that teachers are not feeling that this is happening consistently shows at the building level, and supports the notion that true personalized learning opportunities are not happening effectively within the format.

Table 1

Participants' Responses to What Extent is Personalized Learning used to Support Own Learning and Master Content

	Never Implemented this Practice	Occasionally Implemented this Practice	Frequently Implemented this Practice	Regularly Implemented this Practice
Customize Needs of Learner	4% (3)	37% (28)	42% (32)	17% (13)
Differentiate Delivery of Instruction	4% (3)	34% (26)	49% (37)	13% (10)
Differentiate the Pacing for Groups	2% (2)	49% (37)	33% (25)	16% (12)
Use of Self-pacing and Targeted Independent Practice	4% (3)	42% (32)	32% (24)	22% (17)
Use Choice of Professional Development to Meet Needs of Learners	0% (0)	32% (24)	39% (30)	29% (22)

Note. 76 participants completed this questionnaire.

Reviewing the open-ended responses allowed the researcher to reflect further on the participants' responses in Table 1. One participant stated, "On-line videos and discipline-specific forums devoted to sharing research, teaching strategies, solving

classroom problems, and sharing successes and roadblocks are ways that delivery was differentiated." A few participants noted that time to collaborate with colleagues who teach similar or the same content would be very beneficial in allowing teachers time to meet to address specific needs relevant to what they teach. Another participant noted that allowing more independent research would create more choices to meet specific needs and allow for differentiation of delivery and pace in learning. Finally, one participant commented, "I believe we should have time where we actually look at examples within our own content areas as well, as we are not given too much time with mixing together COP and content." Although some of these reflections show that the participants are not 100% satisfied with what the building level is offering as personalized learning, the overall results show that the building is heading in the right direction to continue to support the needs of the teachers and find ways to ensure the learning is differentiated to their content specific goals as well as the overall goal of the district.

Professional development plays an essential and significant part in creating learning opportunities for teachers to be learners. When teachers are learners, they are better teachers for their students. It is imperative that the professional development that is provided to teachers is impacting their daily instruction to increase student achievement. Professional learning opportunities are intended to support change in a teacher's practice and subsequently improve the learning of students. From the results of the questionnaire, Figure 4 shows 76% (n= 57/75) of participants feel that the professional development they received at the building level has impacted to significantly impacted their daily instruction, while 24% (n=18/75) marked that they saw little to no impact in their daily instruction. Personalizing professional development has made a significant impact on the

majority of the teachers; however, there are some teachers who may need to continue to delve deeper into what their needs are to be able to support more individualized learning plans for them to support their growth in the classroom and increase student achievement.

Figure 4

Impact of Professional Development on Daily Instruction

Note. Chart reflects 75 participants answers on impact of personalized learning and instruction.
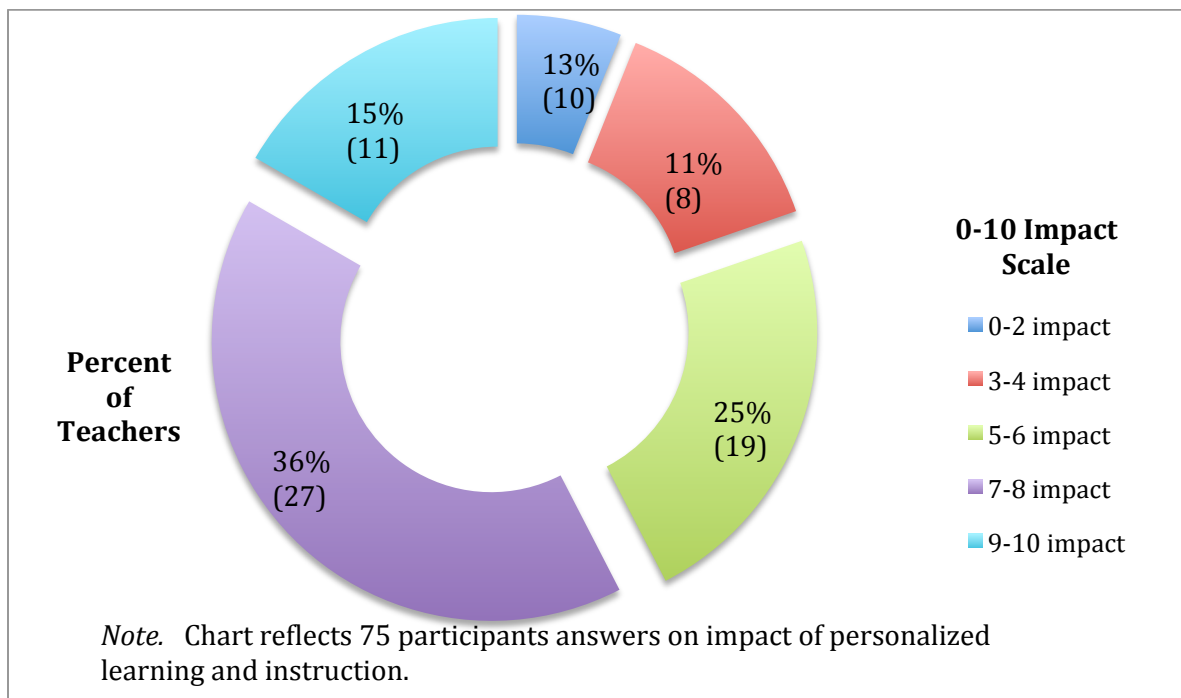
Three participants responded in the open-ended portion of the questionnaire that if the learning is not related to my subject area, it is not very useful. They noted that if the professional learning were related to my content area, it then would match and/or address my current level of skill, proficiency, or needs. One participant noted, "Content specific strategies are good and they positively impact my instruction. However, the most important topic that impacts my instruction is professional development that is specific to my content area." The overall perception of these participants, noted by the researcher,

was that the only professional learning that impacts their instruction is directly related to

their content. Personalizing professional development by providing different modes,

delivery and pacing may allow for those teachers to have more access to their content, but

at the same time continue to embrace some of the new teaching strategies that best

support student learning.

