Teacher Perceptions of School-Based and District Professional Development

Ashley Kennedy

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Teacher Perceptions of School-Based and District Professional Development

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Kennesaw State University

October 24, 2017

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of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the

Bagwell College of Education
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Dedication

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Abstract

Professional development is a leading topic of discussion in the field of education. Because teachers are responsible for implementing relevant instructional practices, meeting the instructional needs of students, and taking ownership of their professional development goals, understanding teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development is critical. The purpose of this study was to investigate how K-12 teachers perceive school-based and district professional development. This study aimed to answer three questions: How do teachers perceive school-based and district professional development? What types of professional development experiences do teachers find effective? Do recent professional development experiences influence how teachers collaborate with other teachers? The researcher hopes that schools and districts will consider relevant, job-embedded, and sustainable professional development options based on the information found and reported in this case study.

Keywords: professional development, teacher perceptions, professional learning communities (PLCs)
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Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

While there is a great deal of research that addresses professional development, there is still a lack of research that specifically provides insight regarding how K-12 teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development experiences. Professional development, its purpose, influence, and impact on teacher development, is a multifaceted topic of discussion. Calls for high-quality professional development sessions are in high demand. Effective professional development sessions focus on student learning data, promote active learning experiences, and build coherence because they focus on building the content knowledge of participants (Shaha, Glassett, & Ellsworth, 2015). In order to provide intentional professional development experiences, educators and professional development policy makers might find useful information regarding how K-12 teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development. It is important to understand whether or not teachers perceive these professional development experiences as well-planned, effective, and relevant to their teaching and learning needs. Likewise, there is a need to understand if professional development experiences motivate teachers to implement what they’ve learned. No matter how interesting a passive learning experience is, if there is not application beyond the initial meeting, impact is minimal (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Lastly, it is essential to understand if professional development encourages teachers to share what they’ve learned with other colleagues. There is a need to gain a deeper understanding of what teachers experience during school-based and district level professional development and how they perceive those experiences.

Intentional and useful professional development is applicable to teacher’s current teaching responsibilities and interests. Professional development should be job-embedded and in
a setting that allows teachers to apply what they’ve learned in a real or natural setting.

“Educators benefit most by learning in the setting where they can immediately apply what they learn and in the school where they work” (Mizell, 2010, p. 9). This type of professional development is what provides the highest return on teacher development and encourages peer collaboration and mentoring relationships. Shillingstad, McGlamery, Davis, and Gilles (2015) argue that effective teacher leaders leverage best practices to courageously share their expertise with their mentees and peers. Strategically planning for and executing intentional, relevant professional development should be considered a non-negotiable when working with teachers and teacher leaders. Teacher leaders who step into mentoring roles are faced with many challenges and responsibilities which require them to have ongoing and effective professional development experiences. It is essential that teachers have access to adequate, ongoing support, either through participation in professional learning communities or involvement in school and university partnership professional development activities (Shillingstad, McGlamery, Davis & Gilles 2015). Exploring implications associated with professional development might reveal opportunities and gaps. These potential opportunities might shed light on what effective professional development looks, feels, and sounds like. This information might provide more insight into the relationship between professional development and teacher development.

Because professional development initiatives and processes continue to change, instructional leaders and policy makers need relevant information from K-12 teachers which verifies whether or not professional development experiences are effective and influential. “Effective professional development is ongoing, intensive, and connected to practice and school initiatives; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; and builds strong working relationships among teachers” (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Adamson, 2010, p.1).
Exploring K-12 teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development experiences will bring a deeper understanding to the field and “provide a voice for individuals not heard in the literature” (Creswell, 2007, p.102).

**Purpose Statement**

Often, professional development is intended to increase teacher effectiveness, develop teacher’s pedagogical understanding, and provide teachers with a stage to share current practices and apply new practices. In other cases, professional development is utilized to support teachers who lack the essential skills that will ensure student success. With student demographics changing and student needs becoming more complex, it is imperative that school leaders, district leaders, and professional development facilitators understand how teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development experiences so they can implement systematic, job-embedded, and ongoing professional development. Reeves (2010) suggests that professional development is intensive, sustained, directly related to the needs of teachers and students, and provides the opportunity for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement.

Although many researchers have examined the topic of professional development, the implementation of professional development, and the intended outcomes of professional development, a minimal amount of attention has been given to analyzing K-12 teachers’ perceptions of school-based and district level professional development experiences. The purpose of this case study was to conduct a constructivist investigation to better understand K-12 teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development.

The researcher aimed to gain a deep understanding of how four, K-12 teachers from a large, public, suburban school district, perceive school-based and district professional development experiences. The goal of this study was to understand the experiences, beliefs, and
needs of K-12 teachers who have recently participated in school-based and district level professional development and to analyze the information from the participants to recommend possible professional development improvements to schools and districts.

The researcher used a qualitative case study research design which was guided by constructivist inquiry. Through one-on-one interviews and a focus group interview, this study investigated the perceptions of K-12 teachers in a large suburban school district who had recently participated in school-based and district level professional development. The case study aimed to explore participants’ perceptions of professional development experiences, opinions about the effectiveness of the professional development sessions, and factors that determine if professional development impacted how they collaborated with other teachers.

**Research Questions**

The following three research questions will guide this qualitative inquiry:

1. How do teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development?
2. What types of professional development experiences do teachers find effective?
3. Do recent professional development experiences influence how teachers collaborate with other teachers?

**Historical Context & Significance of the Study**

The history of American education in the twentieth century is marked by attempts of reform and public concern (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). One could argue that some reforms have impacted how professional development is funded and implemented in districts and schools today. For example, the Excellence Movement, a response to *A Nation at Risk* report, urged the nation to implement school improvement initiatives that would greatly impact teaching and learning. The Excellence Movement launched state and national task forces that investigated the
state of public education in America and landed on a new set of requirements for students and schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The Excellence Movement required students to have more rigorous homework, obtain more credits, and take additional tests while also requiring schools to consider lengthening the school day. The report included very little about strategic teacher development. Because the Excellence Movement was deemed unnecessary and unsuccessful in providing new ideas to public education, it was seen as an ineffective approach. Failure of the Excellence Movement was attributed to the fact that it was widely regarded as a top-down mandate ((DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The end of the Excellence Movement encouraged a new approach to school improvement. This approach considered teacher development. In 1989, in an effort to execute a plan that included national educational goals and standards, President George Bush organized the nation’s governors for a summit meeting on education. The result of the meeting was the naming of Goals 2000. Goals 2000 established six national goals by the year 2000. The six original goals, with subsequent additions, addressed school readiness, competency checkpoints in the four core areas (i.e. English, mathematics, science, and history), student literacy and citizenship rates, drug and violence-free school environments, and that “by the year 2000, the nation’s teaching force will have access to programs for the continued development of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p.5). Because these standards were viewed as a federal takeover, a second Education Summit was hosted in 1991 and the responsibility of developing national standards was left up to professional organizations and curriculum specialists. This discouraged the top-down approach and discredited the Excellence Movement which led to the Reconstructing Movement.
The Reconstructing Movement inspired educators because it honored site-based management; principals responded to issues unique to their building and teachers were encouraged to collaborate professionally during shared planning time. While the Reconstructing Movement came with high hopes, it revealed that site-based management left principals and teachers focusing on minor issues that did not directly impact teaching and learning (e.g. discipline, faculty morale, and parental involvement). Past educational movements and school reform ironically resemble current professional development systems and structures today. All of them have had or are having a profound impact on professional development.

The significance of this study is influenced by educational movements and reforms which have occurred and are currently driving how teachers are being developed in the 21st century. Well-designed professional development has the potential to be more successful than any educational movement. Equally, educators who are aiming to create lasting change have a greater chance at success if they plan and sustain productive professional learning models and experiences. History has shown that professional development reforms and initiatives impact teaching and learning. Reforms and initiatives that do not prioritize teachers being provided focused and sustained professional development have a greater potential of being ineffective and invaluable to teachers, thereby to students and the classroom, as well. As a result, there will be no favorable impact on student achievement. Teacher development has gone through a reform movement over the past decade as prevailing beliefs links high-quality professional development to high-quality teaching and high quality teaching to student achievement (Stewart, 2014). The way in which teachers are trained, contributes to how they view the teaching and learning process.
In this study, great emphasis was placed on uncovering K-12 teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development. It is hoped that this study will support schools and districts with ensuring that professional development is improving teacher and student results. This investigation leveraged what past researchers have said about high impact, effective professional development practices. High impact professional development experiences demonstrate three characteristics; student learning, rigorous observation of adult practices, and the showcasing of people and practices, not programs. Professional development that is planned and focuses on student need is highly effective. Professional development experiences that have a strong connection between teaching strategies specific to student needs should be evident. Similarly, learning that requires observation, analysis, and discussion about instructional decisions ensures high-impact professional learning. Reeves (2008) claims that professional practices and learning should not be distinguished by the label but instead by the extent to which implementation occurs with fidelity. This validates the idea of people and practices, not programs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). When schools commit to providing the time for teachers to learn, reflect, and adjust their instructional practices, the implementation of new processes has a better chance of impacting teachers and the instructional decisions they make for their students. DuFour & Eaker (1998) states that “if the purpose of staff development is improved results for students, it is no longer justifiable to assess the effectiveness of a staff development program solely on the basis of participation satisfaction” (p. 266). Professional development should specifically support teachers’ current skills, knowledge, and identified student needs.

Educational theorists and advocates aim to endorse effective professional development but it is important to analyze this topic deeply. This study aimed to go beyond the surface level of professional development. The researcher merged theories, practices, and perceptions associated
with professional development. The researcher aspired to provide information that will impact and teacher’s learning experiences at their schools and within their school districts. When professional development is effective in producing positive changes in teachers’ instructional practices, it is likely to improve student-learning outcomes (Odden, Picus, & Fermanich, 2003). Understanding and making productive changes for teachers will not only impact teacher’s practices but student learning experiences, as well. Investigating teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development has the potential to impact teaching and learning. This study provides an opportunity for districts and states to better understand teacher perceptions of school-based and district professional development, what the literature says, and how school-based and district professional development impacts teachers and teaching practices.

**Professional Development Defined**

While there are many definitions for the term professional development, it is important that educators have a general understanding of the term. According to Mizell (2010), professional development is a formal process such as a conference, seminar, or workshop. Professional development provides an opportunity for collaborative learning among members of a work team and can also be a course provided at a college or university. Guskey (2000) describes professional development as “those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (p. 15). Professional development is a way in which teacher practice is enhanced and strengthened. It encourages teachers to implement new and innovative ideas into the classroom, reflect on their current practices, and continue to develop their instructional practices throughout their career. Educators use other terms to refer to professional development. They include professional learning, staff development, training, in-service, study groups,
mentoring, action research, or continuing education. Guskey (2000) states that, “Professional
development is the only strategy school systems have to strengthen educators’ performance
levels” (p. 26), providing time for teachers to partake in professional development opportunities
provides them with job-embedded, collaborative learning time and is critical. Collaborative
professional development ensures a clear and systematic approach to professional development
and increases the likeliness of teachers making what they’ve learned actionable. There is a clear
distinction from passively gathering information to actively working with new information
(Stewart, 2014).

Another term closely associated with professional development is professional learning
communities or PLCs. Promoting and supporting professional learning communities is one way
to monitor professional development and professional development goals all while keeping the
focus on student achievement. Professional learning communities thrive best when individuals
share a similar vision of educational values and beliefs (Zepeda, 2008). Professional learning
communities, or learning teams, work together in various ways. In professional learning
communities, teachers analyze student data to identify learning gaps, discuss school issues that
impact student performance, share instructional ideas, determine instructional goals and next
steps, and partake in professional development in order to work towards a common goal. Caine
and Caine (2010) state that professional learning communities provide teachers with a safe,
respectful community that is supported by growing relationships. Professional learning
communities encourage teachers to share student successes and challenges, professional goals,
and worthy instructional practices.

