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SUPPORTING EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN TIMES OF CHANGE

By

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

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SUPPORTING EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN TIMES OF CHANGE

ABSTRACT

This action research cross-case comparison study is set at an independent school in Maine which serves approximately 1,600 students in grades 6-12. Recently, the administrative team of the school articulated an academic strategic plan focused on increasing student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. The changes created a challenge because administrators raised expectations and accountability of staff members with respect to professional performance. The current climate in the institution presents an opportunity to provide a sense of direction and support for faculty through thoughtful leadership and professional development (PD) programming to support their progress on meeting the goals set by the administration. This study documented the needs of the school's teachers and provided a plan for supporting these educators throughout the ongoing process of professional growth amidst change. Nine participants were interviewed and the resulting data were categorized using Drago-Severson's Four Pillars of Professional Development Practice. Results were considered within the context of turbulent change as suggested by Gross' turbulence theory. In the interviews, teachers shared a desire for professional development which was authentic and mutually supported through the reflection of their peers. The implications of this study are that professional development providers and administrators of schools with a great deal of teacher and leadership autonomy would be well served to understand and support the professional goals of the individuals among their faculty.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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The pursuit of a terminal degree suggests an end to learning—at least along one path. I’ve learned through this process that that is quite impossible, really. What the experience has taught me is that if a person is determined enough to set an ambitious goal, to stay awake long after all others are at rest, and pursue true understanding of oneself, there is much to be gained. The greatest gift we can be given is the opportunity for an education, and for all the little ways the universe has conspired to arrange this opportunity, I am grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In schools, one of the primary responsibilities of leaders is to maintain programming which supports faculty and staff and helps to advance the organizational goals set by the leadership and school stakeholders. In these times of ongoing educational reform, professional educators navigate a variety of challenges: preparing for and acclimating to the role of educator, tending to the needs of their students' development, making meaning of the organizational goals and expectations for the profession, and navigating personal relationships which stimulate their continued growth. At all of these stages, an opportunity exists for school leaders to assist teaching professionals as individuals, while advancing greater organizational goals and strengthening relationships among colleagues and administration.

This action research cross-case comparison study is set at an independent school in Maine which serves approximately 1,600 students in grades 6-12. The high school (9-12) is comprised of a mix of students from both local and international locations. The school has a unionized faculty of about 102 teachers, and formal preparation for the staff ranges between no formal education training with some professional content-area experience, to specialized graduate and post-graduate study experience, which may or may not be related to content and/or pedagogy and may or may not be accompanied by traditional educational methods training. Further, state teaching certification is not a requirement for employment, and some who have it initially may choose not to maintain certification. For those who do, however, the state of Maine certification requirements include the continuation of professional learning. This means that those wishing to maintain a certified status at the school must meet a minimum requirement for professional development, while those who opt out of certification have few requirements for

professional development beyond participating in trainings during contracted staff development days. Staff evaluation is not formally tied to student achievement metrics, and there is little accountability for staff performance beyond compulsory contract renewal, which occurs after the third year of employment.

Recently, the administrative team of the school articulated an academic strategic plan focused on increasing student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Two outcomes of the implementation of this plan include a reorganization of the administrative team structure, as well as a redefinition of procedures of staff oversight and evaluation. The changes have created “organizational turbulence” (Shapiro and Gross, 2013) because administrators have raised expectations and accountability of staff members with respect to professional performance. The longstanding culture of autonomy held by teachers combined with the new models of oversight have precipitated a perceived decrease in staff morale. The current climate in the institution presents an opportunity to provide a sense of direction and support for faculty through thoughtful leadership and professional development (PD) programming to support their progress on meeting the goals set by the administration. Flexible models of professional development are necessary as there is a variety of prior knowledge and experience among staff and a wide range of content needs. Further complicating the challenge of providing effective PD to staff with a range of experience are the precedents of staff opting out of professional development opportunities (i.e., taking sick or personal days) simply because doing so is common among the faculty. These absences from collective learning experiences deepen the divide among the faculty in terms of practice and administrators must determine whether a one-size-fits-most model of professional development is effective, or to seek other models that are

both appealing to teachers and effectively serve the wide variety of professional needs on campus.

In recent years, school leaders implemented a variety of new cultural and instructional initiatives in response to feedback and suggestions from the last accreditation visit. Efforts to encourage professional development in the areas of technology integration, curriculum development, and student assessment now constitute a large portion of the hours devoted to professional development. In the case of the school's recent technology initiative, a voucher model of professional development was used to offer a flexible approach to bolstering the technology and curriculum enhancement skills of the teaching staff. Through the voucher model, administration recouped what was previously a full in-service workshop day (approximately six working hours) and reassigned this time to take place throughout the school year. If teachers met the minimum requirement of six hours logged in various ways, they were given the originally scheduled date off. In each of the four years this has occurred at the school, modifications have been made to suit the immediate needs of that year's focus for the school (i.e.; technology, curriculum development, etc.). Teachers could meet their self-set goals in a variety of ways (mentoring, observation, visiting other classrooms or schools, or attending in-house professional development). Ultimately, this strategy increased collaboration among faculty, gave them voice in their work, provided a means to compensate teachers for taking advantage of just-in-time professional development, and helped the school to achieve ambitious results in a short time span. This desire to build common trainings to support coordinated efforts resulted in creative ways to execute the professional development goals in a way that was supportive of faculty and supportive of school goals. For example, the 1:1 iPad initiative was launched using the voucher program as the source of all professional development and the adoption of the technology

resulted in the school being recognized as an Apple Distinguished School at the end of the program's second year. Although this PD strategy was considered very successful among the school's administrators, the need for technology-focused PD has decreased and teachers are ready to refocus, tackling the larger, more disruptive instructional shifts that are taking place in the school.

The administrative team, comprised of the Headmaster, Associate Head of School, Senior Director of School Administration, Director of Instruction, and others have developed a new structure for this work, adopting what are known as "Academic Strategic Plan (ASP) Workgroups." These groups are peer-led, with the goal of engaging teachers in the change process. The groups of approximately 8-10 faculty members who share a common preparation period are led by members who have been identified by administrators as having leadership potential among their peers. Groups meet monthly and use the same agenda, prepared by the researcher responsible for this study. The topics vary monthly, but all serve to inform and support the work on the school's Academic Strategic Plan. Topics such as curriculum, assessment, instructional strategies, and grading practices are central to the group discussions.

Although these workgroups do well in terms of helping teachers become familiar with a common language around pedagogy, there is such variety among the previous experiences that it becomes difficult to make progress toward a common goal. Further, independent school leadership has the autonomy to choose whom they employ regardless of experience, and thus new teachers can join the faculty with a variety of previous experiences (both in teaching and in other industries) and preservice training—or none at all. Reconciling these discrepancies and communicating a common direction forward presents a challenge for administration in its quest to make progress in achieving the vision of the Academic Strategic Plan.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers with past experience in public, private, and other independent schools are employed by the school. Unlike public schools, independent schools have the freedom of appointing candidates of their choosing for their teaching positions, regardless of relevant prior experience or specific educational or certification requirements set forth by governing bodies. Maine has a variety of teacher preparation programs, and the school employs graduates from some of those in addition to graduates of other higher education programs. The faculty at the school have a greatly varied range of experience and training. Although their collective professional experience contributes to a broad range of abilities, talents, and personalities, this flexible approach to recruitment and hiring means that the instructional experience of educators is often limited, and some teachers lack a fundamental understanding about pedagogy. Even beginning steps of rallying staff around an organizational goal are hindered due to a lack of consistent vocabulary and commonly-held understandings about teaching methodology.

The challenge of building professional capacity during a time of increased accountability for faculty lies in reconciling the needs of this range of teachers employed by the school. Tasks like establishing common vocabulary and developing baseline capacity for teachers to support the implementation of educational initiatives are necessary administrative efforts to ensure a foundation for future progress. Addressing the continuum of teacher needs in an efficient professional development program can prove to be foreboding. If administrators want authentic faculty engagement and development of leadership from within, it is important to include faculty voice in that process and respect their process of meaning making through the changed expectations. Faculty insight is key in order to understand the supports teaching staff need to

increase their instructional efficacy as they work in support of the strategic plan's goal of increasing student achievement.

With the right mix of leadership strategies and a time-flexible approach to PD, school administrators can find ways to creatively maximize the time teachers spend learning and collaborating with one another and ensure that the teaching staff are collectively moving in the same direction. If administrators nurture relationships with the various stakeholder populations within the school, they will be best positioned to know what the staff desire for training and how best to meet their professional needs. This study was a thoughtful effort to understand and document educators' needs and provide a plan for supporting them throughout the ongoing process of professional growth amidst change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify what independent school professional educators believe about effective professional development, especially given the context of a change in accountability for teachers. Since this organization employs both certified and non-certified teachers with a wide-ranging variety of pre-service experience, planning a professional development program to help move all constituents along their personal professional continuum is challenging. Because professional development programs impact the growth and morale of teachers, and it was important that the school administration understood faculty perspectives on the topics covered and the needs of the staff around those topics. Reconciling differences that exist between the professional needs of the teachers and the goals of the school's administration impacts instructional practice and student achievement. The researcher asked participants to share their perspectives on how their prior experience influences their practice and also asked the participants to articulate their needs around further growth. Sharing the driving forces of this

phenomenon is important because it informs the ways that professional development can be successful while advancing the school's instructional and student achievement goals. By emphasizing authentic collaborative growth experiences between staff and administration, there is great potential gain for administrators, teachers, and students.

Research Questions

This study is driven by three overall questions that delve into specific teacher needs and opportunities:

- What are the participants' prior content and pedagogical PD experiences in a school setting and which do the teachers identify as being most beneficial?
- What methods of professional development are considered most valuable to educators with varying prior experience and who face changed expectations for accountability?
- What is the influence of rapid organizational change on teachers' perceptions of their experience? What kinds of professional development experiences are most desired by teachers?

Conceptual Framework

When individual adult learners are exposed to new approaches or practices in rapidly changing organizations, professional development programming requires careful attention on the part of school leaders. Research suggests that teachers require context-specific professional development (Desimone, 2009; Borko, 2004). Drago-Severson (2009) proposes four pillar practices for shaping professional development: teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring. One of these pillars, collegial inquiry, is defined as "a shared dialogue that involves reflecting on one's assumptions values, commitments, and convictions with others as part of the learning process" (p. 26). Drago-Severson further says that

“collegial inquiry can help us become more aware of the assumptions that inform and guide our thinking, behaviors, and approaches to problem solving and to alter those assumptions, freeing us to engage fully in learning and growth” (2009, p. 154). Thus, teachers can engage in reflective practices, but the opportunity to share their thinking about their work presents an opportunity to collectively seek professional progress and development.

The organization in this study is undergoing a state of change as a result of its focus on the new direction, and its participants are experiencing what Gross (2013) calls “turbulence” as members of the faculty and administration adjust to a new Academic Strategic Plan--largely focused on increasing student achievement on standardized tests. This impact of change is also supported by Zepeda’s research which suggests that “[b]ecause each person has an individual belief system or paradigm, people will react differently to change. These reactions are outgrowths of their own personal concerns” (2012, p. 27).