On the other end of the spectrum, the researcher noted that one participant stated,

"Personalized professional learning impacts my daily instruction. I have learned about

many new tools during professional learning sessions that I am able to incorporate in my

classroom. Having choice allows me to choose the sessions that would be most useful for

me." Another participant stated, "Professional learning provides me with tangible things

to take back to the classroom, which impacts how I present materials to my students that

is more engaging. I enjoy learning about new tech tools and ways to differentiate and

personalize learning for my students."

Table 2

Demographics of the Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	No. Years Teaching	No. Years Teaching in District
1	F	3	2
2	F	1	1
3	M	14	12
4	M	16	16
5	F	28	28
6	F	29	29

Note. Shows the demographics of the participants in the study

In addition to the data collected from the questionnaires and open-ended responses, Table 2 shows the demographics of the six participants that provided information through a structured interview. The researcher continued to focus on the central question addressed in this study with the remainder of the data collected. The structured interviews took place over a Zoom call due to the Covid-19 pandemic and not being able to meet in person. The researcher believed having a Zoom call versus just sending them the questions would allow them time to better reflect and react to the structured interview questions. The interview questions were sent prior to the Zoom call so that the participants were able to be prepared for the call and have an idea of what the researcher would be asking. The researcher wanted to get a wide range of background experience with the district to get a broader understanding of the current professional

development practices and allow for more data to be collected and additional insight gained.

Results

Structured Interview

The goal of this study was to determine how creating personalized learning opportunities for professional development would empower teachers to take ownership of their learning through choice and enhance their own growth to support student achievement. Given that the interview questions aligned with specific questions from the study, the remainder of the data will be categorized in that manner.

Research Question One

Does teacher engagement increase during professional development when given choice?

The first research question focused on the ability for teachers to have a voice in the content they choose to attend for professional development. In addition, the question focused on how engaged are the teachers in their professional learning when choice is given to them that is created through their input and time to collaborate with other colleagues. Questions one, three, four, and six in the structured interviews specifically addressed this concept. Total responses in the remainder of the data sources related to coding of choice, engagement in learning, and positive learning environment were found in 34% of the overall data. Participants noted criteria such as:

"choice between a myriad of useful sessions";

"choice to pursue what we need as educators";

"a lot of freedom to make fitting choices and customize";

"supported";

"happily overwhelmed, really beneficial";

"more specific individual learning—rotating through stations that we think we need help with; the individual attention we can get if we are struggling";

"choice allows for engaged learning and for teachers to take something meaningful away and use it in their classroom";

"range of things to choose from that I feel meet my needs";

"opportunities that match my learning style";

"it makes teaching more enjoyable and allows me to appropriately challenge myself";

"excited about things we are learning";

"go for it attitude" and

"spark both personal and professional interest."

Participant Two stated, " We are given a variety of choices when it comes to CoP and professional development. I enjoy having the freedom to choose, because I feel that I am able to take what I need to my subject and make it work within my classroom. When it comes to professional development, we are allowed to use our voice and ask for department and school-wide desires. I have been able to advocate for the learning I want as a teacher in order to be the best I can possibly be for my students."

Participants in this study valued the ability to collaborate. A belief that there is a supportive environment from colleagues, coaches and administrators was mentioned by all six of the interviewees. Other responses included:

"mentorship of other teachers, coaches, and administrators";

"eager to learn in each session and from other colleagues";

"collaborate with and learn from other teachers";

"freedom to visit other's classrooms and inspired by those interactions";

"capitalizing on each other's abilities" and

"more like we are all in this together, so let's help each other. I have been able to build more personal relationships."

Participant Six stated, "These past 2 years I have talked with and shared with my peers like I never did before! I'm an introvert and haven't socialized in the faculty room ever…. BUT now, I can stop and have conversations with my peers. I feel more like I "belong" to this faculty and that we are working together to educate children. I feel that more teachers are willing and open to share and "have each other's back" when working together."

While all the participants felt that the professional development currently offered at the secondary building-level was significantly impactful to personalize their own learning needs, they would love to see this model as a district-wide initiative. This would allow all of the district's teachers to experience the same opportunities to have time to really interact and grow with their peers, as well as have a voice in what they want to learn. The ability to create a learning opportunity that is individualized for each teacher's needs, in addition to being able to share what you have learned through job-embedded learning, has allowed the culture of the building to become stronger and teachers more willing to take risks and be vulnerable. Participant five stated, "I think my whole department is more open to sharing ideas (and failures) because we are all trying different things."

In summary, participants in this study valued being given the opportunity to have a voice in creating choices in what they would be learning for their professional development. Throughout the interviews and survey results, it was evident that when teachers were given choices that met their personal needs as educators, they felt more engaged in their learning and were able to utilize what they were taught immediately. They also felt more engaged in their learning because it focused on their needs and interests, and was not just "shoved down their throats." The participants also felt very supported by their colleagues, coaches, and administrators and enjoyed the ability to have a culture that allowed teachers to feel comfortable in taking risks and trying new strategies in their instruction. The collaborative culture discussed throughout the interviews allowed the researcher to understand the importance of creating personalized learning opportunities that open doors for colleagues to ask questions without feeling vulnerable or that they will look like they are in the unknown. This culture has allowed an open door mentality among the staff that invites other teachers into classrooms to see what is happening and to gather feedback that supports each other's growth. Knowing that teachers were able to focus on their needs by giving them choice in what they were learning has allowed for a culture of true collaboration where teachers continuously learn from one another.

Research Question Two

How does giving teachers choice in professional development impact daily instruction?

The second research question focused on how personalizing learning in professional development impacted daily instruction for teachers. This research question

directly corresponds to questions five and seven. Data showed that when teachers were able to choose the focus of their professional development based on their needs, they felt like it made a positive impact on their daily instruction and improving student achievement. The data also showed that some teachers felt more content-specific personalized learning opportunities needed to be part of the professional development choices to support their growth in instructional changes.

Participant Four stated,

"Our instructional coach has been a critical tool in helping me implement quality teaching strategies in my classroom through our monthly CoP meetings. She shows us various tools that not only make learning more fun, but also help us engage our students in a more meaningful way. This really has positively impacted my daily instruction. When I implement these strategies, I see student engagement rise. I believe that it is the best thing I have to help me in becoming a better teacher."

