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Teachers' Perceptions Of Professional Learning Experiences Intended To Promote Growth In Their Discipline And Pedagogy

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES INTENDED TO PROMOTE GROWTH IN THEIR DISCIPLINE AND PEDAGOGY

By

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
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DEDICATION

For Cameron and Cooper, my two shining lights.

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ABSTRACT

Professional learning is an essential tool for teachers to effectively learn and grow in their discipline. The professional learning model has not developed in tandem with the teacher certification requirements, as well as the changing dynamics in education. With the increase in mandated requirements, teachers have not witnessed an enhanced professional learning model that can align with their adult needs and guide them along the path to accomplish the goal of learning.

Preliminary research identified a gap in relationships from professional learning to the implementation in the classroom (Fulmer, 2016). The study's research problem was that while professional learning experiences have been provided for teachers, it was unclear whether these experiences help teachers learn and grow in their disciplines and pedagogy. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore through stories, teachers' perceptions of the professional learning experiences they participated in to identify optimal learning environments that can promote their own learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

The findings in this study revealed that all participants identified a need for professional learning that enhances the importance of teacher motivation, provides a clear purpose for the professional growth, and offers empowerment for teachers through individual choice. Future studies can focus on the culture of the teaching faculty and its impact on professional learning, how to increase motivation with teachers, the impact of professional learning and student learning, as well as change with the culture regarding professional learning.

Keywords: *professional learning, professional development, personalized learning, motivation*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Professional learning is essential for public school teachers to effectively improve upon and develop new knowledge and skills in their disciplines and pedagogy throughout the school year (Kennedy, 2016). To strengthen classroom instruction, teachers have faced increased attention and demands in relation to standardized assessments and student performance scores from the United States Department of Education (United States Department of Education, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010). School districts have focused on mandates such as the No Child Left Behind (replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015) to avoid consequences and meet yearly progress (Lichter, 2017). The professional learning model for teachers has continued to be a step behind the expectations for student learning; when a new initiative was directed to be implemented, the path for teachers to learn was not created simultaneously (Rodman, 2019). Directives from the State Education Department have approved professional learning opportunities for teachers to learn and grow for the hours to count toward a teacher's requirement (State Education Department, University of the State of New York, 2016). Activities that can effectively develop teachers' professional learning have become less frequent and less concentrated across the country (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of professional learning experiences they have participated in that identify optimal learning environments that promote their learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

Educators across the country have witnessed the evolution of mandates of yearly training for teachers, imposed by the Education Departments, centered around professional learning (United States Department of Education, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010). School districts are expected to provide mandated training for teachers each school year. Restricted to a

budget, time constraints, and opportunities, school districts continue to offer bounded learning opportunities for teachers, resulting in a one-size-fits all model (Pedder & MacBeath, 2008).

Professional development is a well-known phrase associated with the education of teachers; however, for the purpose of this study, the focus was on the more current terminology around the "professional learning" of teachers, which is more personalized. There are many interpretations of professional learning, mostly due to the regional cultural understandings of the national directives. The various definitions of professional learning share a common theme: it is a personalized model of professional development that enables public school teachers to narrow their focus and improve their craft (Rodman, 2019). Identifying the needs of each teacher and being flexible to provide personalized learning is important to reach the goals established by the education departments (Herold, 2019). Public school teachers possess an innate ability to want to grow and learn in their profession to leave an effective imprint on each student (Prenger et al., 2017). Thus, it is important for teachers to have the time and opportunity to develop their discipline with authentic professional learning that is relative and engaging over a duration of time.

Research identified a gap in relationships from professional learning to the implementation in the classroom (Fulmer, 2016). Further research illustrated inconsistent support for the teachers' learning during the organized professional development (Bragg et al., 2021). This research provided opportunities to explore teachers' perceptions about professional learning and how it can be enhanced to provide more personalized training to promote growth in their discipline and pedagogy. This research drew upon qualitative data that was gathered from various public-school teachers, who continually must meet expectations to improve their instructional methods and be held accountable based on the professional development provided.

In this study, a group of teachers have been identified to participate with the purpose of providing cultured perceptions of the professional learning experiences which have assisted them learn and grow in their disciplines and pedagogy.

Definition of Key Terms

Culture of Learning: Culture of learning is the ability to use an open mindset to continuously seek to build and share new knowledge as an educational community.

Pedagogy: Pedagogy is the overall approach to teaching, considering how prior experiences influence current practices.

Professional Development (PD): Professional development is a career-long process in which educators fine-tune their teaching to meet student needs.

Professional Learning: Professional learning is the process of acquiring and enhancing skills of teachers to improve the practice in the classroom.

Personalized Learning: Personalized learning is the ability for teachers to customize professional learning to develop their interests, needs, and weaknesses to gain authentic and valuable experiences.

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A Professional Learning Community consists of teachers working together to improve their teaching at their school.

Professional Learning Network (PLN): A Professional learning network consists of teachers connecting beyond their school walls with a common purpose to further enhance their learning. A PLN can consist of teachers of the same or various disciplines, in person, or through social media, to build learning in diverse ways.

Reflection: Reflection is the process of continual learning from one's own experience by examining practices and processes with a distinct perspective, followed by acting to improve.

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is the teachers' beliefs about their own abilities to successfully implement a practice based on the intended outcome.

Social Media: Social media enables teachers to create and share content, or to participate in networking through applications or websites. For this study, Twitter will be the referenced application for social media.

Teachers' Discipline: Teachers' discipline is defined as the knowledge that is acquired through professional learning.

Statement of the Problem

While professional learning experiences have been provided for teachers, it was unclear whether these experiences help teachers learn and grow in their disciplines and pedagogy. Professional learning is essential in public school and identifying optimal learning experiences for teachers to develop their discipline is the basis to impact student learning successfully (Matherwon & Windle, 2017). School teachers are unique in how they acquire skills to enhance their learning and can profit from having the opportunity to develop and implement a growth mindset (Rodman, 2019). Teachers should benefit from having the opportunity to continue to manifest their learning through optimal professional learning practices to meet the evolving needs of today's learners (Fulton & Britton, 2011). Finding additional time to improve public school teachers' professional learning is a focus for many school districts (D'Agati, 2016). Professional learning is typically clumped into professional development days, or Superintendent Conference Days, that either review state mandated material or is deferred to teachers to work in their classroom (Rodman, 2019). Previous studies focused on professional development before, the researcher focused on the gap that enables teachers to identify what they perceive as optimal learning models (Brunasso, 2020). The teachers need to reflect upon the learning opportunities

provided for them (DeMonte, 2013). In this study, a group of teachers in various grade levels, K-12, and disciplines were identified to participate with the purpose of providing a cultured understanding of the educator's experience.

Statement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore how teachers describe professional learning experiences in which they have participated to identify whether they have been optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. The review of the literature supported the more recent studies and offered new language for teachers to improve their individualized crafts (Zou, 2019). Avalos (2011) suggested teachers need to continue their personal development to have a direct impact on their own learning. Further, teachers need to experience a level of trust with their school leaders who organize professional development (Robert, 2017).

Public school teachers instruct students for a minimum of 180 days (about 6 months), as well as provide feedback for improvement and growth (New York State Education Department, 2019). Outside of time spent in student instruction, teachers' time during a school day is typically filled with lesson preparation and returning student work in a timely fashion. Teachers invest their time beyond the school day to self-initiate professional learning at an average of 150 hours (about 6 and a half days) per year, to supplement the district organized development that averages 56 hours (about 2 and a half days) per school year (The New Teacher Project, 2015).

Research Question and Design

1. How do teachers perceive their professional learning experiences as a foundational tool to help them improve upon and develop new knowledge and skills in their disciplines and pedagogy?

The researcher sought a representative sample so there was a focused collection of teachers with a vast array of professional experiences. A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select and identify the study's sample (Palinkas et al, 2015). Purposeful sampling was used with this qualitative narrative study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The six participants were chosen through a solicitation using an educational, social media platform to build the representative sample (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). The researcher utilized the social media platform, Twitter, to invite teachers to participate in the study. The researcher reflected on the current educational climate and COVID-19 related protocols to identify potential subjects. The research utilized potential candidates who were available and willing to participate earnestly (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). In addition, the researcher was aware of the benefit of identifying the samples based on experience, willingness to participate, and convenience (Palinkas et al, 2015). The researcher further understood that each candidate provided rich and cultural experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

The researcher utilized the Adult Learning theory practice to conduct interviews through the Zoom platform to gain a firsthand narrative of the research participants. Each interview was recorded for transcription purposes and stored in a password-protected file. Participants reflected on their professional learning model to address Path-Goal theory through the interview questions. The researcher gathered and analyzed the information from the participants to determine potential opportunities to promote their own growth in their discipline (Muhammad, 2017). The value of answering the research questions provided the necessary information for school districts to reflect on how best to model professional learning that can optimize the learning and growth of teachers so they can improve in their discipline and pedagogy.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Framework

The practice of professional learning can offer growth opportunities for public school teachers to improve their instructional discipline. The conceptual framework for this qualitative narrative study was organized to identify the gaps in the current framework of professional learning. The Adult Learning theory guided the research in identifying the best practices for professional learning.

Adult Learning theory is significant in providing empowerment for the educator. The process of professional learning begins with the educator identifying the area of growth (Malik, 2016). The educator can be focused and concentrate on one task. This process is grounded in the Adult Learning theory, whereupon Malcolm Knowles asserted there is the best learning method for adults to learn and grow with (O'Neill, 2020). Knowles' four principles of Adult Learning include (Cox, 2015):

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning.
2. Adults gain more when they can pull past experiences into the learning process, including past learning.
3. Adults have an interest in topics that are relevant to their professional life.
4. Adults have an interest in the topic that is impactful to them in real-time.

The research question focused on exploring teachers' perceptions with their professional learning. The researcher focused on Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning theory to identify the optimal method which helped teachers learn and grow in their disciplines and pedagogy. Interview questions were centered around the theoretical lens of Adult Learning theory. In addition, the researcher focused on path-goal theory to assess how to motivate followers based on the purpose of the situation.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The researcher utilized a qualitative narrative study to explore how professional learning was implemented and how it can be enhanced for teachers to develop in their discipline and pedagogy (Zee & Helma, 2016). The researcher is a public-school district administrator who maintains good working relationships with colleagues and is an active member of educational organizations. The researcher has an established professional learning network (PLN) through the social media platform Twitter. This study incorporated six participants who teach in public schools at various grade levels across the country. The participants possessed a wide variety of educational experiences. The researcher assumed all participants were honest and trustworthy throughout the study. The researcher assumed the participants would fully understand the questions asked in the survey and any data collected reflected accurate perceptions.