Gross’ (2013) turbulence theory centers on a metaphor where the status of an organization is likened to an airplane’s flight. Challenges faced by organizations are compared to turbulence, and can fall into one of four categories: light, moderate, severe, or extreme. Gross suggests that there are three contributing factors: positionality, cascading, and stability, which impact the course of the turbulence.

When considered together, Drago-Severson and Gross provide a framework for designing professional development which is scaffolding the development of professional skills, while acknowledging the complex needs required by professionals in times of organizational change. The nature of change as a disruptive force on the school’s culture requires special attention to its stakeholders in their time of greatest professional need and the administration has both the responsibility and the opportunity to act proactively to support its faculty.

Assumptions, limitations, scope

One assumption of this study is that teachers will generally feel as though collaborative work gives them a voice in the means and format in which they tackle the task of improving their instruction to serve the school's greater goals. There will be exceptions, as any kind of collaborative work in this institution has the potential to be seen as a threat to teacher autonomy. There may be insecurities among the faculty, but an assumption is that collaboration in non-content-specific groupings will result in better morale among teachers and an overall sense of collegiality which some perceive is currently lacking. Another hypothesis is that teachers will appreciate a flexible and personalized approach to professional development, and specifically one which allows them to customize their program using a variety of modalities.

The study is limited to representative professional educators at a single site. In an attempt to seek out the phenomena specific to a subgroup of individuals in a unique and historic independent school climate, this study is very focused. However, the findings are likely to apply to other schools where teachers reflect divergent preparation and a comprehensive professional growth program across a rapidly changing organization is desired. One additional limitation is the role of the researcher—currently a leader in the school. The researcher is directly responsible for facilitating the leadership groups being studied and documents their progress within that role. Further, the researcher is responsible for documenting teachers' engagement with training and support programs. Although this dual role had potential to influence the outcome of the study, every attempt to acknowledge bias and provide full transparency in both data collection and reporting was made. Participants may benefit from the study as the information they shared may help inform the approach to addressing their professional needs.

Significance

This study focuses on documenting teachers' perceptions about how they experience professional growth amid new expectations from administrators, in a rapidly changing organization. How teachers communicate their needs and expectations for support from the institution will be considered as it relates to teacher agency. The findings from the study will provide direction to administrators who are striving to build the instructional effectiveness of teaching staff and improve teacher practice, while maintaining awareness about the varying past experiences, interests, and professional goals for individual educators. The study's findings reflect recognition of the wide range of teaching professionals, and their respective roles in a dynamic organization. Although the study takes place at an independent school serving students in grades 9-12, the results may be transferable to schools where local hiring autonomy is present, where administrators seek improvement of individualized staff professional development growth efforts, or where schools experience staff and student performance change occurring at a rapid rate.

Definition of Terms

- Independent school: *In this case, the term independent school is used to describe a school (specifically a "town academy" which is not overseen by any local, state, or federal body, and although it does enroll publicly funded students as a portion of its student body, the school operates under the oversight of a board of trustees and a Headmaster).*
- Professional Development (PD): *any activity which teaching faculty engage in to further their pedagogical practice and the goals of the school.*

- Voucher time: *This format is a reallocation of professional development time. Where a six-hour teacher workshop day is a fixed date in time and involves synchronous staff learning, a voucher program allows for those six hours to be divided and spent asynchronously at varying times of the year, sometimes in piecemeal, as needed to fulfill the goals of the school, department, or individual. This is administered as a goal-setting and self-reflective cycle. In exchange for an equivalent amount of time spent throughout the year, teaching faculty are granted a full day of relief on a typically scheduled workshop day.*

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to document teachers' perceptions about effective professional development programming appropriate for individual teachers facing changed expectations. The study focused on information gathered from educators of varying backgrounds with an emphasis on informing a flexible program to meet the individualized professional needs of an independent school faculty, regardless of their professional backgrounds, certifications, current abilities and motivations. Awareness of the motivations, personalities, impact of turbulence, and needs of participants dictated a need for environments that foster support and collaboration, and this proved to be a cornerstone of the findings. This research informs an approach to professional development in a way that is thoughtful, useful, and responsive for schools undergoing rapid organizational change.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is focused on how educators begin in the profession—through preparation and certification as well as socialization. Later, how professional development is provided is discussed, with a specific focus on andragogy, agency, and choice; and communities of practice. Lastly, Drago-Severson’s four pillar practices for growth and Gross’ theory of organizational change—turbulence theory—are explored. By discussing preparedness and acclimation to the role of teacher, defining professional development, and discussing the various accepted formats for teachers, along with considering the professional growth practices of individuals in the context of a greater environment of change, a case for thoughtful professional development planning and implementation emerges.

Preparation and Credentialing

A wide range of research exists to both refute and support the significance of teacher preparation and certification and its impact on student achievement. In a policy analysis of the *Renee v. Duncan* (2010) decision which pertained to teacher quality related to the No Child Left Behind Act, Hanna and Gimbert (2011) detail the history of the NCLB, which intended to instill equity in education for America’s students. Hanna and Gimbert describe the NCLB’s “highly qualified teacher” or “HQT” requirements as “having a minimum threshold of quality [defined as] having obtained full state certification, having passed a rigorous state licensure exam, and having obtained a baccalaureate’s degree or its equivalent in the area to be taught” (p. 33). The authors argue that quality teaching requires these elements as a baseline, but it actually requires a lot more. Critical of the requirements and of certification in general, they argue that “teacher preparation programs are more likely to attract individuals that hail from the bottom third of

college cohorts” and that certifications are indicative of program completion, not assurance that the holder is a highly qualified teacher. Further, they say, the consistency of rigor in these programs is lacking (p. 41), and that while certification shows benefit to student achievement, is not a singular predictor of student achievement (p. 43). Advocating for alternative pathways for certification, the authors support endorsement of the experience of second career teachers, asserting that current certification measures do not allow these strengths to be recognized. The authors conclude by characterizing the teaching certification as a “flat credential, not an instrument.” At the time of this research, states and schools are still grappling with the shift to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA allows schools to use funding to recruit, retain, and reform training practices for teachers and administrators (Salgado et. al., 2018, p. 3). Salgado et. al., suggest that there are many variables at play but concur that certification (traditional or alternative) has little to do with student achievement. However, the authors posit that teacher self-efficacy is a predictor of student achievement, and that teacher education programs should seek to increase teacher self-efficacy by boosting content knowledge, which will in turn impart a positive experience in interactions with students.

Outnumbered in their positive disposition of the value of certification, Cowan and Goldhaber (2016) researched National Board Certified Teachers and found that overall, NBCTs are more effective than their noncertified counterparts with similar experience. They do admit, however, that teacher performance can shift during the teacher’s career, and therefore, is not a perfect indicator of achievement over time. One of the benefits of the NBCT model, though, is that it is metacognitive, reflective, and utilizes mentors, unlike the more rigid process mandates by acquiring HQT status mandated by NCLB. Although Belson & Husted (2015) disagree that NBCTs positively impact achievement—they do report a benefit in schools where there are

NBCTs who model learning and share their practices with other teachers, providing rich PD experiences for colleagues.

Overall, there is some, but decidedly little research to support traditional pathways of preparation and certification having positive impacts on student achievement. Because of this lack, it is a worthy to consider in the context of helping adults adapt to the teaching profession.

Socialization into the Teaching Practice

Socialization is a key aspect of an individual becoming part of a larger group, and in this section, socialization into the field of education is discussed with special attention to the phases of integration to the field, as well as a popular strategy—mentoring.

Sexton (2008, p. 74) succinctly sets the context for socialization into the profession, stating that “teaching is unique in that prospective teachers have extensive opportunities to observe the profession from their time as a student.” For this reason, one must consider that the teacher has always had a mentor, and that the experience of becoming a teacher is rooted in having learned all along the way. Hushman and Napper-Owens (2012) suggest that socialization occurs in three progressive phases: recruitment socialization, professional socialization, and lastly occupational socialization. In the recruitment phase, educators develop their predictions and expectations of their role as teacher. In the professional phase, individuals go through a process of reconciling their preconceived notions from phase one with a bit of a reality check, in the context of beginning to experience the role firsthand. Lastly, in the occupational phase, they become independent in the role, culminating in the first placement. Sexton (2008, p. 83) characterizes this balance between identity and role as a “coherence between who [teachers] are and who they [want]—or [are] expected—to be.” Hushman and Napper-Owens (2012, p. 8) suggest that there are challenges which emerge in this phase, including “marginalization/

isolation, role conflict, reality shock, and wash-out.” Solutions they propose include reflective practices of teaching, modification of programs they are tasked to implement, and development of navigating political aspects of the job (i.e., dealing with parents) by roleplaying with colleagues.

Not all of the socialization research presents in such a bleak manner, however. One popular method of socialization in education is the use of mentors to support teachers through both pre-service experience and in initiation into the profession. Sexton (2008, p. 75) says, “teachers retain sufficient agency to act in new, creative ways... teaching is both ordered and responsive to norms and standards and also improvisational and responsive to other participants.” Negotiating the persona of teachers is then bolstered by mentoring experience. Research by Vumilia & Semali (2016) says that mentoring is a significant socialization strategy which takes many forms in schools. One word of caution they allude to though—keeping the role of mentor separate from the role of evaluator or supervisor. This simple change keeps the relationship healthy, supportive in nature, and beneficial to both parties.

Balci et. al. (2016) say that “[o]rganizational socialization literature highlights the development of both organizations and individuals as part of an interactive process” (p. 71). This intersection of the individual and the organization is an interesting one. Within the scope of Balci et. al’s research, a few interesting characteristics emerged. The researchers found that organizational socialization levels varied significantly by type of school, with private school teachers (an independent school’s cousin) reporting they considered the socialization level important. Another interesting finding was the impact of seniority on organizational values and targets. They found that the “more the professional experience is, the less importance is given to organizational targets and values” (p. 76). They conclude by suggesting that “organizational

performance will improve as socialization process increases in organizations.” The influence the socialization process and mentorship experience have on agency and andragogy are the sort of challenges this research uncovers as teachers make meaning of their place in a changing environment.

Defining Professional Development

In this section, professional development is defined and types of activities regarded as valuable to both educators and school administrators are discussed. Desimone asserts that “[t]eachers experience a vast range of activities and interactions that may increase their knowledge and skills and improve their teaching practice, as well as contribute to their personal, social, and emotional growth as teachers” (2009, p. 182). For the purposes of this study, the author agrees that professional development activities can take many forms, and may take the form of tasks such as curriculum development, in content or methods coursework, structured training sessions, webinars, engagement in professional communities (both digital and non-digital formats), collaborative study groups, on-site visits in other classrooms or schools, and participation in peer observation and feedback cycles. As Borko (2004, p. 4) suggests, “[t]o understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants.” Further, a key characteristic of these multiple frameworks for learning is an emphasis on a constructivist mode of active and authentic knowledge generation (Thoonen et. al, 2011). Through a culture of collaboration, teachers are exposed to a variety of viewpoints, methods, and ideas about teaching. Coupled with a process for experimentation and reflection (Thoonen, et al., 2011), teachers can take meaningful steps toward improving their practice.

