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The Importance of Relevant Professional Development

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### **Abstract**

Teacher professional development is key to helping teachers stay connected, enthused, well-informed, and engaged in meeting the demands of our ever-changing profession. The purpose of this study was to investigate how effective the current model of professional development, and reinforce how the one-size-fits-all model of training is not meeting the growing needs of today's teacher. Through the qualitative process of surveys and informal interviews I was able to extract information from my participants that aligned with the research that was conducted. Teachers overwhelmingly expressed that professional development that was individualized, that they had a say in choosing, was much more meaningful, provided strategies that they implemented in a timely manner, and added value and excitement into their daily classroom instruction and student engagement. Another purpose of this study was to research who decided what professional development was needed and who received it? It was concluded that principals or administrators needed to be actively performing observations, and providing relevant feedback so that they are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their staff. Then professional development could be structured to fill the gaps in a teacher's pedagogy. Participants strongly advocated for collaboration time to compare, share, and plan successful next steps. To conclude, participants surveyed overwhelmingly stated that professional development that they attended that was their choice, had a greater impact on their confidence, willingness to implement, and stay with it, as compared to the one-size-fits-all model that they felt was a waste of their time and precious school funds.

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## The Importance of Relevant Professional Development

### **Chapter One: The Problem**

In today's complex world of ever-changing thoughts and beliefs and educational expectations, teachers are one of the most critical components that make the difference in fulfilling the student achievement gap. The quality and ability of teachers to deliver intellectually challenging curriculum to students has been determined to be one of the biggest contributing factors in student achievement, especially in the area serving low-income low socioeconomic students. Content of the current teacher professional development model is to educate, share and prepare new and veteran teachers by using a broadly-based model of a one-size-fits-all form of training. My research will investigate the many flaws in this concept and explore methods of professional development that is proven to be effective, inspiring, and confidence building. It will show how specializing professional development to meet the needs of the individual teacher will affect their ability to boost student academic successes, implement new methodologies, and share their own expertise with other professionals. With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards teachers are required to add new teaching methods to their existing teaching tool kits, therefore effective professional development is essential for implementation of this new skill set. My research will show the consequences of such diversity and how the participants will be able to collaborate more effectively and regularly, share their strengths and weaknesses, and develop next steps for improvement. It will suggest ways that administrators and other leaders can support their teachers by being aware of what professional development is needed. My research will show that wind professional learning opportunities live up to their potential, professional learning support need to attend two specific characteristics so that learning may be linked to practice and useful coherent ways. It is very important that

professional development be supported by activities that are job and bedded, collaborative, and taken in small steps (Murray, 2014).

### **Purpose of Study**

The intent of the current teacher professional development is to educate, share, and prepare new and veteran teachers using a one-size-fits-all form of trainings. The problem with this approach is that not all teachers need the same professional development, in the same areas, at the same time. a more individualized approach to professional development will strengthen teachers in the areas of concern. The questions my research will investigate are: 1. How can school districts promote relevant professional development? My research will investigate the different ways that school districts promote relevant professional development. One of the many ways that can strengthen a teacher's ability is through collaboration and keeping portfolios that are specific and directed in an area of concern. Time must be given for teachers to conference together, to share strengths and weaknesses in newly attained strategies and methods of teaching. 2. How is that decision made? Often teachers or not observed or evaluated often enough. My research will show that principles who regularly visit classrooms, do informal observations, and give relevant feedback are able to recognize gaps in teacher's ability and suggest professional development that will strengthen those areas of need. Often peers have strength they don't even recognize and when a principal discovers these abilities they can be shared with other peers across grade levels or at a specific grade level. There is a great need for teachers to share their successes. Professional development needs to be offered to teachers to show them the importance of using multiple types of data to inform their teaching practices and classroom procedures. Until teachers have the ability and the expertise to investigate and compare multiple

forms of data, student achievement will continue to have the same results, unprepared students that are not able to meet the demands of the complex world that they are about to enter.

### **Literature**

In these articles multiple ways are addressed to prepare our students to further close the achievement gap. Some key information that was shared focused on students who come from low socioeconomic background and the important role that rigorous curriculum has on academic gains, the power of a positive mindset, and the essentials that should be taught to inspire lifelong successes. This research acts as a roadmap for leadership in the fact that it focuses on the importance of the above-mentioned areas of concern.

In the article by Fischer (2015) Using evidence based instruction enables teachers to observe student responses and proceed with supported instruction. Providing a rigorous curriculum helps students to achieve because when they are taught at high levels they perform at high levels. The use of supplemental interventions can also be recommended to fill student learning gaps. Motivate and engage by using themes, technology, choice, and differentiation it will enhance motivation and engagement (Fisher, 2015). Deepen professional development for teachers. This is an essential component for driving measurable and lasting learning for students. Link school and home; cooperation between school and community are key to closing the achievement gap. Parent involvement has a strong, direct impact on student achievement. Know your students the environment they come from and harness their potential.

Often teachers don't know what they don't know. They must rely on the expertise of those who they are in contact with to lead them in the direction of growth through mentoring, coaching, and professional development. One of the most effective ways to recognize what teachers need is through the principal or other administrators performing regular, meaningful

observations and walkthroughs. The purpose of these walkthroughs should be organic, and checklist should be put aside so that the observer can concentrate on what is really happening in the classroom. It is not productive to make sure that teachers have displayed standard and objectives for subjects being taught. What is important is the content of instruction, the method of delivery, and student engagement. Yes, it is important to have anchor charts and specific support materials displayed only if students know their purpose and they are referred to and used often.

Principals and administrators must get into the classrooms often and on a regular basis. The classroom is Ground Zero. It is where the strengths and weaknesses are happening and if this potential is not recognized it could stifle the growth and improvement of a school or a district.

