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Kansans Can: Redesign Professional Learning and Re-Licensure

Paul Erickson

Professional learning is and always has been a core expectation for educators. Educators, whether they are self-directed as intrinsically motivated learners, or compliantly fulfilling requirements set by their employing districts and state departments, engage in professional learning throughout their careers. While educators engage in traditional means of professional learning in the form of workshops, conferences, mentoring, and graduate coursework, this study centered on educators' professional learning efforts that are more informal and more personalized to their specific interests and passions. This professional learning often comes in the nonconventional forms of social media, professional learning networks, peer observations, and professional units of study known as micro-credentials (Ady, Kinsella, & Paynter, 2015). These forms of learning are more specific to individual educators' needs and interests and are categorized as personalized professional learning (Cator, Schneider, & Vander Ark, 2014).

In this study, personalized professional learning is explored in the form of micro-credentials. Before, during, and after this initial project, participants were surveyed and interviewed as a means to explore the relationship between personalized professional learning and educator efficacy. The impact of educator efficacy, both self-efficacy and teacher collective efficacy, is well-documented in existing literature (Hattie, 2016). Collective efficacy, with an effect size of 1.57, is ranked as one of the most significant factors influencing student achievement (Hattie, 2016). For a comparison, student-teacher relationships have an effect size of .72 (Hattie, 2012). The work is abundantly clear: Efficacy matters and any professional learning that leads to it should be maximized.

If personalized learning experiences can help develop greater feelings of efficacy among educators, then exploring and establishing a connection between the two could be instrumental in the establishment of it as a transformative model for professional learning. This study is centered on that effort.

Participants, as a part of a re-licensure project, completed micro-credentials in areas that were both connected to the five Kansas State Board of Education Outcomes, as well as their own personal interests and needs. These micro-credentials were then leveraged by participants to renew their educator licenses. With the potential of licensure renewal as a product of their micro-credentialing, it became even more paramount to explore and substantiate a relationship between a dynamic as influential as efficacy and personalized professional learning.

Kansans Can Connection

The Kansas State Department of Education is rebranding our educational system with the Kansans Can vision of "leading the world in the success of each student" (Kansas State Department of Education, 2018). In the opinion of the central researcher, this starts with educators, *leading the world in success of each educator*. At the core of the Kansans Can vision is the challenge for Kansas educators, administrators, policy-makers and citizens, in general, to

rethink how our schools operate, analyzing every requirement to determine if it is a support or impediment to our schools' ability to address the needs of each student (Kansans Can: Talking Points, 2018). The same challenge should be made for Kansas educators. Every requirement (for example, professional learning and educator re-licensure) should be analyzed to determine if it is a support or impediment to our schools' ability to address the professional learning needs of each educator. KSDE states that "to achieve this bold vision for Kansas education, schools need to be reorganized around the student, not the systems" (Kansans Can: Talking Points, 2018). A significant purpose of this study was to explore the re-organization of professional learning and educator re-licensure around individual educators, their professional learning interests and needs. This re-organization could be accomplished through the establishment of a personalized learning pathway like micro-credentialing that leads to re-licensure.

Again, how can Kansas lead the world in the success of each student? Kansas can lead the world in success of each student by first leading the world in the success of each educator. How can Kansas lead the world in the success of each educator? Kansas can do so via a new brand of educator-led learning and re-licensure—micro-credentials.

Micro-credentialing and other forms of personalized professional learning also closely align with the Kansas State Board Outcome of Individual Plans of Study. Individual Plans of Study are:

- Cooperatively developed between the student, the student's school and family members
- Based on the student's interests and talents
- Reviewed and updated at least twice per year (KSDE, 2017)

An Individual Plan of Study can help Kansas students obtain a suitable vision of their path toward college and career readiness, allowing students to explore different forms of post-secondary education and select courses based upon their career interests (Kansans Can: Talking Points, 2018).

Micro-credentials are cooperatively developed or selected with teams of educators and administrators, based on educators' interests and talents and evaluated, tracked, and recognized, at minimum, on a yearly basis. Micro-credentials could also help Kansas educators obtain a suitable vision for their journey as professionally hungry educators, explore different topics and forms of personalized learning, and ultimately select or create units of study based on their interests.

Micro-credentials are essentially Individual Plans of Study for educators. When asked about this connection between micro-credentialing and Individual Plans of Study, Brad Neuenswander, Deputy Commissioner of the Kansas State Department of Education, conveyed a similar connection.

