Teacher Autonomy in Professional Development Selection

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Abstract

Educators participate in professional development to enhance teaching and learning strategies. Professional development has existed in the education world for quite some time (Dean Webb, 2006; Yastrow, 1994). Federal and state mandates significantly influence professional development opportunities provided to teachers (Long, 2014). Many educators prefer a voice in the selection of professional development (Lieberman & Miller, 2014); however, it is unclear if teacher autonomy of professional development selection impacts teaching and learning. The researcher of this qualitative study, guided by a central research question, sought to obtain teachers' perceptions regarding self-selected professional development. The sub-research questions focused specifically on the impact of self-selected professional development on the growth of pedagogy, student achievement, and the discipline in which teachers teach. Individual interviews were conducted with 5 high school teachers, each from a different high school within a district with negotiated contract days for teacher-facilitated professional development. An analysis of the responses from the individuals resulted in three findings and nine themes. The researcher found that the advantages of self-selected professional development outweigh the disadvantages. Teachers described feeling empowered by the flexibility, recognition, leadership opportunities, and professionalism that comes with teacher autonomy of professional development selection. Challenges of self-selection include the lack of structure, accountability, time, and resources. Overall, teachers reported that self-selected professional development has a significant impact on growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and discipline in which they teach. Measuring the impact is challenging and teachers described impact by quantifiable measures—test scores, less

quantifiable measures—rapport and relationships, and collaborative efforts. Teachers should participate in professional development selection; however, parameters must be established to ensure professional development aligns to school-related goals. Further research on teacher autonomy in professional development selection is recommended to broaden knowledge regarding the best practices for teacher learning and student growth.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my amazingly, supportive family. My husband encouraged me to pursue my doctorate because he knows how passionate I am about education. My children have been along me every step of the way; my littlest having sat through Zoom classes with me shortly after she was born. I could not have done this without the help of my parents looking after my children so I could finish writing. I am so blessed to be surrounded by such a loving and wonderful family. I am grateful for all the support and encouragement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teachers are licensed professionals. Many states require teachers to renew or upgrade their teaching licenses. In most states, teachers can maintain their professional teaching licenses through either continuing education courses or participating in professional development (All Star Directories, 2019; Mizell, 2010). In the last two decades, professional development has evolved from a traditional setting to a range of opportunities, from virtual to in-person. Location and speaker availability no longer hinder professional development opportunities. Technology has allowed educators the flexibility to acquire new learning and teaching strategies that fit their needs. School districts now have the opportunity to give teachers autonomy with professional development selection. Teachers can self-select professional development opportunities to match their needs or the needs of their students.

According to the America Federation of Teachers Union (2020), professional development is a school's investment in quality opportunities for teachers to ultimately improving student academic performance. Educational professional development can branch off into several avenues. For example, teachers may receive training on trauma, school improvement, instructional practices, or content, among many other topics. Educators spend time and money investing in professional development opportunities (Haskins & Loeb, 2007). Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012) encourage schools to invest in professional capital. They stated that "professional capital itself is made up of three other kinds of capital—human, social, and decisional" (p.3). According to Hargreaves and Fullan, "the five Cs" (p.46) (capability, commitment, career, culture,

and contexts or conditions of teaching) are the components for extremely effective teaching.

Advances in technology and awareness of twenty-first-century teaching and learning led some districts to offer teacher-selection of professional development. Autonomy over professional development allows educators to acquire training and skills specific to their needs (Jacobson, 2019). When a district leader selects the professional development for all teachers or staff development is developed from the top-down, sometimes the material is less relevant or impactful (Lieberman & Miller, 2014). Technological advances help to reduce the obstacles to creating practical professional development opportunities for educators. Offering professional development sessions during business hours in a traditional setting no longer restricts school districts (Lieberman & Miller, 2014; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Educational Technology, 2010). Some districts will partner with neighboring universities to offer discounted endorsements, specialists, or leadership programs to their teachers; however, most teachers pay for the expense of additional degrees or college hours beyond their bachelor's degrees. Besides, teachers also continue to educate themselves by attending conferences, joining professional organizations, and collaborating with their peers (Haskins & Loeb, 2007).

Background

Professional development helps to fine-tune teaching and instruction. Educators participate in a variety of professional development activities and continuing education classes (All Star Directories, 2019; Mizell, 2010). Expense amounts range greatly for professional development opportunities (Haskins & Loeb, 2007). Historically, most

school districts select professional development activities for their teachers while others allow teachers to self-select their professional development activities. Styles of professional development vary from lecture-based to hands-on, collaborative workshops; delivery methods include direct, digital, or virtual contact. Thus, some complete professional development activities with very little person-to-person interaction (Jacobson, 2019; Lieberman & Miller, 2014). While examining characteristics of professional development, Guskey (2003) found "enhancing teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge" (p. 749) as the most frequently cited characteristics of professional development.

Professional development varies widely across the nation's schools. Licensure renewal for educators requires either continuing education coursework or professional development hours. In the XYZ School District, located in Kansas, the negotiated contract built-in two designated days (one per semester; 7.5 hours equal 1 day) for teacher-driven or self-selected professional development. In other words, teachers can select professional development to fit their needs during the year and count these learning activities toward these two contract days. For example, a teacher might attend a conference on technology in July for eight hours. The district requires the teacher to select professional development based on teacher interest and or need (Appendix D).

To maintain professional teaching licenses, teachers must continue to learn or advance their skills within the profession. In most states, teacher licensure renewal requires that teachers attend professional development sessions or complete continuing education coursework (All Star Directories, 2019; Mizell, 2010). In the state of Kansas, teachers holding a professional license can renew their professional license through

experience, completion of 120 professional development points, adding an endorsement, specialist or leadership program, or completion of national board certification components (Kansas State Department of Education, 2019). Professional development plays a crucial role in education. Wagner and Harter (2006) found that opportunities to learn within the workplace correlated with productivity.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers have the opportunity to learn content knowledge, pedagogy, and collaboration skills from professional development. The problem is that the effectiveness of teacher-selected professional development has not been determined. In addition, very little literature or research was found that investigates teacher self-selected, teacher-driven, or teacher autonomy of professional development selection and the effect this type of learning has in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study explored teacher perceptions and experiences from self-selected professional development within the XYZ School District. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of teacher autonomy in selecting and pursing professional development activities related to growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and discipline in which they teach.

Significance of the Study

School districts' negotiation teams often negotiate teacher professional development days into their teacher contracts. Districts tend to select the professional development that will occur on those days. This study explored self-selected professional development opportunities, perceptions, and experiences of teachers in the XYZ school

district. This study extends knowledge about the impact of teacher-selected professional development and could influence the way in which the XYZ School District negotiates future professional development days.

Delimitations

- Interviews were conducted with a department chairperson or veteran teacher from each XYZ District high school.
- Participants in the study were delimited to those that were available to interview for up to an hour via Zoom.

Assumptions

- Department chairs have knowledge of the members of their departments, their classrooms, and professional development choices.
- Information reflected in the interviews was based on current understanding of professional development available to teachers.
- Teachers interviewed responded honestly.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding self-directed professional development?

SubQ1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on their growth in pedagogy?

SubQ2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on student academic achievement?

SubQ3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on the discipline in which they teach?

Definition of Terms

To assist the readers with understanding concepts mentioned in the paper and avoid confusion, the researcher chose to define specific terms that are applied throughout the research study. These term definitions are well-defined to provide transparency and promote common understanding for the reader.

Pedagogical content knowledge. According to Merriman (2014), pedagogical content knowledge is mixing teaching strategies with a discipline or content area. Professional development that focuses on content and strategies suitable for that discipline is more explicit and considered more effective than professional development on content or pedagogy.

Professional development. This type of professional development is typically planned by central office administration and content is delivered to submissive teachers. Often the content delivered has little connection to teachers or the diversity of their classrooms (Firestone & Mangin, 2014). The term professional development also refers to professional development with a discipline or subject focus, but few opportunities for teacher collaboration or larger scale school/district implementation are present. Professional development as described above has also been used interchangeably with staff development (Kragler, Martin, & Sylvester, 2014).

Professional Learning. Professional learning is multifaceted; teachers are empowered to address personal deficiencies to enhance pedagogical content areas, collaborate, and reflect in order to increase student achievement (Kragler et al., 2014). During professional learning, teachers are professionals working towards common goals and participate in a variety of learning opportunities that allow them to improve skills by

collaborating with peers, sharing materials, and attending learning opportunities designed to meet specific deficiencies of the teacher (Firestone & Mangin, 2014).

Self-selected professional development. This term is used when teachers are given the opportunity to choose professional development or learning relevant to their individual and or classroom needs. Teachers understand their pedagogical and content strengths and weaknesses and as professionals should choose the learning that best fits their needs (Van Scoyoc Associates, 2020).

Teacher autonomy. Teacher autonomy is referred to as "the right of an individual to self-direct, the freedom to make informed, uncoerced decisions" (Tomlinson, 2019, para 4). In other words, a teacher is given the opportunity to make professional decisions based on their personal and classroom needs assessments.

Teacher-driven professional development. Teacher driven professional development, as described by McCullough (2020), is allowing teachers a voice in the planning and processes of professional development. Teacher involvement in the planning and preparation should lead to active engagement, implementation, and reflection.

Organization of the Study

This chapter entailed an introduction to the study, background information on professional development, and purpose for the study. Chapter 1 also included the significance, assumptions, and delimitations of the study. Terms utilized throughout this study were defined in this chapter. The methodology was introduced along with the research question and sub questions. In Chapter 2, the literature review guides the reader through the history of educational professional development within the United States.

Federal mandates, historical events, and the evolution of teacher professional development is detailed in chapter 2. The chapter outlines some trends, challenges, and outcomes of teacher professional development. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research design, methodology., and instrumentation. Data collection and sampling procedures are also discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 4 gives detailed results of the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, connections to the literature, and recommendations for the future.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Chapter 2 focuses on the history of education related to professional development within the United States public education system. To fully understand professional development, the evolving definition and delivery methods of professional development must be studied. An exploration into federal and state mandates of professional development is necessary. This chapter includes the implementation of professional development, teacher involvement in selecting professional development, and the obstacles educators face with professional development.

Understanding the Term Professional Development

Professional development itself is not a simple topic. The definition of professional development in the education world continues to adapt to the ever-changing world. Professional development, also referred to as teacher in-service, staff development, professional learning, varies greatly regarding depth and breadth. While some use the terms professional development and professional learning interchangeably, others express the difference quite clearly (Lieberman & Miller, 2014).

Professional development is responsive to federal and state legislation and school testing results. Teachers are the recipients of professional development created by others, such as central office administration. This type of professional development has low engagement (Lieberman & Miller, 2014). The content delivered has little connection to teachers or the diversity of their classrooms (Firestone & Mangin, 2014). The term professional development also refers to professional development with a discipline or subject focus, but few opportunities for teacher collaboration or more extensive scale

school/district implementation are present. Professional development, as described above, is sometimes referred to as staff development (Kragler et al., 2014).

Professional learning is multilayered and empowers teachers with the opportunity to address personal teaching challenges related to pedagogy, content or subject, collaboration, and or reflection (Kragler et al., 2014). In a school environment with professional learning, teachers are professionals and work towards common goals. They actively engage in numerous learning opportunities which help them increase teaching capacity and effectiveness (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Professional learning allows teachers to improve skills through collaboration and reflection (DuFour et al., 2008). School systems that adopt professional learning give teachers opportunities to improve their teaching deficiencies (Firestone & Mangin, 2014).

Martin, Kralger, Quatroche, and Bauserman (2014) deciphered the difference between professional development and professional learning by looking at the definitions of development and learning. They concluded that develop is a verb and, therefore, more similar to compliance, whereas professional learning is authentic and likely to change routines and increase competency. According to Mattson (2014), teachers typically define professional development as training provided and required by the district regardless of teacher opinion. Professional learning, as referenced by Mattson (2014), "is a growth in practice model that values active engagement, teacher voice, creation and collaboration, inquiry, and reflection" (para 3). Professional learning differs from professional development because learning is "interactive, sustained, and customized to teachers' needs—not a one-size-fits-all workshop" (Erickson, 2020, para 1). Herbert-Smith (2019) described development and training as different entities. Training is

specific and can be straightforward or complex regarding how to do something, whereas development is broader and progresses competencies, experiences, and effectiveness (Herbert-Smith, 2019). Professional development is professional learning that increases teacher implementation of effective strategies and leadership techniques to improve student learning outcomes (Learning Forward, 2017). Professional learning allows teachers to select learning based on their teaching discipline and pedagogy (Erickson, 2020). Professional learning actively engages teachers and empowers them to make decisions based upon their reflection of needs for instructional practices. Professional learning then is commonly seen within professional learning communities (Mattson, 2014).

In Mizell's book, *Why Professional Development Matters* (2010), he described professional development as formal and informal. Formal professional development may be college coursework or conferences. Alternatively, informal professional development may occur during colleagues' discussions, individual reading or research, or classroom observations of peers. Professional development delivery methods include workshops, conferences, discussions, videos, lectures, collaboration, coaching, professional learning communities, and training (Mizell, 2010). Often, teachers view professional development as a one-stop-shop with no follow-through or a one-size-fits-all approach to a new instructional practice or concept (Tooley & Connally, 2016). Herbert-Smith (2019) linked the importance of professional development in education as a continual process to improve skills and knowledge related to teaching. Throughout education, many describe staff development or professional development as in-service and training chose by district, state, or federal leaders under the notion that teachers need to perfect

classroom instruction or content knowledge (Lieberman & Miller, 2014). Michael Fullan (2007) referred to "professional development as a term is a major obstacle to progress in teacher learning" (p. 35). When viewed strictly as providing new ideas, contents, and strategies to improve student achievement, professional development shows little effect on academic change (Fullan, 2007). Merriman (2014) noted that pedagogical content knowledge, coined in 1986, combines teaching strategies with a discipline or content area. Professional development that focuses on pedagogical content is considered more effective than professional development focusing solely on content or pedagogy (Merriman, 2014).

Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012) described professional development as a necessary investment for education. Teachers are viewed as assets by school districts. School districts must invest in the professional growth of their educators for academic and social growth to increase (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Federal programs typically set the parameters for states regarding professional development size and scope (Mizell, 2010). Professional development is "a record of what they experience, learn and then apply" (Herbert-Smith, 2019, para 3). Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) reported teachers significantly involved in professional development decisions teach in nations with high student performance.

Greatness by Design, a report written by a group alongside Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson of California, transformed the way educators were educated, recruited and employed, mentored, and evaluated (Tom Torlakson's Task Force on Educator Excellence, 2012). This group essentially proposed a shift from professional development to professional learning. Their view on professional

development included large workshops, sage on the stage, and a one-size-fits-all approach. Whereas professional learning is data-driven, focused on specific communities, schools, students, and teachers. Also, mentoring changed to coaching with frequent follow-ups, and adult learning principles guided professional learning. Teacher abilities are considered and utilized in professional learning (Tom Torlakson's Task Force on Educator Excellence, 2012). Professional learning spreads across the United States, and school districts begin making similar changes (Moir, 2015). Because of the complications with simply defining the term professional development, educators must understand the history of educational professional development regardless of format and outcomes.

Wei, Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2010) noted that impactful professional development must be relevant and related to the school and the student population. Professional development must engage teachers, frequently occur, align with curriculum and instructional practices while relating to community problems in a collaborative effort (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). Effective professional development hones a deeper skillset of teacher pedagogy and knowledge of their teaching disciplines. The learning occurs regularly, and the duration is significant to allow teachers opportunities for implementation, refinement, reflection, and collaboration (Sparks, 2002). "Teachers participate in professional development, but it is ineffective, irrelevant, and makes teachers feel undervalued as professionals" (Pina, 2019, p. ii). The teaching profession and education infinitely changes. Educators' quick response to adapt to virtual learning during the COVID 19 pandemic is evidence that professional learning can evolve quickly (Hoff, 2020).

History of Education Related to Professional Development

Professional development for educators existed, grew, and evolved into an enormous heap of various opportunities for educators to learn and fine-tune teaching practices. Unfortunately, research indicates that much of the professional development delivered to educators has little impact on performance outcomes for students and teachers (Tooley & Connally, 2016). Even though the bulk of professional development did not occur in such numerosity until the 1980s, professional development existed at first through small groups and later through national organizations (Dean Webb, 2006; Yastrow, 1994). Along the path towards a national organization of professional development, many federal mandates helped train and educate teachers. Professional development continues to change and adapt as the world changes (Lieberman & Miller, 2014; Long, 2014).

In 1834, Pennsylvania required teachers to pass tests in math, reading, and writing. Thus, Pennsylvania was the first state to have such testing requirements. Some states had previously required moral character interviews or general knowledge tests (Ravitch, 2003). As secretary of the Board of Education in Massachusetts, Horace Mann spread the concept of Common Schools. Massachusetts Common Schools, also known as public schools, received funding from taxes. According to Mann, Common Schools should alleviate economic divisions, increase civic commitments, and teach moral beliefs (Warder, 2015). Mann's ideas spread to other states, and in 1835, Michigan became the first state to put the state in control of education (Brouillette, 1999). The Normal School of Massachusetts, known as a teacher training school, was founded in 1839 (Cheek, n.d.).

Levin (1992) reported that throughout the 1800s, women taught in one-room schoolhouses. Some teachers taught at many as 60 students in one room across multiple ages. The first schools used standard books for texts such as dictionaries and the Bible. Some teachers attended Normal Schools to prepare for teaching, but others had little training. As the United States continued to grow and expand West, education continued to evolve. Teachers added more students to their classrooms, and each student's background brought about new challenges for teachers (Levin, 1992).

Nearly twenty years later, teachers organized and created the National Teachers Association in 1857. Shortly after the Civil War ended, the Nation Teachers Association later condemned slavery. It sought free public education for blacks, and white students as a requirement for seceded states were to rejoin the Union (National Education Association, 1970). According to Ravitch (2003), by 1867, many states mandated teachers pass tests to earn a state teaching certificate. These tests included basic skills, spelling, grammar, geography, and American History. Teacher certification was sporadic; there were few commonalities amongst teacher certifications, requirements, and professional development (Ravitch, 2003). The National Teachers Association combined with other organizations in 1870 and became the National Education Association (National Education Association, 1970).

During the early 1900s, teachers began to organize and rebel against city and state policymakers. Teachers sought higher pay and better resources (Levin, 1992). Teachers sought organization as an avenue to gain support and momentum for their ideas (Dickinson, 2019; Levin, 1992). The National Council for Teachers of English was established in 1911 to help support English teachers (Dickinson, 2019). Formed in 1916,

the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 2020) helped to voice concerns of teachers. Teacher organizations continued to expand in the 1920s, adding the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Council for Social Studies (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2017; National Council for Social Studies, n.d.). These early organizations still exist today and play a prominent role in curricular development, standards, objectives, and teacher professional development.

While educators collaborated and formed national organizations, educational training evolved. Colleges and universities expanded to include schools of education at both undergraduate and graduate levels (Dean Webb, 2006). Furthermore, education degrees also included various specialized areas such as administration, curriculum, and psychology. In other words, teaching was becoming a profession. Teacher training varied greatly depending on the size, scope, and location of schools. Some larger cities funded private academies and organized teacher training programs taught by veteran teachers. Teacher education in rural areas typically consisted of locally ran teacher institutes that allowed teachers to refine their content knowledge. These types of teacher training were standard experiences through the 1930s (Ravitch, 2003).

The Roaring Twenties allowed educators to organize; however, public education did not escape the wrath of the Great Depression (National Council for Social Studies, n.d.). Public funds were vital for many public entities, which created limited funds for schools. School enrollment continued to increase, but the revenue and funds available for schools sharply decreased (Dean Webb, 2006; Grossman, 2019). As a result, many public schools shortened the length of the school year. Other schools wholly closed their doors. In some instances, families provided their supplies and books, not the school.

Many teaching positions were lost, and some states even banned married women from teaching. In the Chicago area, male custodians were given raises during the Great Depression, and numerous female teachers went without pay for quite some time (Grossman, 2019). Nonetheless, membership in the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers increased, and these unions moved to create "state regulation of certification and curriculum oversight, and greater protection through teacher tenure" (Dean Webb, 2006, p. 246). According to LaBue (1960), the collectiveness of teacher organizations in the 1920s and 1930s inherently sparked education reform towards creating uniform standards for teacher certification.

Teacher certification standards were not the only changes people sought to make in education. Ralph Tyler had conducted a curriculum study for twelve years which became known as the 8-Year Study. Through this study, he concluded integrated curriculum helped to cultivate thriving and involved students and adults. In turn, this study provided evidence and support to focus on curriculum development, specifically integrated curriculum instead of traditional education coursework (Aikin, 1942). Little did Tyler know that over a half-century later, his research helped promote the urgency for professional learning within professional learning communities (Bullough, 2007). Simultaneously another approach favored by William Bagley swept through schools. Bagley advocated for a rigid curriculum and focused teacher professional development on classroom management, discipline, and strict structure (Dean Webb, 2006). This rivalry on curriculum has continued to arise and rouse education and learning throughout the history of education.

Ideas for teacher development and education swiftly changed gears as the nation mobilized for war. The NEA and American Association of School Administrators suggested that the federal government coordinate with schools and colleges. Thus, the federal government created the U.S. Office of Education Wartime Commission in 1942. War preparation and defense became imperative goals of the commission (Dean Webb, 2006; Evans, 2004). This commission did not give specifics for studies but recommended physical education and health, geography and citizenship, cultural academics, and vocational skills (Evans, 2004). In response to the U.S. Office of Education, schools prioritized upper-level math and science courses (Connor & Bohan, 2014; Dean Webb, 2006; Evans, 2004). As a result, the Office of Education provided high school math and science teachers opportunities to attend war courses. National defense was the responsibility of all citizens—teachers and administrators included. Teachers' professional development largely involved activities to benefit the United States defense efforts and civil duties. Schools worked hard to educate and train students. They also spent time volunteering, distributing books, registering citizens for the armed forces, collected metal, sold bonds and stamps, helped with Red Cross efforts, participated in civilian defense activities, and so much more (Conner & Bohan, 2014). Consequently, the enormous war effort on the home front pulled many teachers away from teaching not only for combat but also for higher-paying industrial jobs (Dean Webb, 2006).

The end of World War II left life in America much different than when it started. Progressives continued to push the education pendulum further from traditional education with life adjustment education. Life adjustment education focused on the middle-of-the-

road students, not solely those students bound for college, and was yet another wave to include more courses such as home economics and health courses swept through the education curriculum (Kudlick, Ariel, Martinez, & Sandri, 2016). On the other hand, Arthur Bestor lamented the life adjustment education and insisted on returning to traditional academics. Bestor and others founded the Council for Basic Education in 1956 and hoped to swing the education curriculum to more progressive standards (Dean Webb, 2006; Van Dine, 1979).

Just as educators planned to create standards for teacher certification and establish a curriculum that satisfied traditional and progressive needs, school enrollment increased by nearly 40% due to the Baby Boom from 1946-56. Classrooms and schools filled with students needing teachers (Dean Webb, 2006). As more students were piling into schools, it became evident that separate but equal was indeed not equal at all. In the historical Brown v. Board of Education (1954) case, the Supreme Court declared in that declared separate but equal unconstitutional in education (McClure, 2005). Schools were overcrowded, and educators also had the task of teaching a more diverse and, in some cases, a hostile group of students. A push for desegregation caused southern whites to begin forming councils and groups to resist integration in schools (Dean Webb, 2006). Another glaring problem within education was the lack of accommodations for special education students. Although Brown v. Board of Education touched the surface of civil rights, in 1950, over 70% of children with disabilities were not registered or enrolled in school (Anderson, 2001).

After the Soviet Satellite Sputnik's launch in 1958, the United States passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). This act increased the necessity for rigorous

math and science while also helping students attend colleges and universities. The federal government initiated a national effort to mandate new curriculum materials for math, science, social studies, counseling, and foreign languages (Dean Webb, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2014; Long, 2014). Correspondingly, the federal government also provided funding for teaching in-service (Dean Webb, 2006; United States Senate Archives, 2019; Yastrow, 1994). At this time, the National Science Foundation, Physical Science Study Committee, and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 played a huge role in designing curriculum and training teachers. State-level curriculum consultants worked to train teachers and coordinate districts at the state level (Dean Webb, 2006; Lieberman & Miller; Long, 2014). The nation even broadcasted a TV program designed as math and science training for teachers (Yastrow, 1994). Additionally, teachers received training to provide guidance and counseling for more capable students. The Physical Science Study Committee provided in-services, summer programs, and higher education opportunities to teachers (Dean Webb, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2014). Teachers received stipends or "academic credits to attend the institutes" (Dean Webb, 2006 p. 265).

As a result of the fears associated with the launch of Sputnik, a Red Scare swept across the United States. The Red Scare caused some educators to lose their jobs. Teachers and schools made swift changes to curriculum and teaching materials. Teachers may not have sat through a curriculum development in-service, school districts and teachers vastly stuck to fundamentals to avoid un-American activities. The curriculum taught must profoundly focus on national security. Thus, the pendulum swung once again toward the traditional curriculum and abruptly ended the life adjustment education

(Dean Webb, 2006). Teachers feared job loss if they use uncommon instructional practices (Dean Webb, 2006; DuFour, et al., 2008).

As the nation moved away from the Cold War threats, educational leaders began to combat poverty. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 passed, and federal funding for vocational education drastically inclined creating a need for courses in home economics, industrial tech, and other trade skills (Martin, 1975). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed and prohibited public schools from discriminating. The federal government would not provide funding to public institutions that discriminated (McClure, 2005).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 helped speed the process of school desegregation by providing federal funds and grants to school districts that voluntarily desegregated. These funds provided in-service training as well as technical assistance for integration (Dean Webb, 2006). This act also put in place a requirement for nondiscriminatory practices for institutions receiving federal funds. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act provided equal educational opportunities for all public schools (Civil Rights Act, 1964). Research conducted by James Coleman, now referred to as the Coleman Report, revolutionized academic staff development for the next couple of decades. His report indicated that minorities achieved higher when attending integrated schools. Further analysis indicated socioeconomic status as another factor that determined academic success (Dickinson, 2016).

Lyndon B. Johnson enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 as an essential component of his War on Poverty. ESEA funded schools while holding them accountable to high standards. A primary goal of this act was to

provide equitable access to quality education for both primary and secondary students. This act also mandated funding for professional development (Dean Webb, 2006; Long, 2014). Provisions to ESEA included Title I through Title V (Paul, 2018). Established in 1965, the National Teacher Corps sought to recruit young adults into the educational profession. The government sought out young people for the education profession to bring forth innovation and tackle poverty (Lerner, 1966).

During the 1950s and 1960s, new learning theories developed that influenced district policy, curriculum, and teacher development. In 1968, Jane Elliott revolutionized teaching about morals, and racial prejudice with her brown and blue eyes exercise in rural Iowa (Bloom, 2005). Under President Nixon, ESEA provisions included funds to provide programs for low-income students and refugee students (Paul, 2018). From the 1960s to the 1980s, across the United States, funding battles erupted around school funding. Low-income areas were struggling economically while wealthy areas flourished. States began revising funding based on need in order to provide equal opportunities across the state. Changes to school funding sources made accountability more vital (McClure, 2005).

School districts began focusing more on diversity during the mid-20th Century. Bilingual education, special education, immigrant education, and Native American education became prominent in educational in-services. In 1968, included as part of ESEA, Title VII a bilingual education program (Dean Webb, 2006; Long, 2014). School districts that designed and implemented bilingual programs received federal funding; unfortunately, few districts implemented them. It was not until the mid-1970s that the

federal government began mandating bilingual education curriculum and staff training for such programs (Dean Webb, 2006).