The nature of the necessity for professional development for teachers is multi-faceted. Research has shown that teachers who engage in professional development experience increased professional motivation (Thoonen, et al., 2011). They serve as models of learning for students and, as teachers refine their craft, there is benefit to students (Borko, 2004, p. 3).

Desimone, (2009) outlines five characteristics for professional development: that it is content focused, involves active learning, is coherent, lasts for a prescriptive duration, and is characterized by collective participation (p. 183). Some current methods of professional development include strategies such as professional learning communities (PLCs), book study groups, traditional one-off or “episodic” (DuFour, 2014, p. 31) training sessions, collaborative study, curriculum development, and peer observation and feedback cycles.

Kisa and Correnti (2015) assert that traditional PD is ineffective because it is often too brief, disconnected, and decontextualized. Further, they note that current research suggests that more successful programs incorporate ongoing, authentic opportunities to expand growth, such as coaching, mentoring, and participatory action projects (p. 439). In a 2008 article, Hargreaves and Shirley offer suggestions for “bringing diverse people together to work skillfully and effectively for a common cause that lifts them up and moves them in the same direction” (p. 60) toward an end of school improvement. These “catalysts of coherence” (“sustainable leadership, networks of mutual learning, responsibility before accountability, and building from the bottom, steering from the top”) (p. 60) can be used as a framework to ensure that school administrators build strong, lasting foundations for staff development, but ultimately contribute to the success of America’s students. Klein and Riordan (2011) concur with this argument, suggesting that “[f]inding ways to engage teachers in active experimentation building on reflection will do much to support implementation of new content and experiential teaching methods” (p. 51). Thus,

themes from the literature emerge; teachers benefit most from experiences that allow them to self-design PD, to engage in authentic work in their process of development, and to have the opportunity to reflect on their process and practice. The research supports the benefits of high quality professional development on teacher practice and student achievement, but does not address how to scaffold their development process.

Agency, Andragogy, and Choice

The ability of teachers to learn and reflect is evident in improved practice, so perhaps the approach for greatest benefit for teacher learning is for administrators to include their voices in the planning of teachers' own growth, challenging them to become the best they can be. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) suggest:

The fine learning capacity of teachers is well documented, as is the wide range in developed repertoire and needs. As investments are made in professional development, we believe that supporting teachers as individuals is critically important. And the health of teachers as individual learners is basic to the health of the other models of staff development. The more individuals learn, the more they have to share, the better they are able to learn new curricular and instructional repertoire, and the more discriminating they are in selecting workshops in courses. (p. 32)

Research by Biesta, et al. (2015) suggests that teachers feel increasing pressure to view their roles differently, as facilitators of learning rather than dispensers of information, serving the needs of children first and content second. While this shift is not necessarily unwelcomed, at least among the participants of Biesta's study, it does indicate a need for a changed approach for developing the professional repertoire of educators. What moves a teacher into action is

agency—something the authors define as “not something that people can *have* – as a property, capacity or confidence – but is something that people *do*” (2015, p. 626). Further, the authors note that teacher agency is highly dependent upon the personal qualities that teachers bring to their work (Biesta, et al., 2015, p. 636). When teachers seize the opportunity to learn and grow, rather than just “engage in an exercise of compliance” (Calvert, 2016, p. 52), they become active participants in their personal development. Calvert observes, “[a]s teachers become aware of the importance of their agency, they must give themselves permission to lean into their own learning more often and more effectively” (p. 53). The literature suggests that if presented with the opportunity to engage in their process of learning, teachers will benefit from opportunities to reflect upon and refine their practice.

With regard to the development and growth of professional adults, it is important to note that individuals, because of their varied personal and professional experience, require different supports for growth. Drago-Severson (2009) believes that “[...] because we take in and experience our realities in very different ways, we need different types of support and challenges to grow,” (p. 8) while Buxton, et al. add that “a broad range of factors influence teacher agency and what they engage with and how to engage with professional development” (2015, p. 499). Thus, a mindfulness about the nature of adults’ varying experiences combined with a respect for their individual needs and desires for growth is an important perspective to bear in mind for administrators planning professional development programs and opportunities. Buxton, et al. further suggest that “[i]f one of our goals as researchers and teacher educators is to empower teachers to increase their tolerance for pushing against the structural forces that they find problematic to their pedagogical goals, then it seems necessary that we also empower teachers to make choices about their engagement in professional learning and their enactment of classroom

practices. (2015, p. 499), and in fact, Calvert's research supports this thinking. In her interviews, participants "[...]brightened as they expressed the value of being part of a nurturing professional community, connecting to the real work, and being treated as experts and decision makers" (2016, p. 53). Citing a 2014 report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Calvert also notes that "while fewer than one in three teachers choose most or all of their professional learning opportunities, teachers with more choice report much higher levels of satisfaction with professional development learners" (p. 53). Buxton, et al. further expound on the impacts of personal experience on decision making for professional growth, claiming that,

[...] our notion of teacher engagement in professional learning differs from treatment effectiveness for adherence to a program model in that engagement implies agency both in deciding *what* professional learning to engage in and *how* to engage with the work during the professional learning experiences, based on teachers' knowledge of and goals for their students. We argue that the various structural features, ranging from more malleable structures, such as school language policies and state teacher evaluation systems, to more deeply engrained sociohistorical structures, such as the influences of social class, race, and gender on the professionalization of teaching, all influence how, when, where, and with whom teachers will engage in professional learning and enact project practices in their classrooms. (p. 491)

Simply put, the individual professional and his or her personal and professional experiences matter and contribute to the individual's further development.

Biesta's work also serves as a counterweight and a caution to the limitations of individual agency, though. The study showed that,

[...]much teacher agency is shaped by short-term aspirations to check curricular boxes, deliver enjoyable lessons, keep students engaged and interested, and keep classes quiet and well behaved[; t]eachers are driven by goals in their work, but such goals often seem to be short term in nature, focusing on process rather than longer-term significance and impact (2015, p. 638).

The researchers suggest that “much teacher education may have become geared towards the instrumental side of the spectrum – that is, getting the job done – and has been steered away from a more intellectual engagement with teaching, at school and society” (p. 638). Balancing agency with a process that allows for identifying authentic needs through classroom observation (Zepeda, 2012, p. 69), paired with a cycle of inquiry, enactment, and reflection (Buxton, et al., 2015) will allow the professional development process to “[honor] the adult learner [...] to ensure a transfer of new knowledge into the land of practice. What the teacher does with new knowledge and skills is more important than the professional development activity that the teacher attended” (Zepeda, 2012, p. 49). So, in order to see lasting outcomes from professional learning, the literature suggests that administrators should honor teachers as learners, encouraging them to engage philosophically with the practice, rather than allow for the functional ins and outs of the role to dominate their individual professional development efforts.

Collaborative Professional Development

Although there is a need to individualize the experience in order to preserve motivation and potential for personalized experiences, there are times when professional development takes more collaborative forms, and in fact, can enhance the learning experience for some teachers. Colmer’s 2017 study illustrates the impact of collaborative frameworks on professional development:

Interdependent relationships existed between collaborative professional learning, the development of professional identity and the growth of leadership. Individual educators' professional identity reflected their perceptions about their situation, their access to PD and learning, their ability to be influential and their autonomy and agency in decision-making. Educators' agency was influenced by internal, contextual factors notably through professional relationships which were formed with their peers during collective professional learning. Collective professional learning enabled educators to work together capitalising on collective knowledge and fostering positive professional relationships among educators. (p. 447)

Colmer (2017) also noted that there was benefit in the reflection that occurred as a result of these collaborative opportunities to communicate with colleagues about teaching practice and that it enhanced the construction of shared meaning and purpose (p. 445).

Various models of high quality collaborative professional development exist. Wenger's (2000) community of practice model is characterized by grassroots assemblages of people working together largely as a function of shared interests. Wenger and Snyder suggest there is immense power to be harnessed in such groups, because they: help drive strategy, start new lines of business, solve problems quickly, transfer best practices, develop professional skills, and help companies recruit and retain talent (2000, p. 140). Nurturing communities of practice which are aligned with organizational goals can be a boon for organizations attempting to impact change, even if a slightly non-traditional approach to management.

Boyd and Glazier (2017) are strong advocates for collaborative, collegial discourse. They suggest that in times of great societal change, there is a need for teachers to move beyond patting the backs of one another, transforming professional development by creating frameworks that

challenge thinking among colleagues. Developing “critical colleagueship” is paramount for growth and the authors suggest that over time, as the dynamics of a group lead to increased levels of comfort, so too will the professional development experience become enriched by authentic conversation (Boyd and Glazier, 2017, p. 132).

Another popular model for improving teacher practice is the professional learning community, or ‘PLC’. Cherrington and Thornton (2015) suggest that PLCs are an effective model for teachers to improve practice, because as teachers move through stages of the PLC (p. 317), their professional growth is strengthened through the process of data-gathering and critical reflection (p. 326). The structural and relational conditions (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015) of PLCs paired with leadership that is distributed provides opportunities for teachers to make meaning, refine understanding, strengthen relationships, and share ownership of school initiatives. Providing opportunities to plan, grow, and learn together serve most importantly to build capacity among educators, and are an effective way to support professional growth.

Impact of Organizational Shifts on Andragogy

The challenge of leading organizational change. Burns (1978) states that the object of transactional leadership is:

[n]ot a joint effort for persons with common aims acting for the collective interests of followers but a bargain to aid the individual interests of persons or groups going their separate ways. [...] Leaders can also shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers through the vital *teaching* role of leadership. This is *transforming* leadership. (p. 425)

Burns also points out that the transactional leader is one who recognizes that followers can be leveraged as a means to complete some sort of outcome for the leader, even if he or she does not

benefit the collective good in doing so. But this is not necessarily the way leadership must be; in fact, there is a way (through transformational leadership) whereby the whole organization becomes greater than the sum of its parts, if managed correctly. In transformational leadership, there are opportunities to move beyond the simplistic exchange of inputs and outputs which characterize transactional leadership, in favor of *collective* efforts to see a vision through to its implementation, or even its end. This shift in approach means that leadership is inclusive and garners engagement among followers for long-term efficacy of change.

Even the best leaders inevitably face challenges and conflicts in their quests to change organizations, and transformational leadership is perhaps best characterized through this lens because measured reaction to tension is often the context in which a leader is judged. Heider (1985) suggests a strong strategy for leaders facing conflict: “[y]our strength is good intelligence: be aware of what is happening” (p. 137). It is this awareness which allows us to be considerate of the many factors impacting the turbulence of an organization (Shapiro and Gross, 2013) so that we may respond thoughtfully, ethically, and appropriately. What we show in these challenging moments can set the tone for our interactions with others, allowing us opportunity to enlist the help of others (Kouzes and Posner, 2006) to reach our shared goals.

Teachers, when faced with change, often will feel as though their competencies are challenged (Keesing-Styles, et al., 2014). This threat to their identity must be taken seriously, as organizations experiencing change benefit from considering the impact of change (Gross, 2013). Fullan offers the following (paraphrased) “key points about change:”

1. Change is (necessarily) messy.
2. Change is a response to disturbance—internal or external.
3. A variety of relational circumstances can affect the impact or process of change.