All participants mentioned that the professional development offered within the building has allowed them to choose the sessions that best fit their needs as a teacher and given them the opportunity to learn new strategies that support instruction. One participant expressed that it allowed for diversification in learning, which in turn allowed for reworking and tightening up curriculum to continue to hit essential content but in a differentiated, engaging manner. Other participants noted criteria such as:

"time to develop and implement into my classroom";

"always learning new ideas for my own room to try with students";

"as a math teacher, if I am able to break it down into numbers, I would

honestly say it impacts 70% of my instruction"; and

"my professional development opportunities impact my instruction every day."

Another subject noted, "Overall, our professional development opportunities in the district impact my daily instruction constantly. I may not use a specific application or tool with every single lesson, but the professional development we have in our district provides me with tools and ideas which get my mind thinking continually on how I can make a learning experience better for both my students and me."

Participant Six noted in the data, "My professional development opportunities impact my instruction every day. Having monthly meetings and numerous discussions/interactions with colleagues about things they are trying keeps my goals fresh in my mind. Since our science department is working so closely this year, my daily instruction involves many items that were the result of personalized learning for professional development."

Participant Two shared, "From my first day of professional development back in August, I was changing and innovating what I was already anticipating as my pacing and design for the 7th grade math course. From COP, I will always try as many resources as possible to see how they can be successful in math, plus I believe students enjoy getting different types of teaching/learning styles. Plus the more successful they are (e.g. choice boards), I will adapt and redesign again and again to continuously implement them in my classroom."

Although the overall comments by the participants stated that personalizing learning provided does impact instruction, one participant noted, "Professional learning that is related to my content area, that matches or addresses my current level of skill,

proficiency, or needs will impact. Only some professional learning is differentiated by proficiency, and if I already know it, it won't impact my teaching any more than it already has. I would like to be able to have sessions specific to my subject area." Throughout the data collection, this was a concern that some participants stated within the professional development opportunities and one that is key to supporting personalizing learning for each teacher.

In summary, this researcher continued to see the theme of choice in learning allows for continual growth in daily instruction strategies and tools to support student success. Allowing teachers to focus on areas that meet their individual needs to support their own learning has created more innovation within the classroom, which in turn, met the needs of all of their learners. Although some teachers felt that more opportunities within their own content area were needed, it was clear to the researcher that many of the tools given within the sessions offered did allow choice of tools and resources that supported all areas. Teachers needed to continue to find ways to incorporate their new learning in a nontraditional way that allowed for their own students to have choice in learning and finding success in their needs. In addition, the ability to continually collaborate with colleagues on lessons, no matter if they went well or not has manifested a culture that allowed risk taking and vulnerability to create engaging lessons that increased student achievement. When teachers were given the opportunity to focus on their needs for professional learning, there was a direct correlation to an increase in student engagement in lessons and impact on achievement.

Research Question Three

What are the perceptions of traditional professional development versus nontraditional

personalized learning professional development opportunities for secondary teachers

(grades 7-12)?

The third research question focused on the teacher's perceptions of traditional

professional development versus nontraditional personalized learning professional

development opportunities. Questions two, eight, and nine were all designed to uncover

the participants' perceptions and share what they felt about the personalized learning that

is happening within the building currently. Several key factors emerged from the

participants' responses. Overall, nontraditional personalized learning was favored by all

six participants, specifically noting that the traditional format of sit and get presentations

did not work for most teachers to support their own personal goals and needs.

The data clearly shows that teachers feel more engaged in personalized learning

opportunities and more often take back to the classroom what they learned to try with

students. Having choice allows for more meaningful learning, which allows for teachers

to be more inclined to try incorporating the learned strategy into their own instruction.

Participant Two stated,

> "Traditional can be nice in the sense of you do not have to make decisions and
>
> you have clear expectations about the learning that is going to come out of it.
>
> Having choice though includes that and so much more. You are able to align your
>
> professional development to your personal goals personally and professionally.
>
> As a first-year teacher, these goals will be vastly different from a 30-year career
>
> high school teacher. I am able to grow where I feel is necessary to be a better

teacher and I am able to collaborate more with others. I already have something in

common with the teacher who decided to pick the same session as me and that

opens up room for new conversation and professional relationships, that you just

are not able to get out of "traditional" professional development. "

Participant Five remarked,

"The professional development opportunities happening in our district are

awesome! We have great instructional support from instructional

coaches, fellow colleagues and from administration. As stated before,

 being encouraged to take risks and try something new is a great

environment to work in and a great environment for our students to learn

in. It shows students that we as teachers are willing to take risks and are

willing to challenge ourselves outside of our comfort zone. We ask of this

 of our students all the time. If we ask this of our students then we must

be willing to do it as well. Our professional development is progressive

and rewarding."

Another participant reinforced that personalized learning has more impact on their

learning during their interview:

"Traditional" professional development was a lot of sitting in a room and having

someone tell us about ways to make our teaching better or more

improved. Now we actually get the opportunity to try it out and

implement it which is far better than what it was before. How it is now is

exactly how it should be all the time. If we don't have the time to try

something, toy around with it, attempt to implement it so we can see if it

works, then I don't know how we are to learn. I look forward to our

professional development time and am always eager to see what I can

learn in each session and from other colleagues. I enjoy being able to

choose what to learn as it makes teaching much more enjoyable and

allows me the opportunity to appropriately challenge myself while also

being pushed beyond where I feel I may be at any moment in my career.

Many of the participants noted that traditional professional development usually

consists of sitting through presentations and taking notes or being forced to attend

sessions that may have no personal meaning to you. In contrast, having choice allows for

engaged learning and for teachers to take something meaningful away and use it in their

classroom. Participant Five stated, "In my opinion, "traditional" professional

development tried to teach us all how to do a certain technique in every curriculum no

matter what you taught. We all followed the same steps and you had to do it right."

Participant Five followed up by stating,

"I like what is happening. I think the timing was excellent with our

starting the blended learning and teaching for the 21st century. One thing

that I didn't mention was the more specific individual learning—rotating

through stations that we think we need help with; the individual attention

we can get if we are struggling. Everyone is not expected to be at the same

step at the same time. We have to make adjustments due to our experience,

curriculum and technology capabilities. This is all good!"