In 1970, a small group of educators from different districts, whose job duties involved staff development for teachers, collaborated and formed the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). The council's early years focused on validating district positions for staff development personnel and staff development requirements for educators. During the first decade, the NSDC invited mostly principals, staff development personnel, and university professors to participate in conferences. At the end of the 1970s, membership had grown from 15 to over 600 (Yastrow, 1994).

Additionally, as the War on Poverty pushed forward, districts started to look for best practices in educating students of poverty. In the 1970s, people began considering disparities between white and black students. For nearly two decades, the gap narrowed. During this time, schools mainly focused on basic skills. It is important to note that poverty rates declined and schools across the country desegregated (McClure, 2005). In 1974, the Women's Educational Equity Act passed that helped increase programs and opportunities for females in math, science, computer science, and athletics became the focus for schools and teachers across the United States. As a result of Civil Rights legislation, teacher training and classroom materials saw many equitable changes (Dean Webb, 2006). In 1979, Congress approved the Department of Education. Formally known as the office of education, this office became part of the president's cabinet in 1980 (Wallechinsky, 2016).

President Reagan added provisions to ESEA. States received financial assistance to accommodate learning for English Language Learners. Professional Development in

some states began to provide instruction to teachers on English Language Learning and additional bilingual instructional practices (Paul, 2018). The National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform report* in 1983 (Dean Webb, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2014; Long, 2014). This report highlighted many public education challenges in America and prompted a myriad of educational reforms at local, state, and federal levels (Horn, 2002). As a result, states increased testing for teachers and amplified teacher certification requirements. Murphy (1990) noted that teaching must change as part of this educational reform in response to *A Nation at Risk*. Professional development and continuing education must be available for teachers. Changes needed to improve teaching and teachers included peer visits, staff development plans, teaching methods, and evaluation (Lieberman & Miller, 2014; Long, 2014). Special education reform became another focus area from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s (Long, 2014). More funding poured into special education, and cooperative learning strategies were implemented into classrooms (Yastrow, 1994).

Throughout the 1980s, the NSDC continued to expand membership to nearly 6000 at the end of the decade. The NSDC began providing staff development workshops that focused on coaching, train the trainer, and supervision. In addition to the regional workshops, the NSDC hosted pre-conferences and expanded to over 250 concurrent sessions during their annual conference. In 1988, “beginning teacher induction programs, cooperative schools, mentoring, and teachers as researchers were recognized as effective staff development models” (Yastrow, 1994, p. 16). It is crucial to be cognizant that as the nation wanted to raise standards for teaching during the 1980s, a shortage of teachers

forced many states to offer unconventional routes to teacher certification (Dean Webb, 2006).

In 1988, the achievement gap began to increase. Students falling behind were minorities and students of low-income urban settings. An examination of the curriculum taught in low-income schools versus wealthy schools revealed that the low-income curriculum continued to focus on basic skills. In contrast, wealthy schools taught a more rigorous curriculum (McClure, 2005). Researchers' indicators to determine the effectiveness of professional development included student achievement and instructional behavior changes of the teacher (Bayar, 2014).

Funding for staff development continued to increase from the mid-1970s throughout the 80s. The federal government provided funds for training for teachers and paraprofessionals who worked in disadvantaged areas. Some states began funding staff development to their school improvement plans. In the late 1980s and early 90s, some states provided resources for staff development that linked to state teaching licenses (Yastrow, 1994). Funding for professional development came from federal, state, and local sources. National foundations and federal and state grants also contributed to professional development funds for a school district. Some states and districts required that school budgets designate a specific percentage for professional learning (Mizell, 2010).

In 1986, another national report was published called *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. As a result, school districts received recommendations to assign teacher leaders and mentors amongst their peers, notably established shortly after the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards which created a national

certification system. In turn, many states compensated teachers who completed National Board certification (Dean Webb, 2006; Friend & Cook, 2007). Shockingly, five years after the reform efforts that resulted from *A Nation at Risk*, educational leaders and politicians concluded that these reforms did not lead to any accomplishments (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Educators added more requirements and initiated monumental efforts to reform schools, yet student achievement remained low after ten years of *A Nation at Risk*. Some attributed the failure to improve scores to the top-down approach for improvement. Teacher development rested in the hands of state authorities (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

Seven years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, Fullan, Bennett, and Rolheiser-Bennett (1990) reported that schools' ultimate challenges are too many uncoordinated and unaligned innovations to implement. Furthermore, they concluded that every teacher must be involved in "sustained cumulative improvements" for school-level success (p. 19). In the early 1990s, education leaders began to describe teachers as learners providing teachers more autonomy over classroom resources and instructional strategies implemented within their classrooms. Teachers worked towards refining instructional skills by continually educating themselves, reflecting on their practices, investigating new methods, and collaborating with their peers (Lynch, 2016). Educators began questioning the traditional forms of professional development during the 1990s (Choy et al., 2006; Little, 1993). The lack of improvement in student achievement demonstrated the inadequacy of short, disconnected professional development sessions (Choy et al., 2006).

In 1993, Goals 2000: Educate America Act dispersed federal grants to state education departments to establish curriculum standards. Notably, many professional teacher councils began and also worked towards developing standards. To monitor progress, the government created A National Goals Panel (McClure, 2005). Education also pushed for measurable standards; thus, the rise of high-stakes testing and countless failed scores, teaching to the test became a practice used by some educators. Furthermore, accountability began to hold ties with teacher competency (Jerald, 2006). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reported issues with teacher recruitment and retention in the 1990s and 2000s. Retention or the lack of retention of teachers stemmed from teacher working conditions (Fullan, 2007). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) noted that part of the educational reform of the 1990s included autonomy for schools related to school improvement. Previously states held the authority, and schools responded accordingly to the state recommendations; now, the decisions for school improvement lay in the hands of educators. Goals 2000 also prioritized access to professional development opportunities for teachers (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008). Although these reform efforts happened, more measures were still needed.

Reforms in educational standards and curricula contribute to the changes made in staff development. For example, English and literature become Language Arts. Education in the 1990s and 2000s began to focus on student achievement and critical thinking rather than memorization. There began a greater need for teachers to provide learning opportunities to students while immersing students in the subject matter (Little, 1993). Changing student standards had a domino effect on professional development for

teachers. Teachers needed to obtain more extensive content knowledge and at the same time learn new strategies and techniques to engage active learners. In other words, the sit-and-get lecture-style teaching was no longer efficient. Thus, professional development standards were developed to align with student standards. Furthermore, federal and state governments created guidelines to redefine teacher certification, licensure, university educational programs and distribute funding for professional development (McClure 2005).

Funding these reforms was not cheap. Other school improvement areas also needed reformed. Assessments of various provisions of ESEA allowed the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) to pass in 1994. IASA allowed for federal funds to be distributed across programs by the schools. Additionally, to help with school improvement, IASA allowed for more local control of funds and allowed districts to waive federal requirements that hindered school improvement goals (Paul, 2018). IASA required school districts to adopt standards to ensure that the curriculum was not watered-down or that the basic skills curriculum was not being implemented (McClure, 2005). According to Fullan (2007), to increase teacher retention, "improved instruction through continuous development" (p.36) is needed while also addressing structure and focusing on outcomes and change. Professional development trends studied by Wei et al. (2010) reported that content-related professional development increased from 2000-2010, as did teacher retention rates.

As the curriculum debate continues, technology continues to evolve. In the early 1980s, Apple, with its development of personal computers, revolutionized education. As computers evolved, providing resources and training opportunities for teachers expanded

(Abramson, 2011). Video technology transformed teacher education. In the 21st century, education relied on technology. Technology helped to analyze data and distribute information (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Educational Technology, 2010). The widespread use of computers and laptops in the 2000s put learning opportunities in the hands of many teachers (Abramson, 2011).

Madeline Hunter developed a professional development program instituted across the United States known as the Instructional Theory into Practice Teaching model. A major component of Hunter's professional development practices included stand-and-deliver professional development and videos of effective and ineffective strategies. In turn, her methods and practices led to the creation of tools for teacher evaluation instruments and walkthrough methodology for coaches and principals. Additionally, the Madeline Hunter lesson plan template provided a precise manual for teachers to create lessons that enhanced student engagement, learning, and achievement (Freer and Dawson, 1987). Her lesson plan model included steps for instruction: student learning objectives, anticipatory set, direct instruction, checking for understanding, modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and closure (Wilson, n.d.).

In 1996, Ruby Payne began her business of educating teachers on strategies for working with students of poverty and helping them move beyond the poverty line. Her educational experiences working with students of poverty encouraged educators across the country and expanded pedagogy. Teachers learned practical strategies to help more students be successful in school (Van Der Valk, 2016). Charlotte Danielson, in 1996, developed her teaching framework. This framework focused on effective teaching

practices through teacher evaluation systems that promote professional development for teachers (The Danielson Group, 2020).

The National Center for Education Statistics report on teacher professional development in 1999-2000 found only 26 percent of public-school districts used various pay incentives to promote teacher involvement in professional development events (Choy, Chen, Bugarin, 2006). Even though IASA had good intentions, many states fell short of completing requirements, and few had implemented requirements for assessing disabled and English Language Learners (McClure, 2005). Teaching practices and professional development courses turned slightly more focused on fundamentals after the attack on the Twin Towers. Although the extent may have been less than those felt by the Red Scare and McCarthyism, tensions were high and unpatriotic lessons would not be tolerated (Dean Webb, 2006, p. 270).

Under President George W. Bush, schools were held accountable to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and mandated standardized testing. Schools were required to publish their score reports, and the nation compared school district scores. If schools failed to make progress according to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), schools needed corrective actions put in place. Additionally, schools were required to have improvement plans and measures ready if they failed to meet AYP. Standards for teaching licenses also switched to a highly qualified status. Teachers not highly qualified would have to pass a test or other additional requirements to meet highly qualified standards. Highly qualified teachers also needed to be equally spread across the district (Dean Webb, 2006; DuFour et al., 2008). The 21st-Century teacher certification requirements, as well as highly qualified teacher assessments, helped to improve teacher quality and competency, thus,

increasing the content knowledge for all teachers regardless of the socioeconomic status of their school (Haskins & Loeb, 2007).

No Child Left Behind drastically changed school improvement and accountability. Standardized testing took precedent over actual student growth and learning (Paul, 2018). NCLB placed reading and math testing requirements from elementary grades through middle school. Teachers paid from Title I funding needed to obtain highly qualified status, and schools began monitoring AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In-services for instruction and monitoring and assessing students on AYP took a significant amount of professional development time. For schools that failed to meet AYP, a portion of their Title I funding would be designated towards professional development to help raise scores to meet or exceed AYP (Congressional Research Service, 2007). States and school districts were also required to assess special education students and English language learners if they wanted to receive Title I funding. Under NCLB, districts must also disaggregate data into subgroups and instill accountability measures with rewards and consequences (McClure, 2005). In 2007, Olson reported the same conclusions from research conducted by Harvard University's business school and graduate school of education. In the report, Olson mentioned too many uncoordinated and misaligned school improvement initiatives within schools. After several pushes to reform education and even the implementations of PLCs globally across the United States, schools still struggle to increase student achievement. Moving forward, leaders must focus on the change at hand continuously with deliberative effort before seeking out another significant initiative (Blanchard, 2007). Haskins and Loeb (2007) noted that effective professional development must have a central focus. Furthermore, they

clarified that any professional development activity must directly work towards a curricular goal, and the development must occur over some time. A one-day workshop is not sufficient to improve student academic growth. Also, school districts should invest in mentoring programs and continually monitor professional development progress to ensure increased levels of student learning (Haskins & Loeb, 2007).

Although NCLB significantly impacted education, the legislation's changes did little to improve student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Educators again continue to seek reform to increase student outcomes. Kelly (2012) insisted on restructuring staff development to allow systematic change. For systematic change to occur, he listed three key steps: those that receive training must acknowledge the need for the training, trained staff should have a choice in the training that is received, and training should happen with leaders and teachers together. DuFour and Marzano (2011) stated "improving professional practice" is the ultimate task for school improvement or student achievement (p. 17). They looked to professional learning communities to improve the educational system, teacher practices, and student outcomes.

In conjunction with several others, the NSDC (2010), studied professional development and collective bargaining. Their findings revealed very few connections to professional learning and collective bargaining agreements or state policy. These researchers noted that effective professional development ties directly to established expectations (von Frank, et al., 2010). Professional development that strictly focuses on one topic or with little follow-up will not bring change. School districts in the United States shift professional development focus to individual buildings. This shift had occurred early in the 1990s. While districts continued to work on school improvement as

an entire district, buildings focused on specific staff development that matched the needs of their teachers (Jacobson, 2016). According to DuFour and Fullan (2013), a cultural change brought about through professional learning communities, and continual professional learning is the reform for United States public education. Shifting the focus of professional development from district level to building level was critical. However, cultural change was crucial for student achievement and school improvement.

As schools begin to establish professional learning communities (PLCs), the fundamentals of professional development change dramatically. Rather than thinking of development in terms of teaching and delivering content, professional development focuses on learning (DuFour et al., 2008). Thus, there is an increasing use of the term professional learning with the establishment of PLCs. One of the cultural changes to professional development within PLCs is that there is no endpoint. A PLC continues to work on improvement, and continual adjustments and reflections occur (DuFour et al., 2008).

Additionally, instructional practices change as students change (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore's study on Title I schools provided evidence to support the implementation of PLCs as a means to increase student achievement. Providing teachers with "scheduled time and strategies to continuously prioritize instructional improvement to enhance student learning that enables increased student achievement (2009). PLCs and professional development must align towards common goals for significant changes in achievement. Teachers need sufficient time and reflection to develop necessary skills and reflect on pedagogy. It is pertinent for the district and building initiatives to focus and align with each other. PLCs must be

structured and dedicated to the set goals. The selection of goals and professional development must include teachers (Wei et al., 2010).