*School administrators need rich, firsthand information about teaching and learning to make good operational and instructional decisions. The best place to gain this information, the best setting for continued professional learning is the classroom (Baeder, 2017, p 3).*

Another model of teacher evaluation is The Casual Teacher Evaluation (Marzano, 2012). The role of teacher evaluation, proposed professional development, and how they work hand-in-hand in ensuring instructional improved practices, teacher awareness and confidence, and the importance of teacher collaboration to strengthen a teacher's pedagogy.

This model recognizes that for teacher's observations to be effective and impactful they must happen regularly. The observer needs to visit the classrooms during different times of the day, observe a range of topics being taught, the method of delivery, and how the students respond. It takes time to identify a teacher's potential, identify their strengths, and provide

feedback that will address observed weaknesses. It is a valuable investment of time that will give results and building a teacher's expertise and confidence.

However, no prescribed model of observation will prove to be successful without buy-in from all parties involved. School principals, administrators, and teachers need to acknowledge the benefits and importance of such an endeavor. The examination of teacher perceptions regarding evaluation models provides unique insights regarding the impact on teaching practices (Marzano, 2012). When teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate and reflect they tend to take more responsibility to develop as professionals. The object of any model for observation and evaluation must have the ability to recognize the specific needs of the teacher being observed and provide timely informative feedback that drives the conversation onto what are the next best steps to supporting a teacher's professional development needs. In today's demanding individualized classroom, it is no longer acceptable to provide a one-size-fits-all type of professional development. Classroom practices, interacting with new knowledge, adapting to the culture, and the ability to recognize these important factors are just a few of the complexities that teachers are faced with. Through the powers of focused observations, recommendations can be made for professional development that has the ability to further a teacher's professionalism and gain momentum and strength to meet the needs of our diverse profession.

### **Preview Methodology**

For my research study I used the method of qualitative research. I felt this was the best match for helping me answer my research question; the importance of relevant professional development, because it is primarily an exploratory research method.

By using qualitative research method, it helped me to gain an understanding of the important reasons, opinions, and motivations that teachers feel about attending professional

development. The data that I collected was from a small cohort of teachers that volunteered to participate. I used surveys, interviews, portfolios, group collaboration, or informal observations to gather data and uncover trends that appeared in my research.

Qualitative methodology was also relevant to my research because I was personally involved in the research. It helped me to study people's perspective on how they viewed professional development that they had attended. It was important for the study to focus on a small sampling of teachers rather than a large group. Because my questions on my surveys and in my interviews related more to the teacher's opinion rather than a measurable number also made qualitative method a reliable approach to investigating my research problem. I used qualitative research because I wanted to capture the human experience and the experiences of the participants and understand how my research related to the teachers individually.

### **Significance of Study**

When professional development is relevant, it can strengthen a teacher's ability to deliver informative and insightful lessons. The significance of this research will be to advise administrators, principals, and other professionals that not all teachers need the same one-size-fits-all professional development. When professional development is structured to meet the needs of the individual teachers both willingness to implement and tenacity to continue will apply. When tied in with new forms of funding, relevant professional development can close the student achievement gap, gain confidence, and promote teacher retention. It can rejuvenate a teacher's enthusiasm and bring new life into the teaching profession.

### **Conclusion**

With funding in place and available, it is now possible to move forward in supporting the needs of the teacher. Once principals and administrators get into the classrooms and see the

strengths and the weaknesses that their teachers struggle with then individualized and specific focused professional development can occur. School districts that recognize the importance of this model will experience a more fulfilled, confident teaching staff, a game in student successes, and innovation within the classroom. In Chapter two, Literature Review, I will continue to successfully promote the importance of relevant professional development New studying empirical research conducted by others in this professional field. It will strengthen my thesis.

### **Definitions**

Professional Development: In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other Educators improve their Professional Knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This is a review of literature that focuses on the importance of teacher professional development. With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards teachers are required to add new teaching methods to their existing teaching tool kits, therefore effective professional development is essential for implementation of this new skill set. The importance to give teachers the time to effectively implement what was learned, and time to collaborate and reflect on outcomes and offer suggestions for growth is a growing concern.

In today's complex world of ever changing thoughts and beliefs and educational expectations, teachers are one of the most critical components that make the difference in fulfilling the achievement gap. The quality and ability of teachers to deliver intellectually challenging curriculum to students has been determined to be one of the biggest contributing factors in student achievement, especially in the areas serving low-income and minority students. The real questions that need to be investigated are; 1. How can school districts promote relevant professional development? 2. How is that decision made?

My research will reveal the importance of professional development that is structured and focused on the needs of the teacher and how investing in professional development that is structured and focused on the needs of the teacher will produce impressive gains in many areas including student achievement and teacher retention. The consequences of the one-size-fits-all professional development will continue to have the same results, unprepared students that are not able to meet the demands of the complex world they are about to enter. My research will focus on filling the gaps in teacher craft and the importance of providing critical trainings in the areas that are the strongest predictors of student advancement and achievement.

## Themes

Throughout my review of literature my research investigated ways to strengthen the teaching profession through professional development. common themes began to arise during this process.

Theme One: “The power of observation; out with the old and in with the new. “Across our state and nation there is momentum to change the way teachers and leaders are evaluated. It is predicted that the current process of observing and evaluating teachers needs to and will change dramatically in the very near future. Through theme one of my research I will identify the importance of this change and look at different models of how this change could be implemented.

Observation versus evaluation, these are two very different aspects of a principal's duties, but both should have the same objective; to help promote and support those instructional leaders in the classroom we know as teachers.

Teachers, in most cases, are enthusiastic and welcoming to have administrators come through, stop, and observe what they are doing. It is only then can supports, suggestions, and meaningful collaborations occur that will lead the teacher on a path of development, growth, and confidence. These visits can lead to significant improvements in teaching and learning and act as a guide for developing a path for professional development that is structured and focused on the needs of the teachers.