The purpose of the study was explained to the participants as an exploration of how teachers perceive professional learning, they participate in to identify optimal learning environments and opportunities that can promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. The researcher acknowledged that personal relationships could alter the data, data collection, and interpretation and maintained an unbiased approach as participants were from outside organizations. The researcher was aware that participants can have skewed, or biased, views that may alter the study and data based on their previous experiences. The researcher was prepared to ensure all interviews were conducted with unbiased language.

This study's scope was open to public school teachers from grades K-12. The researcher anticipated the scope would provide a greater understanding of the purpose of the study. The participants had the opportunity to express their perceptions during the interviews conducted by the researcher.

Rationale and Significance

Nationally, the investment for teachers to obtain professional learning costs over 2.5 billion dollars (about $8 per person in the US) a year (Layton, 2015). Professional learning investment goes beyond the monetary cost. Improving public school teachers' professional learning is a focus of school districts with the constraints of time (D'Agati, 2016). Professional learning is a practice that for teachers to seek opportunities to enhance their discipline. Professional learning can improve opportunities for learning and growth for teachers may have a direct impact in the educational community.

Summary

School teachers have opportunities to learn and grow in their discipline and pedagogy through optimal professional learning experiences. Teachers have the potential to be afforded the opportunity by their school districts to implement the best practices in their educational field to provide opportunities that will allow authentic learning and growth (Buffum et al., 2018). School districts can continue to incorporate and collaborate with teachers to develop and schedule professional learning that is relevant and necessary for optimal professional growth (Mitchell, 2013).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presented the literature on professional learning and an analytical stance that contributed to the professional learning models in school districts. This literature review included the historical professional learning impact at the federal and various state levels for school districts including types of professional learning, benefits of professional learning, and potential drawback. The factors experienced analysis to identify themes for this qualitative narrative study to explore teachers' perceptions of the professional learning experiences they participate in to identify optimal learning environments that can promote their own learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Framework

The Adult Learning theory was significant in providing empowerment for the educator as it describes how adults acquire and utilize the latest information to facilitate future experiences (Weber-Mayrer, 2016). The process of professional learning begins with the educator identifying the area of growth, based on the foundational term andragogy, which was introduced in the United States by Malcolm Knowles, and adapted Europe (Knowles, 1970). Andragogy, which is more commonly known as Adult Learning theory, asserts there is a best learning method for adults to grow and learn with (O'Neill, 2020). Knowles' four principles of Adult Learning include (Cox, 2015):

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning.
2. Adults gain more when they can pull past experiences into the learning process, including past learning.
3. Adults have an interest in topics that are relevant to their professional life.
4. Adults have an interest in the topic that is impactful to them in real-time.

Any model of change will be received with some hesitation. Teachers grow accustomed to practices and procedures with established professional development programs (Pehmer et al., 2015). The reflection of a professional learning opportunity can be shared to understand what was learned and how it can be implemented to improve teacher capacity for effectiveness (Gutierez & Kim, 2017). For teachers to be effective with change, they may need clear guidance of expectations for learning, as well as for implementation practices in their profession (Pehmer et al., 2015). The four principles of Knowles' Adult Learning theory provided a clear understanding of how professional learning can be restructured. Knowles (1970) emphasized the importance of including the educators in their learning and provides authentic opportunities to empower the educators to engage in their growth and learning.

In addition, the path-goal theory concentrates on the leader's ability to assess and modify how to motivate followers based on the purpose of the situation. The leader can select between four leadership behaviors based on the combination of the projected outcome and the followers' needs: Directive Leadership, Supportive Leadership, Participative Leadership, and Achievement-Oriented Leadership (Northouse, 2019). To have an effective impact with the followers, the leader should assess the environment and decide what best will serve the followers and the situation, to effectively accomplish the goal in a collaborative manner (Mitchell, 2013). Northouse asserted the leader does need to pay attention to what the followers need to plan how to remove the obstacle and accomplish the goal (2019). The leader does need to identify what will motivate the followers toward the goal based on the followers' behaviors, and then calculate the task characteristics. Based on the findings, the leader will be able to identify how best to work toward the goal, while removing any obstacles in the path.

Mitchell (2013) emphasized that educational leaders can utilize their environments and teachers' need to "optimize through collaboration and shared leadership." This design enables the leader to utilize the function and purpose of professional development. School improvement, or continuous improvement, is the crucial point of focus for the leader to emphasize toward the teachers. The framework created by Mitchell provided the leader to assess the goal, assess the teachers' abilities, then look to identify which path-goal theory will best fit the means to accomplish professional development learning. By having an overarching vision, such as school improvement, further provides the leader with a targeted focus for all to center themselves on.

The focus for Mitchell (2013) is for the leader to identify the scope of professional development learning for the teachers and pair it with the expected outcome. By being able to reflect on the goal the leader will be able to determine the best means to provide professional development learning so that it is authentic for the teachers and productive for the improvement of the school. Adult Learning theory and Path-Goal theory relate to professional learning as it can provide teachers with opportunities to fulfill their capacities as an adult and to accomplish established goals.

Review of Relevant Literature

History of Professional Learning

Professional learning has evolved over time. Professional development is the historical terminology that has been practiced as a single event, traditionally held in one room, led by a highly qualified instructor to enhance teachers' skills (Lloyd and Davis, 2018). With the incredible surge of focus on professional learning, coupled with an increased focus from social media, a new brand of professional learning is sought based on the needs of the teachers as individuals (Rodman, 2019). Avalos (2011) suggested:

> Teacher learning and development is a complex process that brings together a host of different elements and is marked by an equally important set of factors. But also, at the center of the process, teachers continue to be both the subjects and objects of learning and development. (p. 17)

Goh and Loh (2013) defined professional learning as the total sum of both formal and informal learning opportunities during the teacher's career. Mitchell (2013), on the other hand, defined professional learning as that which enables teachers to acquire new skills to enhance and improve each year. The framework for teachers to receive professional learning in their discipline continues to gain attention as public-schools struggle with a decrease in the budget each year. Layton (2015) reported that the nation invests over 2.5 billion dollars (about $8 per person in the US) on teacher learning yearly. The cost for each teacher can be accredited to mandated staff learning that does not provide teachers with personal learning to improve in their discipline. School districts invest an average of $18,000 on each teacher per year, with a total of 6 to 9 percent of the overall budget (United States Department of Education, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010). When teachers can participate in effective professional learning, it may provide them opportunities to learn and grow in the classroom, thus, effectively having a positive impact in their discipline.

Zou (2019) asserted that past topics in professional development have focused on individuals attending workshops. The more recent studies of professional learning offer new language that identifies small community-based learning groups, lesson studies, personalized learning, reflection on learning, all fulfilling a need for teachers to develop a culture of learning as their best practice (Rodman, 2019). With the current economic budget crisis due to COVID-19, schools have reflected on opportunities to save finances and transform learning opportunities.

Professional learning research for teachers has been enhanced since its inception (Jaquith et al., 2010). Concentrating on improving professional learning to make a more profitable endeavor is opportunistic.

Each school district has the responsibility to structure and implement a professional learning model for teachers (United States Department of Education, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2010). Teachers are unique and can benefit differently from how they acquire skills to enhance their learning and can profit from having the opportunity to develop and implement a growth mindset (Rodman, 2019). As a result, the researcher planned to illuminate professional learning and determine if this current practice enhances professional growth. To achieve this purpose, there was a primary question: How do teachers perceive the professional learning model as a foundational tool to promote learning and growth in their discipline? According to Creswell (2015), the study of research problems can provide greater insight into situations by empowering stakeholders to further understand underlying concerns and issues to better support teachers. Understanding the impact of professional learning and asking critical questions about practices can improve professional learning cultures (Mertlet, 2018).

The Adult Learning theory examines not just how adults learn, but how they can best learn and grow to develop their profession. Teachers acquire and enhance skills and knowledge to improve their practice (Mitchell, 2013). Public school teachers benefit differently from how they acquire skills to enhance their learning and can profit from having the opportunity to develop and implement a growth mindset (Mertlet, 2018). History has demonstrated various implementations to provide professional learning for teachers.

Related Professional Learning Studies

At the time of this research, each state, respectfully, continued to align their professional learning models according to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). School districts continued to transform their current learning models to agree with the ESSA expectations. Salgado et al., (2018) suggest that while Every Student Succeeds Act provided schools the opportunity for funding to enhance their professional learning plan, the consistent changes made it challenging to meet each teacher's needs and align with student achievement. Kisa and Correnti (2015) maintained that the traditional model of professional learning continued to be ineffective due to its delivery and inconsistent reinforcement. The authors further declared that it is time to improve on the professional learning models to enhance the teachers' learning and provide more personable approaches (2015). The more recent studies offered new language that identified small community-based learning groups, lesson studies, personalized learning, reflection on learning, all fulfilling a need for public school teachers to develop a culture of learning as their best practice (Rodman, 2019).

Types of Professional Learning

Community-Based Practice

Teachers could connect digitally throughout the course of a day and reinforce their learning today (Hirsh & Killion, 2009). This process can empower teachers to develop a community-based professional learning network. Embracing the structure that technology provides can increase productivity for teachers. Zou (2019) studied teachers in various settings and was able to assert that workshop learning varied from what the teachers are accustomed to. Zou's (2019) research determined that learning with others in a known setting is more productive than attending a one-day workshop with no support structure to reinforce at the school district.

School teachers can have a sense of belonging with their known community. Teachers are also able to relate the material to their individual needs that fit the targeted area of growth. This type of learning in their educational community can provide the opportunity to dive right in due to the comfort level.

Cabaroglu (2014) emphasized that to matriculate teachers' growth, there needs to be an effective system in place. A major area of attention can be placed on teacher learning so teachers can have the opportunity for growth and structure. Cabaroglu (2014) suggested that what the teacher walks into will dictate the pattern of growth and learning. Providing school teachers the opportunity to be a part of a community-based small learning group can provide additional support. Thus, small learning groups promoted collaboration and created a community-based forum to build relationships and learn.

Book study groups are another form of community-based practice that provides teachers' additional support. School districts can select literature that is relevant to the teachers' area of need and develop a community-based book study to provide the opportunity to have collaboration with colleagues. Bach et al. (2011) suggested that school districts can utilize what young adults read to allow teachers a better understanding of who they work with each day. Public school teachers can utilize the topics needed to learn about the best practices provided in literature. Bach et al. (2011) provided insight on how school districts can implement book study programs as a means of professional learning to encourage authentic conversation centered on current student issues. Utilizing the professional learning time to gather, read, and discuss concerns that all teachers face is an optimal way to create a culture of learning that can lead to further discussions and support (Courtney et al., 2017). School teachers can connect with the school library media specialist to assess what books can connect with the areas of need for the

teachers, and school district leaders can support professional learning by providing literature for the teachers.

