Trainers' perspectives of teacher professional development

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TRAINERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk, Committee Chair

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May 2019
ABSTRACT

Considerable attention in the literature has been given to perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding effectiveness of professional development for teachers. However, there is a paucity of research regarding perspectives of trainers and facilitators of professional development for educators. Thus, this dissertation study focused on trainers’ perspectives on effective professional development. More specifically, the study investigated these research questions: (1) What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?; (2) How do trainers facilitate professional development?; (3) How do trainers know they achieved the goals and objectives of their professional development?; (4a) Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?; and (4b) Why do they think their approach is effective? This study utilized a qualitative research design, and more particularly a phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews. The participants consisted of three professional development facilitators with varying degrees of experience. Data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The findings showed that professional development facilitators set goals for their professional development sessions based on teachers’ instructional needs and then provide active learning opportunities tailored to teachers’ needs and interests. They seek feedback from teachers and schools to determine if they have achieved their professional development goals. The feedback also helps them to find out if the professional development has met the schools’ and teachers’ expectations. In addition, four themes emerged from the
findings. Implications of the findings for effective professional development and future research directions are provided.
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May 2019
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“The teacher, more than any other influence, has the greatest impact on the achievement of students” (Hattie, 2003).

Schools have been providing Professional Development (PD) for teachers as long as they have been in existence, in some form or another and for all teachers, pre-K to 12. The purpose of PD is to enhance and update teachers’ instructional knowledge and pedagogical skill sets. Some PD is short and some are long lasting a day or longer, and the effectiveness of some sessions is evaluated systematically, but some are not. When evaluation is done, it seems to be carried out in the form of surveys about participants’ reactions and what they had learned from the professional development seminar. Evaluation may require eliciting perspectives of trainers of PD. Although perspectives and roles of teachers, administrators, and leaders (Blythe, 2014; Hobbs, 2014; Kao & Tsai, 2009; McCray, 2016; Tooley & Connally, 2016; Wise, 2017) have been studied, research on the perspectives of trainers on PD is often not available (Desimone, 2011; Han, 2014; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009; Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whittaker, & Lavelle, 2010). This study aims to investigate professional development trainers’ perspectives of effective professional development.

Research studies (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2013; Fishman et al., 2017; Polly & Hannafin, 2011) show that teacher professional development is critical to teachers’ practice and students’ learning. J. A. Taylor, Roth, Wilson, Stuhlsatz, and Tipton (2017) researched some of the effects of
professional development on elementary students’ science achievement. In their study, they found that students whose teachers received professional development analyzing science teaching practice had higher achievement than students whose teachers did not participate in the professional development. Similarly, DeNome (2015) found that students taught by teachers who received professional development in assessment principles had higher mathematics scores than students taught by teachers who did not receive such professional development. Moreover, Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley’s (2007) study showed that students whose teachers participated in a professional development, lasting an average of 49 hours, had higher achievement scores than those whose teachers did not participate in any professional development. Teacher professional development has been receiving considerable attention in research owing to the central role teacher quality plays in students’ academic achievement levels.

Professional development is believed to have the potential to change teachers’ attitudes to learning, teaching, and also their instructional practices (Banilower, Heck, & Weiss, 2007; Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra, & Volman, 2017; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2000). Due to its many potential positive effects, various professional development models have been proposed.

Many researchers discussed the effectiveness of teacher professional development programs and models (Fishman et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara, & Miratrix, 2012). Scholars studying the teacher change in relation to professional development emphasized the importance of reviewing
one’s beliefs about and attitudes toward teaching and learning (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015; Hunsaker & Johnston, 1992; Smith, Smith, & Williams, 2005) and experimenting with new practices (Hunsaker & Johnston, 1992; Smith et al., 2005). Characteristics of effective professional development presented in the literature include, but are not limited to, the following: longer professional development duration (Borko, Davinroy, Bliem, & Cumbo, 2000; Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001; Smith & Gillespie, 2007), teachers’ self-reflection (Avalos, 2011; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Tripp & Rich, 2012), follow-up (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Snyder & Wolfe, 2008; Wilson & Berne, 1999), coherence within the professional development program (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007), and active involvement in the professional development by teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001; Lee, Maerten-Rivera, Penfield, LeRoy, & Secada, 2008).

Bullough (2009) emphasizes that short-term workshops do not help create meaningful change in teacher practice within early childhood. Increasingly, today, one-time workshops are not considered to contribute much in teachers’ best practices and researchers began to pay attention to content focus. Teachers seek PD that is adjusted to their discipline-specific needs, whether in science, math, or other subject, and provides them with opportunity to explore or test new strategies with their own students. Hence, PD with content focus is often not generic but specific to teachers’ classroom practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). PD with a content focus is aligned with teachers’ classroom contexts and addresses their priorities defined particularly in their own
classrooms. Thus, trainers’ perspectives on incorporating content focus in PD gain importance (Diamond, Justice, Siegler, & Snyder, 2013; Garet et al., 2016; Powell, Diamond, & Cockburn, 2013; Snyder, Hemmeter, & McLaughlin, 2011) when organizing effective PD for early childhood practitioners. Powell, Diamond, and Burchinal (2012) investigated the effects of a coaching-based PD model on support for children’s verbal skills provided by early childhood teachers in an early childhood setting. The researchers used an intervention group and a control group of teachers in their research. Their results indicated that teachers in the intervention group asked more verbal questions and used more language in the classroom than the teachers in the control group did. Analyses in the study showed that the students in the intervention group improved “in the amount of language produced and heard” (p. 25). Researchers (Powell et al., 2012) stated that content focus may have been one of the elements of PD that led to improvements as teachers were exposed to more than 30 samples of evidence-based teaching strategies during the intervention.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) reviewed 35 research studies on professional development activities linking teachers’ instruction to improvements in learning outcomes of students. The reviewed research studies have been published in the last three decades and 31 of the reviewed 35 research studies were content-focused. In their study, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) found that effective PD is:

1. content-focused
2. Incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory
3. Supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts
4. Uses models and modeling of effective practice
5. Provides coaching and expert support
6. Offers opportunities for feedback and reflection
7. is of sustained duration” (p. 4).

The researchers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) believed that content-focused PD was content-specific with a link to particular curricula that teachers used in their classroom contexts with their own students. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stated that PD with a content focus was not generic but specific, providing teachers with opportunities to try out new curricula or specific teaching strategies in a content area.

The purpose of this study is to investigate professional development trainers’ perspectives on effective professional development in a school district in the Midwest.

Statement of the Problem

School districts all over the country provide professional development training to teachers in both private and public schools in an effort to continue building teachers’ skill and knowledge sets. However, the effectiveness of short- and long-term training is often not commonly evaluated or tested (Birman et al., 2000; Desimone, 2011; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Guskey, 2009; Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016). Trainer perspectives that would likely contribute to developing more effective PD are unfortunately under-investigated (Han, 2014; Hill et al., 2013; Whitcomb et al., 2009; Zaslow et al., 2010). By comparison, perspectives of teachers, administrators, and other school leaders (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2001; Hobbs, 2014; Kao & Tsai, 2009; McCray, 2016; Wise, 2017) regarding professional development have been widely studied. Incorporating professional development trainers’ perspectives on PD would potentially improve the quality of both the content and the mode of delivery of PD provided to teachers. Lack of investigation on various perspectives of PD as well as
lack of evaluation of PD is likely to result in perpetuating irrelevant or redundant material and ineffective or incomplete methods (Jayaram, Moffit, & Scott, 2012). Professional development activities cost money and time, so the activities must address teachers’ individual professional needs and ignite their enthusiasm for professional learning. They should not be allowed to be perceived by teachers as nothing other than schedule fillers. One-shot PD, born out of ineffective and incomplete methods, without adequate follow-up is often criticized (Hunzicker, 2011). Professional learning has positive impact on teachers’ knowledge and skills which pave the way to increasing student learning and achievement (Darlin-Hammond et al., 2017; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Systematic evaluation of professional development can serve important purposes such as providing feedback to PD program developers, trainers and participants thereby improving PD programs and guiding future efforts (Dickinson & Brady, 2006; Snyder & Wolfe, 2008). Also, evaluation of PD may be conducted at different levels and with different stakeholders such as PD trainers, teachers, organizations, and for student outcomes (Guskey, 2002). In addition, policymakers, fund providers, and program developers can make use of the data from PD evaluation for planning, decision making, and resource allocation purposes (Snyder & Wolfe, 2008). Moreover, investigating the trainers’ perspectives in a PD program would help educators cultivate more effective ways of conducting the training, ensuring that teachers are using the right methods, addressing timely and helpful feedback, and measuring the potential impact on students of what they have gained from the professional development sessions.
Significance of the Problem

Teacher PD can improve teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogy as well as motivate them to become more reflective practitioners (Hattie, 2003; Kleickmann et al., 2013; Moon, 2013), provide teachers with individual satisfaction (Villegas-Reimers, 2003) and positively impact their beliefs, expectations, and practices (Biesta et al., 2015; Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, 2005; Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Tripp & Rich, 2012). Researchers have shown proof for the positive relationship between professional development and student learning and achievement (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). Teacher PD can be one pivotal pathway to achieving effective educational reform (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Developing teacher professional development that engenders the afore-mentioned desirable outcomes necessitates taking into account the perspectives of those who provide and facilitate PD. Thus, findings of this study will likely contribute to increasing the quality of professional development provided to teachers, thereby maximizing the return on the investment of time, effort, energy, and money.

Purpose of the Study

There is a paucity of empirical investigations about PD for teachers, particularly the perspectives of trainers on what they do, how they do it, and why they do it the way they do it (Han, 2014; Zaslow et al., 2010). The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives of trainers of teacher professional development. More specifically, the study
will investigate the perspectives of trainers involved in PD activities in a school district in the Midwest.

The research questions this study aims to investigate are as follows:

1. What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?
2. How do trainers facilitate professional development?
3. How do trainers know they achieved the goals and objectives of their professional development?
4. a. Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?
    b. Why do they think their approach is effective?

**Conceptual Framework**

Desimone’s (2009) conceptual framework of professional development will guide this study. Although there are many teacher professional development frameworks, Desimone’s (2009) seems to be more comprehensive in its scope and can be used both as a guide to develop a teacher PD and a matrix to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher PD program (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Particularly, the elements of Desimone’s (2009) framework imply the necessity of incorporating trainers’ perspectives in organizing effective PD as they refer to coherence and follow-up that could be provided through feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Shortland, 2010).

Traditional professional development often includes workshops and courses. However, these activities are often perceived by teachers as irrelevant to teachers’ classroom teaching (Kang, Cha, & Ha, 2013). Within various approaches to professional
development, researchers consider situated and cognitive perspectives as conducive to
teacher learning (Borko et al., 2000; Korthagen, 2010). Teachers’ knowledge has been
particularly regarded as one of the factors impacting teaching practice. Kang et al. (2013)
emphasized the importance of professional development in improving the quality of
teaching and, in return, increasing the quality of schools. The researchers also pointed out
that a broad framework of PD evaluation must outline a definition of effective
professional development, its interaction with teachers’ learning and students’ outcomes,
and the core factors that impact PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2013).

All of these dimensions are included in Desimone’s (2009) framework for PD.
The framework is comprehensive and includes “teachers’ knowledge as well as attitudes
and beliefs as critical factors affecting teaching practice” (Kang et al., 2013, p. 12).
Desimone (2009) argued that the framework she proposed is not necessarily situated
within one particular view; rather, it flexibly approaches various views of teacher
learning and is particularly suited to studying the potential effectiveness of PD. It
provides the basics of a core conceptual framework and helps build a foundation that
addresses critical characteristics of effective PD, such as duration, content, consistency,
active learning, and collaboration with colleagues (Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet,
2015).

For those reasons, Desimone’s (2009) conceptual framework of PD will be used
to investigate the perspectives of trainers on PD. More specifically, Desimone’s (2009)
conceptual framework will be used in both the process of interviews and the data
analysis. In her proposed conceptual framework, Desimone (2009) described the key
professional development characteristics as “content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation” within the context of education environment (p. 184). These essential elements are elaborated in the next chapter. When a professional development activity is based on the key characteristics of professional development mentioned above, it is assumed to provide teachers with increased knowledge and improved skills along with a change in teachers’ attitude and beliefs towards learning and teaching. Thus, the change in instructional practices results in improved student outcomes. This framework relates to both the teacher change and the change in instruction (Kang et al., 2013) expressed through trainers’ perspectives of PD.

Professional development content is associated with the subject matter knowledge and the students’ learning of this content (Kang et al., 2013; Kennedy, 1998). Focus on the content of professional development activities may be the most effective aspect (Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015) because it can enhance teachers’ knowledge, instructional practice, and student outcomes (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Desimone, 2009; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2005).

The second essential element which includes observing teachers, being observed by teachers, reviewing works by students, developing class sessions, discussing instruction with other teachers, and similar activities to improve teaching may be considered as active learning opportunities for teachers receiving professional development (Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Kang et al., 2013; Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry, & Hewson, 2003). Feedback on instruction and teaching practice, identifying points that need to be improved and reflecting on teachers’ own
teaching may, also, be included within active engagement in professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ingvarson et al., 2005).

Consistency of professional development with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, different learning activities, reforms and policies within school, district, and state constitutes the third key professional development characteristic (Desimone, 2011; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Kang et al., 2013). The alignment of professional development activities with district and state standards and policies and the extent to which these activities helped initiate professional communication among teachers are considered parts of coherence (Desimone, 2011).

Studies indicate that sufficient amount of professional development, in number of hours and span of time, are required in order for teachers’ beliefs and attitudes to change (Boyle et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Polly et al., 2015). Researchers suggested that participation duration in professional development activities positively contributed in teachers’ preparedness, classroom practices, and attitudes (Banilower et al., 2007; Heck, Banilower, Weiss, & Rosenberg, 2008).

More than one teacher from the same school, district, or grade level may participate in the same professional development opportunities, which may engender interaction and collaboration among teachers to support learning (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Guskey, 1994). Research shows that there may be a positive relation between teaching practice and collective participation by teachers in professional development activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone et al., 2002; Kang et al., 2013; Penuel et al., 2007).
Therefore, effective professional development addresses all those key components such as focus on content of PD activities, active learning and engagement by teachers, coherence with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge and policies within the school, district, and state, PD duration that provides teachers with preparation opportunities, and collaboration among teachers in participating in the same PD opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the professional development trainers’ perspectives on effective professional development. Desimone’s (2009) framework of effective professional development will guide this study to answer the following research questions:

1. What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?
2. How do trainers facilitate professional development?
3. How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives of their professional development?
4. a. Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?
   b. Why do they think their approach is effective?