4. Stakeholders and culture are primary considerations.
5. Change can be understood or led, but not controlled.

In consideration of this threat to teacher identity, leaders should be aware of and recognize this perceived threat, seek to commit members of the organization to their cause and be patient through the implementation dip--or lag in performance as members of an organization adapt to the new way (Fullan, 2004). Cultivating relationships will increase the trust between parties (Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2004).

Impact of change on adult learners. In a study of teacher adaptation to educational reform, van der Berg and Schulze (2014) discuss the experiences of teachers facing educational reform, with emphasis on how the identities of teachers are shaped by both their personal and educational backgrounds (p. 73). They conclude that the teachers who were considered more “adaptive” to changing environments were those who ultimately proved to be more flexible, innovative, and willing to learn (p. 73). The authors also argue that teachers who are given a voice in the creation stages of policy are more likely to positively identify with the organizational change. This stands to reason that teacher voice is important not only for the benefit of institutional change, but also for the benefit of the teacher in enhancing the individual’s ability to engage in an adaptive process.

Conceptual Framework

In the context of a changing environment, individuals often question their own abilities and consider the personal impacts the change imparts upon them. Still, teachers must face the professional requirement of continued learning with support from administrators guiding their development. With appropriate support structures and practices informed by research, administrators may develop a thoughtful, well-rounded growth plan for educators. Further,

through attentive consultation with individuals, a clearer needs-based professional development program may be developed, lessening the anxieties of the participants involved in the organization as it transforms.

Drago-Severson (2009, p. 24) proposes “learning-oriented leadership” as a growth model, characterized by four “pillar practices for growth” which include teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring. The benefits of teaming, Drago-Severson says, are that professionals are presented with the opportunity to reflect upon their practice in implementing a school’s vision, and have the opportunity to compare their interpretations and experience to that of their colleagues. The intent is to foster reflective growth. In providing adults with leadership roles, Drago-Severson addresses the issue of agency. She says, “[a]s adults, we grow from being responsible for an idea’s development or implementation, as well as from different opportunities to assume leadership” (p. 25). There is agency required in this model; Drago-Severson’s leadership roles require that the leadership role is an active one of engagement with followers to fully understand the relationship and perspectives of others. The third practice, engaging in collegial inquiry is an opportunity for teachers to self-analyze and reflect upon their practice collaboratively in dialogue with a colleague, exploring their work and processing new requirements of their teaching roles. Lastly, mentoring is characterized by Drago-Severson as: “safe contexts in which adults are supported and challenged as they articulate their own thinking, assumptions, and reflections in an open way and listen to and learn from each other’s perspectives” (p. 223).

All of these practices have some relational aspect that allows the professional a variety of ways to reflect upon and address the process of professional growth as a member of an organization. But they also require initiative on the part of the professional—something that may

be compromised by times of a sense of insecurity, or organizational change. As a means of contextualizing the work in which professional educators engage, and in recognizing that this growth happens within a greater organizational sphere, consider Gross' turbulence theory. The first factor Gross details is what he refers to as positionality. According to Gross (p. 45), various groups of stakeholders in an organization will experience turbulence or change differently. Further, they can and do experience change differently from within each of their respective groups. The situation of the individual stakeholder is defined as positionality. Gross suggests that leaders should not presume reactions or stances of these stakeholders, but rather be open to understanding the nuances of each respective person. It is worth noting that the illustrative example given to describe positionality is a set of objects in a river experiencing the impact of the river's current. Proximity to the movement is important in the scope of impact, and this speaks more concretely to the nuance with which leaders should approach their assessment of stakeholders. Further, it illustrates the possibility for ripple effects among stakeholders. Though someone at the banks of the river may not feel as directly the impacts of change, in the right conditions, they could be severely impacted. Likewise, even those along the edges may observe some effects from events occurring along the path; the impact varies.

The second factor Gross discusses is the cascading nature of turbulence. Cascading involves the many parts of change which contribute to an overall feeling of turbulence, and in actuality is a series of complicating events which create dynamic environments for the turbulence to continue to occur. While the intent is likely to suggest the flowing, constantly increasing energy comprising the nature of turbulence, the nomenclature of this factor is deceiving. This is not ideal term for what is described, because the term implies a smooth and

somewhat positive sounding experience, where the action (as described in the metaphor) is anything but. Rather, it is exacerbating or aggravating to any existing turbulence.

Lastly, the third factor described within turbulence theory is the stability of the organization. Gross suggests that the stability of an organization is something fairly static and defined by a period of history prior to the onset of turbulence. Stability refers not to the rigidity of the organization, Gross says, but rather its ability to respond to the forces which influence it. Gross argues that the most stable organizations are those which are “confident” and “respond in measured, flexible ways” (p. 48). An organization’s ability to react, adjust, and remain flexible is paramount to its success when turbulence threatens its existence.

Conclusion

This research is shaped in part by the literature on professional development for teachers and changing organizational conditions. In thinking about a professional’s response to the impetus of change, it is important for administrators to consider ways of structuring their approach to meeting the developmental needs of adults in a school setting. The literature suggests that professional development currently takes many forms but could be improved if it were more inclusive of teacher input, focused on the craft of teaching rather than the logistics of the job, and collaborative in nature. Further, it may be enhanced by opportunities for this specific group of adult learners to engage in mentoring and reflection practices.

The research cited here suggests that restructuring the approach to professional development to be more collaboratively designed and teacher-driven will bolster professional growth among staff, regardless of their current abilities and motivations. Of particular note are the pillars of practice which provide adult learners with frameworks for development that encourage agency and choice. The final element within the literature review was the literature on

organizational disruption, which provides the opportunity to address teachers' perceptions about their professional needs within a context of a changing environment. School leaders who maintain an awareness of the implications of change on adult development and adjust to individual needs will see greater professional growth. The intent of the study is to better understand the effects of change on individuals, but also to seek a path forward for adult learners impacted by that disruptive organizational change.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This research draws upon qualitative data gathered at an independent school in New England, where teachers face increasing accountability for improving their practice and strengthening their pedagogy and methods. In this study, a representative group of teachers was identified to participate with the intent of providing a well-rounded picture of the faculty experience. The analysis is drawn from research on andragogy in an educational setting and focuses on Drago-Severson's four pillars of practice and Gross' turbulence theory.

Setting

This action research study was conducted at a school where all nine participants are employed as teachers. The school is an independent town academy which educates students in grades 6-12. The researcher was responsible for conducting various threads of professional development throughout the last five years at this school and is currently assigned to coordinate all areas of faculty professional development. Concurrently, expectations for instruction are in the process being redefined and raised. Participants who meet the study criteria of creating a range of typified faculty provide a well-rounded look at a cross-section of teaching constituencies in the school— among the nine upper school teachers are traditionally trained educators, teachers who are not traditionally trained but who have experience as educators, teachers who are and are not alumni of the school, and teachers who have both taught elsewhere and not taught elsewhere. These teachers are all regarded among their peers as dedicated, effective professionals in their own unique ways. A series of interviews was conducted in the Spring and early Summer of 2018.

Participants/Sample

The research was conducted using a small, representative sample so that it could be focused and representative of the range of teachers' professional preparation. The nine specific participants were chosen because collectively, they are representative of the faculty in terms of the characteristics mentioned earlier. All of the participants are well-respected among their colleagues and are highly motivated, well-respected among all stakeholders of the school, and are considered to be reflective teachers. Their interviews provide a richly detailed narrative that is beneficial to the field of educational research.

Among the sample was a representative distribution of what were identified as key components attributed to the diversity among staff. In total, there were five women and four men, two each from math and history, one from English, two from Science, two from foreign language, and one from fine arts. The participants ranged in length of experience from seven to thirty-three years, and earned degrees in every range from Bachelor of Arts to a majority holding Master's degrees, and five participants with some post graduate work, two culminating in Certificates of Advanced Study. A range of school-type experience was achieved as well; some have only taught at the research site, while others have taught in traditional private school environments as well as in public schools in Maine and other states. One person in the sample has taught at University level, and one person is an alumnus of the school.

Data

All of the interviews were given at the research site, in the researcher's office or a nearby classroom, in a private setting, during or immediately following the participant's work day. Interviews ranged in time from approximately twenty minutes to upwards of an hour, and were candid in nature. Using Drago-Severson's collegial inquiry as the strategy for interviews, the

researcher sought to determine the participants' professional goals and determine what they feel they need in order to accomplish those goals. Interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of past experiences which have led participants to their present professional situations. Interview questions are listed in Appendix A.

In the process of data collection, open-ended questions were asked while electronically recording audio and later transcribed each of the oral interviews. Participants were provided the opportunity and encouraged to review the data collected in their individual interview, and were offered an opportunity to make adjustments or additions to the data if they felt inclined to do so. This was a measure to increase accuracy. Raw data in the form of recordings and notes were electronically maintained in a secure location and accessed only by the researcher and the contributing participant.

Analysis

Initially, the study was designed with fewer participants. After two of the interviews occurred, a preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted, and it was determined that the sample was disproportionately skewed—veteran staff were underrepresented, and so the sample was increased to nine participants. Participants were interviewed by the researcher in Spring and Summer of 2018. Transcripts of interviews were generated electronically, edited by the researcher for format, readability, and to compensate for faulty electronic transcription.

The initial coding began with a review for patterns. The data were then analyzed with constructed codes—that is emergent patterns generated by in vivo coding, as well as codes supported by the literature (ie.: four pillars of practice, impact of change, self-identified areas for growth, etc.). Once open coding was complete, another round of codes included of perceived benefit from specific type (pillar) of PD, nature of commentary on the impact of change, self

identified strengths and weaknesses, personal goals, desires/needs for PD. At this point, the coded data presented as “responsive to the purpose of the research,” “exhaustive,” “mutually exclusive,” and “conceptually congruent” (Merriam, 2009, p. 185) and so could be categorized. Once categorization began, themes which aligned with the literature were identified. Thus, next steps included an analysis of data using the lens of Gross’ theory and Drago-Severson’s four pillars to examine features of professional development desired by teachers experiencing change, which served to inform emergent themes. Lastly, the researcher analyzed and coded the transcripts using the lens of the research questions, influenced by the theoretical framework. An iterative analysis of the data occurred to ensure no gaps existed, in addition to the data having been member-checked by participants to ensure the validity of transcripts and data. Priority was placed on ensuring that participant experiences were accurately depicted in the final narrative and comments as unidentifiable as possible through the use of pseudonyms.

Participant Rights

Participants in the study were informed about the intent of the study, completed consent forms, and were participants in validation of the data collected and presented. There was potential benefit to these participants, because the researcher’s role in the organization is to provide them with access to professional development resources to meet their professional goals. A better understanding of their perspectives and needs for relevant and desirable professional development is likely to professionally serve them especially well. Lastly, in an attempt to keep personal details discreet, pseudonyms were used in reporting on the data.