Professionalism and Professional Development
Grimmett (2014) states that “in order to understand what is meant by the term professional development, it is necessary to understand how professional is defined in the particular context within which development of this entity is called for” (p. 29). It is important to acknowledge the complexity of the word professional in the field of education and how it directly relates to professional development and the perceptions of professional development. Socio-political factors like government policy documents, teacher accreditation procedures, and mandated professional development requirements have impacted the definition of teacher professionalism. Subsequently, this has impacted how teachers voluntarily or involuntarily develop their professional skills and participate in professional development initiatives. For example, teachers in England must demonstrate, through various forms of documentation, proficiency on teaching outcome standards in order to obtain the Qualified Teacher Status. Teachers in the United States voluntarily apply for the National Board Certification credential while in Australia, teachers are registered for professional practice and knowledge institutes by regulatory bodies. In 2011, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership published national standards for teachers to develop their professional knowledge, practice, and engagement abilities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The state of Georgia has its own unique set of socio-political factors associated with the term professional and how professional development opportunities are granted and documented. Georgia created a House Study Committee on Professional Learning which was formed to study the state of professional learning throughout the state scrutinized certificate renewal in order to make recommendations that will improve teaching and learning. The convening of this committee resulted in a new professional rule for Georgia educators. The new rule will require districts and schools to provide adequate time for professional development that is aligned with
the Professional Standards Commission (PSC) rule on certification. Effective July 1, 2017, educators are required to develop Professional Learning Plans (PLPs) which detail teacher’s self-identified Professional Learning Goals (PLGs). Professional learning plans will be based on school data. Teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders will be accountable for the successful implementation of the professional learning plans. Some educators will have required professional learning plans. Educators who meet one of the following criteria will have required professional learning plans: induction level educators, educators working on non-renewable certificates, educators in new positions, educators returning after an absence from the profession, educators new to the state, and educators with annual performance ratings below proficient (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). These professional development requirements impact how teachers perceive the profession and how the profession continues to evolve. Examining the term professional and how it influences the term development may make it easier to understand the knowledge and skills that are needed in order for teachers to experience lasting success and meet the goals they establish for themselves as professionals who are taking ownership of the teaching profession.
Chapter Two

The literature review provides a close examination of literature to define and explain the difference between effective and ineffective professional development models. This examination is a critical step that assists stakeholders with a better understanding of how K-12 teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development experiences. More importantly, this inspection investigates the problem of practice, which is to obtain a better understanding of teachers experiences, perceptions, and beliefs about school-based and district level professional development. Because the researcher had countless experiences with planning and facilitating school-based and district professional development where she relied solely on Learning Forward’s Professional Development framework and standards, she used them to frame how she investigated the problem of practice.

Because professional learning is the singular most accessible means that teachers have to develop new knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to better meet students' learning needs (Learning Forward, 2015), understanding the standards for professional learning may prove why teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development experiences as effective or ineffective. This study relied on concepts presented by Learning Forward, A Professional Learning Association. The third iteration of Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning outline the characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results (Learning Forward, 2015) and served as a guide in this study. The standards for effective professional learning include learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning design, implementation, and outcomes. Below is the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning quick guide.
The Standards for Professional Learning provide a framework in which professional development can be situated as an integral part to support adult learning (Zepeda, 2008). The literature review has been divided into two major headings, effective versus ineffective professional development models with multiple subheadings.

**Effective Professional Development Models**

**Professional development models that inspire.** Professional development opportunities should provide educators with experiences that ignite their professional passion and impact student performance. Reeves (2000) notes that without integrity, efficacy, and diligence, three essential factors, a professional development enterprise is doomed to failure. To meet the demands of these three factors an effective professional development structure should be intentionally planned and co-created with teachers and school leaders, and then executed with
fidelity. The single greatest criticism of professional development is the overwhelming prevalence of single-shot, one-day workshops that often make teacher professional development “intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented, and noncumulative” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 3). Teachers should be inspired by professional development, not discouraged or disheartened because of unproductive systems. While there are many professional development programs that provide single-shot, one-day workshops, current literature confirms that some states and school districts are implementing professional development models that provide a wide- range of diverse professional development experiences. One could argue that these professional development models are inspiring teaching practices. Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, Darling-Hammond (2010) discuss four states, Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, and Vermont, that were deemed professionally active because of their professional development models, teacher participation rates, and student’s national scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). School districts in these states reported key qualities of effective professional development which promoted the success of their state, teachers, and students. One common attribute amongst the districts was monitoring. Each state also implemented processes that monitored the quality of professional development. Each state monitored the effectiveness of professional development by collecting surveys, analyzing student data, and investigating teacher satisfaction rates. Missouri monitored teacher satisfaction rates and conducted a professional development audit using student achievement data as a professional development quality indicator. Missouri also implemented an intentional teacher induction program and committed to sustained training from The National Writing Project. Colorado designed cycles of inquiry for their teachers as a way to encourage consistent collaboration, problem-solving and learning within professional learning communities. The
quality of professional development can have a tremendous impact on teachers and professional learning communities. When professional development experiences are systematic and valued, teachers are more likely to apply what they learn. As a result, their teaching practices are enhanced and student achievement is positively impacted. In order for this to occur, districts and states may need to examine successful models and attempt to replicate those models based on their teacher and student needs.

**Personalized professional development models.** Customizing professional development based on teachers’ skills, knowledge, and current realities will potentially promote more personalized professional development experiences. Theory and practice in professional development programs have a reciprocal relationship, which can have a positive impact on teachers and their instructional practices (Giraldo, 2014). When teachers explore educational learning theories with their current contexts in mind, there is an opportunity for more personalized learning to occur. Giraldo conducted an action research study to explore whether or not novice teachers were impacted by professional development programs that connected theory to their current instructional practices and classroom demands. Three major findings emerged from this study. The findings revealed that teachers’ classroom performance and instructional practices were directly impacted because of how the professional development program was structured. Teachers intentionally focused on student achievement. Zepeda (2008) argues “when teachers examine student work in the company of others, they can reflect on how and why students are or not learning” (p.10). The data also revealed that teachers demonstrated a greater awareness of their teaching practices and student performance. The structure of the program confirmed the value of matching theory to practice. Giraldo’s conclusions and recommendations determined that professional development programs should include a theoretical input that
responds to the needs of teachers. The study also proved that explicit activities that are personalized for teachers provide more opportunities for them to discuss and connect issues that may be associated with theoretical underpinnings. Professional development programs must engage teachers in reflective and collaborative work (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). Giraldo (2014) determined that professional development activities should combine theory and practice so that teachers are encouraged to use educational theory in collaborative ways (i.e. lesson plans, classroom activities, and the instructional planning process). Generally speaking, this study stressed the importance of planning professional development experiences that meet the current needs of teachers, provide structures that allow teachers to connect professional development to theory, and be delivered in a personalized manner so that teachers can apply their learning with colleagues. Teachers should be encouraged to reflect upon what they are learning about teacher practice and student learning (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2011). When teachers are afforded this opportunity, the cycle of continuous improvement for themselves and their students is in motion.

**Goal-oriented professional development.** Granting teachers the opportunity to immerse themselves in professional development experiences that encourage professional growth may help teachers reach the goals they set for themselves and their students. Goal oriented professional development should be linked to some sort of relevant data. Data sources for framing professional development include student work samples, standardized test results and formal or informal classroom observations made by coaches or administrators (Zepeda, 2008). Professional development opportunities and professional learning communities provide the link between what teachers know, how teachers can use what they know, and what teachers want to achieve. Bouwma-Gearhart (2013) noted that professional development should allow practitioners to adequately reflect on what they learn about teaching and student learning. When
educators are reflective about what they are learning and how their learning can impact their students, the purpose of professional development has been fulfilled. Goal-oriented or data-driven professional development experiences might have a greater influence on a teacher’s professional goals. As more students from diverse backgrounds populate 21st-century classrooms, teachers’ goals will continue to become more complex. Failing to equip teachers with relevant pedagogical tools, classroom management techniques, and technology training will be detrimental for teachers and students. As 21st-century classrooms become more diverse, the demand for data-driven professional development will, too. As the need for pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive intensifies (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007), goal-oriented professional development might be the answer that solves challenging instructional barriers. Seeking out, responding to, and valuing teacher goals and supporting those goals through professional development efforts, will promote long-term teacher success. Doing so will support instructional leaders and professional development facilitators as they implement critical steps to guarantee a seamless vision for professional development. Better teaching and improved teaching can only be realized when professional development is no longer viewed as a fragmented add-on to what teachers do (Meister, 2010). Tapping into teacher goals and developing professional development that supports those goals will discourage fragmented professional development approaches.

**Professional learning communities.** Professional learning communities (PLCs) which are being referred to as an effective professional development model, are enhancing the teaching and learning capabilities of individual teachers and schools. “American public schools were originally organized according to the concepts and principles of the factory model, the prevalent organizational model of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (DuFour & Eaker,
p.19), however, professional learning communities challenge that ingrained factory-like model. The industrial-like model offered one way to train and supervise workers. Educators were left with little opportunity to express their needs. There was also a lack of teacher autonomy which leads to a lack of creativity during the instructional planning process. Eventually, school districts began moving in a direction that discouraged standardization, uniformity, and bureaucracy. This helped redesign the workplace so that innovation and improvements were apart of teachers’ daily activities (Fullan, 1991). Professional learning communities are helping schools move away from focusing on procedures rather than results, not valuing teacher opinions, lacking time and flexibility, and assessing if learning is actually occurring. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that the best hope for school improvement is transforming schools into professional learning communities as a way to engage school staff in meaningful ways. Similarly, Battersby & Verdi (2015) state that in order for teachers to benefit from professional development activities, learning should take place through collaboration in the context of teaching. Abandoning old models and embracing the characteristics associated with professional learning communities can help meet the needs of students, teachers, schools, and districts. Leaders and teachers who have committed to professional learning communities, use the following characteristics as a guide:

**Shared mission, vision, and values.** Collectively, these guiding principles make professional learning communities different from any other type of professional development structure. The principles are not decided in a top-down manner.

**Collective inquiry.** Questioning, researching new methods, and testing strategies allow participants in professional learning communities to develop new skills, heighten awareness, and examine their own beliefs. All of this makes collective inquiry “the engine of improvement, growth, and renewal in a professional learning community” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25).
**Collaborative teams.** Collaborative, professional learning community teams share a common purpose for improvement strategy efforts and increase individual’s knowledge and skills. While individuals have the potential to grow because of independent reflective work, being a part of a collaborative team, a school that learns collaboratively rather than individually, creates momentum for continued improvement.

**Action orientation and experimentation.** Professional learning communities understand that passive interactions will not produce results. Professional learning communities leverage their aspirations and visions to organize and experiment. Teachers in the professional learning communities, test and develop theories, reflect on what happened, evaluate results, and repeat the process.

**Continuous improvement.** The continuous cycle of improvement encourages each member to focus on long-term processes and not day to day tasks. Each member is focused on the fundamental purpose of their work, how it will be achieved, strategies for becoming better, and criteria to assess improvement efforts.

**Results orientation.** Professional learning community initiatives are best executed when improvement is based on results rather than intentions. Being result oriented guarantees ongoing assessment, reflection, and then improvement.

Highly functioning professional learning communities provide teachers with ongoing, authentic learning opportunities and increase teacher accountability which can potentially transform the types of learning experiences students have. Professional learning communities encourage teachers to deeply analyze student work, student learning needs, and their teaching practices. The ongoing and intentional conversations that take place within professional learning
communities support the improvement of teaching practices and quite likely student achievement, as well.

**Professional Development Schools (PDS).** Professional Development Schools which emerged in the mid-1980s are an innovative type of school-college partnership. Professional Development Schools got their start after various consortiums recognized the need to better prepare preservice teachers and ensure that professors and teachers collaborate to have a greater impact on future preservice teachers. Professional Development Schools were designed to accomplish a four-fold agenda: preparing future educators, providing current educators with ongoing professional development, encouraging joint school–university faculty investigation of education-related issues, and promoting the learning of P–12 students (National Association for Professional Development Schools, 2008, p.1). Professional Development Schools advocate for the professionalization of teaching by developing teacher knowledge, growing teacher leaders, and addressing professional accountability issues with teachers. Darling-Hammond (1992) identifies Professional Development Schools as the best place to provide accountability for teachers “by ensuring that they have the tools to apply theory in practice and by socializing them to the profession’s norms and ethics” (p.91). Professional Development Schools are also seen as infrastructures that have the potential to transform the culture of teaching and the expectations for collaboration in schools. According to Darling-Hammond (1994):

> Professional Development Schools struggle against traditional school norms as they offer the possibility for socializing new teachers to a different set of expectations about practice within and outside the boundaries of their classrooms. …If Professional Development Schools become the doorways that all new teachers pass through as they
launch their careers, they can transform the culture of teaching and learning in individual classrooms. (pp. 8-9).