Researcher’s Preconceptions of Professional Development

In interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), researchers study how participants make sense of their own experiences (Gill, 2014). Through IPA, both participants’ and the researcher’s perspectives of the experiences can be involved in the data analysis process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2004). However, the descriptive phenomenological approach suggests that researchers leave their preconceptions of phenomena outside the analysis of data (Gill, 2014). Since this study
used an interpretative approach, the researcher is accorded the opportunity to involve his preconceptions of teacher professional development in order to more fully understand the participant PD facilitators’ views. This section includes the researcher’s preconception of teacher professional development.

When I taught at schools at 2nd – 12th grade levels as a teacher of English language, I attended professional development sessions and had the opportunity to facilitate PD sessions. At that time, I thought PD merely consisted of instruction provided by an expert in the field mostly, if not entirely, scheduled without teachers’ input. I was the head of the English language department at a private school from 2006 to 2008 and had organized PD meetings for teachers. This enabled me to view PD differently after numerous discussions and consultations with other department heads. My new view was that teachers were mostly interested in solutions for their instructional issues and interests that PD, unfortunately, often did not address. Later, as a graduate assistant at Regent’s Center at College of Education, UNI, I had the opportunity to observe PD seminars provided to early childhood teachers and I became increasingly interested more in researching the topic of teacher PD. The literature review for this study opened my eyes to the different components of PD and various approaches to facilitating it. As a result, my preconceptions underwent an evolution from viewing PD as mere instruction or delivery of information to noticing that PD sessions I experienced did not address teachers’ needs, and to now being aware of the characteristics of PD available in the literature review in this study. Particularly, the key elements of effective PD (Desimone, 2009), content focus, coherence, duration, active learning opportunities, and collaborative
participation, now, have a place among the researcher’s preconceptions of PD. All of these preconceptions shaped how I view, think, and believe PD sessions ought to be. Anything that I considered any view that deviates from the view I developed as ineffective or incomplete or both.

**Definition of Terms**

**Professional development:** In this dissertation study, professional development is defined as professional learning that improves teachers’ skills and knowledge sets and that takes place through structured activities and job-embedded or externally provided interactions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Stewart, 2014; Desimone, 2011).

**Professional development trainer.** Professional development trainers are expert educators that provide, facilitate, develop, and design professional learning opportunities and assist, coach, mentor, and support teachers in their professional learning efforts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Knapp, 2003). Terms, trainer and facilitator, are used interchangeably in this dissertation study.

**Content of professional development.** The composition of teacher professional development that is considered to increase teachers’ knowledge in the areas that they need, such as subject matter, instructional strategies, or pedagogical knowledge. Content refers to teachers’ gains through professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Kang et al., 2013; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017).

**Active learning.** Active learning refers to teachers’ active engagement in learning opportunities in the professional development provided. Teachers should be involved in observing other teachers, examining student work, using the materials to be utilized in
teaching the concepts within their subject matter before teaching in class, discussing actively, and reflecting on their practice (Desimone, 2011).

**Coherence.** Coherence is defined as the alignment between the professional development activity and teachers’ beliefs, expectations, school, district, and state policies and reforms. In addition, coherence is about the congruency between the goals of professional development activities and teachers’ instructional goals (Lumpe, Haney, & Czerniak, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007).

**Duration.** Duration refers to the time span that professional development activities take place.

**Collaborative participation.** Collaborative participation refers to teachers’ collective participation in professional development activities. When teachers from the same school, district, or city participate in professional development, their collective efforts create a learning environment that is open to reflection, discussion, and interaction (Desimone, 2011).

**Interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA).** In this study, IPA refers to the phenomenological approach to understanding human experiences. According to Gill (2014), IPA does not require researchers to leave their preconceptions of the studied phenomena outside the data analysis.

**Descriptive phenomenological approach.** In this study, descriptive phenomenological approach refers to the phenomenological approach that, according to Gill (2014), advises researchers to leave their preconceptions of the studied phenomena outside the data analysis, unlike IPA.
Organization of the Study

In addition to this chapter, there will be four more. The second will consist of a review of the teacher professional development literature. The methodology that will be used in this study will be described in Chapter 3. The data collected and analyzed will be reported in Chapter 4. The fifth and final chapter will provide a discussion of the results, offer recommendations to researchers and implications for future studies.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, a review of the related and relevant literature to professional development is presented. The chapter is organized in four parts. Part one will provide an historical background of the evolution of professional development in teaching. Part two will offer and examine definitions of professional development. Approaches to professional development will be the focus of the part three. The fourth and final part addresses the key features of effective professional development in general.

Historical Background

Teacher professional development was available in the form of in-service training in the 19th century (Ferguson, 2008; Ogren, 2005). Teacher Institutes provided the medium for teacher education in the early 19th century for American schools (Guskey, 1986). In the late 19th century, teaching began to be shaped through social sciences (Fendler, 2003). So, in-service training was offered as a means to improving the teaching staff. The training was rooted in Franklin Bobbitt and E. L. Thorndike’s views (Clark, 2008). Bobbitt thought curriculum-making had to be professionalized and the skilled professionals for this were found in science and business spheres (Bobbit, 2004). Thorndike emphasized testing in education and the role that environment plays in shaping human beings (Clark, 2008). Thus, teachers were expected to receive training rather than be left to their own professional development initiatives. Thorndike (1912) discussed the necessity of specialized training for teachers beyond conventional education. He described the specialized training as follows:
As men realize the many things that can be done to make a teacher more effective, they will realize the necessity of saving much waste throughout the teacher’s working life by spending more time upon his training. Very soon six, and then seven, and then eight, years beyond the elementary school will be required for entrance to the profession of teaching…But the real teacher, the architect of human lives, will soon be required to possess at least such expert knowledge and skill as only a first-class student can gain in a full four years beyond high school. This knowledge will not be simply knowledge of the mathematics or sciences or languages which are to be taught, but will include rigorous scientific treatment of the problems of education itself. The teacher of the future will think out from scientific principles the best way to teach a given child to subtract or divide, as the engineer thinks out the best way to bridge a given river or tunnel a given hill. The study of these principles and their applications will demand as great talents and as close application as the study of principles upon which medical or engineering practice rests (Thorndike, 1912, p. 257-258).

Bobbit’s and Thorndike’s contemporary, F. W. Taylor’s view of professional development, particularly for the work force, included centralization of planning and supervising the learner as well as scrutinized instruction and accountability (F. W. Taylor, 1914). These early approaches stemmed from a view of social efficiency where teachers were expected to be altruistic people who worked a lot and preferred others’ comfort before theirs (Avent, 1931).

Dewey recognized the need for professional development rather than just staff training. He underscored the importance of practice and education theory to improving teaching (Shulman, 1998). However, Dewey’s suggestion was to expect results of such professional development in the long run as opposed to short-term gains (Clark, 2008). Flexner Report in 1910 examined the status of medical education and was influential in connecting practice with research in the curriculum (Shulman, 1998). Schwab, however, criticized the role that progressives assigned to the teacher in relation to theory and practice (Schwab, 1959). Instead, he focused on the interaction between theory and
practice, where theory is asserted through practical results. Later, Schwab emphasized the preeminence of theory over practice and highlighted the importance of function of practice (Schwab, 1969).

Over time, in-service teacher training was considered inefficient and a new approach to teachers’ roles in learning was adopted. Teacher was not regarded as a passive sitter but a process controller (Clark, 2008). Teachers’ knowledge and their practice increasingly gained importance as reforms began to involve funding teacher professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Guskey, 2000). In-service teacher training was transformed into teacher professional development. Teachers were viewed as groups of learners who create a community, particularly, of practice (Butler et al., 2004). Schön (2017) argued that it was not enough for teachers to practice; they needed to reflect on their practice. Schön’s (2017) contention about the need for reflective practice was supported by research that emphasized the importance of reflection in teaching profession (Avalos, 2011; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017; Tooley & Connally, 2016). However, accountability proponents later attributed low-performing schools to teacher performance (Donaldson, 2012) and standardized test scores were included as criteria for assessing student achievement (Lewis & Young, 2013). Accountability has not necessarily improved professional development for teachers (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2003). In the accountability context, professional development focused on content and duration: short-term workshops were avoided; yet, teachers were not provided with adequate learning opportunities (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). Tucker (2014) believes that the overall education system rather than the teachers
in it is to blame for failing schools. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) draw attention to the staffing issues within the education system. Researchers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011) state that only 50% of the employed staff in education consisted of teachers in the classrooms in 1991, which was a stark contrast to European and Asian countries where the majority of the employed staff were teachers. Hence, the notion of low-performing teachers may not totally be truthful. Although, teacher professional development is an integral part of the profession, the accountability that is based on the notion of low-performing teachers must not be its starting point.

**Approaches to Teacher Professional Development**

Teaching profession has been viewed through many perspectives varying in their foci. Some emphasized teacher change and professional learning-communities, others focused on teachers’ practice (Fishman et al., 2017; Garcia-Carrion, Gomez, Molina, & Ionescu, 2017; Guskey, 2000; Randel, Apthorp, Beesley, Clark, & Wang, 2016). In this section, various approaches to professional development will be discussed. These approaches include school-university partnerships, professional development schools, peer coaching, and teacher change.

**School University Partnerships**

A school-university partnership presents a collaborative effort to improve teachers’ practice. University staff and teachers are considered partners who have unique expertise to create opportunities for professional learning extended beyond public schools (Crawford, Roberts, & Hickmann, 2008; Miller, 2001).
Education reforms and initiatives placed the teacher and the teaching at the forefront of education. Accountability concerns advanced the notion that the student achievement is a product of professional development (Guskey, 2000). Hence, different approaches such as school-university partnerships (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012), professional learning communities (DuFour & DuFour, 2013; Garcia-Carrion et al., 2017), coaching (Batt, 2010), mentoring (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012), and practice-based PD (Fishman et al., 2017) to teacher professional development emerged.

Although school-university partnerships have a history of more than one hundred years, most such partnerships have not survived (Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002). School-university partnerships, born out of educational reform activities, aim at improving teacher quality and student learning as well as trigger change in teaching profession (Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009). Organizational cultures may affect teachers’ professional characteristics. Therefore, a partnership between public schools and universities potentially has many benefits to organizations and individuals (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006).

The focus of school-university partnerships may range from student teacher placement, staff development and training to leadership. Strong partnerships require collaboration, reflection, and constant revision. Strong partnerships have been fruitful for both the public schools and universities in that they contribute to practice and research with the aim of solving issues and addressing challenges that educators face (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). School-university partnerships are instrumental in creating professional learning communities and fostering professional development opportunities as well as
interactions among colleagues (Sandholtz, 2002). Successful school-university partnerships are characterized by mutual trust, clear shared goals, and a clear understanding of the function of the partnership (Martin, Snow, & Franklin-Torrez, 2011).

Professional development schools, as a form of school-university partnership, offer a framework for teachers to improve their knowledge and practice as well as a network for collaboration (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008). Characteristics of professional development schools as a common venue for professional learning will be discussed below.

Professional Development Schools

A professional development school (PDS), as a professional development model, is a typical form of school-university partnership (Martin et al., 2011) where university faculty and school teachers become partners for learning. University expertise and practicing teachers’ inquisitive stance stemming from experience are combined to bring solutions to everyday issues. A PDS can serve pre-service teachers as well as practicing teachers. One important characteristic of PDS is that they provide sustained support in teachers’ continuing professional growth and help them to be more reflective (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Reynolds, Ross, & Rakow, 2002). According to R. Clark (1999), PDSs share four components: a) pre-service education, b) professional development, c) inquiry, and d) school renewal. In addition, PDS, as a professional learning community (PLC), encourages collaboration and support among teachers (Snow-Gerono, 2005). PLC’s provide teachers with various opportunities, facilitate discussion and sharing, and
maintain a professional atmosphere in the work place. Teachers in a PDS use inquiry skills to explore teaching and learning; share knowledge and experience; and reflect on their own practice.

The above was a discussion of professional schools; the next section introduces yet another approach, which involves peer teaching. Thus, it is a discussion of peer coaching that we turn next.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is a process in which colleagues discuss and improve their teaching strategies in a one-way, coach-to-peer PD or a two-way, mutual coaching and learning opportunity (Huston & Weaver, 2008; Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2009). Peer coaching emerged as an approach to professional development and was used in combination with the novel curriculum and instruction strategies in 1980s (Lu, 2010; Wong & Nicotera, 2003). For teachers, peer coaching involved planning together, sharing experiences and teaching strategies that worked well in the classroom, processing new skills, using observation of peers teaching, and providing feedback to one another (Lu, 2010; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Peer coaching focuses on implementing new curriculum and instruction strategies, improving practices among teachers, and establishing collaboration among teachers (Wong & Nicotera, 2003). When utilized as part of teachers’ professional activities, peer coaching creates a culture of collaboration (Wanzare & da Costa, 2000), increases instructional capacity (Showers & Joyce, 1996), and provides support for evaluation (Becker, 1996). It is used as a building-based PD model, which teachers find as convenient and useful especially when it is ongoing and
collaborative. As practicing colleagues, teachers are able to discuss everyday-challenges and issues; contribute in the profession; and share experiences. Through peer coaching, implementation of new techniques and strategies at schools become part of teachers’ agenda. Immediate feedback is provided and evaluation of a particular practice is also possible. Peer coaching also helps the professional development impact teachers more because peer coaching enables teachers to discuss, exchange opinions, and further clarify classroom strategies in an ongoing manner even following a professional development session (Truesdale, 2003). Peer-coached teachers feel comfortable and professionally supported when coaches provide feedback (Scheeler, Congdon, & Stansbery, 2010; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Peer coaching requires ongoing conversation and collaboration. In a coaching relationship, the coach listens actively and initiates thinking as well as builds trust with the teacher (Vidmar, 2006). As a result, the teacher develops self-assessment and management strategies that will improve practice (Thurlings & den Brok, 2017; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2005).