When a student's learning is led through an Individual Plan of Study, the student is learning new concepts and experimenting in new areas, and his/her program of study is customized around his/her unique career interests. Creativity, planning, goal-setting, self-regulation, perseverance are all by-products of the IPS process for the student. This is exactly what teachers are doing when they engage in micro-credentials. Sure, they are

already certified teachers, but now it is time to specialize their skills and professional learning to fit the needs of their students and their communities. That can be accomplished through a unique form of learning like micro-credentialing. (Neuenschwander, personal communication, December 2nd, 2018).

Neuenschwander also saw connections between micro-credentialing and the preparation of Kansas educators to learn how to best leverage KSDE Board Outcomes like Individual Plans of Study. Neuenschwander wondered if “a micro-credential on Individual Plans of Study could be the ideal way to successfully implement Individual Plans of Study” with students. Neuenschwander emphasized that Individual Plans of Study is the most frequently referenced KSDE Board Outcome by both educators and patrons when asked which outcome is most important to realizing the vision of “leading the world in the success of each student.”

If Individual Plans of Study are that significant to the success of each student, then it is worthwhile to explore micro-credentials as Individual Plans of Study for educators. For the 40 educators who participated in this study, Individual Plans of Study for educators were designed in coordination with micro-credentials that led to both efficacy-enhancing learning experiences and re-licensure.

Methodology

Educators’ sense of self-efficacy and collective efficacy were assessed through a digital survey of Likert-type items as well as interviews with both individual participants and teams of participants. Educators participated in surveys and interviews after they had completed the necessary requirements of a study that result in re-licensure for participants. As an additional qualitative measure, micro-credential submissions themselves were analyzed for evidence of efficacy. The sample size included nine participants in the focus group interviews and 42 participants who completed the Likert-type surveys. Below is a visual of both the research questions and data sources that were gleaned throughout the study.

Table 1: Research Questions and Data Sources

Questions	Data Sources
What examples of self-efficacy do educators evince after completing micro-credentials as a part of a re-licensure pathway?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Efficacy Post-Survey responses, • Focus Group Interviews • Artifacts (submissions to Bloomboard and Create-Your-Own)
What examples of collective-efficacy do educators evince after completing micro-credentials as part of a re-licensure pathway?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective-Efficacy Post-Survey responses, • Focus Group Interviews • Artifacts (submissions to Bloomboard and Create-Your-Own)
What relationship exists between micro-credentialing as a personalized professional learning experience and educator efficacy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficacy Survey Responses • Focus Group Interviews • Artifacts (submissions to Bloomboard and Create Your Own) • Reflection

The make-up of participants ranged from elementary to secondary educators from public schools in Kansas. A homogenous factor among participants was that they were seeking re-licensure in Kansas as educators. This allowed participants to field-test their learning with actual students and allowed them time to submit their learning to a peer group in the form of student achievement data, self-reflection, and student feedback.

Participants selected from a menu of micro-credentials provided by Bloomboard, an on-line platform and provider of a variety of micro-credentials or created their own micro-credentials. Whether the micro-credential was provided by Bloomboard or created by the participant himself/herself, the micro-credential’s content connected to a Kansas State Department of Education Board Outcome (for example, Social Emotional Learning or Individual Plans of Study) and included the following design components—Research and Plan, Implement, Analyze, Share and Reflect. In order to achieve re-licensure, participants completed two micro-credentials over the course of two semesters, Spring 2018 and Fall 2018.

Results

Quantitative Findings: Surveys. Survey responses from participants indicated a relationship between personalized professional learning (in the form of micro-credentialing) and educator efficacy, both self-efficacy and collective efficacy.

The survey data indicated a significant positive relationship between personalized professional learning (in the form of micro-credentialing) and the following four elements of educator self-efficacy.

Table 2: Element One - Enhanced Knowledge Base

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey I have a strong knowledge base for this competency due to prior formal professional development.	40.9%	45.5%
Post-Survey I have a strong knowledge base for this competency due to my micro-credentialing experience	0.0%	87.5%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-40.9%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+42.0%

Knowledge base is a key component to efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2004; Bandura, 1994, Stephanou, Gkavras, & Doulkeridou, 2013). This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s perception of a strengthening knowledge base, thus representing it as an efficacy-spiking learning experience.