Often teachers don't know what they don't know. They must rely on the expertise of those who they are in contact with to lead them in the direction of growth through mentoring, coaching, and professional development. One of the most effective ways to recognize what teachers need is through the principal or other administrators performing regular, meaningful

observations and walkthroughs. Principals need to refocus what the purpose of these walkthroughs should be and put aside the checklist and concentrate on what is really happening in the classroom. It is not productive to make sure that teachers have displayed standard and objectives for subjects being taught. What is important is the content of instruction, the method of delivery, and student engagement. Yes, it is important to have anchor charts and specific support materials displayed only if students know their purpose and they are referred to and used often.

Principals and administrators must get into the classrooms often and on a regular basis. The classroom is Ground Zero. It is where the strengths and weaknesses are happening and if this potential is not recognized it could stifle the growth and improvement of a school or a district.

*School administrators need rich, firsthand information about teaching and learning in order to make good operational and instructional decisions. The best place to gain that information, the best setting for continued professional learning is the classroom (Baeder, 2017, p3).*

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This model recognizes that for teacher's observations to be effective and impactful they must happen regularly. The observer needs to visit the classrooms during different times of the day, observe a range of topics being taught, the method of delivery, and how the students respond. It takes time to identify a teacher's potential, identify their strengths, and provide

feedback that will address observed weaknesses. It is a valuable investment of time that will give positive results that build a teacher's expertise and confidence.

However, no prescribed model of observation will prove to be successful without buy-in from all parties involved. School principals, administrators, and teachers need to acknowledge the benefits and importance of such an endeavor. The examination of teacher perceptions regarding evaluation models provides unique insights regarding the impact on teaching practices (Marzano, 2012). When teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate and reflect they tend to take more responsibility to develop as professionals.

The object of any model for observation and evaluation method must be grounded in the advancement of teacher effectiveness and performance. It must have the ability to recognize the specific needs of the teacher being observed and provide timely informative feedback that drives the conversation onto what are the next best steps to supporting a teacher's professional development needs. In today's demanding individualized classroom, it is no longer acceptable to provide a one-size-fits-all type of professional development. Classroom practices, interacting with new knowledge, adapting to the culture, and the ability to recognize these important factors are just a few of the complexities that teachers are faced with. Through the powers of focused observations, recommendations can be made for professional development that can further a teacher's professionalism and gain momentum and strength to meet the needs of our diverse profession.

When trying to fix what appears to be broken, teacher evaluations and observations are a key component as recognized by the National Education Association. Although not the only component, it runs a very close second only behind preparation and hiring as the most critical way to assure teacher effectiveness Teacher Assessment and Evaluation.

High quality professional development must be available to every teacher. Not only aligning these programs to state standards, schools identified yearly learning goals, but more importantly the identified needs of the teachers and students. Observations need to be performed often and by principals and other administrators who are adequately trained to conduct this important function. The use of pre-constructed checklists is obsolete and are often seen as meaningless when the outcome that is being sought is one of implementing growth and change in the classroom. Observation should be used as a positive tool whose objective is to promote comprehensive performance assessment that lead to suggested, targeted support for the teachers. This support should promote the advancement of professional growth, time to implement and practice new strategies and skills, and the opportunity to collaborate with other teaching professionals in a safe and open environment. Given these opportunities, the strength and inspiration that teachers gain from one another will serve to promote instructional leader's confidence and it master content and refine critical teaching skills, all while helping to ensure that teachers remain in the profession and in the classroom.

Theme two: "Teachers observing teachers; a different approach." Learning from colleagues is one model of professional development that is key to supporting a new vision in teaching in the 21st century. Professional learning communities are now being utilized more efficiently within school districts to meet the growing needs of successful teacher professional development. In this model a professional development you recognize the expertise of the teachers that are among you and their willingness to share their techniques and avenues of success. This collaborative teaching culture focuses on strengthening knowledge and gaining a deeper understanding of the complex forms of instruction. Research indicates that new learning for teachers needs to be sustained overtime to ensure the kind of meaningful changes in practice

that result in improved teaching and learning (McCoy, 2014). The current structure a professional development relies on someone, usually at the district level, deciding what teachers should have further instruction in. This thinking is not productive for teaching today's innovative curriculum and students. The model that is showing a lot of promise is the model of teachers teaching teachers. Collaborative learning is an important component of professional development. "Teachers teaching and observing teachers; a different approach." Direct connections have been sighted between the content of professional development and a teacher's classroom practice. As districts and schools struggle to meet the needs of an ever-growing innovative curriculum new ideas about what teachers need and how those needs must be met are emerging. One of the latest models of successful professional development is the "teachers teaching teachers" model. This is gaining recognition and relevance through successful implementation and practice. Districts are recognizing that not all teachers have the same strength or weaknesses. The ability to recognize each can have a powerful impact on a teacher's willingness to share and teach one another. Throughout my research there are key elements that are evident for this process to be successful.

- 1. Choice- teachers are like students and appreciate choice. This allows teachers to determine their personal priorities.*
- 2. Flexibility- in addition to choose, teachers need to be allowed to make modifications to make new learning work best in their own classroom environments.*
- 3. Small steps- learning is incremental. It takes time to change practice and to become lasting it must become part of the teacher's routine.*
- 4. Support and 5. Accountability- change in teaching practices is challenging and requires both support and accountability. teacher learning communities (PLC) provide teachers*

*the opportunity to develop personal action plans, report back to the group what happened as a result of implementing those plans, and reflect and receive feedback(support) from colleagues who are working on the same changes in practice (Vislocky, 2013).*

It is proven that what teachers are teaching inside their individual classroom needs to be focused on closing the gap between what students know, and bring with them, prior knowledge, and what their learning target or goals are.

