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The Impact Of Professional Development Of Effective Teachers In Low Performing Schools

Brian Gibson

THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Doctoral Dissertation Research

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

National Louis University, Tampa Campus

College of Professional Studies and Advancement

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Organizational Leadership

By

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March 2020

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Abstract

Professional development is a substantial contributing factor to the success or lack of success in low-performing schools. Specific student-focused professional development can be used to increase academic achievement, school culture, and the level of effective teaching. A lack of attention to school-specific professional development can contribute to low student achievement, diminished school culture, and reduced teacher efficiency. In Florida, public schools have implemented the "4 Professional Development Standards" (Planning, Learning, Implementation, and Evaluation) to act as a tool to identify best practices in schools and classrooms as well as to determine what professional development is needed to improve instructional practices. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the perspectives of teachers and school leaders regarding student-centric professional development and its effects on school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools. The study involved face-to-face interviews with teachers who participated in strategic professional development and school administrators who were integral in implementing the professional development. Results showed eight of the 10 participants embraced schoolwide professional development that contained a focus on school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my family and friends. To my wife, Cherry, I would like to thank you for being my support throughout this entire study. Your words of encouragement and patience kept me focused and pushed me through this daunting journey. I do not know how I made it this far without you. To Bryce and Brayden, thank you for being two amazing boys who love me unconditionally. Both of you are my inspiration and drive to be the best Dad I can be. To LaTanya, thank you for being the best sister a brother can ever ask for, your protection of me has always allowed me to pursue my dreams and aspirations. You have no clue what that means to me. To Cory, the brother I never had. Thank you for being there for me no matter what I have going on, you always stand in the gap. I appreciate you for being Cory at all times. To my Grandparents (Verna and Gene Thomas), everything that I do, I do it for you. Without your sacrifices to raise my sisters and me, I would not be who I am today. I Love you…

To my friends, I dedicate this study to you for all of the moral support and encouragement to hold me accountable even when I did not want to be responsible. Shawn Smith, Robert Codie, Lionel Davis, Reginald Hester, and Alex Derival, you guys, have been there for the good and the bad, but through it all, each you have played a big part in the completion of this study.

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I am thankful to National Louis University for standing in the gap through an awkward and nerve-wracking educational time with the transitions from the other institution to National Louis University.

I am also thankful to the administrators and teachers who participated in this study. Their unwavering dedication and commitment to their school and student success were profound. Their ability to share their experiences and perspectives was eye-opening and very helpful to my study. It was my honor and privilege to have the opportunity to learn from my peers in education, not only during this study but also for many years to come.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my wife, Cherry, and my boys (Bryce and Brayden) for their support in assisting me with not giving up and staying the course.

Finally, I am forever thankful for my Grandparents Verna and the late Gene Thomas for making the ultimate sacrifice to raise my sisters and I. EVERYTHING that I do; I do it for you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Florida State Standards have increased the level of pressure placed on teachers to use instructional best practices and enact subtle changes in their classrooms to show student growth. The Florida Department of Education uses achievement level data to rank schools and has created a school grade formula that gives every public K-12 school a letter grade of A through F (Hart & Figlio, 2015). For Kindergarten to Grade 8, the letter grade is based mainly on a school's Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) scores. However, the formula for high schools is different, as only 50% of a high school's grade is derived from FSA scores (Florida Department of Education, 2019), with the other 50% coming from graduation rate, college readiness, student participation in college-level classes, and whether students earn college credits for the college-level courses in which they are enrolled.

Leaders in the State of Florida have charged all schools in the state to make continuous progress toward achieving state standards by encouraging and providing teachers with formal and informal professional developments that are district required, state required, and school needed to help teachers create their own innovative best practices to ensure student achievement and efforts to sustain or increase their school's letter grade (DuFour & Marzano, 2012). Educators are expected to stay abreast of new, creative, individualized academic instruction for diverse learners; assist students in attaining high standards; become specialists in the development of students; and maintain an open level of communication with parents and the community (Hart & Figlio, 2015). Effective teachers strive to accomplish these goals. However, they often deprive themselves of optimal opportunities to learn (Castleberry, 2010). In today's low-

performing schools, teachers experience frustration related to students living in poverty, students who are academically deficient in core academic areas, students with disabilities, and high-stakes testing. Teachers in schools that are considered low-performing struggle with each of these variables simultaneously in their quest to be effective teachers in their school districts. For a teacher to be considered effective, the results would be based on the individual school district evaluative tool that consists of the Danielson Evaluation Framework as well as the value-added model (VAM).

Teachers often benefit from professional development and collaboration with peers. It is the responsibility of school and district leaders to determine the best professional development that will make the most significant impact on the school. The professional development can be instructional inclined, with a focus on instructional best practices, or adaptive inclined, with a focus on relationship building best practices. The most appropriate approach is based on the culture of the school. Evans (2014) stated that when teachers are involved in the process of building professional development or professional learning communities, where fluid discussions take place about how to embed professional development, all can benefit from the training. Effective professional development will empower all staff to meet high levels of expectations and standards.

Leadership best practices are essential to turning around a low-performing school when the track record of the selected leader is proven to increase the school's capacity and student achievement. The school leader is chosen to go into the struggling school to make impactful strategic decisions as well as implement systems that provide teachers, staff, and students with expectations and accountability that will increase student performance. Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) stated that principals of schools

show growth in student achievement when they embed best practices to increase student achievement and school grade. An effective leader can ensure the district provides the necessary support, encouragement, and motivation to teachers in low-performing schools (Finnigan, 2012). A significant component in the ability of the leader to change the scope, culture, and expectations of low-performing schools is the level of professional development embedded throughout the schools to employees. Educational leaders recognize that professional development is not always a complicated process, but can pose a problem when there is a disconnect with the culture of the school and expectations of the teachers and staff. Professional development intends for teachers to have the ability to develop best practices to meet their students at their level. Sherrod (2014) noted that effective professional development programs that have rigorous state standards and district school improvement goals increase student performance and the school grade.

Student achievement levels in schools in Southwest Florida have declined, and schools are failing to meet the progress goals set by the Florida Department of Education. In an attempt to efficiently address this decline, leaders of school districts identified and assigned instructional coaches who have instructional skills and knowledge of innovative best practices that can make an immediate impact on student achievement. Classroom instruction has the highest impact on student achievement, followed by leadership (Leigh Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). Across the country, inner-city and urban schools are struggling to hire highly effective teachers who are willing to work in schools where more than 70% of the students are academically deficient in core academic classes (Loeb, 2017). Students may have different academic achievement levels within schools. As it pertains to low-performance students, effective teachers demonstrate the best opportunity

for students to learn and increase their achievement levels. Low-achieving schools with a high concentration of minority students are typically serving students from low-income families in comparison to high-achieving schools with a high concentration of proficient students (Loeb, 2017). The inability to evenly disperse students across the district leads to difficulty hiring effective teachers who are able to embrace professional development and facilitate student mastery of challenging content, complex problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) stated active professional development can help teachers learn and refine their instructional skills and implement strategies that are essential to teaching skills at a high level of instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers have a direct impact on student achievement; however, the ability to develop meaningful and useful ways to get students to learn by embedding standards-based best practices with fidelity is a real issue and concern because of student achievement levels and high-stakes testing (DuFour & Marzano, 2012). High-stakes testing and constant demands for teachers to make student achievement gains in a small window of time are the priority within schools. However, when schools and teachers do not accomplish the goal, it causes teachers to become discouraged, which leads to stress and worry about job security when the teacher's evaluation is not satisfactory. District and state assessments are placing pressure on teachers to have students perform in the class setting; however, teachers are not provided with targeted professional development designed to equip them with best practices to get students to learn (DuFour & Marzano, 2012). The implementation of strategic professional development that is student-driven

to address the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity to meet the needs of the teacher is essential to increasing student achievement. To meet the needs of the teacher requires a change in the approach of the school leader in terms of what professional development will be embedded in the school. The change cannot be so challenging that teachers will have difficulties converting their style of teaching to meet the evolving expectations of teaching low-performing students.

Cultivating meaningful professional development systems is essential to establishing an environment that will attract high-quality teachers (Loeb, 2017). Low-performing schools every year have a high turnover rate, as teachers leave in search of a school with fewer pressures, accountability, and discipline concerns. Jacob (2007) stated teacher shortages are a challenge within many low-performing schools; therefore, the ability to staff low-performing schools with effective teachers becomes a daunting task for school administrators. Low-performing schools tend to be staffed with mediocre, ineffective teachers whose services were not wanted at other schools because of their inability to provide meaningful, rigorous instruction or their lack of classroom management skills to ensure every student will have the opportunity to learn in a conducive learning environment (Loeb, 2017). Many teachers who are hired at low-performing schools fly under the radar because students typically demonstrate low academic abilities coupled with coping mechanisms to cover up their academic deficiencies. The students also exhibit high levels of discipline concerns as a means to cover up their academic weaknesses. Therefore, when ineffective teachers are attempting to teach students who have academic deficiencies as well as discipline concerns, this equates to minimal teaching by the teacher and minimal learning by the students. The

variable of a teacher shortage is also profound when applicants attempt to place their interest in specific schools or teaching positions. In many cases, applicants are not interested in low-performing schools in urban school districts or schools where the minority rate is over 50% or highly impoverished schools (Simon, Johnson, & Reinhorn, 2015).

To help retain effective teachers, the school administration must plan, implement, and embed school-driven professional developments that cater specifically to the needs of the teachers and the students they are serving. There has been minimal attention concentrated on making significant changes in instructional practices, processes, policies, and procedures to ensure the level of responsibility is embedded with fidelity and equitably throughout the entire school district. The needs in low-performing schools are different from those in high-performing schools. Therefore, the level of training required for teachers to be successful revolves around the level of support provided to the teachers and staff. Students in low-performing schools come to school with various home, community, and personal variables that have a direct impact on their instructional outcomes. Therefore, it becomes essential that schools embed the appropriate level of pressure to ensure teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the needs of the students. Changing the instructional approach in meaningful ways must start at the school leadership level first and then transfer down to the teachers and staff. A critical best practice in low-performing schools is making sure teachers are equipped with the necessary training and professional development to be empowered and gain clarity to the abundant needs of the students.

High-stakes testing, teacher accountability, inconsistent distribution of non-proficient students, and lack of meaningful professional development are some of the alarming contributors to why low-performing schools struggle with increasing academic achievement. Green and Allen (2015) stated that educational transformation occurs when teachers embrace professional development and use the best practices gained as a bridge between current practices, standards of measurement, and student performance. Struggling schools that are not performing at a high level tend to have a higher concentration of minority students from low-income families (Loeb, 2017). Discussion within the district and the Florida Department of Education of closing low-performing schools and reconstituting new schools or creating charter schools occurs when schools are not performing well and receive a letter grade of "D." Schools become a Differentiated Accountability School where the state provides structures and supports to build capacity to sustain improvements by embedding a steady release model (Loeb, 2017). Teachers in low-performing schools often benefit from structure and accountable teaching environments that provide multiple levels of support, leadership, and meaningful professional development because it sets the expectation that facilitates the ability to increase student achievement and rigor. Green and Allen (2015) acknowledged teacher productivity as an essential component of improving student achievement and resources toward useful and productive professional development. Effective teachers in low-performing schools need professional development and professional learning communities to embrace the complexities and adversities that are attached to teaching in low-performing schools (Loeb, 2017). Professional development promotes levels of motivation and creativity that influence researched teacher best practices and student

engagement to move schools from the status of low-performing toward being high-quality or high-performing schools with effective teachers. Thus, this qualitative study was designed to determine whether student-focused professional development provided to teachers who teach in a Southwest Florida low-performing school can increase student achievement. The results of this program evaluation offer insight into professional development for effective teachers and administrators interested in working in low-performing schools or schools that are on the verge of being labelled low-performing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine what kinds of student-centric professional development practices and activities enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools. The study was designed to determine how teachers and school leaders who were fully engaged in the professional development process identify which type of professional development is most effective in building connections between active professional development and increasing student achievement in low-performing schools. Castleberry (2010) stated that to meet the needs of teachers and school leaders, in-depth professional development pedagogy must be compatible with the teaching preferred in the classroom. Meaningful and valued learning from professional development enables teachers and leaders to reflect on how the professional developments were able to build a connection to stabilize their tenure as a classroom teacher and leaders of the school (Gamrat, Zimmerman, Dudek, & Peck, 2014).

The emphasis of this study was on gathering and analyzing data from school administrators and teachers on whether the professional development provided to

teachers in Southwest Florida urban schools increased student achievement. It was also essential to focus on the teachers' views and perceptions of the impact of student-centric professional development and the instructional climate and culture of the school to identify how teachers and school leaders perceive professional development. The school leaders and teachers were part of the process to ensure the teachers were closing the instructional gap of the students in the low-performing school by embedding the learned strategies and best practices provided by the professional development. Needs assessments based on interviews of teachers who participated in professional development training and school leaders who developed and implemented professional development were used to gather data to monitor whether or not the professional development was impactful to the school by improving the school culture and increasing student achievement. The researcher also focused on what specific student-centric professional development was found to be useful or ineffective in increasing the culture, student achievement, and best practices for effective teachers to maintain their evaluative status.

The focus of the interviews was to collect and analyze data concerning the effects of professional development on teachers as well as to gather insight into their expert opinions concerning which style or approach to professional development is the most effective in increasing student achievement and cultures in schools. The process of collecting data to identify patterns through discovery and interpretation provided a perception of how student-centric professional development affects teachers by considering the knowledge of the teachers and the school leaders to enhance the culture, student achievement, and productivity of teachers in low-performing schools.

Professional development for teachers entering the education profession provides teachers with the ability to focus on meeting the direct needs of the students, parents, and all of the stakeholders attached to the school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). It is important to be strategic in terms of which professional development will be provided to teachers because it has to be meaningful and monitored to ensure best practices can be embedded with fidelity by novice teachers to acquire the level of success needed for retention and growth. Meaningful professional development requires well thought out plans and activities by school leaders that are essential to the needs of the school that will afford the participants with immediate implementation of the best practices when the initial training has ended (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). It is essential that focus-based or need-based training is provided to ensure teachers, administrators, and school employees are all on board to eliminate resistance; more importantly, clear expectations help ensure the desired outcomes are obtained.

