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Professional Development In Disciplinary Literacy Strategies For Middle School Content Area Teachers

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN DISCIPLINARY LITERACY STRATEGIES

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL CONTENT AREA TEACHERS

By

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for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In order to improve literacy skills, students must spend time practicing those skills, and not just in the Language Arts or Reading block. Gambrell and Morrow (2015) stated "one way to encourage and support students' literacy development is to view every subject or content-area lesson as an opportunity to teach reading and writing" (p. 21). Literacy skills are used in every facet of education, which is why they need to be taught in every content area in order for teachers to see the literacy gains that are necessary for student improvement and understanding.

This capstone focuses on exploring how professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies can support middle school content area teachers. In this chapter I share my journey to discovering how content area literacy is critical to student learning and how I have come to be passionate about this topic. I describe what I hope to gain and learn from researching this topic. I focus on how I can develop a resource that will support and encourage content area teachers to implement disciplinary literacy strategies into their classrooms. I decided to focus on the research question, *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?* I am hoping to create a resource that supports teachers with the texts they already use as well as provide additional resources that teachers can use in each content area that will help them teach their students how to read content area text through research based best practices.

The Journey

"Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a red bird looking at me. Red bird, red bird, what do you see? I see a yellow duck looking at me" (Martin, 1984, pp. 1-4).

This is the first book I remember, and the first experience I had with reading. Reading *Brown Bear*, *Brown Bear* was a humiliating experience for me because at the time, I thought I was the only child in Kindergarten who could not read. Looking back, I am sure most of the students had the book memorized, but I did not know it then. This negative experience sparked a determination and will in myself that I never lost; because of this moment, I wanted to learn how to read and I vowed I would be better at it than every single one of my classmates. In first grade, I was placed in Advanced Reading, and I never looked back.

I have been a seventh grade reading teacher at the middle level for seven years, the entirety of my teaching career. I majored in English Education because I loved kids and I loved reading. I never imagined that I would land my dream job right out of college – teaching reading. What I didn't know then is that teaching reading is not just reading books and discussing them with kids; it is so much more. When I began to see students struggling with understanding text, and I remembered how alone and inadequate I felt back in Kindergarten, I started to research different methods and practices for teaching reading.

I discovered Nancie Atwell and *The Reading Zone* (2007) in my second year of teaching, *The Book Whisperer* (2009) and *Reading in the Wild* (2014) by Donalynn

Miller and Layne's (2009) book *Igniting a Passion for Reading* in my third year. I became passionate about getting the right books in the right students' hands and kindling that fire for reading. Several years later and I am still passionate about engaged, avid reading, but I find that something is missing. The more research I read, the more I began to understand how complex reading is. Although I was working harder than I ever had before, student test scores were not showing much improvement.

I quickly learned that it takes more than a passion for reading to help students improve their literacy skills. It takes more than one forty minute block of reading and strategy instruction to provide students with what they need to make the gains they need. I started conducting "reading groups" where students could come in for a study session with me to learn how to apply the strategies they learned about in reading class to the texts they were being assigned in other classes. Then it hit me, why are these strategies not being taught alongside the text in that classroom? Students had many content specific questions that I could not answer because I was not the expert in that area. For example, I was conducting a reading group on mitosis one day and the students were asking why a cell grows in a certain way or it reproduces in another way. I could only provide them with the knowledge that was provided in the text because I have no background knowledge on mitosis and the stages of the cell division. Eventually, I stopped the session because I felt that I was causing more confusion than clarity and I decided something had to change.

Rationale

After many discussions with content area teachers, I discovered that reading is not

being taught in content area classrooms for several reasons. The first reason being that teachers are not trained in teaching reading; they simply do not know how. Secondly, many teachers felt they did not have time to devote to reading instruction when they had so much content to cover. Finally, many teachers felt there was no need to address reading instruction when the students had a separate class period for reading instruction daily.

Considering that student achievement is one of our most important goals as educators, I knew that something must be done. In order for changes to be made, content area teachers need to understand the importance of content area literacy, they need to understand their responsibility to student literacy via content area literacy state standards, and they need to be trained and supported in implementing literacy instruction into their classrooms. Therefore, I decided to focus on the question *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?*

Significance of the research

As my school continues to grow, we have come face to face with many challenges: large class sizes, limited classroom space and resources, and stagnant reading scores. When the staff was asked to prioritize what our school valued the most, we responded that our number one priority is maintaining the middle school teaming philosophy, and our second priority is reading instruction. The proposal is to implement a year-long reading class at every grade level. While this is incredibly encouraging for us as a school, I do have some concerns. I have heard teachers claim that they do not teach

reading strategies because they do not know how. Other teachers may feel it is the sole responsibility of the reading teacher to impart these skills or strategies on the students and that they should be able to transfer these skills to other content areas. I am scared that if reading is implemented as a separate class at every level, content area teachers are going to wash their hands of literacy instruction. Gambrell and Morrow (2015) reported that effective disciplinary vocabulary and comprehension instruction shows an increase in student learning. In addition, regular disciplinary writing activity increases student content area learning. I am confident that every teacher in my building is capable of teaching disciplinary literacy strategies if they had the tools and the training to do so. I feel that this instructional training would greatly benefit our students, our staff, and our community. Therefore I believe it is imperative to train content area teachers on how to teach students to read their texts. This underlines the importance of the project I created. It has the potential to build capacity in teachers and therefore increase student achievement.

When I began thinking of a capstone project to create, I had originally wanted to focus on small group instruction at the secondary level. So many of my students are struggling readers and are not being provided with any services. Then I began to think about the impact I wanted my research to have. I want my time and my work to truly make a difference to my students and to my school. So I asked myself what does my school need to improve literacy? Of course we need some type of intervention model built into our schedule, but that only affects so many students. What we truly need is a building wide system of training and support for our content area teachers so that they

can incorporate reading instruction into their curriculums. We need a Literacy Coach. However, there is no money in the budget to provide for this position. So what can I do, as a student and as a teacher that could not only benefit our struggling readers, but also every reader that we have in the building? I knew that I wanted to focus on supporting content area teachers, but I didn't know how that would look and what I could do to bring that to life. One of my Hamline instructors, Terri Christensen helped me turn my burning questions into a possibility; from a thought and a need that my school has to a potential solution. I decided to focus on developing a year-long professional development plan to support middle school content area teachers in literacy instruction by asking the question, *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?*

Summary

School-wide content area reading instruction is imperative to increasing the reading abilities of all students. Witnessing the stagnant reading scores year after year has led me to believe that student literacy is a team effort that is in dire need of improvement. However, we cannot expect content area teachers to know how to plan for, model, and implement this type of instruction without providing them with relevant and timely discipline specific professional development in literacy instruction.