Potential Limitations

Although the researcher is an administrator with oversight of the participants’ work, she does not have a disciplinary role with regard to their employment. The researcher maintains good

working relationships with all of the participants and expected to gain insight that might otherwise be difficult to obtain. The researcher acknowledges the possibility that these relationships could ultimately skew data collection, and as a result, all necessary precautions (i.e., member-checking and collaborative work with participants) were taken to ensure that the data is as reliable as possible. The researcher also remained cognizant of the potential for participants to offer discussion points which are biased by ensuring interviews were conducted in neutral language that did not encourage them to respond with undue favorability to shared past experiences.

Further, the fact that this is a focused qualitative study means that the sample size is limited. In an attempt to gather detailed perspectives from a select group of teachers, the research was conducted with a small sample size. Although there are few participants within specific subsets of the greater faculty, the intent was to collect results that are representative of the whole faculty and relatively transferable. A range of years of experience, school type experience, certification history, and content area are represented, contributing to rich sample characteristics, despite the small sample size.

CHAPTER FOUR

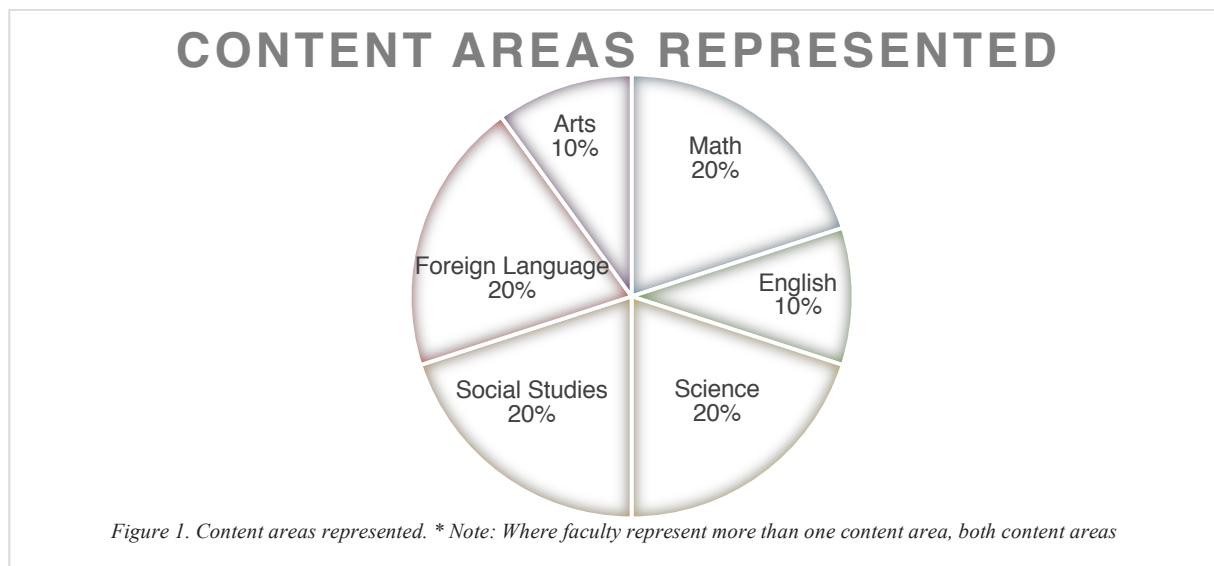
FINDINGS

This study aimed to report upon the formative experiences of educators, to describe their preferences related to professional development, and present their goals for growth in the context of changing expectations. Aligned with the framework of the research presented herein, the findings of this study are reported. Described within this chapter are the methods of analysis used for the study, as well as a detailed report of the findings, presented as outcomes related to each research question. In reporting the findings, Drago-Severson's four pillars: teaming, leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring were used as a priori themes. Organizational change is addressed as a supporting theme, followed by a concluding theme of preferred methods of professional development.

Participants

The site of the study is a 9-12 high school with a staff of 102 teachers. The researcher reviewed the pool of possible participants that included 102 teachers, representing departments including English, Fine Arts, Foreign Language, History/Social Studies, Math, Science, Technology and New Media, and Wellness. The research sample was designed to achieve representation from as many demographic populations as possible, with consideration given to length of service, nature of previous experience, variety of discipline, and a balance of both genders. A representative sample of the tenured faculty at the research site were invited to participate, and there was an assumption that some were more likely to participate based on previous interactions with the researcher. Every participant invited to participate did so. The following figures (1 & 2) illustrate characteristics of the sample. In figure 1, the whole of the sample is broken into the areas represented by each department. The sample is exclusive of

representation from the Technology and New Media department, which is the smallest in the school and had undergone the loss of one of its teachers during the school year, reducing the department to two full-time members at the time of the study.



Data were collected in the Spring of 2018, in interviews consisting of seven questions as initially proposed (see Appendix A). The questions were derived from Drago-Severson's proposed four pillar practices of professional development and were intended to prompt participants as they shared their thoughts about the types of professional development they have experienced as teachers with varying types and lengths of service and education. A follow-up question about the impact of change on the individual (Gross) and perceptions of the individual's assessment of impact on colleagues was also asked. Both of these theoretical frameworks provided a guide for the interview questions, as well as a basis for organizing the resulting content in the interview transcripts.

Analysis Method

After the data were transcribed, participants were electronically provided with the raw transcription data and invited to correct the record and/or make any pertinent additions to the

data. No corrections or additions were requested. An inductive approach to coding was used. The researcher read through the transcripts on multiple occasions, first with an open coding method, and in later rounds of coding seeking to identify emergent themes.

Finally, these emergent themes were categorized to reflect relevance to the respective lens of the theoretical underpinnings of Drago-Severson and Gross. Initial rounds of coding were conducted directly on the transcript, and once themes were established, a spreadsheet was created by developing a matrix of each participant's demographic and experiential information as well as his/her commentary as it related to the themes and questions. Once the major findings relating to each question emerged, one last search for keywords in the raw text was run to ensure none of the important pieces of data were lost among the raw data.

Responses to Interview Questions

The interview questions were organized around the four pillars of teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. The responses were therefore reflective of each of the four pillars. Emphasis on any pillar in particular was left up to the participant to make, and some participants chose to speak at length about some, but little about others. The data were initially coded for the aforementioned demographic categories, each of the four pillars, responses related to the perceived impact of change, and preferred characteristics of PD. Accompanying subthemes are presented below, in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Six emergent themes and corresponding subthemes.

A primary objective was to understand the past experiences of the teachers who participated. Each participant was asked a couple of demographic questions about his or her certification status, education, and whether he/she had teaching experience prior to working in this organization. Research suggests that the kinds of professional development opportunities the participant previously experienced influences their beliefs about current experiences. That prompt provided the opportunity for the participant to later refer to past experience when answering the questions related to the theoretical underpinning of the four pillars and the

perception of change. Figure 3 illustrates the composition of the sample; the teachers represented in blue stem are certified by the state of Maine, green represents those who are not certified. The middle branch represents the highest degree earned, and the outer leaf shows the nature of previous teaching experience. Each outer leaf represents one participant. Research about certification impacts on student achievement are contradictory, but this is a variable at the site that suggests a level of professional preparation (useful or otherwise) that deserves mention.

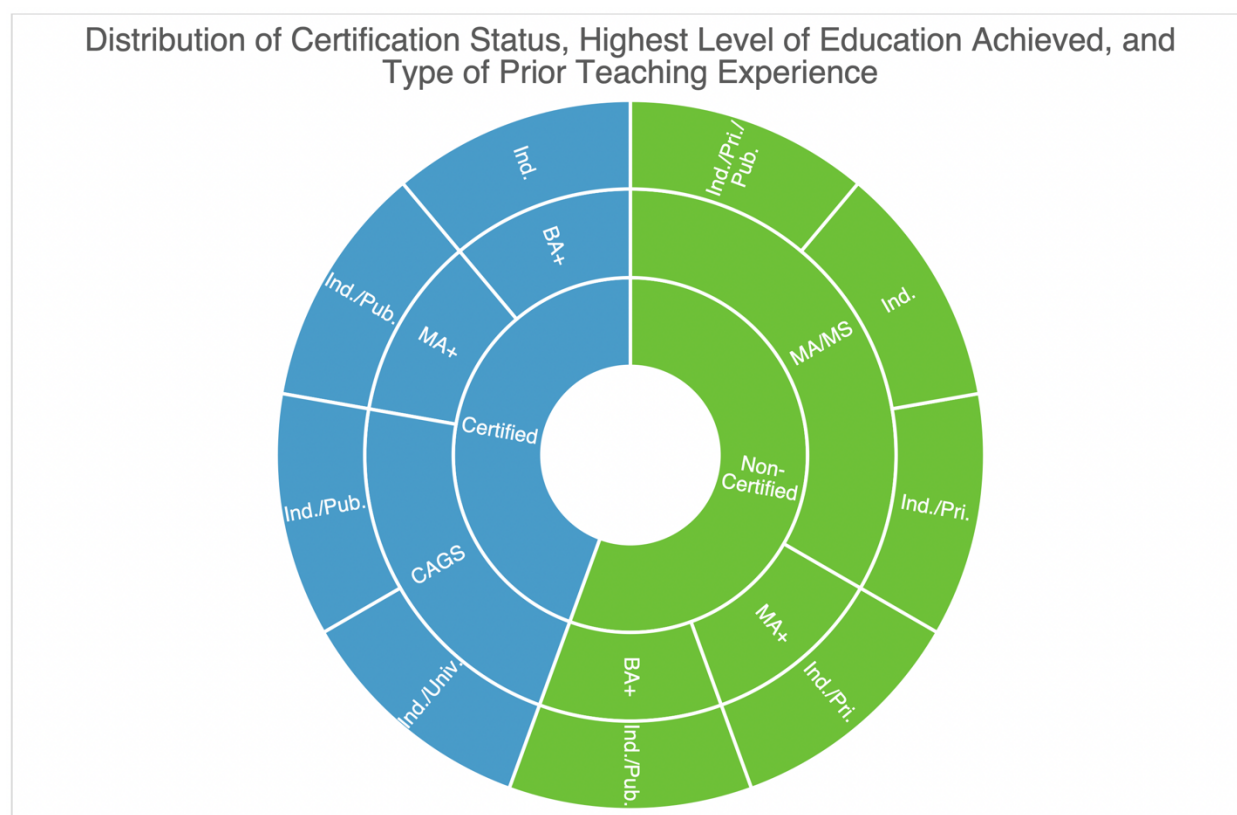


Figure 3. Key: Certification referenced in the stem is Maine State Teacher Certification. In the middle branch, highest degree earned (BA, MA/MS, Certificate of Advanced Study (CAGS), with + to indicate study beyond the degree. The outer leaf represents the nature of previous experience for the given teacher (Univ.=university, Ind.=independent school, Pri.=private school, Pub.=public school.)

After the demographic backgrounds were documented, the participants were asked more directly about their opinions related to the pillars, their perception of the change the school was undergoing, their strengths and weaknesses, and professional goals. In the next section, six themes are presented and analyzed through the use of excerpts of participant responses: each of

the four pillars are presented as themes, as well as two additional themes of the impact of change and preferred modes of PD.

Teaming

Drago-Severson (2009) describes teaming as a way that school leaders can encourage teachers to collectively “own” the success of their students and team, engage in reflective practice, and promote individual and school development. She says that teaming “opens communication, decreases isolation, builds interdependent relationships, and supports adult development” (p. 71).