Professional Development Schools are invested in connecting the P-20 continuum by encouraging and receiving input from universities, districts, and schools in order to provide solid support structures and professional development opportunities for teachers. The mission of the National Association for Professional Development Schools is to focus on two overarching goals: the advancement of the education profession and the improvement of P–12 learning. In an effort to achieve this mission, The National Association for Professional Development Schools outlines 9 required essentials for PDS. The essentials were created to ensure that school districts and universities have highly functional PDSs for those educators who engage in their work. The nine essentials are:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope and furthers the education profession.

2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community

3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need.

4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants.

5. Publicly sharing the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants.

6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved.
7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration.

8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings.

9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Creative professional development models like Professional Development Schools promise sound professional development structures that are needed to develop teachers and impact the field of education because they provide hands-on, evidence-based, integrated, and supervised professional development experiences. The nine essentials to Professional Development School demonstrate why this professional development model has stood the test of time and is viewed as an effective professional development model. Exploring the impact of a Professional Development Schools could be beneficial to districts and schools considering it is a different type of professional development model that involves a larger pool of stakeholders. A Professional Development Schools goes beyond the walls of a school building and a school district. It encourages systematic authentic partnerships that allow teachers to experience the benefits of effective professional development.

**Ineffective Professional Development Models**

*One size fits all professional development.* Respecting the adult learning theory principles is important when leveraging teacher talent and soliciting teacher input when planning professional development. Effective professional development integrates teacher voice and considers what and how they will learn (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008). Bifuh-Ambe (2013) conducted a mixed methods study that examined the perceptions of elementary school teachers
who did not have the opportunity to provide input on the professional development topics and workshops. Teachers participated in 10, research-based professional development sessions which took place over a 10 week period. The sessions took place in a traditional classroom for 2 hours. The objectives focused on writing strategies, identifying teacher writing strengths, understanding mini-lessons in a writing workshop, differentiating writing instruction, and learning effective ways to assess and evaluate writing. Bifuh-Ambe (2013) found that teachers valued working with colleagues from schools across the district. The participants felt that the facilitators were knowledgeable but were concerned that the professional development sessions did not address their needs. Adults need to relate the content of their learning to real-world problems (Knowles et al., 2011). Instead, the sessions provided generic content and did not highlight the writing challenges that teachers were encountering at that time. As a result, it was recommended that teachers be more involved in developing the content and designing the professional development workshops. Adults are self-directed learners. The term self-directed implies that a person is not influenced by others and is taking responsibility for his or her own decisions (Cox, 2015, p. 29). The study also mentioned that if teachers had a greater say in determining the content and design of the professional development work, they might have felt differently. The study highlighted the importance of seeking teacher input when designing professional development so that the information presented addresses their teacher’s current classroom needs. Seeking teacher input might also expose knowledge gaps so that teachers are more aware of what they need to know in order to best support their students. Cox (2015) noted that “adults learn when they are ready and when they have a need to learn” (pg. 30). State, district, and school leaders should leverage teacher knowledge and solicit their input when planning for professional development. Because adult learners thrive best when they give input and give voice to what they need as teachers and
for their students, districts and schools should evaluate how often teacher input is sought out when planning professional development workshops.

**Professional development that does not compliment teacher’s learning styles.** The delivery method of professional development can immediately engage teachers or cause them to shut down. In addition, if teacher’s learning styles are not considered, professional development might be viewed as irrelevant. Traditional professional development models require teachers to participate at the same time and in the same location creating problems such as scheduling, travel, space, and funding. Other methods, like online professional development, provides the freedom for teachers to log on and participate at the time of day that is best for them. To address learning style preferences, educators should closely examine how different methods of delivery influence how teachers perceive professional development experiences. Soliciting input from teachers or having them engage in activities that celebrate their learning styles might provide insight into how teachers learn best.

Fishman, Konstantopoulos, Kubitskey, Vath, Park, Johnson, and Edelson (2013) examined the differences in teacher and student learning when professional development was offered face-to-face and online. The quantitative study highlighted the differences between online and face-to-face professional development. The purpose of the study was to determine if teachers learned at a greater rate, and how or if what they learned was implemented in their classroom. Although this study revealed no significant difference between face-to-face and online professional development, the researchers provided conclusions that are important to acknowledge. It was noted that this study does not represent all professional development. In addition, the researchers mentioned that online professional development should be considered as a more practical professional development approach because of factors associated with cost,
context, and content. The study validates the importance of considering diverse delivery models when planning professional development. It also reminds educators that the presence of nontraditional professional development methods will continue to become pervasive. Online professional development opportunities have dramatically increased over the past few years as technology has advanced (Brown & Green, 2003). Regardless of the professional development method of delivery, key components like duration, teacher needs, student needs, content, and learning activities, should guide the professional development planning process. The most effective professional development experiences employ active learning techniques, demonstrate coherence with other school initiatives, and are of extended duration (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, Yoon, 2001). To achieve ideal professional learning attributes, intentional planning should occur as an effort to best meet the needs of teachers and their students.

Quality versus quantity. The amount of time that teachers spend in professional development and what takes place during that time is associated with the quality of professional development. “More than 90 percent of public school teachers participate in workshops, conferences, and training sessions” (Reeves, 2010, p. 24). While many schools and districts are attempting to develop their teachers by designing professional development workshops and conferences, research notes the misunderstanding of what teachers need versus what they receive when they spend time in a professional development workshop. There is an enormous gap between what teachers expect and what they receive in professional learning (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, Orphanos, 2009). Unfortunately, some workshops occur one time with no opportunity for application or collaboration with colleagues. Studies show that when teachers are involved in 50 or more hours of high-quality professional learning approaches, student test scores rise by an average of 21 percentage points (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Adamson, 2010).
Professional development seat-time is an important factor. It is important to ensure that the amount of time spent in professional development is quality time. In his blog, Mizell (2009b) writes:

> Expectations are at the heart of professional development. Many educators don’t expect much because they have often been the victims of poorly conceived and executed professional development. Some people responsible for organizing professional development apparently don’t expect much either, because they seldom determine whether and to what extent it produces positive results at the classroom level. Even officials who fund professional development don’t expect much because they rarely hold anyone accountable for outcomes. Each day, for thousands of educators, this syndrome of low expectations jeopardizes the quality and results of professional development.

Planning for quantity over quality will not yield the best results for teachers and students. Quantity places value on how much and how often while quality aims for a gold standard that best meets the needs of teachers and students. The lack of quality professional development has the potential to negatively impact teachers and students. It also creates a risk of not fully understanding whether or not professional development promotes student achievement and learning.

**Professional development and its impact on students.** Wei, Adamson, & Darling-Hammond (2010) provided longitudinal data on teachers who participated in ongoing professional development. In 2008, teachers reported having fewer and fewer opportunities to participate in sustained professional learning opportunities, revealing that professional development trends in the United States were going in the wrong direction. In addition, this report closely evaluated the quality of each state’s professional development and how students
were impacted. Teacher development and high-quality professional development are two components that impact student achievement. Some of the findings from the report include:

*Professional development participation for students with disabilities.* Data revealed a decline in the area of teachers receiving support who teach students with special needs; 33% in 2004 to 26% in 2008.

*Teachers participating in induction programs.* Participation in induction programs for beginner teachers increased from 68% in 2004 to 74% in 2008. Although this increase is positive, there is still room to develop because “teachers in urban and rural schools and schools with the highest free and reduced lunch and minority enrollments participated in these programs less, and less often than teachers in suburban schools and schools with few low-income and minority students” (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Adamson, 2010, pg. 4).

*Teacher collaboration opportunities.* Low percentages of teacher collaboration efforts were reported in the 2004 and 2008 survey; 17 percent in 2004 and 16% in 2008. A teacher who is a learner has the opportunity to establish collaborative relationships that can help meet the needs of both of organization and its people (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Teachers who experience sustained, job-embedded professional development have the potential to positively impact teaching and learning experiences. The more teachers are developed, the greater impact they have on their students and possibly other teachers. Building and sustaining teachers squashes the “I am just a teacher” mantra (Helterbran (2010, p. 363) and places a stronger emphasis on their strengths and professionalism. Teachers who receive relevant and adequate professional development are more likely to have greater confidence in the classroom. Likewise, schools that provide intentional professional development and evolve as a
learning community create an ethos of care for the individuals and the group as a whole (Zepeda, 2008).

While current literature discusses topics and implications associated with professional development, there is still need to investigate K-12 teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development experiences. This study will seek to fill the gaps in the literature while leveraging research-based best practices and standards for professional development. This study will examine how teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development, the types of professional development experiences teachers find to be effective, and if and how professional development impacts how teachers lead one another so that districts and schools have information that will assist them when establishing and implementing professional development.
Chapter Three

Chapter three includes the researcher’s worldview, goals, and the research approach and design. Participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures are also described. Strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and ethical treatment of informants are also discussed.

**Worldview**

Qualitative researchers bring a variety of beliefs and perspectives to a research project. Because of this, it is important to understand the worldview of the researcher. A paradigm or worldview is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p.17 as cited in Creswell). Understanding the researcher’s beliefs guarantees that the methodology is grounded and comprehensible to the reader. The researcher’s social constructivism worldview, rooted in ontological philosophical assumptions, guided her throughout the study. Creswell (2007) argues that, “Social constructivists seek to understand the world in which they live and work” (p. 20). The researcher relied on the participants’ perceptions and experiences in order to make sense of the problem of practice and to uncover and create meaning making her an integral part of the construction process. According to Creswell (2007) “Social constructivists recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation” (p. 21), and as a result, rely on the participant’s experiences and perspectives as a way to honor the complexity of the meaning. The researcher intended to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning of others, and rather than starting with a theory, the inquiry was conducted in an inductive manner to develop a working theory. The researcher investigated and reported multiple realities by using the participants’ words. The multiple ideas and meanings that surfaced required the researcher to look for the complexities amongst those ideas. The questioning created patterns of meaning that were analyzed and
categorized. The patterns revealed various levels of meaning and theories contributed to uncovering teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development.

Goals

**Personal goals.** The researcher was inspired to conduct this study because of her desire to understand how teachers perceive school-based and district level provided professional development. More importantly, the researcher yearns to understand how professional development influences the way in which teachers collaborate and share ideas with one another. Personally, the researcher feels that teacher leaders provide great contributions to their colleagues and students. The researcher is committed to implementing effective professional development practices which have motivated this investigation. Selfishly, the researcher wants to inspire others who are committed to providing teachers with effective, intentional, and systematic professional development opportunities in an effort to positively impact and uplift the teacher to have a profound impact on students. Because the researcher believes in the powerful influence professional development can have, she feels emotionally connected to it. As a result, she was inspired to complete an investigation that might deepen her understanding of the perceptions and processes associated with school and district level professional development.

**Practical goals.** Because the researcher serves as a professional learning facilitator, she is curious about understanding how K-12 teachers perceive school and professional development experiences. One can assume that professional development structures and policies will continue to change. A study like this might serve as a guide to help others better understand how teachers, the individuals directly impacted by professional development initiatives and changes, perceive school and district level professional development. The researcher hopes this study will provide information that can be used to support those who are responsible for communicating, planning,
and implementing professional development systems. The researcher is optimistic and feels that school and district leaders will benefit from the information provided in this study. She hopes that they will consider those practices that will best meet the needs of teachers.

**Intellectual goals.** The researcher’s intellectual goals are influenced by ontological assumptions. They prove that she is serious about having an expert understanding of professional development. Qualitative research was used to gain an expert understanding because it is experience based, situational, and personalistic (Stake, 1995). Investigating the experiences, voices, and unique situations of teachers went beyond what one might observe during an actual professional development session. It goes beyond a casual conversation regarding the impact of school and district level professional development. The acquired information might provide district leaders with relevant, grounded information that motivates them to evaluate current systems and practices or at least inquire more into effective professional development practices.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were explanatory in nature. They aimed to find and explain patterns related the participant’s experiences. Creswell (2007) states that qualitative research questions restate the purpose of the study “in more specific terms and start with a word such as what or how” (p. 107). This study was guided by three research questions: How do teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development? What types of professional development experiences do teachers find effective? Do recent professional development experiences influence how teachers collaborate with other teachers? Each research question showed that the researcher was interested in describing the participants’ experiences and understanding the themes that represent the participant’s experiences. The research questions supported how the researcher looked for connections with the understanding that unknown
complexities associated with the problem of practice might be revealed. Figure 2 has been adapted and was used to formulate the research questions mentioned above.