In chapter two of this capstone, I review the literature that is currently available on disciplinary literacy strategy professional development for middle school content area teachers. I will look specifically at the learning characteristics of middle school students, the demands and challenges of content area instruction, the needs of content area

teachers, and the different avenues that literacy can be embedded into content area instruction. In addition, I will be researching literacy strategies and how they support learning and impact student achievement, and which strategies are most effective and available to support instruction in the content areas.

In chapter three, I implemented my methodology by developing a professional development resource to support middle school content-area teachers in literacy instruction. I look at ways to address the individual needs of each teacher as well as how the resource can support them on a continual basis through professional development, which would be implemented on Wednesday mornings, during our grade-level curriculum meeting time. I considered what content was provided in the professional development, what materials and resources were needed, and how the professional development sessions was evaluated. I created separate resources for each of the content areas. The work that we need to do will be important and could potentially impact student achievement greatly. I believe I have the potential for teacher buy-in, though implementation will take some time. I am excited about what I learned from the research and the impact it could potentially have on my school, my staff, and my students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I read, analyzed, and synthesized research that addressed the question, *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?* I addressed three very important factors that influence the success of a professional development plan. The first topic is characteristics of middle-level-learners. The second topic is about literacy strategy instruction, and the last section is about literacy strategies in specific content areas.

Middle level learners face unique needs as they are in a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. An important factor for middle level learners is physical, emotional, and social development. How students develop in all three areas plays a key role for student learning. It is also important to factor in student needs in adolescent motivation and engagement. Research has indicated key factors for success in student development and motivation in regards to learning. Some of the key factors for student engagement include autonomy, identity, and relevance of material to student lives (Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995).

Secondly, there are a vast amount of literacy strategies educators can use to appeal to their students' needs. This section describes what literacy strategies are as well as how to implement them in the classroom. Educators and reading specialists talk about using strategies to improve student comprehension. I examined how literacy strategies support learning and what value using strategies in the classroom adds to instruction.

Finally, content area literacy is vital to the learning and understanding of students.

In this section, I looked at each subject in more depth and researched different teaching methods and literacy strategies that are best practice in the content areas. I also looked at specific literacy strategies that have been used in science, social studies, math, and language arts and how they can be used in a professional development format to ensure all students receive literacy instruction in the content areas.

Characteristics of Middle Level Learners

Development

Physical development. Adolescents are experiencing many physical changes as they approach or enter puberty. According to Compas et al. (1995), the hormonal changes adolescents are experiencing can influence the growth and functionality of the brain and central nervous system. In addition, the same hormonal changes are responsible for the physical changes in the adolescent's body. Girls and boys are at many different stages of puberty at the middle level and often compare themselves to one another. The effects puberty have on both male and female adolescents is based on how early or late the teenagers reach puberty (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This disparity of physical and emotional maturation is difficult for adolescents. While the timing of the development is different not only between boys and girls but among them, research suggests that adolescent social environments and peer groups can affect the timing of the physical development. It can also affect the adolescent's emotional and behavioral health (Compas et al., 1995).

In addition, adolescents are often accused of moodiness and behaviors caused by the physical changes in their bodies and the influx of hormones at this particular age.

According to Steinberg & Morris (2001), hormones can cause an increase of aggression in males and depression in females, but the actual effect hormones have on teenagers is minimal. On the other hand, the body changes that females experience during adolescence do contribute to depression and eating disorders. Research has shown that the physical development that occurs during adolescence can have a direct impact on the emotional and social health of the teenager, which in turn, affects academic achievement.

Emotional development. In addition to the physical and hormonal changes that adolescents experience, emotional growth is central to adolescent development as well. Some factors of emotional development include familial relationships, self development, and behaviors.

Relationships between adolescents and their parents as well as their siblings can be tense during this time of growth (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Due to an increase of bickering and fighting, parents and adolescents become more detached from one another and spend less time together. This is especially difficult emotionally and mentally for both the parents and the teenagers. In addition, parenting differences between siblings can cause conflict within families. Siblings can also influence one another in both positive and negative ways (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Middle school is a period of time where adolescents are trying to discover who they are and where they fit in. Teenagers often see themselves as different people when they are in different social contexts. For example, they see themselves differently when they are with their parents compared to when they are with friends, or with teachers at school (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This is a period of reflection and increased awareness

of the self in which the students analyze their relationships with family members as well as peers, often comparing and contrasting to place themselves in their society.

These comparisons among social groups can lead to problem behaviors such as depression, eating disorders, and even criminal activity if the adolescent feels badly about their own self-image. Research has shown that adolescents often engage in false self-behavior (acting in ways that are not the true self), particularly when among classmates and in romantic relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The impact of false self-behavior on adolescents' mental health depends on the reasons for it. Many adolescents who suffer from depression will engage in false behavior because they have no self-worth. However, there are adolescents who engage in false self-behavior to please others or just for experimentation (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Research has shown that depression develops more frequently in women than in men. Oftentimes, this depression develops during adolescence, though the cause of this is still unknown (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Therefore, the emotional challenges that students are facing either as a result of physical changes, self awareness, or relationships can have a direct impact on student motivation and learning. This information is important for teachers to be aware of while planning lessons to engage adolescent learners.

Social development. Arguably the most important factor of adolescent development stems from the social relationships teenagers cultivate with family members and peer adolescents. Not only do relationships with family members affect students' emotional health, but they also have an impact on their relationships with their peers. Research shows that teenagers in families that are authoritative but warm and supportive

have more positive relationships with their peers and allow for less peer negativity to affect the adolescent. In addition, depending on the amount of support students receive from their families shows a direct correlation to the quality of peer friendships teenagers have (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). In other words, the healthier the relationships teenagers experience among family, the healthier the relationships teenagers are going to experience among peers.

Adolescents are influenced by one another in both positive and negative ways because they want to be accepted. Young adolescents are especially susceptible to the influences of their peer groups due to an increase in the need for conformity in their younger years. As they grow older, adolescents spend increasingly more time with their peers compared to time with their parents. These relationships can have a positive or negative effect on student motivation. According to Ryan (2001), homophily is "the tendency of individuals to affiliate with others who are similar on various attributes" (p. 1136). Adolescent GPA's, future post-secondary goals, time and effort spent on homework, and academic engagement are all examples of situations in which homophily takes place. Due to the socialization behaviors of the adolescents and the ability to choose their friend groups, it is common for the adolescents in the groups to demonstrate similar behaviors (Ryan, 2001).