Participant Six reinforced this belief when they stated, "I feel very good about the

opportunities in the district right now. I feel that the people leading us really care about

helping the teachers. It is a feeling of true support. I feel that the professional

development presented is not a waste of time." Overall, all the participants felt that

allowing choice to teachers creates time to truly learn about strategies and areas that

impact their own learning and daily instruction. The ability to be empowered and

entrusted to know what is best for their personal growth is refreshing for teachers and, in

turn, seen in what they are doing with students in their classroom. Teachers are

supporting teachers, which is a fantastic way to allow for true job-embedded learning.

Participant Three commented on the very essence of what personalized learning

can do for engaging teachers in learning:

"My first few years of teaching seemed to consistently be sit and get PD. We

listened to a "professional" talk to us about what we should be doing in our

classrooms via a PowerPoint presentation. This style of PD seemed hypocritical,

as they would use a PowerPoint to tell us that we should be using new learning

techniques to engage students… Enter the CoP model. Having choice

automatically invites engagement because we are making the conscious choice to

be in whatever session we want to be in."

In summary, the data indicated that the participants felt that the majority of the

professional development was personalized to their needs and modeled what they should

be doing in their classroom for students. Participants indicated they felt "empowered" in

their learning and were able to be challenged to be a better teacher through peer

collaboration. Personalizing learning during professional development sessions has

allowed for teachers to begin understanding the importance of being able to reflect on

their own personal needs and find topics or sessions that will impact their own growth.

The one size fits all type of professional development does not work for today's educators, or for students. Teachers need to live and breathe differentiation among their own learning opportunities to be able to truly impact their own instruction to create that same type of learning environment for their students. Engaged students learn better and are more successful, so creating opportunities that allow students to feel like they have a voice in how and what they learn is incredibly powerful. Teachers need to have the same chance to feel empowered in their learning, and through personalizing their learning with nontraditional formats, districts are allowing for that to happen.

Summary

The researcher looked at the data to determine if personalized learning through more job-embedded and real life issues that teachers face within their classrooms would increase their learning and engagement in these professional learning opportunities. Through the convergent parallel mixed-method research design, the researcher used the research results of both the qualitative and quantitative data to allow for themes to emerge or comparisons to be made among the data analyzed. Three research questions were examined to determine professional teachers' perceptions concerning personalizing learning opportunities during professional development, and the change from the traditional format to a nontraditional format. The questions specifically looked at the impact of giving choice to teachers on topics that support their goals and interests, and a direct correlation of personalizing learning to impact their daily instruction. The results of the research were gleaned from questionnaire responses and structured interviews. The data was reported in both chart and narrative form.

It was clear to the researcher that the majority of the participants felt that personalizing professional development to meet individual needs had a major impact on teacher engagement and that the implementation of strategies learned within their daily instruction was evident. Allowing teachers to have the freedom to choose what they want to learn, in the manner they want to have it delivered, and in a format that leans toward their own learning style has created a culture of ownership of learning and collaboration among the staff. Teachers felt that they were more open to try new innovative strategies and work with colleagues that they would not normally work with to find the best tools or resources to meet the needs of their students. When teachers were able to focus on professional development areas that were personalized to their own needs, it was evident that they were more likely to feel engaged in their learning and find ways to ensure that it impacted their instruction.

Other areas of the data that the researcher found were important to note was the use of instructional coaches and the Community of Practice happening within the secondary complex. Throughout the interviews and survey results, teachers continually mentioned how being involved in the Community of Practice group, which focused specifically on their interests and needs for professional learning has created a culture of true collaboration and sharing of resources among all staff members. This form, or personalizing learning for professional development, has allowed teachers to choose the topic that they felt most matched their own learning needs, placed them with a similar group of peers that had the same interests, and allowed for an opportunity to share ideas, discuss what has worked or didn't work, and visit each other's classroom to allow for true job-embedded learning. At the same time, utilizing instructional coaches as resources in

learning has allowed teachers another choice to have someone help find ways to support their professional learning. Instructional coaches have worked side-by-side with teachers helping to create engaging lessons for the students using choice, and allowing for teachers to feel like they can take risks and not feel judged. These opportunities have been personalized to meet the needs of each teacher and through a digital or in person format that allows for the comfort level of every teacher to be met. Personalizing learning has become part of everyday life for teachers, and it shows in each innovative and dynamic lesson that is impacting student achievement positively.

This researcher would like to see a continuation of personalizing learning for all levels within the district as a way to support teacher learning and empowerment over their learning. Although this study has shown that personalizing learning has allowed for teacher choice and growth in their own learning, there are still some changes that could be made to increase the effectiveness for all teachers, no matter the content area they teach. A further summary of the results as well as future recommendations can be found in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the convergent parallel mixed-method study that was conducted using data collected from the results of an anonymous online survey sent to a group of secondary teachers, as well as a structured interview with six specific teachers. The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of personalizing learning in professional development for secondary teachers in a suburban school district in south central Pennsylvania when given choice in topics that support their own growth and needs as an educator. The researcher was interested in understanding the characteristics that encompass how to effectively personalize professional development for teachers and the impact on teachers' daily instruction if done with fidelity. In addition, the researcher was interested in understanding the impact of using nontraditional approaches for professional development and the effectiveness of these approaches through teachers' perceptions. Through this investigation of choice in topics, collaborative relationships, impact of daily instruction, and understanding the needs of adult learners, the researcher documented how participants felt about their engagement in different professional development opportunities that were personalized for their own learning needs. The researcher also documented how participants utilized these personalized learning opportunities to cultivate a true collaborative culture that enhanced risk-taking and innovation among colleagues. This learning format allows for

collaboration with coaches, expert teachers, or outside networks to increase a teacher's reach for their own professional development.