Professional learning communities have transformed professional development into professional learning. According to Dufour and Fullan (2013), schools that fully implement PLCs have disregarded the old design of professional development, which required teachers to attend workshops, in-service, or graduate courses added to the school calendar. Instead, professional learning is continuous and embedded into the daily routines of teachers. Teachers are not just compliant participants. Instead, they are engaged, active, reflective, and accountable. Teachers receive feedback frequently and consistently, monitor goals, and progress is measured habitually (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Wei et al. (2010) reported professional development opportunities to support bilingual education, special education, poverty, and diversity increased after ten years into the 21st century. However, they believe these opportunities came from the efforts of NCLB legislation and tagging underperforming schools through AYP.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed in 2009 focused on improving low-achieving schools, increasing teacher effectiveness, and increased funding for teacher professional development. Race to the Top, a national competition under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, allocated nearly $4 billion for engaging, recurring teacher professional development embedded into daily activities that align with academics and improvement. Additionally, teachers must actively monitor student progress by assessments and collaboration and teachers. Teachers must also use the information gathered from monitoring student progress to adjust their pedagogy, classroom materials, and assessments (Long, 2014).

DuFour and Eaker's first book on professional learning communities came out in 1998. A decade later, they revised their book on professional learning communities. In between the ten years, DuFour and Eaker stated they learned more from other individuals that help them understand "the complexities of school improvement at a deeper level and helped clarify" their thinking (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 1). Just as these educators have adjusted their processes and understanding of creating more efficient PLCs, so must educators around the United States. Each school brings different challenges, including diversity, socioeconomic status, language gaps and barriers, technology gaps, or special educational needs. Rural, urban, and suburban schools face different challenges, and those challenges change each year (Wei, et al., 2010). School systems must continually strive to improve professional learning if student achievement is to increase. Successful implementation of PLCs involves teachers embracing a focus on learning rather than teaching, which means that "the best way to improve student learning is to invest in the learning of adults who serve them" (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 19). After nearly a decade of defining and implementing PLCs, Wei, et al. (2010) found that nearly one-third of teachers did not have structured daily collaboration time.

Throughout the last forty years, educators have continually noted the importance of ongoing professional learning related to pedagogy. School shootings, the terrorist attack on 9/11, increases in youth suicides, and the COVID 19 pandemic put social and emotional learning (SEL) at the forefront of professional development in the 21st century (McClure, 2020). Professional development for educators drastically changed as teachers found themselves remotely teaching students. Virtual opportunities emerged as the safest form of professional development: webinars, online courses, zoom meetings, streaming

conferences, and events. Several organizations offered free events for teachers (Leadbeater & Leslie, 2020). As schools across the United States closed doors in March of 2020, many educators learned to teach remotely independently. Some districts worked diligently to provide options to teachers during the summer months. Other districts put little time or effort into teacher professional development around the unplanned building closures. Inconsistency between states and school districts regarding teaching and learning left teachers floundering to provide adequate instruction amidst the pandemic (Thompson, 2020).

Amidst the pandemic, educators saw the significance of aligning professional development to the situational needs of students (Foster et al., 2020). The COVID 19 pandemic ensured SEL as part of professional learning for teachers. Also, effective professional learning during the pandemic involved self-efficacy to empower educators and build confidence to teach remotely. Professional development also needs to include reflection time for educators to acknowledge virtual challenges and perfect their online teaching strategies. Many teachers across the United States taught online for the first time when schools closed because of the COVID 19 pandemic (Erickson, 2020). As the COVID19 pandemic continued throughout the United States, educators faced the reality that high-demand professional development was crucial moving forward. Not only did educators need to tackle teaching remotely, they also needed to find ways to engage students virtually. During the pandemic, some educators also grappled with hybrid learning—a combination of remote and faced-to-face learning. Educators faced a glaring reality; professional development must be relevant and personalized (Hooker, 2020).

Although schools started to integrate technology in the 1980s, online professional development did not take off until nearly a decade into the 21st century. Innovations such as online collaboration tools, data analysis tools, educational platforms for online grades and communication, and digital assessments began to engulf educators. As these tools integrated into schools, these suppliers also started providing teachers with implementation guidance and digital collaboration opportunities (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

Isolation and social distancing swept across the globe as a way to provide safety from COVID 19. Foster et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of collaboration and relationship building online to prevent social isolation during a period of social distancing. Notably, the COVID 19 pandemic made it clear that teacher choice of professional learning was necessary. For teachers to be effective in a more isolated environment, they had to reflect upon their skills. Teachers frequently sought out opportunities to learn and improve their pedagogy to better serve their students and communities. Teachers worked with fidelity to meet the needs of their students. School districts must give teachers some autonomy over professional learning. Trusting educators to focus on the skills needed is essential at any time but especially relevant during a pandemic (Foster, et al., 2020). Professional learning in the 21st century must align with school and district goals and enhance teacher abilities (Hooker, 2020). Additionally, professional development that allows teachers to receive feedback from students "allows teachers to adjust their pedagogy based on what works best" for their students at that time and place: remote or face to face (Alexander, 2020, para 11).

Teacher autonomy related to professional development

Districts can provide professional development opportunities virtually, in-person, or through online forums. Additionally, teachers are beginning to have a more significant part in the selection process for their professional development (Jacobson, 2019). Teachers' involvement in the selection of professional development plays a crucial role in change within their teaching pedagogy, classroom, and building (Brunkowski, 2004; Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Manzanares, 2016; Watkins, 2019).

Although self-selected or self-directed professional development has been around for decades, little research has been found related to self-selected professional development (Brunkowski, 2004; Jacobson, 2019; Manzanares, 2016). Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) referred to self-selected professional development as individually guided development. They identified individually guided development as an effective professional development model that included teacher planned activities designed to enhance learning and teaching. In turn, teachers are empowered to seek relevant professional development and feel a sense of professionalism (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989).

Nearly a decade later, Day (1999) examined research on teacher training and in-service. He found that teacher autonomy or self-selection of professional development opportunities is more likely to be implemented into teaching and learning. Day implies that self-selection of professional development that addresses a teacher’s weaknesses or goals is more likely to result in change within teaching and learning than professional development that is not self-selected.

One early study, conducted in Chicago Public Schools by Brunkowski (2004), focused on teachers' participation in self-selected classroom management professional development activities. The researchers gathered data and had participants complete surveys and interviews. The purpose was to examine teachers' perception of classroom instructional practices after participation in self-selected professional development. Brunkowski found that educators are capable of identifying their professional development needs, and self-selection of professional development has a positive impact on classroom instructional practices. Acknowledging that teachers are professionals and can select appropriate professional development is critical if schools want to see change happen within the classrooms. Additionally, Bruknowski noted that to facilitate teacher change, both reflective and research-based components must be a part of self-selected professional development (Brunkowski, 2004).

DuFour and Fullan (2013) note that the PLC process empowers educators to make critical decisions for professional learning, improving, and achievement. When teachers get the opportunity to self-select or chose their professional development, it is likely they will be more invested and implement new learnings within the classroom.

Another study that focused on professional development was conducted by Colbert, Brown, Choi, and Thomas and published in 2008. The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of teachers who participated in an achievement award program. The researchers used interviews and surveys to gather data for this study. The results indicated that autonomy over professional development increased teacher involvement, attitude, and behaviors toward professional development. In other words, teachers are more willing to try new things if they are attentive and engaged in

worthwhile professional learning. Additionally, engaged teachers are more likely to leave professional development with lessons, ideas, tools, and plans. Colbert et al. also noted teacher excitement over the newly learned materials transferred to student excitement for learning (Colbert et al., 2008). Enthusiasm for one's profession is refreshing and is much preferred, especially when teacher burn-out is so prevalent.

Research on professional development trends indicate insignificant increase in continual professional learning of content and pedagogy. Notably, trends depicted a decline in professional development covering technology integration, classroom management, and teaching fundamentals like reading (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). Teachers are professionals and should use reflections to incorporate best practices into the classroom. Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) states that "research identifies professional development around content as an important building block for potentially effective professional development" and that a majority of teachers in the United States select content related professional learning as highly significant for the teaching profession (p.38). "The most helpful PD involves strengthening teaching pedagogy—with a focus on content and instruction—through ongoing practice, feedback, reflection, and collaboration" (Williamson, 2020, para 12).

In 2014, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation conducted research on teacher perception of professional development and found that less than 1/3 of teachers in the study chose professional development for themselves. The teachers that had autonomy in professional development selection stated higher satisfaction rates with self-selected professional development experiences. The research indicated a disconnect between

district intentions and teacher experiences of professional development (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

A qualitative study was conducted by Manzanares (2016) from 2013 through 2015, at a United States military base elementary school to learn about experiences of elementary teachers after they completed self-selected professional development. The purpose of the study was to analyze teachers' classroom experiences after finishing self-selected professional development. Interviews, reflections, essay responses, and other writings made up the qualitative data of this study. The results indicated that educators appreciate face-to-face professional development with their peers, teachers want to implement their learning in the classroom, and teachers focus on relevant topics. Self-selection of professional development or teacher buy-in positively impacts implementation (Manzanares, 2016). In other words, teachers value the ability to select appropriate and meaningful professional development. Furthermore, the likelihood that some change will occur is more significant because the teacher or group of teachers are invested in professional learning.

Learning Forward indicated that teachers are still not involved in selecting professional development. Teachers that participated in a nationwide survey conducted by Learning Forward (2017) reported at least 75% of teachers reported that they are not involved in planning and selecting professional development; that task is completed by district leaders and building principals. Notably, only 4% of teachers reported teacher-selection or involvement in planning of professional development (Learning Forward, 2017).

Existing research supports teacher-driven or teacher-selected professional development, and also indicates that teachers appreciate opportunities to work with like-minded individuals towards a desired outcome. Bohny (2018) conducted a study in New Jersey that investigated teachers' professional learning in a self-designed, teacher-led study group. The results indicated that teacher-driven professional development interactions stretched beyond individual classrooms and teachers, and that like-minded professional development study groups are active in changing the classroom environment (Bohny, 2018). If schools are genuinely seeking to improve student achievement and eliminate gaps, change must happen. Providing educators with opportunities to collaborate, learn, and work with others towards a common goal is one way to make change happen.

The purpose of a 2019 study conducted in New York by Watkins, was to understand teachers' perception of online professional development and to investigate if online learning communities increase collaboration and promote reflection. Watkins focused on teacher perceptions of their professional development experiences. The results indicated that teachers prefer to self-select their professional development to meet their specific needs. Since we live in a digital world, the opportunities for professional development have skyrocketed. With the use of technology, teachers can complete professional development activities in multiple ways. For example, teachers can attend Edcamps, online courses, a virtual field trip, join a book study, and so much more. Instructional fairs also offer teachers the opportunity to select professional development that meets their needs. Additionally, teachers that participated in Watkins' study shared that district or building chosen professional development lacks

personalization. Watkins (2019) also reported that teachers felt they were able to sustain the professional learnings when they were required to develop a lesson.

The lack of autonomy and the rigorous demands of teaching have contributed to teacher turn-over (Williamson, 2020). A one-size fits all approach in teacher professional learning is a form of micromanaging. Teachers' self-reflections on their abilities should guide them to self-select and identify individual needs related to pedagogy and content. Districts with effective professional development programs have embedded professional learning communities and coaches or mentors to consistently collaborate, reflect, and enhance pedagogy (Williamson, 2020). "The most helpful PD involves strengthening teaching pedagogy—with a focus on content and instruction—through ongoing practice, feedback, reflection, and collaboration" (Williamson, 2020, para 12).

Upon reviewing research on professional development, a common theme emerged as a challenge—scheduling professional development. Most of the researchers concluded that time, schedule, and location became issues for professional development activities (Mazanares, 2016; Bohny, 2018; Watkins, 2019). Manzanares suggested that teachers recognize challenges with professional development, such as scheduling and being overworked and under-valued (2016). Bohny's research found that schedules and finding meeting locations for teacher-led study groups were difficult for teachers (2018). Notably, Watkins reported the reduction of schedule conflicts from online professional development makes online professional development a popular choice (2019).

Participating in an achievement award program is likely to be rewarding and exciting. Teachers are also motivated to participate in professional development when

learning relates to their content area or pedagogy. Patton, Parker, and Pratt's (2013) conducted research to examine the pedagogy of professional development facilitation specifically within physical education. The results indicated the importance of providing teachers with professional development opportunities where learning is meaningful. Meaningfulness is not something that can be handed over on a piece of paper. It must come from within the person. Teachers all find purpose and meaningfulness differently. Additionally, strategies and skills that work with one set of students may not fit the instructional needs of the next group. Teachers must continually adapt or flex their instructional practices to meet the needs of their learners. When districts select professional development for all teachers to participate in during the calendar year, many teachers may feel neglected or may not reap benefits from professional learning. Patton et al. (2013) also reported that learning as doing without dictating, learning by trying, and learning by sharing were preferable teaching techniques. The researcher noted that active engagement occurred most often when the instructors were facilitators rather than lecturers (Patton et al., 2013). Best practices for teachers to use within the classroom with students may also be the best practices to use during adult learning.

Summary

Chapter 2 focused on professional development and professional learning and explored the shift in teacher learning from passive participants to active and engaged participants implementing job-embedded practices daily as part of their routine. Furthermore, this chapter covered the history of professional development through a series of historical events and federal legislation. The history included some background

on professional development funding through state and federal mandates. Chapter 2 described the shifts in the focus and intensity of professional development. The chapter also included research related to federal legislation and school implementation of professional development. Additionally, chapter 2 highlighted some research on teacher autonomy of professional development. Teachers have continually adjusted to the changing world through developing and learning. As time moves on, we will see if educators learn from research and truly change professional learning to develop practices that can contribute to change.

Chapter 3 describes the methods implemented in this qualitative study to analyze teachers' perceptions on teacher autonomy of professional development selection. Chapter 4 presents the results of the examined data analysis on teachers' perceptions of self-selected professional development on pedagogy, student achievement, and the discipline in which they teach. Chapter 5 summarizes the study and connections to literature are provided. Recommendations for the future are included in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3

Methods

This phenomenological study explored teacher perceptions of self-selected professional development and experiences within the XYZ School District. The research question addressed in this study was what are teachers' perceptions regarding self-directed professional development? Additionally, the following sub questions were investigated:

- What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on their growth in pedagogy?
- What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on student academic achievement?
- What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on the discipline in which they teach?