Figure 2: Design Guide for Qualitative Study

Research Tradition

This study was qualitative in nature and followed the case study method. Yin (2003) argues that the “case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2). The characteristics of qualitative research guided how the researcher studied the problem.

This study adopted a case study approach to better understand how teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development. Stake (1995) describes qualitative case studies as a deep examination of the uniqueness and complexities of cases which leads to a
thorough understanding of the cases within a specific context. In this case study, the context was school-based and district professional development. According to Creswell (2007), case study research has a long and distinguished history across many disciplines and is a research strategy (or tradition) that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings. Case studies offer new, specific, rich descriptions about a topic which might be of advantage to stakeholders who plan and implement professional development. The descriptions and information gathered from the participants offer a new perspective on the topic of school-based and district level professional development. After all, case studies encourage the understanding of an activity, process, event, or individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Case studies occur within a bounded, integrated system with working parts (Stake, 1995). In this case study, the setting was the bounded system that investigated the phenomenon. The phenomenon being investigated was teacher perceptions of school-based and district level professional development experiences. Case studies acknowledge that knowledge is constructed, not discovered. This construction of knowledge is detailed through the findings of this study. Because an in-depth study of individuals or a group is necessary (Creswell, 2013), this study provides an in-depth analysis of the perceptions of K-12 teachers who teach in a large, public, suburban school district. Multiple forms of data collection, including focus groups and interviews, were employed over the course of this qualitative case study. The chosen methodology and design plan investigated the problem of practice and, as a result, has provided trustworthiness. The goal of qualitative researchers is to examine cases carefully so that others “can learn from these cases and perhaps transfer some of the knowledge gained to their own situations or practices” (Merriam, 2008, p.180). Because professional development is a complex and evolving practice in the field of education, a case study was ideal in capturing a select group
of participants’ perceptions and experiences. In this study, the experience of four participants was captured. Their experiences confirm much of what is noted in past and current literature. Yin (2003) mentions that “case studies have been done about decisions, programs, the implementation process, and organizational change” (p.23). This case study investigated how teachers perceive recent school-based and district level professional development experiences.

**Setting**

The setting for this study was a large, public, suburban school district with approximately 100 schools. At the time, the school district employed over 7,000 teachers. The district was responsible for educating nearly 100,000 students. An estimated one-half of the students in the district participated in the free and reduced lunch program. The student population was diverse, with a breakdown of: 40% Caucasian, 30% African American, 20% Hispanic, and 5% Asian students.

The district provided various opportunities for professional development. At the time, the district provided quarterly, evening professional development opportunities for teachers, integrated content academies, and teacher leader academies. In addition, various departments throughout the district office hosted Twitter chats as a way to encourage teachers to develop professional learning networks (PLNs). District provided professional development was voluntary. District personnel were also available to provide professional development to schools if they made a request based on a school specific need. Administrators and teacher leaders also served as professional development facilitators at the local school level. Schools in the district had the autonomy to determine what types of professional development was offered to teachers. The frequency of professional development was also made at the school level. Most school-based professional development decisions were made based on annual school goals, College and
Career Performance Index (CCRPI) data, the School Strategic Plan (SSP), and the school’s Title I Plan if applicable.

Participants

Four participants were included in the study. Each participant was a teacher at a school within the large, public, suburban school district. The table below outlines participant information.

Table 1. Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Approximate Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Education/Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grades &amp; Subjects Taught</th>
<th>Self-Reported Professional Development Value (Valuable, Somewhat Valuable, Not Valuable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Denise</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Masters/6 years</td>
<td>9th-11th English</td>
<td>Valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Morgan</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Masters/7 years</td>
<td>K-3rd All subjects</td>
<td>Somewhat Valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Julie</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Masters/13 years</td>
<td>6th-10th English</td>
<td>Somewhat Valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tiffany</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Masters/9 years</td>
<td>6th-11th English</td>
<td>Valuable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A variety of sampling strategies are used in qualitative research. In this study, purposefully sampling was used to investigate the problem of practice. Purposeful sampling means “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 125). In this study, purposeful sampling was an effective strategy because each individual had recently participated school-based and district professional development. This particular type of sampling worked well in this study because each participant experienced a similar phenomenon of interest. Stake (1995) argues that we aim to learn as much as we can by
selecting cases that will lead us to the greatest understanding. As a result, criterion sampling was used for quality assurance. Criterion sampling requires the researcher to seek out participants that meet the same criterion. In order to be selected for this study, participants had to have participated in school-based and district provided professional development within the last year, been a part of the district’s teacher leader development program, and hold an advanced degree. The first criterion ensured that the participants could share information about relevant and timely professional development experiences. The second criterion demanded that the participants identified themselves as a teacher leader. Teachers who were a part of the district’s teacher development program applied and included specific information that revealed their commitment to the field and teacher leadership. And, lastly, the third criterion showed the participant’s commitment to deepening their content and pedagogical knowledge.

The researcher attempted to select a diverse group of participants. Participants varied in age, race, experience, and role. The maximum variation approach is often selected because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives (Creswell, 2003, p. 126). Participants were K-12 educators and included one elementary school teacher, two middle school teachers, and one high school teacher.

Data Collection

Because “qualitative researchers engage in a series of activities in the process of collecting data (Creswell, 2007, p. 118), the data collection circle was followed to answer the study’s research questions and investigate the problem of practice. Each of the activities was followed to ensure a sound methodological design plan. Below is an image of Creswell’s (2007) data collection circle. Figure 3.1 provides a snapshot of how the researcher addressed each
component. A detailed description of each data collection circle component follows the two visuals.

**Figure 3.** Data Collection Circle (Creswell, 2007, p. 118)

![Data Collection Circle](image)

**Figure 4.** Data Collection Circle Activities

![Data Collection Circle Activities](image)
Locating the site or individuals. In this study, as noted in the participant section, four participants were included as an attempt to answer the study’s research questions. Creswell (2007) notes that the researcher needs to select a site or sites to study, such as programs, events, processes, activities, individuals, or several individuals (p. 122). Participants were invited to participate in the study via an informed consent form (Appendix A). Consent to participate was initially granted via e-mail, and then followed up with a signature on the consent to participate form. The informed consent form explained the purpose and procedures of the study, as well as the risks and benefits. Furthermore, the informed consent forms reassured participants of voluntary participation and confidentially.

Access and rapport. The informed consent form confirmed access to the participants. It established and maintained rapport with the participants, explained the purpose of the study, the researcher’s reason for selecting participants, and how the study might potentially impact the field of education. Other information, like how the findings of the study would be reported, the length of the data collection process, and what participants would gain from the study were also be included. Providing participants with this information helped establish rapport, which was important for the one-on-one interviews. Creswell (2007) notes that researchers need participants who are willing and ready to speak and share ideas. Establishing rapport discouraged shyness that could potentially lead to inadequate data.

Purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling strategies were used in this qualitative study. Criterion sampling and maximum variation were used in this case study to answer the research questions. Creswell (2007) argues that “researchers can sample at the site level, at the event or process level, and at the participant level” (p.126). In this study, sampling
occurred at the participant level. In this study, the researcher sought out participants that met the same criterion. Each participant met the following three criterion:

1) Has participated in school-based and district level provided professional development within the last year,
2) The participant has been a part of the district’s teacher leader development program,
3) Has earned an advanced degree in the field of education.

The maximum variation approach was selected because the researcher wanted the findings to acknowledge different experiences and perspectives. The participants were K-12 educators and include one elementary school teacher, two middle school teachers, and one high school teacher. Each participant provided information to help answer the research questions based on their individual experiences during school-based and district professional development.

**Forms of data (Collecting data).** Data collection in a case study is extensive and pulls from multiple sources. A variety of data sources were adopted, including:

1) Open-ended, one-on-one interviews were used as an intimate, non-threatening approach to gathering information from each participant. The mode of the interview, face–to-face or Skype, was determined based on the participant’s availability. Participants were be asked a variety of questions during the interview. Because the interviews were semi-structured in nature, questions were devised ahead of time, but other questions did surface once the interview begins. The questions guided the one-on-one interview and can be found in Appendices B and C. Because the interviews were open-ended, the researcher noted and recorded any additional information that was shared by the participants. Boundaries were not placed on the participants. If one question prompted or
sparked additional ideas, that was noted, too. The time of each interview was documented at the end of each interview. The interviews were recorded.

2) Being that “focus groups are advantageous” (Creswell, 2007, p. 133), each participant participated in one semi-structured focus group which lasted approximately 45 minutes. The focus group interview produced rich data because participants hear each other’s responses and provide additional comments that they might not have made in an individual interview. Five questions were asked during the focus group interview. The focus group protocol included the following prompts: How useful have your most recent professional development experiences been? Can you describe a recent professional development experience that met your needs? What are your current professional development needs? Do you feel professional development is necessary for all teachers? Have your most recent professional development experiences encouraged you to go and share what you learned with a colleague? The protocol was shared with the participants before the focus group began. The researcher read from a focus group interview script before the focus group began (Appendix B). This ensured that all voices were heard and respected during the focus group. The focus group interview was recorded.

**Recording information.** During the individual interviews and focus group, protocol forms (Appendices D and E) were used to record information. Interview protocols help a researcher take notes and organize items such as headings, information about starting the interview and concluding statements (Creswell, 2007). Each protocol form included specific features like the title of the study followed by the purpose of the study. A brief description of the study was read to the participants. A script was be created to ensure that all important details were included and actually stated during the interview and focus group. The time of interview,
date, place, and the interviewee’s names were also recorded. Interview and focus group questions were included on the protocol form. Protocol forms also included a section for additional comments or ideas given by the participants that did not directly respond to a particular question that was asked. Closing comments were stated to thank each participant and inform them about what would happen next (e.g. a request for follow up information, interviews with other participants, or data analysis). The information on the protocol forms was shared with the participants in a sequential fashion. In essence, the protocol forms guided the interviews and focus group.

Field issues. When gathering data, potential field issues were considered. During interviews, the sharing of extraneous personal information from the researcher did not occur because of the negative impact it could have potentially had on the data collection process. Protocols and structured systems were implemented to discourage field issues. After conducting the interviews and focus group, the researcher transcribed the interviews. Creswell (2007) states “that many inexperienced researchers express surprise at the difficulty of conducting interviews and the lengthy process involved in transcribing audiotapes from the interviews (p. 140)”. In response to this potential field issue, protocol forms were followed and data triangulation was executed. These processes are described in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Storing data. To ensure the data were properly stored, data were stored within specific files on a secured laptop. A portable hard drive and an Office 365 cloud were used as a backup method for storing the collected data. Cloud is another term used as a metaphor for the term Internet.

A data collection strategies matrix was created to support how the problem of practice was investigated and how the data collection process was intentionally accomplished. The use of
a matrix infers that a case study is information-rich (Creswell, 2007). The data collection strategies matrix aligned directly with the study’s research questions and confirmed the information the researcher needed to know while ensuring that a systematic approach was followed.

### Data Collection Strategies Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I need to know?</th>
<th>Why do I need to know this?</th>
<th>What kind of data will answer the questions?</th>
<th>Who will provide me with what I need to know?</th>
<th>Timeline for acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD experiences</td>
<td>I need to understand the history of the teachers PD experiences</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (One on one)</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Spring 2017 (April/May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator beliefs about PD opportunities/experiences</td>
<td>This information will help me understand the beliefs that teachers hold when approaching PD, as well as how their experiences have shaped their views.</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (One on one)</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Spring 2017 (April/May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived PD needs</td>
<td>This will give me insight as to what it is that teachers expect from PD. This information might reveal what teachers feel is most needed.</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Spring 2017 (April/May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs and values regarding professional growth</td>
<td>This will help me understand the perspective of educators who participate in voluntary or involuntary PD at their school or within the district. This will allow me to begin determining similarities/differences amongst the teachers</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview and focus group</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Spring 2017 (April/May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ thoughts about how PD experiences influence them.</td>
<td>Understanding teachers’ thoughts regarding the influence of PD/how it contributes to them impacting other teachers.</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview and focus group</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Spring 2017 (April/May)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

When gathering multiple sources of data, the researcher reviewed the data, began making sense of the data, and organized the data into categories that were common across all of the data sources. Building categories led to inductive data analysis. Creswell (2007) states that the inductive process involves researchers working back and forth between the themes and the database until they establish a comprehensive set of themes. Interpretative inquiry and holistic accounts, two additional qualitative research characteristics, were also leveraged in order to investigate the problem. The researcher made interpretations of what she heard to better understand multiple views of the problem. The researcher reported multiple perspectives to identify the factors associated with the problem of practice.