Studies illustrated teacher success through community-based learning. One study from Capraro et al. (2016), illustrated professional learning communities can assist in increasing teacher learning by incorporating high-quality learning. A community-based approach can provide teachers with a focused concentration for a reachable task relevant to their teaching initiative through collaborative efforts (Ho et al., 2016). Teachers can develop strong interpersonal relationships through the goal of teacher success. By developing strong relationships with a team, a positive impact of reevaluating professional learning, according to Rodman (2019).

Method of Lesson Study

Vermunt et al. (2019) presented a model that focused on teacher learning patterns based on the lesson study approach. Coenders and Verhoef (2019) introduced the lesson study as a professional learning model to support teachers. The framework focused on providing a group of teachers with the opportunity to collaborate and observe another teacher's lesson. The observation would enable the teachers to record data and provide feedback. The centralized focus is how small groups with a similar topic can benefit with concentrated learning. Vermunt et al. (2019) asserted that teachers can improve their lessons and plan collaboratively with a concentrated focus. School teachers can benefit from the lesson study framework by having a shared focus. The research of Vermunt et al. (2019) suggested when teachers engage in the lesson study professional learning model, the learning intentions in the classroom have greater meaning and there is a decrease in problematic learning. A lesson study structure can provide the teachers with a purpose for supporting one another through lesson observations. The framework

can motivate the teachers to be in a setting that is comfortable and reflects on learning that is genuine.

Coenders and Verhoef (2019) presented more up-to-date information to bring attention to the lesson study method and how it can support inexperienced teachers and further develop experienced teachers. The authors emphasized that teachers learn from one another and recognize the importance of viewing the lesson from other teachers. González and Deal (2019) focused on the lesson study method as a means for teachers to have a reflective community within the school building. By establishing a lesson study group, the teachers can benefit from an increase in shared knowledge, common language developed in a professional community, and established resources that are developed in the study. Based on the structure of the lesson study method, the teachers can collect data and observe the students' interactions to promote the connection between students and learning. This method illustrates that real-time observations by a small group of teachers can be beneficial and effective for personalized learning. A lesson study provides the opportunity to have reflective practices with peers who are coordinated with the outcome of the objective in real-time. González and Deal (2019) emphasize that a professional community can be established by the school district to allow the teachers collective time to meet each week.

Educational settings can create silos as classroom teaching can continue to be a lonely activity. Avalos (2011) focused on the transformation of learning from the classroom to collaboration. Teachers can have the ability to learn together and work through situations to develop effective resources from the lesson study. Providing a structured system that empowers teachers to have reflective practices with colleagues is a return on the investment. Pehmer et al. (2015) revealed that the utilization of the lesson study format using video and feedback with

teachers can have a significant impact on a teacher's demeanor and behavior. Teachers can use the opportunity to reflect on the visual that they have of themselves and establish routines to impact best practices. Revitalizing an evaluation system to enable teachers to receive critical feedback from peers in a non-evaluative manner may increase morale and culture.

The cost benefits of the lesson study method can be advantageous for a school district. Akiba and Wilkinson (2016) pointed out that the lesson study method does not cost much financially and can assist school districts with trimming the budget. The lesson study method can provide a significant decrease in costs for professional learning and an increase in community-based feedback from peers that can improve the learning and teaching of teachers. The focus of identifying the teachers' needs can further develop their skills, while assisting the school district with an affordable professional learning model that can keep the expenses in house.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

A professional learning community (PLC) is a process, or cycle, whereupon teachers collaboratively work to achieve a better result of their intended target, with improvement in their craft (DuFour, 2004). A professional learning community enables teachers to develop a sense of community among their colleagues and create a culture of learning (Brown, 2014). In this model, teachers engage in a community to learn and grow from one another, thus supporting the community to achieve the goal (DuFour et al., 2016). A professional learning community motivates teachers to collaborate and produce a collective process to empower others.

Educational communities have incorporated professional learning communities to promote learning and community among teachers (Benjamin, 2015). Learning can occur as various teachers are grouped together, whether by subject or grade level, to produce growth. The community is the actual involvement of the teachers who work together, who may not have been

grouped before. Providing the opportunity for learning through a community is a key factor to develop and enhance the collaboration for success (Dimmock, 2016).

A professional learning community provides opportunities for teachers to gather and collaborate throughout the school year. The model focuses on having time to collectively share, as well as individually reflect, to ensure each voice is heard. How teachers engage in the collaboration to achieve the collective goals through aligned understanding or practices is imperative for a growth mindset (Thessin & Staar, 2011). Supporting teachers with a team strategy approach is a vital role of the professional learning communities (Carpenter, 2015).

Professional Learning Network (PLN)

A professional learning network (PLN) consists of teachers connecting beyond their school walls with a common purpose to further enhance their learning. A PLN can consist of teachers of the same or various disciplines, in person, or through social media, to build learning in diverse ways. Professional learning networks are not new; however, technology has enhanced the ability for teachers to connect through social media (Dogan and Adams, 2018). The barriers of geography, culture, language, time zones, cost, travel, have all been removed using the social media platform, such as Twitter (Poortman and Brown, 2018).

Teachers can join or create a professional learning network by taking charge of their own professional learning (Dogan and Adams, 2018). Through a PLN, teachers can be flexible with their time and stay current on trending topics of interest. Through the social media platform Twitter, joining a PLN enables teachers to relate to others. A professional learning network consists of teachers and resources that support ongoing learning (Poortman and Brown, 2018). Through a PLN, teachers have the potential to discuss, inquire, reflect, and share with others who have similar interests and ideas. A professional learning network can meet weekly,

with the option to further engage throughout the week through direct messaging or hashtags on the social media platform. Social media has provided teachers with the technological ability to establish relationships with teachers in an alternative setting, rather than attending a workshop.

Prenger et al. (2020) emphasized that professional learning networks provide teachers more than the ability to establish connections. The authors suggested a PLN can further provide teachers self-efficacy through increased motivation to establish relationships focused on common interests (2020). Professional learning networks can provide teachers with additional opportunities to grow and learn, beyond the school day. A PLN can provide teachers the ability to connect from different schools, at various times and reflect on diverse learning, all for the benefit of growth and learning (Prenger et al., 2020).

Benefits of Professional Learning

Personalized Learning for Teachers

Hill et al. (2013) emphasized how the mass professional learning workshop's structure can hinder individual teachers. A mass professional learning workshop's structure places all the school's teachers in one setting with an opportunity to hear a one-size-fits-all model. Having all teachers together at once can be beneficial; however, not all teachers will be at the same point in their personal learning. Hill et al. (2013) added that the system in which data is retrieved for mass professional learning workshops does not provide authentic feedback. The surveys that teachers complete are captured in a snapshot of the day with no ability to bring information back with them to apply. School teachers walk out of the workshop with information and have limited time to reflect as a community. Hill et al. (2013) asserted:

> Some professional development scholars have sought to compare the effects of program features, rather than evaluating specific programs. These researchers rely primarily on

> surveys that ask teachers to report on both the content of their professional development experiences as well as key outcomes, such as their knowledge, perceived teaching capacity, or instructional practices. (p. 477)

This structure removes the teacher from the survey data. The teachers are left to create an implementation plan on their own without synthesis.

Amjjad et al. (2017) examined how school teachers' interests and needs for planning training are essential for creating a culture of learning. With teachers' increased demands and responsibilities, recognizing and identifying the personal need can provide them with time and the opportunity to reinforce what is learned. Public school teachers have a desire for personal, professional growth to have a greater impact on student learning. The ability to create a focused pathway for learning can provide individualized attention for each teacher. Amjjad et al. (2017) further asserted that technology is a significant component that requires consistent professional learning time. Teachers can be at different points in the learning curve and can best learn based on their needs of learning. Hill et al. (2013) made it clear that developing a personal pathway for all teachers can increase the energy the teachers put forth each day. The ever-evolving forum is fast-paced and to stay up-to-date and be the lead learner of the classroom, teachers require the opportunity to learn at their level and pace. Focused training is imperative for teachers to gain knowledge and implement in the classroom as this will provide a personalized model.

Capps et al. (2013) focused on the system of professional learning itself and questioned what needs to change for teachers to have a more personalized learning pathway. Capps et al. (2013) find that the school districts who design the professional learning programs for teachers need to be aware of each individual teacher’s experiences to optimize the learning. The model of personalized learning can provide a customized pathway that meets the interest and needs of the

teacher, while adapting to the level of ability. Rodman (2019) presented a roadmap for school districts to reevaluate their current state and examine how valued learning can be created for school teachers. Professional learning should be valued and examined each school year for school district leaders to implement effective growth opportunities with purpose for teachers.

Understanding the why behind professional learning is important to develop effective learning plans. Avalos (2011) identified teachers, and their needs are the reason for developing professional learning. Teachers' strengths and weaknesses should be assessed on a consistent basis for school district leaders to reflect and transform the professional learning process. Recognizing that each teacher has a different makeup is important for understanding what is important for all. D'Agati (2016) illustrated how teachers can accrue professional learning hours that are relevant to improving their teaching. Rodman (2019) emphasized that professional learning should be a teacher-driven model. Different from the mass workshops, teachers' needs should be the driving force behind the school district leaders' planning. Avalos (2011) added that all teachers do not need to experience the same professional learning. Regardless of the impact of the workshop, the focus should be on what is relevant for all teachers. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) suggested that for professional learning programs to be effective there should be support outlined for each teacher. Every professional learning opportunity is not suitable for teachers; professional learning should be important and relevant to have an impact in the classroom. Understanding what teachers need to be effective is the first step through assessment (Rodman, 2019). Following through with professional learning that meets the needs will provide opportunities for growth and learning.

Having the ability to make a connection with professional learning opportunity and the students in the classroom are paramount for the return on the investment. Based on a study by

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014), the research stated that teachers average 68 hours (about 3 days) each year with school-directed professional learning, with a total of 89 hours (about 3 and a half days) when their own learning occurs. The New Teacher Project (2015) reported that teachers spend up to 150 hours (about 6 and a half days) a year dedicated to both school-directed and individual learning. Professional learning hours do not contribute to success. They support concentrated areas of learning that relate directly to the teachers themselves (Rodman, 2019). School districts can improve teacher efficacy by providing them with quality professional learning that is worth the time of teachers (Zee & Helma, 2016).

According to research presented by Thoonen, et al. (2011), teachers who participated in a continuous method of professional learning continued to see an increase in motivation within their profession. Teachers need to be engaged in their learning and finding ways to identify their interests, needs, and abilities is important every school year (Klein & Riordan, 2011). Teachers can be involved in the development and implementation of professional learning to ensure that it not only meets the state's educational mandates, but it is relative and authentic to their personal development (Hall, 2013).