Another approach in teacher professional development emphasizes change in teachers’ attitudes toward teaching and learning and also change in their classroom practices. The next section will include a discussion of teacher change.

**Teacher Change**

Teacher change refers to the positive change in teachers’ practice and attitudes toward teaching and learning through PD and, thus, the improvement in student achievement (Boyle et al., 2005; Guskey, 2002; Smith & Gillespie, 2007).
Professional development is believed to prompt change in teachers’ attitudes towards teaching and learning and in their classroom practices (Boyle et al., 2005; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey, 2002; Parise & Spillane, 2010). Guskey (2002) pointed out that teachers experiment with novel practices gained through PD and when their experimentations lead to increased student achievement, teachers change their attitudes and beliefs in two ways: first- and second-order change. First-order change brings along adaptation of something already existent. The second-order change requires implementation of change through new knowledge and skills (Anderson, 2009). Guskey’s argument about teacher change (2002) aligns with the second-order change which requires new knowledge and skills that engender enduring change. Guskey’s professional development model suggests that change takes place in three areas: teachers’ classroom practices, student achievement, and teachers’ beliefs and attitudes (Guskey, 2002). Change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, according to this model, occurs when teachers implement new strategies and practice new skills that they gained through professional development. Teachers are more likely to change their practice when they see an increase in student outcomes as they would attribute the increase to the effectiveness of the new strategies that they are using in the classroom (Guskey, 2002; Hubber, Tytler, & Haslam, 2010). Guskey’s (2002) teacher change model is not similar to other change models as it expects teachers to change only if they immediately implement what they have learned from PD.

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) considered the focus of professional development as “change as growth or learning” (p.948). They viewed change as an
expected result of teachers’ professional activities and considered teachers as learners within a learning community. For them, change is a complicated process where teachers engage as active learners in professional development through reflection (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) proposed a professional growth model with four domains: “external, personal, practice, and consequence” (p.951). External domain, referring to support available for teachers and information sources, is located outside personal domain that involves teachers’ beliefs, attitudes toward teaching and learning, and their knowledge. The domain of practice is about teacher’s experimentation in professional world. This may be about testing out a new teaching strategy or using a new technology in the classroom. The domain of consequence refers to tangible outcomes that teachers consider valuable in their practice. For example, when collaboration leads to increased understanding in students, this becomes a valuable strategy that produces a tangible outcome in the teacher’s eyes. Change happening in any of the domains is transmitted to change in others through reflection and putting beliefs into action. The researchers considered that teacher change involved cyclical interactions among these domains (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

Collet (2012) examined gradual increase of responsibility (GIR) model, adapted from Pearson and Gallagher’s Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) (1983) model, applied on coaching and teacher change in a clinical environment at a university. The mixed-method case study aimed to describe the role of coaching process leading to teacher change. Participants included three instructional coaches that supported 46 literacy teachers tutoring public school students in grades 3 through 7 in three semesters.
Collet’s (2012) findings indicated change in teachers’ and coaches’ practice. Teachers used new strategies in their classes and received support from coaches all along. The study showed that coaches were able to provide social interaction for teacher change; collaboration among teachers increased; and teachers improved their practices (Collet, 2012).

Researchers (Avalos, 2011; Coffino, 2012; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Eylon, Berger, & Bagno, 2008; Guskey, 2002; Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2007) proposed various factors, including motivation, instructional resources, technology, longer duration and collaborative efforts, in change models for professional development.

Schools and districts adopt educational goals, such as closing the achievement gap between low-SES and more advantaged students, improving literacy levels, or increasing accountability, that are usually aligned with teachers’ classroom practices. Developers of effective professional development are expected to consider these goals when planning the professional development in order to trigger change (Avalos, 2011; Wei et al., 2009).

Various models of PD incorporated feedback (Ingvarson et al., 2005; Shortland, 2010) as an indicator of PD effectiveness and a source of sustained support. Feedback from various shareholders as well as trainers involved in PD is needed to create efforts to improve teacher professional development. Coaching, collaborative practice, or reflective practice may potentially incorporate perspectives of those involved in PD. However, the models reviewed in this section did not particularly include eliciting trainers’ perspectives of PD as a supportive and guiding factor in developing effective PD. As such, trainers’ perspectives on PD have not received enough attention by researchers.
(Desimone, 2011; Han, 2014; Hill et al., 2013; Whitcomb et al., 2009; Zaslow et al., 2010) although teachers’, administrators’, and leaders’ perspectives of effective PD have been the focus of research studies (Blythe, 2014; Hobbs, 2014; Kao & Tsai, 2009; McCray, 2016; Tooley & Connally, 2016; Wise, 2017). Thus, this study aims to investigate the trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the trainer perspectives of PD in a school district in the Midwest. Desimone’s (2009) conceptual framework will be used as the theoretical framework for this study, particularly in investigating trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development. Desimone’s (2009) model consists of five key features: content focus, coherence, active learning, duration, and collaboration. Desimone (2009) believes that earlier research studies focusing on professional development lacked the investigation of outcomes of PD and the processes by which PD worked and these studies mainly looked into change in attitudes, satisfaction of teachers, or engagement in innovation. However, more recent research studies commonly referred to some core characteristics in effective professional development (Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015). The researcher, then, goes on to argue that characteristics of effective professional development are available in the empirical studies within a research consensus (Desimone, 2009). A review of relevant literature reveals some characteristics of effective professional development activities. She asks “How can we best measure professional development and its effects on teachers and students?” (p. 182). Her response to this question is by using research-suggested five core characteristics of effective PD: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and
collective participation (Kang et al., 2013). Based on these, the researcher proposes a theoretical framework for increasing the quality of professional development provided to teachers (Desimone, 2011; Desimone & Garet, 2015). In the following section, the five key features of effective professional development proposed by Desimone (2009) will be elaborated.

Key Elements of Effective Professional Development

Content of the Professional Development

The first key element in Desimone’s (2009) theoretical framework is referred to as content, which is related to teachers’ gains through professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Kang et al., 2013; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Subject matter knowledge and the knowledge of students’ ways of learning subject matter constitute the two major categories of professional development content (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2013; Kennedy, 1998; Mundry, 2005; Shulman, 1998; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017).

A professional development program is structured around the needs of teachers who intend to learn and improve their professional skills. Teachers may attend a professional development session and leave without gaining what they have hoped for. What the designers of the professional development plan to provide teachers with and what teachers gain through the program may not match, thereby creating disconnect between PD content and teachers’ professional needs (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, & Hewson, 2009; Wei et al., 2009). However, teachers are motivated to engage in professional development activities that offer answers to questions they have and provide new knowledge related to pedagogy and their content
area. The content of the professional development is the primary aspect that appeals to teachers more than any other feature of a professional development program (Kennedy, 1998). Relevant content that addresses teachers’ needs and professional interest is a key defining feature of the effectiveness of a professional development program (Loucks-Horsley, & Matsumoto, 1999; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). Teachers prefer, desire, and enjoy attending a professional development program with a focus on targeted needs much more than a professional development with a general content focus (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In addition, a content-focused professional development program with opportunities for teachers to examine issues related to content and relevant instructional methods is more effective because it offers the teachers the opportunity to construct knowledge about their particular area of content (Hausfather, 2001). Knowledge of the subject matter forms the basis for teaching. Effective instruction by teachers requires sound content knowledge (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Therefore, professional development with an expressed focus on content engenders better teaching practice and learning outcomes (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Knowledge of the subject matter combined with effective teaching skills that facilitate students’ learning of the content (Kang et al., 2013; Kennedy, 1998) should be the central focus of the professional development. Put differently, profound understanding of the subject matter content and the ways that students learn the subject matter constitute crucial portions of professional development (Birman et al., 2000). Teachers who know the subject matter are more likely to teach it in ways that help
students to grasp it better. Thus, a professional development program may focus on either
the subject matter or a particular teaching skill used for this subject (Birman et al., 2000).
Hill and Ball (2004) found that professional development opportunities with a focused
content is more effective in developing both teachers’ subject matter knowledge and their
ability to teach in a flexible and interpretative manner; also, the teachers are more able to
make more sense of the subject matter (Hill & Ball, 2004). Generic professional
development without a focus does not address main topics of school subjects (Cohen &
Hill, 2000). Heller et al. (2012) studied the relationships among teachers’ knowledge,
their practice, professional development, and student achievement in an experimental
research with more than 270 elementary teachers and 7000 students. The research
examined three interventions for teachers: Teaching Cases, Metacognitive Analysis, and
Looking at Student Work, with also no-intervention groups. Those three professional
development courses with similar in-depth science content, delivered in 24 hours totally,
let the researchers study the effects of interventions on teachers and student achievement.
The researchers stated that the interventions enabled teachers learn actively; both teacher
and student curricula aligned well; adequate duration was provided in the interventions;
and teachers were able to professionally discuss in a collective-participatory manner
(Heller et al., 2012). Teaching Cases included written accounts of teachers’ practice in
the classroom, Metacognitive Analysis involved reflection on teachers’ learning, and
Looking at Student Work let teachers analyze student work with a link to relevant
teaching. Teachers’ and students’ content knowledge was measured through pre- and
post-intervention selected response tests and written justification for answers (p. 340).
Researchers reported that all three interventions increased teacher content knowledge. Students of teachers who received the professional development courses scored higher than the students in the control group. The focus of the PD content in this study was about the content alignment between the teacher curriculum and the standards-based student curriculum. Thus, the professional development with a content focus proved to be successful (Heller et al., 2012). Ingvarson et al. (2005) investigated the effectiveness of professional development programs and reported content focus among the factors impacting the professional development. The researchers (Ingvarson et al., 2005) gathered data on self-reports of 3250 teachers who participated in more than eighty different PD activities and the modes of delivering PD included workshops, online learning, coaching, mentoring, and other work-embedded programs. The study looked into the impact of PD on student learning. Ingvarson et al. (2005) stated that student learning outcomes were more likely to be improved when teachers’ grasp of the content that they taught, how students learned the content, and the best manner of teaching the content increased. Related literature (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Desimone, 2009; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005) suggested that focus on the content of professional development can improve teachers’ knowledge, instructional practice, and student outcomes.

Yoon et al. (2007) reviewed the literature related to the impact of teacher professional development on students’ reading, science, and mathematics outcomes. They found that content-focused professional development positively contributed to teachers’ knowledge and practice as well as enhanced student learning.
Killion (1999) reviewed 26 staff development programs for teachers of elementary and high school grades and examined their common characteristics. He found that professional development programs with a focus on any desired outcome tended to achieve their goals. For instance, a professional development program with a focus on improving student achievement would achieve its goal, or, a staff development program aiming to improve teacher knowledge would improve teacher knowledge (Killion, 1999). That is, focus gives a professional development program the necessary direction. It is no wonder that National Staff Development Council (Fishman et al., 2003) lists content among its main categories for a successful professional development.

The above was a discussion of the first element of an effective professional development. Next, we turn to a discussion of coherence, which is the second key element in Desimone’s (2009) model.

Coherence

Consistency of professional development with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, different learning activities, reforms and policies within school, district, and state constitutes the third key professional development characteristic (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2013). The alignment of professional development activities with district and state standards and policies and the extent to which these activities helped initiate professional communication among teachers are considered parts of coherence (Garet et al., 2001).

Literature on effective professional development indicates that coherence is a key characteristic of and for professional development (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001;
Kang et al., 2013; Penuel et al., 2007; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Coherence refers to the consistency of professional development with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, learning activities, and school, district or state policies and reforms (Desimone, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Kang et al., 2013).

Rivet’s (2006) study showed that teachers consider and seek congruency with curriculum goals of any professional development that purport to improve their teaching. Similarly, teachers, who are aware of the professional development policy needs that are aligned with their district goals, may find professional development around new ideas consistent with their own goals and therefore embrace those new ideas (Lumpe et al., 2000; Penuel et al., 2007).

Garet et al. (2001), in their experimental study, investigated the consistency of professional development with teacher goals and the alignment of professional development activities with district and state standards. Their results showed improvement in knowledge and skills among teachers who participated in professional development activities that were coherent with their other professional development activities as well as with related standards. Garet et al. (2001) concluded that coherence in professional development improved teacher knowledge and skills and brought about changes in practice.

Penuel et al. (2007) investigated the characteristics of effective professional development among 454 teachers included in an international science education program. They used data from surveys and a database to mainly focus on the professional development practices and situations. To analyze the data, hierarchical linear modeling
(HLM) was applied. Penuel et al.’s (2007) results indicated that coherence significantly improved teachers’ pedagogy knowledge. We now turn to Desimone’s (2009) third key element: opportunities for learning.

Opportunities for Learning

Opportunities for learning includes observing teachers, being observed by teachers, reviewing works by students, developing class sessions, discussing instruction with other teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Kang et al., 2013; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2009). In addition, active engagement in professional development includes feedback on instruction and teaching practice, identifying points that need to be improved and reflecting on teachers’ own teaching (Ingvarson et al., 2005).

Teachers learn through staff development programs and researchers suggest strategies for teacher learning (Heller, Daehler, & Shinohara, 2003; Killion, 2003). Teacher learning is about gaining knowledge about teaching through practice of teaching (Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Shank, 2005). Thus, effective professional development must provide active learning opportunities through experimenting with new instructional practices.

Putnam and Borko (1997) considered teachers as active learners constructing their own knowledge. Wilson and Berne (1999) pointed out that since “subject matter knowledge is acquired differently across disciplines, then one would anticipate disciplinary differences in professional development” (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 202). Hence, subject matter-related learning opportunities must be included in professional development. For teachers, it is important to engage in their own learning and to
scrutinize their practice through professional development programs (Ingvarson et al., 2005). Banilower and Shimkus (2004) considered opportunities for active learning within the characteristics of high-quality professional development. Opportunities to examine learning and teaching for teachers within a professional development program provide active learning for teachers (Garet et al., 2001; Kang et al., 2013). These opportunities, as was mentioned earlier, range from observing other teachers, being observed by colleagues, reviewing student activities, working on assessment, discussions, presentations, and mentoring to activities in a learning community (Corcoran, 2007; Desimone, 2009). In addition, Ingvarson et al. (2005) listed feedback on instruction and teaching practice, identifying points that need to be improved, and reflecting on teachers’ own teaching within active engagement in professional development as essential ingredients of an effective professional development for teachers.