Table 3: Element Two - Ability to More Effectively Teach Students

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey I can presently teach students effectively as a result of this competency.	4.6%	50.0%
Post-Survey I can now teach students effectively as a result of learning this competency via micro-credentialing.	0.0%	91.7%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-4.6%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+41.7%

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to one's ability to "teach students effectively as a result of learning this competency via micro-credentialing." No participants disagreed with the statement "I can now teach students effectively as a result of learning this competency via micro-credentialing" and 41.7% more participants agreed to the statement post experience. This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one's perception of his/her ability to teach students effectively, another key component to educator self-efficacy.

Table 4: Element Three - Sense of Expertise in an Area of Competency

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey I already consider myself an expert in this area of competency.	72.	13.6%
Post-Survey I now consider myself an expert in this area of competency.	12.5%	72.5%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-55.7%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+58.9

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to one's perception of himself/herself as "an expert" in the area of competency that he/she focused on in the micro-credentialing experience. Nearly 59% more educators felt that they were "experts in this area of competency" post- experience.

This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s perception of “expertise,” which is a key component of educator self-efficacy.

Table 5: Element Four - Ability to Teach Peers a Newly Learned Competency

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey I feel like I can teach others this particular competency.	56.8%	25.0%
Post-Survey I feel like I can now teach others this particular competency.	0.0%	75.0%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-56.8%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+50.0%

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to one’s belief that he/she can now “teach others this particular competency.” No participants disagreed with the statement “I can now teach others this particular competency” as a result of the micro-credentialing experience and 50.0% more participants agreed to the statement post experience. This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s belief that he/she can teach other educators, a key component to educator self-efficacy, as stated in the previously shared operational definition.

The survey data also indicated a significant positive relationship between personalized professional learning (in the form of micro-credentialing) and the following four elements of educator collective-efficacy.

Table 6: Element One - Perception of Teammates’ Knowledge Base

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey My teammates have a strong knowledge base for this competency due to prior formal professional development.	32.5%	35.0%
Post-Survey My teammates have a strong knowledge base for this competency due to their micro-credentialing experience.	0.0%	66.7%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-32.5%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+31.7%

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to “teammates’ knowledge base” as an element of educator collective efficacy. No participants disagreed with the statement “My teammates have a strong knowledge for this competency due to their micro-credentialing experience” and 31.7% more participants agreed to the statement post experience. This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s perception of a strengthening knowledge base among his/her teammates, a key component to educator collective efficacy.

Table 7: Element Two - Perception that Teammates Can Teach Students Effectively

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey My teammates can presently teach students effectively as a result of this competency.	5.0%	35.0%
Post-Survey My teammates can now teach students effectively as a result of this competency.	0.0%	80.9%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-5.0%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+45.9%

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to one’s perception of his/her teammates’ ability to “teach students effectively as a result of learning this competency via micro-credentialing.” No participants disagreed that with the statement “my teammates can now teach students effectively as a result of this competency” and 45.9% more participants agreed to the statement post experience. This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s perception of his/her teammates’ ability teach students effectively, a key component to educator collective efficacy.

Table 8: Element Three - Perception of Teammates’ Expertise in Area of Competency

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey My teammates are experts in this area of competency.	42.5%	19.7%
Post-Survey My teammates are experts in this area of competency.	9.1%	68.1%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-33.4%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+48.4%

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to one’s perception of his/her teammates as “experts” in the area of competency that they focused on in the micro-credentialing experience. More educators, 48.4% more educators, felt that their teammates were “experts in this area of competency” post experience. This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s perception of his/her teammates as “experts,” which is a key component of educator collective efficacy, as delineated in the previously shared operational definition

Table 9: Element Four - Ability of Teammates to Teach Peers a Newly Learned Competency

Statement	Percentage of SD and D	Percentage of A and SA
Pre-Survey I feel like my teammates can teach other educators this particular competency.	25.0%	30.0%
Post-Survey I feel like my teammates can teach other educators this particular competency.	4.8%	71.4%
Change in SD and D Pre and Post	-20.2%	
Change in SA and A Pre and Post		+41.4%

The changes in the categories of strongly disagree/disagree and strongly agree/agree reflect a significant shift in perception as it pertains to one’s belief that his/her “teammates can teach other educators.” More participants, 41.4% more participants, agreed to the statement “I feel like my teammates can teach other educators this particular competency” post experience. This data indicates that a personalized professional learning experience like micro-credentialing is connected to one’s belief his/her teammates can teach other educators, a key component to educator collective efficacy, as stated in the previously shared operational definition.