Through a purposeful sampling, the researcher focused this study on secondary teachers in grades 7 – 12 that have been involved with the beginning phases of personalizing learning opportunities for professional development at their specific building level. These teachers were chosen to be part of the study to allow the researcher to better understand their perceptions, as educators, of the effectiveness of the "traditional" professional development that had been previously presented (prior to three years ago) to them in a one size fits all model, to what has been offered recently: transforming professional development to be more personalized for teachers' specific needs to support daily instruction. Due to the changes in the format of professional development at the secondary level, the researcher not only looked at the data collected in this study and the change in teachers' perceptions over these last few years, but also the financial impact to the district when utilizing internal experts versus outside presenters and the attendance patterns of teachers on these designated professional development days.

The participants that completed the online questionnaire did so voluntarily and anonymously, while the six participants for the structured interview were selected due to their years of service at this specific school district in south central Pennsylvania. Two of the six participants had been teachers within the district between one and five years and are considered non-tenured. Two of six teachers had been with the district between 10 – 16 years and only taught in this specific building level. The final two participants had been teachers in the district for their entire career, which is at least 20 years or more. In

addition, each of these two participants had only taught at the secondary level in this

district. Although these teachers do not all work at the same building, they are all part of

the secondary complex and receive the same format of professional development created

at the building level. Through this study, the researcher was able to use the findings to

determine that personalized learning had changed the perceptions of teachers when

thinking about professional development within the buildings. Personalizing learning

opportunities allowed teachers to feel more connected to their learning and ownership of

their growth, professionally and personally.

Conclusions

Jones-Carey (2017) states that changing from the traditional professional format

of sit-and-get to a more nontraditional personalized learning format supports educators in

becoming makers of their own learning, as well as creating and implementing their own

plan. Allowing teachers the choice to determine what topic they want to learn, the format

that works for their learning style, and to work at a pace that gives them ample time to

fully understand the content is what personalized professional development comprises.

Ann Lieberman, one of the leading school reformers on professional development, notes

that schools need to radically rethink the traditional approach to professional

development to one that has a wide array of learning opportunities that engage teachers in

their own learning (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Lieberman continues to state,

> "People learn best through active involvement and through thinking about
>
> and becoming articulate about what they have learned. Processes,
>
> practices, and policies built on this view of learning are at the heart of a
>
> more expanded view of teacher development that encourages teachers to

involve themselves as learners – in much the same way as they wish their

students would (p. 2).

Understanding the need for teachers to be actively involved in their learning is essential

in creating personalized professional development. Learners need to create their own

knowledge structure, which can create the pathway that truly opens up the best avenue

that meets their individualized needs.

This researcher was able to recognize, through the data analyzed, that teachers

want to feel empowered in creating a blueprint for personalizing their learning. Out of all

the statements from the participants focusing on choice and engagement, it was evident

that teachers felt that the amount of choices given for professional development has been

improving and that they were more engaged in the learning happening due to these

options. Having the ability to be part of the process to vocalize needs for the building, as

well as individually, ensured that topics offered were essential for the growth of those in

attendance. In addition, using internal experts to present key information, resources, or

tools has also created a culture among colleagues that allows them to share with each

other what has worked and what hasn't worked in a non-threatening environment.

Through this study, teachers commented numerous times that they felt more

engaged in their own learning and that they were able to implement what they learned

immediately into their instruction. Teachers felt that being able to personalize what they

are learning, the level in which they needed support, and the amount of time allowed to

complete the tasks allowed them to be successful in their own needs. Many teachers

noted that they appreciated the ability to work at their own pace and over a longer amount

of time to be able to effectively implement and master the content that was introduced

during the professional learning opportunities. Being able to offer multiple job-embedded learning opportunities within the building allows teachers to have continuous coaching with the internal experts, coaches, and administrators, rather than have to "go and get" the information to bring back and never have any follow-up support. Although the district has a strategic plan for the overall needs of its teachers, the ability to create building-level specific goals set for shared objectives creates many different ways that teachers can personalize their own learning. Teachers are able to choose the sessions that meet their individual needs, work independently or in a group setting, use online learning or face-to-face setting format, and research areas that interest them to find ways to increase their own understanding of a topic they would like to learn more about. Personalizing learning for teachers has continued to build better results for teacher engagement, empowerment, and leadership opportunities.

Over the past three years, the secondary level at this suburban south central school district in Pennsylvania has slowly been changing its traditional professional development format to one that allows teachers to personalize their learning to support current needs for their growth. It is important to note that over the past three years, the percent of secondary teachers absent on professional development days built into the school calendar has seen a significant decline. During the 2017-2018 school year, there was an average of 19% of the secondary teachers who called off sick or took a personal day on these designated professional development days. This was the first year that the secondary level began to transition away from the traditional "sit and get" type of format to allowing teachers to have more of a say in what and how they are learning. The following school year, 2018-2019, the average decreased to 12% of secondary teachers

taking off on these designated days of adult learning. At the end of the third year of changing to a more personalized learning environment, the secondary level is averaging a 7% call off rate, which is a 63% decrease of absenteeism over a 2-year period. In comparison, the elementary buildings, which consist of 147 teachers, had approximately 15% of the teachers call off during professional development days during the 2019/2020 school-year. Personalizing learning for professional development made a significant impact on engaging the secondary teachers, which was shown by the increased number of teachers in attendance. Taking this personalized approach for professional learning, the goal of this researcher would be to see the same increase in engagement happening across the district and an increase of teacher attendance at all levels.

The decrease in absenteeism is significant and powerful in understanding that teachers want to know they are empowered in creating their own pathways for learning and are able have their voices heard and needs met. Through the results of the questionnaire and interview questions, teachers clearly articulated that they actually enjoy these professional development days because sessions offered and the variety of choices within those sessions provide real-life problem solving opportunities that will impact their daily instruction. In addition, teachers noted that they appreciate being able to collaborate and work with other teachers outside of their department who share their same interests in learning more about a topic. Breaking down these barriers has increased resource sharing, cross-curricular lesson planning, and literally opened up doors for teachers to visit other teachers' classrooms at any time. It is evident that when teachers are able to create their own pathway of learning, they are more inclined to be in attendance and engaged in their learning. Given this data, this researcher believes that

school leaders need to continue to utilize the different models and formats of personalizing learning, including teacher leaders, to support other teachers and create the roadmap that allows teachers to grow in the areas that they have determined as essential learning.