Ryan (2001) examined how peer groups can impact adolescent motivation and achievement in school. The results of the study showed that students who had high expectancies to do well placed a higher value on school work and grades. Those students tended to have higher grades and were typically the same students in sixth grade and

seventh grade. In addition, these students typically had higher levels of motivation. Ryan (2001) claimed that students with similar motivation and achievement tend to associate more with one another. The results of this study showed that peer relationships and groups have a direct effect on student motivation and achievement.

Motivation

For most students, motivation is paramount to success. In this section, I researched autonomy, interest, and relevance, as well as how motivation directly impacts reading abilities.

Autonomy, Interest, and Relevance. There is much evidence that shows that in general, student motivation and engagement decrease as students get older. In addition, attitudes towards reading generally worsen as students get older. In the study conducted by McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, and Meyer (2012), the attitudes toward reading drastically dropped between fourth grade and eighth grade. The study provided alarming statistics that explained the decline of reading.

> Recent decades have seen declines in the amount of reading in which students and adults engage. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) reported that the percentage of U.S. 17-year-olds who read nothing at all for pleasure doubled between 1982 and 2002 and that the percentage of college graduates who reported reading literature fell from 82% to 67% during the same interval. (p. 287)

According to the study, motivation decreased from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Students had lower expectations for their own performance and saw less purpose in their work toward the end of the year (Ryan, 2001). So how do educators

address the decline of student motivation in academic learning and non-academic reading?

One way to address student motivation is to consider students' needs are met first. In self-determination theory there are three basic needs in terms of student motivation: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Pintrich (2003) claimed students need to believe they are capable of mastery and interacting with their environments successfully (competence). They also want some form of control over their own behavior (autonomy) as well as a feeling of attachment or belonging to a group (relatedness) (p. 670). Students need to feel that they are capable of mastering the content, that they have control over their learning, and that they belong in the groups in which the learning is taking place.

Research showed that adolescents categorize everything they read into two categories: texts that they have to read and texts that they want to read. This can be interpreted as in-school reading and out-of-school reading. Oftentimes, males in particular, resist the in-school literacies because they feel incompetent and avoid them. However, they do sometimes embrace literacy in out-of-school contexts. Because of this, teachers need to include strategies that appeal to students, such as giving students choice in which books to read and including more popular literature and current events into the classroom (McKenna et al., 2012).

Research has proven the more students believe they have control over their own learning and believe they will be successful, the more successful they are because they employ work ethic and determination, and they are motivated because they feel in control. In other words, they are motivated to do well because they believe they can

(Pintrich, 2003).

Control and autonomy are central to student engagement and motivation. When students feel as though they have control over what they learn and how they learn it, motivation increases. When students feel they have no control over their own learning, motivation decreases (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Daniels and Steres (2011) claimed that adolescents are more likely to work diligently if they see that their voices are valued and incorporated into what happens during the school day. Another aspect of feeling in control is if students feel like they have control over whether or not they are successful. Daniels and Steres implied that students know when a teacher has high expectations and if the teacher believes the student can meet those expectations.

Interest is also an essential factor in self-determination theory. Students who have intrinsic motivation will not only feel determined because they have a sense of control, but they will also have interest in the subject or topic being addressed. Academic learning is extremely hard work, but it is supported by social interaction and emotional and motivational factors (Pintrich, 2003).

According to Daniels and Steres (2011), the higher priority that administration and staff placed on reading, the higher the students valued and were engaged in reading. Due to the increased value on reading, student engagement increased dramatically over the three years of the study. Based on the sociocultural theory and the impact that social influences have on students, the environment and school-wide culture must prioritize reading in order to create better readers. According to this study, if administrators encourage and enforce a school-wide culture of reading, student engagement will

increase. Daniels and Steres (2011) mentioned that in order for schools to foster better readers, it is necessary for schools to make reading a school-wide priority. Sociocultural theory reminds educators that the middle school environment significantly influences student engagement.

Motivation affects reading abilities. In the past, research concerning struggling readers has focused on the cognitive differences and difficulties students face. More recent research suggests that motivation may have more to do with it (McKenna et al., 2012). In other words, if a student is afforded choice, interest, and relevance in regards to the texts being read, student achievement could show much more positive results. Students perform better when they find purpose and relevance in what they are learning. Teachers need to do more than just plan lessons that are challenging and rigorous. Teachers also need to create motivating learning environments (Daniels & Steres, 2011).

In summary, the physical, emotional, and social health of adolescents is paramount to the motivation and engagement of students. Furthermore, the motivation and engagement of the students directly and imperatively impact student learning. By creating lessons that address the developmental and motivational needs of students, educators can make the greatest impact on student learning. When providing professional development for educators, it is important to keep basic student needs in mind or order to effectively prepare educators for implementing literacy instruction into the content area classroom. In the following section, I examined effective literacy strategies to improve student understanding in several different areas.

Literacy Strategies

There are a vast amount of literacy strategies educators can use to address their students' needs. This section explained what a literacy strategy is as well as which strategies are the most effective. Alvermann (2002) stated "Effective instruction develops students' abilities to comprehend, discuss, study, and write about multiple forms of text (print, visual, and oral) by taking into account what they are capable of doing as everyday users of language and literacy" (p. 193). As you can see, in order to become truly literate members of society, students need to be able to do so much more than just read and understand.

According to Serravallo (2015) in *The Reading Strategies Book*, "strategies are deliberate, effortful, intentional and purposeful actions a reader takes to accomplish a specific task or skill" (p. 8). In fact, Serravallo referred to strategies as a step by step process to help readers who have not developed the skills yet. The goal of strategy instruction is for the reader to become more skilled and for the use of the strategies to become automatic, something the reader does not have to think about before using. Eventually, once the reader has mastered that particular strategy, it becomes important to remove the scaffolded instruction in order to allow the student to become independent readers (Serravallo, 2015).

Modeling. One of the most effective methods of literacy instruction is modeling. Teachers can demonstrate their thinking processes through shared reading. Many teachers include classroom activities such as echo reading (students echoing the words aloud after the teacher reads), choral reading (students reading aloud while the teacher reads aloud),

and close reading (teacher reads aloud and pauses periodically for students to fill in the missing word) (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008).