The implementation of quality and strategic professional development cultivates a learning environment in which teachers and administrators can see the results in the classroom and academic achievement from the students. If the staff development is strategic and of high quality, the knowledge base of the teachers will be enhanced and the content taught will be used effectively in the classroom. Strategic and quality professional development will also decrease wasted training sessions and reduce the likelihood of teachers not using the training immediately to improve their teaching and curriculum development to transfer to more student discourse, engagement, and standards-based instruction to facilitate more excitement in creating purposeful best practices (Shea, Mouza, & Drewes, 2016). The school leader's ability to obtain

productive professional development to create a climate and culture for training will need to consist of instructional strategies that are standards-based, opportunity for reflection of learning, and progress monitoring to ensure the professional development is assisting instruction to lead meaningful instructional best practices (Shea et al., 2016).

Teacher and Administrative Development

The school culture and climate have a direct impact on student achievement because teachers become more motivated to teach, which then increases student performance and student outcomes on assessments. The approach to developing an evaluative process to monitor the pulse of teachers and administrators is essential to getting a grasp on what specific professional development to infuse in the school to increase the culture and student achievement (Branch et al., 2013). Studies have shown teachers who are fully emerged in academic best practices are often connected to gains in student achievement; however, teachers who are not as strong with building connections with students or implementing academic best practices often will leave the education profession (Green & Allen, 2015).

Professional development, coupled with meaningful ongoing training and modeling, has a direct influence on retaining teachers beyond their first years of teaching. Many novice teachers are teaching and learning best practices as they surface to their attention. This approach can be daunting and overwhelming because they have lost the direct coaching and teaching approach gained while engaging in hands-on student practicum, peer teaching, and collaborative university student teaching. Collegiate colleges of education are diminishing across the country; therefore, support systems are complicating teachers' ability to cultivate and maintain confidence. Novice teachers

require consistent training to increase self-esteem, enhance their planning process of lessons, build their confidence, create appropriate goals, and participate in training that has an impact on their becoming an influential and impactful teacher. Beginning teacher programs embedded by the district can provide novice teachers with more experienced teachers to work hand-in-hand to establish goals, analyze data, and create a culture in the classroom setting that supports professional growth and peer collaboration (Clandinin et al., 2015).

Research Question

What professional development activities will enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools?

Limitations

The main limitation of this qualitative study was the unknown style of professional development would surface that was student-driven that made an impact on the schools' culture and how it would be described by participants. School start times and end times differ based on the varying grade levels of participants. The focus in this study was exclusively on the professional development practices in two secondary schools (i.e., Grades 6 through 12) within District X (a pseudonym). The research findings may be different in other schools and districts. The final limitation is that the interview data were collected from school administrators and identified leaders and teachers with the school who chose to participate. A total of 10 participants were selected from two secondary schools as follows: six teachers, two assistant principals, and two principals.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the terms below are defined as follows.

Administrator: An individual who oversees the daily operations of the entire school. The school administrator is responsible for serving as a direct link between students and the community. The school administrator provides strategic leadership when crises surface and provides the school with a positive vision for the future (Bruens, 2012).

Effective teacher: A teacher who uses strategies that motivate students to learn and provides an environment that affords all students the opportunity to experience academic success. Effective teachers hold themselves accountable for the academic success of their students and empower their students to achieve (Veney, 2008).

Low-performing school: A designation given to a school based on its school grade that depends on the state and the various grade levels. Many schools are considered low-performing as a result of low test scores; however, test scores do not make that determination alone. Some public schools are classified as low-performing if a significant number of students are not proficient in core content areas for 2 or more years (Pascual, 2016).

Professional development: Training designed to shape and maintain the morale of the staff through the process of cultivating and enhancing the capabilities of staff through access to specific educational trainings in the work environment or agencies outside of the scope of education. Professional development also attracts higher quality staff to a school or organization (Green & Allen, 2015).

Professional learning community: A group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way, the fundamental purpose of which is to enhance teacher productivity as professionals, for students' ultimate benefit (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p. 27).

Teacher leader: A teacher who has taken on the responsibility of leadership within the school. Teacher leaders provide academic support and resources to teachers as well as distribute the decision-making responsibilities that go beyond the administrative team within the school to model innovative instructional best practices (Bruens, 2012).

Value-added model (VAM): A way to measure and evaluate the teacher's involvement and impact on students' achievement in a specific year by comparing test scores of current students to those of students from previous years (Florida Department of Education, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Professional development is the key to ensuring teachers possess the required knowledge, skills, and approach to promote student success in the classroom. Professional development is also essential to student success because research-based best practices are embedded in engaging lessons and student discourse (Gamrat et al., 2014). The findings of this study should help school leaders and human resource professionals who are involved in cultivating, developing, and implementing professional development understand the importance of empowering effective teachers to provide the tools needed to teach students in low-performing schools. The importance of active professional development includes an understanding of how teaching students in low-performing

schools can influence the relationships, attitudes, and behaviors of low-income youth facing a diverse range of social barriers and environmental concerns. Professional development contributes to supporting the progression of individual and collective group actions that comprise independent study, research, and training.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic context for this study was the impact of professional development on teachers in low-performing schools. The underlying issue related to what professional development is needed in the educational setting is knowing how teachers develop professionally (Evans, 2014). Kraft and Papay (2014) stated school leaders should be specific in their implementation of professional development to mold and shape teachers' approach to on-the-job training and learning. Professional development must be tailored to the exact needs of the school to provide teachers with learning opportunities that are aligned to standards and assessments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). The term professional development is a foundation for reform to how educational leaders can model best and cutting-edge practices and spread information to the targeted audience (Nishimura, 2014). The process of inserting meaningful and productive professional development derived from educational systems that focused on teachers' ability to teach and school leaders' ability to provide the tools required to sustain meaningful learning. Since the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which ensures all children are afforded an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and attain a minimum proficiency level on state standards and state assessments, professional development has been an important component that has made a significant impact on how leaders lead and how teachers teach (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was amended to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which focuses on a rigorous and comprehensive state plan developed to enhance educational results for students, close the achievement gap, increase equity, and improve academic instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). The approach to how teachers learn has

transformed the fundamental thought process that connects thought-provoking

professional development to quality teaching and instruction and high-quality teaching

related to student achievement (Stewart, 2014). Desimone (2009) stated continued

professional development and professional learning communities for teachers are

essential to improving quality learning in schools. Professional development has been a

consistent best practice to monitor whether the organization can maintain a focus on

content knowledge, structured learning activities, and active learning (Kraft & Papay,

2014). Professional development structures are designed to encourage and facilitate

activities that will have substance, increase the knowledge of content among teachers,

and change the perspective of previous practices in the classroom and the scope of what

quality instruction and learning activities empower teachers to continue to make a long-

term impact on students (Cheng & Phillips, 2014).

Professional development provides teachers the ability to focus on their needs as

well as enhance their ability to become more involved in the learning process with

impactful results. The act of being fully engaged in the process of planning and

executing instruction and activities is perceived to be the cornerstone of a solid structure

for meaningful and successful learning for both teachers and students (Finnigan, 2012).

Teachers who participate in professional development have to embrace the coaching

aspect to enhance teacher–student collaboration to increase test scores and academic

achievement to sustain the best practices taught from the professional development (Kraft

& Papay, 2014). However, the process of implementation and its impact on the learning

environment is something that is up for debate and in question for leaders of school

districts and schools that are emphasizing fluid teacher development and professional

development (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Modern-day professional development provides additional tools such as engaging follow-up activities or progress monitoring practices to evaluate whether the best practices provided are implemented in the school by the teachers. Whitworth and Chiu (2015) stated professional development is designed to improve how teachers teach to promote strategic student learning. Rather than teachers participating in interest-based learning and working together with similar learners, prearranged professional developments are the standard professional development style. The academic foundation of the school requires the need for systematic thought-provoking and of substance professional development to promote teachers to have the desire to be enduring learners and educators for students of all cultures and diverse backgrounds. Active professional development provides schools and organizations with tools for teacher learning and adapts their perception of what is deemed as active professional development to increase student achievement.

Professional Development

The quality of teaching is essential to influencing how students learn and professional development enables educational leaders to determine which instructional best practices can enhance student learning and achievement (Chapman, 2012). Attention must be given to the purpose and rationale for professional development and how it can make an impact on the educational setting. Professional development also places attention on the style of leadership and concern of using professional development as a means of increasing student achievement and school improvement (Mitchell, 2013). Professional development is designed to provide teachers with best practices that will result in changes in how the participants embrace the professional knowledge and skills

over time (Chapman, 2012). Professional development targets practical approaches to developing lasting best practices and training designed to meet the specific needs of the school or organization (Donnell & Gettinger, 2015). The wide range of professional development training affords participants with the opportunity to embrace and expose new concepts to learnings with the expectation that the practice gains will sustain over time to become the culture of the organization (Nishimura, 2014).

Historically, professional development involved a direct process of educators attending training and then attempting to embed what they learned into their classrooms (Otter, 2019). Integrating classroom best practices based on the professional development provided is essential if teachers and school leaders want long-lasting results to sustain over time to remain impactful to all stakeholders in the school (Otter, 2019). Teachers' professional development affects their choice of activities, how they engage in the educational setting, and how they inquire about instructional best practices. In many instances, in a large forum or group setting, the facilitator is focused on meeting the capacity of the room rather than the meaningful support or accountability of the apparent professional development learning (Hadfield & Jopling, 2016). The administrator or staff who is responsible for embedding the professional development for the organization must learn how to assess and evaluate the quality of the professional development and its effectiveness (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Nishimura (2014) stated effective professional development gives teachers the ability to be active and increase the rigor in their classrooms to become influential teachers with the ability to self-reflect on what is best for their students. School leaders must choose professional development that is in conjunction with the school's goals and needs (Guskey, 2014). Leaders have embedded

professional development into schools though there is not a full consensus on what exactly it will look like and what precisely they want to accomplish (Henderson, 2016).

The whole group approach to professional development is referred to as the "sit and get" approach to training and is not considered a best practice approach to learning. The whole group approach to professional development affords teachers with the reward of receiving credit for attending the professional development session; however, extra support is not provided to ensure the training rendered will sustain over time. In the most traditional form of professional development, mentoring and coaching, as well as face-to-face professional learning communities, are practical approaches regardless of the school setting, culture, and structure as long as the professional development is well planned (Guskey, 2014). The methods and practices of teaching adult learners are discounted when professional development is provided to teachers who work in K-12 schools. A teacher with more than 15 to 20 years of experience will be reluctant to receive or want any professional development that is in isolation because they feel they have already learned the best practice at some point in their career. Veteran teachers will require more than a 1-day training to change their perspective of teaching or embrace a new approach to education. Experienced teachers will be apprehensive about whether the training will work for their students, how they will be able to embed and teach what they have been taught, and what instructional best practice strategies will be most effective in the classroom. Teachers must engage in a variety of interactive and collaborative educational and professional experiences to embrace the new strategies of teaching to feel as if they are a part of the change in the style of teaching rather than feeling they are forced into using one style or implementing the best practices (Taylor et al., 2018).

Professional development for teachers is the best way to encourage effective and quality teaching and instruction, as well as a means to promote school improvement efforts by the school leader (Bayar, 2014). Schools that support extensive teacher professional development that focuses on student learning, quality teaching, and instruction can build a culture of the school that will enable the teachers to assert the essential efforts to improve school morale and culture (Taylor et al., 2018). Professional development is most useful for teachers' classroom practice when all educational stakeholders are actively involved in the learning opportunities and the activities gained from the professional development build upon the teachers' previous knowledge (Little, 2012).

Types of Professional Development

Professional development is a crucial component in increasing and enhancing teachers' knowledge and skill sets to improve their teaching approaches and increase student achievement. Content-focused, active learning, and coherence are three of the featured characteristics that are critical elements of active professional development best practices (Desimone, 2009).

Content-Focused

Content-focused learning in schools is a process in which specific content is facilitated through professional development. This approach to learning is a traditional and effective approach to teach and sustain instructional best practices. Mindich and Lieberman (2012) described content-focused learning as the process of understanding how students learn based on the objectives and purpose of the lesson. Schools' professional development will give participants the ability to understand which best

practices would be best for the students the teacher is teaching during core instruction. A content-focused teacher learning style may be viewed as the most influential professional development style (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). Content-focused professional development links activities to the subject matter of the content. Content-focused professional development focuses on the teacher's knowledge to increase student achievement (Desimone, 2009). Content-focused professional development supports the use of instructional strategies in particular content areas. Collaboration among teachers and administrators to continually review norms can shift how collaborative practices are embedded in content-focused professional development (Stewart, 2014). Content-focused professional development provides teachers and administrators with a deep understanding of the learning objectives and how students learn the content (Stewart, 2014). Content-focused instructional best practices consist of reviewing student data, progress monitoring, implementing meaningful instruction to facilitate learning, analyzing student work, and creating common assessments to monitor student success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Instructional tasks that can be promoted in the professional development activities and relations to depth of learning are reading about resources and attending training are designed to expose the content that is taught and does not have a direct impact on teachers' practices unless the material shown is reinforced through in-depth and monitored exercise (Stewart, 2014). Teachers do not perceive broad professional development that concentrates on the content to be effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). The process of focusing on content means recognizing the professional development activity based on a specific subject or content area to increase the understanding of how students learn. Content-focused professional development

avoids general teaching methods and focuses on specific teaching methods that keep the participants engaged and focused on how students will learn (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000).

Active Learning

Active learning professional development helps teachers become engaged in conversations and student discourse as a piece of professional development activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Meaningful professional development enables educators to participate in the activities they want to use in the classroom (Bayar, 2014). Professional development that involves the active learning approach to learning includes teachers observing and being observed by their peers. This type of observation affords opportunities for teachers and their peers to participate in conversations to discuss the best practices observed. The professional development used in an active learning environment allows teachers to engage in discussion and discourse rather than passively learning by listening to a lecture (Desimone, 2009). Active learning professional development provides opportunities for teachers to receive immediate feedback or make a presentation, rather than passively listening to lectures (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Active learning professional development provides teachers with the ability to direct themselves in the classroom by infusing prior experiences and applying what was learned to their new setting and job responsibility (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Active learning professional development moves teachers away from traditional practices and environments of teaching to involving students in the academic discourse (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

Coherence

Coherence focuses on the extent to which learning is constant with the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the content as it is aligned with district and state standards. The learning opportunities from coherence focused professional development demonstrate the best instructional practices teachers are likely to show in the classroom that will showcase student work (Desimone, 2009). The goals, content, and activities that are in conjunction with the school standards and curriculum address the policies of the school district and state reforms (Desimone & Garet, 2015). The reform movement provides teachers with the needed tools to re-examine and think in-depth about teaching and learning with new approaches to educational best practices.