Chapter 3 consists of an explanation of the research design, setting, sampling procedures, instruments, interview, observation, data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis, reliability and trustworthiness, researcher's role, and limitations of this study.

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was selected to explore teacher perceptions of experiences with self-selected professional development within the XYZ School District. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained that "qualitative research includes an understanding of context, circumstance, environment, and milieu" (p. 38). Qualitative research is a method for discovering and understanding how individuals or groups perceive a societal phenomenon. A phenomenological approach permits the

researcher to study the intricacies of the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2014). Hence, a phenomenological approach was chosen for this study to investigate teachers' perceptions of self-directed professional development. The researcher employed responsive interviewing to collect data. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) responsive interviewing "emphasizes the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give-and-take in the conversation" (p. 36).

Setting

The school district involved in this study is located in a suburban area in the Midwest. For this study, this district was selected because self-selected professional development was part of the negotiated teacher contract (Appendix D). The XYZ school district encompasses a large area and has five traditional high schools. Department chairs were asked to participate first because of their broader perspective on professional development within their departments and professional learning communities.

Sampling Procedures

The intended population to inform this study was teachers who participate in self-selected professional development. Hence, the researcher sought perceptions of secondary teachers from one district across five high schools that required teachers to participate in teacher-driven or self-selected professional development. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), purposive sampling "involves selecting a sample based on the researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled" (p.175). Participants interviewed in this study were selected based on the criteria that they had participated in self-selected professional development during their employment with the XYZ school district. Department chairs were the first teachers asked to participate in the

study since they have a broader perspective on the established professional learning communities. The researcher first reached out to department chairs for the core subjects. The researcher hoped to gather perceptions from one to two high school teachers per high school for a total of up to ten participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that in phenomenological research, a researcher institutes balance and assiduousness not by quantity, rather through a diligent evaluation process that comprises multiple viewpoints. Saturation is when new information or diverse perspectives are no longer accessible or until the researcher has no more volunteers or participants for the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, the researcher interviewed participants in this study until saturation was reached.

Instruments

To better understand the views and experiences of the participant teachers involved in self-directed professional development, interviews were the main measurement used. Interviews are a phenomenological technique used to gather meanings and perceptions of the participants involved in the research (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). A responsive interviewing technique known as semi-structured interviewing was used for this research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher prepared 10 questions (Appendix E) in advance with plans to ask follow-up questions such as "How did you measure your growth from the self-selected professional development activity?" and How long did you monitor progress?" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, both elaboration and continuation probes were utilized to warrant depth and transparency to the participants' responses. Rubin and Rubin (2012) described continuation probes as a signal to the participants that the researcher is attentive, and that the interviewee should continue their

answer. An elaboration probe asks for additional detail or explanation of a theme or concept that the researcher has selected from the participant's response (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Refer to Table 1 for the probes used in this research.

Table 1

Response Interviewing Probes

Continuation Probes	Elaboration Probes
And…?	Tell me more about that…?
So…?	Give me more details about that…?
What about…?	Share an example…?
Then what…?	Explain more about this…?

Interview questions were validated to align with the research question and sub questions. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) noted the significance of validating interview research questions. The interview questions were validated by educational experts who included the following: one district coordinator, one high school instructional coach, and one secondary building leader. The researcher corresponded via email with the educational experts to validate the interview research questions. There were 10 pre-constructed interview questions including three demographic questions. Three questions focused on the central research question related to teacher perceptions of teacher autonomy in professional development selection. Three questions sought to gain teacher perceptions about each of the sub research questions.

SubQ1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on their growth in pedagogy?

SubQ2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on student academic achievement?

SubQ3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on the discipline in which they teach?

The final interview question addressed all three sub research questions within a department or PLC setting focusing on ways the department tackles pedagogy, student achievement and content knowledge through self-selected professional development.

Data Collection Procedures

Before starting the data collection, the researcher obtained verbal and written approval for the research from an associate superintendent in the XYZ School District (Appendix A). The associate superintendent indicated the importance of obtaining permission for this study because teacher contracts include self-directed professional development days, therefore, the results could affect future negations. The researcher also submitted an application to Baker's Institutional Review Board before data was collected (Appendix B).

After approval to conduct research was obtained, a pilot interview was completed to test the questions of the study. This pilot interview was conducted with a former colleague of the researcher. Any additional probes or follow up questions were jotted on the researcher's interview script based on feedback from the pilot interview.

Next, the researcher invited teachers to participate in the study. Department chairs were the first teachers invited to participate in the study. A request to interview was made directly to the department chairs by email. When department chairs accepted, a letter of consent was distributed and collected from them via email. (Appendix C). The researcher tried to select participants from both core and elective courses for this study. If department chairs were unable or unwilling to participate, the researcher requested

names of teachers that may be interested in interviewing from department chairs or principals. Individual teachers were invited to participate and once a teacher from each high school had accepted, the researcher stopped requesting additional volunteers. For this study, the researcher hoped to have at least one teacher from each of the five high schools with teachers that taught from either core or elective courses. Additional volunteers that were not selected were thanked via email for their willingness to participate. While this was not a large sample size, the sample size was manageable and ample to obtain perceptions across all high school buildings and a majority of subjects in the study.

A consent form was signed and received prior to each interview. The researcher and participants selected dates and times for the interviews. All interviews took place via Zoom. The researcher was in a home office during the interviews and requested that the participants be in a location free from distractions. All participants were in classrooms or offices within the school. Each interview started with a brief introduction followed by the researcher stating the purpose of the study. The researcher thanked the participants for volunteering and reminded them that confidentiality would be honored throughout the process. The researcher shared other parameters and requested verbal permission to video record in Zoom with live closed captioning, and back up audio record in voice memos on an iPad during the interview. Definitions regarding teacher-driven and self-selection were defined and instructions to answer honestly and freely were spoken to the participants. Next, participants were given an opportunity to ask questions. Each interview lasted between 35-55 minutes.

The interviews were audio recorded with live captioning and transcribed later for analysis. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher thanked the participants for their time and willingness to share their experiences related to self-selected professional development. Next, the researcher transcribed the interviews from the audio recording. Transcripts were made available for participants to review within 24 hours of their interviews. The transcripts were digitally shared with the interview participants. The researcher requested participants to notify the researcher with any corrections by adding comments or editing the document and then participants approved accuracy via email once corrections were made. After transcripts were checked and corrected, the researcher uploaded the interview transcripts to Dedoose Research Analysis software program.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

A plethora of data are generated using qualitative methods and therefore, require, a regimented system for comprehensive analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Certain steps were taken to effectively analyze the data while documenting important findings. Qualitative data is best analyzed once transcribed verbatim. The researcher used Dedoose Research Analysis software program as an aid in managing and analyzing the data derived from the transcribed interviews. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted the efficiency of computer analysis software and reiterated the necessity of the researcher reading each line of the transcript and assigning codes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended a 5-step process for qualitative data analysis. Those steps were used with an additional step.

1. Organize the data and prepare the data by transcribing and uploading to the designated software analysis tool.

2. Read and review all data to gain an overview of each participant's point of view.
3. Identify research questions that evolved and changed during the study.
4. Develop a coding system and start the coding process.
5. Write a description and identify themes from the coding process.
6. Decipher how the themes will be applied to the study.

Step 3 was an additional step added by the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that "often in qualitative studies, the questions are under continual review and reformulation" (p. 135). In this study, it became evident during the interviews that participants viewed all three sub research questions as connected and interlinked. Participants either provided the same answers for each interview question related to pedagogy, student achievement, and content knowledge or they discussed how pedagogy, content, and student achievement are all linked together. Additionally, sub research question 3 specified academic achievement, but during interviews participants viewed student achievement beyond just academic success. The researcher continued to review these changes and relied on these adaptations throughout the data and analysis process.

Once the researcher uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose, the researcher began developing a coding system by joining related ideas from the interview responses to create codes. Computer software for qualitative data has limitations. Computers do not interpret context, emotions, and therefore may group items inaccurately (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Therefore, a coding procedure, "which assigns an alphanumeric system to segments of transcripts" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 231) was used to organize and examine the data acquired through participant interviews. The transcripts were coded

three times by the researcher. First, after the initial interviews, secondly after a separation of the information into categories and themes was completed, and a third time to consider interviewee responses that had not been initially considered. Rubin and Rubin (2012) specified that researchers must consider themes and categories initially overlooked. The second and third coding process highlighted categories and themes not initially caught.

Chunking raw data before analyzing qualitative data is advisable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As was suggested by these authors, the researcher started analysis through coding. Next, the data were analyzed, and common themes were revealed. The coding application is provided in Appendix F. Afterwards, connections were drawn from the research conducted and themes of the data were compared for more analysis and interpretation. Finally, the researcher redacted the transcripts by modifying direct quotes when reporting results to protect anonymity of participants.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the basis for trustworthiness. It is imperative that the researcher establishes trustworthiness by providing "evidence that her or his descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied" (p. 202). To assist with credibility, the researcher used live captioning to assist with transcribing each interview. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher used the audio recordings to review the interview and correct mistakes made from the live captioning. The researcher completed transcription within 24 hours of the interview so that participants could check for accuracy within a short time from interviewing.

Participants commented or made edits to their responses or confirmed accuracy of the transcripts before the transcripts were coded in Dedoose. Only one participant made changes or modifications to their interview transcript.

At the time of the interviews, the researcher no longer worked in the XYZ school district and had moved out of state; therefore, the distance helped to increase trustworthiness and allowed teachers to express opinions in confidentiality. The researcher explained her interest in self-directed professional development in hopes to encourage open dialogue and honest feedback from the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher acknowledged that her personal ideas, values, viewpoints, and perceptions regarding self-directed professional development may be biased and efforts were deliberately made to reduce or eliminate that personal bias. The researcher was vigilant to only use what was shared by the participants during the interviews.

Researcher's Role

According to Rubin and Rubin to ensure objectivity and effectiveness the researcher must understand how their personal attitudes, values and beliefs can influence interview questions and reactions to those questions. Hence, the researcher made a conscious effort to focus and listened objectively (2012). Life experiences and human nature do not always allow researchers to distance themselves from a study. Thus, the researcher worked to regulate personal bias to avoid compromising data and analysis.

According to Creswell (2018) and Lunenburg and Irby (2008), personal reflexivity is crucial in qualitative research; researchers must explain their personal biases that they may bring to the study. Personal reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect on personal values, beliefs, and a broad range of life experiences and identify ways in which

the research or researcher may have been affected or changed (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Thus, reflexivity creates a transparent narrative that resonates positively with readers (Creswell, 2018). The researcher used academic and professional experiences to guide the purpose of this study. Previous professional experience in the XYZ School District allowed the researcher first-hand knowledge of professional development practices over a 15-year period of time. Some of the first-hand experiences with professional development included creation and delivery of district-wide professional development. The researcher acknowledged that personal experience within the district had an influence on the subject of this study.

Furthermore, the researcher's background as a secondary teacher, district specialist, professional development facilitator, adjunct professor, and 15 years of educational experience provided understanding and inspiration that gave the researcher applicable expertise and outlook to examine the questions asked in this study. The development of professional learning communities and established PLC time in the high school schedule also contributed to the researcher's inspiration for this study.

The researcher earned three master's degrees in education and focused on professional development throughout her career in education. Early and continued experience with delivering district-level professional development related to curriculum, technology, instructional practices, student achievement helped to develop the interview questions. Additionally, the researcher lived within the school boundaries for over half of the time she worked for the district. All of these experiences may potentially shape the interpretations of the data.

Limitations

Limitations are factors beyond the control of the researcher (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). The researcher could not control what happened during the day for the interview participants or whether they invested themselves in the interview. Additionally, the researcher could not control factors and other experiences that might have influenced the way the participants responded. Another limitation is the potential for the researcher's personal bias. Also, the researcher had no control over the COVID 19 pandemic and the district's responses to the pandemic. Finally, during the interviews, it became evident that some teachers may have recalled fewer activities and impacts because of the rapid transitioning from in-person learning to remote learning during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Summary

In this chapter, the methodology for the study was outlined. This study was conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of teacher-facilitated professional development and the impact on student academic achievement, teacher pedagogy, and discipline of teachers. Data was derived from interviews. Procedures for data collection and analysis were included. The researcher's role in the study was clearly stated and explicit. In chapter four, the results of the data analysis are given.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of this qualitative study of teacher autonomy in professional development selection are described in this chapter. The responses of five high school teachers were obtained to inform this study. Each participant in the study represented a different high school within the XYZ school district. The participants included 3 males and 2 females. Both core subjects and elective subjects were taught amongst the five participants. The level of courses taught by the participants ranged from remedial to college level. The average years teaching amongst the participants was 19 years. The mean years teaching within the XYZ school district was nearly 17 years. Although the researchers first invited department chairs to participate in the study, only one participant was not a department chair. Participants averaged a little over 5 years as department chairs within their buildings. All participants had earned a master's degree or higher in the field of education. Participants all had five years of experience with self-selected professional development. Additionally, participants were involved with department activities and professional learning communities for at least five years.

To protect the privacy of participants, content area, years of teaching experience, years of teaching within the XYZ school district, and school buildings were not associated with individual participants. Instead, the researcher refers to teachers as Teacher 1 through Teacher 5. Exact courses taught by the participants are not mentioned and are not associated directly with a school; however, both core teachers and elective teachers participated in this study. Additionally, specific training and specific student

achievement, certifications, or awards are intentionally not mentioned in order to protect the privacy of both the teacher and the school.

The interviews were all conducted between March 3, 2021 and March 5, 2021. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once the interviews were transcribed the participants reviewed them for accuracy. Next, the transcriptions were uploaded and coded using Dedoose Research Analysis software. From those codes, the researcher identified themes derived from the analysis of the interview transcripts. Findings 1 and 2 are discussed in relation to the central research questions concerning teachers' perceptions of self-selected professional development. Finding 3 is discussed in relation to the three sub research questions pertaining to the impact of self-selected professional development on growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and the discipline in which each participant teaches.