Middle school students reported that read-alouds and built in time for independent reading made them want to read more (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). During a read aloud, teachers can model their thinking, demonstrate how they use reading strategies, develop understanding of text structures and text features. Read alouds are one of the best ways to get students excited about reading. This is effective because a good read aloud is expressive and exciting, oftentimes exciting the students to read as well (Fisher et al., 2004). According to the study,

All of the expert teachers included each of the following components during their read alouds: (1) Books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and matched to their developmental, emotional, and social levels. (2) Selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher. (3) A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established. (4) Teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text. (5) Teachers were animated and used expression. (6) Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text. (7) Connections were made to independent reading and writing. (Fisher et al., 2004, pp. 10-11)

Secondary teachers do not often use think alouds and modeling as a teaching method. Oftentimes, students are asked to read and interact with complex content-area text and vocabulary, which is too difficult for many students. Therefore, teachers must become the liaisons between students and the texts. Many teachers do not know how to

help students interact with text because their specialty is the content. Researchers noted that "content area teachers, trained to be content specific specialists, define themselves by their specializations as scientists, historians, athletes, and musicians first and teachers second" (Lapp, Grant, Moss, & Johnson, 2013, p. 378). It is essential that content area teachers are trained in the method of modeling to improve student literacy.

Thinking aloud, or modeling the thinking process while reading, allows students to recognize and implement metacognitive reading strategies. Therefore, students can see how a skilled reader works him or herself through a difficult and challenging text or uses the features or structures of a text to increase understanding (Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008).

Strategy instruction. According to Fisher and Frey (2008b), modeling and guiding are critical to student learning. These methods allow teachers to demonstrate their own thinking as they read a text depending on the following four categories: comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features.

Comprehension strategies include inferencing, summarizing, predicting, clarifying, questioning, visualizing, monitoring, synthesizing, evaluating, and connecting. Vocabulary strategies include modeling using context clues, using word parts, and using references. Examining text structures allows students to understand the purpose of the author and to look at how the structure affects the meaning of the text in both nonfiction and fiction pieces. Modeling text features provides an opportunity to look closely at headings, captions, illustrations, charts, tables, graphs, boldfaced words, table of contents, glossary, index, and margin notes (Fisher & Frey, 2008a).

Fisher and Frey claimed there is no evidence that shows that teaching one strategy at a time is effective. Instead, readers should have an arsenal of strategies in which they learn to "activate the right strategy at the right time" (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 16). Determining which strategies are needed and applying those strategies to make meaning is an essential skill that readers need to develop.

On the other hand, Serravallo claimed that the most effective strategy instruction she has experienced is to "introduce one strategy at a time, guide the student in practicing the strategy, and move on to a new strategy when the student appears to be secure with the first one" (Serravallo, 2015, p. 9). It appears that more research is needed in order to determine which method is more effective.

According to Burns et al., students have a greater chance of comprehending text when they develop a mental or visual image of the text. Therefore, some strategies that can be used to help create those images before reading the text include previewing the text and pre-teaching the challenging vocabulary words (Burns, Hodgson, Parker, & Fremont, 2011).

Previewing the text can be done by asking students what they already know about the main topic, looking at important text features such as a character list, captions, pictures, headings, and more, and giving the students a brief summary of the text, and defining the most challenging words. Pre-teaching vocabulary leads to increased understanding and is well known to be an effective strategy for struggling readers. Activating prior knowledge is another great strategy that allows the student to recall what they already know and then build off that knowledge. The students can use their

foundational knowledge to begin building the image in their minds. Small group instruction is a strategy that allows the teacher to really focus on a small group of students and address their needs. The study found that previewing text and pre-teaching vocabulary has a very positive effect on student learning and comprehension (Burns et al., 2011).

The classroom structure and routine that Fisher and Frey (2008b) endorsed include four major components: focus lesson (establish purpose and model thinking), guided instruction (small group instruction), collaborative learning (needs-based collaborative working groups), and independent learning (students assume full responsibility). This routine follows the gradual release of responsibility model, which allows students to work their way up to implementing the strategies independently. "The gradual release of responsibility model requires that learners have multiple opportunities to engage with facts, concepts, and literacy strategies before they're expected to use them on their own" (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 19). This model had proven to be successful not only in student performance, but also in student motivation.

Grouping. According to research, the most effective literacy teachers use a variety of grouping formats including whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, and individual lessons with the majority of the instructional time being in small groups (Ankrum & Bean, 2007). Excellent literacy teachers conduct the majority of the instruction in small groups based on the instructional reading level of the students. These teachers emphasized the importance of flexibility within the groups and scaffolding or coaching during the small-group instruction. Ongoing assessment is necessary to ensure

that all students are grouped correctly and receiving instruction at their own individual

levels. Assessments can be informal or formal (Ankrum & Bean, 2007).

Literacy Centers are stations set up around the room for various literacy activities

for students to complete. Independent reading improves reading stamina and fluency, and

independent response encourages the development of reading and writing skills. All of

these are literacy activities students can work on while the teacher is conducting small

group instruction (Ankrum & Bean, 2007).

In summary, the most effective method of teaching literacy strategies are the

modeling and think-aloud methods. These methods allow students to truly see how good

readers think and process while reading. Some of the essential literacy strategies that

students need to know address comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text

features. In addition, it is most beneficial to use flexible grouping with students in order

to address the needs of each student in the classroom.

Literacy Strategies in the Content Areas

Content-area literacy is vital to the learning and understanding of students.

Disciplinary Literacy is defined as "Literacy skills specialized to history, science,

mathematics, literature, or other subject matter" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 44).

The skills that are needed in order to comprehend disciplinary literacy are more advanced

and rarely taught in the classroom. "By the time adolescent students are being challenged

by disciplinary texts, literacy instruction often has evaporated altogether or has

degenerated into a reiteration of general reading strategies" (Shanahan & Shanahan,

2008, p. 45).

According to Gambrell and Morrow (2015), "one way to encourage and support students' literacy development is to view every subject or content-area lesson as an opportunity to teach reading and writing" (p. 21). In order to improve student learning in the content areas, Gambrell and Morrow suggested having students complete thirty minutes of reading or writing in the content area classroom at least two times per week in science and social studies, and once per week in math. The first step is choosing the texts the students will read.

Disciplinary literacy. The results of a study conducted by Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) showed how different disciplines read text differently. For example, mathematicians relied on rereading and close reading. This is because math "requires a precision of meaning, and each word must be understood specifically in service to that particular meaning" (p. 48). Scientists relied heavily on visuals (charts and graphs) to provide structure for the text. Finally, historians paid close attention to the author or source when reading the text because they understood they were reading "an interpretation of historical events and not 'Truth'" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, pp. 49-50). Based on the results of the study, Shanahan and Shanahan are convinced that students need to be taught how each discipline approaches different texts with different lenses.