Garet et al.’s (2001) study included “observing and being observed, planning classroom implementation, reviewing student work, and presenting, leading, and writing” as learning opportunities for teachers involved in a professional development (Garet et al., 2001, p.925-926). Their results indicated a positive relationship between the amount of learning opportunities within the professional development and teachers’ improved skills and knowledge. Desimone et al. (2002) used the same learning opportunities for teachers participating in a professional development to examine active learning and found that active learning was positively related to better instruction by teachers.

According to Loucks-Horsley et al. (2009), providing opportunities for teachers to engage in and try teaching strategies is a design feature of effective professional
development. Opportunities to try new practices through active learning provided by professional development bring along improvement in teaching (Boyle, While, & Boyle, 2004; Garet et al., 2001).

Other studies reported that effective professional development programs tend to facilitate active learning as well as collective participation (Garet et al., 2001; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017; Wayne et al., 2008). Similarly, Doppelt et al. (2009) argue that, in an effective professional development, teachers participate as active learners. Makopoulou and Armour (2011) investigated physical education teachers’ learning in a professional development opportunity and showed that teachers participating in case studies distinguished between professional development with direct knowledge transmission and professional development that is focused on active engagement in learning. In one of the case studies, teachers pointed out that treating teachers as passive learners actually devalued them. Most, if not all, teachers considered learning as an active knowledge and meaning construction process. “It is paramount that PE teachers engage actively in the learning process searching for ways to achieve complex curriculum expectations and address their pressing questions.” (Makopoulou & Armour, 2011; p. 429)

In addition to content focus, coherence, and opportunities for learning, duration of the professional development is a key element. Thus, it is to a discussion of this fourth key element of Desimone’s (2009) model we turn next.

**Duration**

Duration is the fourth key element of an effective professional development for teachers. Studies (Borko et al., 2000; Boyle et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017)
show that sufficient amount of professional development, in number of hours and span of

time, are required in order for teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and practice to change.

Participation duration in professional development activities has been found to be

positively correlated to teachers’ preparedness, classroom practices, and attitudes

(Banilower et al., 2007; Heck et al., 2008).

Both the number of PD hours and the length of engagement time with the PD

activities help define the duration in PD (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Kang et al., 2013;

Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). The amount of professional development matters because

teachers’ beliefs and attitudes need to positively change. In order for the change to take

place, sufficient amount of PD is required (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Borko et al.,

2000; Boyle et al., 2005). The number and quality of contact hours of teachers in

professional development mean more preparedness for classroom practices and more

positive attitudes toward the professional development and its agenda (Banilower et al.,


within Local Systemic Change (LSC) science projects. National Science Foundation

(NSF)-supported LSC projects were organized in various local contexts and targeted to

improve teaching and learning through professional development. LSC projects, set in

urban, suburban, and rural areas, represented the districts and schools around the nation.

NSF-supported LSC initiative provided data from 42 schools in 7 years (Banilower et al.,

2007). The researchers found that teachers who had more hours of PD participation

practiced inquiry-based teaching and relevant classroom culture (Supovitz & Turner,

2000). Yoon et al. (2007) reviewed nine studies that met What Works Clearinghouse
evidence standards and concluded that teachers who participated in sufficient amount of PD could improve the achievement of their students. PD was offered in workshops and summer courses. Participation over 19 hours was significantly effective on student achievement. The average amount of PD in the reviewed studies was 49 hours (Yoon et al., 2007).

The fifth and final essential element of professional development in Desimone’s (2009) model is collaborative participation, which is discussed next.

**Collaborative Participation**

Teachers report that collaborative participation makes it more worthwhile for them to participate in professional development. More than one teacher from the same school, district, or grade level may participate in the same professional development opportunities, which may promote interaction and collaboration among teachers to support learning (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009, 2011; Guskey, 1994; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Research shows that there is a positive correlation between teaching practice and collective participation by teachers in professional development activities (Desimone et al., 2002; Kang et al., 2013; Penuel et al., 2007; Randel et al., 2016; Voogt et al., 2015).

Teacher learning during PD is greatly enhanced by interaction and collaboration among teachers from the same school, district or grade level (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009, 2011; Guskey, 1994). In reference to the opportunities where teachers collectively seek ways to improve teaching, Borko (2004) reported that professional development settings offer such opportunities. Rosenholtz (1989) pointed out that teachers increase
their knowledge and contribute to the profession when they engage in collaborative efforts. Collective participation in PD provides teachers with opportunities to discuss, exchange ideas, and share knowledge. Desimone et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the PD effects on teachers’ instruction. Their research included 30 schools within 10 districts in five states, with 207 teachers who participated in the Eisenhower Professional Development Program (Desimone et al., 2002). The researchers used longitudinal surveys to collect data on various features of PD including contact hours, time span, coherence, use of technology, and collective participation. Among other results, they concluded that PD effectiveness increased when teachers from the same school, district, grade or department participated collectively in PD (Desimone et al., 2009).

Desimone’s (2009) theoretical framework of effective professional development included five key elements. These are content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. Content focus refers to teachers’ gains through professional development as well as subject matter knowledge and the knowledge of how students learn the subject matter. A focus on the content of PD connects teachers’ instruction to students’ learning. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Mundry, 2005; Kang et al., 2013; Kennedy, 1998; Shulman, 1998; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017). Active learning is about opportunities for learning embedded in PD. These opportunities included observing teachers, being observed by teachers, reviewing student works, developing class sessions, and discussion on instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Kang et al., 2013; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). Opportunities for learning provide teachers with
active learning instances (Kang et al., 2013). Coherence refers to the consistency of professional development with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, different learning activities, reforms and policies within school, district, and state (Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2013). Teachers seek PD that is congruent with their instructional goals (Penuel et al., 2007; Rivet, 2006). Sufficient amount of time, namely both the number of hours and the length of engagement time, in PD activities is necessary for teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and practice to change (Borko et al., 2000; Boyle et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Kang et al., 2013). Hence, duration of PD is a key element of effective professional development. Final key element of effective PD in Desimone’s (2009) theoretical framework is collaborative participation which promotes interaction and communication about instructional practice and knowledge among teachers (Penuel et al., 2007; Randel et al., 2016; Voogt et al., 2015).

Perspectives and roles of teachers, administrators, and leaders (Blythe, 2014; McCray, 2016; Hobbs, 2014; Kao & Tsai, 2009; Tooley & Connally, 2016; Wise, 2017) are available within the relevant literature. However, the perspectives of trainers on PD have not often been studied (Desimone, 2011; Han, 2014; Hill et al., 2013; Whitcomb et al., 2009; Zaslow et al., 2010). The current research aims to examine the professional development trainers’ perspectives of effective professional development.

**Various Perspectives on Professional Development**

Previous section included explanation of key elements of effective PD. Effective professional development addresses teachers’ instructional needs (Darling-Hammond et
al., 2017) and administrators play an important role in planning, funding and supervising the PD at schools (Wise, 2017). Similarly, trainers contribute to PD efforts and provide sustainability within professional learning as shown in the example of Ramps and Pathways (Counsell, Uhlenberg, & Zan, 2013; Zan & Geiken, 2010) and their efforts are meaningful and valuable as they point out to the characteristics of effective PD. To show the value of the insights of different stakeholders in PD are, this section will include the perspectives of teachers, educators, and leaders on professional development. Taken into account, these perspectives may guide the design and development of further professional development.

There are various perspectives that educators, educational leaders, and administrators have about professional development. A review of the existing literature shows a paucity of research on trainers’ perspectives about professional development. Among the following studies that were located by the researcher on Rod Library databases and Google Scholar and obtained through interlibrary loan, only Thomas’ (2010) study focused on trainers’ perspectives of PD. Hence, we now turn to the teachers’, educators’, and administrators’ perspectives about PD.

McCray (2016) described the middle and high school teachers’ perceptions and expectations of PD in a qualitative study. Participants of the study were 45 full-time teachers of any subject, 6th through 12th grades. The researcher stated that participants’ degrees, experience, and professional training levels varied. Data were collected through interviews and the research results showed that teachers perceived PD as a learning tool and believed that its impact could be increased through incorporating student
achievement data analysis and collaboration. Teachers stated that teacher leadership through PD could be helpful in improving teaching practices and defining strategies to increase student achievement. They also pointed out that teacher-led PD is more meaningful and effective for them. The participants shared a vision of PD as a platform for enhancing their practice.

Similarly, Badri, Alnuaimi, Mohaidat, Yang, and Al-Rashedi (2016) reported about the results of Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) conducted in Abu Dhabi on teachers’ perceptions about PD needs and barriers to effective PD. 4941 public and private school teachers participated in the study. Results indicated that teachers’ perceived PD needs included subject field knowledge, pedagogical competences, knowledge of classroom management, and assessment practices. Teachers mentioned scheduling conflicts as the most-encountered barrier to PD followed by affordability as a second major barrier. The study also showed that public and private school teachers perceived barriers to PD differently. Private school teachers pointed out that they did not have pre-requisites for teaching; their administrators did not provide adequate support; and the PD provided did not align with their needs. Public school teachers, on the other hand, perceived barriers as scheduling conflicts and inadequate incentives for participating in PD (Badri et al., 2016).

In another study, J. M. Brown (2013) used phenomenological approach to investigate teachers’ perceptions about PD using interviews and document reviews. Research results indicated that teachers were not sure of the link between the PD and student achievement. Also, their PD experiences varied as follows: they preferred
interactive PD that could be applicable; they were concerned about the time allocated for PD; they believed that they were not involved in planning PD; and PD lacked focus. All teachers, however, thought that PD was necessary.

In addition, White (2009) examined secondary teachers’ perceptions about PD. More specifically, he examined their preferences of PD types, motivation to participate in PD, and their belief in experiences improving teaching practices. Results indicated that teachers mostly participated in individual workshops and grade-level meetings. Teachers’ highest sources of motivation to participate in PD included increasing student achievement and improving skills and knowledge in teaching. Most teachers preferred PD to be held during school day and teacher perceptions of experiences to improve their teaching practices focused on content, follow-up, teaching, and learning strategies. Most teachers believed that their district was not meeting their PD needs. Collaboration was among the changes that teachers suggested for future and forthcoming PD.

Thomas (2010) studied educators’ perceptions of online PD courses in a quantitative research. The participants consisted of instructors who taught the online PD classes and the educators who took the classes. Both instructors and educators indicated positive perceptions of online PD courses. They both reported scheduling flexibility in online courses and the accessibility on any computer with Internet as benefits of online PD. Also, lack of travel requirement was among the motivators. Most participants, in both groups, indicated that technology needs and slow Internet connection were barriers to choosing online PD over face-to-face meetings.
On the other hand, Wise (2017) studied Ohio public high school principals’ perceptions of their roles as PD leaders. The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data with a survey. Research results indicated that principals participating in the study believed that PD constituted a strategy to improve teachers’ effectiveness. They also highlighted knowledge, skills, new strategies, and content among the gains that teachers get from participating in professional development opportunities. Principals stated that they valued PD in connection with increased student achievement and also pointed out to time constraints in organizing PD at schools. Results showed that collaborative leadership played an important role in making PD effective.

In a similar fashion, Hobbs (2014) examined administrators’ perspectives of the impact of leadership role on PD in a qualitative case study. More specifically, they investigated how leaders perceived the teacher utilization of skills and knowledge provided by professional development opportunities. The researcher also discussed how educational leaders’ role impacted the teachers’ classroom practice based on PD gains. The school principals interviewed in this study indicated that they perceived their role as that of creating a welcoming and supportive environment for learning. Principals also stated that being a mentor was among their roles to ensure their faculty’s success and professional growth. Most participant principals believed that teachers had to adopt a collaborative approach towards PD for it to be effective and productive for them.

In another study, Starnes (2011) examined the perceptions of 124 northeast Tennessee school principals’ perceptions about their PD programs. An instrument designed by Learning Forward to measure perceptions about PD was used to collect data for the
study. Elementary school principals considered their PD plan as “comprehensive, sustained, and intensive” (Starnes, 2011; p.78). However, PD plan was not perceived as comprehensive at higher levels of the school system.

Similarly, Ferguson (2008) conducted a qualitative research to study PD perspectives of school and central office administrators and elementary teachers. Interviews with administrators and teachers showed that they demanded time increase on traditional academic schedule to include PD. PD follow-up and job-embedded training were considered among factors positively impacting PD. Collaboration was emphasized as a strategy to boost teacher learning and administrators and teachers regarded classroom teachers as rich sources of PD ideas. Participants also believed that the PD trainer’s personality greatly influenced the learning and retaining of knowledge.

Finally, Greer (2003) investigated the perceptions of central office and campus leaders on professional development for building capacity to improve teaching and learning and examined teachers’ perceptions of professional development for building capacity in classroom instruction. A mixed-methods study design was used to investigate the perceptions on PD. Central office leaders’ perceptions about PD included a focus on areas such as curriculum and instruction alignment, partnerships with experts, and allocation of resources. Principals indicated that they prioritized teacher-preferred PD and believed in post-PD support as follow-ups. Greer’s (2003) study revealed that teacher participants perceived PD as a student-centered effort aligned with curriculum and instructional programs.
Teachers’ and educators’ perceptions pointed out to various aspects of PD such as PD as means of learning (McCray, 2016), barriers to effective PD, pedagogical and content knowledge (Badri et al., 2016), the link between the PD and student achievement, duration of PD activities, and interactive involvement in PD (J. M. Brown, 2013), content focus and follow-up of PD (White, 2009), and motivators of and barriers to online PD activities.

In addition, administrators’ perceptions referred to teachers’ effectiveness, skills and content knowledge gained through PD, and collaboration in planning PD activities (Wise, 2017), administrators’ roles in planning PD and their role as mentors and collaborators (Hobbs, 2014), PD planning process (Starnes, 2011), time constrains for PD in regular school day, follow-up, and job-embedded PD, collaboration among teachers, and teachers as rich sources of PD ideas (Ferguson, 2008), the alignment of classroom curriculum and PD activities, partnerships with PD experts, and PD support in follow-ups (Greer, 2003).

As can be seen, teachers, educators, and administrators mentioned Desimone’s (2009) key elements of effective PD. They included content focus, collaboration, duration, and active involvement in PD among their perceptions. These insights, gleaned from years of experience in the profession, may provide PD developers with valuable guidance and make PD more worthwhile for teachers, educators, and leaders. Similarly, PD trainers’ insights about PD and the effectiveness of PD may contribute much to the field. A review of relevant literature shows a paucity of research on trainers’ perspectives
of PD (Han, 2014; Zaslow et al., 2010). Thus, this study aims to examine the professional development trainers’ perspectives of effective professional development.