Thus, professional development must move away from providing teachers with theories but provides teachers a structure that has at its heart, successful outcomes. Teachers are demanding supports that go beyond the sharing of information. Teachers want to be supported and empowered with a professional development model that allows for professional growth, time to experiment and try new strategies, personal reflection, and collaboration with their peers and co-workers. All stakeholders would have a voice.

Furthering the discussion of teachers helping teachers is an emerging model of using teacher portfolios to promote professional development that is specific to individualize school sites. This model also recognizes the importance of allowing teachers time to introduce and use new strategies, time to collaborate and reflect with other teachers, and how providing these conditions support both professional learning and a teacher's confidence.

Although not a new approach creating and using teaching portfolios is being revisited. These portfolios required teachers in depth focus on one specialized area, to become efficient and effective in that area and then move on to the next important area of concern. This reinforces the previous suggested structure on taking steps to ensure understanding and complete implementation. When using portfolios, it was found that teachers were more engaged and reflective of their own teaching practices and through the constructive conversation were able to

grow as professionals. This model of professional development encourages teachers to learn with and from colleagues in their school communities, to reflect critically on their daily practices, and to enhance their capacity to understand complex subject matters from the perspective of diverse learners (Xu, 2003).

Theme three: “Professional development funding; the vehicle that makes this possible.” Professional development is not a new concept in the profession of teaching. In the past it was viewed as necessary but not critical. Only when newly adopted or the latest and greatest methodology was buzzing around would teachers be rounded up and fed what professional development was deemed necessary from the administrators, usually the superintendent's office. Although this model still exists in several school districts, studies are showing that more individualized professional development is what is needed for true advancement in meeting the demands on teachers that the Common Core State Standards have produced.

Funding for schools in California had stayed the same for 40 years. Finally, in 2013, new Legislature was enacted by Governor Jerry Brown known as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Originally projected to take 8 years to fully fund we are now in year four of implementation. Of the many contributing factors to school funding the LCFF recognizes the importance of professional development.

As part of the LCFF, school districts are required to develop, adopt, and update a 3-year Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). There are eight State priority areas that must be taken into consideration and these priorities established the goals and actions and how they are measured.

With federal and state governments recognizing the importance the urgency for relevant teacher professional development, monies are specifically set aside to be spent on this. It

recognizes the importance to give educators the proper training and professional development to help strengthen a teacher's pedagogy and ensure teacher retention.

With funding in place and available, it is now possible to move forward in supporting the needs of the teacher. No longer should professional development be designed as a one-size-fits-all. Instead it needs to be individualized and focused on the specific needs of the teachers. School districts that recognize the importance of this model will experience a more fulfilled, confident teaching staff. They will be able to sufficiently retain teachers for years and break the trending pattern of qualified teacher shortages (Koppich, 2015).

### **Summary**

It begins with administrators and principals. Teachers work as solo practitioners isolated from each other. They graduate from college and are put into a classroom with the assumption that they are prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. For veteran teachers, it is assumed that they have the wherewithal to comprehend and develop new strategies and recognize new standards and priorities. They teach for long periods of time without inspection from their supervisors. Teachers need constructive feedback and suggestions on how to build and develop their craft. This feedback is welcomed in many forms. It can come from an administrator or principle that actively observes often and collaborates regularly with teachers. Not only to highlight weaknesses, but to celebrate strengths that teachers have to offer their school community. Only then will professional development be structured and focused on the needs of the individual teacher. Multiple observations over extended periods of time need to happen concluded with feedback that is intended to evaluate a teacher's progress toward agreed-upon goals. It is no longer acceptable to evaluate teachers once or twice a year and expect professional advancement or desired outcomes to be achieved. The relevance and importance of timely

professional development for teachers to be prepared for the reforms and education brought about by the adoption of the Common Core State Standards is a must.

Once recognized, the format of this development must be addressed. My research investigated several approaches that were concluded to be successful. Deciding which model would best benefit a specific School site would be the decision of the school site staff itself. Although many teachers enter this process unwillingly they found it extremely beneficial and rewarding at the end and recognized the attributes that it added to their teaching skills and pedagogy.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The intent of the current teacher professional development model is to educate, share, and prepare new and veteran teachers by using a broadly-based model of a "one-size-fits-all" form of trainings. My research investigated the many flaws in this concept and explored methods of professional development that was proven to be effective, inspiring, and confidence-building. It showed how specializing professional development to meet the needs of the individual teacher affected their ability to boost student academic successes, implement new methodologies, and share their own expertise with other professionals. The consequences of such diversity are that teachers were able to collaborate more effectively and regularly, share their strengths and weaknesses, and develop next steps for improvement. My research investigated multiple different approaches to correct the current model. It suggested ways that administrators and other leaders could support their teachers by being aware of what professional development is needed.

The content in this chapter identified my method of research. I used surveys and questionnaires. I was able to evaluate the methods used by participants and share their findings feelings and outcome of relevant teacher professional development.

#### **Design**

The design method used in this study was qualitative. This method was used due to its concern with human behavior and the use of information gathered from personal experiences. This design answers the "why" questions. I will be conducted informal observations and interviews. I asked participants to keep journals and describing why they felt that my research question was an important one. We had formal and informal collaborations and opportunities to gather together to share strengths and weaknesses as we progressed through this process. This

research was empirical, studying teachers in their natural classroom environment and trying to make sense or interpret experiences. To understand the social reality of individuals, groups, and cultures as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it (McLeod, 2017).