Although not present at this site, the practice of teaming is one that participants have found positive benefit with in their past experiences. One participant, Ruby, said that although it was never her experience at this school (because she teaches a subject that is multi-grade), she often wished she was able to be teamed, because the benefit of shared time with colleagues to connect about student achievement seemed (to her) to be something she missed out on often, despite her efforts to connect with teams—it was simply an impossibility due to schedule constraints. Ruby shared, “...if there’s something that I miss about my old school, it’s that.” She continued, “The collaboration forced me to be a better teacher because it wasn’t just me in my classroom. [...T]he focus was truly on each student and the way we all as a group best served them. And so we had to let go in some ways of our own pride and our own ego to do so.” Ruby noted that the process not only affected the success of her students, but also the focus of the professionals on the team. Ruby’s response echoed others who were similarly given the charge to meet with team colleagues and focus on students in predictable and recurrent opportunities in which to reflect on practice.

One participant, a math teacher, noted that while teaming at the high school level makes a lot of sense for connecting about specific students and is extremely helpful for the team, this participant felt as though it can be exclusionary for disciplines like math, where students are often tracked by ability, and thus off-team. Should a problem arise, it can be difficult to track down the appropriate team, and rarely does a math teacher share the same prep period—opportunity to connect—with the rest of the teachers on the team.

Another teacher, Nate, looked back on his formative years in preservice work. Although he was not initially fond of the idea of being teamed with other teachers, through experience, he now recognizes how little he currently engages in the practice. He shares his perspective below.

[...A]t the time when I wanted to find out who I was as a teacher, I was disappointed because it was now this shared experience and I didn't feel I would really be able to reflect on myself with my own mark on that classroom. But now having spent years and years on my own in a room there are close to no chances to reflect with other people, to have somebody else in your room and talk about what you're doing.

Nate noted that he was happy to recently have been paired with another teacher in one of his classes because “it's been great to bounce ideas back and forth constantly about what's happening in the room.” This teacher's sentiments about an initial reticence to engage in work where teachers could potentially feel vulnerable was echoed throughout all of the findings. When discussing his opinions on the new ASP workgroup format, a participant named Carl candidly noted, “it wasn't like every time I saw my calendar I was like 'yes!' But once we're in here, you know, when it's a half hour, 45 minutes like that, I really benefit from that [conversation with colleagues], big time.” Another participant, Elizabeth, is an outlier in terms of the content she teaches—the only one at the school. For her, teaming was exemplified by the ASP groups as well

because they are an opportunity to source ideas from others in other disciplines in the school. She said, “my group is [comprised of] mostly Special Ed [teachers] and people who don't really teach in a classroom setting the same way that I do, and getting to hear their perspectives and getting to work together to talk about different things that happen in the school has been really eye opening. And it's made me think about what I do in a different way.”

The responses of many of participants throughout the interviews suggests that teachers are reluctant to engage in work that *forces* them to collaborate, yet in every case when a participant mentioned initial discomfort with a collaborative approach to PD, ultimately they found the experiences enriching and valuable. Participants noted that there is discomfort in new or unexpected pairings with colleagues they know little about sharing their personal opinions with, or exposing professional weaknesses. Responses suggested that when the conversation is less structured and more open, there is greater opportunity to reflect on one's practice and connect to fellow colleagues.

The responses of participants support Drago-Severson's assertion that “individual change is a precursor to organizational change, and reflective practice supports both” (p. 76). Their experiences highlight the ways that connecting and collaborating with colleagues benefits not only their personal experiences, but also their professional growth and enhances the experience of their students.

Leadership Roles

This second theme from the four pillars, providing adults with leadership roles, was included as part of the interview and was intended to document teachers' thoughts about whether they found benefit from being provided with opportunities to fulfill leadership roles. The practice of providing adults with leadership roles is one which ultimately inspires distributed leadership

within an organization, but Drago-Severson (2009) clarifies that the concept is really about developing leaders as individuals in the roles that are provided. She says that these opportunities “support learning, build capacity, and positive school climates, decrease isolation, nurture relationships, and support adult development.” The participants concur, in a variety of ways. The sample included participants whose experience across their teaching careers (at this school and others) allowed them to be among those serving in a variety of leadership roles: departmental leadership positions, mentor teams, new staff, grade-level, curriculum, community-building, and technology leaders.

Carl, who was reminded in the interview that he did in fact currently hold a leadership role, reflected briefly, and noted that the benefits were unexpected. The opportunity had given him a chance to see colleagues in a new light. A person he otherwise would never have interacted with was now a fairly regular point of contact and although he and some colleagues are unlikely to mesh in the same social circles, he now has great respect for these very different peers because they support the same cause and have become humanized in these interactions that are a result of his taking on the leadership role. Another participant, Hank, a strong and highly regarded leader in the school, took a different approach to the prompt and spoke not only of his own experience, but also of how it develops others as well. He opined,

[Leadership roles] kind of push us out of our comfort zones and force us to grow in ways that we may not have opted for without sort of being pushed to that. And I think of people I've seen who were in, from what I could see no official leadership role, and then sort of thrust on a pretty big one and you can see them sort of transform... level of confidence and kind of become a different persona professionally, or publicly at least. I think of the leaders I've seen over the years with the [accreditation] process who kind of

get plucked from wherever and suddenly they're running a multi-year big deal process with 100 to 200 people. It always pulls in more than teachers.

Andrea, a teacher with public school experience in addition to working at the research site, pointed out that access to opportunities for leadership “depend on where you’re at.” She spoke favorably of the conditions at the independent school, saying, “I feel here we have more of a chance to be a leader and people want you to be a part of the school and the community in a public school setting. It’s more of who you know and how you can actually get into those leadership roles.” Ron, a participant who has taken on multiple leadership roles at the research site, shared two examples of his leadership at a previous (private) school: a role he created to more formally mentor new-to-the-school staff, and another role as a member of the school’s academic leadership team. He shared that the experience was “very good for me though too-- to learn a lot about the way that schools worked and also how to motivate faculty. At the same time without making them too worried about [a shift in the] hierarchy.” Ruby shared that she felt as though the changes the school is undergoing create an opportunity for her to lead. She said the changes have “forced me to refocus on what I do in the classroom, to push myself past my comfort zone in some areas. [...]I’m willing to work with others and push myself to change in terms of how I am with colleagues. I try to be a mentor. And while that’s outside the classroom, I think it only helps my skills in the classroom.”

Drago-Severson suggests that with both opportunity and support, leaders will emerge and become crucial players in addressing the burden of leadership in changing times for schools. She also suggests that leaders can help become advocates for the collective mission among their peers, strengthening the reach of a leader’s communication and influence (2009, p. 111). The responses from participants indicated sometimes unexpected benefits of growth and insight

gained from leadership opportunities. Whether provided with leadership roles or creating their own, teachers agree that leadership opportunities give them new identities and new means to interact with their peers and forge a path of growth on their own.

Collegial Inquiry

Drago-Severson defines collegial inquiry as “a shared dialogue that involves reflecting on one’s assumptions, values, commitments, and convictions with others as part of the learning process” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 26). She expands the definition to include contexts which support teachers in collaboratively thinking through their practice, both in planning and reflection. Drago-Severson suggests that these opportunities provide educators with the chance to analyze their approach to teaching for the greater individual and collective good.

One participant, Ron, agreed, sharing that he has had multiple experiences of work being enhanced by this kind of collaboration. At his former school (a much smaller, private school), he was granted the opportunity to work as part of a leadership team which afforded him the opportunity to observe others in practice. At the research site, a grassroots technology-focused group (referred to by the group’s self-selected name, the Nerd Herd) has been supported previously by the school’s IT department and the researcher. This participant (and others) identified this group as being beneficial, in part because it provides an opportunity for teachers to get together around a common interest, with a lot of unstructured time, allowing for conversational interactions around technology use in the classroom. Often, the Nerd Herd group also supported greater PD needs by periodically sharing their experience with other faculty by delivering PD sessions around a specific skillset. Ron shared that [as Drago-Severson (2009) suggests] the experience for his students was enhanced by the process. When he delivered instructional content to peers in a formal PD setting, it provided him with the opportunity to

reflect upon his own practice, identify why he was using the instructional technology strategy in the classroom, and articulate it for the benefit of colleagues.

Another participant, Ruby, briefly highlighted three vastly different ways she has engaged in collegial inquiry: through Nerd Herd, in interdisciplinary work with another department, and in accessing a community of like-minded educators in a self-curated professional learning network (PLN) on Twitter. Rebecca--the most experienced participant in the sample--noted that while she found great benefit in ASP meetings because it “felt like, you know, people were listening,” she finds collaborative opportunities are dwindling, “because class size has grown so much. I mean we have big classes, and with big classes, it means you have a real mix of students in every class with a lot of demanding needs.”

Opportunities that teachers associated with collegial inquiry were activities like observation of peers, impromptu conversations about the practice and new initiatives, and time to reflect either with or about engagement with others in a professional context, and although they are regarded as beneficial, making time for them can be difficult. For Ruby, Ron, Carl, and Rebecca, instances where they were provided with opportunities to engage in collegial inquiry was likely the most valuable time spent in PD, but multiple participants acknowledged that taking the time to engage in these conversational, less formal or scheduled activities doesn't come as a priority, especially when undertaken voluntarily. Drago-Severson reminds us, though, that the process of inquiry and reflection help us refine our thinking and “create space for growth” (2009, p. 161) and so teachers may be encouraged to continue seeking these opportunities.

Mentoring

Drago-Severson suggests that mentoring programs can vary fairly significantly in both type (principal, teacher, etc.) and in focus. These relationships are both impactful to career and relational aspects of the development of teaching professionals. The data gathered here support that. In one case, a participant identified a formal mentoring program which the research site supports. Primarily characterized as career-based development that is largely a support for the state teacher certification pathway, the school leadership also makes recommendations to faculty who are new to teaching and/or the school for support. In the state of Maine, a teacher is professionally certified when he or she has shown to meet the prescribed standards of certification with approval from a certified mentor, usually after two years. Teachers at the site receive a continuing contract after three years, so most who are mentored are engaged in this supportive process for two to three years. Although the relationship is career development-focused, psychosocial benefits are realized as well. At the site, mentoring often will serve the purpose of socializing the teacher into the school. Balci et. al., (2016) suggest that in private schools especially, historical context is important to understanding the inner workings of the organization. One participant (and member of the school's mentoring team) said that her message to mentees is this: "Our job is to guide you and be your support system. And you can come to me and come to my classroom anytime and I'm there to help you. And I don't share what I see and what I write with anybody on the administrative team has nothing to do with hire/fire. And they breathe a deep sigh of relief when they hear that." Vumilia and Semali (2016) assert that this is a key part of effective mentoring—a relationship that is truly supportive in nature. Hank, who also identified strongly with mentoring as a beneficial PD practice said, "...it really forces a lot of conversations about practice and provides a platform for a lot of questions that

people might not otherwise think of or feel comfortable asking an administrator or department chair.” This mentoring program is not run or administered by the school’s administrative team, nor is it evaluative in nature, except for clearance for the state’s certification expectations. Although the school has a formal Observation, Supervision, Evaluation, and Feedback team (OSEF is mostly comprised of administrators), participants found the mentoring structure to be a good balance for teachers to have lower-stakes oversight and input from peers.