Finding 1: Teachers favor self-selected professional development

The central research question of this study focused on teachers' perceptions regarding self-directed professional development. The responses indicated the advantages of teacher autonomy in professional development selection outweighed the disadvantages. Four themes emerged as reasons participants favored teacher autonomy in the selection of professional development: professionalism, leadership opportunities, recognition, and flexibility.

Professionalism. Four participants responded positively simply because given opportunities and specific contract time allows them to act as a professional and select relevant professional development opportunities. Participants expressed the desire for self-directed professional development themed around personal, classroom, or building

needs assessment results and selecting specific opportunities to improve, perfect or grow on those areas, challenges or weaknesses. Teacher 1 stated:

> Self-directed professional development has been really good for us. I can select high quality professional development myself that focuses on activities and instruction that I can use in my classroom or help elucidate some situations for my students.

Similarly, Teacher 2 reported, "I want my opinion involved in selecting professional development; I know what I know, and I get more out of professional development when I have a choice in selecting it." Likewise, Teacher 3 stated, "You give the choice and control over the things. You see teachers as professionals who genuinely want to get better at their craft." "At some point, you have to trust professionals to be professional," was stated frequently by Teacher 5. In each instance, the participants described being valued and enjoyed the concept of being viewed as a professional.

Three participants appreciated the ability to select relevant professional development based on data garnered from various assessments. Some made self-selected professional development decisions based on student assessment scores, opinions from student surveys, informal observations and assessments, and feedback from administrators and other colleagues. Teacher 4 referred to observations of other teachers as "piquing my interest in professional development I knew little about. Students responding positively towards it and I wanted to know more." Correspondingly, Teacher 3 gave some powerful insights into the decision process for self-selected professional development:

> You allow people to be able to identify gaps in their teaching game that need to be addressed, which is helpful and empowering. I know that I feel that way. If I can approach the year, and if I've reflected about the previous year and start thinking toward the new year, I really can address those parts of my teaching. I have control over my areas of weakness, and I can explore them by doing some action research and getting with other people as a support group to kind of figure out an answer to my weaknesses. I think it's really helpful and positive.

Teacher 5 stated their appreciation for, "the opportunities that are embraced that do allow individuals and PLCs or even larger groups to work toward or pursue and investigate areas that are a more immediate need or interest." All participants also indicated that they spent far more time engaging in self-selected professional development than the district required 15 hours.

Leadership opportunities. Some teachers perceived the opportunity for leadership and expert roles within their PLCs and departments as a major advantage of self-selected professional development. Teachers referenced dividing or splitting up professional development opportunities and then coming together to share with their PLC or department. Teacher 2 responded that "sometime professional development was so good we all were interested and frequently asked each other if we had tried this or that yet, but most of the time we split up and became expert with certain strategies related to our content." Comparably, Teacher 4 said, "we actually like to break it up to have eyes on all activities." Teacher 4 went on to say that by dividing up professional development opportunities related to content and pedagogy it allows the team to "come back and we have a little bit of everything. We are such a good team that we like to come back and

share." Equally, Teacher 3 shared about experiences with free online professional development. Teacher 3 said, "I was building out best stuff, content notes, links, and strategies. Trying to distill it to share." with our department and vertical team. Furthermore, Teacher 3 referenced several opportunities within their PLCs that "the resident expert on a subject gives us a definitive takeaway each day, and it might be technology, it might be content, or it might be a strategy related to content." This demonstrates that teachers rely on each other to share knowledge and strategies and gives teachers opportunities to be leaders and experts on specific topics or strategies. Additionally, Teacher 5 said by "allowing teachers to select relevant professional development and reflect as a PLC this system has benefited our students by benefiting our teachers." Teacher 1 reported "We had groups of teachers that would share out lessons, strategies and resources that worked best, and we could take these back and try them." Furthermore, Teacher 1 added, "if we struggled with something, we have a teacher contact in the district we can reach out to for help."

Recognition. Participants also expressed gratification for receiving credit for work they already do outside of contract time. Teacher 1 commented that "the contract days for self-selected professional development are one of the rare instances where you actually get credit for what you do." The participant went on to discuss several self-directed professional development opportunities that exceeded the designated time for teacher-directed professional development. Relatedly, Teacher 2 said "having two days for teacher-facilitated professional development allows me to get credit for some of the work I do that I don't get extra pay for, and it is nice to be recognized." Teacher 5 responded, "It is nice to get credit; however, 15 hours typically falls short of what some

teachers spend on teacher-facilitated professional development." On a similar note, Teacher 4 said, "teacher-facilitated days are good, it is nice that our summer work counts for something." According to Teacher 3, "Summer sessions are another nice option." Furthermore, Teacher 3 clarified that, "If I go to that impact institute, or I [attend] a webinar, or I go to [another professional development event] training to coach myself up, I can apply those hours and meet that obligation on my own time versus maybe during a hectic school schedule or family schedule during the school year." Teacher 5 noted that "if you go to a training [or ongoing sessions, people should be able to], count [those activities as time spent] towards professional development [because] those are the people that are continuing to develop professionally and seek out those opportunities."

Flexibility. Participants in this study made remarks on locations and timing of professional development opportunities. They saw recording and logging professional development opportunities prior to the designated calendar days for teacher-facilitated professional development as a huge benefit. According to Teacher 5, "I do like the self-directed professional development, especially in terms of flexibility and time." Teachers 1 and 2 both mentioned on numerous times the challenge with missing school days to attend professional development. They both expressed the difficulty of finding a quality substitute as well as the preparation of lessons for a substitute that may or may not be qualified to teach their subject matters. Notably, Teachers 3, 4, and 5 all highlighted summer as a prime time to participate in teacher-facilitated professional development. Specifically, Teacher 3 stated: "So that flexibility has been appreciated, and I know I think that makes it easier on the teachers." Teacher 2 also expressed additional gratitude

for flexibility: “I get to collaborate with colleagues outside my building during the summer and together we bounce ideas off each other to adapt and improve lessons.”

Finding 2: Challenges with self-selected professional development

The second finding related directly to the central research question of teachers’ perception of self-selected professional development. Although participants favored self-selected professional development, weaknesses associated with self-selected professional development opportunities were concerning. Themes emerged around the lack of structure and accountability, and a need for considerable amounts of time and resources.

Structure and accountability. Although teachers overall reflected positively on teacher-facilitated professional development, some noted the importance of structure and accountability. “The dangerous part of self-directed PD is that you are presented with the world as your option and you have to actually take active steps to make sure you get something good out of it,” stated by Teacher 1. Those sentiments were also mentioned by Teacher 5 who said, “not everybody’s going to be professional.” Furthermore, Teacher 5 added,

> I think the major weakness is with flexibility, there's always loopholes, and it does contribute to the tendency of just I'm going to hurry through and get this done, and not really make application or attempted application of this. I read a book last summer, so therefore I will check it off. Done. I get a free day out in the sun.

Although some people take advantage of self-selected professional development logging system, Teacher 1 shared:

> When we first started here in the district we were under pretty tight parameters and held accountable; however, over the five years of district self-selected PD, we

> moved away from the strict parameters because the district discovered that there's a group of people who don't do anything. [Administrators] do not always prioritize checking teacher logs for self-directed professional development which allows some people to sleep through the cracks, and when they see that there's 30% [of teachers in their buildings] that haven't turned anything in, they [don't always ensure] they're actually doing something valuable. So, we [teachers] fluff hours and activities.

Relatedly, Teacher 5 expressed concerns with lack of accountability and structure:

> Some building administrators are more flexible lenient than others. Those that are in those buildings enjoy it, those that are [in] other buildings kind of create some friction because we were told that doesn't count or we can't do that. So yeah, I think some standards is standardization streamlining of the process will be good, especially when you talk about data analysis, moving toward goals, and in really having a focus.

Furthermore, Teacher 5 described the need for structure because sometimes too much is overwhelming. "And that's a thing, as someone that hasn't really had an overriding focus through five years of this is what I'm working on and this is how I'm methodically building toward that." Teacher 5 then elaborated about the lack of accountability with the tracking of teacher-facilitated professional development

> "Those just aren't tracked. [Nothing is done with the teacher logs of professional development.] No data is taken from them. [Administration is not] tracking them, because there's no merit in this [process for teacher-facilitated professional development]. If the district did track them it might bring value to the district if

they considered numbers [of teachers participating or engaging in those activities] and emphasize relevancy at the district level.

Participants did not use consistent methods for selecting professional development. Some teachers made references to student surveys and personal reflection to identify needs for future self-selected professional development, but the district did not require teachers to complete any of these assessments prior to selecting professional development. District XYZ also did not give out lists of potential professional opportunities that teachers must choose from to complete for their self-selected professional development. Teacher 4 said, "I tend to choose things that I don't know about." Teacher 2 reported activities on a year-by-year basis, stating that, "this year I wanted to go to PD on technology [because of remote learning], but other years I [focus on pedagogy] or building relationships." Teacher 1 replied that "I select PD related to content and pedagogy." Teacher 3 indicated teacher needs for student engagement and focused most of their self-selected professional development on increasing student engagement. Participants implied the selection of these topics more often because they could directly identify changes in personal behavior or behaviors of students as a result of their learning without needing precise test results to determine impact. Also, teachers could address specific personal weaknesses related to content and or pedagogy.

Additionally, most participants indicated a portion of the self-selected professional development activities they participated in over the last five years were workshops or traditional professional development that contained little or no follow up. Only Teacher 2 referenced self-selected opportunities as sessions they repeated. Follow-

up of activities resulted mostly within teacher-formed support groups or established PLCs.

Time and resources. Even though teachers prefer to select their own professional learning, sometimes finding high quality professional development opportunities is not always easy. Teacher 1 noted seeking out opportunities for social and emotional learning and diversity but in the Kansas City area, "those don't exist in the wild." The teachers that taught electives referenced the lack of available high-quality opportunities to attend within the area. Elective teachers also indicated many professional development opportunities concentrated specifically to core disciplines. All five participants mentioned funding and cost as a potential challenge with high quality professional development selection. Teachers 1 and 2 referenced professional development opportunities within the school calendar as not a viable option. Teacher 1 stated "I don't want to miss class," and teacher 2 noted that "Finding a qualified substitute is too difficult." Both teachers expressed willingness to attend self-selected professional development opportunities during the summer but said funds for travel can be an additional obstacle. Additionally, Teacher 1 described the process of setting up the book study and organizing various teachers as "time consuming and tedious" which in turn has prevented the group from creating another similar opportunity.

Finding 3: Positive impacts of self-selected professional development on student achievement and pedagogical content knowledge

The three sub research questions concentrated on teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on their growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and knowledge of the discipline in which they teach. Throughout

the interviews, teachers shared the most experiences with pedagogical content as the focus of self-selected professional development. All teachers indicated that the professional development they attended was designed for teachers of their content areas. However, all teachers indicated they did not attend a professional development session to strictly increase only their content knowledge or only pedagogy. Even though all teachers described impactful professional development pertaining to both pedagogy and achievement, teachers in this study also expressed impact from social and emotional learning and relationship building pedagogy within their content areas as impactful within their classrooms.

Teachers perceived success and felt their classrooms and students reaped benefits from their self-selected professional development that focused on growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and content knowledge. Three themes emerged as ways teachers gauged the impact through quantifiable student achievement indicators, less quantifiable teaching and learning indicators, and or collaboration efforts. Notably, measuring the degree of impact is challenging. Some content areas and student achievement results are more easily correlated to each other, while others are less easily measured and correlated. Participants in this study, expressed that self-directed professional development is not always directly measured and often there is a lot of gray area.

Quantifiable student achievement indicators. ACT test prep, College Now seminars, Advanced Placement trainings and institutes, Kansas assessment scoring training, curriculum mapping, common assessments, certificate related training, discussion, and station rotations are examples of activities that participants shared as teacher-facilitated professional development activities related to student academic

achievement. All the participants in some way or another stated as Teacher 5 stated, “We could probably connect most of our professional development to student achievement in some way, shape, or form.”

Teachers 1, 3, and 4 described increased student engagement as a direct benefit of implementing student-centered activities. As a result, those teachers saw more students choosing to enroll in electives or higher-level courses. Teacher 5 discussed a couple pedagogical content professional development activities specific to student-centered writing in their subject and took that knowledge back to their PLC “to tailor approaches based on the needs of their students.” Essentially, teachers expressed gratitude with the ability to collaborate and reflect upon self-selected professional development experiences. Notably, teachers who focused on student-centered professional development saw increases in student interests and future enrollment.

Teachers noted successes with collaboration on self-selected professional development related to student achievement. Some teachers content and state or national assessments provided concrete feedback related to student achievement. According to Teacher 3, “all these things that have happened over the last five years: ACT scores going up, AP scores going up, and graduation rates going up.” Furthermore, Teacher 3 connected that student achievement by stating “that's kind of when we started kicking in this self-directed PD.” Similarly, Teacher 2 referenced student comments such as “This is easy. We have been doing this all year. We’ve got this” and “increases in student assessment scores” as a way to connect student achievement to self-directed professional development activities related to mapping and common assessments. Teachers 1 and 4 both considered self-selected professional development activities as successful and

impacting student achievement based on the level of course a student enrolled in or the number of high-level courses the student completed within that field. Teacher 1 also shared specific self-selected training that directly led to student awards, certificates and state or national recognition.