After the data was collected, data analysis followed, and a within-case analysis of the case occurred. Creswell (2007) recommends when multiple cases are chosen, a thorough description of each case and its themes should be included. This approach supported the analysis of themes and patterns within the cases. Data analysis in case studies reveals patterns. Researchers establish patterns and look for correspondences between two or more categories. Themes and patterns are a result of triangulation. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources. It is viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity. Data source triangulation tested the validity of this study. Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, (2014) recommends that data source triangulation involves the collection of data from different types of people. Data source triangulation and the use of varied data sources validated the data. If researchers can substantiate various data sets with each other, the interpretations and conclusions drawn from them are likely to be trustworthy (Carlson, 2010). ATLAS.ti, a scientific qualitative analysis software, was used to code the triangulated data. Software like this is helpful when
closely examining and making meaning of themes, patterns, and code families. ATLAS.ti allowed data to be coded, annotated, and compared to other pieces of information.

It is important that researchers consider a variety of strategies when triangulating data. Doing so, ensured data dependability and credibility. In addition to triangulation, member checking ensured trustworthiness. Member checking is a way to discover whether the data analysis aligns to participants’ experiences. In this study, member checking was an individual process and a single event that occurred once the interviews were transcribed. Because “the act of transcribing is influential on member checking (Carlson, 2010, p. 1106)”, a complete transcription of all data sources will be done by the researcher. Member checking guaranteed that the data collected was scrutinized the accuracy of interpretation. In this study, the approval of trust was very important. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggests that procedures for trustworthiness should be determined by the incorporation of three lenses; of the self (the researcher), of the participants, and of the external readers of the final research report. During the member checking process, each lens was a motivating factor which ensured trustworthy data. This is further described in the credibility section.

**Trustworthiness**

Morse (1999) expresses concern about qualitative research losing value by emphasizing when qualitative researchers fail to recognize the importance of reliability and validity. To reiterate that qualitative research is valuable, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was established. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the value of a research study is strengthened by its trustworthiness. Because this takes planning, the establishment of trustworthiness protocols in qualitative research requires the researcher to rely on multiple techniques.
Credibility. Morse (1999) suggests the establishment of trustworthiness protocols in qualitative research requires the use of several techniques. Data triangulation was used to check the consistency of findings that emerge from the interviews and focus groups. In addition, member checking was also used to establish credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggests that this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Two weeks after the one-on-one interviews, participants received a copy of the transcribed interview so that they could read and edit the document for accuracy.

Transferability. Thick description is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving a type of external validity. Because the phenomenon was described in great detail, the conclusions can be viewed as transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Past and current research in the field of professional learning are also included. Lastly, context was established in chapter four to ensure transferability. Morse (1999) states that “reviewing crafted questions with a peer reviewer for clarity, planning questions that call for extended answers, and asking open-ended questions that solicit detailed answers (p.25)” are strategies that promote thick description in this study.

Dependability. Outlining the plan for the study, intentionally describing each process, and including protocols was included in chapter three. This allows a future researcher to conduct a similar study or repeat particular processes that he/she finds desirable.

Confirmability. Rather than seeing triangulation as a method for validation or verification, qualitative researchers generally use this technique to ensure that an account is rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple methods supported the investigation while shedding light on the phenomenon and establishing confirmability. Each ensured that the ideas reported were the ideas of the participants and not the researcher. The
researcher made admissions to her beliefs by describing her personal, practical, and intellectual goals. Limitations were noted in chapter five as a final step to ensure that confirmability is established.

Chapter three provided a detailed description of the researcher’s worldview, goals, research approach, and research design. More importantly, participant information, data collection, and data analysis procedures were discussed so that other researchers and colleagues will understand the plan for investigating the three research questions associated with the study. Merriam and Associates (2002) states, “colleagues and other researchers will want a detailed description of the methodology in order to assess the study’s contribution to the field” (p.15). The following chapter, chapter four, presents the findings of the study. Because qualitative research relies on the participants and their interactions with the world and how they perceive it, chapter four explicitly details the words and phrases of the participants in the study.
Chapter Four

Chapter four presents the findings from the study. Chapter four includes figures and tables which correspond to each participant’s perceptions of recent school-based and district level professional development experiences. The purpose of the study was to investigate how teachers perceived school-based and district professional development experiences. The following research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. How do teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development?
2. What types of professional development experiences do teachers find to be effective?
3. Do teachers feel that professional development impacts how they lead other teachers?

This study aimed to answer the research questions so that schools and districts can use the information provided by the participants when planning for and facilitating professional development. All researchers aspire to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam and Associates, 2002, p.22). To ensure that chapter four is of quality, the researcher followed the guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative research, presented in question format, in Merriam and Associates (2002, p. 23). Those guidelines are:

1. Are the participants of the study described?
2. Are the findings clearly organized and easy to follow?
3. Are the findings directly responsive to the problem of the study?
4. Does the data presented in support of the findings provide adequate and convincing evidence for the findings?

Coding, an inductive data analysis process was used to identify themes associated with the research questions. Bernard (2006) states that coding is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns exist. An open coding method was used to sweep through the data and mark, using the digital tools available through ATLAS.ti, participant words
and phrases that established a particular theme. After the one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti. All comments were coded and code families were established. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the initial open coding method which revealed the code families which were based on the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview.

*Figure 5. Open Coding Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grounded</th>
<th>Density</th>
<th>Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diff PD Perferred</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District PD Frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Embedded PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching PD to Teacher Ne...</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Perception of PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passionate</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD impacts practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD Impacts Studnet Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD Inspires Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD is Necessary</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perception of PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive PD</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More specifically, Table 2 outlines the seven most prevalent code families and the number of iterations from greatest to lowest number of iterations.
Table 2. *Code Families and Iterations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Families</th>
<th>Number of Iterations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perceptions of Professional Development</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development that Impacts Teacher Practices</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Perceptions of Professional Development</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Professional Development Preferred</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Should Match Teacher Needs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development that Impacts Student Learning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-Embedded Professional Development</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In qualitative research, it is the rich, thick descriptions, the words (not numbers) that ensure trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Associates, 2002). To ensure rich, thick description and trustworthiness, participant data from the most prevalent code families were analyzed using the open network tool in ATLAS.ti. Data that supported each code family was uploaded using the open network tool which guided the data analysis process. The data tool generated web-like figures which connected reoccurring themes to the experiences of the participants. These figures and the information they provided are significant for several reasons. The figures captured the words and phrases of the participants which supported the most prevalent themes. They also ensured that the researcher carefully analyzed the experiences of the participants which ensured trustworthiness. Moreover, the figures supported the researcher by providing a visual of the data which supports the narrative explanation of the findings. The visual representation of the data reiterated the themes associated with the participant’s recent professional development experiences. Figure 6 and 7 have been included to provide readers with a visual example of the web-like figures generated using ATLAS.ti.
Figure 6. Coding Theme & Participant Responses (ATLAS/ti)

1.17 I know principals and county people say what we need but I think it is

2.4 I don’t think we always do a good job of doing what teachers or having it

3.11 If teachers don’t care about it, they can’t inspire that students to c

5.15 I think it’s applicable to my teaching then it becomes something

5.19 Even though we needed different levels we were all aiming towards the

5.24 When it applies to me. When it’s something that I need or want informat

5.31 The biggest challenge for me was not having an ESOL push in teacher. We

5.34 My recent experiences allowed me to get much better at teaching within

5.41 I think some great PD that’s needed is differentiation. It’s a cont

Figure 7. Coding Theme & Participant Responses (ATLAS/ti)

1.17 I prefer differentiated PD,

2.16 If I can be more differentiated to teacher needs.

2.3 I prefer professional development that I have a choice in and choosing

2.8 Sometimes especially school-based PD could be geared a little more low

3.26 46 teachers definitely need PD but I don’t know that it’s differentiated

3.53 I was in the Duval training she displayed her template. There is

5.17 I probably don’t need the same PD as a first-year teacher or a

5.34 Veteran teachers we are being told what they need to know and we sh

14 That time should be used for those who don’t have it. We are expected

46 The iDocamp: I don’t need the same PD as a teacher who has been teach

47 I prefer differentiated PD,
Code reports were also used to thoroughly analyze themes and patterns. Because multiple data sources were used, data source triangulation was achieved. Member checking, as described in chapter three, was completed to ensure data dependability and credibility. Member checking was achieved one week after the data were collected in order to ensure alignment between the data and each participants’ experiences. As noted in Merriam and Associates (2002) in any write-up of qualitative report, the audience needs to be considered. Because of this, the findings have been organized by themes that surfaced during the data analysis process. Writing up the findings in this way will support school and district leaders with thoroughly understanding the findings.

**Teacher Perceptions of Effective Professional Development**

**Denise (Self-Reported Professional Development Value: Valuable)**

Denise’s definition of professional development: “Professional development…. I guess it varies. Any type of training or instruction that allows you to grow as a teacher. That could be face-to-face training or even a Twitter chat can be professional development.”

Denise reported many examples of recent school-based and district professional development experiences that were effective. She stated, “When it is done right, I think it’s definitely something that is needed and definitely something you can learn and grow from.” She spoke highly about recent district professional development experiences. She said, “District professional development can be a networking opportunity which builds excitement because you know that you’re going to see other people and hear about what’s working in their environment. You can borrow from teacher leaders throughout the county.” She added, “The two district professional development experiences I was a part of were the best. The teachers were homogenously grouped which made it a success. We were all aiming towards the same goal.”
Denise mentioned that when you are in a professional development session with other leaders or great teachers you know it’s going to be about more than the content of the professional development. You might learn another strategy from another person in the room. This statement confirmed that Denise found learning from others valuable which, in her opinion, makes professional development more effective. When asked if recent school-based and district professional development experiences influenced how she collaborates with other teachers, Denise said, “Yes”. Denise stated that while professional development experiences have impacted how she leads other teachers, she still feels that she needs more development to support her with teacher leadership and coaching. She said, “I need to continue to build my coaching and leadership skills.”

**Morgan (Self-Reported Professional Development Value: Somewhat Valuable)**

*Morgan’s definition of professional development: “Professional development is when teachers are furthering their education about topics related to teaching, the classroom, and anything related to their career.”*

Morgan recounted several recent examples of effective professional development experiences. She described a time when her school had a professional development session where they looked at K-5 math teaching and learning implications. Teachers took a deeper look at how the standards progress and filled in instructional gaps. Morgan felt it was beneficial to see the K-5 spectrum. She said she’s most excited about professional development, when the professional development facilitator provides the resources and she can take them back to my classroom and use them immediately. Morgan reported positive perceptions of district professional development, too. She said, “I was excited to attend district professional development because I got new information about things I had never heard before.” She
confidently stated that district professional development experiences were something she needed
to grow professionally. Morgan’s positive perceptions of school-based and district professional
development reveal that professional development can build a teacher’s awareness of their
instructional practices and teaching capabilities. This also supports what literature says about
teachers becoming more aware of their teaching and learning needs because of professional
development. When asked if recent school-based and district professional development
experiences influenced how she collaborated with other teachers, Morgan said, “Yes”.

**Julie (Self-Reported Professional Development Value: Somewhat Valuable)**

*Julie’s definition of professional development: “Something that refreshes, adds to, or develops your profession.”*

Julie’s positive perceptions of professional development were specific to district
facilitated professional development sessions. She described an English for Speakers of Other
Languages (ESOL) district professional development that took place at her school. She said the
session was short, sweet, and interactive. She added, that she and her colleagues participated as if
they were ESOL students and were able to walk away with strategies that could be implemented
with their students immediately. Julie also provided a specific example of the district teacher
development program she was a part of. She said, “During the district professional development,
I liked the breakout groups with teachers from my content area; we had conversations about what
is working well for us. I was able to learn and from my peers.” Julie’s comments prove the
importance of teachers learning side by side with other teachers and being provided the
opportunity to collaborate and apply what they are learning to relevant classroom situations.
When asked if recent school-based and district professional development experiences influence
how she collaborates with and leads other teachers, Julie said, “Yes”.
Tiffany (Self-Reported Professional Development Value; Valuable)

Tiffany’s definition of professional development: “In a perfect world, it is giving people the opportunity to learn more about the things they care about and how to impact their field with the new learning opportunities. It looks different from that sometimes.”