The methodology that was used to investigate the research questions of this study is described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the perspectives of professional development trainers on
effective professional development. This chapter describes the methodology that was
used in this study, including participants, instruments, study design, data collection, and
data analysis.

In qualitative research, a phenomenon is studied in the setting where participants
experience it. Hence, the researcher wishes to understand the perceptions of the
participants in this particular experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Bogdan and Biklen
(2007) state that qualitative research takes place in a natural setting in a descriptive
manner. In qualitative research, a researcher explores another’s perception of experience
and, therefore, asks questions to know about values, behaviors, and emotions (Merriam &
Tisdell, 2015). Various approaches are available within qualitative research (Bogdan &
Biklen, 2007). Case studies help researchers to study the overall conditions in a
phenomenon (Yin, 2013). Through grounded theory, a researcher seeks for patterns as
well as similarities and differences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Cultural elements around
experience are what a researcher investigates through ethnography (Oladele, Richter,
Clark, & Laing, 2012). Phenomenology is interested in individuals’ perceptions as their
experience happens (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

This study used a phenomenological approach. Data were collected with semi-
structured interviews (Appendix A) in this study. Semi-structured interviews allow
researchers to address particular issues related to the phenomenon studied and, through
their semi-structured character; they also enable participants to verbalize the meaning that they attribute to those issues (A. Brown & Danaher, 2019). Semi-structured interviews can be conducted in a single meeting or multiple sittings and the researcher may clarify any meanings, reflections, and points made by the participant through reciprocation available in semi-structured interviews (A. Brown & Danaher, 2019). The one-on-one interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants (Appendix B). The tape-recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed by the researcher. To ensure the confidentiality, identifying details of participants were removed and the researcher replaced participants’ names with pseudonyms.

Data analysis in phenomenological approach targets themes, units, and meanings embedded in experiences of individuals from whom data are gathered (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This study used face-to-face, one-on-one interviews to gather data from PD trainers involved in professional development activities in a school district in the Midwest. Interviews used in qualitative research enable researchers to collect information on people’s values, backgrounds, and perspectives (Ferguson, 2008) and to document data to allow analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Design of the Study

This study used a qualitative design, particularly a phenomenological approach. It refers to a process of seeking meaning in individuals’ experiences as they have happened (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Lien, Pauleen, Kuo, and Wang (2014) state that the researcher builds a link to the world of an interviewee in phenomenological approach. Bernard (2017) states that phenomenology is about relating to others’ experiences.
Hence, the researcher in this study used one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to seek meaning in PD trainers’ description of an effective PD. The semi-structured interview allows the researchers to be flexible in questioning the participants and lets the researcher exchange conversation to clarify what the interviewee means. The description of actions and thoughts elicited during an interview help clarify meaning. Phenomenology focuses on the description of human experience in an activity (Merriam, 2009); thus, in this study, a phenomenological approach design was used to describe and illustrate the PD trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development.

**Participants and Procedure**

Convenience sampling was used in selecting the participants in this study. Convenience sampling is a type of non-random sampling through which the participants in a study are selected based on specific criteria. Convenience sampling allows researchers to consider proximity and availability of participants at a time frame as well as meeting certain criteria (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The participants in this study were professional development facilitators in a school district in the Midwest. The participants are located in the same area where the researcher works and they meet the criteria of facilitators of professional development. The criteria are as follows: the participants must have served or must be serving as licensed teachers of any subject in the public school system, and they must be currently providing PD to teachers. The trainers were contacted by the researcher through email messages that described the study and asked them to participate in the research. Trainers’ email addresses were obtained at the professional learning department of an educational institution. Following the approval
of this study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted the head of the professional learning department and described that this was a qualitative study aiming to investigate the trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development. Due to a paucity of research on the trainers’ perspectives of PD (Desimone, 2011; Han, 2014; Hill et al., 2013; Whitcomb et al., 2009), there is a need for investigating trainers’ perspectives of PD. The literature review in this study shows that, although teachers’ and administrators’ perspectives of PD have been examined, the research on trainers’ perspectives of PD is scarce. Hence, this study aims to investigate the PD perspectives of trainers in a school district in the Midwest. The researcher, then, explained the head of the professional learning department about the criteria of service in public schools as teachers of any subject matter and current involvement in PD training for possible participants and, also, the convenience of sample located in the area. The IRB approval was provided to the department and they were told that the researcher wished to select participants among trainers in the area. Based on this, the head of the professional learning department was asked to talk to the trainers about participating in this study and to provide their email addresses. Potential participants were contacted through emails (Appendix C) sent by the researcher asking them to participate in this study.

The researcher asked the trainers who participated in this study to meet at a time and location that were convenient for them. A consent form and a demographics information questionnaire (Appendix D) were attached to an email message for the trainers to sign and to fill out.
Returned demographics questionnaires showed details of the potential participants; they had varying amounts of service years. As this research did not examine the perspectives of different genders on PD, there was no gender preference. Such limitation allowed the researcher to dedicate more time for the interviews and focus on them narrowly in details. The variation in service years provided a wide span of perspective based on experience. Table 1 includes the criteria for the trainers.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainer Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Grade/Subject Taught</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Years providing PD training</th>
<th>Number of Workshops Participated</th>
<th>Number of PD Workshops/Sessions Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>6th – 8th /Applied Technology</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>more than 500</td>
<td>more than 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>7th/Literacy, Spanish, ESL</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>too many to count</td>
<td>too many to count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>3rd/NA</td>
<td>6 + 16 admin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>more than 100</td>
<td>more than 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Later, trainers who returned the consent form with an email were contacted to set up a meeting for an in-depth, one-on-one interview. They were given priority about the choice of time and location. In the meeting, first of all, the researcher provided information about the confidentiality of the interview and told the participants that their names would be replaced with pseudonyms and their identifying details would be
removed. Participants who did not wish to continue were thanked by the researcher and were given his contact information to use if they changed their mind.

The areas that were investigated in the interview included their experience as PD facilitators, their views of effective PD, goals as trainers, their decision to become trainers, effective PD practice, objectives of PD, and the feedback from the teachers that they served. The research questions that this study sought to answer are as follows:

1. What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?
2. How do trainers facilitate professional development?
3. How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives of their professional development?
4. a. Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?
   b. Why do they think their approach is effective?

Hence, the interview questions targeted the above-mentioned areas that helped to answer the research questions.

The interviews were tape-recorded with the participants’ consent and were transcribed by the researcher. The data analysis process will be described in the Data Analysis section.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews that were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. In order to ensure confidentiality, identifying details of participants were removed and the researcher replaced the participants’ names with pseudonyms.
Data Analysis

This study used an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) and the data were collected using semi-structured interviews. A phenomenological approach involves data analysis focused on themes, units, and meanings found in experiences of individuals from whom data are gathered (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). IPA researchers discover and interpret how participants make sense of their experiences (Gill, 2014). The interpretative method lets the perspectives of both the participant and the researcher be involved in the data analysis process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2004).

Descriptive phenomenological analysis, however, advises researchers to leave their preconceptions outside of the analysis of data (Gill, 2014). Thus, in this study, the researcher was given the allowance to use his preconceptions of professional development in order to fully understand the views of PD facilitators interviewed for this study.

The following data analysis steps based on Smith et al.’s (2009) outline of IPA were used: close reading and re-reading of the first transcript and taking notes of potential cluster themes, using cluster themes from the first transcript as guidance for analyzing other transcripts and connecting themes, creating a table of final themes and subordinate themes, and providing a narrative on themes.

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2017) mention triangulation, member checking, and external audit as techniques to ensure validity in qualitative research. This study used triangulation of findings with the researcher’s notes collected; member checking was
conducted through asking the participants to review the research findings; and an expert qualitative researcher on the dissertation committee was asked to ensure themes have been correctly clustered.

The Setting

The school districts housing the professional development activities were located in two Midwest towns. The districts have a total of 15876 K-12 students enrolled in 28 schools. One of the school districts has a late start on Tuesdays and early dismissal on Wednesdays; during these time slots and also at other times in the semester, teachers in both districts collaborate and involve in professional development activities. The professional learning community of teachers in the two districts continuously plans PD activities and teachers improve their knowledge and practice in a collaborative manner.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the professional development trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development. More specifically, the study investigated the perspectives of trainers involved in PD activities in a school district in the Midwest.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?
2. How do trainers facilitate professional development?
3. How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives of their professional development?
4.a. Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?
   b. Why do they think their approach is effective?

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented in the following order: 1) description of respondents, 2) data reported for each of the 5 research questions mentioned above, 3) presentation of identified themes that emerged from the data, and 4) a summary of the data and related themes.

Description of Participants

In order to contextualize the findings of the study, a thorough description of each participant is provided first. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms of Casey, Kara, and Jamie, respectively, are used to refer to them in the descriptions.
Casey

Casey (not her real name) has a BA in computer science with a minor in math and an MS in ed leadership. She taught applied technology and computer programming in grades 6-8 for 11 years. Currently, she is a media specialist and a technology integrationist. She’s been facilitating professional development for 4 years. As a teacher, she participated in over 500 sessions of PD and led herself over 200 sessions.

She was asked to begin leading PD while teaching middle school. She was both a teacher and a tech coach and had opportunities to work with teachers and to lead PD. She said she was “passionate about teachers getting better at what they do” and was employed at an educational institution as a PD facilitator. She did not receive any training to be a PD facilitator; however, she thinks that, through her ed leadership degree, she learned curriculum development, leadership styles, and how to engage people in educational activities. She said that she “relied heavily on that training at work”. She was also trained as a meeting facilitator in her previous school district, which provided her with the opportunity to earned how to engage people, collect data, and redirect where the meeting is headed. She also received on-the-job training on adult learning when she began her job as a PD facilitator and continues to build her facilitation skills.

Kara

Kara (not her real name) had taught literacy, Spanish, and ESL at the 7th grade level for 11 years before she began to facilitate PD. She is now a technology consultant and leads PD for an educational institution in a mid-size town in the Midwest. She has facilitated teacher PD for 6 years in the same institution. She participated in countless PD
sessions as a teacher and as a technology consultant. She also facilitated countless
teacher PD sessions.

When she was a teacher, the district needed to pilot some technology and they asked her to pilot Promethean Boards in her middle school classroom. She enthusiastically gave this response: “I said ‘absolutely’ because I have always been interested in technology. So, I participated in the pilot”. Following the pilot, she was asked to train her colleagues as Promethean Boards were to be installed in every classroom. She became one of the twelve trainers in the school district. That experience was followed with request to lead PD in other technology such as Infinite Campus. She was involved in creating a grad class in technology for teachers and loved working with adults. She says, “once I started, I knew I loved working with adults”. Currently, she is working with the director of professional development at her institution to create a support program for instructors.

Jamie

Jamie (not her real name) was a corporate trainer and coach for leadership before becoming a 3rd grade teacher. She had an undergraduate degree in resource development and worked for a corporate entity providing coaching for businesses to develop their employees. She got her teaching degree and became a 3rd grade teacher for 6 years prior to serving as a principal. She was an administrator at schools for 16 years. Currently, she is supervising PD facilitators as the director of professional development at an education institution in Midwest. Al in all, she has been training teachers for 20 years. As a teacher,
she had participated in over 100 PD sessions. As a facilitator, she led over 100 PD sessions for teachers.

While reflecting on her teaching experience at schools, she mentioned her principal as an influential educator; she said, “I had a really positive principal that gave his teachers a lot of activities to present for each other”. She says that she got involved in PD by providing feedback to peers, reading, and “learning from people like Michael Fullan about change”. In teacher PD, she stated that she used her experience of working with adults as a corporate coach for businesses. She says, “I think the difference between adults and students is the adults have experience that they can draw from. So, I might not be the expert in the room but I’m just as curious to learn from the people in the room as they learn from each other”.

Findings per Research Questions

Research question 1: What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?

Based on a synthesis of the three participants’ answers to this question, their goal setting activities involved two particular directions. The first one pertained principally to schools’ specific professional development needs. The second goal and objective for the trainers is to accommodate the specific needs of schools for number of sessions and content requested and situating them within the general primary goals that trainers have for professional development. Their general primary goals included the following: prioritizing teacher growth and learning, recognizing the expertise among teachers, making the sessions engaging and stimulating, ensuring differentiation and relevancy,
facilitating learning through hands-on activities, obtaining better student outcomes, and collaboration among teachers. Further, participants’ goal setting for specific PD sessions will be elaborated and participants’ perspectives of overall primary PD goals will be explained.

To begin with, when referring to the goals and objectives of professional development, all three participants mentioned that they do not define the goals for specific professional development sessions that are requested by the schools in the district. They clarified this point by pointing out that specificity of professional development goals differs from school to school, depending on their pedagogical and content knowledge needs in both the short and long term for their entire staff or for a segment of the staff based on their discipline. In other words, the particular goals for professional development training are formed around what the schools identify as an area of need. Participants’ responses to the question “How do you determine the goals and objectives of PD?” included the following:

So, it’s kind of two-fold. So, I always will base it on what the school asked for…but then I always try to infuse some sort of a like how do we get the students set at learning, how do we get at good tech integration, and I will infuse that in. Kind of based on how I engage them (Casey).

So, usually when a district calls me with a PD request, so, the district will contact me to say ‘hey, can you come to talk on this topic?’ My follow-up question to them is ‘what data do you have to support the idea that you have this need in the district?’ (Kara).

Usually I could decide based on conversations I have with participants or people that work with participants. So, a lot of upfront conversations about why it is relevant and what should happen as a result of it. Kind of like your strategy for like basketball or baseball, kind of like your game plan. And you know that you
want to have this outcome in the end. And then, the gift there, you might have, strike out some missed shots but in the end as long as people are working to process and to get that outcome, that either builds on to the next time or they can just say ‘OK, I can use this tomorrow’. That’s how I set up the objectives (Jamie).

As can be seen, the participants’ responses do not include any mention of any goals or objectives; the specifics revolved around a schedule or a pattern of PD training at given school. According to the participants, schools share their needs for professional development when they contact the PD facilitators, and PD trainers develop and tailor their training to match schools’ requests. The facilitators did not previously know about the PD needs of the schools in advance; facilitators only knew about them when schools contacted them.