Less quantifiable learning and teaching indicators. To measure the amount of change resulting from a self-directed professional development activity was challenging. Some changes are not quantifiable. Teacher 5 engaged in numerous self-selected professional development activities over the past five years around social and emotional learning. Some activities included local discussions and book studies, online research, and webinar attendance. Teacher 5 stated, "I encouraged SEL as a topic to dig into more and SEL became a major component of our lesson planning as a department." Because Teacher 5 selected professional development on SEL, their department "created a process, beginning with self-management proceeding to self-awareness for daily lesson focuses that include those aspects of social emotional learning." As a result of implementing SEL into their daily pedagogy, Teacher 5 reported, "Teachers built in time to not only build relationships but to emphasize team building amongst students. We really started to focus on students getting to know themselves better and identify areas of strength and of need." Teacher 5 went on further to say that instruction included "explicit teaching [of] study skills, soft skills, and self-management skills" while simultaneously "connecting students to who they are as a person to where they want to go." Finally, Teacher 5 noted that students were more likely to turn to teachers for references and advice to help them make better life choices. Relatedly, teacher 3 devoted self-selected

professional development time on establishing community partnerships. The goal and impact of the partnership according to teacher 3:

> Promoting student success skills; family, business, and community partnerships; personalized learning; and real-world applications. The partnerships resulted in two students getting jobs directly based on partnering with a company and doing some interviews and some shadowing work as part of a class assignment.

This community partnership is just one example of how the teachers in this study implemented self-directed professional development activities related to pedagogy into their classrooms.

A popular topic among the participants involved creating rapport with students and building positive relationships. Teacher 2 spent some self-directed professional development on Black Lives Matter because "this topic is important to the students and therefore, it is important to me." From researching and discussions with other teachers about Black Lives Matter, Teacher 2 improved relationships with students by "breaking down barriers." Notably, Teacher 2 felt "more students approached me with questions and engaged in more meaningful conversations about both academic and personal issues."

Integrating social and emotional skills or soft skills comes more natural for some high school disciplines but also for some high school teachers. Teacher 4 reported:

> Social and emotional and soft skills are a major focus throughout the coursework, and therefore, a large portion of the self-directed professional development I attend addresses both to better prepare students for the real-world.

This teacher also stated “I love learning. I love professional development, and I always integrate techniques that help students be better adults or citizens.” While some courses and teachers easily integrate relationship building, soft skills, and SEL into their classrooms, other teachers must seek out additional training. In turn, as part of self-selected professional development, Teacher 1 collaborated with others in the district to create a district PLC devoted to real-world experiences and applications for students to use within the classroom.

Collaboration efforts. Collaboration emerged as a theme specifically woven into self-selected professional development covering pedagogy, student achievement, and content. Professional learning communities and departments are consistently utilized for student achievement goals. Teacher 3 expressed collaboration outside of building and department PLCs, but also collaboration with vertical PLCs.

> The focus of the vertical team is to have people from 6th grade and 12th grade around the table. We look at data to identify our weaknesses. And here's what we're scoring low on ACT or on AP. We then seek ways to find strategies or resources to address those weaknesses.

Together the members of this vertical team supported each other while also sharing resources to improve teaching and learning. Along similar collaboration ideas, teacher 1 reported, “Collaborating with other teachers in and outside of the district creates opportunities to build on ideas and successes of others.” Notably, Teacher 2 shared when attending self-selected professional development related to student achievement with colleagues,

> You can build off of it and talk through it. We keep talking together and when we all are having a lunch break, we're all messaging each other like oh my gosh, this was good and I like this, I took this from it. So it's just nice to be able to bounce things off each other. To feel the sense of accountability with it, asking each other if we have tried this yet or yeah just seeing how it went. You know, they let us know, Hey I'm going to try this like; Oh, let me know. I want to see if I can utilize that too and kind of follow your lead.

Virtual collaboration, especially during the COVID 19 pandemic, became a lifeline for Teacher 4. Teacher 4 described, "Facebook has been my godsend for teacher groups and teaching remotely." Additionally, Teacher 4 noted that when they collaborated as a department and PLC, "it was daily and when we had opportunities to attend PD related to student achievement, we divided up our greatest needs and then came together later to share." Alternatively, Teacher 5 expressed and encouraged teachers within their department to spend self-directed professional development with another teacher who has "philosophical differences in regard to pedagogy and their approaches to student achievement." Noting that "these discussions and common PLC professional development experiences have helped to grease the wheels of change and smooth out the teaching and learning process [within their departments and PLCs]." Teacher 1 reported that "Setting up high quality self-directed professional development related to student achievement is a lot of work; however, when divided up amongst a PLC it is much more manageable, and results are more attainable." Furthermore, Teacher 1 stated that teachers attending that self-directed professional development session "was the best PD they ever attended!"

Summary

This chapter presented the findings that derived from the data analysis obtained from five teachers who voluntarily participated in interviews via Zoom. These teachers from five different high schools with District XYZ provided their perceptions of teacher autonomy in professional development selection. Three major findings and nine themes emerged from the data corresponding to the research questions of the study. The findings and themes of the study were centered around teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy in self-selecting professional development, specifically identifying the impact of self-selection on pedagogy, student academic achievement, and the discipline in which they teach.

Chapter 5 summarizes this qualitative study, reviewing the problem, purpose, research questions, research method, and findings. Moreover, chapter 5 examines the research findings related to the literature. Also included in chapter 5 are implications for action, suggestions for further research, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

This chapter is organized into three major sections to review and summarize the interpretations of this qualitative study concerning teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy in professional development selection. The study summary includes an overview of the problem, the purpose, and research questions that guided the study. The summary also includes a review of research methodology and major findings. Next, follows a section on the research findings related to the literature. Finally, this chapter concludes with implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Study Summary

The following is a review of the major sections of this study to provide context for the conclusions. This summary provides an overview of the problem, purpose statement, and research questions. The major findings are also presented in the study summary.

Overview of the problem. Schools invest in high quality opportunities for teachers to learn as a means to improve academic scores of students (America Federation of Teachers Union, 2020). According to Mizell (2010), many teachers across the United States renew teaching licenses and certifications upon completion of professional development opportunities and experiences. As the world continues to change and adapt to technology and challenges, educational professional development has evolved. Integration of technology gives educators the flexibility to pursue learning and teaching opportunities that tailor towards their individual needs. In turn, schools have the chance

to allow teachers autonomy in selecting professional development. The problem is that the value and effectiveness of teacher autonomy in professional development selection has not been determined. In addition, very little literature or research was found that investigates teacher self-selected, teacher-driven, or teacher autonomy in professional development selection and the effect this type of learning has in the classroom.

Purpose statement and research questions. This phenomenological study explored teacher perceptions and experiences with self-selected professional development within the XYZ School District. This study specifically focused on perceptions from high school teachers. The study was guided by a central question and three supporting research questions:

RQ1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding self-directed professional development?

SubQ1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on their growth in pedagogy?

SubQ2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on student academic achievement?

SubQ3. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on the discipline in which they teach?

Review of the methodology. The methodology used for this phenomenological study was a qualitative research design which explored teachers' perceptions of self-selected professional development and the impact those selections had on pedagogy, student achievement, and the discipline in which they teach. Interviews were conducted with volunteer participants from five high schools. All teachers shared experiences with

self-selected professional development opportunities. Participants responded to 10 interview questions and follow-up probes and questions in a semi-structured interview format.

Interviews were recorded and live closed captioning was active during the interviews. The researcher later transcribed each interview by using the live closed captioning transcript and the audio recording to correct any errors made in the closed captioning. The researcher organized the data and uploaded the data into Dedoose Research Analysis computer program. The researcher then coded the interview transcripts, and themes and trends began to emerge around each research question.

Major findings. The researcher sought to obtain teachers' perceptions of teacher autonomy in self-selecting professional development, specifically identifying the impact of self-selection on pedagogy, student academic achievement, and the discipline in which they teach. Three major findings and nine themes emerged from the data corresponding to the research questions of the study. The findings are organized and discussed according to the research question and supporting research questions.

The first finding of the study addressed the central research question regarding teachers' perception of self-directed professional development. All teachers reported positive perceptions of teacher autonomy in professional development selection revolving around four themes professionalism, leadership opportunities, recognition, and flexibility. Participants revealed the advantages of self-selected professional development outweighed the disadvantages.

The second finding of the study also addressed the central research question regarding teachers' perception of self-directed professional development. Teachers'

perceptions indicated concerns associated with self-selected professional development. Lack of structure and accountability, and lack of resources and time emerged as themes. These themes were viewed by the participants as concerning weaknesses associated with self-selected professional development.

The third finding of the study addressed all three sub questions teachers' regarding the impact of self-directed professional development on their growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and discipline in which they teach. Participants noted challenges associated with measuring impact and found that they measured impact in three ways—quantifiable student achievement indicators, less quantifiable teaching and learning indicators, and or collaboration efforts.

Findings Related to the Literature

Teacher autonomy in professional development selection has existed for quite some time under various circumstances; however, little research has been conducted related to self-selected professional development (Brunkowski, 2004; Jacobson, 2019; Manzanares, 2016). Teachers who participated in a nationwide survey conducted by Learning Forward (2017) reported at least three fourths of teachers responded that they are not involved in planning and selecting professional development; that task is completed by district leaders and building principals. Notably, fewer than 5% of teachers reported teacher-selection or involvement in planning of professional development (Learning Forward, 2017). This data helps explain the lack of research and literature related to self-selected professional development.

The researcher found that empowering teachers with professional development selection leads to professionalism, leadership opportunities, recognition, and flexibility as the first finding of the study. Most of the research related to self-selection of professional development had findings that matched the theme of professionalism. For example, Brunkowski (2004) found that educators can identify their professional development needs, and self-selection of professional development positively impacts classroom instructional practices. Professionalism emerged as a theme in this study, and the current research supports Brunkowski's finding. The current research findings also support Williamson's (2020) literature regarding teacher self-reflections and self-selection of pedagogical content professional development. Likewise, the current study results are consistent with results from Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1989).

This finding about professionalism is also consistent with results from Manzanares (2016) that indicated that educators appreciate in-person professional development that focus on relevant topics. Self-selection of professional development or teacher buy-in positively impacts implementation (Manzanares, 2016). In other words, teachers value the ability to select appropriate and meaningful professional development. Furthermore, the likelihood that some change will occur is more significant because of the teachers' investment in professional learning. The findings from the current study supports the work of Manzanares (2016).

Patton, Parker, and Pratt (2013) indicated the importance of providing teachers with professional development opportunities where learning is meaningful. Top-down professional development does not always meet the needs and expectations of all participants. Conclusions from the current research support the results of Patton, Parker,

and Pratt (2013) because providing relevant professional development aligned with professionalism was common in the results of both studies.

The results from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) research mentioned in Chapter 2 are also supported by the first finding of this study. Teachers with more autonomy in professional development selection had positive reactions with self-selected professional development experiences. However, in the current study all teachers were given opportunities to self-select professional development and fewer than one third in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation research selected their own professional development.

Watkins (2019) indicated that teachers prefer to self-select their professional development to meet their specific needs. Additionally, teachers who participated in Watkins' study shared that district or building chosen professional development lacks personalization. The researcher of the current study also found that teachers preferred to self-select professional development.

Flexibility was another theme that emerged in the first finding of the current study. Watkins (2019) reported flexibility as a benefit of self-selected professional development. Watkins (2019) literature supported this study's theme of flexibility as a strength of self-selected professional development, although other researchers did not have similar findings regarding recognition and leadership opportunities. (See Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989; Day, 1999; Brunkowski, 2004; Mazanares, 2016; Bohny, 2018).

The second finding of the current study was that teachers perceive a lack of structure and accountability in self-selected professional development. Watkins (2019) also reported that teachers felt they could sustain professional learning when required to

develop a lesson. Results from the interviews conducted for the current study supports Watkins (2019) regarding the need for structure and accountability within self-selected professional development. Bruknowski noted that to facilitate teacher change, both reflective and research-based components must be a part of self-selected professional development (Brunkowski, 2004). Teachers are professionals and should use reflections to incorporate best practices into the classroom. Bruknowski's finding supporting the need for reflective and research-based components relates to perceived frustrations regarding lack of structure and accountability in the second finding. Williamson (2020) also supports the second finding because many teachers in this study shared the desire for additional structure and accountability with self-selection. The current study indicated there is a lack of consistency and reflective practices associated with self-selection.

Guskey and Yoon (2009) analyzed more than 1300 studies investigating the correlation between professional development and student achievement. They also validated the necessity of follow-up activities after initial professional development (2009). Similarly, the second finding of this study provided evidence of a lack of structure and often revealed little follow up.

Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore's Title I research supports the implementation of PLCs to benefit student achievement. Their research provided evidence for the importance for districts to continuously schedule teachers' time for instructional improvement (2009). Professional development and PLCs should align with each other to provide structure and common goals. Teachers need enough time and ongoing or continuous learning to develop necessary skills and reflect on pedagogy. There should be only a slight deviation from school initiatives and teacher professional

development. Teachers must be involved in selecting goals and selecting professional development (Wei, et al., 2010). Existing literature has implied the importance of structure, common goals, and appropriate time allocation to increase student achievement. While teachers in who participated in the current study selected professional development opportunities, the participants indicated that structure and accountability measures were inconsistent, and finding appropriate time proved challenging.

In the second finding of the current study, the researcher identified lack of time and resources as major challenges to self-selected professional development. Manzanares (2016) suggested that teachers recognize professional development challenges, such as scheduling and being overworked and under-valued. Similarly, Bohny's (2018) research found that schedules and finding meeting locations for teacher-led study groups were difficult for teachers. Guskey and Yoon (2009) concluded that time was a significant factor; however, the quantity of time spent in professional development was not as pertinent as the time to comprehend, analyze students' work, and integrate new strategies into instruction. Equally, the researcher of the current study noted the need for more time but did not go into the depth of time allocation.

For the third finding, the current researcher found that teachers perceived positive impacts on growth in pedagogy, student achievement and the discipline in which they teach. Brunkowski (2004), Manzanares (2016), and Watkins (2019) all reported teachers' involvement selecting professional development critically impacts teaching pedagogy. This is consistent with the third finding of the current study. Typically, follow-up occurred within PLCs. Comparably, both the current researcher and Guskey and Yoon

(2009) reported that professional development that combines pedagogy and content is the most impactful on teaching and learning. Elmore (2006) reported that teachers will implement new teaching strategies if there is evidence supporting student growth in learning, which is consistent with the research from the current study.