<center>**Meaningful Professional Development**</center>

The process of developing meaningful professional development with a focus on quality over quantity opens the ability for the organization to cultivate a learning environment that increases the culture of the school by setting new norms and expectations, encouraging the growth mindset of the teachers, and providing opportunities to learn from each other in a safe, judgement-free environment (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). Professional development plays a vital role in addressing the gap between teacher preparation and standards-based modification. Evans (2014) stated the focus of professional development is recognizing how an effective leader will foster an educational environment in which others can grow professionally by demonstrating the best practices acquired from the professional development training. Meaningful and quality professional development can provide teachers and educators at all levels the essential best practices needed to walk into a class and embrace the unforeseen

challenges with confidence as well as be receptive to peer support to have an open mind about the resources, expectations, and standards that will become the new norm (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). Meaningful professional development enables leaders to develop useful and effective strategies and procedures to progress monitor the targeted professional development (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Active professional development empowers teachers to embrace the learning and application components that usually take place in the classroom when the teachers can reflect and plan effectively to practice new best practices (Nishimura, 2014). School-based professional development and professional learning communities allow teachers to work together to identify the needs, resources, and strategies to ensure students can benefit in the classroom (Persky & McLaughlin, 2017).

Effective and meaningful professional development must be targeted, and the structure of activities must address essential areas that will make a direct impact on the school or organization (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Professional development that does not have a reliable or robust content component has the potential to be ineffective and hinder teachers' ability to share new and innovative best practices (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Earlier forms of professional development models that took place during the workday, weekends, and after school were time-consuming and infringed on the personal time of the teachers or educators. Professional development becomes ineffective in increasing teacher instruction and student achievement when there is a disconnect between the professional development activities and school improvement plans, and when feedback or immediate follow-ups that are not directly connected to the purpose of the professional development training (Almuntasheri, Gillies, & Wright, 2016).

Professional development that elevates teachers to become confident in their ability requires a variety of essential needs. Teachers must embrace the learning and school community to assess and build relationships where each stakeholder is respected and heard. Evans (2014) stated that the developmental focus and expectations of the leader for the teachers could develop the level of trust from the staff to establish and maintain systematic best practices and strategies that will meet the needs and welfare of both teachers and students. The framework of professional development goes beyond the scope of the educational community, schools, and school districts. The range of the professional development has a lot to do with how well the professional learning communities can implement the plan of action to review the targets and take responsibility and accountability for the implementation of professional development (Persky & McLaughlin, 2017).

The quality of the professional development and the style of leadership are vital components to empower teachers and educators to become more competent and experts in various forms of curriculum, standards, and technology to ensure that engaging quality instruction is embedded with fidelity (Persky & McLaughlin, 2017). The facilitator of the professional development and the participants must create a consistent plan of action that can sustain over time. Quality and meaningful professional development should be an ongoing part of the day-to-day instruction for teachers to have a consistent conversation and share best practices to be successful and meaningful (Persky & McLaughlin, 2017).

Traditional professional development places a focus on building the infrastructure of the school, teacher, and school leaders (Bayar, 2014). Appropriate levels of

professional development facilitated by outside experts, trainers, and consultants who can share processes and procedures to deliver meaningful instruction are essential to sustainable and traditional professional development. Embedded professional development also denotes to teachers learning that is fundamentally grounded to daily teaching best practices that will enhance the content-specific instruction that will increase student learning and academic achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The takeaways and expectations from the professional development must meet the needs of the educational setting and the students who will benefit from the professional development. The shared processes created by the trainer and school leaders will provide teachers with vivid understanding and skills that can be applied directly to the school setting and instructional best practices (Matherson & Windle, 2017). In turn, schools and educational settings will become better because quality professional development and the systematic implementation of professional development will offer teachers effective ways to implement what they have learned as well as show their understanding of how to embed the new strategies with others (Naizer, Sinclair, & Szabo, 2017).

A targeted specific professional development that focuses on teacher development is an essential approach for student learning (Brasfield, 2016). The scope of professional development encompasses more than the district and school community. The leaders in the school and district have an essential part in deciding which professional development will be the most meaningful. Teachers and other educators play a significant role in the local community by building relationships that cultivate respect among all stakeholders. This approach leads to collaboration among the education community and teachers to increase fluid involvement. At each educational, academic level, it is important that the

school leader choose professional development that has relevance to the teachers and the needs of the school. Therefore, the training will embed strategies of quality as well as develop a conducive environment for learning. The ability to advocate for quality professional development by the teachers provides them with a voice to express their need to enhance their teaching best practices (Brasfield, 2016). Fluid collaboration among teachers and leaders is the key to implementation as well as participation to ensure long-term dedication will be a part of the professional development plan (Madden, 2017).

Professional development that occurs in the optimal setting for learning has a direct impact on its outcomes. The implementation process, the closure/follow-up, and transition of the professional development must complement each other to ensure the core of the professional development is held to high standards and the tools obtained within the training remain useful tools that can transfer back to the classroom (McNamara et al., 2015). It is a best practice to choose professional developments that will be motivating and encouraging for both the facilitator and the participants. These contributing factors help the ability to have stable training and educational setting so the working conditions, innovation, engagement, and curriculum instruction can meet the needs of the students and the culture of the school (McNamara et al., 2015). Targeted school culture has a direct impact on how the educational setting embraces professional learning. Specific professional development can boost the culture and morale of the teachers within the school and enhance the fluidity of the teachers sharing a common practice that will be embedded throughout the school. Positive culture through professional development cultivates members of the staff in the school to develop engaging lesson plans, cooperative learning, and diverse learning styles (Song & Choi, 2017). The empirical

research shows positive academic achievement is attached to a positive school climate when professional development is meaningful and impactful to the school (Capp, Astor, & Gilreath, 2018). When the positive school culture is embedded with fidelity, traditions, values, and beliefs are developed; therefore, the process of getting things done systematically, while addressing goals for student achievement, remains the focus of the professional development. An embedded school culture will result in more engaging lessons for the students and better collaboration among peers to infuse old practices and new best practices for future learning (Kruse & Louis, 2010). The positive educational environment established by the school climate enhances academic achievement, teacher retention, progressive student development, and school success (Cohen & Brown, 2013). The implementation of meaningful professional development is designed based on participation by teachers in recognizing the need and creating a relevant content-specific professional development plan that also meets the needs through follow-up activities, assessment, collaboration, discussion, and ongoing observations with feedback (Cohen & Brown, 2013).

Florida Standards for Professional Development

Florida's teaching standards are designed to provide excellent best practices, services, and resources in collaboration with all stakeholders, communities, and partners in education. The standards were developed in conjunction with national and state expectations and principles for effective teaching. The purpose of Florida's professional development system is to provide school district leaders with the essential tools and best practices to increase student achievement, help teachers implement classroom instructional strategies that will encourage rigor and relevance through the curriculum,

and prepare students to be productive citizens in society as well as continuing education and entering the workforce (Florida Department of Education, 2018). Professional developments for the State of Florida are aligned with the standards adopted by the state, which supports the conceptual framework for the standard that was implemented by the National Staff Development Council (Learning Forward; Florida Department of Education, 2018). Florida's professional development standards are divided into three levels: the educator, school, and district. Within each of the levels, the standards are broken down into focus areas. The standards assess the planning, learning, implementation, and evaluation of professional development activities based on the standard modeled and recognized as best practices to ensure systems or plans are created for specific improvement. The standards embedded within the three levels have specific expectations pending the purpose of the professional development for the educator, school, or district (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The professional development provided to Florida's educators influences every aspect of the education profession in Florida. The Florida Department of Education created the standards for all three levels to ensure school districts across the state share the same best practice approach for teachers and those involved in the teaching profession (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The concentration and scope are for all of the stakeholders in the educational circle at the state and local areas to work collaboratively to create a systematic and coordinated approach to professional development that can be shared among all collaborative partners in education. The three levels (i.e., educators, school, and community) have a direct impact on closing the achievement gap if the

implementation process, monitoring process, needs, and data to support the purpose of the professional development are explicitly expressed by each level.

The Florida Department of Education has provided school districts with direction to help school leaders know what the professional development will consist of when facilitating the training. The Florida Department of Education has defined the development process to plan and develop consultation and significant components of the system to conform to the statutory requirements to increase instructional strategies that encourage rigor throughout the curriculum (see Appendix B).

Impact of Professional Learning Communities

Successful teachers are engaged in in-depth conversations to learn from their peers and share best practices to increase student achievement. Professional learning communities enable teachers to collaborate to share ideas that facilitate growth and provide encouragement to each other and their students (Barton & Stepanek, 2012). The relationship component that is developed in professional learning communities provides meaningful collaboration where teachers can grow and respect their peers' knowledge and improve the teaching and learning that came from professional development (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). Professional learning communities are grounded in pedagogy, theory, research, and innovation. The approach associated with the professional learning communities is based on the need and culture of the educational environment, the social and situational knowledge base of the educator, and the social development of teachers (Pareja Roblin & Margalef, 2013). Recommended professional leaning communities afford educators with opportunities to use data and student work and assessment to progress monitor efficiently (Toh, Jamaludin, Hung, & Chua, 2014).

Professional learning communities are intended to engage teachers to collaborate and contribute their thoughts about what professional development would be best for the school setting (Pareja Roblin & Margalef, 2013). The collaboration is essential to teachers working together toward a common goal and bringing that goal to reality without concentrating on different beliefs and expectations or differences in opinions, which can cause tension and disrupt the teachers' desire to work together. During the professional learning communities, vivid communication is needed to explain how, why, and in what timeframe new ideas will be disseminated among the team. When teachers can take the necessary time to investigate the work of their students, they can develop professional learning communities that can be targeted for systematic lessons and assessments (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). A teacher is driven by the motivation to actualize; school leaders are reconsidering how learning is taking place as well as considering making changes to develop a creative, outside of the box learning environment (Toh et al., 2014). Leadership plays an essential role in diffusing and maintaining school-based interactions across learning groups within the school or district. Professional learning communities and school improvement are designed to decrease teacher isolation and create collaboration to share the expertise of peers in the school to sustain schoolwide initiatives and instructional strategies to increase student achievement. Hargreaves (2010) stated that for school improvement to sustain, the foundation of the professional learning communities has to revolve around improving schools' systems while holding school leaders accountable for the growth of teachers in the classroom. The classroom environment must include conversation, peer discourse, and collaboration to cultivate engaging practices to enhance teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 2010).

The school culture has a direct impact on professional development and how professional learning communities will function. Professional development and professional learning communities can have a direct effect on teachers' skills and approaches to teaching students if the professional development is sustained over time (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Professional learning communities ensure teachers have opportunities to embrace and learn best practices that are innovative to cultivate a new way to instruct diverse learners (Harris & Jones, 2010). Professional development in schools is a continuous body of work and training that is monitored by school leaders. Professional learning communities in schools are strategies and in-depth conversations that afford teachers and stakeholders a voice and decrease teacher isolation and increase the sharing of best practices with the intent of reviewing results (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

Both professional development and professional learning communities are viewed as powerful change agents to increase student achievement and to enhance teachers' use of best practices in the classroom (Hord, 2015). It is imperative that teacher professional development and professional learning communities can shift collaborative practices and integrate the academic skills students require to be prepared for both workplace and college readiness. Professional learning communities thrive when professional development training and professional learning communities are on the same level of focus and participants are invested in the body of work they are both attempting to accomplish (Stewart, 2014). If both groups are not comfortable settings, neither the participant of the professional development nor the professional learning communities will feel comfortable together. This, in turn, makes it difficult to offer or receive

constructive criticism or feedback in a helpful manner (Stewart, 2014). When both professional development and professional learning communities within the school can build capacity and they both become the norm in the school, this allows for reform and structures to be deliberate and purposeful (Harris & Jones, 2010). The foundation of both professional development and professional learning communities is to provide support to the teachers and embed a level of collaboration to extend teacher roles to increase teacher efficacy and effectiveness (Harris & Jones, 2010).

Influence of Transformational Leadership

The most critical instructional leader in school is the principal or educational leader, as he or she is tasked with cultivating the organizational conditions in which teachers work best (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Leaders develop and share content knowledge with teams that includes a clear mission, vision, and specific strategies that encourage school success. Transformational leaders are exemplary leaders who adopt a culture that encourages relationships between aspiring leaders and willing followers (Thompson, 2012). Appropriate leadership affects the performance, culture, climate, and well-being of employees. The diverse leadership style of a transformational leader and the ability to contribute to the professional development of employees is a strength that leads to the culture, climate, and well-being of the team (Mourão, 2018). Though it is essential to manage the educational setting by attempting to control the organization, leadership requires the ability to lead by example and set clear goals to cultivate positive change within teachers' behaviors toward professional development and learning new best practices for teaching (Thompson, 2012). There are still a substantial number of schools that are considered to be turnaround schools that demonstrate characteristics of

low test scores, poverty, low graduation rates, and discipline concerns, all of which make it difficult to retain quality teachers (Cisneros, 2016). The turnaround school must have influential educational leaders who will embed a level of integrity to retain staff and use innovative resources to cultivate momentum with the staff and teachers to motivate the teachers to embrace the vision and mission of the school. Transformational leaders are essential to turning around schools to meet the standards that are set by the state Department of Education. Transformational leaders increase teacher efficacy and increase teachers' desire to want to improve their instruction by including innovative instructional best practices through professional development (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Cisneros (2016) stated transformational leaders could motivate teachers and staff by increasing their importance of the school's goal and encouraging them to exceed their personal views by influencing, motivating, stimulating the teachers to change to the expectation of the transformational leader for the sake of the organization. Transformational leaders can develop professional developments that can influence, motivate, and stimulate the relationship with the teachers that changes their mindset to embrace the vision of what will become of the school (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). A transformational leader who creates professional developments that can allow teachers to share goals and encourages innovative ways to find solutions and maintain systemic communication facilitates the ability of all to be engaged (Cisneros, 2016). A transformational leader can use different leadership styles to make the teachers and staff feel their participation in professional development by creating a vision that is meaningful and increases teacher commitment to the school (Mourão, 2018). A transformational leader can focus on relationships between leadership and learning.