Calvert (2016) asserted that when teachers engage in authentic professional learning, they are developing their self-efficacy. Teachers will learn and grow, while engaged in activities to help them best meet the needs of the students. When teachers can learn from the model they are instructed to teach with, they experience opportunities that can lead to creative and collaborative mindsets (Calvert, 2016). Professional learning should align the teachers' professional needs to reinforce their own learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

Opportunity for Reflection on Learning

Amjjad et al. (2017) focused on professional learning as a valuable tool for teachers. More importantly, Amjjad et al. (2017) highlighted that reflection and follow-up are significantly important for teachers to enable effective professional learning. Too often, school districts provide a one-and-done workshop to open the school year or fill a gap in the middle of professional learning day. The avenue of making a connection is necessary for teachers to build their growth of learning in their discipline and pedagogy. The ability to spiral learning opportunities can further reinforce the initial investment with time and money.

School districts faced many professional learning pressures amid trying to acclimate to the new Next Generation State Standards. Greenleaf et al. (2018) believed that to achieve teacher learning, school districts need to provide professional learning experiences that can transform teachers. Providing opportunities that are enduring matter more for teachers when bringing back best practices and strategies to the classroom.

Blanton et al. (2019) emphasized that school districts should assess their teachers' needs with specific learning rather than the traditional model of receiving lectures. One avenue of focus is the ability to incorporate a professional book study, which is defined as a group of teachers gathering to read, discuss, and analyze a specific text to be applied to their profession (Blanton et al., 2019). The organization of a book study model enables staff to establish a common likeness to learn from. Public school teachers can further benefit from engaging in weekly workshops that provide an opportunity to check in, have reflection, and build from what they learned. The creation of a study group with a common focus will provide teachers with a personalized learning model with a common purpose that is spiraled throughout the school year.

Having time to reflect on professional learning is important for teachers to fully process what they learn. Avalos' (2011) research stated:

> Teacher professional learning is a complex process, which requires cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers individually and collectively, the capacity and willingness to examine where each one stands in terms of convictions and beliefs and the perusal and enactment of appropriate alternatives for improvement or change. (p. 10)

Teachers can best implement their professional learning when provided with the proper means to process. Teachers who reflect with a community-based professional learning model can collaboratively develop growth as a collective unit and implement resources learned.

This literature review supported that the best person to navigate one's path is the teacher. Teachers can generate goals and reflect on learning that is needed to best impact the students in the classroom. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) highlighted school district leaders have a crucial role in supporting change with teachers. Reflection is a key component that can impact teacher learning and growth as an effective professional learning model. Rodman's (2019) research is clear with her emphasis on change by school district leaders that can improve teacher professional learning. School districts can revitalize professional learning, from the one-and-done method, for teacher success. Frost (2012) suggested that teachers are students themselves and need to have their learning aligned with best practices to have optimal results. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates research (2014), teachers have reflected and addressed their needs for professional learning that includes personalized pathways with opportunities to reassess.

Creating a Culture for Learning

Teachers deserve the growth opportunity to learn with content that is relevant to their discipline and pedagogy. Capraro et al. (2016) emphasized that the model of teacher professional

learning has a direct impact on their own learning. Depending on the quality of professional learning, the outcome can look differently for teachers. Rodman (2019) asserted when teachers have the ability to learn what they need at their pace, their level of teachability can increase.

Blanton et al. (2019) asserted that a professional book study can provide the necessary structures for a knowledge community. Blanton et al. (2019) emphasized there is an increased teacher buy-in that can connect to the instructional practices in the classroom. The development of a framework for professional learning provides the foundation for creating a learning culture. The ability to generate increased participation through a focused professional book study enables teachers to have increased efficacy in their learning process.

Frost (2012) suggested a culture of learning can be created through teacher leadership. Frost emphasized that by having the proper trust and support by school leadership, teachers can feel empowered to lead, be innovative, build their professional skills, and impact colleagues. This type of cultivation does take time and can start by identifying that all teachers can be innovators and lead their learning. Rodman (2019) suggested all teachers can create and be a part of a culture of learning and not wait for the school district to dictate when professional learning will take place and how it will be structured. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) suggested that to impact teachers' learning, the school districts must first reflect inwardly. The practice of reflection can be practiced improving teachers' professional learning.

The literature confirmed that the need to focus on teacher support is imperative for school culture. Capps et al. (2012**)** focused on teachers receiving effective professional learning that can impact their classroom practices. Embracing the personalized learning pathway for teachers and providing support can lead to a stronger culture that will impact the students in the classroom. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) made it clear that school district leaders can reevaluate the current

professional learning model and facilitate change. Examining what is the current professional learning, and connecting with the assessment of what teachers need, can provide the optimal learning pathway. The school district leadership has a responsibility to put the interests and needs of teachers in the spotlight to promote a culture of learning, to move the needle in student learning forward.

Drawbacks

Cost of Professional Learning

Layton (2015) highlighted that the market for professional learning should be fresh and up to date. There has not been a focused study for effective professional learning for teachers. Layton (2015) further emphasized that professional learning carries a hefty price tag at over $2.5 billion (about $8 per person in the US) spent a year. The New Teacher Project (TNTP) conducted a study that gained National attention in 2015. The estimated individual expense for each teacher's professional learning is $18,000 a year. The New Teacher Project (2015) utilized this data to conclude that the educational system can reflect and improve how it provides teachers professional learning. The New Teacher Project (2015) provided recommendations to evaluate what it means to help teachers be successful with their existing professional learning and how collaboration can be implemented to further support teachers. School districts face the eternal struggle to employ an effective plan that is both cost efficient and worthwhile for teachers. Reflection is an opportunistic practice for understanding what is working for teachers and what is not.

Whitworth and Chiu (2015) recognized that public school teachers cannot effectively change the system themselves and believe there are many facets that come into play that can influence progression and improvement with teachers' professional learning. There are multiple

layers to address, and the focus is on the leadership of the school districts. Whitworth and Chiu's (2015) study found the following:

> School and district leaders play a significant role in the planning and implementation of professional development, as well as providing ongoing leadership to support teacher change. Considering this role, school district leaders are not just a contextual factor, but an integral part of the process and should be integrated into and considered part of any professional development model in science education. (p. 121)

The responsibility to lead professional learning and include teachers and community members to redefine, reevaluate, and reinvent how professional learning looks for teachers starts with the leaders of the school district (Jaquith et al., 2010). The school districts can have the opportunity to reallocate the financial component of professional learning to ensure that the money is well-spent to provide all teachers with relevant learning to their interests and needs.

Challenges of Change

Any model of change will be received with some hesitancy (Rodman, 2019). Pehmer et al. (2015) recognized **t**he challenge ahead to effectively encourage teachers to shift their perceptions of professional learning. The reflection of a professional learning opportunity can be shared to understand what was learned and how it can be implemented to improve teacher capacity for effectiveness. Pehmer et al. (2015) added to be effective with change, teachers can benefit from clear guidelines based on their learning as individuals, and how each person learns differently. Public school teachers face different challenges in their classroom and learning. Effectiveness matters and rolling out a new model for school teachers requires clear communication with clear expectations (Fulmer, 2016). In addition, a purpose for the methods of learning should be shared with the teachers and allow for opportunities to meet as a group to

reflect and review. This process requires the school leaders to be active participants in listening to the needs of the teachers (Fulmer, 2016).

Summary

D'Agati (2016) emphasized that professional learning is an integral component for building strong teachers that can continue to be effective in the classroom and in the long term. Understanding the optimal methods for teachers to continue to learn and grow in their own discipline and pedagogy is important to make that learning effective. Matherwon and Windle (2017) emphasized professional learning is essential for teachers to develop.

The practice of professional learning is a consistent product for teachers to seek opportunities to enhance their craft (Rodman, 2019). Improving opportunities for learning and growth for teachers can directly impact their discipline and pedagogy in the educational community. The value of answering the research questions will provide necessary information for school districts to reflect on how best to align professional learning that can optimize the participation of teachers so they can improve their personal instruction in the educational community (Muhammad, 2017).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative narrative study explored how teachers describe professional learning in which they have participated to identify whether they have been optimal learning environments that promoted learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. The use of narrative analysis allowed the researcher to understand how each participant constructed a story from one's own personal experience (Butina, 2015). The narrative approach enabled the researcher to collect narrative (stories) from the participants through interviews. The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling approach when participants were selected. The researcher reflected on the cultural environment and current pandemic to identify the sample size. Therefore, the researcher selected participants who possessed the characteristics sought based on availability and convenience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Snowball sampling assisted the researcher with identifying appropriate subjects with similar interests (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The researcher incorporated Malcolm Knowles' four principles applied to Adult Learning through the interview process (Smith, 2002):

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
4. Adult Learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

The research question focused on exploring teachers' perceptions of professional learning to reflect and address optimal practices for their learning. The researcher focused on Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning theory to identify the participation of teachers in their professional learning model as a foundational tool to improve instruction. Knowles' Adult Learning theory is

important as it outlines the learning characteristics for adults, which is useful for determining optimal adult professional learning.

To begin, the researcher concentrated on the research question that will guide the path for the subjects to engage with:

1. How do teachers perceive professional learning experiences as a foundational tool to improve upon and develop new knowledge and skills in their disciplines and pedagogy?

The researcher incorporated Malcolm Knowles' four principles applied to Adult Learning theory to gain the necessary perceptions of teachers: Does the professional learning plan involve teachers through the design and evaluation phases? Does the professional learning plan (including mistakes) provide the basis for learning activities? Can teachers learn subjects that are of interest and that have immediate relevance to their profession? Is the professional learning plan problem-centered rather than content-oriented? (Smith, 2002).

The qualitative narrative study involved collecting and analyzing data to understand the concepts, opinions, or experiences of the subjects. Narrative studies enable researchers to focus on the purpose through human experience by allowing subjects, in this case teachers, to tell their individual story with personalized learning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The participants of this study consisted of teachers who reflected upon their experiences in the classroom and shared through storytelling. The researcher utilized this methodology and did not expect results to be generalized to one group. Instead, the researcher used an array of subjects' representative of diverse backgrounds found in public education fields, grades K-12. The open-ended, broad questions provided the researcher with the opportunity to report on the participants' responses (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The qualitative narrative study was used to help gather in depth

insight into the proposed problem and then generated data that supported detailed reporting, thereby building a rich storied outcome.

Site Information and Demographics/Setting

This qualitative narrative study was conducted virtually through Zoom, where six participants were chosen from those employed as full-time teachers through the social media platform Twitter. Each participant was a public-school educator representing the K-12 grade span. Schools were in rural, urban, or suburban regions across the United States. Participants met the requirements as a full-time teacher and engaged in an interview in the summer of 2021. The researcher utilized the initial portion of the interview to establish a comfortable environment to gather the baseline information for all participants. The remainder of the interview provided the participant the opportunity to personalize the responses. During the period of the research, the researcher did not hold a position in any association with the candidates.