Elizabeth, a teacher whose only teaching experience is at the research site, said that she found benefit in the variety of mentoring opportunities the school provides. She has found her department chair to be a wealth of knowledge and very supportive of her growth. And while the formal administrative observation provided benefit to her as well, she found the most beneficial mentoring experience to come from a member of the school’s mentoring team. Her mentor, a middle school teacher, could not access the content in Elizabeth’s classes, and offered pedagogy-only feedback as a result. Elizabeth said that the combination of her mentor being a more distant colleague (by virtue of teaching in the middle school building) and having no knowledge of the content itself contributed to a more “direct and honest” approach to feedback.

Hank shared that he felt teachers benefited from mentoring experiences which exposed teachers to multiple mentors. He candidly shared that for novice teachers especially, “[i]t can be hard to recognize that [feedback is from] one quirky person or one helpful person whatever happens to be. But if you're working with a couple of others as well that balance maybe one of the three can talk you off the ledge from what other person of the three got you to that window to begin with.” Another participant, Claire, shared that in another school she experienced mentoring by nature of teachers engaged in a classroom observation cycle. Teachers in that public school would be trained as observers, and visit the classrooms of colleagues, sharing informal feedback

about what they saw with the teacher they observed. This allowed for the opportunity for both parties to reflect and relate to the practice, and was a practice Claire liked.

Drago-Severson (2009) reminds us (p. 222) that mentoring relationships are meant to provide an environment for growth through support, challenge, and mindfulness about the experience of both parties. The responses support this thinking; each participant who elaborated on mentoring as a highlight of his or her experience noted the benefit of these rich interactions among professionals, opportunities to make meaning of their experiences in the field and challenge assumptions about the profession (p. 224). The participants in this study shared the variety of ways they have engaged in the mentoring process, agreeing that the greatest benefit is building a relationship with another professional that feels less formal and more supportive—even when the mentor has no access to the content of the mentee. These interactions facilitate reflection and meaning-making that is essential to the professional growth process.

Impact of Change

Over the past few years, the culture of the school has changed, and could be characterized as “moderate” according to Gross’ “Completed Turbulence Gauge,” because there is “widespread awareness of the issue” (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 18). The school’s administrative team has asked more of the teaching faculty, especially along the lines of refining curriculum and collaborating with colleagues to achieve that goal. Gross’ cautions that context is important when judging the impact of change on an organization, and three areas he describes as “relevant issues of context” are characterized as “cascading, relationships among key individuals, and the current stability or volatility of the organization” (p. 54). Ruby provides a summary of the changes, and the context given the changes, stating,

I have two understandings of the changes. Number one I see what it is as somewhat the official stance of what the change includes which is looking at S.A.T. scores and trying to align what we do in the classroom so S.A.T. scores are more matching to what our students do. You know like any school--to raise the scores. Second, what I tend to see as a little bit more philosophically, is a stronger shift to examining what goes on in individual classrooms. So that our students are getting a more standardized education. And I don't mean that in a negative way whatsoever. So that as a school we have more defined standards of what a student needs to graduate. And S.A.T. scores tend to sort of be the touchstone in our shift is to create a more coherent, consistent experiences for students.

Although Ruby said she was comfortable with change and that it positively affected her, she added more detail to that point, stating,

It's forced me to refocus on what I do in the classroom, to push myself past my comfort zone in some areas. But in truth it is also giving me some leadership opportunities that I really value because it's going to eventually bring more positive collaboration to what we do which I think is necessary to be a good teacher at least on my end.

When pressed to characterize the impact of change around her, she further described the impact on her colleagues, describing a mix of reactions. She shares,

I think there are people who do see it as a positive but they perhaps are the quieter voices. We have a very vocal [faculty] and sometimes the voices heard are the ones that are not happy--or uncomfortable might be a better word, with the changes the school is undergoing. So that can lead, in truth, to some difficulty even for me in trying to apply

the changes to the classroom and trying to get the collaboration that can be positive and enriching--but it does happen.

Ruby thought more on the topic and ultimately said she felt as though the change had to occur in smaller groups, outside the larger conversations with louder voices. It wasn't this particular change that she felt caused this sort of reaction, but rather the fact that any change was a threat to autonomy—something that teachers often share is the school's "greatest benefit, and greatest weakness."

None of the participants characterized their own experiences with change as negative and of those who were aware of the change, all understood why the new direction was necessary or beneficial to the school. One participant, Nate, said, "I would characterize these changes as challenging for a number of different reasons. But I think a challenge is good and I do think we need to be pushed to grow. We enjoy our autonomy here but maybe not autonomy to change and maybe our autonomy to stay exactly where we are." Three of the participants either directly noted or alluded to the fact that others around them appeared to be struggling in similar ways. Like Ruby, Elizabeth feels comfortable with change and has found it easy, while her colleagues seem

much more reluctant to want to engage with the process, which I don't quite understand. [...] I have had a couple conversations with people who I think I would describe as being like stuck in a rut kind of, like if I'm being purposely blunt about it. Like, some people who I think maybe need to change their practices or reflect on what they do [based on what I have seen through a supportive role with students]. [...] The people that I gravitate towards the most and who I talk to the most at school are the people who are willing to try new things, even if they kind of fall on their face, you know. Like I think a lot of who

I will have those kind of organic PD moments with are the people who are open to the process and want to be able to reflect differently and change things up, and are open to the idea but then there are so many teachers that have been there for a while and they want to redo the same thing or do what they've always been doing.

But there were some teachers who experienced less of an impact including Carl, who was unclear about the question because it wasn't really on his radar that an organizational shift was underway. He struggled to identify an impact on him professionally, and ultimately determined that the shift was manifested as a slight increase on the "paperwork" end of teaching. This might have been due to the fact that he felt the change was happening for good reason and hadn't noticed any effect. After prompting and clarification about the change, he reasoned,

Those things [discussions about aligning curriculum and instruction] I think are all moving in the right direction as far as, you know, what's best for best for kids and how we can benefit them most in the classroom. Yeah. There wasn't a lot of stuff that came out of the ASP [meetings] that I was like, 'that's ridiculous.' I thought that was good.

Carl's reflective process is supported by Gross, too. On p. 56, Gross reminds the reader that change and resulting turbulence are dynamic, and that when we consider the relationships among constituents (in Carl's example, he references new groupings in the ASPs), we see that these changing contexts present opportunities for the impact of change to shift as well. Claire saw something similar, and described joining the faculty to find that other teachers seemed content with what they were doing. Her comments suggested that at the time she joined the faculty (around the initial shift), teacher autonomy was the norm and that she "wasn't in a place to question" the lack of action toward developing common assessments and curriculum, as requested by school leadership. Claire's perception is that the change has now been realized.

Ultimately, the responses from participants varied greatly with regard to the impact of change. For some, the change was barely noticeable, while for others it was perceived as necessary and justified, even though it was challenging. The responses speak to the theory—that the perceived impact is dependent on a variety of factors. The positionality of the individual—part of a department actively engaged in making meaning of the change, for example—could affect perceptions about the change, and the comments from participants support this thinking.

Preferred Modes of Professional Development

Late in the interviews, participants were asked to identify characteristics of professional development experiences they found favorable. DeSimone (2009, p. 182) suggests that “teachers experience a vast range of activities and interactions” which should be considered professional development, despite their sometimes unstructured nature. In fact, the responses from teachers in this study support that assertion, as all of the participants identified casual, just-in-time conversations with colleagues as beneficial. Multiple participants said that these occurrences characterize the most beneficial PD they had experienced. Participants identified a wide range of desires for their own growth, and all fit into the proposed conceptual framework set forth by DeSimone (2009, p. 185).

All of the participants said or suggested meaningful experiences with PD provide an organic environment to interact with colleagues and explore ideas and strategies together. In most of the interviews, PD already happening on campus was discussed, and the participants who mentioned these groups reported that the supportive nature (Nerd Herd) and “organic” conversations with a direct line to administrators (Academic Strategic Plan groups) to be positives in achieving forward motion with their individual growth and an understanding about the school’s direction.

One last question participants were asked was about their individual identification of strengths and weaknesses, which precipitated a conversation about professional goals and how the school could support them in achieving those goals. As in other questions, there was a range of answers. Self-reported strengths included content-area knowledge, ability to connect with students, willingness to learn, acceptance of change, and adaptability both as a teacher in a classroom environment, and in professional expectations. The participants as a whole identified some of the same items as weaknesses: classroom management, self-isolation, and content area knowledge as areas of weakness. Additional concerns were related to technology, differentiation, and what could be characterized as management of both time and healthy levels of commitment to the work. Although these areas are easily achievable through DeSimone's "core features," (2009, p. 185) much of the requests to support responses to these weaknesses were characterized by participants as beyond the school's ability to impact. Rather, the teachers viewed the need for a personal commitment to improving in their areas of weakness, and the freedom to do so. When further prompted to unpack these needs, participants identified time, opportunities to collaborate or receive support, a reduction of class size, and general administrative awareness of the burden of self-development in addition to daily tasks as areas where the school's administration could be supportive of efforts to achieve personal growth.

Summary of Findings

In sum, the research conducted in this institution reflects many of the findings in the literature. While all of the participants agreed that each of the four pillars is beneficial to the development of educators, there was variety among the pillars selected as most beneficial, and all of the teachers reported experiencing each of the pillars as part of their own development either at the school or otherwise in their previous experience.

Responses related to the first of the four pillars, teaming, suggested that the practice benefits both teachers and students. The research site has not adopted a model that supports teaming cohorts of students, a characteristic that both of the teachers mentioned in the section experienced at their previous schools. One challenge regarding teaming that Drago-Severson acknowledges is the logistical aspects of teaming initiatives: they are limiting due to the goal of achieving common times for teams to collaborate, and their adoption necessitates a commitment to the model—something the research site does not currently have. Participants noted that while this formal structure does not exist at the site, other opportunities for professional teaming exist, including opportunities to collaborate both within and outside of traditional groups, such as in departments.

With regard to providing professionals with leadership roles, participant responses suggested greater flexibility in independent or private settings, sharing a range of experiences they had engaged in and found beneficial both at the site and in previous work experience. Multiple participants felt a sense of agency in creating their own opportunities to lead others, and appreciated the challenge and personal rewards associated with those experiences.

Collegial inquiry, like teaming, was suggestive of collaborative opportunities for professionals. Participants favored opportunities to collaborate in ways that were less formalized, and more casual in nature. Participants felt that structures such as the mixed ASP groupings were opportunities to share ideas and have their opinions heard among colleagues. A flexible mode for collegial inquiry was proposed by one participant, who seeks collaboration even among those outside her physical reach—in a highly curated Twitter PLN.