Zepeda (2013) provided three ways to merge appropriate professional development while forging the relationship between leadership and learning:

- The styles of leadership most closely related to enhanced student learning will be identified.

- The focus on what needs to be done to raise levels of student learning will be clarified.

- The argument will be made for an approach to educational reform that links instructional leadership and school improvement (Zepeda, 2013).

The competitive school environment has placed much prominence upon the need to increase the standards to improve the school's outcomes from standardizing testing (Zepeda, 2013). Professional developments that focus on cultural changes that sustain school improvement are more likely to occur with transformational leaders because this style of leader concentrates on the people who are fully engaged in relationships and requires a method that looks to address feelings and beliefs (Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, & Azeez, 2014). Teacher efficacy and teaching experience are indicators of how well the teachers will embrace the professional development of an educational setting desire. A transformational leader committed to the educational organization and profession focuses on student learning by internalizing and analyzing how to change teachers' attitudes and increase engagement toward the professional development as well as the teaching profession (Ibrahim et al., 2014).

Leadership and Professional Development in Struggling Schools

Educational leadership is an essential and significant component of a school's academic success. Competent administrators and principals lead effective schools.

School effectiveness is the focal point for studying the impact of the educational leader on the students in the school and their success (Suber, 2012). Educational leaders in schools are continually looking for innovative approaches to build learning communities to facilitate professional developments that will maintain the desired culture. School leaders have a unique and profound influence on student achievement, and the provided professional development is correlated to student achievement (Suber, 2012). School structures, processes, and procedures keep the central focus and strategically shape the belief that academic instruction is the most critical aspect of the school (Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2013). School leaders provide professional developments that are directed to enhance teacher learning, student success, and teacher best practices in their desired teaching content (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Professional development leaders focus on using managerial or leadership skills that will infuse meaningful curriculum and instructional strategies into the academic setting (Desimone et al., 2013). School leaders who have a deep understanding of why specific professional developments are chosen for their schools begin to build a broad-based understanding of leadership. The professional development based on the board base leadership approach plays an essential role in school improvement by reinforcing the training to contribute effectively to the instructional development of teachers and staff (Evans, 2014). The school leader's purpose is to provide the teachers and staff with the tools to facilitate the use of high-quality best practices with their students. The best practices will give teachers every possible way to maintain effective teaching practices (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). The principal is responsible for creating and developing professional developments, supporting teachers while holding the teachers accountable, and, most importantly, being

an instructional leader (Suber, 2012). Therefore, creating a link that connects the characteristic of the school, climate, and culture must coincide with the instructional aspect of the principal to ensure the appropriate student achievement is attained.

Ensuring teachers are consistently placed in appropriate educational settings is essential to building capacity within the schools. Moving teachers around in struggling school or high poverty schools does not improve academic achievement, nor does it assist in building the culture of professional development and accountability to retain effective instructional teachers (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Educational leaders encourage and support professional development in schools by reinforcing the expectations, preparations, and strategic training to contribute to growing the staff effectively (Evans, 2014). Through strategic planning and identifying systems to help teachers enhance classroom instruction, teachers become more willing to work in low-performing schools (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Leaders in schools tend to focus their professional development on developing ways to improve teaching practices, collaboration, and teacher self-efficacy that will extend beyond the classroom. Leadership focused on professional development provides minor support but can build leadership skills for teachers and gradually accumulate professional experiences and self-efficacy (Hunzicker, 2012). School leaders take charge of how the teacher and staff professional development looks within their school buildings. Successful leaders in schools work collaboratively to facilitate change, make keen decisions, and convert followers into school leaders and leaders into contributors to change (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000). Teachers who participate in professional development in struggling schools are faced with ongoing changes in instruction daily. Deciphering between student achievement and student

growth as well as being proficient academically and earning learning gains to ensure

instruction are reliable indicators of whether teachers can predict the level or increase in

student achievement growth (Desimone et al., 2013). The connection between

professional development and strategic instruction creates a partnership between

professional learning community changes and instructional best practices (Desimone et

al., 2013). Teachers who were engaged in professional developments that were content-

focused had an increase in standardized testing posttest scores (Blazar & Kraft, 2017).

School leaders who are culturally aware of the schools they represent are more

knowledgeable and attentive to the needs of the teachers. Professional development that

is focused on the needs of the students allows for the teachers to meet the needs of the

students academically, socially, culturally, and emotionally. Standard bending that is

strategically aligned to the school culture and intervention with the school's core

academic priorities has a direct impact on closing the achievement gap and increasing

student achievement (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). Schellenberg and Grothaus

(2009) stated implementing professional development that caters to students who are in

need both academically and socially reinforces the soft skills that are needed to be

productive students in schools as well as in the community. The implementation of a

culturally blended intervention shows a positive impact on achievement for the students

participating and providing experiences that are often unintentional for the students but

have a lasting impact on their lives (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). Professional

development that is geared to the culture of the school should be immediate, and the new

best practices should foster reflection and peer collaboration. The reflection and

collaboration provide for the professional learning communities will create rigorous and

higher-order thinking for the participating teachers (Landa, 2011). Different approaches

to how students learn in various school settings have to be based on the culture and needs

of the school. Professional development using the blended format gives students the

ability to be flexible in how they embrace learning and teachers the ability to be flexible

in how they are teaching standards because the lesson will be based on culturally relevant

instruction for the students. Consistent and ongoing professional development can help

teachers to accept and become more culturally aware and more knowledgeable

(Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009). When school leaders and teachers are successful with

blending their instruction and standards for the diverse learner, a high level of instruction

and clarity can influence academic growth and achievement for the students to close the

achievement gap. Standard blending provides school leaders with the ability to develop

plans of instruction to address the needs of low-achieving students while refining a more

receptive school culture and climate based on students' needs.

Leadership in Professional Development and Professional Learning Communities

Effective leaders in schools provide teachers with various opportunities and

essential resources to learn and implement best practices (Almy & Tooley, 2012).

Professional development provides teachers with ways to stay engaged intellectually to

transfer resources to the professional learning communities to make sure the best

practices gained from the professional development can be transferred to the classroom

for the students (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). Educator leaders encourage

professional learning communities and professional development in their schools that will

promote teacher creativity as well as student achievement. It is imperative that when

facilitators are providing professional development, the traditional form of "sit and get" is

not likely to cause changes in how teachers implement best practices and produce increase student achievement (Almy & Tooley, 2012). Similar to students, administrators and teachers need various opportunities to embrace social systems to express and apply what was learned in the professional development to the teachers the professional learning communities. Professional learning communities provide teachers with a variety of ways to stay current with trending curriculums, student learning best practices, and instruction (Evans, 2014).

Leading and cultivating staff and leading professional development are effective continuing best practices that leaders must always demonstrate to set the standard to achieve the expected high standards within the school (Evans, 2014). Leaders who are designing what professional development will be embedded in the school must also be committed and encompass the skills to empower and sustain the team and challenge, motivate, and influence the school and groups to attain the high goals and expectations. The motivation of the school leader in choosing the appropriate professional development for the school building is increasing the competence of teachers and staff and the level of accountability to implement strategies and best practices to ensure teachers have the skills and knowledge to support the transition and transformation of the school's student achievement (Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2012). Leaders in schools that target specific professional development ground with standards will increase student achievement, student outcomes, and sustainability when the administrator is fully engaged in the training with the teachers and staff (Spanneut et al., 2012). Leaders must make data-driven decisions to design appropriate professional development for their schools that targets daily challenges related to test scores, student behavior, and school culture. Data

collection is an essential element to address immediate reform. The implementation of

the data-driven decision to determine professional development is most appropriate for

the schools to ensure that professional development is catered to the school's needs

(Keith, 2008). The leader must understand and be engaged in data just as much as the

leader is involved in the stakeholders. Sharing the lead role among the teachers and

parents keep the stakeholders a part of the decision-making and employing the strategies

to making better decisions and best practices and hold all accountable. Precise outlines

leaders follow regarding data are the following:

> Develop a strategy for the continuous collection, analysis, and reporting of data,
> Share results with teachers, parents, and students, Use the results to develop and
> revise curriculum, Use data to add to the understanding of the results of
> standardized achievement tests, Articulate the relationship between school-based
> data and standardized tests, Work with parents and other members of the
> community as an advocate for a broader system of school indicators, Provide
> students with incentives that increase their interest and use of performance
> feedback to enhance their learning experiences. (Bennett, as cited in Keith, 2008,
> p. 31)

The purpose of the leader embedding professional development in a school is to

enhance the professional knowledge, attitude, and skills so the students will improve

academically (Bizzell, 2011). Linking professional development and students' ability to

learn and be engaged in the learning process is the responsibility of the school leader.

Linking professional development to how students are performing academically is a

challenge and can become complicated as it pertains to principals to gain the necessary

skill to improve student achievement and culture of the school (Bizzell, 2011).

Professional development for school leaders should have an emphasis on job-embedded

skills so teachers can implement the practices gained from the training to the school in

context. Professional development that is chosen by the school leader must address the

needs of the school and the needs of the school leader as they pertain to the future of the

school. Professional development must be able to sustain and plans to progress monitor

various learning opportunities and formats to adjust to the staff learning style. Finally,

quality professional development must be considered when scaffolding the curriculum to

reinforce ideas and conditions that the leader will encounter (Goldring, Preston, & Huff,

2012). The principal should be deemed as an instructional learner who can facilitate an

engaging school that demonstrates modeling and celebrating what is expected from both

teachers and peers (Bizzell, 2011). A school leader's ability to create hands-on

professional development for the staff that allows a collaborative culture and structured

will facilitate team building that will help schools and professional learning communities

function in an effective manner to increase collaboration among teachers and peers and

student achievement (Matherson & Windle, 2017). School leaders must demonstrate the

importance of why professional development would be the best choice for the school.

The principal or school leader must also model investment and commitment to

professional development and progress monitoring strategies to ensure the professional

development is meaningful. School leaders and principals who create a culture in which

there is collaboration and discourse among teachers and staff, process and procedures are

embedded, and structure is developed with a streamlined focus will support the school to

function effectively (Owen, 2014). The principal should play an involved role in how to

provide time for collaboration during the school day. Conversations with the team to

create systems for collaborative inquiry are essential to identify the specific professional

development that is needed to increase teacher performance and student achievement.

Developing essential questions to guide meaningful inquiry collaborative teams can

increase collaboration among peers and thought-provoking instruction for engaging

questioning for the students. Identifying and tracking student achievement goals and data enables school leaders and teachers to use data to lead instruction. School leaders must require results and progress monitoring for any professional development that will play an essential component of the culture of the school (Owen, 2014).

The level of progress monitoring and instructional supervision is important to cultivate a fluid learning community for students, teachers, and staff. School leaders who have recognized that establishing learning communities that support professional development have a direct connection to making sure the professional development is embedded with fidelity (Watson, 2014). It is recommended, based on research, that professional development and professional learning communities change the scope of leadership toward the teacher to facilitate dialogue, inquiry, and problem-solving for both the school leaders and teachers. The implementation of traditional styles of evaluation that infuse observation by the school leader to evaluate teachers and progress monitor the goals set at the start of the year is dictated by the type of professional development that is chosen by the school leader. The school leader can create schoolwide process and procedures that connect professional development expectations that will have a direct impact on planning and decision that has an immediate effect on the school. Teacher engagement and discourse help facilitate making decisions and building the school community to come together as one voice (Watson, 2014). Therefore, the vision, team building, processes and procedures to address progress monitoring play a significant role in the principal or school leader's ability to increase student achievement based on data. However, the teacher learning must remain laser-focused on the training core values and not lose the purpose of the training and why the practice was considered for the school by

the leader (Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengtson, 2014). The process of connecting both professional development and professional learning communities requires engaging various sources by adopting internal and external progress monitoring, ongoing data collection, and job-embedded provide the students and teacher with relevancy, goals, and self-direction (Zepeda et al., 2014).

Summary

The main focus within this study was on determining the ways in which student-centric professional development affected both teachers and students in schools that had a trend of being not successful based on the Florida Department of Education School Grade tool. Professional development is a component of learning that is only effective when teachers and staff can infuse best practices and progress monitoring to identify what they need to be an innovative teacher in the classroom (Botha & Herselman, 2015).

Principals, as well as other educational leaders, have a crucial part in selecting the appropriate professional development to create the climate, culture, and the quality of professional development teachers will obtain in the school. Gaining clarity of the culture, studying the trends and norms, and knowing the historical contributing factors that have shaped why schools are successful or not is based on the strategic professional development and progress monitoring that is facilitated through professional learning communities. It is vital that when the school leader is addressing the culture and climate through professional development that the leader can interpret the school character, whether it is positive or negative, to reinforce the positive and convert a negative back to positive culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Quality and traditional professional development helps with creating a positive culture within the school as well as increases teachers' ability to teach and develop excellent opportunities for peers to learn from professional development. It is equally essential to create professional developments that will allow teachers to embrace change rather than being the change agent (Hunzicker, 2012). Traditional professional development can be stimulating by motivating teachers to facilitate rigorous curriculum instruction and engagement tools that gain buy-in, no matter the style of professional development. Quality professional development provides teachers with various levels of experience the tools to tackle classroom challenges with professional learning communities that can support their idea and actions (Grissom, Viano, & Selin, 2016).

Further Research

The research related to both professional development and professional learning communities is still ongoing and changing as the demand for school accountability increases. Previous research on professional development addressed the importance of school community involvement as a vibrant component of how the teachers and staff respond. The act of giving teachers time to reflect and inquire about what best practices would be important to their learning environment is essential to ensuring the appropriate professional development is embedded to increase student achievement and teachers' use of instructional best practices. The roles and responsibilities of the school leader are in question as they pertain to selecting and developing learning communities in the educational setting as an option to traditional professional development. More research is needed on how to strategically and systematically provide fluid and transparent opportunities for teachers to get the most out of professional learning communities based

on the selected professional development selected by the school leader. Innovative and creative professional development and professional learning communities are essential to capture the need for choosing and benefiting from the detailed training provided to the school. Despite the difference in opinions many may have about how professional development, the impact of professional development on instructional best practices and teaching practices can boost student achievement and change the school culture.