Participants/Sampling Method

The researcher sought a representative sample so there was a focused collection of teachers with a vast array of professional experiences. A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select and identify the study's sample (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is commonly used with a qualitative narrative study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The six participants were chosen through a solicitation using the educational social media platform, Twitter, to build the representative sample through snowball sampling (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). The researcher utilized potential candidates who were available and willing to participate earnestly (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). The researcher was aware of the benefits of identifying the samples based on experience, willingness to participate, and convenience (Palinkas et al.,

2015). The researcher further understood that each candidate provided rich and cultural experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Table 3.1

Participant Background Information

Participant	Certification Areas	Current Teaching Assignment	Years in Service
Participant 1	Pre-K-6, Special Education	Grade 2	8
Participant 2	Elementary Education 1-6, Administration	Grade 4	10
Participant 3	English, Secondary Education, Special Education	Special Education	12
Participant 4	English, English as a Second Language (ESL (English as a Second Language)), K-6, 7-12	English as a Second Language (ESL)	16
Participant 5	General Science, K-6	Grade 6	20
Participant 6	Business, Secondary Education	Business, Grades 10-12	22

Efron and Ravid (2019) illustrated the purpose of a snowball sample to recruit potential participants. The researcher utilized the social media platform, Twitter, for inquiry regarding professional development. Snowball sampling provided the ability to identify the subjects who know other people that may have similar interests and characteristics (Palinkas et al., 2015). The

researcher embraced the purposeful outreach through the snowball sampling effect to develop an appropriate representative sample of public-school teachers. This chapter will explore how the research was conducted, the participants included in the study, the type of data that was collected and how it was analyzed, the participants' rights within the study, and how the researcher addressed any potential biases and limitations.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The researcher utilized a logical plan for the purpose of the qualitative narrative study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) and employed the following steps: 1) The researcher collected and reviewed authentic literature about professional learning; 2) The researcher obtained IRB approval, which included participants' confidentiality and informed consent forms; 3) The researcher invited potential candidates through the social media platform Twitter; 4) The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews through the video conference platform Zoom with six participants, that were saved on a password protected device. The researcher interviewed each participant once, at different times, starting with general questions to establish a relationship with the participant; 5) The researcher aligned the remaining interview questions to the research questions established, in addition to Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning theory to identify the participation of teachers in their professional learning plan as a foundational tool to improve instruction; 6) The researcher utilized the recording to transcribe the semi-structured interviews; 7) The researcher then completed the stages of coding, by hand, for common themes and recurring categories and saved electronic documents on a password protected device, and hard copies in a locked, fireproof safe; 8) The researcher utilized the interviews, coding, and collected literature as a method to systematically organize common themes during the multiple stages or coding.

Participants authorized their involvement in the research study using a consent form. The form stated that by participating in the interview process, the participant provided the research consent for participation. The form also provided the opportunity for confidentiality for the participant throughout the research and was not identified (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Interviews were conducted and recorded by the investigator; each participant was asked to be recorded. Interviews were not completed in person due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis using technology video conferencing resources, Zoom, and were recorded for purposes of transcribing. Participants were chosen through voluntary participation and thus had the right to cancel their participation anytime. The researcher secured data through a password protected storage device; and any printed material was stored in a locked, fire-proof safe in the researcher's possession. Upon completion of the study and presentation of the findings, the stored data was destroyed.

Data Analysis

The researcher systematically organized the data to identify common themes through semi-structured interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher incorporated thematic analysis as identified through the coding procedure. The researcher utilized the six steps in analyzing data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019): 1) prepared and organized the data for analysis; 2) engaged in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it; 3) used the codes to develop a more general picture of the data; 4) represented the findings through narratives and visuals; 5) interpreted the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the literature that might inform the findings; 6) conducted strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings, including analysis of Adult Learning theory through the four-principles verification and Path-Goal theory structures. The researcher utilized a resource that enabled voice recordings to

be transcribed. The researcher also reviewed the transcription with the recording to verify its accuracy.

Limitations, Delimitations, Ethical Issues

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) identified limitations as the elements that may potentially affect the interpretations of the research findings. The researcher acknowledged that personal relationships could alter data, data collection, and interpretation. Therefore, the researcher did not engage with anyone within his organization. The researcher utilized participants who had a wide range of experiences and who did not have an affiliation within the organization, to avoid any personal conflict of influence to impose a limitation. The researcher was also aware that participants can have skewed, or biased, views that may alter the study and data. The researcher was prepared to ensure all interviews were conducted with unbiased language. Further, the researcher pursued more detailed information from the participants when gaps in reporting or understanding occur (Alley, 2016).

The researcher recognized the concern to produce accurate and reliable information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The element of personal bias that the researcher presented is that of being in the educational field as a school administrator. The researcher understood the importance of being authentic and conducted the research with professionalism and attention to minimize potential concerns (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

The researcher used the three basic principles of the Belmont Report to ensure the qualitative study is ethical (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The three basic principles of the Belmont Report include the respect for all participants, the beneficence of treatment of participants, and justice for all participants (United States, 1978). The researcher further recognized that the use of bracketing within this narrative study assisted in mitigating potential

bias. Bracketing is defined as the process in which the researcher brackets, or places aside, his own experiences to understand the participants' experiences in an authentic manner (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher recognized his innate bias within the study topic and remained aware of this to minimize personal voice within the data. The researcher further recognized to remain unbiased and focused on incorporating bracketing. The researcher was knowledgeable with bracketing and focused on impartiality in his work through the creation of a planned mind map, stepping away from the findings, and reflecting on the work at hand (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility refers to ensuring the findings are an accurate representation of the data from all views from the researcher, the participants, and the readers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher recognized the need to capture the truth from the participants and accurately represent what the participants think. The researcher utilized the strategy of analyst triangulation to support internal validity. Through the practice of analyst triangulation, the research utilized member checking for all participants, which was also a means to maintain the confidentiality and accuracy of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Rourke et al., 2001).

Member Checking

The researcher recognized the importance of validating information with each participant in the qualitative study. Upon completion of the transcribed interviews and data collected analysis, the researcher ensured credibility with the participants. The researcher provided the interviewees the opportunity to review the preliminary interpretations for verification purposes

(Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This member-checking enabled the participants to provide feedback and clarify any misconceptions during the process of transcription (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is the process in which the results of the qualitative narrative study can be generalized and applied to other settings and context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher recognized the significance of conducting a qualitative narrative study, which incorporates rich narratives for each participant. Transferability was exhibited through the researcher's ability to generate a voice through language and descriptions of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher focused on utilizing such narrative quotes by each participant to ensure each experience was captured with vivid language (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Validity

Validity occurred when the researcher tracked the processes and procedures used to collect the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher was aware of having confidence in his subjects for the study to be completed. The researcher utilized member checks, also known as respondent validation, to establish a baseline of the participants to reference preliminary or emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher conducted member checks and compared them with the baseline information throughout the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the notion of objectivity in qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher recognized the necessity of reducing personal bias, to the degree possible, throughout the research. The research determined the results of the findings through the participants. The researcher followed a plan to create an audit trail to engage in reflexivity.

Reflexivity allowed the researcher to consciously participate in all aspects of the process and design with a lucid attitude. As a result, the researcher was able to remove himself from the study, personal bias, and focus on the narratives provided (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the researcher's methodology for the qualitative narrative study that was utilized to identify appropriate personalized professional learning pathways for public school teachers. Interviews through video conferencing were utilized for data collection methods. The researcher incorporated thematic analysis as identified through the coding procedure and utilized the six steps in analyzing data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The conclusion offered insight and recommendations for the best education practice centered around professional learning for educators. The researcher's intent of this study was to make a strong contribution to how K-12 public school teachers best learn, as adults, for personal growth.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected through the interviews conducted in the qualitative narrative study. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore through stories, teachers' perceptions of the professional learning experiences they participated in to identify optimal learning environments that can promote their own learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. The study's guiding research question was, "How do teachers perceive their professional learning experiences as a foundational tool to help them improve upon and develop new knowledge and skills in their disciplines and pedagogy?"

The use of narrative analysis was the framework utilized to gather the stories and experiences of the participants; specifically, how professional learning has impacted them as a teacher. The qualitative narrative study satisfied the purpose of the research because it provided the opportunity to listen to personal narrative accounts of the participants. Butina (2015) noted the importance of understanding how each participant constructed a story from one's own personal experience (Butina, 2015). The narrative approach provided the researcher to collect narrative (stories) from the participants through interviews.

Six participants from public school education participated in the study. After the completion of the Zoom interview, a series of steps were made to further understand the data (Smith et al., 2012). Through the step of transcribing the interviews, I was able to listen and read the interviews several times. This process enabled me to identify the repetition of words and phrases from the participants for thematic analysis.

Analysis Method

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to determine how teachers, through their stories, describe-professional learning experiences which they have participated in to

identify whether they have been optimal environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. To answer the research question, I focused on the Adult Learning theory, specifically Malcolm Knowles' four principles to identify a clear organizational pattern (Smith, 2002):

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
4. Adult Learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

I additionally focused on Path-Goal theory to conceptualize whether each adult was able to have their goal accomplished and what was blocking the adult along the path. This process provided a step to assist with identifying themes.

Through the process of analysis of information provided by the adults, data were discovered that fit into clear themes in each reading of the transcribed interviewed. This information was documented in the Microsoft Word tool. I split up the interviewee's narrative into smaller pieces and grouped them by theme with other interviewee's statements. This broke up the individual's personal narrative (Smith et al., 2012). I coded with narrative blocks (themes) on the table in Microsoft Word and read over all the narratives to note their similarities and differences. I then created nest codes based on the framework and collated each event by its structure (theme) and themes related to Adult Learning theory (Riessman, 1993). The analysis was completed by hand to ensure proper coding was made as recommended (Smith et al. 2012).

The data collection procedures were used to guide this study through a qualitative research method. After data collection and analysis, member checking was completed to ensure credibility with the participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Member-checking enabled the participants to provide feedback and clarify any misconceptions during the process of transcription (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). I used narrative analysis to analyze the content from the various candidates to understand how each participant constructed a story from one's own personal experience (Butina, 2015). The narrative approach enabled me to gain the proper narrative (stories) from the participants through interviews.

Presentation of Results and Findings

For this research, the data was collected from six participants, each through a separate Zoom interview. One important understanding is that each participant was provided the opportunity to share past professional learning experiences. The interview process consisted of 14 questions. In the first part of the interview the participants were asked to share their professional background. Questions 1-5 were used to gather background information about each participant and provided an opportunity to develop comfort in the interview. The second portion of the interview provided the six participants the opportunity to reflect on their firsthand experiences. Questions 6-12 were used to allow the participants to share their personal stories about their experiences with professional learning, including their observations in their public school district. The third portion of the interview empowered the six participants to reflect on the interview and to provide the opportunity to build on their stories with suggestions and insight related to the topic.

Three major themes were identified through the interviews with the six participants: *the importance of motivation*, *the purpose for professional growth*, and *the empowerment through individual choice*.