Determining texts. Research has shown that less is more. According to Daniels and Zemelman (2004), it is not important to teach the entire textbook. Rather, it is more effective to prioritize and focus on the really big ideas. Daniels and Zemelman (2004) stated, "It's not about coverage anymore - it is about *thinking*. Students don't need more

time with their noses in the textbook - they need tons and tons of practice time reading, talking, and writing about important subject-matter content" (p. 182). The trouble with textbooks is that they contain too much information, they are incredibly difficult for students to read because they are written as more of a reference material, they provide only one point of view, they can be inaccurate, and they are very expensive. That being said, the problem is not really the textbooks themselves, but how they are used. Schools often assign textbooks to be read from cover to cover, similar to a novel. Textbooks contain so much information, they truly are reference materials.

There are some instructional strategies Daniels and Zemelman (2004) suggested to help students understand how to read the textbook including front-loading or pre-teaching some of the hardest concepts (including vocabulary) before assigning the reading. In addition, using the power of social learning theory, allowing students to work together in groups to read, write, discuss, and create understanding. Teachers need to be selective in what they assign. Rather than assigning the whole chapter, teachers should choose the most important parts for students to really delve into. Finally, teachers should also supplement the textbook with multiple other genres and texts including articles, newspapers, websites, blogs, editorials, reviews, memoirs, novels, primary sources, and more (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004). Providing students choice in these texts will also increase student motivation.

Close reading. Close reading allows students to truly dig deeper into the text to look closely at the structure of the text and how all of the details fit together to support the author's central idea. This strategy only allows teachers to provide minimal

background knowledge rather than an extensive overview of the text. This forces students to develop those skills themselves. Preparation for the strategy lesson includes selecting the text, identifying the purpose for reading, teaching students how to annotate, and writing text-dependent questions that will force the students to dig deeper into the text by searching, synthesizing, and inferring (Lapp et al., 2013).

During the first reading, the teacher shares the purpose and process while students read and annotate. Then students chat about their responses and chart them. Next, students read the text again while working to answer several text-dependent questions. Students continue sharing about their responses and where they find them in the text. Finally, students demonstrate their understanding of the text through some form of formal assessment. "After teaching students to closely read informational texts, teachers noted that they were in awe of the deep thinking their students shared" (Lapp et al., 2013, p. 112).

Writing. Knipper and Duggen (2006) stated, "Writing to learn is an opportunity for students to recall, clarify, and question what they know about a subject and what they still wonder about with regard to that subject matter" (p. 462). The process includes modeling (examples of both good and bad), guided practice (step-by-step guidance and instruction), and feedback (teachers and peers).

Examples of writing that helps students prepare for reading assignments include writing procedures, learning logs, quick writes, structured note taking, and listen-stop-and-write. Examples of strategies that focus on reviewing and summarizing include microthemes, framed paragraphs, text boxes, and sentence synthesis. Critical and

creative writing strategies include bio poems, word maps, and ABC lists. Writing is an important strategy because it forces each student to participate and to synthesize their thinking from their brain to paper. Is also effectively shows teachers what students do and do not understand.

In summary, experts of different content areas approach texts differently. They use certain strategies more often in math than they do science and vice versa. It is imperative that students are taught how to approach a history text like a historian, a math text like a mathematician, and a science text like a scientist. Therefore, one of the most important factors of disciplinary literacy is the text teachers assign for students to read. Due to the extremely challenging nature and bias of textbooks, it is imperative that students are assigned multiple genres of text, including primary documents, to study a common theme or concept. In addition, students need to be taught close reading skills in all content areas as well as how to write to learn in order to increase understanding in the content area classroom.

Professional Development

Professional development is an effective way to continue ongoing training and education for teachers in the classroom. Research shows that the structural features of professional development can make a huge impact on the effectiveness of the training. Structural features of the professional development model include the form of the activity (study group, workshop, conference), the duration of the activity, including contact hours and span of time, and the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001, p.

920).

Methods. The most common and least effective form of activity in professional development is the workshop model. This traditional form does not provide sufficient time or content to make a substantial change in classroom practice. Workshops usually take place after school or during the summer months and are typically run by an expert in that area (Garet et. al, 2001). Study groups, mentoring, and coaching are "reform" types of professional development. These styles are becoming more popular because the majority of the time spent in professional development occurs during the teacher's workday, either during classroom instruction or planning time. These forms may be more sustainable over time and teachers may be more responsive to the time allowed for the training. Some ongoing professional development forms include mentoring, peer observation and coaching,and study groups for content area teachers (Garet et. al, 2001). Another important factor of professional development is the duration of the training.

Duration. The duration of professional development is important because:

...longer activities are more likely to provide an opportunity for in-depth discussion of content, student conceptions and misconceptions, and pedagogical strategies. Second, activities that extend over time are more likely to allow teachers to try out new practices in the classroom and obtain feedback on their teaching. (Garet et al., 2001, p. 922)

In addition, the duration of professional development is directly related to how much change teachers actually make. Research shows that year-long or even systemic professional development is much more effective and sustainable than one day

workshops or weekend long conferences. Teachers often forget the material they learned, or did not have enough support or time to implement what they learned into practice after the day long or weekend retreat trainings (Garet et al., 2001).

Collaboration. Collaboration is key to the success of implementing the sustainable changes teachers are looking for when attending professional development opportunities (Garet et al., 2001, p. 922). The advantages of grouping teachers who work together for professional development include the opportunity to discuss concepts, skills, and problems, the opportunity to share materials and assessments, the opportunity to discuss student's needs, and finally, the opportunity for sustainable change in classroom practice (Garet et al., 2001, p. 922). Substantial change is more likely to occur when teachers feel they have a sustainable support system in which to learn and grow.

According to Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway (2009), effective professional development allows teachers to examine the literacy practices of their students as well as themselves. It should not only examine the attitudes and beliefs of teachers in regards to literacy instruction but it should also show teachers "how to infuse literacy into content area curricula" (p. 78). Research shows that teachers are far more likely to utilize and expand upon professional development if they are awarded time to see the strategies modeled and to figure out how to apply them and reflect upon the effectiveness of the lesson (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009).

The professional development helped teachers understand that their job entails more than just covering content, but also includes providing students with literacy instruction. After teachers saw that student were performing better after the

implementation of content area literacy instruction, teacher perceptions and attitudes improved. The study showed that this form of professional development can have a lasting impact on school improvement in literacy learning across the content areas. In order to make this improvement sustainable, teachers will need support to increase knowledge and skills needed to teach literacy skill to students in the content area (Cantrell et al., 2009).

In summary, teachers need to have a support system built in where they can discuss, collaborate, experiment, and reflect on suggested practices. Collaboration among teachers who work together will make a significant impact on the sustainability of change teachers implement. In addition, the professional development must happen over a long enough period of time to allow teachers to obtain feedback and make positive changes and observations to the practices in their classrooms. Finally, reform methods of providing professional development are essential to the sustainability of continuing practice of the content provided.