School leaders and the principal have a direct impact on a school's culture; therefore, choosing the appropriate professional development is critical to the school design and structure to ensure student achievement. The school leaders can shape the culture of the school by understanding the historical culture of the school and analyzing the school trends and norms. Embracing the mission and core values of the school, as well as acknowledging the pros and cons of the school, can shape the community's views of the educational setting. The professional development chosen by the leader will control and transform a negative viewpoint by reinforcing what positive aspects are working.

Professional development research consistently restates that professional development is efficient when the collaboration is integrated into teachers' daily classroom practices. An embedded follow-up activity is important to detect the gaps in the teachers' ability to teach (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Quality professional development provides concrete indicators of what quality professional development and professional learning communities should entail. Both professional development and professional learning community strategies expose teachers to best practices that transfer

to the classroom to promote student achievement and culture in the school that facilitates professional growth.

More research to learn about how school leaders make the critical decisions of what professional development is needed to meet the needs of the teachers and students. More importantly, it is important to explore how educational settings can affect the culture and student achievement of a school. Developing a plan is the start of the change. A sit and get or one-time progress monitoring workshop diminishes the value of the professional development and the fluid collaboration in the professional learning communities. The ability of the teachers and staff to engage in ongoing progress monitoring of professional development and professional learning communities provides teachers the ability to embrace high-performance instructional practices for teachers and student achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This chapter contains details of the qualitative design used to conduct the current study. It includes information about the researcher's ability to access the population, an overall description of the population demographics, and sampling strategies. The open-ended qualitative questions and the collection of data are also explained.

This study was designed to examine teachers' experiences with student-centric professional development and professional learning communities designed to help build culture, increase student achievement, and enhance the productivity of teachers in low-performing schools. The sample comprised self-selected teachers and school administrators with specific characteristics (i.e., teaching experience 1 to 30 years, age 21 to 60 years, number of career or school/job changes one to 30) as well as background characteristics (i.e., positions served in the educational setting) and Florida's professional development standards, school culture/morale, and administrative support. The researcher examined the background characteristics of the educators and administrators that had an impact on choosing and implementing professional development.

Qualitative research in education, as described by Creswell (2014), affords researchers the ability to ask general to broad questions, gain the perspectives from the participants, and collect data that consist of words from the participants. Qualitative research is based on in-depth and formal contact with individuals. The researcher is responsible for uncovering the meaning of the context from the viewpoints of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2014). Through a qualitative research design, researchers can look for an understanding of how individuals embrace their experiences.

Qualitative research consists of a process that includes creating concepts, theories, and hypotheses; building abstractions; and examining existing theory (Arghode, 2012). In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary collector and analyzer of the data. When collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher can be responsive to a chosen framework and adjust to the circumstances.

A descriptive qualitative study affords the ability to capture useful data to break down through a systematic inductive process. The impact of Florida's professional development standards on school culture professional development and the school culture was explored using the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher anticipated that connections would be able to be drawn between student-centric professional development designed to enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers in low-performing schools. Researchers want meaningful and useful information to focus on the background perspective of an individual view or occurrence. In-depth interviews are the primary method used to capture data on lived experiences and personal circumstances. This research study consisted of personal experiences that were compared and analyzed to ascertain the fundamental and primary structures of specific professional development activities/training and their effectiveness on school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers in low-performing schools.

The methodology for this study, the usage, advantages, and disadvantages were examined as part of the method. The focus was on the potential influences of required professional development on Florida teachers who were actively engaged in professional development in the last 12 months. Purposive sampling was used in this study to focus

on administrators and teachers. Patton, Parker, and Tannehill (2015) noted that appropriate sampling at specific school locations with a focus on specific professional development is essential to understanding the rationale for why a school is embedding the targeted professional development. The administrators and teachers were recruited for one-on-one interviews based on the characteristic of being a teacher, school leader, or staff development administrator. Participants were self-selected volunteers who met the prescribed characteristics.

The focus of this study was on developing results based on the data collected through the method of interviews. The results can be used to establish a specific case such as the views of administrators and break down the data patterns. Open-ended interviews were used to recognize explicit influences to define why specific professional development was chosen to focus on student achievement. To ensure the elimination of research bias or influence of data, Rev.com was used to identify patterns provided by the participants engaging in the study.

Design and Rationale

Data collection occurred by asking open-ended interview questions. The interview questions were intended to enable the participants to reflect on professional learning communities and professional development concerns and impacts. This approach to research fit the study's purpose of examining the impact of student-centric professional development on teachers and student achievement. Open-ended interviews were used to obtain information about the specific experiences of the participants and relied on the researcher's ability to query and reflect throughout the interviewing process to gain more in-depth insight on the study topic and problem. The questions from the

open-ended interviews were the same for each interviewee to ensure consistency and assist with expediting the interviews to analyzing the data (Mansour, Heba, Alshamrani, & Aldahmash, 2014). Interviewing the sample participants about their experience in professional development enabled the researcher to understand better the types of professional development activities that were most useful and impactful for effective teachers and learning communities at their schools.

Sample and Population

The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit participants who volunteered to join the study. This method provided the researcher the ability to ensure every person who met the requirements would be invited to be interviewed. The K-12 teachers who participated in this study had engaged in professional development within the past 12 months or were school-level administrators employed in the school within the last 12 months. The sample included 10 participants (two principals, two assistant principals, six teachers/teacher leaders). All of the participants were from K-12 secondary schools in District X (a pseudonym), which covers Grades 6 through 12. The interviews assisted with answering the research question of what student-centric professional development might be implemented by school leaders to enhance the culture, student achievement, and productivity of teachers in a low-performing school. The researcher used the collected data to determine whether the teachers and the administrators agreed with the types of effective and ineffective professional development activities. The use of open-ended interviews allowed administrators to gain input from staff development employees from the school, school administrators, and district personnel. The sample size of 10 was dependent upon the purpose of the study, reliability and credibility, the interest and the

time frame to complete the research, and what reliable resources were available.

Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) noted that qualitative studies do not have

definite rules for the sample size. Therefore, researchers in qualitative studies ensure

they have more than enough samples to produce sound research.

Instrumentation

An open-ended interview is a method that enables a researcher to provide an

intimate environment in which to ask questions face-to-face, gain in-depth clarification of

a participant's response to the question, probe to extend, or obtain a better understanding

of the reaction of the participant interviewed. There are a variety of qualitative

interviewing methods for research. In many cases, the interviews most commonly used

are the standardized open-ended interview, informal conversational interview, and formal

guided interview (Mikėnė, Gaižauskaitė, & Valavičienė, 2013). Open-ended interviews

give the researcher the ability to process and learn from the participants. In this study,

interviews provided the participating teachers the ability to reflect on how their

professional development experience linked to the classroom. Open-ended interviews

enabled the researcher to gain meaningful insight into the administrators' views of the

effectiveness of the professional development provided to the teachers to help them meet

the "effective" status of Florida's professional development standards. The researcher

developed an interview protocol that was used as a guide (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

The study site was District X and a copy of the approval letter was included in the

IRB submission. After receiving committee approval of the proposal and approval from

NLU's IRB, recruitment began and interviews were scheduled with individuals who volunteered to participate in the study.

Data were collected through one-on-one interviews using open-ended, semi-structured questions. A copy of the research instrument is included in Appendix A. The instrument contained seven general demographic items and 12 open-ended, semi-structured questions that were used during the one-on-interviews.

Before the start of each interview, informed consent was reviewed and all participants were assured they were volunteers who could withdraw their participation at any time. All data were stored at the home of the researcher in a hidden and locked location to be destroyed 3 years after the completion of the project.

Each interview was conducted at a time and location convenient and comfortable for the participant. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each and were conducted using a method of the participant's choice: in-person at a closed and private setting, on the telephone, or using web-based technology (e.g., Skype, FaceTime, etc.). The researcher ensured a private, confidential setting for the interview and engaged participants in conversation to gain in-depth clarification of their responses, probe for or extend further inquiry, or obtain a better understanding as needed with appropriate and relevant follow-up questions.

If participants verbally agreed, audio recording was used to capture their responses to questions and to facilitate data transcription and analysis. If a participant did not consent to be recorded, the researcher took copious notes during the interview. The audio recordings were only accessed and used by the researcher to ensure the quality and integrity of participants' responses. A researcher's journal was also maintained

throughout the interview process to record and collect any additional information offered, such as any significant nonverbal observations noticed by the researcher.

Recruitment

Participants were teachers, school leaders, and school administrators who had been participants of the various professional development and teaching at the schools for 12 months. The interviews contained a focus on gaining data that would assist with answering the research question of what student-centric professional development needs might be implemented by school leaders to enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers of low-performing students in a low-performing school.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who self-selected as volunteers for the study based on the criteria above. All potential participants were from secondary schools in District X, ranging from Grades 6 through 12. The researcher contacted two secondary school principals to share the reason for the contact and seek permission to visit their school campus and send out emails and letters to share the goal of the study. After sending out the email, the researcher waited for responses and selected 10 participants from the pool of eligible participants who volunteered and wanted to participate in the study.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Signed informed consent forms were used and each participant needed to return to the researcher a signed consent form before interviews commenced to collect data. A copy of the Informed Consent Form is included in Appendix B. The form contained information about the study's purpose and procedures as well as participants' right to

decline participation without fear. Individuals were also informed of their right to stop and withdraw participation at any time without explanation or fear of reprisals.

Risk and Benefits

There were few to no anticipated risks associated with the study. Interviews were private and confidential, no participant identities were used, data were secured with password protection, and confidential handling of all study-related materials was practiced to protect the participants' privacy. All information was treated as highly confidential and will be protected in the researcher's home under lock and key for 3 years after the completion of the study, after which these materials will be appropriately destroyed by shredding of hardcopies and purging/deleting of digital files.

Potential benefits of the study included learning more about the types of student-centric professional development activities and practices that will enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers in low-performing schools. Findings may be used by school district leaders to enhance the professional development program or contribute to other school districts or organizations in embedding similar best practices. Another benefit of this study is to add to the collective knowledge of professional development practices that positively affect secondary schools.

<div align="center">

Analysis

</div>

Florida's best practices for professional development for teachers are built on the four standards of planning, learning, implementation, and evaluation according to standards modeled after Learning Forward (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The researcher studied the trends of the data collected and developed a process to make

sense of the data. The researcher concentrated on common words or word phrases as well as participants' actions while capturing the participants' responses and lived experiences gained from professional development. The participants of the study also were an essential component of the school culture and school environment, and therefore data generated from their responses provided insight into the participants' perceptions of effectiveness on Florida's teacher professional development standards. Data collection and analysis combine as a process of bringing an understanding of the data.

Data collected from participant interview responses were recorded to ensure fidelity of responses using Rev Notes software to recognize consistencies and patterns. To process and analyze the interview data, the researcher used Yin's (2015) inductive coding method, which allowed the research to materialize from the responses of the raw data. The inductive coding method affords the researcher the ability to turn raw qualitative data into useful data without the influence of preconceived thoughts or assumptions but allowing the idea to surface from the raw data. Yin suggested specific terms such as "why" and "how" to confirm the legitimacy of the interview response and to avoid influence or biases of their investigation. Yin affirmed that a dependable researcher is a person who captures response in real-time of the individuals being interviewed and documents the valued information or responses to include the personal interviewer biases. Yin's method was essential because the participants' responses did not come from prior research, but from what the participants experienced while being interviewed. Inductive coding was beneficial to the research because it ensured no misunderstandings could be considered to continue the research because the participants' responses were current and built strictly on the involvement of the participants (Belz &

Binder, 2017). The research question used in this study were the basis for identifying

how professional development can help students, teachers, and administrators and bring

attention to why professional development can have a direct impact on what best

practices can change the morale and student achievement in low-performing schools.

The researcher documented the participants' responses by categorizing the themes based

on Florida's professional development standards.

     Open-ended interviews were used to address themes that described how

professional development has made an impact to increase student achievement and

develop school culture in low-performing schools. Anecdotal written notes and Rev

Notes were used to identify themes and consistencies expressed by the participants in this

study.

Limitations

     The study design involved the limitation of a small sample size, as data were

limited to the experiences of only the participants and their environment. The

disadvantage of the interview process was the time-consuming component and the ability

to schedule the interviews based on the interviewees' timeframe. Additionally, there was

the potential for researcher bias, as the researcher was a school administrator in the

district chosen for this study. Being aware and acknowledging this potentiality helped

the researcher to guard against the potential for bias. The advantage of an interview data

collection method was that it afforded the researcher the ability to ask follow-up

questions to further the inquiry to gain more abundant data and understanding.

Verification and Validity

The process of qualitative research gives the participants, researcher, and readers the ability to interpret and break down the qualitative actions. The researcher used triangulation as well as acknowledge potential researcher bias (Creswell, 2014). Data collected from the qualitative interviews were compared and triangulated against the literature review. This provided possible similarities and differences stated in the interviews.

Researcher bias related to the fact that the researcher was a school administrator in District X, the same school district in which this research study took place. The researcher had a perception of how student-centric professional development can have an impact on the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools. The expectation was to capture the strategic professional development decided upon by the school leaders that potentially change the sample schools from being low-performing schools to effective schools in the school district. Although the researcher was an administrator in District X, the researcher did not have any undue influence on participants in this study. It is essential to express and acknowledge that the participants in this study volunteered to allow the researcher into their professional lives to gain their perspectives. Though the researcher was an administrator, it was stressed that participation was voluntary and individuals had the right to decline without fear of reprisals.

Confidentiality and Consent

Participant rights and privacy were assured by providing participants a consent form that gave them adequate information about the study and their involvement,

allowing participants to make an informed choice about whether to participate in the

study. No names were collected or used in the reporting of study findings. Informed

consent and participant confidentiality were safeguarded. A copy of the consent letter is

contained in Appendix B.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine what kinds of student-centric professional development practices and activities enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools. The study was designed to determine the perspectives of teachers and school leaders who were fully engaged in the professional development process regarding whether professional development is effective in increasing student achievement in low-performing schools. Results can be used to inform educators and school leaders of the overall experiences of teachers educating students in secondary schools while participating in and implementing more innovative and sustainable professional development to increase student achievement, culture, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools in Southwest Florida.