Qualitative Findings: Focus Group Interviews. Data gleaned from the focus group interviews indicated similar connections to both self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Participants’ responses consistently included enhancements in “competence and a sense of expertise” and the “confidence to impact teammates.” Unlike the surveys but supportive of the relationship between micro-credentialing and efficacy were responses around the theme of “empowerment,” as participants from each focus group interview felt empowered to learn, change, and impact their schools.

In the interviews, participants also shared that the micro-credential experience helped a competency become more synonymous with their educator identities. Remarks supporting that claim include: “morning meetings are my secret weapon” and “I am now a better role model for literacy.” “Identity” was not an intended theme, but one that can be connected with educator

efficacy. “Pride in my work and our school’s work” was another theme that was unintended, but, nonetheless one that can be connected to educator efficacy.

Summary of the Relationship between Efficacy and Findings. Hattie (2016) and Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) explain efficacy through the lens of competence, confidence, and the belief that one can execute specific the responsibilities that pertain to effective teaching. Allinder (1994) expands the idea of educator efficacy to include the belief that his/her teaching competence in teaching methods will invariably lead to successfully meeting the needs of students. As it pertains to these elements of educator efficacy, personalized professional learning, in this study, shows a positive relationship. Participants shared an increased belief in their strengthening knowledge base and that of their peers after their micro-credentialing experience. Participants shared a greater feeling of expertise—both their own and that of their peers—after their micro-credentialing experience. Feeling a greater sense of expertise for themselves and for their peers directly related to their increased belief in their ability to both teach students and each other more effectively after their micro-credentialing experience. Growth in these elements of efficacy—confidence, competence, expertise, more effective teaching of students, and increased ability to teach peers—was apparent in both surveys and focus group interviews.

Stephanou, Gkavras, and Doulkeridou (2013) relate efficacy to positive feelings about one’s work like empowerment and pride. In the focus group interviews, participants shared a change in their perceptions of empowerment, as well as a sense of pride.

Based on the data collected in this study, efficacy is connected to personalized professional learning, as it pertains to specific elements of both self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Personalized professional learning can be leveraged to enhance educators’ efficacy and, therefore, can be considered both a platform for high-level professional learning as well as an alternative pathway to educator re-licensure.

Overall Implications

The findings shared here led the central researcher to consider a diverse range of recommendations for academia, for in-the-trenches practitioners, for school leaders, for district leaders, and for state level leaders. Each of these interconnected groups of educators are an important part of the educational system.

For academia, recommendations included embedding a micro-credential within in methods courses as an effort cement one’s new learning and application of pedagogy, as well as explicit instruction on the leverage that efficacy has for educators and why the most efficacious learning experiences (personalized learning) are a worthwhile use of one’s time, energy, and effort as a professional learning. The micro-credential would provide focus to a key strategy or learning outcome.

Practitioners and school leaders could use micro-credentials as integral components to an individual educator’s Individual Plan of Study, thus enhancing both job-embedded learning experiences and evaluative measures that are used to assess one’s growth as an effective educator. District leaders could use micro-credentials as a way to package and streamline

professional learning. This professional learning could be used to meet district-specific goals, building capacity around important outcomes specific to one's own district. District leaders could also, following the lead of Kettle Moraine Public Schools (Deklotz, 2017), leverage micro-credentials as a means to compensating educators for their professional hunger.

While these are all worthwhile recommendations, perhaps the one that is the most unique and potentially impactful is a recommendation for the State of Kansas to honor educators' personalized learning efforts with re-licensure.

Specific Implications for State Leaders

The vision of Kansans Can is leading the world in the success of each student. How can Kansas lead the world in the success of each student? Kansas can lead the world in success of each student by first leading the world in the success of each educator. How can Kansas lead the world in the success of each educator? Kansas could do so via a new brand of teacher-led learning and re-licensure—micro-credentials.