Summary

In summary, student development and motivation greatly impact student performance in the classroom and ultimately how much they learn. It is important to address student needs of social interaction, choice, purpose, and relevance when implementing literacy instruction in the classroom in order to have the most effective lessons as possible.

The single most effective method for teaching literacy strategies is modeling and think-alouds. This method allows students to see how readers handle different texts and

the thinking processes that happen when a reader is truly working through a text. Some important literacy strategies to cover include the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features.

Disciplinary literacy is important because experts of the content areas approach texts differently, utilizing different strategies based on the purpose of their reading. Multiple genres of text must be used in addition to the textbook in order to provide students opportunities to read text with multiple points of view as well as formats. It is essential for content area teachers to provide literacy instruction in the classroom if the goal is for student literacy to improve.

Professional development must be offered in a format that occurs during the regular work day and that is extended over a long period of time to offer participants enough time to experiment and reflect on the practices being studied. Furthermore, fostering collaboration among teachers who work together will increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the professional development by allowing discussion, experimentation, and feedback to guide classroom practice.

In chapter three, I provide a detailed explanation of the project. First, I explain who will participate in the professional development by describing the setting and the audience. I also provide the context in which the project will take place and the rationale of the project. In addition, I address the frameworks of the project as well as a timeline for completion keeping in mind my research question, *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?*

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

In chapter three, I create a professional development plan that addresses the question, *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?* Over the last several years, it has come to my attention that our reading scores are remaining stagnant and that we need to increase the quality and quantity of literacy instruction to improve student reading achievement.

Before I began planning, I had to research characteristics of middle level learners in order to work towards improved student motivation and engagement. I also had to conduct research on best practices in literacy strategy instruction, specifically in the content area classroom. Finally, I had to research best practices and effects of professional development for teachers in the field.

In this chapter, I address what motivated me to choose this project in the research paradigm section. It is important to understand why I selected this project to add to the conversation on disciplinary literacy instruction. I will also discuss my choice of method for the project and how it will be delivered to the content area teachers. The method of the project is important to know as it is based on research of professional development and directly impacts the effectiveness of the project. The setting and audience section will describe who the project is intended for. In the project description section, I outline what will be provided through the shared online resource. Finally, I provide a timeline for completion and an overview of what is to come in Chapter Four.

Research Paradigm

The goal of my professional development plan was to inform the staff of research-based best practices for content area literacy instruction, and then to provide them with the tools and resources needed to implement literacy instruction into the content area classrooms.

Due to stagnant reading scores over several years, the school needs a building-wide system of training and support for content area teachers in order to improve student literacy across the board. After synthesizing the research I completed on adolescent development, literacy strategy instruction, content area literacy strategy instruction, and professional development, I knew that in order to improve student literacy at my school, I would have to provide support for my content area teachers in a format that was easy to use and implement in the classroom and that did not create more work for the classroom teacher.

Based on the research on adolescent development, I wanted to create a lesson plan template that encouraged teachers to address the physical, emotional, and social health of adolescents in order to increase student motivation and engagement. By creating lessons that address the developmental and motivational needs of students, educators can make the greatest impact on student learning (Compas et al., 1995; Daniels & Steres, 2011; McKenna et al., 2012; Pintrich, 2003; Ryan, 2001; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

In addition, the most effective method of teaching literacy strategies are the modeling and think-aloud methods. These methods allow students to truly see how good readers think and process while reading. I knew that I wanted these teaching methods

incorporated into the lesson plans as well (Alverman, 2002; Ankrum & Bean, 2007; Blachowicz & Ogle, 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Burns et al., 2011; Serravallo, 2015).

Based on the research I discovered on content area literacy, I knew that I wanted to organize my project by literacy strategies that would be specifically beneficial for each content area. Experts of different content areas approach texts differently. They use certain strategies more often in math than they do science and vice versa. It is imperative that students are taught how to approach a history text like a historian, a math text like a mathematician, and a science text like a scientist (Daniels & Zemelman, 2004; Gambrell & Morrow, 2015; Knipper & Duggen, 2006; Lapp et al., 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

After researching professional development, I found that teachers need to have a support system built in where they can discuss, collaborate, experiment, and reflect on suggested practices (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009; Garet et al., 2001). Based on this information, I knew I had to provide professional development that was built-in, collaborative, long-term, and sustainable.

Choice of Method

When deciding on a course of action for my project, I realized that it was essential for me to build my work into something the teachers were already doing. Teachers were already feeling overwhelmed with 504's, IEP's, behavior plans, ELL plans, book studies, ICU, and most importantly, planning and providing engaging and relevant lessons to their students and assessing student progress. My original plan was to create study groups or

work literacy goals into PLC discussions somehow, but PLC's are fairly new in my district, and teachers only meet once a month. I feared that when meeting as an entire department, teachers would not have the time to apply literacy strategies to grade level lesson plans and curriculum design. Therefore, I asked my capstone peer discussion group the question, "What resource can I develop that would be beneficial for students and useful for teachers, but that does not create more work for teachers?"

Suggestions from my classmates led me to consider using the time teachers already have carved out each week when writing lesson plans together as a grade level curriculum team, as well as provide a strategy based online resource that teachers can access easily. This shared, online resource included opportunities for professional development in the form of videos in which teachers can see the strategy modeled, titles of articles and books for additional research, meeting agendas, lesson plan templates, and graphic organizers or examples of how students can use the strategy to increase comprehension. The resource was organized according to literacy strategies. This plan addressed research proven best practices for professional development by providing time within the work day, maintaining duration and sustainability by meeting once a week throughout the entire school year, and by providing an opportunity for cooperative planning (Garet et al., 2001).

Setting

I teach at at a middle school in a rural area in South Dakota. It is a sixth through eighth grade setting. The community is supportive of education and the arts. The population of the town is a little over 23,000 people, with 14% living in poverty and 95%

of the population being White. There is a public state university located in the town as well. At the middle school, there are 735 students with 22% of them economically disadvantaged and 3% ESL students. The ratio of teachers to students is 14 to 1, and 100% of teachers are highly qualified, with 75% holding Bachelor's Degrees and 25% holding Master's Degrees. The average years of experience are eleven.