Table 4.1

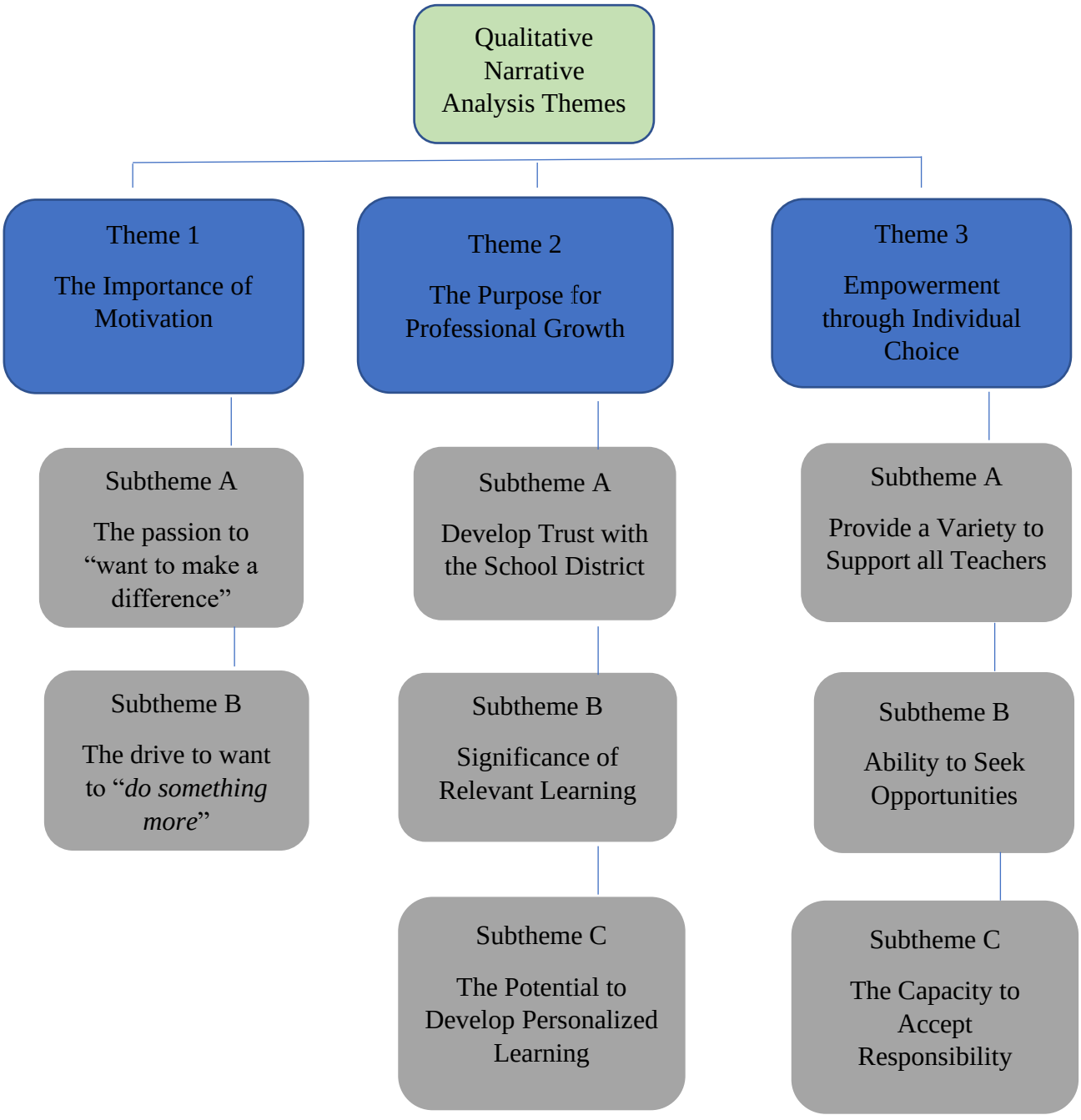
Theory Analysis: Malcolm Knowles' four principles (Smith, 2002):

Malcolm Knowles Principles	**Participant Involvement**	**Theme Development**
Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.	No	• *The importance of motivation.* • *The purpose for professional growth.* • *Empowerment through individual choice.*
Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.	No	• *The importance of motivation.* • *The purpose for professional growth.*
Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.	Yes	• *The. importance of motivation* • *The purpose for professional growth.* • *Empowerment through individual choice.*
Adult Learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.	Unsure	• *The importance of motivation.* • *Empowerment through individual choice.* • *The purpose for professional growth.*

Through further questioning, subthemes were identified as *the passion to "make a difference," the drive to want to "do something more," to develop trust with the school district,* the significance of *relevant learning, the potential to develop personalized learning, to provide a variety to support all teachers, the ability to seek opportunities, and the capacity to accept responsibility.* Based on the collective analysis of the principles with the participants, it was evident that without their inclusion the Path to the Goal was not clear for understanding the importance of professional learning.

Table 4.2

Themes and Subthemes Summary



The Importance of Motivation

The participants started their conversations by sharing their motivation for becoming a teacher. Each participant was provided the opportunity to freely express their purpose for choosing the educational field as a career. Participant 1 shared: "*I did not originally want to be a teacher, but then I started to volunteer in the classroom and enjoyed working with the students to make a difference."* Based on the information shared by Participant 1, the visits to the classroom provided a sense of joy and completeness that the current job was lacking. The evidence provided illustrated a desire to do more than what the participant was currently doing.

All participants, six out of six, shared a passion for wanting to make a difference in their personal lives, as well as make a difference for someone else. This was illustrated with the response from Participant 4: "*I was working in business, and it was the same thing every day. I wanted to do something more and give back to others,"* this type of servant professional career selection was identified for all participants. When completing the analysis of the participants' collective stories, the importance of motivation was indicated as a theme. Participants shared their stories of why they educational field to "make a difference" or "do something more" than they were already accustomed to.

Each participant talked about obtaining their professional certifications, including the motivation to select the certification area. Participants made that life-long commitment to instruct students in areas that they found intrigue and where they could leave an imprint on students. Interestingly, it was observed that five out of six participants' certification selection surprised themselves: *"I would not have guessed I would be teaching at this level when I graduated from high school."*

In all instances, the participants continued their educational growth with additional certification areas. Participants expressed their *love for life-long learning* and *wanting to improve themselves* as the main reason for receiving additional certifications. One participant completed the administrative degree, however, found that career path to be too far removed from student interaction. When completing the analysis of the participants' collective stories, the importance of motivation was indicated as a theme based on the continued desire to learn and grow. The participants expressed their desire to be able to select what intrigued them the most, and as an adult, have the opportunity for choice in their own selection as a course of motivation.

To gain a better understanding, each participant shared their number of years in service in the public education platform, with the average years in service interviewed was 14.6 years. The 14.6 years are a reflection in the education category; however, two participants had worked ten years in another career field prior to making the switch due to their motivation to help others and improve their lifestyles. This evidence illustrates a lack of motivation in the previous profession and the ability to make a difference in the field of education, resulting in the change.

Through stories, each participant shared there was an appropriate placement for teaching within their certification area. It was observed that three of the six participants had been approached by their administration, within the past two years, to teach classes outside of their certification. All three participants expressed the challenge to be asked to *"do something they were not prepared for"* and *"watch the students without an appropriate teacher"* but decided that they were not the right fit to assist with their lack of certification. Participant 1 shared: *"I would be doing a disservice to the students if I were teaching a subject that I was not familiar with. In turn, this would limit my motivation as I did not select that certification area or a reason."* As a result, all participants identified their current placement was within their

certification area, which helped them identify with having a sense of motivation to want to do something more in a field they expressed comfort with.

The Purpose for Professional Growth

Participants were provided the opportunity to provide stories about the significant question of professional learning and its purpose, **"**In your professional opinion, what is the main purpose of professional learning for teachers?" All participants reflected and shared a response as they visually displayed attention to this question as their body posture, identified in the Zoom interview, improved as they responded.

Participant 6 expressed that professional learning can be delivered appropriately for the presenter, however: "*Professional learning should be relevant for the teachers."* This information included that all professional learning is not relevant for the participants during the school year. Participant 3 shared: "*Everything is advancing and changing in education, so professional learning should be as well."* This information provided insight into how schools are empowered to be at or ahead of the learning curve to best prepare their teachers. And participant 6 stated: *"I should learn more with professional learning and be a greater service to the students."* It was noted that each participant expressed a desire to *"learn more"* each time professional learning occurred. The overarching feedback provided by all six participants was professional learning should help the person grow and learn new things every time.

The purpose of professional learning led smoothly into the next question to address the participants' satisfaction with their professional learning. The results were emphatically collective, with six out of six participants expressing their lack of satisfaction with the professional learning they receive from their respective public-school districts. Interestingly, one participant shared that: *"I have not been satisfied for some time. We had stagnant direction and*

there was no collaboration, so I took the initiative to see learning opportunities for myself." When asked a follow-up question to inquire what the teachers have done as a whole, the participant expressed that while the overall satisfaction of professional learning is low, this also limits the requirements that teachers need to meet: *"there is a lack of motivation from the teachers to want to learn and grow and this is challenging for me, who wants to improve."* Four other participants concurred with the follow-up question, that motivation has decreased, making professional learning stagnant.

One participant provided a faithful response in the school district: *"This is a tricky component. I must believe that I will get what I need from the district. But I still go after what I want to learn."* This participant's response illustrates the factor of trust in teachers. Overall, five out of the six participants identified a lack of trust in the overall professional learning model presented by their public school district. Participants shared frustration with their school districts and trusted that relevant learning would occur to support them in their classroom.

The participants' responses focused on having reciprocal cooperation with the school district administration to support their learning while having the chance to take risks and fail forward. The sub-theme of developing trust with the school district became evident as stories were shared. Participant 6 said: *"My role is big. I make it a point to be involved and ask questions at faculty meetings to be informed. I feel comfortable enough to seek opportunities and share them with colleagues."* Another participant shared that being more vocal and advocating for opportunities is important: *My role is changing. I have become more vocal so I can be more involved."*

Each participant expressed that a change in how professional learning is structured, supported, and encouraged is necessary to have continuous improvement for teachers to learn

and grow. For example, Participant 4 said: *"I am trying to change it and work in collaboration with the school administration and the educational committee to make a difference for relevant learning and individual choice for growth."* Based on the narratives shared, it is evident that teachers want to take risks and try new things to learn and grow. This process, in conjunction with the ability to be trusted by administration to fail forward, is significant for professional learning opportunities to formulate and empower teachers to develop in their disciplines.

The participants shared stories of facing challenges in relation to professional learning every day that connected with the subtheme of develop trust with a school district. With each participant serving in the capacity of a classroom teacher, each understood that their opinion reflects their position, and not that of a school district administrator. Participant 1 stated the most challenging component with professional learning is: "*I find that there is a lack of intent or motivation from the school to ensure that learning is relevant."* This is the message that participants shared in different words, with a lack of support from administration creating a challenge.