The fourth pillar, mentoring, uncovered insights that suggest a collaborative or team approach to mentoring could be successful, since so much of the mentoring experience is

dependent upon meaning-making and relationships. It was noted that mentoring, like the other pillars, may be considered broadly too, so as to include peer observation, feedback and reflection. Each participant had a different way to describe his or her experience as mentor or mentee—but all agreed that the relationship was supportive in nature and benefited both parties. This finding was supported in the literature too, as mentoring is key in the socialization of teachers to the practice.

Regarding the impact of change, findings suggest a variety of positionality among the participants. Some, but not all of the participants could succinctly describe the changes the school is facing, despite the intent of the school's administration to help them adopt a new Academic Strategic Plan. Further, those who seemed to be least fazed by the organizational change were teachers who either identified themselves as open to regular reflection or change, or who present as surefooted in their role at the school. These findings suggest that while the members of the administration believe they have clearly communicated and supported a direction, more work can be done to help teachers make meaning of how the changes affect them. Finally, the consistent driving themes for desirability of professional development centered around agency to pursue goals of the teachers' own identification, with a strong preference for opportunities to collaborate without strict adherence to structured direct instruction. These findings, while supportive of the suggestion of both theory and literature nonetheless illuminate the aspects of adult learning in the context of change and personal growth in new ways.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Each year, school leaders are tasked with finding effective, efficient ways to develop their teachers as individuals and help them navigate organizational change. This study, conducted at an independent school in Maine, was designed to document the professional experience and disposition of a representative sample of tenured faculty within the context of Drago-Severson's four pillars of PD practice, seek understanding of the impact of change upon them, and describe desirable traits of PD to meet their professional development needs. Three research questions guided the study through the stages of design, research, data collection, and analysis:

- What are the participants' prior content and pedagogical PD experiences in a school setting and which do the teachers identify as being most beneficial?
- What methods of professional development are considered most valuable to educators with varying prior experience and who face changed expectations for accountability?
- What is the influence of rapid organizational change on teachers' perceptions of their experience? What kinds of professional development experiences are most desired by teachers?

Two theories provided the underpinnings of the study. The first, Drago-Severson's four pillars of PD practice, provided a framework to categorize the experience of the participants. The four pillars: teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring served as a means of eliciting and sorting responses and guided the interpretation of data. The second, Gross' turbulence theory helped contextualize the responses. As the organization shifts, it has the

potential to shape the experience of the teacher, and in the context of a developing professional, the impact of change can be great.

A review of the literature produced themes of teacher preparation and credentialing impact on student achievement, socialization into the profession, defining professional development; agency, andragogy, and choice; collaborative professional development; and the impact of change on andragogy. Six themes, drawn from the literature, were used in reporting findings: each of the four pillars, a fifth theme on the impact of change, and the sixth addressing agency and andragogy.

A sample of nine teacher participants from the site was chosen to represent the faculty, exhibiting a range of disciplines, experience, and educational background. Data, in the form of participant interviews, was collected in the Spring of 2018. After the interviews were transcribed, a process of open coding was used, and ultimately the data were categorized using the theoretical lens of both Drago-Severson and Gross. The sections that follow present the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study.

Findings

The participants in this study hail from a wide range of experience prior to their employment at the institution, all of which informs their unique perspectives and interpretation of the change at the institution. Unsurprisingly, their narratives support the research, suggesting a call for individualized professional development to meet each of their unique goals. Also supported is the theory of varying impacts of turbulence on various stakeholders in the organization, depending on their respective positionality.

Research question 1: *What are the participants' prior content and pedagogical PD experiences in a school setting and which do the teachers identify as being most beneficial?*

Participants shared a wide variety of anecdotal examples of pre-service training and professional development. Among the examples were events which could be characterized as teaming, collegial inquiry, experience in leadership roles, and mentoring. Examples of teaming included teaching on a team with a shared student cohort, meeting regularly or co-teaching with a Special Education partner. Opportunities citing collegial inquiry included the site's Nerd Herd and ASP groups, which allow for conversation that supports instruction and provides opportunities to learn alongside and from one another. Experience in leadership roles were tied to this, as leaders of those groups were participants in the study. Other leadership highlights included being a trained faculty observer, leading an academic team, and leading student life initiatives. Lastly, mentoring was a commonly experienced pillar—some were mentored, and mentored others, finding benefit to both parties. Participants saw value in collaborative activities, individual pursuits of courses and/or leadership trainings, curriculum development and alignment, and peer observation, all of which speak to their agency. They felt that these experiences allowed them to connect with colleagues in meaningful ways, reflect upon their experiences in the classroom, learn about and witness strategies informing and improving their approach to the work, and grow as leaders. Clearly presenting as individuals in both experience and need for growth, their stories illustrate what the research suggests—individualized support is a must and can result in some amazing growth opportunities for educators.

Research question 2: *What methods of professional development are considered most valuable to educators with varying prior experience and who face changed expectations for accountability?*

Participants expressed a strong preference for creating an environment for teachers to connect in authentic ways, and many cited efforts the school currently uses (Nerd Herd, and ASP

groups). The opportunity to confer candidly with colleagues in impromptu situations, participants felt, was one of the best ways to prompt their reflection of practice and encourage continued engagement in the practice. Most participants identified time as a key limitation, and three of the nine participants suggested that large class sizes had an impact on the time they felt they had available to devote to professional growth. Some noted that they needed to find the drive to engage in the learning beyond what is offered by the school, and that the onus was on them as individuals to pursue growth by those means. One participant noted that he would like to have access to influential thinkers in the field of education for inspiration, and two participants requested additional intensive training with technology.

Research question 3: *What is the influence of rapid organizational change on teachers' perceptions of their experience? What kinds of professional development experiences are most desired by teachers?*

Participants' perceptions of influence of change on the faculty (including themselves) varied greatly among staff members, as is supported by the literature. While some teachers reported feeling keenly aware of change and their role in it, others were far less concerned, and were content to carry on as normal. For some, the impact of change was perceived as inconsistently affecting their peers, and this, in turn, had an impact on the individual him- or herself, as some participants expressed that there were members of the faculty who did not "buy in" to the new direction. All agreed that the change was necessary, and that the change was good for the organization. While support for the changes was implied by the participants in the study, the primary motivation for growth was intrinsic. Each participant was quick to identify an area he or she desired to improve upon. These ranged from classroom management, to technology integration, to content area knowledge acquisition and refinement. Other participants identified

personal characteristics he or she wished to develop, such as time management strategies, or motivation to actively engage with colleagues. Collectively, participants suggested that the professional development program should be supportive of teachers as individuals, reflect an awareness of the professional burdens they inherently experience in the role of teacher, be characteristic of collaborative, authentic opportunities to learn and reflect, and be flexible in both approach and in time commitment.

Implications

As institutions of learning, it is imperative that schools encourage and support learning of all individuals, including teachers. The results of this study illustrate how the perceptions of teachers influences what they value in professional development (DeSimone, 2009, Thoonen, et al., 2011, and Joyce and Calhoun, 2010) and are supported within the framework of Drago-Severson's four pillars (2009). Leaders of organizations experiencing change must remain aware of the challenges teachers face; growth occurs even while an organization shifts and the management of that process presents an opportunity to support this essential adult learning, which ultimately benefits students.

Recommendations for Action

- What are the participants' prior content and pedagogical PD experiences in a school setting and which do the teachers identify as being most beneficial?

Drago-Severson contextualizes growth within the framework of the four pillars, and says that "[m]indfulness of developmental diversity helps us understand how teachers [...] will experience the pillar practices and other efforts to support their learning in different ways" (2009, p. 54).

- What methods of professional development are considered most valuable to educators with varying prior experience and who face changed expectations for accountability?

Based on the research conducted and the findings described herein, a recommendation drawn from this study is to enact professional development programming within the four pillars framework suggested by Drago-Severson. Creating experiences which allow choice, flexibility, collaboration, and support for educators will serve to engage them in authenticity in reflecting on their practice.

- What is the influence of rapid organizational change on teachers' perceptions of their experience? What kinds of professional development experiences are most desired by teachers?

Although teachers experience change and perceive the experience of change in others in varied ways, awareness of that variance on the part of school leadership is paramount. Fullan (2004, p. 161) states that “[a]n organization cannot be improved only from the top[...]. The people involved are a key element. The top can provide a vision, policy incentives, mechanisms for interaction, coordination, and monitoring, but to realize the vision there must be people below building capacity and shared commitment so that the moral imperative becomes a collective endeavor.” School leaders should be a part of the meaning-making process teachers experience as they navigate growth in the context of change. Understanding that growth is a highly personalized process will increase the likelihood that leaders cultivate capacity. One simple way to achieve this is in allowing teachers to develop individual plans for PD. Identifying the boundaries of comfort zones and feeling supported while testing those boundaries is the area where professional growth occurs. By supporting teachers at different stages of their careers, leaders can influence growth which serves both the individual and the school goals.

Recommendations for Further Study

Agency is a key component of adult learning, and the research suggests that past experience influences the engagement of teachers in professional growth process, from the activities they select, to the degree in which they engage, to the most important feature—whether the learning is applied in the practice itself. In the context of change, how does a professional adjust his or her growth to suit new learning conditions and supports which may be presented by organizational or even employment change? Further, how might school leaders assist teachers as they make meaning of this change?

School leaders often enlist third parties to assist in changemaking work, but at the research site this has been avoided in the recent past, mostly due to the fact that previous attempts to introduce consultants or similar third parties have proven unsuccessful in achieving long-lasting and meaningful change. In this school, an intentional shift in favor of internal capacity building has been employed as a strategy, and groups like the ASP and Nerd Herd are examples of this being done in ways that the participants found to be effective. One area for further study is to closely examine the ways that professional development models the pedagogical practices of the teachers themselves—that is, to pre-assess the knowledge of educators, attempt to know their individual needs and preferences. Then, PD providers could guide them through frameworks which allow for PD that meets the needs of the professional, yet with respect for the organizational dynamics and goals. Since the findings suggest that high quality professional development follow the four pillars and work within the confines of organizational change phenomena, research in this area may prove beneficial to schools like the research site.

Conclusion

This case study at an independent school serving students in grades 6-12 in New England has documented the dispositions of a representative sample of participating teachers in grades 9 – 12 with regard to professional development experiences in the context of organizational change. The research outlined in the study defines professional development and characterizes key elements: andragogy, agency, and choice. The theoretical framework is grounded in the four pillars of PD practice presented by Drago-Severson, and in Gross' turbulence theory which characterizes the impact of organizational change on constituents of an organization. Study findings are supported by the research, and suggest that teachers should be provided with choice in developing personalized plans for growth and opportunities for collaboration. This work is significant in its support of the growth of teachers, which may be aligned to organizational growth, and positive impacts in the classroom.

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Appendix A: Sample Questions for Data Collection

- What kind of preservice educational training have you undertaken?
- What is your previous work history (related to teaching)?
- Some research suggests that practices like teaming, providing teachers with leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring enhance the professional development process. Would you agree, and can you share examples of those types of experiences if you have found them beneficial?
- Are there other features of professional development that you consider to be particularly effective?
- Our school is undergoing ambitious shifts. How does this change affect you professionally?
- Reflect on yourself as a teacher. What are your strengths? Areas you wish to improve?
- Describe an ideal path for reaching those goals, and explain how the school could support you in those efforts.