Audience

The intended audience of this project are the seventh grade content area teachers at the middle school—specifically teachers of Social Studies, Science, Math, and Language Arts. There are three teachers of each content area. According to the Needs Assessment survey I conducted in September 2016, most of the seventh grade content area teachers felt they have the knowledge or skills needed to incorporate literacy instruction into the content area classroom, but lack the resources and the time for planning it into the curriculum. If the teacher felt that he or she did not have the knowledge or skills needed to incorporate literacy instruction into the content area classroom, they expressed that with time, resources, and appropriate professional development, they would be comfortable incorporating disciplinary literacy strategies.

Content area teachers can make a significant impact on students' literacy abilities if they have the training needed to incorporate literacy instruction into the content area classroom. Therefore, the indirect audience of the project are the seventh grade students in the general classroom. Currently, students are being asked to read and interact with texts on a very superficial level without reaching the depth of understanding needed to reach the highest levels of cognitive functioning. The goal is for teachers to work

together to enhance the instruction they already provide by addressing student motivation and engagement through student choice, purpose, and relevance. In addition, setting literacy goals, providing direct instruction of content area literacy strategies, and providing scaffolding are all strategies that can make a positive impact on student literacy through the content area classroom.

Project Description

The purpose of the project was professional development design. I created a shared, online resource that addressed adolescent development, literacy strategy instruction, disciplinary literacy strategies, and professional development best practices. The method I chose was to create a shared Google Drive folder organized by research based best practice literacy strategies. Grade-level content area teachers meet every Wednesday morning for a planning period to plan lessons and units of study. My goal in developing the professional development was for the content area teachers to work as a team on the first Wednesday of every month to determine a literacy goal for the month or unit and use the lesson plan template and resources provided to work towards that goal. Within these grade-level curriculum meetings, teachers can choose which topics would be the most beneficial for the content they will be teaching. Within the shared resource, teachers are provided with a description of a literacy strategy that would apply, a video that models the strategy being taught, and resources for implementing the strategy.

While participating in the teacher-led professional development, teachers will create lessons that address students' areas of need such as motivation and social development while using literacy strategies to improve students' content area literacy.

Allowing student choice in the text they read would be vital to student motivation to learn. In addition, following social learning theory, students would need to work collaboratively to improve their content area literacy skills.

Teachers would determine which strategies are needed for the texts they will be teaching in their classes. They would need to follow research best practice which states that math students need to know how to read like a mathematician, a history student like a historian, and a science student like a scientist. As a reminder of the study conducted by Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), mathematicians relied on rereading and close reading. Scientists relied heavily on visuals (charts and graphs) to provide structure for the text. Finally, historians paid close attention to the author or source when reading the text because they understood they were reading "an interpretation of historical events and not 'Truth'" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, pp. 49-50). Teachers would work together as a grade level curriculum team to build literacy instruction into their curriculum using the lesson plans template and addressing a literacy goal for each lesson.

Starting in August 2018, the grade-level curriculum teams will meet on the first Wednesday of every month to discuss how they will meet their literacy goals through their curriculum and lesson plans. They will follow the meeting agenda provided in the shared Google Drive folder. The meeting would begin with a mini-lesson on a literacy strategy via videos or journal articles. Then, teams would discuss the strategy and what it currently looks like in their classrooms. Discussion would then move towards how to implement the strategy into their lessons and which teaching method to use to incorporate it, modeling or think aloud. Next, teachers would work together to plan a lesson using the

literacy strategy and lesson plan template provided. Once the lesson plan is completed, teachers would upload the plan to their content areas folders in the shared Google Drive folder. The lesson plans would hold teachers accountable for their literacy related work. Finally, the teachers would reflect on the effectiveness of their meeting and how it might be improved in the future using the fast feedback form provided on the agenda.

Timeline

The process began with a survey of the seventh-grade content area teachers to determine areas of most need. I conducted the survey on September 27, 2017 to obtain information regarding the current level of literacy instruction and the areas of most interest and need. Unfortunately, the results were inconclusive with the same content area teachers choosing different strategies and skills to focus on in the classroom. I decided to rely on the literature review to determine best practices in the content areas.

In October, I worked on creating the resources that will be provided in the shared folder such as the meeting agendas, fast feedback forms, lesson plan templates, and literacy strategy folders. I worked on finding videos of the strategies being modeled as well as several resources for implementation for each strategy.

In November, I worked on writing and rewriting chapter four and completing the project or shared Google folder. I also prepared for my Capstone Project Presentation, and completed all of the necessary steps by December 10, 2017.

Summary

In summary, I created a shared, online professional development resource teachers can use collaboratively in order to determine literacy goals, write lesson plans,

and incorporate literacy strategy instruction into the content area classroom. I provided

meeting agendas, fast feedback forms, lesson plan templates, strategy descriptions, and

strategy resources. In chapter four I will reflect on the process I went through to create

the resources and what impact it might have on my students, peer content area teachers,

building, and district.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

As I reflect on my experience throughout this process, I wonder if I have created an effective professional development plan that answers the question, *How can professional development in disciplinary literacy strategies support middle school content area teachers?*

In this chapter, I will reflect on my major learnings throughout this process as well as the information from the literature review that was most helpful in guiding me to create this professional development plan. It is important to understand how the research guided my project and what information was the most influential. In addition, I will reflect on the implications of my work and how my professional development plan addresses all of the objections posed by content area teachers. Finally, I will share my future plans for implementing the professional development plan and the impact it may have on the teachers and students in my District.

Major Learnings

Throughout this process, I learned the most about professional development in education. I think my most valuable learning came through my relationships and conversations with teachers as well as through the research conducted in the literature review. It is incredibly important to understand the setting and the people being affected by the professional development plan and what they will be willing to devote their time to. I understand that this plan would require more work, more collaboration, more time,

and more change. I had to consider all of these factors while creating the professional

development plan because I not only wanted it to be excellent professional development,

but I also wanted it to be realistic and meaningful for staff and students. I knew that if I

required too much change at once without fully supporting the importance and rationale

of my work, I would not have teacher buy-in. I also came to understand that without

teacher buy-in, the professional development plan would be ineffective. I can expose staff

to as many resources as are out there, but if they do not feel that it is important and worth

their time and effort, they will not implement it into their classrooms and then the training

becomes mute. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of this project was not

necessarily the materials compiled in the resource, but rather, how I was going to

convince staff to believe in it enough to participate collaboratively in the training and

implement it with fidelity in the classroom.

In addition, I came to understand the channels through which one must travel in

order to make changes at the secondary level. I have worked tirelessly on this project

only to fully understand that none of my work will be used in my building unless I can

obtain administrative support of my project. Not only do I need to convince teachers of

the value of this training, but I have to convince my administration first. Without out that

approval, nothing will come of my work. Fortunately, my content reviewer is incredibly

supportive and does not need to be convinced of the importance of this work as she is an

advocate of it already. Her position at the University and on the School Board allow for

influence favorable of this work, though nothing is guaranteed.