In addition, the participant’s responses indicated that they base the goals and objectives of specific PD sessions on the stated needs of the schools. Casey, for example, talked about defining the goals and objectives in a two-fold strategy: what the school needs and what the PD trainer believes is needed to add to enrich the schools’ list of needs. Participant two, Kara, mentioned that after receiving a schools’ request, she would contact the school to request data that the school used to justify its needs for a specific PD opportunity. In this way, Kara can integrate the data-driven needs into the PD training program that she develops for the school. Kara is pretty particular about providing PD training that addresses real needs, not imagined needs. Participant three, Jamie, mentioned that she uses a strategy to discover the PD needs of teachers at the school by communicating with them in advance in order to determine the PD objectives. She visits
with teachers in person and contacts them over the phone or through email in order to assess and confirm their specific needs for professional development.

The three participants also varied in their views of primary PD goals in general and their views also included similar overall goals and objectives for PD. Their varying views included the following: Casey prioritized growth and learning and described her job as keeping teachers on task. She said that she wanted to recognize and honor the expertise among teachers and she also emphasized the motivational factor of making the PD sessions fun, stimulating, and engaging. Kara mentioned differentiation and relevance as primary goals as well as hands-on experience. For her, differentiation meant considering different learning styles and providing various forms of representation, sometimes with the help of a co-facilitator. She said that, when she used differentiation, she divided the teachers into groups where they could receive very guided direct instruction or they could learn on their own with resources. Kara mentioned that she asked schools for data to be certain about what they needed. Thus, relevance was about making the PD truly address the needs of teachers. She wanted the PD to be relevant to teachers’ PD needs. One of Kara’s primary goals was providing hands-on experiences. She said that, in her PD sessions, she would not be the “sage on the stage”; she would provide the resources and let teachers learn on their own; and, if it is a session on how to use Google Drive, for instance, she would let teachers use it during the session.

Jamie mentioned better student outcomes as one of the desirable goals she aims for. She added that her training includes elements that provide teachers with relevant information, that could be put in practice right away. These may include immediately
beginning to use Google Docs or a new software in the classroom after being introduced to them in the PD sessions. Similarly, Casey and Kara mentioned collaboration among teachers as part of their primary PD goals. This type of collaboration involved engaging in professional learning with other teachers at school, exchanging ideas and experience, supporting each other, and even coaching a teacher colleague. Kara and Jamie mentioned relevancy among primary goals: the PD opportunities that they provide should be relevant to teachers’ PD needs and address their needs.

Participants’ responses to the question “What are some primary goals that you hope to achieve in PD?” included the following:

So, my first goal is always to honor the expertise in the room. And, so, to know that, when I present to a staff of teachers, there are first-year teachers and there are educators that have worked for thirty years. And I can’t be the keeper of knowledge and I can’t know everything; so, I at least try to comment, to honor, that there is a lot of experience in the room; I feel like one of my jobs is to bring that out. I feel like my role is to keep them on track and focused on the goal because I am there to lead and I feel like the work we do is really serious work but we should have fun when we do it; so, to honor and make it an enjoyable experience. So, same for kids, learning should be a fun thing kids want to come back to school for every day; PD should be the same. Teachers should not dread it. It should be that it’s about growth, and learning, and collaborating with your colleagues (Casey).

I always want to differentiate. For sure, that’s always a goal when I’m planning. I want it to be hands-on and relevant. And I always include collaboration. (Kara)

Well anytime that somebody is giving up their valuable time, I want them to walk out with something that's relevant, yeah, that they can use right away and that can help them. I think that’s a better outcome for students. That's always at the forefront of my mind. (Jamie)

Based on the afore-mentioned participants’ responses, the trainers’ goals and objectives of professional development include recognizing, affirming, and honoring...
teachers’ expertise, keeping teachers on task and focused on the PD objective, making training sessions engaging, stimulating, and fun, promoting professional growth, fostering learning, encouraging collaboration, promoting differentiation, providing hands-on experience, and making the PD sessions relevant to teachers’ needs and interests.

Research question 2: How do trainers facilitate professional development?

Trainers’ responses to the interview questions associated with how they facilitate PD showed the following: (a) they first do some sort of needs assessment and then determine the goals and objectives of the specific PD session based on the preliminary assessed needs. They plan the PD based on the determined needs and characteristics of teachers attending the PD sessions, prior to the PD session. (b) When they facilitate the PD, they focus on: engaging the group; honoring and involving each teacher’s voice; removing themselves from the stage and making teachers be at the center of the stage; promoting active and transparent participation; differentiating based on the response from the group; providing hands-on opportunities; tapping into teachers’ experiences and expertise; checking for understanding; and reviewing what has been shared and discussed. (c) Immediately after each PD session, trainers customarily seek feedback from the attendees and also do a follow-up with the schools.

Prior to the PD Session

The participants indicated that their (a) needs assessment processes involve communicating with the administrators, coaches, and teachers. Although each participant follows her own approach to needs assessment, their approaches have many similarities.
The following are quotes from the participants that reflect their unique needs assessment.

Casey stated the following about her needs assessment process:

So, before the session, I try to talk to as many people in the district as I can about what are their needs, what are their goals. So, some sort of needs assessment and then planning. I like to, if there’s time, kind of present my plan to whoever I talked to and say is this going to fit the needs, so now, what do we need to change and I also like to engage the staff that’s there. So, I think there is a big piece of PD to say like again honor the expertise. Yes, I’m coming in to support you but do you have people in the building that could cooperate with me or could share the load. So, those are all things I like to do before. I also like to ask about their staff, I don’t know if this is good or not but I like to say like, first off, not like what’s the size of your staff but what’s the culture of your staff in your building, do they like to collaborate, is it open, if it’s not, should I change the type of activities I planned for them. Uh, and then, yeah, what’s their background knowledge so if I come in to talk about literacy, what do they know, what have you done before, I don’t want to repeat something they’ve already done…(Casey)

As can be seen, prior to planning the PD session, Casey communicates with the staff in the school district about their PD needs and goals as part of the needs assessment process. After planning the PD, if possible, she shares it with the school administrators and teachers to ensure its alignment with what they need and asks for feedback. If feedback is provided, she integrates it into her plan. In the same way, Casey recruits the available members of the staff in the school district to tap into their expertise and provide opportunities for them to share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues during the PD session. Also, Casey tries to sense the atmosphere and culture, including the background knowledge of the teachers in the location through communication with people in an effort to refrain from repetition. This participant mentioned that knowing the culture helps tremendously with facilitating any PD session she leads. It also makes her
more sensitive, respectful, aware, and understanding of the peculiar character of the school districts.

Kara stated the following about how she prepares prior to a PD session:

So, usually when a district calls me with a PD request, so, the district will contact me to say ‘hey, can you come to talk on this topic?’ My follow-up question to them is ‘what data do you have to support the idea that you have this need in the district?’ (Kara)

When this participant is contacted by a school district with a PD request, the first thing she wants to learn and see is the data supporting the need for PD in the district. The data in the school district is what this participant bases her needs assessment process on.

Similarly, Jamie communicates with the teachers in the school district to see if what she plans meets their needs:

A lot of times in preparation I'll interview folks and I'll send out a survey ahead of time or I'll send out the actual agenda and give them a power-point or put it together on a website so that they can give me feedback and tell me if I'm on track and if it's not meeting what they think it should do, then I change it. (Jamie)

Jamie uses technology such as power-point presentations and a designated website to discuss her plan with the teachers in advance. She invites the prospective attendees to provide feedback on the proposed PD plan. She then adjusts her plan to accommodate any proposed changes received from the teachers.

When Facilitating PD

(b) When facilitating the PD, trainers shared that they use various techniques such as engaging the audience, eliciting teacher’s voice and stepping aside to maximize opportunities for active interaction, differentiating based on the teachers’ responses to
PD, creating hands-on opportunities, referring to teachers’ experiences, checking for learning and understanding, and reflecting on what has been shared. Casey shared the following about how she facilitates PD:

At the beginning of a session, if it’s a staff I haven’t worked with, uh, I think they need to know who I am and what my background is, and what I’m passionate about. Uh, I always show pictures of my kids because I think that makes it real and I often like to share stories about my kids… The other thing during the session is I watch body language. I am really intentional about the body language. How are they reacting to me? Do they need a break? Did my directions make sense? Watching the non-verbals between the participants for the same reasons; not only do I need to change something I’m doing but also like, OK, so what’s the culture? Are they OK with each other? How is that effective? And then watching for learning. So, are they getting it or not? Do we need to go back and re-try something? Like constantly formatively assessing; and then I do try to model using technology tools. So, I might use electronic sticky notes to ask them for formative assessment and then when we take a break I’m looking at their responses to just figure out if they get it or not get it, what do I need to adjust. (Casey)

The afore-mentioned quote shows that this participant begins her PD session by introducing herself to the audience in order to build rapport and to connect with teachers. During the session, she uses her observation to gauge the reaction to PD session in the audience. This involves getting a sense of the culture in the group and checking for effectiveness. Casey uses modeling and informally assesses to see if it is necessary to modify her way of facilitating a certain segment of the PD or of there is a need to present some ideas in a different way. In other words, this participant uses formative assessment throughout her PD session. She is observant and attentive to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the attendees and does everything she can to make the OD session informative, interactive, stimulating, and relevant.
Kara shared the following about how she facilitates a PD session:

I always want to get everyone’s voice in the room within the first five minutes. So, when I start right away, I try to bring them in. I am also trying to control the energy in the room. So, I really want to make sure that there is a positive energy, people are engaged; people are really focused then on the work. I am very hands-on, so, if you came to one of my training, I would not be the sage on the stage. I am going to get you engaged; I am going to get you talking to your peers. I really use collaboration and I’m going to differentiate. (Kara)

Kara pays attention to involving all teachers in the group, right from the outset. She aims at getting people engaged and focused on the task. Kara removes herself from the stage to allow teachers to work in a hands-on manner and to create pair-work where teachers do think-pair-share activities. She also says that she collaborates with other facilitators and differentiates in her PD. That is, she constantly adjusts her method of facilitating in order to reach each and every attendee. If one method does not resonate with the audience, she flexibly and quickly employs another.

Jamie described her way of facilitating a PD session as follows:

So, I try to make it highly engaging that really based on what they're about. I think the difference between adults and students is the adults have experiences that they can draw from. So, I might not be the expert in the room but I'm just as curious to learn from the people in the room as they are to learn from each other. So, I try to make it very open. I try to understand the group that's coming together so that I can draw on their experiences as well or if there are a lot of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, I know about that too. So, in a non-threatening way I can maybe surface that so that we can all question in a row from up. (Jamie)

From the quotes, it is clear that this participant puts a lot of emphasis and effort on making the PD session engaging. Jamie compares children’s and adults’ learning and
concludes that adults have experiences to refer to. She thinks that adults’ and children’s
learning are similar but adults have previous experiences to use when they reflect on their
new learning. Similar to the sentiment expressed by the other two participants, this
participant also thinks that she might not be the only expert among teachers and she can
learn from teachers attending the PD. Put differently, this participant is open minded,
perceives herself as a learner and sharer of knowledge and skills, and does not believe she
has the last word. In addition, this participant mentioned that it is important to her to
attune to the group dynamics of the attendees, to identify and address any misconceptions
expressed by the teachers, and to tap into teachers’ own experiences.

All three facilitators stated that they collaborated with other staff to deliver PD for
a variety of purposes. They collaborate with their colleagues and fellow facilitators in
order to share some PD duties, to differentiate when facilitating PD, and to be able to
incorporate their skills and knowledge that would appeal to a wider audience. This may
involve sharing different sessions or dividing groups to facilitate PD at different levels.
At schools, they collaborate with administrators, teacher leaders or instructional coaches
to identify their PD needs, sense the culture among teachers, and to receive feedback or
to follow up with the school following PD. Casey shared the following about
collaboration:
I try really hard to collaborate with people in district like the principal and the instructional coaches to make sure it fits to what they’re working in …… and then I try really hard to collaborate with my colleagues that I work with so, like there is special ed consultant, literacy consultant in the service, in the buildings. I try to work with them too. So, if I can do it together, I’d like to. I feel like that’s better. (Casey)

I would say the positive about collaborating with other people is its someone else’s perspective and knowledge base, and so I think and believe what I am getting is more robust learning experience for participants because you have a larger knowledge base to draw from. (Casey)

As is clear from the above quote, Casey collaborates with school district staff to maximize the relevance of PD for teachers. She also taps into her colleagues’ knowledge and experiences whenever possible during the PD sessions.

Kara names differentiation as primary motivation for collaborating with her colleagues:

I am a big proponent for differentiation. So, I will always structure in a way that provides choice and differentiation. Sometimes, that can get tricky when I am all by myself; so, in those scenarios I do like a co-facilitator but it may be that we are not in the same room but we actually split off into separate rooms. (Kara)

So, if we differentiate and some people need, for example, direct instruction, from a person, not a video, not a tutorial, then I do need a second pair of hands sometimes. (Kara)

Jamie emphasizes mutual learning as a positive outcome of collaboration in a PD environment in the following quote:

Well, I do both. Sometimes I’m alone and sometimes collaborate with others, but I do prefer to collaborate with others. Just because I think it enhances the learning for everyone. I feel like I learn a lot when I provide opportunities for professional learning and I learn just as much from the other people as they might learn from me so I prefer the collaboration. (Jamie)
There are times when facilitators prefer to lead PD by themselves so that they are more able to plan their PD delivery as they choose and all based on teachers’ immediate needs and responses in PD:

So, leading alone I can pivot the instruction and make those decisions independently. So, I can take formative assessments, whether that’s informal or formal from the participants and really quickly decide to change direction based on their needs and how they are reacting. (Casey)

And I am fine going with different routing. If I have my intention of, ‘ok this is my learning outcome’, but I notice that ‘hey, that’s not the need of the group’, I am okay to shift. Whereas if I’m presenting with someone else, this would not be okay to take those cues into shift where I am comfortable doing that. (Kara)

Following the PD Session

Trainers stated that (c) they sought feedback from the audience at the end of their PD session. This involved either a verbal check or a survey given to the teachers to complete. The trainers also followed up with the contact person(s) who requested the PD to gauge reaction and assess participants’ overall feelings about the PD. Casey shared the following about how she deals with feedback and how she does follow up:

And then, at the end of a session, I always like to do some sort of a check. Check in with them and have them process it and make a commitment. So, like when I use this …check, there is heart and feet. So, they find a partner. So, what’s one thing you learned today and how you are feeling about what you learned, and what supports would you need to implement it?... So, I just try to have some sort of a processing tool that acknowledges like what did you get out of this. What are you coming through before the trying? And I try to always ask for some feedback. Some sort of a survey about the presentation, what they liked, didn’t like. Sometimes it’s on paper, sometimes it’s electronic. It just depends. (Casey)

And then, at the end of a session, what I also try to do is some sort of a follow up with whoever asked me to come. So, if it’s principal or coach, it would be like
OK so, in a month, can I come with you to walkthroughs and see how it’s going or in two weeks, they are going to email, so what…what is the next step? (Casey)

Casey asks teachers to reflect, in pairs, about what had been covered in the PD session. She stated in the quote above that she always looks for and welcomes feedback from the audience, and sometimes she uses a survey as a formal way to get feedback.