Research Question

One research question guided this exploration of how the implementation of professional development activities might influence and enhance the perspectives held by teachers and school leaders toward school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing secondary schools in one school district in Southwest Florida. Considering ways to maintain the engagement of effective teachers was the essence of this study. The researcher gathered data from participants (i.e., teachers and administrators) employed in secondary schools (i.e., middle and high schools) in Southwest Florida. The research question was: What professional development activities will enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools?

The researcher used the descriptive qualitative design because it is a detailed and concentrated approach to ensure a careful study of the phenomenon examined (Yin, 2017). The qualitative approach enabled the collection of substantial data reflecting the participants' experiences, influence, and knowledge of how student-centric professional development increased student achievement, school culture, and teacher productivity in secondary schools in Southwest Florida. Using the information gathered, the researcher was able to ascertain common themes that assisted in gaining a better understanding of why teachers and educators embrace student-centric professional development in low-performing schools.

This chapter contains details of the setting, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and themes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the patterns and themes gathered from the interview responses from the participants.

Setting

The interviews were conducted one-on-one in various locations, including classrooms, conference rooms, and administrative offices of the schools at which the interviewees were employed. The researcher emailed all teachers and administrators who were currently working in the chosen schools and were employed in the schools last year. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the participants were asked to email or call the researcher to provide documentation of their agreement to participate in the study. The interview questions were consistent when asked of each participant. The participants in both the middle school and high school indicated their targeted approach to professional development had a direct impact on collective academic success, student achievement, and school culture. These educational expectations and structural influences were

developed based on the school's needs and concerns to provide an optimal learning environment for the students, teachers, and staff.

The sample included a total of 10 participants (i.e., two principals, two assistant principals, and six teachers). Five participants were from the middle school and five participants were from the high school. All participants volunteered to participate in a 30- to 45-minute one-on-one interview. Pseudonyms were used to protect each participant (e.g., P1, P2, etc.). The participants were currently employed by the school district and at the secondary schools during the time of the study. All interviews were facilitated and completed within a 2- to 3-week timeframe based on the participants' work schedules.

Yin (2015) stated a descriptive study is appropriate when the researcher wants to explore, explain, and describe the subject being interviewed. In this study, the researcher documented the data using an audio recording and handwritten note two-pronged process. Rev.com audio software was used to transcribe the audio recordings to produce a transcription of each participant interview. The transcripts provided an opportunity to highlight themes, codes, and joint statements provided by the participants to gain a better understanding of their experiences. The identities of the participants were protected by using pseudonyms, as noted in the interview protocol. The data collected will be stored for 3 years, after which the data will be destroyed to ensure the confidentiality of the research participants.

Table 1 provides demographic information for the 10 participants, along with their number of years of experience in the educational profession. Collectively, the average years of teaching for the participants was 12.5.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants in School District X

Participant	Years of experience	Grade level	Position
P1	34	High school	Principal
P2	16	High school	Assistant principal
P3	20	High school	Teacher
P4	18	High school	Teacher
P5	8	High school	Teacher
P6	19	Middle school	Principal
P7	10	Middle school	Assistant principal
P8	10	Middle school	Teacher
P9	12	Middle school	Teacher
P10	9	Middle school	Teacher

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews and transcription process, the researcher shifted concentration toward recognizing and identifying the codes and themes that surfaced from the participants' experiences expressed during the interview process. Based on the framework of this study, the researcher related, compared, and analyzed the participants' responses based on the Florida standards for professional development. The researcher wanted to ensure there was alignment between the participants' responses and the Florida standards for professional development regarding how educators learn best through meaningful professional development that provides school district leaders with the best practices to increase student achievement, instructional best practices, and school culture to prepare students to be productive citizens in society and continuing education for entering the workforce.

The coding process used provided the vital data needed for assisting in the processing of reliable and robust conclusions contingent upon each participant's educational experiences. The coding process consisted of the researcher rereading the individual transcripts to attain the themes developed from statements, similarities from the individual responses, repetitive words, and expressions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The data collected and recorded showed value because they immediately diminished researcher bias and assumptions and were able to capture the participants' expressions, experiences, and thoughts. The researcher used a process to find common themes within the interview transcripts that involved color-coding using highlighters to recognize similar responses and significant patterns. This approach to coding assisted the researcher in obtaining a clear understanding of the experiences and challenges the participants embraced throughout their professional experiences in education. Each participant's experiences were diverse and different; however, the results showed the participants shared the same perspectives and concerns, which makes this study valuable.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure a meaningful qualitative study, the data collection process must be captured with integrity and transparency through the implementation of the four pillars of creditability, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. According to Hadi and Closs (2016), researchers should reflect and take under consideration these four pillars when facilitating the accuracy, rigor, and reliability of a qualitative study; the four pillars must remain at the forefront of the researcher's thought process.

Credibility

To capture accurate data during the interviews and to eliminate bias in recording the data, the researcher received transcript verification receipt from Rev.com to ensure accurate collection of data for each participant interviewed. In an attempt to ensure compliance with the transcription process, the researcher reviewed the data collected from the participants' interviews to make sure the information reflected their educational and personal experiences.

Dependability

In an effort to eliminate concerns of repeatability, the researcher used dependability norms and used identical data collection procedures with every participant. To make sure accuracy and dependability were embedded in this study, the participants were asked the same questions, interviews were audio-recorded, and the researcher engaged in note-taking of their responses. A review of the questions and the participants' responses was provided at the end of each interview to ensure the data collected were authentic and accurate and captured each participant's professional and personal educational experiences.

Transferability

The sample was 10 educational professionals from two different secondary schools who were currently employed by District X. In the two secondary school subgroups, the researcher was able to conduct 10 one-on-one interviews. All 10 participants involved in this study were educators in secondary schools in District X. The concentrated effort between secondary educators is changing the lives of the students they serve by providing student-centric professional development for secondary schools.

The sample size consisted of two principals, two assistant principals, and six teachers employed by District X. A variety of individually crafted and vetted interview questions assisted in capturing valuable descriptions of the experiences of the participants and the impact of meaningful professional development.

Confirmability

To address confirmability, the researcher used the Rev.com auto software to capture verbal transcripts as well as a way for the researcher to be able to reflect on the data collected and process the information gathered from the interviews. This qualitative descriptive study contained a focus on the participants' professional lived experiences in the field of education; the researcher's biases did not affect this study because the researcher analyzed the data directly from the transcription and notes collected. The researcher also used the transcripts to identify or trace any biases or compromised data that would bring into question the integrity of the data analysis. To make sure researcher bias was prevented, the researcher only recorded and recounted the data provided by the participants while the interviews were taking place. The processes and procedures were sound practices, and the researcher was able to ensure the findings from the one-on-one interviews were credible and without concerns or errors based on the participant transcripts, notes, and audio recording produced by the Rev.com software. The researcher did not move away from the processes, policies, and procedures that were approved by the dissertation committee and the IRB, and consent forms were provided to each participant.

Themes

This section contains the results from the one-on-one interviews with the 10 participants. The similarities among the sample were that each participant had been employed at the educational location and was working there before the strategic professional development was implemented and was able to see the impact on the culture, teacher productivity, and student achievement. Each participant was positive, hopeful, and assured the schools would continue to be successful and maintain a school letter grade of "C" or better based on the Florida Department of Education rubric. Each participant described his or her experience teaching at the middle and high school level, dedication and buy-in to the program, the school culture change, the challenges faced before the implementation of the professional development, the teacher productivity increase with the implementation of the professional development, and the rise of student achievement that was established as strategies were applied to help improve the overall school success. All of the participants in the one-on-one interviews are referred to in this section using their assigned pseudonyms.

Theme 1: Culture

The school cultures for both schools before the strategic student-centric professional development stemmed from the reputations both schools had as being the least selected schools based on the school choice process of the district. Because of the school choice process, the selection of students had been frustrating to leaders of the schools because both schools were receiving students who were not selected or met the other school criteria for entrance. Therefore, the students who were selected were those whose academic achievement levels were low and demonstrated behavioral conduct

concerns. Both schools began every school year with 70% or higher of the student population below grade level. The participants reported the number of students not on grade level had a significant impact on the school culture among both the students and teachers. In both the middle and high schools, the participants reported that because of the low-performing students, the schools had a bad reputation, students were physically aggressive, teachers' feelings were hurt as a result of student interactions, and students lacked appropriate respect for adults. The middle school participants reported the implementation of professional development had an effect on the culture by implementing a schoolwide professional development that concentrated on embedding instructional best practices.

The middle school implemented AVID strategies for professional development. AVID contains a focus on providing teachers with instructional best practices that enable teachers to teach the WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, Reading) methodologies in their daily instructional lessons. Once AVID was accepted and implemented in the school, each participant was able to embed the AVID best practices in the classroom. With the participants having similar responses and reflections on the impact of AVID on the culture of the school, the participants were able to see teachers, staff, and students work together to establish values, beliefs, a vision, and expectations the promoted students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. One example was P10, who shared her perception of how professional development changed the culture of the school:

> Some of the professional developments that have changed the culture are the ones that focus on how to respond appropriately to students and how to engage students. We've had a lot of AVID training over the past few years. We've also had training specifically to consider students who are struggling with past trauma.

We also had a lot of our professional developments focused on things that were expected of all teachers. There was a certain amount of accountability that was standard for everyone. Everyone was expected to meet certain professional conduct standards, certain ways that you treat students, to follow certain procedures and a lot of what we were doing, we felt like we were all in it together.

P7 shared his perception as an assistant principal of how the culture of the school

changed with the appropriate embedded professional development:

[Middle school] does professional development very well embedding a coherent implementation plan. We start right from the beginning, and we identify the things that are very most important to our school, and that's what we gauge our professional development off of. From that point, that's when we have our checkpoints such as our [school] way walkthroughs and optional professional developments and frequent inspecting what you expect. The professional development was great, as with a lot of other programs. But the fact is, we do a good job making sure that this stays in front of the staff and not just something that sits on a shelf.

P8 stated she had noticed the culture change based on the AVID strategies a year after

she began teaching at the school:

I think that the culture of the school is changed by the fact that the AVID professional development helps with our buy-in to the programs. So there's a lot of people that are maybe unsure about what AVID is or how it can help. And when you attend the different PDs [professional developments], and you do the follow-ups, I think that's a chance where teachers get to try it in their classrooms and see how it helps. I also believe that we focus on leadership roles for our students, and that can change the whole culture inside the classroom and outside.

P6 shared that:

When you walk from classroom to classroom, teachers are using the same language. When students go from class to class, the same language is used, and there are systems in place. And when there are tight systems in place, we'll see an increase in student achievement and improvement of instruction.

The high school implemented a professional development program titled

Capturing Kids' Hearts to address culture concerns. This program is not a professional

instructional development, but a social interaction professional development. Capturing

Kids' Hearts was used to focus on the relational separation the teachers were

experiencing with students. The participants reported that with the implementation of

Capturing Kids' Heart professional development, the culture was enhanced by improving

student attendance, decreasing discipline referrals, and increasing graduation rates and

student performance. The participants shared similar responses and reflections and noted

that when students feel a connection with their teachers and schools, they experience

more opportunities for academic success. Academic achievement and students' ability to

thrive contribute to a positive school culture. P1 shared her perception of how

professional development increased the culture of the school for teachers:

> The big professional developments that we have spent the past 2 years working in developing is called Capturing Kids' Hearts. And the premise of that is you have to have a kid's heart before you can have their mind. And there was such a need for that kind of thought process and philosophy here because there was such a disconnect between students and teachers. There weren't relationships; there wasn't a feeling that the adults were proud of the kids or the kids were proud of the adults or the school.

P2 noted the culture and how strategic professional development had an impact on the

culture by expressing:

> The professional learning that has impacted our school, as we were talking at the beginning, is called Capturing Kids' Hearts. And it's a social-emotional learning opportunity for teachers to understand who they are as people and model for them what it feels like for our students to figure out who they are as people. What makes this person tick? Why do I want to be in this class? How do I create a safe environment? Without the structure of Capturing Kids' Hearts, we would not have been able to push things forward with the level of intentionality and passion that we were able to do.

Other comments from participants in this area were as follows:

> When I came to this school, we started a professional development piece called Capturing Kids' Hearts. It involved teachers in building a relationship with students as well as students being able to have relationships with teachers, positive relationships. I saw that the teachers grab hold of this particular professional development. I saw teachers standing at their door, shaking students' hands, talking to the students, treating the students mainly with respect. One of the things that I used to encounter from students is that their major complaint was that some teachers did not treat them with respect, and they didn't feel that

someone cared about them. This training taught teachers how to respect students as well as show them that they care about them. I saw the relationships change between students and teachers and that teachers were engaging the students in conversations that were mostly non-academic conversations. It mainly was personal conversations and conversations that the students could feel comfortable sharing with the teacher. I saw some very positive changes in those relationships and the students, what I saw in the classrooms, where the students felt a part of the class because now someone has listened to them. I saw that particular change as well as the teachers now taking the time to acknowledge the student's presence. That was positive that I saw from that professional development. (P3)

When the culture increases, when we're able to build and focus on strengths in our building, as we're doing that, we're building the capacity of all of the people around us. (P1)

Theme 2: Student Achievement

The participants expressed the importance of professional development and how impactful it can be on student achievement. It was clear from each participant that the ultimate goal was to embed best practices to increase student achievement. Collectively, the participants noted professional development facilitated instruction and enhanced student learning when there was a connection to the curriculum and instructional material teachers used to guide their teaching and the accountability measures they used to determine success. Student achievement for both the middle and high school is at 30% of their student proficiency at the start of each year. Therefore, the administrators noted that when developing and considering what meaningful professional development will be best for their schools, the administrator knew 70% of the students would not be proficient. P1 stated:

When you build a sense of community, and you want to be proud of the work that's happening in your school, and you want other people to recognize your school for all of the work that's happening. I think when that is kind of the philosophy of the building, everyone wants to do better. And I think that, and they understand why it's important.

P2 noted:

Student achievement increased dramatically. Our graduation rate went up 15.8% since we started Capturing Kids' Hearts. That is an amazing feat. But that being said, it wasn't the professional development, it was the flip in relationships and the flip and focus and priority that Capturing Kids' Hearts pushed forward.