### **Participants**

The participants of this research were a combination of professionals in various teaching positions throughout ABC School District. They were invited to collaborate in this research by invitation, recommendation, or request. Most of the professional participants are general education teachers, our district technology teacher on assignment, a resource specialist, and a special education teacher. All participants work at ABC School District and have varying years of experience covering a variety of grade levels. My research focused on elementary grades, kindergarten through sixth grade. It was also important in the recruitment of my participants that they shared the same concerns regarding professional development. It was also important that they were concerned with filling the gaps and that was worked together collectively to strengthen teacher craft and the importance of providing critical trainings in the areas that are the strongest predictors of student advancement and achievement.

### **Setting**

My study took place at Husky Elementary School which is in the central region of ABC Township. It is one of eight elementary schools in that township. It is a Kindergarten through sixth grade school with an enrollment of approximately 660 students. It has had significant growth over the past five years with an increase of 27%. The student/teacher ratio is 28:1 which is above the State average of 24:1. It offers a variety of curriculum including music, band, sports, and the traditional subjects. It was established in the 1960s. It follows a traditional school

calendar. The majority of students receive free or reduced lunch. 74.3% qualify for the national school lunch program. Husky Elementary School has a minority enrollment of 76%.

The ethnic makeup of Husky Elementary School is:

- 56% Hispanic
- 24% White
- 14% African American
- 4% two or more races
- 1% Asian
- 1% Hawaiian

There are more female than male teachers overall in ABC Township Unified School District. The percentage of female teachers in this district is approximately average for California with Husky Elementary being at 77% female and 22% male. Most of Husky Elementary school teachers are Caucasian. The Caucasian majority is also average for California school districts. In fact, California has a mean of 67% Caucasian teachers. The teacher education level showed a greater percentage of Highly Educated teachers at Husky than compared to the average California School District. The district itself has a greater proportion of teachers with a Master's degree or higher, 51% compared to the California average of 38%. Husky Elementary also has a lower percentage of inexperienced teachers with 83% of the teachers having five or more years' experience. The average teacher to student ratio is 28 to 1 which is higher than the state ratio of 24 to 1.

This study is conducive to my study because it establishes a need for relevant professional development that addresses the noticeable gaps in student achievement as measured

by the state standardized testing scores which rank Husky Elementary as low-performing. After eliminating the current curriculum as a factor, it needed to be considered that teacher performance and knowledge about curriculum could be a contributing factor to these test scores. By providing training in designated areas of need, allowing for implementation of these relevant trainings, and time to professionally collaborate, this school would be adequately equipped to close in on this student achievement gap.

### **Instruments**

The instruments used for my research coincide with the narrative and grounded theory methodologies. They are both methods of qualitative methods and used stories from individual experiences, documents, interviews, reports, observations, journals and portfolios (Sauro, 2015). The grounded theory is relevant because it started with a broad question and through the research the question was refined to pinpoint a more exact research investigation (Biddix, 2009).

Perspective is very important in qualitative research. One of the instruments I used was informal observations. During these observations I was able to understand the layout of the classroom and the types of interactions between teacher and student. I was also able to observe how strategies and techniques learned at professional development was implemented and received by the students.

Another instrument I used was interviews. During the interviews I used open ended questions designed to generate data. I could document a teacher's attitude toward the implementation of the professional development received by what information the teachers shared. Some of the questions that were posed included:

- o Where did you receive your professional development?
- o What subject/area was your professional development focused in?

- o Did you decide the need for this professional development or was it decided for you?
- o How long did it take you to try the strategies presented from the professional development in your classroom?
- o How long ago did you receive this professional development?

Journals and portfolios were also used as instruments. These journals were kept by individual teachers and included personal feelings and reflections. Although not publicly shared they were brought to collaboration meetings where strategies that were successful as well as unsuccessful were voluntarily shared with the team and next steps were generated to help improve the implementation of the professional development. By journaling, the cohort was able to track progress, time needed for implementation, and the relevance of the training received.

These tools were good matches for my study because it supported the data collected and analyzed it to further develop themes in common conceptions about the research. It enabled me to develop a theory which offered explanations through the analysis of gathered data, while also it validated the approach in explanations and individual experiences and outcomes.

### **Procedures**

Multiple steps were followed to complete the process. I first had to gain permission from ABC school district and Husky Elementary Administrators to conduct my research. Then I carefully invited, recruited, and accepted recommendations for teachers who were willing and interested in contributing to this research topic. It was important that they were interested in the research topic and were interested and being part of the vehicle for change and improvement.

Next, the introduction of current research and the findings from other sources was investigated. Suggested instruments; surveys, questionnaires, journals, and portfolios were

considered for relevance. From there permissions were requested to do informal observation in the teacher's natural setting. Permission to conduct these was received from the site administrator and District Superintendent.

Then, collaborations with cohort began. Time was given for comparison of notes and sharing of successful and unsuccessful strategies. Through this process strengths and weakness were recognized.

Finally, data collected was analyzed. The Content from the data collected and analyzed to focuses on insights, similarities and differences. Key points were marked, and themes emerged. Similar outcomes were grouped and categorized. Variables were considered.

### **Analysis**

My research was designed to find gaps in the current method of providing teacher professional development. The focus was to first determine what professional development was needed by examining results from school data gathered from multiple areas including standardized state tests, district benchmark tests, grade level and classroom tests, and teacher observations. Next, was to determine what specific professional development was needed and who made this decision, Administration or the teacher? Finally, analyze all collected data, interviews, surveys and informal observations and analyze to find common themes that arose. Determine relevant questions and next steps for implementation. Through constant comparisons of collected data next steps were created.

I used qualitative analysis of data to understand how professional development helped or hindered in the natural environment, the classroom. It gave importance and meaning to the experiences and views of the participants. My purpose was to gain an insight into the practice of how professional development is offered, recommended, required, or mandated. I used a small

sample of teachers and other educational professionals to extract opinions, concepts, and insights. My research question was flexible and not predefined. Survey questions were open-ended allowing participants to interject their personal experiences, opinions, and outcomes. Interviews were interactive and I, as the researcher, was involved throughout every step (Nigatu, 2009).