Tiffany provided multiple examples of effective district professional development experiences. She explained that each time she left the district professional development academy, she shared what she learned with her 6th grade professional learning community (PLC). She said her and her teammates would discuss how we could make those same learning experiences happen for their students. Tiffany also reported feeling inspired by district professional development experiences. She said, “Hearing from and sitting in a room with other educators and district professionals inspired me to create my own projects in my school.” She also reported the engagement levels during district professional development as an effective attribute. She mentioned that district professional development experiences included modeling which was more impactful than listening to someone talk about how to conduct a classroom conversation. She added that the hands on approach that district professional development provides encourages teachers to work together. She feels strongly that teacher education should be hands on. Because Tiffany experiences effective district professional development experiences, she looks forward to future sessions. She said, “I look forward to district professional development because whatever they are creating and sharing, I can use to build upon what I am doing at my school and with my content area.” Tiffany’s comments show that when professional development is effective, teachers will find value in their learning experiences. Finally, when asked if recent school-based and district professional development experiences influence how she collaborates with and leads other teachers, Tiffany said, “Yes”.
Job-Embedded Professional Development. Two of the participants discussed the impact of recent professional development experiences that were job-embedded. Julie reported that a district leader who presented an interactive training helped her better understand how to teach her students who speak English as a second language. She stated that because he gave them the opportunity to practice strategies and provided handouts that could be used later when teachers worked on their lesson plans, she had a better understanding of how to teach the strategy to her students. She said, “I need to hear it and see it.” Julie reported that this professional development session took place during her planning period. Denise expressed that a good school-based, job-embedded professional development session for her was a recent EdCamp. She was able to choose the professional development session based on her interests. The EdCamp was organized by academic coaches and teacher leaders in her building. She explained that the EdCamp was teacher-led and she received resources that she could take to her classroom and use immediately. Denise also talked about a job-embedded, district professional development experience that she referred to as “intensive professional development.” It took place during the 2016-2017 school year. It occurred approximately 8 times throughout the school year. The professional development experience took place within her district but not at a school. She stated that every time she attended, she was highly engaged and she learned things that she and her colleagues could use and benefit from.

Sit and Get, Not Differentiated? No Thanks. Negative perceptions of recent school and district professional development experiences were mentioned by each participant. Tiffany feels as though her recent school professional development experiences were “sit and get, not create” and lacked differentiation. She added that veteran teachers were being exposed to information and resources that they were already aware of. The participants reported that those experiences
were aggravating. She explained that professional development at her school is very top-down and the sessions are lecture based; teachers listen, take notes, and they are given a handout that they either use or lose. Julie made comments that were similar to Tiffany’s. Julie expressed that there was a time when she looked forward to professional development. She said that recently the school-based professional development sessions she has attended have become redundant and a waste of time. She said her recent district professional development experiences included some conversations with other colleagues, but they also included a lot of sit and get which she does not prefer. Denise also discussed negative attributes of recent school-based professional development. Denise said school-based professional development feels like a check off the list of things to do and it is not really about developing teachers. She commented that sometimes the sessions focus more on math and science and are not useful for her English classroom. Denise pointed out that her school doesn’t do a good job of offering professional development sessions that teachers need or want. When discussing recent district professional development experiences, Denise stated that she recently completed a district endorsement program that was mostly online and a lot of busy work. She said, “It was sit and get and reading and regurgitating what you read rather than putting it into practice.” She said that it left her dissatisfied. Although Morgan has not completed any district endorsement programs, she did share her perceptions about district professional development that occurred at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. She explained that the sessions did not present information or content that was up to date. In addition, she feels as though the district should consider the convenience of time when scheduling professional development. She said, “Teachers are checked out after school.” Because teachers are tired at the end of the school day, it is unrealistic to expect them to attend a
professional development session. She noted that the sessions should be throughout the school day and not after teachers have worked all day.

Matching School and District Professional Development to Teacher Needs. A teacher’s grade level, daily responsibilities, and needs can change from year to year. The majority of the participants deemed professional development that is applicable to their current content areas, pedagogical understandings, and student needs as important. Tiffany stated that her principal recently brought in a professional development facilitator who conducted a series of training throughout the year. She added that this person knew the teachers and was able to build upon each training. She built the training based on the teacher’s needs. Tiffany also shared comments about her learning preference. She stated that she prefers hands-on experiences that allow her to apply what she is learning so when she goes back to her classroom she has experienced it and is confident about what she is implementing. She provided details regarding a particular district professional development experience that were hands-on. Because she was able to apply her learning, she replicated the challenge with her students. She said, “I took this particular challenge back to my classroom because it helped my students with teamwork as they prepared for a group project.” Morgan detailed similar thoughts regarding professional development that supports teacher’s current needs. She feels as though principals and district personnel sometimes say what teachers need but feels that they should ask teachers what they want. Morgan said, “When professional development is something I need or want and it directly relates to something that I need to better support my students, I am interested.” She noted that when professional development is not applicable to her teaching, it is a waste of time. Denise discussed the need to match professional development to teacher needs in the high school setting. She explained that if a teacher is attending an English professional development session and the
focus is on British Literature, it is more beneficial for her because the content is very specific. In a frustrating tone, she explained that as a high school teacher she needs more training on how to support high school students who are reading on elementary reading levels with strategies that will ensure they can read and comprehend high school English content. She said, “I have not had training on how to do this, and it is so difficult.”

**Differentiated School and District Professional Development Preferred.** Comments about differentiation proved to be a positive professional development attribute. Each participant discussed the effectiveness of differentiated professional development. Morgan mentioned that district and school-based professional development should be more differentiated to meet teacher needs. She said, “I don’t need the same professional development as a first year teacher or a teacher who has been teaching for three years.” Denise declared that all teachers need professional development, but she doesn’t think it is differentiated as much as it needs to be. She added that choice is a significant factor and that she preferred being able to choose professional development topics based on her interests and classroom needs. Sessions that are led by facilitators who differentiate on the spot is important to Julie. She explained that she had recently attended a district professional development session where the facilitator planned for ways to support teachers who were confused while advancing those who were ready to move on. She said that this is how teacher’s time should be spent. She felt that teachers should be treated the same way they are expected to teach their students. Julie provided an analogy. She said, “It’s like the advanced child in the classroom. I want to be advanced, not remediated.” Adding to her toolbox and enhancing what she already knows is important to her. Julie also stated that she feels as though teachers don’t have the bucket of strategies they need in order to differentiate for all types of students. She provided an example of the challenges she encountered during the 2016-2017
school year. She stated that not having an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support teacher was a big challenge for her because she taught ESOL students who were struggling readers. While Julie articulated the need for differentiated professional development which will support her with teaching diverse students, Tiffany shared the importance of differentiated professional development which values how she learns as an adult and honors what she is passionate about. She noted that the district professional development sessions she attended were more differentiated than her school-based experiences. During district professional development she was given the freedom to research topics she cared about while being inspired by new and differentiated techniques she could use in her classroom. Tiffany reported the district professional development sessions she attended were more differentiated than her school-based experiences.

School-Based and District Professional Development Influences Teacher Behaviors.

Each participant voiced comments that demonstrated how recent school-based and district professional development experiences have explicitly impacted their behaviors (i.e. teaching practices, student, and interactions with their colleagues). Tiffany reported several examples of how district professional development experiences, and not school-based, influenced how she collaborated with her teammates to promote richer student learning experiences. She said, “every time I left a district training and had the opportunity to explore how educating locally can impact the classroom, I would go back to my 6th grade professional learning community and discuss how we could replicate that same experience for our students”. She explained, in an excited manner, that her district professional development experiences inspired her to go back and talk about the new information she learned. Tiffany explained that she really found value in giving her students in school opportunities that they may not receive outside of school. She commented
that anytime she learned something from a district professional development session that she felt would engage her students, she felt invigorated. She provided specific examples of recent district professional development experiences that encouraged schoolwide, real-world applicable learning experiences. Tiffany explained that her school cycling program, recycling initiatives, and a local field trip resulted from being motivated by district professional development. Tiffany reported that all 6th grade were students impacted by these learning experiences, and they were able to make many connections to the community and world.

Denise’s perceptions and experiences, which vary from Tiffany’s, impacted how she implemented strategies. She noted that during district training, she was able to take away and discuss strategies with other English Language Arts and English teachers because it was a collaborative environment, and they all shared strategies that they believed worked well for students. Denise reported that when it came to sharing back at her local school she did not; she only shared with teachers who were at the district training. She did communicate that her recent school-based professional development experiences allowed her to become more proficient at teaching writing.

Julie’s perceptions and experiences were similar to Tiffany’s. Julie described how a recent district professional development motivated her to seek out additional technology support to impact her instruction. This also provided her an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers from all over the district. She noted that she could not wait to schedule an appointment with a district team member from that department to come to her local school so that teachers in her professional learning community could experience it, too. She also mentioned that she used district professional development sessions as a time to productively collaborate with teachers to find out about their student populations and how things are going for them in their classrooms.
She said, “I use district professional development opportunities to figure out what can work better for me and my students.” Julie relied on resources that were given during district professional development sessions and shared them with her colleagues when she got back to her school. She said, “I would earmark in professional development books that were given, and I used and referenced those back at my school during content collaboration meetings.” Julie’s district professional development experiences went beyond the actual session. She shared new information with her colleagues with the hopes of impacting teaching and learning at her school.

Summary

Deeply understanding teacher’s perceptions of school-based and district level professional development was the primary goal of this study. The findings section provides factual reporting of the data. Each participant’s perceptions of school-based and district level professional development were acknowledged and transparently articulated in this section. Giving a voice to each participant offered multiple perspectives of recent professional development experiences were perceived. The participants in this case study also provided information that might support school and district leaders when planning for professional development. The findings from the participants might also provide insight to other educators and support them with understanding how school-based and district level professional development might impact their instructional practices and perceptions of the field. Finally, this study might support those who are responsible implementing professional development systems to best meet the needs of teachers. Because qualitative research is experienced based, these findings might aide school and district leaders when considering how professional development initiatives are perceived by teachers.
Chapter four presented the findings of this study and provided factual information from the participants. Chapter five includes a summary of the findings, which connects to literature and research presented in the previous chapters, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.
Chapter Five

Chapter five was organized to help readers thoroughly understand the study, the participant’s perceptions, and the researcher’s beliefs which are all connected to literature applicable to professional development. Chapter five presents a summary of the study and a discussion of the study’s findings. Chapter five also provides the limitations and future research recommendations associated with the study. Chapter five ends with a conclusion.

Summary of the Study

Based on historical implications and current literature about professional development, there was a need to understand how teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development experiences, favorable professional development characteristics, and how teachers learning experiences impact how they engage with other teachers. The purpose of this case study was to conduct a constructivist investigation to better understand teacher perceptions of recent school-based and district level professional development. Led by personal, practical, and intellectual goals, this study relied on the information from the participants to guide and support school and district leaders with planning for effective and meaningful professional development experiences.

The following three research questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development?
2. What types of professional development experiences do teachers find to be effective?
3. Do recent professional development experiences influence how teachers collaborate with other teachers?

The researcher’s social constructivist worldview and desire to want to better understand the field in which she works encouraged her to conduct this qualitative case study. The setting
was a large, public, suburban school district with approximately 100 schools. Although the researcher was aware of her own assumptions regarding professional development, it was imperative for her to rely on the participants as informants. Interview questions were developed to support the study’s research questions, and the researcher used interview protocols to conduct each interview. A data collection strategies matrix which aligned to the study’s research questions and confirmed the information the researcher needed to know while ensuring that a systematic approach was followed was created. Qualitative data collection methods were executed. One-on-one interviews and a focus group interview were conducted to investigate teacher perceptions of recent school-based and district level professional development. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the researcher. Coding was done using the ATLAS.ti software and member checking was implemented as an additional triangulation strategy to ensure that the data collected aligned with the participant’s experiences.