Bohny (2018) indicated instructional change as a result of teacher-driven professional development is more likely to happen through collaboration. In the current study, the collaboration efforts teachers explained as part of Finding 3 demonstrate the importance of collaboration; however, each building, department, and PLC of District XYZ has varying levels of common goals. Similarly, DuFour and Fullan (2013) indicated that the PLC process empowers educators to make critical decisions for professional learning, improvement, and achievement.

The third finding of the current study indicated that teachers spend a significant amount of time with pedagogy and content; however, participants described numerous self-selected professional development sessions related to social and emotional learning. Wei et al. (2010) reported slightly different trends from their data. They reported a decline in professional development covering technology integration, classroom management, and teaching fundamentals like reading (Wei et al., 2010). On the other hand, Williamson's (2020) claims that "the most helpful PD involves strengthening teaching pedagogy—with a focus on content and instruction—through ongoing practice, feedback, reflection, and collaboration" (para 12). The current study is more aligned with Williamson; however, this study was also consistent with Wei et al. Their (2010) study found that "research identifies professional development around content as an important building block for potentially effective professional development" (p. 38) and that a

majority of teachers in the United States select content related professional learning as highly significant for the teaching profession.

DuFour et al. (2008) noted that professional development must be embedded into daily work to increase student achievement. Professional development must be on-going learning, team-based, hands-on and engaging, sustained with focused goals, and regularly assessed. The results of the current study support literature from DuFour et al. (2008) regarding collaboration efforts found in the third finding relating to teachers' perceptions on the impact of growth in pedagogy, student achievement, and content.

Conclusions

This conclusion includes implications for action. Also included are recommendations for future research. Finally, concluding remarks end the chapter.

Implications for action. The 2020-21 school year marked the fifth year that District XYZ allocated two contract days self-selected professional development (Appendix D). Each building was requiring its record or log of teacher participation in self-selected professional development activities. The current qualitative study provided perceptual information regarding self-selected professional development. The findings of the current study provide teacher insights on self-selection of professional development and the perceived impact of their involvement in those activities. These teacher insights may be of value to the administrators and staff in District XYZ and other schools and districts when developing school improvement plans or professional development plans. Additionally, the NEA and teacher certification offices may find these insights helpful when setting up professional development parameters.

An implication for action is for district leaders to recognize teachers as professionals by allowing them a voice in professional development planning. Teachers should be allowed to demonstrate leadership skills outside of their classrooms and colleagues throughout the building and district. Notably, recognizing teachers' dedication and service completed beyond the contract day is essential. When developing school calendars and negotiating teacher contracts, flexibility to attend learning opportunities should be addressed whether teachers be allowed flextime or provided opportunities for self-selected professional development during the school year without requiring a substitute.

Additional parameters should be set up to ensure structure. A second implication for action is to create clear goals for professional development and student achievement. Also, activities should be tied directly to those goals, and the impact should be measured frequently. Guidelines and accountability should not vary across administrators or buildings. Establishing parameters and providing structure will assist teachers when selecting professional development opportunities. Districts should also plan to allocate resources and time to provide opportunities for teachers to attend high-quality professional development.

A final implication for action is for teachers to actively participate in professional development opportunities that increase their growth in pedagogy and content while working to increase student achievement. It is pertinent that teachers and district leaders recognize that student achievement is not always academic. Personal student growth can enhance student academic growth. Teachers must continue to measure the professional development success and adapt to the current students and the environment.

Recommendations for future research. Additional research on teacher autonomy in professional development selection is recommended to further inform schools and educators on the best practices for teacher learning and student growth. The results of this study should not be directly applied or transferred to other schools in the district or other districts. While the current study focused on secondary teachers at five different high schools, additional research could offer insights into teachers' perceptions of middle or elementary schools regarding teacher self-selection of professional development. The current study concentrated on teachers with similar years of teaching and also focused on department chairs. Further research could provide perceptions of teachers and administrators with more and less experience.

A quantitative study could be conducted to examine the self-selected professional development opportunities teachers participated in over the past five years. This quantitative study could involve the evaluation of teacher selection of professional development on student achievement, school climate, and other goals outlined in the strategic plan. Additionally, the data could be used to determine overall teacher interests and goals in specific types of professional development. A mixed-method study could be conducted to examine the quantitative data above as well as teacher perceptions. Notably, the school district may need to adopt one form to use consistently across buildings for logging professional development. There could also be clear guidelines defining appropriate professional development opportunities. Additional measures should be taken to ensure that guidelines and structure support teachers' efforts to engage in professional development. Additional factors could be studied involving departments or PLC influence.

Furthermore, studies can be conducted on types of professional development and the level of teacher engagement and implementation from those activities. That data could provide insights into shifts from professional development to professional learning. A study such as this might also highlight a need for change in designing professional development sessions. Future research could also examine the shift from in-person professional development to virtual professional development during the COVID 19 pandemic. The study could include the lasting effects of the pandemic on educator professional development.

Studies on professional development in schools with notable increases in student achievement could be researched and compared to those with stagnant or decreasing scores. Perceptions of the impact of the professional development, school improvement plans, and teacher engagement in professional development could be compared between districts with differing student achievement levels.

Concluding remarks. School districts, federal and state governments all mandate teacher completion of professional development. Professional development opportunities must integrate content, pedagogy, and student achievement. For student achievement to rise above current levels, it is critical that professional learning enhance pedagogical content areas through collaboration and frequent monitoring and reflection. Learning opportunities, collaboration, reflection, and feedback for teachers must be ongoing and connected to school improvement goals. The disconnected one-time workshops dictated by federal and state mandates or central office administration must be adapted to involve teachers in the planning so that professional development fully transforms into learning.

Professional development continues to be adapted as schools adjust to new environments and federal and state mandates. The shift from professional development to professional learning takes time and resources and continually changes according to real-world situations. The COVID 19 pandemic demonstrated how quickly the professional development needs of educators changed and adapted to virtual learning. Teacher autonomy in professional development selection empowers educators by allowing teachers to attend training based on personal needs. Empowering teachers in this manner endues professionalism. However, teacher selection and involvement in professional development vary greatly. Professional development no longer needs to be limited in size and scope to certain subjects and locations. The opportunity to reflect and self-select professional development based on those reflections should be given to all teachers. District guidelines for teachers regarding self-selection allow teachers to measure student achievement and impact from professional development.

There is a need for a shift from professional development to professional learning. That shift will take time. For districts to shift from professional development to professional learning opportunities must expand for all teachers to acquire quality professional development. Some districts have begun shifting from professional development to professional learning through measures that allow teachers a voice in professional development planning. Schools have also established professional learning communities that continually collaborate to monitor student achievement. These collaboration efforts must continue and adjust as the student population changes. Notably, districts should also establish guidelines and provide on-going opportunities to implement newly learned pedagogical content into the classrooms.

Participating in self-selected professional development provides opportunities for teachers to become experts and leaders in pedagogy or content. The flexibility of self-selecting professional development is a significant benefit. Teachers should have the opportunity to participate in professional development at convenient times for their schedules.

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Appendices

Appendix A: District Approval of Research

From: April Bullman <AprilBullman[redacted]
Date: Thursday, February 21, 2019 at 11:42 AM
To: [redacted]
Subject: Research/dissertation

Hey [redacted],

Here are my thoughts for my dissertation and research that I said I would email you about.

Focus on high school, core subjects teacher facilitated or self-selected PD. I would like to gather the data from the high schools for the past two years on the teacher facilitated PD. I would also like to interview teachers, possibly up to four per high school in the core subject areas regarding this topic.

I am still working on my research questions but here is what I have so far. I am thinking of relating them or including interview questions regarding PLC work, especially since we have had the hs PLC time for a couple of years now.

RQ1 Do teachers consider self-directed professional development to be helpful to their growth in pedagogy?

RQ2 Do teachers consider self-directed professional development to be helpful to student achievement?

RQ3 Do teachers consider self-directed professional development to be helpful to their growth in the discipline in which they teach?

Please let me know your thoughts…I am hoping to get started this spring and summer.

Thanks,

April Bullman
[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2019 11:56 AM
To: [redacted]
Subject: FW: Research/dissertation

Thoughts on this?

From: [redacted]
Date: Monday, April 8, 2019 at 1:04 PM
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Research/dissertation

April and I visited about this several weeks ago. The part about recruiting teachers to interview is fine with me.
There really isn't any other data that she can collect other than through the interviews.

I am curious to know what larger body of research this ties in with.
What sources is she pulling from in her lit review?

[R ed

From: [Redacted]
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2019 9:50 AM
To: [Redacted]
Subject: Re: Research/dissertation

We have the spreadsheets we could collect.

On Apr 24, 2019, at 4:27 PM, [Redacted] [Redacted] wrote:

Good.

Does everyone use the same template?

[R ed

From: [Redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2019 6:18 PM
To: [Redacted]
Subject: Re: Research/dissertation

Maybe we should request their spreadsheets and have them share them with you and me and see what we end up with.

[Red acte

From: [Redacted]
Date: Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 8:08 AM
To: April Bullman <AprilBullman@ [Redacted]
Subject: Fwd: Research/dissertation

We haven't forgotten you!

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: [Redacted]
Date: April 25, 2019 at 7:58:57 AM CDT
To: [Redacted]
Subject: RE: Research/dissertation

Ok – I am starting with HS principals…

From: [Redacted]
Date: Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 8:28 AM
To: April Bullman <AprilBullman@[Redacted]
Subject: Re: Research/dissertation

We created a template for them that was extremely easy so I would be shocked if they're not using it. We'll see what we get.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 25, 2019, at 8:21 AM, April Bullman [Redacted] wrote:

Thank you. I hope they use the same template…but who knows! For my research I just plan to use high school, since the designated PLC time has been around for a couple of years now. Please let me know if you need more from me.

Thanks again,

April Bullman
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Appendix B: IRB Approval

Baker University Institutional Review Board

February 26th, 2021

Dear April Bullman and Harold Frye,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Sara Crump, PhD
Nick Harris, MS
Christa Manton, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD

Appendix C: Consent to Participate

Research Title: Teacher Autonomy in Professional Development Selection

Researcher: April Bullman

Advisor: Dr. Harold Frye
School of Education
Baker University
8001 College Blvd.
Overland Park, KS 66210
(913)-344-1220
harold.frye@bakeru.edu

My name is April Bullman, and I am a doctoral student at Baker University in Kansas. I am conducting research on teachers' perceptions of self-selected professional development. As education continues to evolve to meet the needs of all leaners and the demands of federal and state legislation, professional development continues to progress. Because you are a teacher in the [redacted], you have contract days designated for self-directed or self-selected professional development. In order to learn more about self-selected professional development and the effects of this professional development model on education, I am looking for individuals like you, who have had some experience with this approach, and are willing to participate in an interview about your experiences.

You will be asked to answer approximately 10 questions pertaining to your perceptions and experience regarding the contract days designated for self-directed or self-selected professional development. You may decline to answer any question at any time. Moreover, you may discontinue your participation at any time for any reason.

All personally identifiable information will be kept confidential. Interview transcripts will be password protected and only the research advisor and analyst will have access to the raw data.

Consent to Participate:

I understand that my participation in this research study is completely voluntary. I also understand that I am able to discontinue my participation within this study at any time for any reason. I understand that the principal investigator can be contacted at aprilbullman@[redacted] should I have questions or wish to discontinue my participation.

I have read and understand the above statement. By signing, I agree to participate in the research study. The Baker University Institutional Review Board approved this study on _____ and will expire on _____ unless renewal is obtained by the review board.

Participant Signature_____Date_____

Appendix D: District XYZ Master Contract

District XYZ Master Contract: Professional Learning Time
d. Two of those four Mid-Quarter dates will be designated for Teacher Facilitated Professional Learning Time.
f. The new Teacher Facilitated Professional Learning Time and District/Building Professional Learning Time will be planned and facilitated based upon the identified needs of teachers. Flexibility with respect to locations for professional learning will be supported. This may include collaborating from home, businesses, libraries and site visits to other schools or community business partners.

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Background Questions

1. How many years have you been a teacher, and how many years have you taught in SMSD?
2. What subjects/grade levels have you taught?
3. How many years have you participated in self-directed PD?
4. Do you feel professional development is a requirement or an opportunity? Explain your answer.

Teacher Perceptions of teacher-facilitated PD

5. Which type of PD do you prefer and why? (self-directed or district/building/plc selected)
6. How did/do you determine which topic of PD to complete for self-selected or teacher facilitated PD?

RQ1 – Growth in pedagogy

7. Tell me about your self-directed PD related to pedagogy.

RQ2 - Student Achievement

8. Tell me about your self-directed PD related to student achievement.

RQ3 – Discipline/content

9. Tell me about your self-directed PD related to your knowledge of you content area.

Department/PLC teacher-facilitated PD

10. As a department chair, how do you encourage your department to attend specific professional development opportunities that relate to pedagogy, student achievement, and the discipline in which they teach and how do you measure the impact?

Appendix F: Coding Application

	RQ Advantages of self-selected PD	*Professionalism	*Leadership Opportunities	*Recognition	*Flexibility	**RQ Disadvantages of self-selected PD**	*Lack of accountability and structure	*Time and resources	**SQR 1 impact of pedagogy**	Activities and measures	**SQR 2 impact student achievement**	Activities and measures	**SQR 3 impact of content**	Activities and measures	**SQR 1-3 collaboration efforts**	**Totals**
Teacher 5	3	2	1	2	2	4	2	2	7	2	4	2	7	2	14	56
Teacher 4	4	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	4	3	4	1	3	1	6	35
Teacher 3	16	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	13	5	6	4	6	2	17	79
Teacher 2	8	1	1	1	2		2	2	4	2	2	1	9	3	5	43
Teacher 1	9	1	2	1	1	4		1	3	2	6	3	12	3	9	57
Totals	40	7	8	6	8	10	7	7	31	14	22	11	37	11	51	