The data collected led the researcher to conclude that when participants are able to personalize their own learning pathways, it impacts many areas of the school building and district. The impacts range from a shift in "silo" mentality at the secondary level to one of collaboration and sharing, to an increase in engagement and attendance during professional development days. In addition, student achievement and engagement has been impacted by the different types of instructional activities that are happening within the classrooms that support the needs of learners. Finally, the financial impact on the district has decreased with the ability to allow teachers to become leaders and experts within their content and fields. Since the district has traditionally spent about 5% - 8% of its budget on professional development, utilizing internal experts will decrease the amount of financial need to the district to hire outside presenters that have had little to no impact on supporting teacher change or growth. Allowing the district to shift some of that line item budget to another area creates additional revenue to other areas that may need the funds.

When participants were asked to comment about how they learn best, many noted that they felt being able to personalize their learning to support their goals was essential for their own success. Others noted that they would like to have more opportunities to delve deeper into their own content area to determine how they can continue to grow in the background, and were not able to totally connect some of the opportunities presented

to them and how it could tie in with their own content. Other teachers wrote that they would like to have more time to research independently and complete tasks on their own without the need to be "hand-held" through a new concept. The researcher was able to take this information and feedback to continue to look at ways to refine how the secondary level is offering personalized professional learning to ensure that all the teachers feel they are being given the best learning style, format, and model that meets their specific topic of choice. However, the researcher also noted that the majority of the participants stated that they appreciate the changes in professional development offerings that have happened over the past three years and hope to see them continue in that same direction. The belief that all the participants and teachers in the building want to continue to grow professionally and their desire to find ways to support students should be at the forefront of all decisions as it relates to personalizing learning.

According to Sparks and Loucks-Horsley, models of teacher development consists of training, individually guided observation and feedback, involvement in an improvement process, and inquiry. Teachers can also learn through action research, participating in-group studies, observing peers, planning lesions with colleagues, and reflective journaling (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). The researcher believes that the professional learning opportunities that were recognized by the participants were focused on these models that support the personalization of learning for each adult learner. Participants made note that more times than not, they were able to go back into their classrooms and implement what they had learned or the tool they were introduced to by the teacher expert to varying degrees of success. In addition, the researcher was able to continue to note themes throughout the research findings, which supported other

research work in understanding that all teachers have different strengths and areas of growth that need to be addressed through differentiated professional development that meets their personalized goals. These pathways of learning are based on where teachers are professionally and will allow them to designate their road of learning to support student learning in the end. Teachers are being recognized as instructional leaders within the building and they are opening themselves up to colleagues, which shows trust among the staff. Continuing to build upon this model is essential at the secondary level to ensure teachers feel empowered and valued professionally and personally.

This researcher recommends that this suburban south central Pennsylvania school district expand this format of personalizing professional development to involve all levels of buildings, not just the secondary. This study has allowed the researcher to collect data that supports personalizing professional development. This nontraditional format creates a true collaborative environment that allows teachers to feel they have ownership of their learning by having a voice in the process and product. It has increased attendance and engagement among the teachers, and supports a sense of belonging among them. It also allows teachers to work at their own pace, dive deep into a topic of a potential growth area, and utilize the model that will let them flourish in their learning. This could look very different for each teacher, but the process and accountability of the end result is always the same: increasing student learning through their own learning.

Future Directions for Research and Recommendations

This research is critical for educational leaders who are interested in developing a professional development plan that allows teachers to feel empowered, engaged, and trusted in understanding their strengths and areas of growth that they would like to

address. In addition, it is important for leaders to understand that using a nontraditional format or model will allow for multiple job-embedded learning opportunities to happen on a daily basis.   In this ever-changing world of education, educators need to be able to have the right to create a pathway of learning that supports the development of areas of growth specific to each individual, as well as promote collaboration among colleagues and show instructional leaders among them. This study provides insight and information on how to personalize professional development for educators that make an impact on their own learning and student learning.

Recommendation for Practices

The following are recommendations of educational leadership practices based upon the data and conclusions of this study:

1.   Leaders should encourage and promote opportunities for staff to reflect on their own strengths and areas of growth to build a greater understanding of professional development needs.

2.   Develop opportunities for staff to become instructional leaders to colleagues.

3.   Provide ongoing professional learning that addresses their individual challenges, interests, strengths, and expertise.

4.   Allow educators to have a voice in what topics will be covered and through what format they would like to have it presented to them.

5.   Provide time and opportunity for practice, reflection, and application in a collaborative setting.

6.   By creating an environment where teachers can respectfully disagree and share their own opinions on teaching and learning, a greater sense of trust can develop. By developing trust among colleagues, the learning community can be more open and willing to take risks and be vulnerable to new ideas and concepts.

7.   Promote educational risk taking among teachers and encourage them to share their results with colleagues. By creating an environment where it is safe to share without judgment, staff will be able to grow with one another in a noncompetitive environment.

8.   Provide time for teachers to be able to learn the new strategy and implement over a period of time that supports their comfort level for success with additional coaching as needed.

9.   Vary the delivery methods, both virtual and face-to-face, for teachers to choose what learning style works best for them.

10. Provide multiple opportunities for teachers to engage with each other and apply the learning in the classroom.

11. Content needs to support the needs of the teachers and could be specific to the discipline or grade level, or a resource that may be implemented across many disciplines.

12. Allow for teachers to visit other classrooms to be able to reflect on the learning in real time and upon their own practices and understanding of knowledge.

13. Utilize technology, such as social media, online learning communities, and/or a Learning Management System, to overcome barriers of time and proximity to promote resource sharing of instructional strategies or tools among teachers.

14. Leaders should help to establish a way for teacher accountability for student learning.

15. Educational leaders should use data to develop a shared and reliable knowledge base from which to build accountability for teacher learning and implementation of content.

Suggestions for Further Research

Results from this study indicated some additional options for further research.

1.   Researchers in this same district could continue this research study by utilizing the same research methods and determine if the elementary and intermediate participants' perceptions are the same or differ from the secondary perceptions.