Casey also stated that she always follows up with the principal or coach who requests the PD and also explores the possibility of further PD work to build upon what has already been provided.

Kara shared the following about how she follows up with teachers after a PD session:

I typically end with some kind of a recap, review, and I always want feedback. Typically, I am trying to elicit feedback either through a Google form, a follow-up survey or some kind of way for them to give me feedback on how they changed in their thinking and in what they’ve been able to do. (Kara)

Kara stated that, at the end of a PD session, she usually does a review with the teachers and later, she uses an online survey as a means to assessing change in teachers’ thinking and practice. Kara also explained how she likes to collaborate with an instructional coach to do a follow-up at a school. Together, Kara and the instructional coach organize a follow-up session to check with each teacher and gauge their reactions about the PD and see if they need any additional support.

So, I actually partnered with an instructional coach and we went through each staff member and put them in three categories. If this is somebody that’s doing OK, they are going to go on their own, is this somebody that the coach just touch-base with and do a little check-in, is this somebody that needs a coaching cycle, then they would engage in a coaching cycle. (Kara)
When referring to the effectiveness of PD, Jamie shared that she actually visits schools to see manifestations of what was covered in the PD in action as a follow-up effort:

…one way I know it's effective is when I come back and see those people later or visit their school and I see it in action. It's been effective. (Jamie)

She also added that she visits schools to check with coaches as another way to follow up:

An example of that would be what we’ve done with teacher leadership and we used the…coaching model we had rubric that they use. We actually go and visit their schools later on. And they show us what they've been doing and we actually watch them in action and that's been very effective. (Jamie)

Thus, the trainers conduct needs assessment activities, determine the goals and objectives of PD session based on the needs of school districts. Then, prior to the PD session, they design a plan of PD based on teachers’ needs. During the PD sessions, they engage the group, allow teachers to talk about their choices, interests, and needs, create opportunities for interaction, differentiate their delivery of PD based on the response from the group, provide hands-on opportunities, refer to teachers’ experiences, check for understanding, review what had been discussed. Following the session, trainers seek feedback from the teachers as well as follow up with the schools to ensure that their PD needs have been met satisfactorily.

Research question 3: How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives?

As mentioned above, at the end of PD sessions, facilitators check with the audience for immediate feedback on the effectiveness of their PD delivery. Later, PD trainers do a follow-up in a variety of ways, with the schools that they provide PD for, in
order to know whether they achieved their PD objectives. They visit schools and observe classrooms to see how well teachers apply what they have learned, review data to see change in teachers and look for signs or indicators of positive student growth, design and administer surveys, and collaborate with instructional coaches in scheduling follow-up sessions.

In her follow-ups, Casey wanted to observe the teachers after PD. She visited the schools for that, collaborated with principals and leaders at schools, and sometimes joined principals’ walkthroughs to see what’s happening in the classrooms of teachers after PD.

So, whether that’s the principal who is going to do walkthroughs to see where teachers are at and not a got-you but a formative assessment or that I get an opportunity to go see like here is what I taught you, here is what I hope to happen, now I get to observe it in the classroom and go, oh, I really missed that. I need to go back and re-teach that and re-think of that. (Casey)

And then, at the end of a session, what I also try to do is some sort of a follow up with whoever asked me to come. So, if it’s principal or coach, it would be like OK so, in a month, can I come with you to walkthroughs and see how it’s going or in two weeks, they are going to email, so what…what is the next step? (Casey)

Casey also wanted to look at evidence of change in teachers, following the PD sessions she facilitated. She organized perception surveys to assess the extent of students’ academic achievement. For instance, she talked about her work of four years in the school district and ways she devised or utilized to examine evidence of growth:

So, I think it’s about evidence. So, it’s those informals, its’ the observations that I’m making in the check-ins. But I think it’s also about looking at data too. So, like the instant that assures you; after four years I’m not saying it’s, there is correlation or it’s only but in four years with the work I’ve done in this district there is a growth in student achievement, teachers are happier, they have more
confidence based on perception surveys. So, it’s what type of evidence can we look at and continue to see positive growth. (Casey)

When her follow-ups indicated that teachers needed additional support, she collaborated with the school leaders to do just that. She wanted to see which strategies were working and which ones were not so she can do the necessary and needed adjustments for the next round of PD. She said that she sometimes re-taught a session based on helpful feedback from the attendees.

Then, we need to adjust. So, and I think that’s where working with the school leaders is really important. To say, OK, like student achievement isn’t changing. What do we need to change? Is it the way I’m engaging them? Is it about accountability? What do we think isn’t happening? Let’s make that happen and change that. And sometimes, you re-teach. I mean just like with kids. So, ......re-taught adults. That’s humbling. That’s right. It’s OK if that’s what they need. (Casey)

Kara mentioned reviewing the PD session at the end of a session to obtain immediate feedback and also used a follow-up survey to find the change in teachers’ views and practice.

I typically end with some kind of a recap, review, and I always want feedback. Typically I am trying to elicit feedback either through a Google form, a follow-up survey or some kind of way for them to give me feedback on how they changed in their thinking and in what they’ve been able to do. (Kara)

Kara collaborated with a coach to follow-up after PD sessions in the school district when they noticed that planned progress was not made and teachers needed additional support. Then, Kara and the coach monitored teachers’ progress and improvement and provided teachers with support on different levels:
So, for example, I work with this district, we got three sessions and we weren’t making the gains we thought we would; so, rather than bringing me back again and again, we thought ok we need something to help teachers implement on a day-to-day; they don’t need a PD session, they need it in the day. So, I actually partnered with an instructional coach and we went through each staff member and put them in three categories. If this is somebody that’s doing OK, they are going to go on their own, is this somebody that the coach just touch-base with and do a little check-in, is this somebody that needs a coaching cycle, then they would engage in a coaching cycle. (Kara)

Kara talked about not being able to get any feedback on an occasion when a one-time PD session was scheduled. She compared this to when she tried to get feedback from the school district that she worked with. Kara tied the feedback back to goals as achieving the goals was evidence for progress and PD success:

So, I don’t really know what their data says. So, I may never get feedback on that one. But the school I work with, I am trying to get data because we have certain goals I am trying to help my schools to accomplish. (Kara)

Similarly, Jamie engaged in follow-up activities and visited schools to observe teachers in their classrooms following PD.

…one way I know it's effective is when I come back and see those people later or visit their school and I see it in action. It's been effective. (Jamie)

On one occasion when they had PD sessions for coaches, this facilitator used a coaching model, as part of her follow-up activities, Jamie visited the schools and observed teachers in their classrooms.

An example of that would be what we’ve done with teacher leadership and we used the…coaching model we had rubric that they use. We actually go and visit their schools later on. And they show us what they've been doing and we actually watch them in action and that's been very effective. (Jamie)
In summary, PD trainers wanted to ascertain that they had achieved their PD goals, so they scheduled various follow-up activities. They visited schools and observed teachers practicing their newly gained knowledge and skills. They assessed change in teachers’ practice through classroom observations and student growth. They conducted perception surveys among teachers and collaborated with instructional coaches in planning follow-up sessions.

Research question 4a: Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?

Casey, Kara, and Jamie had valid reasons for their chosen activities or actions in relation to PD and why they carried them out in the manner they did. Their motives for various activities are incorporated in the answer to research question 4.

All participants stated that they did needs assessment prior to their PD sessions in order to set specific goals for PD sessions and to check if their planned PD matched the needs of teachers and their schools. Casey, for example, stated that she communicated with many people in the district about their PD needs prior to planning her PD sessions:

So, before the session, I try to talk to as many people in the district as I can about what are their needs, what are their goals. So, some sort of needs assessment and then planning. (Casey)

Kara inquired about the data related to the specific PD needs in the district:

So, usually when a district calls me with a PD request, so, the district will contact me to say ‘hey, can you come to talk on this topic?’ My follow-up question to them is ‘what data do you have to support the idea that you have this need in the district?’ (Kara)

She stated that she administered a survey to find out what was needed in the district:
We actually pulled together a technology committee and we had their staff take this survey called the clarity survey by a company named Bright Lights. This survey gives us all sorts of data on how teachers and students are using technology in the classroom. So, for example, this particular district I’m showing you. They found out that teachers are using technology to communicate with students only 19% of the time. Well, that’s very low. We want that number to be higher. (Kara)

Jamie communicated with school personnel and used online survey to ensure that her PD plan was compatible with the districts’ needs:

A lot of times in preparation I'll interview folks and I'll send out a survey ahead of time or I'll send out the actual agenda and give them a power-point or put it together on a website so that they can give me feedback and tell me if I'm on track and if it's not meeting what they think it should do, then I change it. (Jamie)

PD trainers were involved in the above-stated activities prior to leading PD in this manner based on the following reasons: (1) PD trainers’ communication with teachers and districts was for preparation purposes, (2) they identified the PD needs through needs assessment so that they could plan to meet those needs and (3) they also wanted to ensure, through communication with PD-demanding parties, that their PD plans were relevant to teachers’ needs. Their PD needs were the focus of trainers’ activities prior to PD sessions. Trainers planned PD and (4) set goals based on the teachers’ PD needs they identified.

While facilitating PD, Casey, Kara, and Jamie used various strategies such as paying attention to stepping aside to let participants interact and be active participants, using their own facilitation skills such as differentiation, and collaborating with others. These strategies were carefully chosen to produce different results in participants. For example, Casey stated the following about using observations as one of her primary
facilitation skills as a means for checking for understanding and to learn more about the teachers’ and school’s culture:

The other thing during the session is I watch body language. I am really intentional about the body language. How are they reacting to me? Do they need a break? Did my directions make sense? Watching the non-verbals between the participants for the same reasons; not only do I need to change something I’m doing but also like, OK, so what’s the culture? Are they OK with each other? (Casey)

Kara used her facilitation skills to involve all teachers, control the flow and progression of the PD session, and keep teachers on task. She also made sure she is not the person talking all the time in order to create hands-on and discussion opportunities for teachers. She also used different tactics to address teachers’ individual needs:

I always want to get everyone’s voice in the room within the first five minutes. So, when I start right away, I try to bring them in. I am also trying to control the energy in the room. So, I really want to make sure that there is a positive energy, people are engaged; people are really focused then on the work. I am very hands-on, so, if you came to one of my training, I would not be the sage on the stage. I am going to get you engaged; I am going to get you talking to your peers. I really use collaboration and I’m going to differentiate. (Kara)

Jamie tapped into teachers’ experiences and considered that she and teachers mutually learned during the PD sessions:

So, I try to make it highly engaging that really based on what they're about. I think the difference between adults and students is the adults have experiences that they can draw from. So, I might not be the expert in the room but I'm just as curious to learn from the people in the room as they are to learn from each other. So, I try to make it very open. I try to understand the group that's coming together so that I can draw on their experiences as well or if there are a lot of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, I know about that too. So, in a non-threatening way I can maybe surface that so that we can all question in a row from up. (Jamie)
While facilitating PD, trainers were involved in the above-stated practices based on the following reasons: (1) they observed the group to gauge teachers’ reaction to PD, (2) to sense the group culture, (3) to engage each teacher in the group, (4) to control the flow in the PD session, (5) to create hands-on opportunities, (6) to address teachers’ needs, and (7) to bring teachers’ experiences into the session.

After the PD session, Casey, Kara, and Jamie, kept in touch with the teachers and districts to see if any additional PD work is needed. They communicated with teachers and coaches and used different strategies such as visiting schools to observe teachers in their classrooms, administering surveys to collect feedback, and collaborating with school leaders to gauge change and growth in teachers’ practice. When the facilitators found that certain aspects of what they shared with teachers were not implemented properly, they offered their kind guidance.

Casey, Kara, and Jamie maintained good relationships with the staff in their school districts as part of their professional approach. Those relationships provided them with insights into PD at schools. For instance, Casey talked about how she used her relationships to have teachers in PD sessions although the principal was not planning to include special education teachers:

So, we’re doing the literacy work… we’re doing some work on the literacy standards with teachers and he wasn’t going to send the special ed teachers. So, we had influence to say ‘ok, we respect that but what if the special ed teachers came. We really think that they would benefit from this and here is how it would help’ and so now they are coming. (Casey)
Relationships that PD trainers established with the staff in the district also enabled them to facilitate PD. They collaborated with people at different levels through those relationships. For example, Kara collaborated with an instructional coach at a school to follow up with PD:

So, I actually partnered with an instructional coach and we went through each staff member and put them in three categories. (Kara)

Jamie used her relationships to contribute to her own practice through feedback that was provided through her relationships with teachers. She thought that collaboration, taking place through her relationships with colleagues, improved learning for her and for teachers:

So, I’m not going to change unless I have honest feedback with someone else saying you know you really just talked to this side of the room and everybody over here sitting. (Jamie)

Sometimes I’m alone and sometimes collaborate with others, but I do prefer to collaborate with others. Just because I think it enhances the learning for everyone. I feel like I learn a lot when I provide opportunities for professional learning and I learn just as much from the other people as they might learn from me so I prefer the collaboration. (Jamie)

PD trainers maintained relationships with their colleagues as well. They collaborated with them to lead PD sessions together in a professional manner. These relationships helped PD trainers to grow in their practice. Kara talked about her colleague providing feedback in PD sessions that she co-facilitated with a colleague:

One thing that I do like about co-training – if I am the one that’s speaking or leading, I want you as a co-trainer to collect valid data for me. So, what I want you to do is you are going to be telling me “hey, these people over here, they are really struggling with this, hey, these people over here just shared a really good
comment or connection, you might want to call on them”. So, as my co-trainer, I need you to bring me the data because I can’t always see everything. (Kara)

In summary, Casey, Kara, and Jamie established and maintained relationships with the staff in the schools districts and with their colleagues thereby enabling them: to follow up with schools about PD and to see the change in teachers’ practice, to receive feedback both about PD sessions and their PD delivery, to collaborate both with the school leaders and their own colleagues as co-facilitators of PD, and to contribute to their own growth as PD trainers through feedback from colleagues.