P7 added that professional development increased student achievement:

Consistent increase in student achievement can be attributed to the professional development that we as a school, not just an administrator, but as a leadership team or all stakeholders have deemed essential for our students. And a lot of it revolves around AVID and AVID has WICOR strategies, and those WICOR strategies are all research-based practices that are directly tied to student achievement. Keeping the traditional practices int the forefront, you're just almost guaranteeing student achievement, but it's got to be done right.

P6 said student achievement increases were prevalent when strategic professional development was embedded with fidelity. She expressed, "The increases in our test scores [are] because of professional development. We get a lot of new teachers, and professional development is it. That's how they improve. That's how the students are improving in school."

Theme 3: Teacher Productivity

The participants had similar thoughts on teacher productivity and how professional development connects to teacher collaboration in professional learning communities. P1 noted, "Ongoing professional development plays an essential component to teaching, with choices as it pertains to what to focus on for the school." While engaging with the participants during the one-on-one interviews, it became clear that professional development has a direct impact on the school and teachers when the professional development is aligned with the strategies and core expectations within the school. P6 noted professional learning communities contributed to teacher productivity:

At the beginning of the year, we lay out the foundation of what we're going to teach, and we use the AVID strategies, which are WICOR strategies. Every teacher is trained in WICOR strategies, and in their small learning communities or their PLC [professional learning community], they should discuss what WICOR

strategy they're using that week. And then, the following week, they need to look at the results. Was it successful? Do they need to strengthen that strategy? Do they need to go to another strategy? But the results are the strongest where the strategies are used effectively.

Other comments from participants in this area were as follows:

PLCs, having those meaningful conversations, you can see kind of how it works or how it worked in your class versus other people. And I think doing it in PLCs also holds everybody accountable. (P8)

Every time we attend any type of professional development, whether it's in the summer, whether it's at the district level, or whether it's an optional training that we do at the school level, we always bring that back to our PLCs, and that person who attends that training teaches us one of those strategies. (P4)

When I first got there, teachers didn't even believe in AVID and the WICOR strategies. They did not want to use the WICOR strategy, but it . . . We had to continue to train, continue to insist that this is what's best for students. The collaboration had to increase because we set up open classrooms where teachers no longer went into their classroom and closed the door, so their classroom was open. Other teachers had to go into another colleague's class. (P6)

As an AVID demonstration school, a lot of professional development is geared towards collaboration. When you're focused on a common goal, and you're focused on, or you're rallying behind a specific program, it becomes very easy to assist teachers. So, based on professional specifically chosen for your school, collaboration among teachers increased? One of the reasons why is that because you rally behind a program such as AVID, it becomes straightforward to find resources and different variations of the same structure. (P7)

To build collaboration and allow everyone to gains expertise in different types of things. And what works for one teacher might not work as well for another teacher because they don't have as much experience in that. But if we can model, if we can work together, if we can co-teach, we can build the capacity of the team. And through that collaboration just thrives. (P1)

Themes and Codes Connected to the Research Question

The process of developing the themes derived from the research question as well as the participants' responses to the interview questions. The interview protocol consisted of 12 questions; however, most of the questions were targeted to address the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity. All of the participants in

this study used similar phrases regarding how professional development enhanced the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity. Interview Questions 1, 3, 4, and 11 focused on school culture; Questions 5, 8, and 11, and 12 focused on student achievement; and Questions 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 focused on teacher productivity. The themes that surfaced are provided in Figure 1.
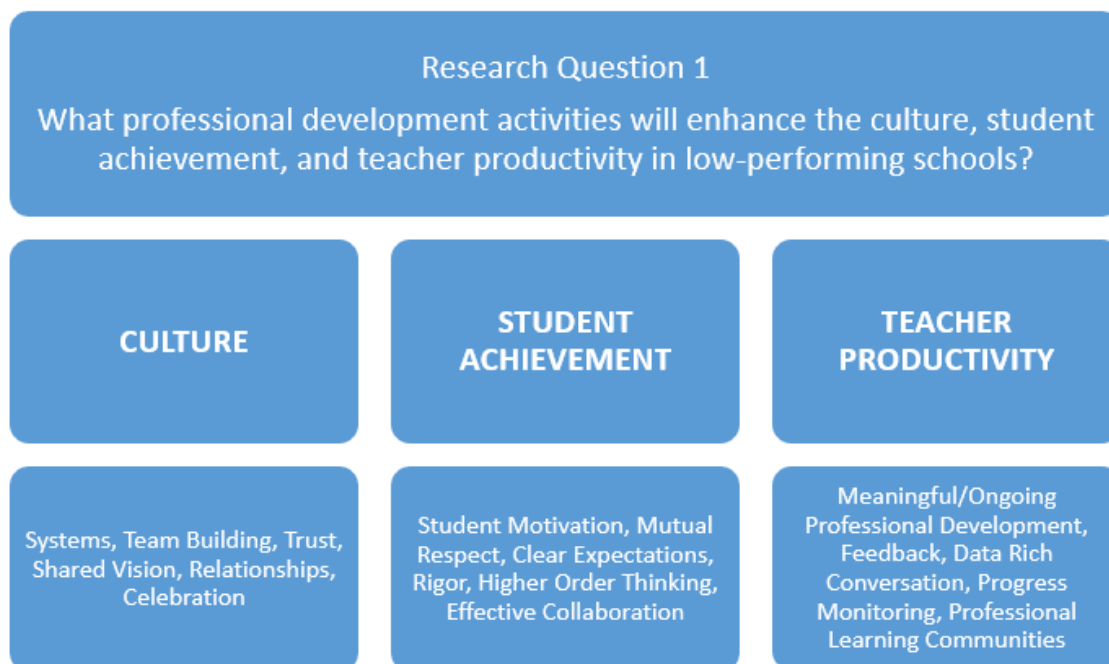
Figure 1. Themes and their connection to the research question.

School Culture

The variety of phrases and similarities in words that surfaced showed each participant's experiences with professional development helped change the culture in their respective schools. Examples of phrase and similarities derived around the structures and systems from the professional development that provided support to their educational setting, how staff worked together to create the new narrative of the school's story, and why the schools felt more like thriving schools while using nontraditional learning styles. The independent professional development and cultural structures of the

two secondary schools seemed to apply to the various academic styles and cultural change of the learning community. More importantly, the natural thought process and perspectives from the participants consistently demonstrated that making a connection with the culture and the academic success of the secondary schools had an impact on the professional development selected for schools. Other phrases such as a sense of community, understanding the "why," positive relationships, inspire teachers, best practices staff, becoming more cohesive, optional professional development, student engagement, sense of support, shared best practice, progress monitoring, strategic, student achievement, intentional, and remove barriers were common themes that surfaced when describing the participants' experiences while embracing the professional development culture in their secondary schools.

Student Achievement

The second theme of student achievement emerged when participants discussed their perspectives toward implementing professional development. The strategic professional development practices included systems, leadership, student relationships, a schoolwide implementation that assisted with an increase in teacher productivity, and student achievement. The strategic student-centric professional development was targeted differently for each school to increase student achievement. The high school did not focus on instructional based professional development. The focused, trained professional development was more relationship building professional development (Capturing Kids' Hearts) that concentrated on staff learning how to engage with students more respectfully. Data gathered from the participants in the high school showed there was an apparent disconnect among the students and teachers and an extreme lack of

respect toward each other, which affected student achievement. The middle school focused on professional instructional development to increase student achievement. The focus was on incorporating AVID strategies to become a schoolwide initiative that would allow students to lead the discussion through student collaboration and student discourse.

Teacher Productivity

The third theme of teacher productivity emerged when the participants began to note how the student-centric professional development provided teaching best practices and strategies with a rich curriculum that supported the learning environment. Intentional focus allowed the teachers to enhance their effectiveness by reestablishing their pedagogies in the areas of content and relationship building. The professional development provided by the leaders encouraged better instruction, improved student achievement, increased student discourse, and enabled continuous progress monitoring, feedback, and reflection to provide support to the teachers as well as student learning gains. The content-embedded professional development increased the efficacy and confidence of the teachers and their effectiveness as teachers improved beyond the classroom and into the lives of the students.

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Final Thoughts

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The participants expressed their feelings, thoughts, and overarching experiences as educators about the implementation of professional development in District X. A number of the participants had worked at their current schools when the schools were not successful based on the Florida Department of Education school grading scale. All 10 of the participants who participated in the one-on-one interviews shared similar responses when speaking about their experience with the transition of strategic professional

development and its impact on increasing the school's culture, student achievement, and

teacher productivity. The participants expressed that strategic professional development

provided a good sense of knowledge and a sense of happiness that increased engagement

and participation in the school. Some of the participants' final thoughts were:

> I would like to say that I know I put a lot of emphasis on WICOR strategies, and some people may say that, "Why not just good teaching?" But the teaching profession has changed. We get a lot of new teachers, and we get a lot of career changers, and they need those research-based best practices to engage students in meaningful learning. And a lot of times, if you focus on that, the classroom management is not an issue. And if it's not the case, a lot of new teachers and career changers, they're spending so much time focusing on classroom management, they don't have time to focus on the content, because they don't have the strategies or the tools in their tool belt to engage students. And if students are not engaged, they're not learning, and a teacher is going to have problems in the classroom. (P6)

> I've seen a lot of money being spent on professional development, both the school level and a district level, and it hasn't always been really impactful, in my experience. So, I think it's really figuring out what is needed and how best to implement it and support it. (P1)

> The only reflective statements I can think in regards to something like that is, there definitely needs to be some type of coherent implementation plan, some type of way that it can stay in front of everyone. (P7)

> So I think instead of principals just picking the latest hot trend to send their people to, we should be thinking first, what do we need? What do our teachers need? What do our kids really need? And then find a learning, or look for opportunities, that would meet that need. (P2)

Summary

The analysis of data from the interview process revealed three themes that

reflected an in-depth description of the participants' total experience with professional

development in District X secondary schools. The themes identified were observed

based on the oral expressions provided during the one-on-one interviews. The

participants noted their perspectives of professional development and its impact on the

school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity, which kept them involved

to enhance their school's academic success. Each participant shared their personal experiences and perspective of their respective school's professional development approach to effect change in the school's academic success. Participants shared the importance of progress monitoring the professional development through professional learning communities to sustain the content learned from the professional development and shared best practices discussed in the professional learning communities. The strategic professional development cultivated the school's morale to show relevancy to how meaningful learning for educators is a foundational component for teachers and leaders. The impact of how the professional development begins and ends starts with understanding the school's "Why." The school leader's passion for empowering staff to be more responsible for continuing and sustaining their learning and experiences was evident in the professional development given to each participant.

In Chapter 5, the researcher connects the research results to the literature delineated in Chapter 2 and provides a final breakdown and researcher interpretation connected to the limitations and conceptual framework of the study. Recommendations for future research are also addressed in Chapter 5 regarding student-centric professional development that engages educators to improve school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the perspectives, experiences, and views of secondary school administrators and teachers employed by District X regarding how the strategic implementation of student-centric professional development increased the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity. School leaders, teachers, and stakeholders can use the results to understand the importance of embedding meaningful professional development that is progress monitored and sustainable training to increase student achievement best practices, culture, and teacher productivity in secondary schools in District X.

Findings

One barrier uncovered in the initial development of this study was that not a lot was known about the participants' educational perspectives and experiences as they embraced the schoolwide professional development and its implementation in secondary schools. To address the phenomenon, the researcher conducted a descriptive qualitative study with a focus on the perspectives of school administrators and teachers (Yin, 2015). The results provide useful and in-depth data that encompass the participants' experiences and perspectives of the impact of professional development within secondary schools in District X. Common themes surfaced that assist in gaining a better understanding of why educators should implement meaningful student-centric professional development to enhance the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity

Strategic Professional Development to Encourage and Facilitate School Culture

Eight of the 10 participants in this study felt the implementation of strategic professional development with a focus on school culture is essential to establishing

educational systems, structures, and student–teacher relationship building to promote academic progress and success. All of the participants believed school leaders were attempting to embed professional development to address the school culture, but noted progress monitoring and teacher feedback were not integrated with fidelity because of the lack of focus after the professional development was provided. For both educational levels (middle/high), all of the participants noted that before the meaningful and strategic professional development was embedded in the schools, the cultures of the schools were at an all-time low. Students were engaged in physical confrontations, teachers were not connecting with the students, and community members were apprehensive about sending their children to either school. Mourão (2018) stated administrators or leaders who encourage a culturally oriented approach to learning, creativity, and communication help teachers embrace the professional development. Administrators who invest the time into creating or maintaining an active school culture reduce student conflicts and behavioral concerns and increase student achievement, climate, teacher motivation, and academic success. Administrators and leaders should focus on ensuring common conversation is taking place with teachers and leaders to ensure the entire school is on the same page and the narrative of the school is clear for all. This practice will allow for continuity among all whenever a disconnect surfaces or a cultural shift arises, such as when systems, trust, vision, or relationships are not being embedded with fidelity, so it can be addressed early by putting in place interventions and professional development to facilitate and promote learning and school success. Continual professional development, observations, communication, and progress monitoring enable administrators to remain active to keep a pulse on the school culture and enable teachers to be held accountable for the overall

success of the school and students. The results of this investigation showed eight of the 10 participants believed professional development is an integral component in building a meaningful school culture. Still, a progress monitoring component is essential to making sure the systems that are put in place are monitored on a timely and regular basis. Affording teachers and administrators the needed training and appropriate resources and keeping a robust school culture for both the middle school and high school are essential to academic success among the students.

Increasing Student Achievement

The essential role of an educator is to educate; however, to accomplish this task, the educator has to be empowered with the critical tools to be an intentional instructional leader by providing curriculum and professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Based on the participants' responses, professional development can increase student achievement when students' relationships with teachers are meaningful and overall expectations are communicated effectively. When professional development is appropriately embedded, students feel their teachers care about them and their success, thereby increasing student achievement. The participants stated teachers who embrace professional development and concentrate on classroom management build strong student–teacher relationships and increase student achievement levels because there is a foundation of systems and best practices in the school. Each of the participants expressed that when the professional development for the high school (Capturing Kids' Hearts) and middle school (AVID) was implemented as a schoolwide initiative, student achievement and schoolwide academic success gradually increased.