2.   Researchers could conduct a study with a different district that has never implemented any form of personalized learning for professional development collecting baseline data at the beginning of the year. During the school year, the district will begin to personalize professional development for teachers and then collect post data to determine the impact of changing to a nontraditional format.

3.   Researchers could conduct a study investigating the potential of offering only virtual settings for professional development to personalize learning.

4.   Researchers could conduct a study investigating the impact on teachers'

instruction by completing face-to-face collaborative options versus online

learning options to personalize learning.

5.   Given the amount of freedom and choice educators would have in this

nontraditional learning environment, researchers could investigate the impact on

student learning through this type of nontraditional professional learning.

6.   Researchers could investigate the impact of using a Community of

Practice Model to support personalized learning professional development.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how changing from a traditional "sit-

and-get" professional development format to a nontraditional personalized learning

format would impact teacher engagement in their learning and growth. Carol Dweck

states that some of the benefits for personalizing learning for teachers are as follows:

- Formulate their own challenging, individualized, professional learning plans

- Follow through with the plan to achieve mastery

- Share their learning and evidence that they accrue with colleagues

Teachers need to be able to be vulnerable to identify instructional areas that need to be

improved, and to reflect upon that goal for specific growth goals. This is a very

challenging concept for many teachers (Overstreet, 2018). However, through

personalizing learning opportunities, administrators have created an environment that

supports the culture of collaboration, sharing, and reflection among colleagues. It is

important to note that the researcher found most participants commented that being able

to collaborate with others, inside and outside their department or grade level, was one of the parts of personalizing learning they found to be most beneficial and rewarding. Having the time to share resources, discuss the trials and errors of new ideas or activities, and create lessons together allowed for more risk-taking and a sense of trust among the staff.

In the past, staff development has been an afterthought for many administrators or districts. Fortunately, many school districts now understand the need for a well-designed plan that includes formats and models to support personalization of learning for all teachers. Without a well-designed plan, districts are realizing that they cannot educate students to high expectations if they are not taking an invested interest in creating opportunities that support teacher learning, as well (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Personalized professional development for teachers is one way to facilitate the mindset of innovation and risk-taking among teachers, as it allows for continual collaboration and sharing through different means, rather than thinking everyone has to try the same idea or concept, and that it always needs to be a school-wide initiative. It is essential that each teacher used their understanding of what challenges or needs were associated with his or her own growth to create an effective pathway of learning. The new knowledge and skills that were learned should always meet the needs of their own classroom and support continual student learning opportunities and growth.

The overall results of this study support research that states professional development has to look different in today's learning environment and become more personalized to meet individual teachers' needs for growth. Guskey (2003) noted the major goals of effective professional development are: "change in classroom practices of

teachers, change in their attitude and beliefs, and change in their learning outcomes of students." This type of professional development allows for the creation of teacher-led professional development opportunities among many different collaborative groups within a school or district. With this type of philosophy in place, personalized learning becomes the model that continues to empower teachers in choice and voice in their own learning and learning pathway. Utilizing a personalized learning model allows teachers the ability to choose topics, create a pathway of learning, and implement multiple

The creation and implementation of a district-wide professional development plan that involves teachers and administration, that moves away from any traditional format and moves toward a personalized learning format, allows teachers to feel empowered in their learning and in return, increases student achievement. When teachers are given choices, engaged in their learning, have a voice in what they learn and how they learn it, attendance increases and implementation of content is prevalent in all classrooms. Educational leaders are critical to change the old mindset of traditional one size fits all learning to a nontraditional professional development that personalizes learning through a variety of choices in topics, models, and formats for all educators. Allowing teachers to have ownership of their learning, providing time to collaborate with colleagues, and time to learn and implement with fidelity will increase engagement in their learning and support student growth.

Educational leaders will find this information useful when trying to engage teachers in professional development that will impact their own learning, as well as student learning. Leaders can use this study to support the shift from traditional to personalized learning, which will allow teachers to feel valued and connected to what

they are learning, encourage collegiality, and support taking risks to make change less threatening. Personalized professional learning is the key to creating an environment that supports teachers as professionals and creates a culture where teachers create their own blueprint for learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions:

1. For the purpose of this study, I am defining personalized learning as: *an approach that allows teachers to collaborate with their colleagues and administration to design educational experiences that match their unique interests, needs, and goals as learners. Personalized learning gives teachers voice and choice in what they learn, how they learn, and how they demonstrate their learning. It allows teachers to pursue unique learning opportunities that build their passions, interests, and strengths.*
Based on this definition, can you talk about your experiences with personalized learning for professional development opportunities in your building?

2. Can you talk about your experience in Community of Practice (CoP) and professional development?

3. Can you talk about how much freedom you feel like you have in the CoP and making decisions in your professional development?

4. Can you talk about your relationships with other colleagues during CoP and professional development?

5. Can you talk about how confident you feel in your ability to accomplish your goals and expectations for professional growth in CoP and professional development?

6. Thinking about your overall experience in professional development, can you talk about how much freedom you have in choosing to learn about things that are connected to your personal/professional interests and goals?

7. In thinking about your overall professional development opportunities in the district, how much do you feel it impacts your daily instruction?

8. Can you talk about how you feel about the professional development opportunities happening in the district presently?

9. Can you talk about "traditional " professional development versus having choice in what you learn?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this interview. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me. I may contact you in the future for the purpose of follow-up interviews. Again let me assure you of the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any questions or further ideas you want me to know about, please feel free to contact me at the phone number or email address provided to you.

APPENDIX B: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research: To understand the experiences with professional development, personalized learning, and teacher choice within your school district.

What you will do in this research: If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked several questions. Some of them will be about your perceptions of the school district's professional development opportunities, others will be about your thoughts on what makes professional development effective, and its impact on your daily instruction. With your permission, I will record the interviews so I don't have to make so many notes. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefits: This is a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences concerning effective professional development that impacts your own personal growth.

Confidentiality: Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code. The recording will be erased when my capstone project has been accepted. The transcript, without your name, will be kept until the research is complete.