I used Experiential learning as my educational theory. It provided the process of learning through experience, or learning through the reflection of doing.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3, the methodology portion of my thesis examined the design method that I chose, which was qualitative. This method worked best for my analysis because my research did not lend itself easily to numerical statistics. Participants were identified and how they were chosen was shared. Some were chosen because of experience, background, and willingness to participate, but all needed to express the same concern about professional development and show a desire to fill the student achievement gap and better their personal teaching craft. The setting was revealed and the makeup of the school, its students, teachers, and community were examined. Instruments were identified and the importance of each. Procedures outline for the research methods and data analysis structure. Graphs and charts with results from the data analysis is provided. Also, the reasoning of why I chose qualitative and what educational theory will be discussed.

### **Chapter Four: Data Analysis**

In today's complex world of ever-changing thoughts and beliefs and educational expectations, teachers are one of the most critical components that make the difference in fulfilling the student achievement gap. The quality and ability of teachers to deliver intellectually challenging curriculum to students has been determined to be one of the biggest contributing factors in student achievement, especially in areas serving low-income low socioeconomic students. The current teacher professional development model is to educate, share and prepare new and veteran teachers by using a broadly-based model of a one-size-fits-all form of training. My research asked the question; how can teachers receive relevant professional development and who decides what professional development is needed? No more one-size-fits-all professional development. My research investigated the many flaws in this concept and explored methods of professional development that was proven to be effective, inspiring, and confidence building. It showed how specializing professional development to meet the needs of the individual teacher affected their ability to implement new methodologies and share their own expertise with other professionals.

#### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The qualitative data that I examined was provided from a survey completed by a small cohort of certificated teachers. Of the teachers surveyed there were many variables to be considered; years of experience, grade level being taught, classroom teacher, or teacher on assignment. The information they shared was valued and their concerns regarding our current state of mandated professional development was valid.

They were surveyed in a number of areas regarding their personal experiences with professional development. The survey was short and to the point. It was constructed to gain the

most information possible from direct questions concerning district professional development. The data collected was analyzed and focused on insights, similarities, and differences. Key points in the survey were marked and themes emerged. Similar outcomes were grouped and categorized. Variables were considered.

The survey consisted of 10 questions. The questions and outcomes are recorded below.

Question 1. Thinking about professional development that you have attended, was it a training that you decided to attend or were you required to attend mandated from the district?

Responses. All teachers surveyed replied that professional development that they chose to attend was much more relevant and they were more willing to implement into their classroom. A small percentage also found that mandated professional development was relevant and helpful as well but did not implement in a timely fashion.

Question 2. How often have you been observed teaching in the past 24 months?

Responses. 90% of the teachers have been observed at least twice over a two-year period. One teacher had been observed 4 times within the past 24 months. One teacher has not been observed since 2015 because of the position that she holds. She is a teacher on assignment and the district technology lead. Although I am not included in the survey, I have not been observed or evaluated since 2014.

Question 3. How long have you been teaching and what grade levels have you taught?

Response. All teachers surveyed had 10 plus years at the elementary level. Only one teacher has taught secondary grades. All teachers surveyed are currently teaching at their favorite grade level.

Question 4. How can our school district change our current model of teacher professional development?

Response. Responses varied, with all teachers surveyed saying that they preferred a choice in choosing what professional development they attended. Quote from one teacher states that "teachers are great teachers for their peers and need to be given first opportunity to provide trainings".

Question 5. Share your best professional development that you attended, was it District mandated or was it your choice to attend?

Response. There was a variety of answers, but the one obvious conclusion was that everyone shared their favorite professional development and it was a professional development that they chose to attend. Responses varied from GLAD training, Real World Math and Common Core training, attendance at a math conference in Palm Springs, and SDE teacher conference in Las Vegas offered every July and our district graciously pays for teachers who are interested in going.

Question 6. Would you be willing to keep a targeted portfolio?

Response. 90% of the teachers were overwhelmingly in agreement to do this especially when collaboration time was included and the opportunity to plan next steps was provided. A quote from one teacher states that "with all staff working toward shared goals and supporting each other with feedback along the way it is a recipe for success".

Question 7. Please give suggestions on how our district can support the needs of our teachers to strengthen our teaching profession.

Response. Responses varied; involve teachers in the LCAP goal making process, provide training that teachers are interested in, stop mandating that teachers go to useless professional development that is irrelevant the needs of the teacher, and provide opportunity for grade-level collaborations and getting into each other's classrooms to observe each other.

Question 8. How often do you use data to drive your instruction?

Response. All teachers surveyed said they use some form of data to drive their instruction but feel that if more time was provided they could dig deeper into the and use it more efficiently to benefit the academic success of their students

Question 9. Are you familiar with our current Mission and Vision statement?

Response. Of all teachers surveyed only one teacher was familiar with these statements.

Question 10. Please add your thoughts and comment on how being involved in this survey made you feel? Did it make you reflect on your teaching and think about your many strengths? Did it make you think about areas that you would appreciate more training in?

Response. Most felt it was a relevant topic. Some individual quotes include “It made me realize I should focus more on discovering my strengths and weaknesses”, “Collaboration time doesn't have to be strictly with your grade level other grade levels can provide great information on teaching practices”, “This survey made me understand just how isolated teachers truly are in their classrooms”, and “More than anything I appreciate that my input was asked for”.

### **Interpretations**

Based on the data examined my survey concluded that professional development that is mandated from the district office is less effective then professional development that is chosen by the teacher. However, based on the lack of observations that teachers are receiving from their administrators it would be a difficult task for our district to provide individual type trainings when they are unaware of what the teachers truly need to strengthen their profession. The data also provided a road map for improvement. It highlighted the willingness of teachers to keep professional portfolios, gather and collaborate and plan next steps for improvement when given the opportunity and time to do so. When I answered the questions myself that were on the

survey my responses were in alignment with the evidence that was provided from the teachers that so willingly took the survey.