Four participants were included in the study. Purposeful sampling was used in this study because each participant had recently been a part of school-based and district level professional development. Criterion sampling was another strategy used in this study. In order to be selected for this study, participants needed to have participated in school-based and district level provided professional development within the current school year or the 2015-2016 school year, be or have been a part of the district’s teacher leader development program, and hold an advanced degree. The first criterion ensured that each participant could provide relevant information and contribute to the findings of this study in a meaningful way. The second criterion proved that the participants had either self-identified themselves as a teacher leader or aspired to be included in additional professional development opportunities with hopes of having a greater impact in their
classroom and within their schools. Finally, the third criterion revealed each participant’s commitment to deepening their content and pedagogical knowledge.

This study contributes to filling the professional development research gap by specifically addressing the issue of how teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development experiences, what types of experiences they view to be effective, and how those experiences impact the way in which they interact with other teachers.

**Discussion of Findings**

The discussion of findings provides an in-depth explanation of the findings which are support by examples that were provided by the participants in the study. The discussion of findings has been organized based on the themes presented in chapter four. In addition, the discussion of findings includes literature and the voice of the researcher. To support the discussion of findings the Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning outlined will be noted. The Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results (Learning Forward, 2015). Effective professional learning includes learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning design, implementation, and outcomes. Because the standards support the conceptual framework of this study they will be noted in this chapter to provide schools and districts with actionable steps based on the participants’ recent school and district level professional development experiences.

**Job-Embedded Professional Development**

Given the imperative for teachers to continually hone their knowledge, skills, and practices, teaching has been aptly called the “learning profession” (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). As a result, job-embedded professional development is imperative. The opportunity to
experience professional development in authentic learning settings was deemed an effective professional development attribute by each participant. EdCamps, year-long district level professional development institutes, and school-based professional development sessions which occurred during the participants’ planning periods were all examples that the participants found to be job-embedded and favorable. Since adults learn best from connecting their learning to real-world problems (Knowles et al., 2011), real-world professional development experiences become invaluable for teachers because new knowledge is being acquired in their school buildings with their students in mind. Job-embedded professional development elicits formal and informal social interactions among teachers, situated in the context of teacher’s schools and the classrooms. Although each of the participants’ experiences did not include students, which is an essential component to job-embedded professional development, the majority of their professional development experiences did take place in a school, shortly before or after instruction, and focused on topics that were applicable to actual teaching and learning practices. While it is important for teachers to engage in relevant professional development, schools and districts should plan and provide professional development experiences that include students. Including students in professional development will allow teachers to make decisions about instructional practices that will best meet the needs of their students. Including students will also make learning experience more authentic for the teachers.

Participants emphasized the effectiveness of engaging in professional development that addressed teaching and learning implications which were applicable to their current teaching needs and responsibilities. Julie provided an example of how a recent job-embedded professional development experience allowed her to apply what she learned about English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) strategies into her instruction. She explained that she struggled implementing
a variety of strategies for her students. Because her professional development experience was job-embedded and relevant to her current needs, she was able to immediately implement the strategy into her instruction. These two factors increase the effectiveness of professional development because they allow teachers to connect their learning to their current contexts. Moreover, professional development immediately becomes more relevant because teachers can apply it to their current lesson plans in order to more effectively plan for address upcoming standards and student learning outcomes. Denise’s EdCamp experience allowed her to choose the professional development sessions based on her teaching responsibilities. Giving teachers the opportunity to select professional development session increases buy-in, advocates for teacher voice and autonomy, and encourages teachers to become more invested in what they are learning about. Denise’s job-embedded experience, which took place at her school in her colleague’s classroom, allowed her to experience learning with her students in mind. It is professional development situated in schools that is always about the current work of schools (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). During this EdCamp experience, Denise was given the opportunity to collaborate with her colleagues in a non-threatening environment. Teachers need the opportunity to learn in safe environments that provoke reflective conversations. When learning environments are safe and open, teachers will share what is happening in their classroom and seek out support to improve or enhance their instruction. Schools and districts that promote learning environments that are safe and collaborative put themselves at an advantage. This advantage will more than likely encourage teachers to work within functioning professional learning communities. Once this occurs, schools and districts can be more intentional about implementing professional development structures that use data, resources, and strategic learning designs to best meet the needs of teachers.
In addition to the EdCamp professional learning experience, Denise took part in an intensive district level professional development experience. She felt as though this professional development experience was highly engaging. She stated that each time she was involved in this experience, she was compelled to go back to her school and share what she learned with her colleagues. Denise’s learning experiences allowed her to meet with other teachers, analyze and discuss one another’s instructional practices, and share classrooms challenges. Denise’s district level professional development experience shows that teachers do value working with colleagues from schools across the district (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013). Although the district level professional development experience took place away from Denise’s school she was able to collaborate with colleagues who teach the same subject about actual topics that were relevant to her classroom. The closer learning activities are to the actual work of teachers in classrooms with their current students, the more job-embedded it is (2010). Denise’s conversations with colleagues encouraged her to reflect on her student’s learning needs and her teaching practices. Denise’s district level professional development experience was influential. Not only did it focus on current teaching and learning situations, it was collaborative. Her experience allowed her to learn with and from other teachers. This encouraged her to go back to her school and share what she learned with her colleagues. The enthusiasm that Denise had about the district level professional development confirms that she felt that it had a positive impact on her teaching practices.

Job-embedded professional development should be provided to teachers. Teachers need to have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skill set during the school day. This will ensure that teachers can collaborate with other teachers and think about their own contexts. Teachers can reflect on instructional decisions and connect their learning to relevant classroom circumstances. In order to promote and sustain job-embedded professional development, schools
and districts should support leaders with understanding what job-embedded professional development is and how to implement it, encourage, work to develop a school culture among teachers in which continued learning is, engage in long-term strategic planning for human capital, and help teachers understand the connection to job-embedded professional development and their evaluation (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). Job-embedded professional development ensures that teachers are not required to take part in learning experiences outside of their contract hours. Because some teachers may have negative perceptions of professional development, it is important that schools and districts create meaningful, job-embedded experiences.

**Personalized and Differentiated Professional Development**

Participants expressed the importance of providing teachers with personalized and differentiated professional development experiences. They each believed that professional development is important but feel that it tends to fall short and is unproductive because it is not personalized or differentiated for teachers. The participants believed that differentiated professional development focuses more on a group of teacher’s needs, their teaching experiences, and instructional needs they might have. On the other hand, each participant expressed why personalized professional development was equally if not more productive than differentiated professional development. They noted that personalized professional development goes one step beyond differentiation because it is customized to meet the individual needs of teachers. Denise said, “When professional development is done right, you learn and grow.” More personalized professional development carefully considers each and every teacher. Tiffany mentioned that because the district level professional development sessions valued teacher autonomy and built in time for teachers to apply information to them as individuals and not as a
group of teachers, she was inspired to create projects for her students and school that were most beneficial to them. This approach honors teacher’s learning styles and needs, teacher and student data, and teacher’s professional learning goals or plans. Since research advocates for the professionalization of teaching by honoring teacher knowledge, while growing teacher leaders, personalized professional development will be more beneficial for teachers because it will increase buy-in and teacher accountability. If professional development is more personalized school and district leaders can fairly hold teachers accountable for their learning. After all, they will be learning about topics that are pertinent to them. Instructional coaches and teacher leaders can implement systems of accountability to ensure that what teachers learn during professional development is implemented into their classrooms to encourage academic success. Furthermore, providing more personalized professional development will afford more effective professional development experiences by exposing teachers to instructional implications that connect theory to practice. Doing this will expose the reciprocal relationship between the two (Giraldo, 2014).

Participants recommended that teachers be given the opportunity to select their professional development topics. Participants noted that teachers need additional support with learning strategies, student readiness levels, and innovative learning experience that will keep their student’s engaged. The findings revealed the participants felt empowered, respected, and excited when professional development was planned in an intentional manner. Most importantly, they felt as though being a part of differentiated and personalized professional development supported them with the instructional difficulties they tend to face in their classrooms.

Participants, like Julie and Tiffany, who experienced differentiated school and district professional development were able to provide specific examples of how those experiences influenced their instructional decisions. While custom-made professional development may be
viewed as unrealistic, due to the amount of time it would take to plan such personalized and specific professional development sessions, participants in this study believed that when teacher learning preferences, current teaching responsibilities, and student needs are considered, professional development becomes more effective and will be more likely to impact teaching practices. For teachers who need to apply what they learn, hands-on professional development sessions with time built in for application is imperative. These are characteristics that school, district, and professional development leaders should be adhere to. Each of these characteristics has to be planned. For example, if a professional development facilitator knows that he or she has 90 minutes with a group of teachers, they need to build in time to deliver the content in a hands-on manner. They also need to build in time for collaboration and reflection. Most importantly, time to apply their learning with their own context in mind needs to be granted. Because literature notes that expectations are at the heart of professional development, teachers deserve the opportunity to engage in intentional professional development sessions with built in collaboration time (Mizell, 2010). Teachers need the time to apply what they’ve learned. Participants described well-planned, applicable professional development experiences as confidence boosters. Because customized professional development requires knowledgeable and diligent professional development facilitators, teacher leaders within professional learning communities should be used to promote more personalized and relevant school and district professional development experiences. Participants expressed that personalized and differentiated professional development will maintain their interest, support them with effective strategies to support at-risk students and to ensure their learning time is used in a productive way.

Benefits of Effective Professional Development Practices
Networking with peers, being introduced to new ideas, learning alongside other eager teachers, walking away with meaningful resources, learning about new, and innovative instructional practices, engaging in hands-on activities, and observing modeled lessons during school-based and district professional development sessions are examples that participants deemed effective professional development practices. Each participant perceived the opportunity to network with peers from across the district as a positive professional development attribute. It is clear they were enthusiastic about this opportunity and felt as though it reenergized them. Because they were able to collaborate with other eager teachers, they felt as though their attitudes about teaching and learning were positively impacted. Advocating for common planning time and releasing teachers as appropriate to visit other teachers’ classrooms, will promote deeper collaborative activities and discussions (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). Teachers will be more likely to implement better instructional practices based upon what they are learning and seeing from their colleagues. Teachers were confident they would walk away with ideas and resources that would boost their instruction. This is valuable considering teachers within a district can learn so much from one another. Regardless of a school district’s size, professional development structures and initiatives should be in place to ensure that teachers can collaborate with one another to share success, challenges, and assumptions. Often teachers face challenges in which they have to find solutions to best serve their students. Having the opportunity to network with a countless number of peers might support teachers when those instructional challenges surface. District professional development provides the opportunity for an immense amount and deeper level of collaboration and teacher learning.

Professional development programs that require teachers to reflect and work collaboratively (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010) are beneficial to teachers and increase the effective
of professional development sessions. When this happens teachers view professional development in a positive manner. The direct quotes from each participant showed that teachers might become more optimistic about school-based and district professional development if school leaders and district personnel approach it in a systematic, differentiated, and embedded manner. Denise discussed the importance of having a choice when selecting professional development sessions. Similarly, Julie expressed the importance of participating in professional development that occurs at her school on topics that are applicable to her student’s needs. Tiffany and Morgan celebrated the fact that district professional development sessions provided the autonomy to explore instructional topics that were meaningful to them. According to Zepeda (2008), “Professional development must be viewed as more than a pull out program” (p.298). The experiences the participants described negated the pull out program model. The experience they described were meaningful and connected to the participant’s instructional needs, desires, and interest. They did not view the experiences as a disjointed. They viewed them as purposeful and logical learning experiences. When reporting effective professional development practices and experiences that were job-embedded, the participants spoke in an enthusiastic and hopeful manner. They used words like excited, successful, beneficial, inspiring, encouraging, and impactful to articulate their feelings regarding successful school-based and district professional development experiences.

The majority of the participants spoke about how their experiences enhanced how they delivered instruction and, consequently, impacted student learning. Professional development should be the core of what teachers do, working in tandem with teaching (Zepeda, 2008). Denise discussed how her recent school-based professional development experiences allowed her to become more proficient at teaching writing. She felt as though having the opportunity to
explicitly explore writing strategies and approaches allowed her to implement into her instruction. Julie shared how an interactive district professional development session supported her with teachers her ESOL students. She stated that because she was given relevant resources and time to apply what she learned, she immediately incorporated the newly acquired knowledge into her lesson plans. In the same way, Tiffany reported how district professional development experiences, and not school-based, influenced how she collaborated with her teammates to impact more than just her students. She took what she learned during district professional development to support and collaborate with her 6th grade professional learning community. Together, they implemented grade level and schoolwide initiatives that enhanced their content standards and instruction. Lastly, Morgan described the benefits to a school professional development where her professional learning community analyzed K-5 math teaching and learning implications. The participants’ perceptions revealed the more their learning was contextualized or developed with students in mind, the more it resonated with them and impacted their teaching practices. Because of this, what each participant explored and learned worked for them and aligned with their instructional needs and goals versus against them.