The key code linking your name with your number will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office, and no one else will have access to it. It will be destroyed upon completion of my capstone project. The data you give me will be used for my research project and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future. I won't use your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You will receive payment based on the proportion of the study you completed. You may withdraw by informing the experimenter that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). You may skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

To Contact the Researcher: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Maura Hobson at 717-405-0509 or Maura_hobson@etownschools.org. You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Todd Keruskin,

Superintendent of Schools, Elizabeth Forward School District
tkeruskin@go-efsd.net:412-896-2310

Agreement:
The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Name (print): _____

**APPENDIX C: PERSONALIZING LEARNING IN PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability. All answers are
anonymous.

1. Please indicate the TOTAL number of years that you have worked in education.
☐   0-5 years

☐ 6-10years

☐ 11-15 years

☐ 16-20 years

☐ 21-25 years

☐ 26- 30 years

☐ 31-35 years

☐ 36+ years

2. Personalized learning is described as a "vision where learning systems may abandon
the industrial, time-based "traditional" approach to learning and replace it with a learning
system that fulfills every learner's need at his/her present performance level. Using this
description, with zero representing no implementation and 10 representing complete
implementation, how close is our school to achieving the goal of implementing
personalized learning in professional learning for all teachers.

No Implementation   Full Implementation

☐ 0 ☐ 1   ☐ 2   ☐ 3   ☐ 4   ☐ 5   ☐ 6   ☐ 7   ☐ 8   ☐ 9   ☐ 10

3. Assess to what extent personalized learning is used to master content for professional
development overall in your building.

	Never has implemented this strategy	Occasionally implement this strategy	Frequently implement this strategy	Regularly implement this strategy
Customize professional development to the needs of the learner				
Differentiate delivery of instruction for				

various learning styles			
Use differentiated pacing for groups within professional development			
Use self-pacing and targeted independent practice			
Use choice of professional development to meet the needs of various learner			

4. My school provides time in the workweek for shared collaboration (CoP, common planning time, etc).

☐ YES   ☐NO

5. How much time is provided on a weekly basis to you intended for collaboration with colleagues?

☐ No time is provided

☐ 1-20 minutes

☐ 21-40 minutes

☐ 41-60 minutes

☐ 61 or more minutes

6. With zero representing no collaborative time and 10 representing complete satisfaction with collaborative time, to what extent do you think collaborative time provided with colleagues is adequate?

Zero Satisfaction   Complete Satisfaction

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

7. With zero representing no control and 10 representing complete satisfaction with your current level of control, to what extent do you think you have control of your choice in professional development topics?

Zero Control   Complete Control

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

8. With zero representing no flexibility and 10 representing complete satisfaction with flexibility, to what extent do you think that you are provided with flexibility (time) in schedules in professional development?

Zero Flexibility   Complete Flexibility

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

9 Assess to what extent you engage in professional development activities as defined in the descriptions below.

	Never implemented this practice	Occasionally implement this practice	Frequently implement this practice	Regularly implement this practice
Engage in professional development to support personalized learning				
Engage in professional development for new teaching				

strategies or curriculum using personalized learning				
Engage in professional development that is specific to my content area				
Participate in professional development aligned to my own professional goals and interests				
Give feedback on professional development topics of interest and need				
Use content learned during professional development in my daily				

instruction				

10. With zero representing not effective and 10 representing completely effective, to what extent do you feel the professional development offered in your building is effective in meeting your personal needs and interests professionally?

Zero effectiveness   Complete effectiveness

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

11. With zero representing not satisfied and 10 representing completely satisfied, to what extent do you feel the professional development offered in your building is providing you choice in topics?

Not satisfied   Completely satisfied

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

12. With zero representing no impact and 10 representing completely impacting, to what extent do you feel the professional development is impacting your daily instruction?

Zero Impact   Completely Impacting

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

13. What type of professional development do you feel is the most effective type of learning for you?

☐ Personalized Learning

☐ Traditional (sit and get)

☐ Other _____

14. What type of professional learning most impacts your daily instruction? Explain your choice.

APPENDIX D: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PERSONALIZING LEARING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

You are being invited to participate in a research study about using personalized learning opportunities in professional development. My name is Maura Hobson, a doctoral student at California University of Pennsylvania and High School Principal at Elizabethtown Area School District, and I am conducting a research project. The objective of this research project is to attempt to understand if teachers are more engaged with personalized learning opportunities for professional development than "traditional" opportunities. It is being conducted in the secondary schools focusing on teachers in grades 7-12. The survey is being given to current teachers in the district.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study, nor are there any costs for participating in the study. The information you provide will help me understand how best to satisfy the needs of the district for professional development. The information collected may benefit you directly, and what I learn from this study should provide general benefits to the entire district.

This survey is anonymous. If you choose to participate, do not put your name on the survey. No one will be able to identify you, nor will anyone be able to determine which school building you work for. No one will know whether you participated in this study. Nothing you say on the survey will in any way influence your present or future employment with the district.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, please submit your responses electronically through the survey site. It should take you not longer than 5 to 10 minutes. No one will have access to your responses other than Maura Hobson. By returning the survey you are giving consent to the researcher to use the data as part of her research.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the survey or about being in this study, you may contact me at (717) 367-1533 x 21120 or at maura_hobson@etownschools.org

The California University of Pennsylvania Review Board has reviewed my request to conduct this project. Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX E: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Institutional Review Board
California University of Pennsylvania
Morgan Hall, 310
250 University Avenue
California, PA 15419
instreviewboard@calu.edu
Melissa Sovak, Ph.D.

Dear Maura,

Please consider this email as official notification that your proposal titled "Personalized Learning in Professional Development: Empowering Teachers Through Choice and Ownership of Learning Opportunities for Personal Growth" (Proposal #19-008) has been approved by the California University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board as submitted.

The effective date of approval is 10/7/19 and the expiration date is 10/6/20. These dates must appear on the consent form.

Please note that Federal Policy requires that you notify the IRB promptly regarding any of the following:

(1) Any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented)

(2) Any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects

(3) Any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

(4) To continue your research beyond the approval expiration date of 10/6/20 you must file additional information to be considered for continuing review. Please contact instreviewboard@calu.edu

Please notify the Board when data collection is complete.

Regards,

Melissa Sovak, PhD.
Chair, Institutional Review Board