One insight that I gained from this research was that teachers really do not understand the difference between being evaluated and being observed. Evaluations usually happen every two to five years and go into a teacher's personal file. Whereas observations should be conducted on a regular basis with frequent feedback so that teachers can work toward improvement daily. Another point to be made here is that through these observations principals can find out strengths and weaknesses within their staff and team teachers up for improvement or for sharing their expertise.

This survey had limitations because of the small cohort of teachers that were invited to participate. If done again I would like to include new teachers, mixed genders, and possibly the viewpoint of an administrator. My hypothesis is that the responses regarding the relevance of mandated versus chosen professional development would stay the same. However, I do feel that new teachers would find that even mandated professional development was useful and productive to implement into their classroom management and instruction.

### **Conclusion**

The key Concepts that were investigated in this chapter were the flaws in the one-size-fits-all professional development model that are School District currently uses. Teachers were surveyed, and their responses validated on how to make teacher professional development more useful and relevant to all teachers. The evidence from the surveys overwhelmingly concluded that teachers want more to say into the type of professional development they are required to attend. All teachers surveyed felt that professional development that they chose meant more to them and they were more willing to implement into their classrooms and daily instruction.

Professional development that they chose was exciting to them and helped them to re-energized there teaching. Our school district needs to stop wasting money on professional development that most teachers feel is irrelevant and focus on those strategies that strengthen, inspire, and motivate teachers to continue to boost their students' academic success as well as build their own confidence. In chapter 5 I will review findings and make more recommendations and plan a future direction for the use of this research.

### **Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Interpretations**

The objective of my study was to investigate teacher relevant professional development procedures within the school district. This research was intended to answer two questions; how do we make professional development relevant and who decides what professional development is needed? This thesis explored whether professional development that was mandated from our district office and delivered as a one-size-fits-all model was as impactful and well received by the teachers as professional development that was more personalized and worked toward building on teacher's strengths and lessening their weaknesses. Within the contents of this chapter findings will be summarized and the result of many hours of research, interviews, and surveys provided. Interpretations of findings are discussed and the importance of each and further investigation explored. Findings are connected to literature that was referenced. As a result of the findings recommendations are offered to my school district and actions that need to be embedded to make our professional development individualized, meaningful, and well received. Limitations of my research are addressed and a proposed direction for future professional development is offered as they related to the findings. Finally, I concluded the summary of my research and brought it all together in a meaningful and engaged manner.

If professional development is intended to educate, prepare, and share new innovative strategies, technologies, and best teaching practices why is it not focused, relevant, and inspiring? My research questions investigated the importance of professional development for teachers both veteran and new, and the contents of this chapter will clearly show how the use of broadly-based model of a one-size-fits-all form of professional development is mostly ineffective and a waste of precious funding.

### **Findings Summary**

My findings suggested that Professional Development that was chosen or individualized to the need of the teacher had a major influence on implementation into teacher's classroom and daily instruction and was valued more. Of that teachers surveyed, 90% felt that the current model of professional development was non-productive and not a good use of the designated professional development funds. My research was designed to answer two questions; how do we make professional development relevant to meet the needs of the teachers and who decides what professional development necessary and for what teachers? A small percentage of survey teachers felt that any professional development was useful and mentioned that one of the only time the one-size-fits-all professional development is useful is when a new curriculum adoption is introduced all teachers, new and veteran, need to be introduced and supported during the process of discovery and implementation.

The findings also revealed that teachers are rarely observed by their administrators. Most stated that they were only observed twice every other year for a formal evaluation which satisfies the mandated process from our district. Which led directly back to my research question of who decides what professional development is needed and which teachers received those trainings? The survey clearly indicated that teachers were overwhelmingly willing to keep targeted portfolios and share successes and failures if it strengthened their peers. They were also willing to host other teachers in their classrooms, they could demonstrate the teaching practices and strategies that they felt were effective and successful. Just posing such a question on the survey brought about excitement and conversation about the possibilities and positive impact this could have in strengthening a teacher's pedagogy. The participants in this study showed a clear preference for professional development that was personalized and chosen either by themselves

or an administrator that had actively observed them teaching as compared to mandated, unpersonalized one-size-fits-all professional development.

### **Findings Interpretations**

When findings were interpreted the results were aligned with results from other research. With regard to question one; how do we make professional development relevant, the findings strongly suggested that professional development that was chosen by the teacher and offered in areas that the individual teachers felt they needed strengthening in was accepted, implemented into classroom instruction and procedures in a timely manner, and valued. The willingness to share successes and shortcomings were also evident when teachers were provided the opportunity to collaborate and share with each other. The process took on a direction no one anticipated. Once implementation of the professional development had taken place, teachers showed excitement and enthusiasm toward strategies and curriculum. Teachers planned next steps to advance future outcomes.

The second question, who decides what professional development is needed and who receives it, was more difficult to interpret. Most participants felt that the decision and the direction should be suggested and mutually agreed to by the teacher and the principal or administrator. Often teachers do not know what they do not know. Meaning, that because teaching is such an isolated profession, many teachers do not know what they are lacking in their professional tool kit. This is when frequent informal observations become critical and a guiding tool for suggestions for professional development. But, as my research revealed, 80% of the participants were only formally observed approximately two times every other year, 10% had not been observed in more than four years, and 10% had been observed four times in a one-year period. Therefore, it can be concluded that principals and administrators are not aware of the

needs of the teachers and thus it would be difficult to suggest or recommend professional development relevant to the needs of the individual teacher.