Additional challenges were expressed by participants that ranged from finding time to complete professional learning, finding opportunities that are available, as well as finding substitutes to cover classes to attend professional learning. Participant 4 said: *"a challenge is finding what suits the needs of a person, a teacher, to learn."* The limited offering of professional learning opportunities was supported in three out of the six participants' responses.

Further, participants shared the culture of the teaching environment, which created a significant challenge for teachers to work together to identify common needs. The school culture for teachers to have collaboration is a direct result of the teachers being on the same page: "*the culture that has been created over time creates the greatest challenge. We need to shift our*

mindset to collaborate to get to where we need to be." All the participants shared that they have grown frustrated with cultures created by teachers and school districts and that their needs to be common ground to collaborate "*we don't know what we don't know…but we do know that we all need to work together to seek improvement opportunities and if that means to make a change, then we need to do it."* Personalities as well as professional egos have created boundaries for teachers to create a healthy environment to develop their learning.

Empowerment Through Individual Choice

The participants shared varied stories for receiving choice from their respective school districts. The results of this question ranged with all the participants as their personal narratives supplied individual responses. For instance, participant 5 said: *"I accepted the role of the lead teacher and part of my role is to task the team to collaborate. Through this process I look for opportunities that can benefit the team and be reflective for professional learning.* In this case, the participant understood that waiting around is not an ideal option and identified the need to find targeted learning opportunities as a leader.

Identifying goals through opportunities developed as another participant expressed that to reach the goal established, that seeking opportunities by herself is imperative for her development as a teacher. Further, finding joy in one's daily craft was rationalized by two of the six participants: *I look to make it not boring. I know that the school is not providing me with what I need or want… so I must take the initiate to identify my own needs and seek out opportunities so I can develop."* The subtheme of ability to seek opportunities became clear from the participants' responses. All the participants shared that they do not want to wait for their involvement to manifest and look for growth on their own in the process. This information further displays a lack of trust in the school district and an increased frustration with the slow

process of the system to change for the betterment of the teachers.

The participants provided the opportunity to be empowered to create individual choices can create an increase in accountability. The subtheme, the capacity to accept responsibility, materialized as the participants looked inward at the potential to accept responsibility to manage progress: "In your professional opinion, who is accountable for improving teacher instructional practice through professional learning?" Based on the responses from all six participants, it was clear that teachers are responsible for their own learning. Through the information shared, the participants expressed frustration with the professional learning provided by the school districts but asserted that they (participants) can seek out learning through their own personal motivation. Participant 1 said: *"We need to all be reflective, both school district administration and teachers. I understand the process can take time to move the needle, but nothing stops me from looking for opportunities and sharing the information."* This reflection provides insight that no matter who makes the ultimate decision, each participant can take the initiative and seek out opportunities on their own.

The passion to "want to make a difference" emerged as a subtheme for all participants as they expressed their purpose for becoming a teacher was centered around motivation and helping others. Participant 2 stated: *"Teachers have the ability to make a difference in students' lives every day, so we should be reflective on what we say to them and take the initiative to learn and grow ourselves in order to keep up with the students."* This summation of helping others despite being limited in what is perceived as trust and support is still the essential drive behind becoming an educator in the first place.

Seeking improvement through actionable steps was relayed through the participants' responses for the twelfth question: "What would you improve in the school's professional

learning model to make it more beneficial for both you as a teacher, and the school creating the opportunity?" This question provided each participant with the opportunity to make measurable suggestions for an effective professional learning model. Participant 4 said: *"we should be provided a variety of learning opportunities to grow."* This assertion is a result of the information shared throughout the questions that focused on teachers needing more opportunities that are relevant for developing their discipline.

Participant 4 stated: *"similar to how we instruct our students, our interests and needs should be considered when reflecting on how professional learning is developed for the school district."* This reflection provided insight into how the learning process for students is like that of adults; adults should have choice and voice in their learning. This is an extension of Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning theory.

A final reflection provided by four out of the six participants focused on personalized learning as a model for professional learning. The participants expressed that since school districts are limiting the options for learning, teachers should be provided the chance to personalize their learning. Through ownership and empowerment, personalized learning is another component of Knowles' Adult Learning theory as it provides direct adult involvement. Participant 2 said: *"learning should be personalized for each teacher."* The participants shared that there are opportunities to improve professional learning and the subtheme of personalized learning emerged. The participants reflected that personalized learning addressed the *"round peg square hole"* theory in that all teachers are not created equally.

Each participant further recognized that much needs to happen to have improvement occur. Participant 6 said: *"I recognize that no matter what instructional leader is in charge, we, the teachers, need to be open to change and growth to improve."* This inward reflection is

imperative for teachers to recognize that change starts with the teacher who wants to improve. Participant 3 summarized an earlier question: *"attitudes and culture from the teachers receiving the learning need to have an open mindset. We talk about change as if it is a terrible thing, but it is continuous improvement."* Each participant expressed their desire to be a teacher as a career choice all the way through retirement. The participants reflected in their previous responses that making a difference in others' lives is an important reason to be the best at what they can be. The participants shared their personal investment and thematically linked their responses to the three themes *Individual Choice, Professional Growth, and Motivation.*

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore how teachers tell their stories about their professional learning experiences which they have participated in to identify whether they have been optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. This chapter is a compilation of the data collected through narrative interviews. The participants shared that further questioning can be centered around *personalized learning, attitudes, and culture of teachers, and creating motivation in teachers.* The participants recognized this list of interview questions focused on *professional learning* and provided them with the opportunity to express their reflections.

The data were examined to provide an analysis of the results. Based on the data three themes were introduced to provide and understanding of the participants' perspectives and there was evidence to support that teachers' professional learning experiences do not help them learn and grow in their disciplines and pedagogy: *the importance of motivation, the purpose for professional growth,* and *the empowerment through individual choice*. Through further questioning, subthemes were identified as *the passion to "make a difference," the drive to want*

to "do something more," to develop trust with the school district, the significance of *relevant learning, the potential to develop personalized learning, to provide a variety to support all teachers, the ability to seek opportunities, and the capacity to accept responsibility*.

All six participants theorized that they have been successful with professional growth in relation to their profession as teachers because they continue to be motivated and seek opportunities for themselves. The participants reflected on their firsthand experiences and shared what they considered to be helpful based on the questions. The participants communicated their commitment to their profession learning development, no matter what may hold them back. Summarizing the information from the six participants, Participant 6 decreed *"we are not always in control of what happens to us. But we are in total control of how we respond."*

The findings illustrated that participants did not feel that professional learning from the school district is preparing them to be the teacher they need to be. Additionally, the participants feel there are potential cultural and attitude barriers from teachers that hinder the necessary change to improve professional learning. The participants shared adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning, be reflective on their past experiences, and have an interest in topics that are relevant to their professional life and in real-time that provide clear understanding of what should be accomplished along the path to attain the goal.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore how teachers tell stories to describe professional learning in which they have participated to identify whether they have been optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning theory was the framework used to comprehend the participants' experiences through the interview process (Smith, 2002). Knowles' theory provided the foundation for the research question and data analysis process. The research question for this study was, "How do teachers perceive the professional learning experiences as a foundational tool to improve upon and develop new knowledge and skills in their disciplines and pedagogy?" In addition, the Path-Goal theory was utilized to assess if motivation was effectively to provide professional learning.

This study was significant because there was minimal research on the importance of motivation and professional learning in relation to potential teacher growth. The narrative design was the optimal method to utilize to gather information during the process and analysis of the findings as it provided the participants the opportunity to tell stories in a comfortable environment. The findings illustrate the teachers' perspectives of how they view professional learning and its impact on their professional growth.

The following three major themes and seven subthemes emerged: 1) the importance of motivation, with the sub themes, a) the passion to "make a difference" and b) the drive to want to "do something more"; 2) the purpose for professional growth, with the sub themes, a) to develop trust with the school district, b) the significance of relevant learning, and c) the potential to develop personalized learning ; and 3) the empowerment through individual choice, with the sub

themes, a) to provide a variety to support all teachers; b) the ability to seek opportunities; and c) the capacity to accept responsibility.

Interpretation and Importance of Findings

The findings from this qualitative narrative study provide implications, most importantly that all the teachers in this study viewed professional learning as an integral component that can assist teachers to develop their knowledge and skills. To assist with this growth, school districts should be willing to collaborate with teachers for the overall potential of improved professional learning (Carpenter, 2015). This study provided full narratives from the participants to provide fluid personal conversations for lucid comprehension. The use of relevant and meaningful accounts from the participants can increase the understanding of the first-hand accounts to connect with the readers' emotions (Lingard, 2019).

The findings of this qualitative narrative study aligned with Adult Learning theory, specifically that adults need to be involved to have the professional learning work to its full capacity (O'Neill, 2020). The participants shared, through their stories, that their needs have not been met to be the best in their profession by not being included in the planning and evaluation of their instructional practice, by not being encouraged to take risks and make mistakes for basic learning, by not having individual choice about learning subjects that are relevant to their professional interests, and by not focusing on the problem-centered areas for growth and learning. Professional learning is impactful when it is mapped with intention and includes the adults who are involved (Mertlet, 2018).

Teachers should be involved in the developmental process to best understand the path in relation to the goal of professional learning. A well-rounded professional learning plan that is comprehensive in building and growing the teachers every year is a valuable tool for teachers to

have a lucid understanding of the expectations (Amjjad et al. (2017). Teaching requires consistent education for teachers to be the experts in their educational craft. Therefore, the school district should work in unison with the teachers to develop a plan, over the years, that identifies key learning areas for teachers. The school district should remove the barrier and communicate in collaboration to accomplish the goal with identification of what will best motivate the teachers (Northouse, 2019).

Further, professional learning should motivate teachers to learn relevant material that is applicable (Mitchell, 2013). Participating teachers in this study described the role of feeling frustrated with not being able to grow and learn in their profession; teachers are looking for opportunities to illustrate that they matter. When teachers can collaborate, they can impact the culture of a school (DuFour, 2016). An increased change with intentional professional learning can impact the teachers as individuals, as well as a collective whole. Thus, both school districts and teachers should remove the obstacles and create options for teachers that will empower them to personalize their learning based on their interests, needs, and abilities. By removing the

Implications

Professional learning continues to be mandated for teachers to complete, as well as for school districts to offer (D'Agati, 2016). The process for structuring professional learning has not been optimized by school districts. The current professional learning model limits the school districts and teachers from creating choice and developing motivation for learning and growth. The development of professional learning should include teachers with a voice and choice, in what they learn and how they are able to share it out. Both parties need to collaborate to change for improvement with the current education trends. Until there is an acceptance that how one learns matters, change will not occur (The New Teacher Project, 2015). Further, teachers need to

find the motivation to identify what they want to learn from their pedagogy. The data illustrates that teachers need and want a change to be effective with their own learning. Until this happens, the pattern will continue with limited growth and development.