With any vision, there must be a structure, a model, for it to become a reality. In collaboration with the KSDE Professional Standards Board via Teacher Licensure and Accreditation, a model for instituting policy related to micro-credentialing equating to re-licensure has been discussed and drafted. Based on the findings in this study, the Professional Standards Board has reached consensus on the belief that personalized professional learning is a significant pathway toward building educator efficacy and should be considered as work/evidence toward educator re-licensure. For the study, participants, as an incentive, were and will be (based on the expiration of their existing license) granted re-licensure based on their completion of two approved micro-credentials. The participants had a choice among 25-40 preselected micro-credentials within the Bloomboard system and/or they could create their own micro-credential. The criterion guiding either their selection or creation of micro-credentials was that the micro-credentials related to a Kansas State Board Outcome such as Social Emotional Learning or Individual Plans of Study. This criterion supported the Professional Standards Board's vision that if micro-credentialing were to become an actual pathway toward re-licensure it would require direct alignment to Kansas State Board Outcomes.

An initial proposal suggested that five micro-credentials be required for re-licensure. This is a clean correspondence that implies that learning is ongoing and one microcredential should be completed each year of the professional license. Further, this pathway could completely lead to re-licensure on its own, without any additional graduate credit or professional development points. This is an important feature to the proposed model, as many states recognize micro-credentials for professional development points (Priest, 2015), however, no state currently recognizes micro-credentials as a stand-alone pathway toward educator re-licensure. That feature is important to the PSB and the central researcher because, if this pathway were to become policy, Kansas would be become the first state to recognize personalized professional learning (more specifically, micro-credentialing) as a clean-cut, stand-alone pathway to re-licensure.

The overarching categories of professional learning that have been proposed align to the Kansas State Board Outcomes, as well as Individual Professional Learning Outcomes, which could reflect the goals of one's district and school in addition to those about which he/she is personally passionate. While consensus has not been reached yet on the set number of micro-credentials per category, the recommendation has been a ratio of three micro-credentials falling in the category of Kansas State Board Outcomes and two micro-credentials falling in the area of Individual Professional Learning Outcomes. The Kansas State Board Outcomes category would include, and this is assuming that the Kansas State Department of Education would become a creator and/or conduit of micro-credentials, a menu of micro-credentials that emphasize the five Kansas State Board Outcomes—Social Emotional Learning, Kindergarten Readiness, Individual Plans of Study, Graduation Rates, and Post-Secondary Success—as the central subject matter for the educator's personalized professional learning. The Individual Professional Learning Outcomes bucket would be much more diverse and would emphasize district, school, or individual personalized professional learning interests that the educator and his/her school's or school district's Professional Development Council (PDC) would approve.

This model, while in need of refinement, does embrace the tight-loose orientation (DuFour & Fullan, 2013) that is essential to innovative policy and its success. The model focused in that it includes a set number of micro-credentials over a five-year re-licensure cycle and it is aligned to the Kansas State Board Outcomes. One could argue that it would have a significantly more relevant connection to Kansas State Board Outcomes than any current re-licensure pathway, as those are open to any professional learning topics so long as they equate to PDC points and/or graduate credit. The model is loose in that it allows the individual learner significant voice and choice within the recommended parameters. While the bucket is defined, one can still choose which Kansas State Board Outcome on which to focus and which micro-credential on the menu in which he/she would engage his/her learning efforts. In addition, two of the five required micro-credentials would still be specific to one's individual learning curiosities and/or needs.

This pathway would also best resemble the Individual Plans of Study (IPS) for educators' model that was previously mentioned. Principals and/or Professional Development Councils (PDC) would work with each teacher to choose/develop micro-credentials that fall within the parameters of these buckets and then systematically track and support his/her progress each year. Goals, timelines, and supporting evidence would be both part of the educator's micro-credentials and the educator's IPS. These micro-credentials and the artifacts that would naturally become by-products of the work could also be linked back to the educator's evaluation via Kansas Educator Evaluation Protocol (KEEP). With a futuristic mindset, one could even picture the micro-credentials supporting the Kansas State Board Outcomes being a natural part of KEEP, which would be a substantive effort to link professional learning and evaluation.

Systems and the individuals within systems both crave and need continuity if both are to be optimally effective. For educators in Kansas, that continuity encompasses professional learning, evaluation, and state initiatives. All three of these crucial elements currently exist in relative isolation. Micro-credentials could be the variable that welds them together, providing an unprecedented level of continuity among state and district systems and the individuals that work and thrive within them.

Conclusion

In the end, it is clear that personalized learning is more than a fad and cannot be stereotyped as something millennial educators do. It can serve as an impetus for a meaningful learning experience that can enhance one's sense of efficacy, become a pathway to re-licensure, and, most significantly, impact educators on a personal level, transforming their professional identities and/or bringing them closer as a team that trusts, respects, and believes in their collective ability to serve students.

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