The relationship between the dependent and independent variables in my research showed that the observation of teachers and deciding what relevant professional development is needed will cause a change to occur in the model of professional development that is currently being used in our school district. By principles getting into the classrooms more frequently, observing and providing relevant feedback it will bring about much-needed change in our districts broad-based model of the one-size-fits-all type of professional development.

All teachers surveyed felt they were more willing to implement new ideas, strategies, and suggestions when they felt that it would directly strengthen their classroom procedures and their student's ability to learn and thrive. They were excited about the possibilities when professional development was targeted and chosen especially for them.

### **Findings in Context**

In context my findings throughout this research were aligned and agreed with the evidence that was provided in my literature review. Baeder (2017) stated that

*“School administrators need rich, firsthand information about teaching and learning in order to make good operational and instructional decisions. The best place to gain this information, the best setting for continued professional learning is the classroom “.*

While Marzano (2012) concluded that; the role of teacher evaluation, proposed professional development, and how they work together in ensuring instructional improved practices, teacher awareness and confidence, and the importance of teacher collaboration to strengthen a teacher's pedagogy. Both recognize the need for administrators to establish a routine that allows for observations that are conducted regularly. Another alignment that arose from my

research was the importance to give teachers choice in determining what professional development they deemed important. Being flexible was also suggested and being allowed to implement new trainings into the classrooms in small measured steps. Finally, support from one another and accountability were important for success to be evident (Vislocky, 2013). To be effective and impactful. It is through these observations that administrators gain the knowledge of teacher strengths and weaknesses. Through this process decisions could be made regarding what professional development is needed and who needed it. This process also identified a teacher's potential and showed that they are valued and provided confidence in the job they do.

### **Lessons Learned**

Many lessons were learned throughout this process, not just the mechanics of how to do this thesis, but how immersed I became in the complete topic. The more I researched and investigated the more areas of concern regarding the way my school district currently addresses the professional development needs of our teachers were brought to my attention. Several other areas need to be addressed. The importance of walkthroughs, getting organized, and make the best use of our time are all areas that need immediate attention. It really does not matter what field, or level of professionalism you are at, all these suggestions can have a powerful positive impact on how efficient and effective a day can be. Just taking into consideration and implementing a small fraction of the suggestions can have a huge impact on the amount we can accomplish.

To empower our professionalism further, developing a common professional language could ensure that we are all on the same page. We come from very different backgrounds, age groups, cultures, and level of expertise therefore developing that common language could be

something that we do together. When we have the opportunity to do this, it helps to make all parties involved feel that their contributions are valid and accepted.

These are just fragments of the areas that I feel could be researched to strengthen our pedagogy within our District and our site. As I progressed through the research many more questions became relevant. One constant that stayed throughout this complete process was the fact that I began personally involved and continue to be personally involved in this issue. Professional development needs to be meaningful and not be considered a waste of time. The fact that great amounts of money are being spent on teachers that don't need the support in the area that's being provided. Professional development needs to be personalized, and that doesn't mean that each individual teacher gets a one-on-one mentor but rather a group of teachers having the same issue can work together through discussion, collaboration, and observing other teachers within their School site or the school district to meet their individual professional development needs. Another model of professional development that can be offered is a symposium type professional development where teachers within the district teach other teachers on topics that they are strong in. Through this process teachers have the freedom to choose which sessions they want to attend. This provides freedom and pinpointed training and excitement when teachers get the chance to choose what professional development they will attend.

Through this process I also learned that teachers are yearning to be asked their opinion. Teaching is such an isolated profession and when given the opportunity teachers are incredibly willing to share and encourage each other. The leaders among our teachers need to be recognized and valued and given an opportunity to share those teaching practices and strategies that they are very good at. It would provide bonding and respect between those teachers who participate in these practices.

**Limitations**

This research I felt is very limited. There is adequate literature to be read and considered to strengthen this research but because I used a small cohort of teachers and a limited amount of questions on a survey I felt that there was much more that could have been exposed through this process. The design and focus of this research also had limitations. The method I chose was qualitative. I used this method because my research involved human behavior and opinion. Although it answered the “why” questions I felt that adding a quantitative component would have strengthened my results and further validated my research findings. It was difficult to analyze my findings and there was no quantitative evidence provided through my survey process.

**Future Direction/Conclusion**

Although my research aligned with my literature that I reviewed I still feel the future direction needs to address the personal feelings and needs of the individual teachers. Most of my research was based on group studies and large populations of teachers. To make sure that professional development is more individualized to the need of the teacher, the research needs to reflect this idea as well.

This research study was a long journey. One that opened my eyes to the many directions and need for positive change within the school district I work for. I can conclude absolutely that principals and administrators need to be actively in classrooms, observing, recommending, and providing feedback to strengthen their teachers and support staff. For this to take place principals and administrators must be allowed time. I think about my principal, she is responsible for over seven hundred students, the teaching staff, support staff, and all the requirements that are placed upon her from District Administrators. She attends to the parent’s needs, student’s needs, staff needs, behavior issues, being involved in the community, School

Site Council, parent involvement, family involvement, and many other areas that I am not even completely aware of. Until she can be provided with support, possibly in the form of an assistant principal or some other qualified staff member, I don't see how our current model of professional development is going to change. Of all the things I know are important to her, getting into the classrooms and observing her teachers is one of them. With that being said, it is usually the first thing that gets put back, rescheduled, or cancelled altogether. Until our superintendent at the district office realize how important the issue of relevant professional development is I feel that it will continue along the path that it has for so many years. I have already asked our assistant superintendent to please take the time and sit down with me and discuss what I have discovered through my process of researching and investigating how to make professional development meaningful, impactful, and valuable to the teachers, the schools they work at, and the district they support. I feel confident and prepared to present my findings. Only time will tell if they honor my request.

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