Recommendations for Action

Teachers enter the field of educating students for a variety of reasons. In this qualitative narrative study, the participants were clear that their motivation was to help and make a difference in students' lives. Teachers need to continue to feel that same importance of motivation and have their required learning be engaging and meaningful. Creating time for teachers to reflect on their personal learning can develop a sense of empowerment.

One recommendation is to create a professional learning committee comprised of teachers of all levels and school district administrators. Through this committee, the goal should empower all people to reflect on how professional learning has been presented and look for avenues to increase the relevancy of the process. Teachers can have trust in their school districts and motivational support to implement the best practices in their educational field to provide opportunities that will allow authentic learning and growth (Buffum et al., 2018). The committee can explore various methods of Adult Learning, based on Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning theory, including, but not limited to PLCs, PLNs, and book studies. The committee can unpack the school's desired purpose for professional development to provide clear expectations for teachers to feel empowered.

A second recommendation is to look for opportunities to create choice and voice for professional learning. Through collaboration, teachers can first identify the purpose of professional learning and then create the options for teachers to follow the path toward the goal through differentiated choices. Teachers can provide this method to students, so school districts

should have the same opportunity to do so with teachers. Based on the evidence from the study, teachers want to learn and grow and know what they need to enhance their learning. To follow the Path-Goal theory, teachers and school districts should align the calendars with a multi-year plan that can identify growth opportunities for all teachers, as well as new teachers to the district. Teachers can be a part of the cultural improvement for enhancing the professional learning process and how the structure can elicit a clear path toward the goal (Rodman, 2019).

A third recommendation is to explore personalized learning as a form of professional learning. As discussed by the participants, all teachers do not learn the same, in matter and on time. Therefore, creating a personal model for each teacher can enhance motivation and learning experience. This type of learning model can create empowerment and the ability for the teacher to engage in learning that enhances growth and development. Aligned with both the Adult Learning theory and the Path-Goal theory, teachers will be able to enhance their creation, learning, and joy by feeling empowered through learning that matters to them. The model for teacher generated learning can have a positive impact on their own learning (Capraro et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Further Study

This research provided beneficial insight to improve the problem of the study centered around professional learning. Since this study focused on one area for the research question, there is a need to conduct further research to explore additional future research. Avalos asserts that professional learning is a complex process and future research should focus on one topic to best understand improvement or change (2011).

Next steps for researchers in this area of study:

- Engage in personalized learning. Based on the evidence from the participants, it was clear that creating a model to allow teachers the opportunity to have choice and voice is imperative.
- A need exists for creating a pathway for teachers to learn after they graduate from college to enhance their pedological skills for the classroom.
- Further study should include the best strategies to implement professional learning with a culture that is not ready for change. Change for growth and improvement should be reflected in how to roll out a new method that can impact the culture and attitudes of the teachers.

Additional researchers could study:

- The culture of the teaching faculty and its impact on professional learning.
- How to increase motivation with a teaching faculty.
- Does teacher professional learning have an impact on student learning?
- How can administrators change the culture regarding professional learning?

Conclusion

Teachers enter the field of education motivated to help others learn and grow. As a result, teachers have the potential to follow the same model with professional learning. Teachers have invested time and money to be effective and wish to continue personal growth to develop their craft as a professional. The goal of professional learning is to provide teachers with appropriate learning that is relevant and worthy of their time, that will lead to impacting growth to develop them as educators, over time.

School district leaders should embrace the opportunity to collaborate with and listen to the stories of teachers to enhance the professional learning model. Collaborative reflection based upon real stories can provide an improved culture and attitude from the teachers to enhance their overall development as educators. The teachers are most impacted by what they learn and how they learn it. Therefore, teachers should have a voice in the process of professional learning for all educators, and a methodical plan should be created that promotes professional learning over time.

School districts will continue to be required to offer professional learning for teachers and teachers will be required to complete professional learning for certification requirements. Therefore, by crossing the paths of both stakeholders the educational unit can enhance learning for teachers and promote motivation and empowerment.

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APPENDIX A: SOCIAL MEDIA (TWITTER) INVITATION for RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPATION

Subject: Research Study Participation Request

Dear K-12 Educator:

I am currently a doctoral student at the University of New England working on my dissertation, Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Learning Experiences to Promote Growth in their Discipline and Pedagogy, and I am looking to interview 8 to 10 volunteers who are known as K-12 educators, across the United States, who have participated in professional learning experiences. I am hopeful that you will be one of them.

Participant Information:

- Interviews will be conducted online through Zoom and are expected to last up to 30 minutes.
- Prior to the interview, a consent form will be reviewed and signed. An interview occurring online will use an electronic signature, and an emailed form is acceptable.
- Volunteers will have an opportunity to review a transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy.
- Participant identity and institution information will be protected and masked.

I know you are very busy, and I appreciate your participation and will be respectful of your time. Please let me know if you would like to schedule an interview or if I can provide any additional information about the research study. I may be reached at koleary6@une.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Karl O'Leary

Doctoral Candidate

University of New England

Version 8.22.18

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

Project Title: Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Learning Experiences to Promote Growth in their Discipline and Pedagogy

Principal Investigator(s):
Karl O'Leary, Doctoral Student, University of New England, phone (607) 244-6449, email: koleary6@une.edu

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

Each year, school districts provide teachers professional learning opportunities, across the United States. The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers describe professional learning in which they have participated to identify whether these experiences have been optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

There is no consultative or financial interest relating to this study.

Who will be in this study?

You have been identified as a potential participant in this study because you are a certified teacher who works in the K-12 discipline in the United States. The approximate number of adult staff members participating in this study is 6 to 10.

What will I be asked to do?

This research is being conducted to explore how you as a teacher describe professional learning in which you have participated to identify whether these experiences have provided optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy. Participation in this research includes completing a virtual interview.

The interview will take a minimum of thirty minutes of your time and will be conducted via Zoom and recorded for transcription purposes. The anonymous responses from your interview will be collected as data.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There is always some level of risk for the subjects. The researcher will minimize any risks by utilizing a password protected computer, by keeping the participants anonymous, and providing the opportunity for participants to review the transcript for accuracy. Participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous. You may terminate your participation from this study at any time if you experience any form of discomfort. Nothing that you disclose while participating in this study may be used in a negative way against you as all results and participants will remain anonymous.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

The benefit to the subjects is not monetary but does give them a voice to express their perceptions which may help inform the research. The data collected from this study will provide teachers participating in professional learning in school districts with a voice in the implementation of future professional learning in schools.

What will it cost me?

There are no costs associated with this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interview will be stored in a password protected computer. Your privacy and anonymity will be protected, and not shared. The result of the interviews and findings will be included in the written dissertation of Karl O'Leary through the University of New England.

How will my data be kept confidential?

This study is designed to be anonymous, which means that no one can link the data results from the interview responses to you. Research records will be stored in a password protected computer device.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason. If you choose not to participate there is no penalty for you. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty.

What other options do I have?

You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

The researcher conducting this study is Karl O'Leary. For more information regarding this study, please contact Karl O'Leary, Doctoral Student, University of New England, phone (607) 244-6449, email: koleary6@une.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE (University of New England) Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

You will be given a copy of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

06/28/2021

Participant's signature or Date
Legally authorized representative

Printed name

RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature Date

Printed name

APPENDIX C: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Research Title: Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Learning Experiences Intended to Promote Growth in their Discipline and Pedagogy

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Principal Investigator: Karl O'Leary, Ed.D. student

University of New England Faculty Advisor: Dr. Deborah Jameson

As the principal investigator of this research, I understand that I may have access to confidential information about the site study and participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

I understand that names and any other identifying information about the study site and participants are completely confidential.

I agree not to make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the duration of this research investigation that could identify the people who participated in this study.

I understand that all information about the site study or the participants or accessed by me in the duration of my work will be confidential. I agree not to disclose to unauthorized people any of this information, unless specifically authorized to do so by applicable law or court order or public health or clinal need.

I understand that I do not read information about the voluntary participants, or any other confidential documents. I will not ask questions of participants for any personal gain but only for this research project.

I agree to notify Dr. Deborah Jameson, faculty advisor, immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

_____ _____ _____

Signature of local principal investigator Date Printed name

APPENDIX D: SOLICITATION for PARTICIPANTS

UNE Online
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

Solicitation for Participants

Who can participate: K-12 Public School Teachers
What: Doctorate study to explore teachers' perceptions about professional learning
Where: Virtual Zoom interview in the location of your choice; privacy and anonymity will be protected
When: Scheduled 30 minutes in the next four weeks
Why: To explore how teachers describe professional learning experiences in which they have participated to identify whether there have been optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

Karl O'Leary, Doctoral Student
Express interest by July 10, 2021

University of New England
email: koleary6@une.edu

Please email with any questions or interest to participate.

UNE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name of Interviewer: Karl O'Leary

Pseudonym: TBA

Date of Interview: TBA

Location/Method: ZOOM Platform

Greeting and Initial Interaction:

Good afternoon, (*Participant*). I appreciate your willingness to meet with me and the time to interview you for my research study. I am a doctoral student at the University of New England in the online EdD program for Transformative Leadership. The title of my study is Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Learning Experiences Intended to Promote Growth in their Discipline and Pedagogy. This study seeks to explore how teachers describe professional learning in which they have participated to identify whether there have been optimal learning environments that promote learning and growth in their discipline and pedagogy.

Thank you for reviewing the consent form. Do you have any questions about it before you sign it? (*If yes, answer. If not, proceed*).

Your role in education is ideal for my research and I seek to understand your experiences. This interview is for my research purposes, and I will be transcribing the interview, as well. Do I have your permission to record the interview for transcription so that I may more easily listen and interact with you, rather than take notes?

You will be provided a chance to review the transcript and make comments and/or corrections to it prior to my use in this study. Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns that you need me to address?

Thank you.

Opening:

I would like to begin with some background information about you to help me understand your perspective and experiences.

1. Why did you choose the field of education for your profession?
2. What are your certification areas?
3. How many years have you been teaching in a public school?
4. At what grade levels have you taught?
5. What are you currently teaching?

6. In your professional opinion, what is the main purpose of professional learning for teachers?
7. In your professional opinion, are you satisfied with the professional learning you currently receive?
8. Based on your professional experience, how would you describe your role in your school's professional learning process?
9. How has your involvement and participation in professional learning experiences influenced your professional practices?
10. In your professional opinion, what do you think is the greatest challenge in developing professional learning experiences that are relevant for the teachers?
11. In your professional opinion, who is accountable for improving teacher instructional practice through professional learning?
12. What would you improve in the school's professional learning model to make it more beneficial for both you as a teacher, and the school creating the opportunity?
13. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?
14. What questions do you believe I should have asked you and did not?

Thank you very much for taking your time to interview for this research study. At this time, I will stop recording.