In summary, my major learnings centered around how I could put my professional

development plan into action. I discovered the steps it takes to not only create professional development, but then how to get it out there to an audience, and then how to convince the audience to implement the training with fidelity. I can only hope and continue working towards making that goal a reality.

Revisiting the Literature Review

While completing the research for my literature review, I learned so much about professional development in education. In fact, because I have been learning about literacy instruction for two years, I felt that I learned the most about professional development, and found the research to back up best practices in literacy instruction I had been learning about in my classes. I think the information that helped to guide me the most in creating my professional development plan was the work that came from the paper, "What Makes Professional Development Effective?" by Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001). I learned that adults learn and retain more information in a study group or mentoring/coaching format rather than a workshop format. I quickly understood that if I could build the professional development into the teacher's workday and into a planning period teachers were already using to develop curriculum as well as maintain the professional development over the course of the year, the duration of the plan would make it that much more effective. In addition, allowing teachers time for collaboration and working with and learning from their peers would also increase the potential of a sustainable and effective professional development model.

The source that was most helpful and important to my project in the area of content area literacy instruction was the work of Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) in the

article, "Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content-Area

Literacy." This work gave me the information I needed to show content area teachers the

importance of teaching students to read like mathematicians, scientists, and historians.

Their work provided specific examples I needed to show content area teachers why

students need them to teach how to read a text, not just assign a text. In short, this text

provides content area teachers with a purpose for implementing content area literacy

instruction into their curriculums.

In summary, learning about the most effective format of professional

development for educators is what makes my project obtainable. Providing teachers with

purpose, time, resources, collaboration, and duration makes this professional

development plan easy to implement with the potential of a tremendous impact on

student literacy.

Implications

In chapter one, I revealed that after many discussions with content area teachers, I

discovered that reading is not being taught in content area classrooms for several reasons.

The first reason being that teachers are not trained in teaching reading; they simply do not

know how. I feel that through the videos and articles provided, most teachers will be able

to self-teach how to incorporate these teaching strategies into their classrooms. However,

I think that having a literacy coach would make the training more effective. If the

teachers could have a coach come in and help them write the lesson plan and model for

them how to teach the strategies, the teachers would feel much more comfortable with the

strategy instruction, and probably more likely to incorporate more literacy strategies into

their instruction. I do hope that my project leads to the development of this position, but I understand that the budget is tight, and therefore, unlikely. That being said, with the resources we have available, I do believe that if the teachers are willing to learn, the majority of them could learn from this self-taught, collaborative professional development model.

Secondly, many teachers felt they did not have time to devote to reading instruction when they had so much content to cover. Through the content area overview documents, I feel that I have made the necessity of content area literacy clear. By allowing teachers to use time already built into their day for the professional development and the curriculum planning, teachers do not have to devote time outside of the school day to learn new information or try to incorporate it into their instruction. In addition, the meeting agendas and lesson plan template specifically suggest using lesson plans content area teachers already use and modifying them include literacy instruction. I truly believe the teachers will see the benefit and the payoffs of content area student knowledge when the students are able to comprehend content area text.

Finally, many teachers felt there was no need to address reading instruction when the students had a separate class period for reading instruction daily. Although this objection did not get addressed directly through the project, my school is moving forward with combining the Language Arts classes with the Reading classes to make the reading and writing instruction more collaborative and intertwined. This, in turn, automatically rejects the idea that there is a separate class for reading instruction. In addition, again, the content area literacy overview makes clear the different kinds of reading content area

experts engage in and should teach their students to engage in as well.

In summary, I believe that by providing teachers with resources and time to learn the strategies and write them into lesson plans as well as demonstrating the importance of content area literacy, teachers do not have to worry about not having enough knowledge or time to teach literacy strategies. In addition, with the integration of the Language Arts and Reading classes, content area teachers cannot pass all of the responsibility of student literacy onto the Language Arts teachers. Therefore, I feel that through this professional development plan, I have addressed all of the concerns of the content area teachers.

Future Plans

I have created this professional development plan with the vision of it being implemented in my district. Through the support of my content reviewer, Jennifer Lacher-Starace, and my Curriculum Director, Michelle VandeWeerd, I can see that vision becoming a reality. While many content area teachers will probably not be happy about yet another expectation or responsibility on their plates, I hope they will come to see the importance and the impact we can make on student literacy, together. I am meeting with both of my content reviewers to discuss the possible implementation of this project. It is designed to start in the fall of 2018, and so that is where we would start if we get approval and support from administration. Jennifer has so graciously offered to act as an instructional coach for our content area teachers, if needed. I also plan on meeting with my building principal to discuss implementation. I truly believe that my school needs to develop a Literacy Plan and that all teachers are responsible for student literacy. I am hoping that my Principal sees this as a priority and supports the creation of a Literacy

Plan and the Implementation of the Professional Development Plan. Administration is needed to hold teachers accountable and to create a building wide culture of literacy.

There are several limitations to this professional development plan. The first limitation is that as a teacher, I would need to participate in the discussions with my ELA colleagues and therefore, would not be available to answer any questions or provide any guidance for content area teachers throughout the training. This is the reason why I have created an online, self-guided format for this project. The teachers will receive only as much training as they choose to put in. Will this be effective? I will have to wait and see.

The second limitation is that this plan relies heavily on administration approval, implementation, and accountability. This plan will only be implemented with the help and support of administration. In addition, teachers need to be held accountable. Turning in lesson plans is only one piece of the puzzle. Administration needs to be visiting classrooms and discussing with teachers how the professional development plan goals are being met.

The third limitation to this project is teacher buy-in. I am hopeful that the introductory materials of the professional development are enough to convince content area teachers of the importance of teaching content area literacy. However, this will depend on each individual teacher and their personal philosophies on education.

In summary, it will take a lot of people to make this professional development plan work. I will need administrative support from both my building principal and my curriculum director, as well as buy-in from content area teachers. I will need administration to help in the implementation and accountability aspects of the project,

and I will need teachers to see the importance of literacy instruction in the classroom. I am hopeful for all of these things to happen, and for the professional development to begin in the fall of 2018.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I truly appreciate how much work and planning goes into creating professional development for teachers. I understand that it takes several people to put a plan in motion, and that teachers have to believe the professional development will have a purpose and a positive impact on their students. Teachers need time to learn about literacy strategies and make a plan for implementing them into the classroom. They need support from administration and from one another. I am hopeful that this professional development plan will inspire teachers to focus on student literacy, and will have a positive impact on my school and our students.

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