Teacher Productivity

Ensuring students want to learn and teachers want to teach starts with what tools are provided to teachers in the form of professional development that is relevant and inviting. Strategic professional development with a focus on school culture and student achievement increases teacher productivity. The selection of the appropriate professional development to capture and engage teachers' perspectives on to how to build relationships with students to facilitate instructional best practices will drastically decrease opportunities for students to engage in inappropriate behaviors that often disturb the learning environment (Kola, Sunday, & Ayinde, 2015). Based on the responses given by the participants in the current study, strategic student-centric professional development was essential in increasing teacher productivity in the classroom. Teacher evaluative scores, student achievement, and student academic growth are analyzed by state assessments and end of course exams that assist in determining the effectiveness of the teacher and whether or not the professional development progress monitoring component is effective in increasing the success of the teachers and the schools. The participants all agreed that if the professional development is slated for teacher productivity, it has to be beneficial to the needs of the teachers as well as include impactful takeaways that enable best practices to be embedded and implemented immediately.

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Limitations of the Study

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This qualitative study research design had three limitations. The first was the variable of timing that made it difficult for the participants to schedule their personal and

private time to meet for the interviews. With the interviews being conducted in two different locations in District X, theoretical reproduction cannot be attained.

The second limitation was maximizing the data gathered from a small sample size from the same schools. The data practice of using one-on-one interviews revealed participants shared similar responses or perspectives as their peers. As a result, one-on-one responses from the participants were authentic based on the position and responsibility of the participants in the schools.

The third limitation was the researcher's bias as the researcher and a school administrator in the district used in the study. Being that the researcher was a school administrator, it was essential to not interject personal thoughts and to provide the participants with a comfortable one-on-one interview setting that allowed for a healthy flow of conversation and dialogue. Interviewing educators who experienced similar impacts of student-centric professional development provided a more detailed review of best practices on how different strategic professional development can affect the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity.

Recommendations

The phenomenon of educators being afforded opportunities to learn best academic instructional practices using student-centric professional development will continue to be an intriguing area of research. More in-depth research needs to be facilitated to identify other professional development approaches that will be beneficial for teachers in low-performing schools. Based on the participants' responses, schoolwide professional development is essential to the success of a school. An initiative of schoolwide professional development that addresses the needs of the school is an impactful approach

to change the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity. If more schools take on the approach of strategic professional development that is schoolwide, it will not only improve the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity, it will also reduce the disconnect students have with teachers and concentrate on the relationship building component and provide structures and systems to the teachers, staff, and students.

It will be important to conduct qualitative descriptive studies of other educators' perceptions of student-centric professional development to determine what systematic challenges those participants faced. The results can be used to promote more conversation, discussion, and further research. When educational leaders, teachers, and researchers have a firm understanding of how to build a plan, less time will be wasted on pondering which strategic approach will best meet the needs of the students and school. More time can be embedded in identifying meaningful progress monitoring professional development that is intentional and meaningful to the school. This study directly addressed the challenges educators experienced and overcame. Having these baseline data can assist in future studies serving schools, professional development, and researchers.

Researchers can compare and contrast the strategic professional development implemented by the participants' schools with those of other schools that have experienced the same concerns regarding culture, academic achievement, and teacher productivity. Results of the comparison can enable school administrators to choose the most appropriate schoolwide initiative professional development approach. The leadership, systems, structures, and implementation of the professional development had

a direct impact on the success of the professional development, the schools, and the participants who engaged and participated in the study.

More descriptive qualitative studies similar to this study need to be conducted to provide school leaders, educators, and researchers with concrete professional development recommendations. This approach will deliver real experiences for why the school administrators decided to implement student-centric professional development and its impact on the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity.

A correlational design could be used as a different type of study in a quantitative methodology. A correlational design is used to discover relationships among variables using statistical measures. Using this methodology, the researcher looks to recognize the relationships between variables and how each variable affects others (Curtis, Comiskey, & Dempsey, 2016). The methodology provides meaningful and immediate feedback. This methodology could be valuable because it studies the cause and effects of the antecedent and the exhibited actions by the sample. The current study did not use this research methodology; however, this style could be beneficial for other researchers who want to showcase different variables that have different professional development best practices with other educators.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether student-centric professional development practices was effective in enhancing the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity in low-performing schools. Using a quantitative correlational methodology, other researchers can concentrate on identified variables and how the variables can facilitate strategic professional development to promote schoolwide

professional development that will increase the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity.

Based on the results of this study, the approach toward professional development used in District X, the middle school, and high school changed the academic structures of both schools along with their cultures, student achievement, and teacher productivity. The strategic and intentional student-centric professional development that encompassed the entire schools transformed how staff engaged with students. District X has supported the embedded professional developments because they were student-centered, creative, innovative, and made the learning environment more welcoming to the students and their academic growth. As an educator and school administrator, the researcher recommends that District X and the participating schools continue to encourage and duplicate the professional development best practices to help teachers build relationships with students to enhance the school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity. Each participant concluded their ability to embrace a schoolwide professional development had changed the scope of the entire school and the academic progress made from the professional development selected.

Implications for Methodology

The qualitative research method approach enables researchers to ask participants to answer one-on-one questions, record the interview responses, and identify themes and codes. The researcher's role in a qualitative study is to develop and ask analytical questions, listen, and accurately note-take and document the participants' responses. The researcher needs to create an open and trusting relationship with the participants to facilitate an authentic interview while shielding the integrity and privacy of the

participants. Actively listening and appropriately documenting the responses is essential when facilitating a qualitative study because the data obtained from the participants' responses provide meaningful information to gain an in-depth understanding of their perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2014). In this qualitative study, the goal was to gather meaningful data and document the participants' experiences with student-centric professional development in low-performing schools in District X.

Implications for Practice

In an effort to identify strategic student-centric professional development that is effective in terms of increasing school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity, strategic professional development must be embedded into the school. In order for the various schoolwide professional development to sustain, it is important to recognize the essential components and elements of the professional development that will enable administrators and teachers to embrace the professional development. When all of those components are embedded with fidelity, students, teachers, and staff will have their needs met and the school's culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity will increase because the staff will be well trained. The students will feel as if their voices have been heard. Providing a progress monitoring component will not only solidify the success of the schoolwide professional development best practices, it will ensure the school's academic success remains a main focus. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to understand the impact of student-centric professional development through an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of administrators and teachers in secondary schools in District X, and how school culture, student

achievement, and teacher productivity can help to engage the participants in the schools while ensuring best practices are implemented to meet the needs of the school.

Conclusion

This qualitative descriptive study involved examining the experiences and perceptions of professional development held by administrators and teachers in low-performing secondary schools in District X. Participants noted they believed in the framework of professional development. The participants also recognized the impact of the professional development on their schools and the complexities they experienced before a schoolwide professional development was embedded in their schools. Using the conceptual framework based on Florida's Department of Education (2018), the researcher was able to connect themes that surfaced through the interviews to concentrate on the experiences of the educators who participated in the schoolwide professional development. Each participant openly and willingly provided his or her personal education path, struggles, and passion for teaching and building relationships with students to ensure academic growth. There are a variety of takeaways from this study. One is the appreciation and dedication the participants had for their schools and students. Each participant was fully vested in the transformational change in the schoolwide professional development that changed the scope of the schools internally as well as the range of the schools externally as it pertained to community perception. Another takeaway is the value of student relationships to increase school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity. Many of the participants walked into their schools knowing they were facing an uphill battle. However, the strategic implementation of Capturing Kids' Hearts and AVID as schoolwide professional

development best practices enabled the teachers to align their practices with the Florida Department of Education's professional development standards of planning, learning, implementation, and evaluation. As a result, both secondary schools in District X are now thriving. The secondary middle school is an AVID demonstration school and has maintained a school grade of "C" since the full implementation of the professional development. The secondary high school is a district pilot school for Capturing Kids' Hearts; the school was a failing school before the schoolwide professional development. After 1 year of implementation, the school grade increased from a letter grade of "D" to currently a letter grade of "C." Professional development, such as AVID and Capturing Kids' Hearts, is necessary in low-performing schools. Strategic student-centric professional development can change the lives and mindsets of many educators of future generations; this is why professional development that is student-centric is necessary to address issues with school culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Demographics: Ethnicity: African American____   Caucasian___   Asian___   Hispanic/Latino____ Stakeholder Group: Administrator_____   Teacher____ Years of Experience: _____ Grade Level:_____ Gender: Male_____   Female____ Grade Level_____ School:_____

1.	How long have you worked in your position? What was the reason for coming to this school?
2.	What link, if any, do you see between professional development and teacher retention in your school? Please explain.
3.	Please explain the culture of the school when you became employed at this school.
4.	In what ways, if any, has professional development changed the culture of the school?
5.	In what ways, if any, has professional development increased student achievement?
6.	How have teachers in your school worked together in professional learning communities to infuse the professional development training that has been provided to the teachers? What were the results of the small group learning?
7.	Based on the professional development that has been specifically chosen for your school, has collaboration among teachers increased?
8.	Have teachers in the school embraced professional development focused on assisting teachers and school leaders in using data to lead instruction?
9.	What follow-up from professional development expectations are implemented to monitor what is taking place in the classroom, best practices, and student achievement?
10.	Are various professional development opportunities afforded to teachers? Do those opportunities provide teachers with a better understanding of the content that teachers are expected to teach based on the professional development provided?
11.	Based on your experience, which or what types of professional development activities have had the most positive impact on student achievement, school culture, and teaching effectiveness?
12.	What additional perspectives and information would you like to share that was not discussed during this interview?

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

My name is Brian Gibson and I am a Doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study "**THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS**" occurring from 12-2019 to 12-2020. The purpose is to examine what kinds of student-centric professional development will enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers in low-performing schools.

This study will help researchers determine how teachers and school leaders who are fully engaged in the professional development process identify which type of professional development is most effective towards building connections between active professional development and increasing student achievement in the low-performing schools. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Brian Gibson, Doctoral student, at National Louis University, Tampa.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore what kinds of student-centric professional development will enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers in low-performing schools. Participation in this study will include:
- 10 individual interviews scheduled at your convenience in the fall, winter and spring of the 2019-2020 academic year.
    - Interviews will last up to 45 min. and include approximately 12 questions to understand how student centric professional develop could enhance the culture, student achievement, and teacher productivity of effective teachers in low-performing schools
    - Interviews will be recorded and participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform professional development practices at The School District of Lee County but participants' identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in his home office. Only the researcher Brian Gibson will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to The School District of

Lee County and other schools and school districts looking to embed student focused professional development practices.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, Brian Gibson at conscience1906@hotmail.com to request results from this study.

In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Brian Gibson, conscience1906@hotmail.com, 954-599-5881.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact the dissertation chair: Dr. Pender Noriega, email: pnoriega@nl.edu; the co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth, email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu, phone: (312) 261-3526; or Dr. Kathleen Cornett, email: kcornett@nl.edu, phone: (844) 380-5001. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration

Consent: I understand that by signing below, I am agreeing to participate in the study, *THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS IN LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS*. My participation will consist of the activities below during the 12/2019 – 06/2020 time period:
- Join in 1 of 10 interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

District Professional Development Elements

Development Process

- Teachers

- Teacher-educators of community colleges and state universities

- Business and community representatives

- Local education foundations

- Consortia

- Professional organizations

Major Components of the System

A. Planning

"The Professional Development System must be based upon":

Analyses of student achievement data

Student needs

Personnel needs (describe your processes for collecting data on personnel needs)

Instructional strategies and methods that support rigorous, relevant, and

challenging curricula for all students

School discipline data

School environment surveys

Assessments of parental satisfaction

Performance appraisal data of teachers, managers, and administrative personnel

School Improvement Plans

School in-service plans

Other performance indicators to identify school and student needs that can be met by improved professional performance

B. Learning

"Inservice activities for instructional personnel shall focus on": analysis of student achievement data, ongoing formal and informal assessments of student achievement, identification and use of enhanced and differentiated instructional strategies that emphasize rigor, relevance, and reading in the content areas, enhancement of subject content expertise, integrated use of classroom technology that enhances teaching and learning, classroom management, parent involvement, and school safety, "Provide for delivery of professional development by distance learning and other technology-based delivery systems to reach more educators at lower costs." Describe how professional development is focused and delivered in the district.

C. Implementing

Describe how the district provides: "in-service activities coupled with follow-up support appropriate to accomplish district-level and school-level improvement goals and standards."

D. Evaluating

"Provide for the continuous evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs to eliminate ineffective programs and strategies and to expand effective ones. Evaluations must consider the impact of such activities on the performance of participating educators and their students' achievement and behavior."

Describe how the district evaluates significant professional development efforts to document the effectiveness of the programs and the efficacy of the use of the funds for professional development.

E. Master Plan for Inservice Activities

"The master plan shall be updated annually by September 1, must be based on input from teachers and district and school instructional leaders, and must use the latest available student achievement data and research to enhance rigor and relevance in the classroom. Each district in-service plan must be aligned to and support the school-based in-service plans and school improvement plans pursuant to s. 1001.42(18). District plans must be approved by the district school board annually in order to ensure compliance with subsection (1) and to allow for the dissemination of research-based best practices to other districts. District school boards must submit verification of their approval to the Commissioner of Education no later than October 1, annually."

Describe the development and ongoing maintenance process for the district's Master Plan for Inservice Activities for all district employees from all fund sources.

F. Individual Professional Development Plans

Each school principal may establish and maintain an individual professional development plan for each instructional employee assigned to the school as a seamless component to the school improvement plans developed according to s. 1001.42(18). The individual professional development plan must:

Be related to specific performance data for the students to whom the teacher is assigned.

Define the in-service objectives and specific, measurable improvements expected in student performance as a result of the in-service activity.

Include an evaluation component that determines the effectiveness of the professional development plan."

Describe the process used to develop and review Individual Professional Development Plans. (This may be incorporated into deliberate practice metrics in department-approved evaluation systems.)

G. Inservice Activities for School Administrative personnel

"Include in-service activities for school administrative personnel that address updated skills necessary for instructional leadership and effective school management according to s. 1012.986.

Describe the process of delivering in-service to school administrative personnel.

H. Systematic Consultation

Describe the system to:

"Provide for systematic consultation with regional and state personnel designated to provide technical assistance and evaluation of local professional development programs."

I. Funding

Describe the district's commitment to and method for funding professional development (Florida Department of Education, 2019).