The findings suggest effective professional development practices were contingent on who or what type of teachers participated in the professional development session. For example, Denise and Morgan mentioned that they were inspired by district professional development experiences because they were grouped with other great teachers and teacher leaders who had similar instructional and professional goals. They noted they always walked away with strategies they could use with their students because of the homogenous group setting. They explained that the teachers who participated in the district professional development sessions wanted to be there, they wanted to learn from others, and they were willing to be collaborative. The level of
sharing was at its peak because of who was involved. This is an important factor for school and district leaders because teachers bring various perspectives and attitudes. Perspectives and attitudes can positively or negatively influence the collaboration and application that occurs during professional development. Supporting professional learning communities will guarantee that teachers can focus on their personal professional learning goals.

**Building School and District Professional Development Capacity**

The study results show that school-based and district professional learning facilitators should consider professional learning communities, learning designs, and implementation in order to provide more effective professional development experiences. Because research suggests that there is a gap between what teachers think they will experience during professional learning versus what they actually experience (Mizell, 2010), planning more effective professional learning experiences might have a positive impact on teacher perceptions. Repeatedly, participants reported perceptions and experiences that might have been viewed as more effective if these three professional learning attributes were present. Morgan noted that professional development should not happen afterschool because teachers are tired. Denise stressed the importance of having teachers facilitate professional learning so their colleagues can learn from them in a more job-embedded fashion. Implementing and supporting professional learning communities would ensure that professional learning occurs during the school day. In addition, teacher leaders and teachers can guide the instructional conversations that take place during that time.

Table 3 is aligned to the findings of the study and to Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning. The purpose of this table is to illustrate how the findings confirm the need for schools and districts to take action and plan for professional learning communities, learning
designs, and sustainable implementation systems. The table includes findings from the study, effective professional learning attributes as outlined by Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional learning, and research-based actionable recommendations for schools and districts.

Table 3. *School and District Recommendations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Finding</th>
<th>Learning Forward Standard for Professional Learning Gap/Need</th>
<th>School &amp; District Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-based professional development tends to include mundane, sit and get experiences. Teachers are not provided the opportunity to apply and create.</td>
<td>Learning Communities Implementation</td>
<td>Research suggests there is a gap between what teachers expect to learn and what they actually learn during professional development (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, Orphanos, 2009). Create professional development opportunities that allow teachers to take ownership of what they will be learning and how they learn it. Consider timeframes for professional development implementation that include the opportunity for planning, dialogue, and reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based professional development lacks differentiation and does not consider the needs of novice versus veteran teachers.</td>
<td>Learning Communities Learning Designs Implementation</td>
<td>Plan for professional development that acknowledges teacher knowledge, experience level, and professional learning goals. Once teachers begin implementing new strategies and techniques, they can partake in goal-oriented dialogue within their professional learning community. Collective goals will drive sustainable changes in practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based professional development is top-down. Topics and content are determined by school leaders and not teachers.</td>
<td>Learning Designs Implementation</td>
<td>Abandon top-down approaches and invest in teacher leaders. Fullan (1991) acknowledges the importance of workplace redesigns to promote innovation. Teacher voice and innovation discourages top-down mandates and increases teacher buy-in. Allow teacher leaders to plan and implement job-embedded professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District professional development is offered after school and as a result is not job-embedded.</td>
<td>Learning Designs Implementation Resources</td>
<td>Commit to providing structures for job-embedded professional development opportunities (i.e. coaching, critical friends groups, examining student work protocols, individual professional learning plans, professional learning communities, study groups, etc.) so that school-based professional development is sustained and more likely to have a lasting impact on teachers and students. Designed cycles of inquiry, as referenced in the literature, can be implemented as a way to encourage consistent teacher collaboration and problem solving.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since criticisms of professional development include disjointed and irrelevant workshops that leave teachers feeling as though the development is superficial (Ball & Cohen, 1999), schools and districts should consider the actions noted above to ensure effective professional development models. School and district leaders who are aware of and respond to professional learning standards gaps have the opportunity to build teacher leader capacity in their buildings and districts which might have a more profound impact on teaching and learning. In order to plan and implement professional development that will have an impact on teaching and student learning, school and district leaders need to provide job-embedded experiences that support teacher’s needs and goals. Do execute this, school and district leaders will need to plan and implement a variety of job-embedded professional development experiences that can be sustained over time. Creating a system to support high-quality job-embedded professional development requires common effort across three levels: states, districts, and schools (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). The outcomes of professional development will yield better results if school and district leaders collaborate to promote a culture of continuous learning, value and encourage teacher voice, build sustainable professional development structures that compliment teacher’s evaluations, and connect professional development to teacher’s everyday contexts.
Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

As a novice researcher, not acknowledging the study’s limitations would be careless. Although the participant’s provided rich descriptions of their most recent school-based and district professional development, a quantitative study might influence school, district, and state leaders to take action. The rich description of research might be more influential to lawmakers and other stakeholders.

Although a maximum variation approach was executed, increasing the number of participants might also ensure that the topics and findings are taken seriously, while strategically leveraging the diverse perspectives of multiple individuals. Additionally, including additional cases might provide a more global perceptive. While criterion sampling was an effective data collection strategy because each participant experienced the same phenomenon, it proved to be a limitation in this study. The findings did not offer the perspective of those individuals who had not experienced the phenomenon. In this study, each participant experienced school-based or district level professional development within the current school year or the year before. In order to pursue new leads or solicit unexpected data, opportunistic sampling should be considered if similar research is conducted.

The participants provided a sufficient amount of information to effectively answer the study’s research questions. With that being said, research devoted specifically to how recent school-based or district professional development impact how teachers lead and influence other teachers might provide more specific information for stakeholders who are interested in utilizing teacher leaders as catalysts for change. Focusing on their impact might provide more information regarding how the effectiveness of school-based and district professional development influences
teacher leader development. This may also provide insight into the functionality of professional learning communities and how they impact teacher practices and student achievement.

The limitations of this study should not be ignored or viewed as weaknesses. Instead, they should be seen as opportunities for future research and for researchers with similar interests and motives to confront their assumptions.

Conclusion

Teachers will continue to participate in professional development as an effort to build capacity within the teaching profession and meet the needs of students. Effective professional development practices like intentional learning designs, functional professional learning communities, and learning experiences that allow teachers to apply their learning are most beneficial for teachers. This qualitative study answered the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive school-based and district level professional development?
2. What types of professional development experiences do teachers find to be effective?
3. Do recent professional development experiences influence how teachers collaborate with other teachers?

The participants in this study perceived school-based and district level professional development as necessary but in need of more personalization. They felt as though their recent experiences were beneficial when they were job-embedded and engaging. They felt as though professional development is effective when it is not top-down and teachers have the opportunity to choose what they learn about. Similarly, the participants perceived professional development that inspired them as effective because they were more likely to implement the newly acquired information. Participants also felt empowered and excited about professional development that was specific to the needs of the professional learning community and applicable to their current
situations. Lastly, they felt that district professional development motivated them to share new ideas and instructional strategies with other teachers when they had the opportunity to apply their learning before leaving the professional development session. Doing so built their confidence and inspired them to share their learning with others.

This study provided insight into how teachers perceive recent school-based and district professional development and how those experiences impact their teaching practices. Teacher perceptions of school-based and district professional development are a direct reflection of what teachers have actually experienced. In fact, the voices of teachers who are experiencing professional development are invaluable when examining the effectiveness of professional development structures. Teachers are motivated by professional development experiences that are personalized, interactive and relevant to their current teaching responsibilities and situations. They are disheartened when professional development is mundane, outdated, and unintentional. Because professional development is a highly regarded topic and factor in the field of education, it is important that school and district leaders, as well as professional development policy makers commit to ensuring that professional development is meaningful for all teachers.
References


doi:10.1007/978-94-6209-610-3


http://www.learningforward.org/advancing/whypdmatters.cfm

Morse, J. (1999). Myth #3: reliability and validity are not relevant to qualitative inquiry.

*Qualitative Health Research, 9*, 717.


Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

SIGNED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: Teacher Perceptions of School-Based and District Professional Development Experiences

Researcher's Contact Information:
Ashley Michelle Morris
601-597-2990
Amorr109@students.kennesaw.edu

Introduction
You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Type of Project
Case Study

Description of Project
The purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers perceive recent school-based and district professional development experiences. My dissertation will thoroughly examine teacher’s professional development experiences and if and how those experiences impact them. It is hoped that this study will provide school and district leaders with information that will guide how they plan and implement professional development structures and processes.

Research Questions
1. How do teachers perceive school based and district professional development experiences?
2. What types of professional development experiences do teacher find to be influential, effective, powerful?
3. How do teachers feel that professional development impacts how they lead other teachers?

Explanation of Procedures
You will be asked several brief questions during two interviews. One interview will be one-on-one and the other will be a focus group interview. These interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription and coding purposes. The interviews will be stored on a password-protected computer, allowing access to only the researcher. They will be deleted when the project is completed, and no identifying information will be used.

Time Required
The interviews should take no longer than 30-45 minutes each.
There are no known risks. No identifying information or information regarding participation in this study will be made known to anyone else.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study. The investigator may learn more about how teachers perceive school-based and district professional development. The information the investigator learns may potentially benefit the field of education, as well as school-based and district professional development systems and processes.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

________________________________________
Participant Name/Date
Appendix B: Focus Group Script

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of the study and this focus group interview.

As you know, the purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers perceive recent school-based and district professional development experiences. My dissertation will thoroughly examine teacher’s professional development experiences and if and how those experiences impact them. It is hoped that this study will provide school and district leaders with information that will guide how they plan and implement professional development structures and processes.

You will be asked several questions during this focus group interview. This interview will be audio recorded for transcription and coding purposes. The interview will be stored on a password-protected computer, allowing access to only the researcher. It will be deleted when the project is completed, and no identifying information will be used. I encourage you to be open and honest. You are welcome to speak as frequently as you would like and in any order. This focus group interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this focus group interview. Let’s begin.

Focus Group Questions:

1. How useful have your most recent professional development experiences been?
2. What are your current professional development needs?
3. Do you feel professional development is necessary for all teachers?
4. Have your most recent professional development experiences encouraged you to go and share what you learned with a colleague?
5. Describe a recent professional development experience that met all of your needs?
Appendix C: Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of the study and this focus group interview.

As you know, the purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers perceive recent school-based and district professional development experiences. My dissertation will thoroughly examine teacher’s professional development experiences and if and how those experiences impact them. It is hoped that this study will provide school and district leaders with information that will guide how they plan and implement professional development structures and processes.

You will be asked several questions during this one-on-one interview. This interview will be audio recorded for transcription and coding purposes. The interview will be stored on a password-protected computer, allowing access to only the researcher. It will be deleted when the project is completed, and no identifying information will be used. I encourage you to be open and honest.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this one-on-one interview. Let’s begin.

Interview Questions:

1. How do you define the term professional development?
2. In general, how do you feel about professional development?
3. What type of professional development experiences do you prefer?
4. How would you describe your most recent professional development experience?
5. Has there been a time when you left a professional development session and could not wait to share what you learned with someone else?
6. When are you excited school-based and district professional development?

Other Questions: TBD (Based on the information recorded from the first six questions.)
Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire (Use after script is read.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Participant Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you define the term professional development?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. In general, how do you feel about professional development?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What type of professional development experiences do you prefer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How would you describe your most recent professional development experience?</td>
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<td>5. Has there been a time when you left a professional development session and could not wait to share what you learned with someone else?</td>
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<td>6. When are you excited school-based and district professional development?</td>
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Follow Up Questions:
1. 
2. 
3. 

Additional Comments (Made by the Participant)
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Appendix E: Focus Group Questionnaire (Use after script is read.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How useful have your most recent professional development experiences been?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What are your current professional development needs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Do you feel professional development is necessary for all teachers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Have your most recent professional development experiences encouraged you to go and share what you learned with a colleague?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Describe a recent professional development experience that met all of your needs?</td>
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</table>

Follow Up Questions:

1. 
2. 
3. 

Additional Comments (Made by Participants)

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