In addition, Casey, Kara, and Jamie were involved in needs assessment, before they delivered PD so that they could plan and set goals for their PD session. They talked with people at schools and in the districts and used surveys to learn more about what teachers and schools really needed. When they facilitated their PD session, they stepped aside to provide hands-on opportunities. They used their facilitation skills to check the group reaction to PD and to sense the group’s culture, to keep teachers focused and on task, to control the flow of the PD session, to tap into teachers’ experiences and honor their expertise, and to address their identified and emerging PD needs. The PD trainers consistently did a follow up after they led PD. They kept in touch with schools and teachers to get feedback on their PD, and to occasionally observe teachers to ensure new skills are being implemented properly. In their school districts, and also with their colleagues, they established, built, and maintained relationships based on a solid foundation of trust.
Trainers facilitated PD session(s) in the manner that was outlined above, through activities mentioned, because they viewed PD as an important part of teaching profession and as an opportunity to learn and grow. They thought PD would “create a support structure for teachers to change the way they do things and the way they engage kids” (Casey). They emphasized relevance because they believed that it enabled teachers to put what they took away from PD into practice in their classrooms. Kara pointed out that teachers should be able to “take away something they can apply in their classroom tomorrow” (Kara). Trainers facilitated PD in the manner they did because they believed that teachers had to continually improve to support student learning. That is why they continually followed up and received feedback from teachers to plan for further PD:

And then, at the end of a session, what I also try to do is some sort of a follow up with whoever asked me to come. So, if it’s principal or coach, it would be like OK so, in a month, can I come with you to walkthroughs and see how it’s going or in two weeks, they are going to email, so what…what is the next step? (Casey)

Casey, Kara, and Jamie looked to receive feedback from different sources in order to learn what methods to continue using and which ones to adjust and refine. They obtained feedback from (1) teachers and school leaders that helped the assess positive change and growth in teachers’ classroom practice and to ascertain that teachers’ PD needs were successfully met. They used this interaction as part of their relationship- and trust-building efforts.

I see the change in them and I think what they see is that they trust that I’m going to keep coming back to support them whether it goes well or it goes poorly. (Casey)
PD trainers also received feedback from the colleagues they collaborated with. They could know, through feedback from co-facilitators, what went well and what did not. Receiving feedback from colleagues contributed to their own growth as PD facilitators and to positive relationships, too:

Because I respect the people I work with first of all. And so… I mean I think I’m very fortunate to work with very, highly-skilled and very knowledgeable educators. And so, I’d be a fool to not take their feedback and learn from it. And I have to model that. So, my job is asking teachers to change what they are doing and so if I’m not willing to do that, then I lost all credibility and I think that’s how you get better at this. When somebody watches you to go ‘hey, what did I do well and what can I fix, what didn’t go well?’ and they have a different perspective than you do. (Casey)

So, as my co-trainer, I need you to bring me the data because I can’t always see everything. (Kara)

PD trainers modeled learning by doing by facilitating PD in a manner that offered hands-on experiences for teachers:

You learn by struggling” (Casey)

…the majority of people learn by doing. (Kara)

That’s, that’s the most important part – the practice. If you look at the, you know, I can read a book and I can have a recipe to something but didn’t actually tried it out and used it with people and see how they react, I don’t know if it’s going to work. (Jamie)

PD trainers planned PD in chunks so that teachers could work on what was covered in PD sessions, practice it in their classrooms, and come back to share their experiences. By sequencing the content and skills of the PD, they made complex PD concepts more digestible and easier to implement.
So, ideally what I like to do, I think what’s express for teachers, one or two chunks of learning and then like a four-five-week span to let them implement in their classroom and try it and then bring them back and do another hour, two-hour training. (Casey)

It depends on the content. Ideally, I would always provide implementation time. It needs to be long enough to play around the new idea, new concept or the new tool and actually start using it. (Kara)

Jamie allowed time for teachers every 8 minutes to discuss the newly covered concepts in a PD session. This enabled the teachers to process and internalize new information before implementing:

Adult learning theory says that If you’re providing professional learning for a long period of time, you can do a whole day. It’s just making sure that about every eight minutes, let the adults in the room have time to talk to somebody. And reframe their own thinking about what they just heard and cognitively decide, you know, what's important. It’s about every eight minutes so if a lot, they want to break it up. (Jamie)

Casey, Kara, and Jamie unanimously emphasized that scheduling PD was almost always challenging due to time constraints at schools, which forced them to schedule PD sessions based on teachers’ availability in schools. PD trainers differed in their beliefs about when to organize PD sessions. Casey and Kara believed that people were more energetic and fresh in the mornings. Casey thought that the time of the year to schedule PD sessions did not matter much; Kara, however, thought mid-year was best as teachers did not have worries about the beginning or the end of semester activities such as getting to know students and grading. Jamie said that they surveyed schools about this and decided to make PD sessions accessible at various times.
Research question 4b: Why do the facilitators think their approach is effective?

Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s responses to the interview questions associated with what makes their approach to PD effective indicated the following: Casey and Jamie emphasized that both having a goal for PD and planning made their PD facilitation effective. Kara said that the more interactive and concrete the PD session was, the more effective it became. The following excerpts from the interviews highlight each facilitator’s answer to the above question:

So, I think, first of all, having a really clear goal makes it effective. And I think there is levels of goals; so, what’s the goal for the individual teacher; what’s the goal for the building; what’s the goal for the administrator; how does it fit in; what’s the goal for kids, you know, how does this help the kids. Uh, I think the other thing is, uh, really precise planning. (Casey)

That's a good question. The same thing for both, that would be what's your purpose and then plan for it. You know, what's your purpose, what do you want to have for the outcome, and then for that to happen. And then, that tells you how much time you need. That tells you who need to be there and then also what, how to break it up into smaller chunks so that you can get there accordingly. (Jamie)

It’s interactive and no matter what I’m doing, I’m trying to bring it into the concrete. (Kara)

Casey also added that a session is effective when teachers conscientiously apply what they have learned in the session in their respective classroom. Casey referred to this as accountability, or a follow-up to the PD session with the aim of giving constructive feedback.

And then there is some sort of accountability. So, whether that’s the principal is going to do walkthroughs to see where teachers are at and not a got-you but a formative assessment or that I get an opportunity to go see like here is what I
taught you, here is what I hope to happen, now I get to observe it in the classroom and go, oh, I really missed that. (Casey)

When asked why teachers should attend her PD sessions, Kara referred to relevance, hands-on experience, differentiation, and being concrete, usable and applicable in the classroom to point out to the effectiveness of her PD sessions.

Why should they come to my training? They can expect the kind of things they keep they’ve been referencing. They can expect that I’m going to do my best to keep things relevant. It’s going to be hands-on, I’m going to differentiate. And they’re going to walk away with something they can apply in their classroom tomorrow. So, I’m trying to make everything back-to-back concrete. Concrete and usable. (Kara)

A related question asked the participants about how they knew that their PD sessions were effective. Participants answered by saying that they knew their PD sessions were effective when attendees left with either additional questions and/or firm grasp of the content and major themes presented and discussed in the PD session. Such results would seem to suggest that the teachers engaged in some active and deliberate mental processing of the PD session. Facilitators also thought that PD was effective when they were invited to facilitate PD sessions in the same school again. Facilitators felt that teacher feedback was an important indicator of the effectiveness of their PD session(s). Facilitators also added that they knew their PD sessions were effective when they visited teachers and saw they were implementing and applying what they had taken away from PD sessions. Insights into facilitators’ response about indicators for effectiveness are reflected in the following quotes from three participants:

I think that one sign it’s effective is if people leave, trying to think the correct word, I feel like it’s OK people leave with a little bit of unease. So, if you kind of
push their thinking enough that they leave going like ‘oh, I don’t know about that’. If they’re questioning your practice or questioning what you presented to them, you spark something there. I also think another good thing or another positive of good PD is that they leave with an affirmation as well though. So you can affirm something they are already doing but you can also leave them with a question mark like ‘maybe I could do that better, how am I going to wrestle with that to make it better’. I think another thing is that they invite you back. There is not so much …that they are inviting you back to continue to work with them. (Casey)

For example, if I show up at a training and it’s not my school district but they need more presenters, I might show up to help out another school but it’s not my school. So, I don’t really know what their data says. So, I may never get feedback on that one. But the school I work with, I am trying to get data because we have certain goals I am trying to help my schools to accomplish. (Kara)

I think if…one way I know it's effective is when I come back and see those people later or visit their school and I see it in action. It's been effective. (Jamie)

The answers associated with this question point out that the three PD facilitators believe their PD approach is effective when it is aligned with what they believe an effective PD to be like. For example, Casey believes that effective PD requires “a really clear goal” and “precise planning” (p.6). Casey also thinks that PD is effective when accountability for teachers is involved. Jamie thinks that effective PD depends on what the purpose of the PD is and the planning for this purpose. Kara states that effective PD takes place in an interactive manner and it is hands-on and tangible as well as usable for the teachers; effective PD allows teachers to implement what they have learned and apply it in their classrooms.

Similarly, PD facilitators base their appraisal of their effectiveness on the data they gather following the PD sessions. The data consists of their observations of teachers,
either during the PD sessions or after the session when teachers begin to put their newly gained knowledge and acquired skills into practice in their classrooms. For example, Casey takes teachers’ questions and manifestations of emerging knowledge and skills taught in the PD as a strong indicator of their effective facilitation. Another evidence of effectiveness for Casey is when she is invited back to facilitate additional PD sessions. Kara points out to the importance of feedback from the schools to show her PD has been effective. She says that she usually does not receive any from districts that she does not work with, and, without data, she may never know if the PD sessions she facilitated in such schools were thought of and considered to be effective by the attendees. Jamie measures the effectiveness of her approach by direct observations of teachers in their classroom. If she sees teachers implementing what they have learned, she takes that as a testimony to her effectiveness.

When analyzing the findings reported above, certain themes emerged. The following section describes and elaborates four major themes along with some sub-themes.

**Themes**

**How Themes Were Generated**

This study employed an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) and the data for it were collected using semi-structured interviews. When a phenomenological approach is used, data analysis focuses on themes, units, and meanings found in experiences of individuals from whom data are gathered (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). IPA researchers aim to discover and interpret how participants make sense of their
experiences (Gill, 2014). The interpretative method permits the perspectives of both the participant and the researcher to be involved in the data analysis process (Smith, 2004). Descriptive phenomenological analysis, on the other hand, advises researchers to leave their preconceptions aside in the analysis of data (Gill, 2014). Hence, in this study, the researcher is given the allowance to use his preconceptions of professional development in order to fully understand the views of PD facilitators interviewed for this study.

This study employed the following data analysis steps based on Smith et al.’s (2009) outline of IPA: close reading and re-reading of the first transcript and taking notes of potential cluster themes, using cluster themes from the first transcript as guidance for analyzing other transcripts and connecting themes, creating a table of final themes and subordinate themes, and providing a narrative on themes.

Following the interviews with participants, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings and began to read the first transcription. He then read it closely three times and underlined statements that seemed as potential themes. Then, using the margins on the text, the researcher took notes of clustering themes on the first transcript. Meanwhile, the researcher went back and forth between the underlined statements and his field notes several times. This back-and-forth thinking was part of the researcher’s interpretative effort to make meaning of participant’s experiences. After clustering themes on the first transcript, the researcher used them as leads to work on the other two transcripts, which were read closely 2-3 times, all the while underlining statements that could be potential themes, and taking notes of clustering themes on the margins.
Then, the researcher re-read the underlined statements and notes on the margins several times on all three transcripts. That became part of the researcher’s interpretative work on the themes. The researcher took notes of emerging sub-themes and made a table showing all themes and sub-themes. Later, he reversed his attention and matched the themes and sub-themes on the table back to his notes and underlined statements. The final phase of analysis was to write the themes narrative, with quotations from the transcriptions of interviews with the three participants.

**Themes**

In the following section, themes that emerged from the findings will be described. Based on the participants’ responses to the interview questions, the following four themes emerged: PD facilitators’ views, their expertise, the relationships that PD facilitators build, and the roles that PD facilitators take up when doing their job. Figure 1 shows the themes and sub-themes identified in and that emerged from the data analysis.

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<th>THEMES</th>
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Figure 1 Themes and Sub-Themes
Theme 1: Views

PD facilitators shared their views of professional development and how they went about performing their jobs. Facilitators’ “views” entail their beliefs of how learning takes place, how it grows, and what should teachers do to continue to be more effective teachers. Their views pertain to three sub-themes that include learning, teaching, and PD facilitation. Each one of the three sub-themes is discussed next.

Views on Learning

PD facilitators view learning as a continuous endeavor. Hence, teachers, students, and facilitators must never cease to learn. They believe that teachers develop as long as they continue to learn and many people learn by doing. PD facilitators firmly believe that hands-on experiences are necessary for learning, so teachers need to put what they acquire in PD into practice in their classrooms in order for learning to take place. Casey talked about her views of learning as follows:

…there is still a lot of teachers talking to kids and hoping through osmosis that they are going to get it. And I don’t believe anybody learns that way, I think you learn by doing. (Casey)

They have to do it. You have to experience it and I think, that’s probably because I was a STEM teacher, honestly. But if you don’t make the mistakes, then, you don’t know how to support the for kids when they get there. You don’t know how to create an environment where educators or students…if I can anticipate what type of mistakes or frustration you are going to come up against, then, how can I plan to support you in that? Or how can I plan and collect resources that would help you to get over that hump without me saying like ‘well here is what you need to do’, ‘you’re going to do this and this, like this”? You learn by struggling. (Casey)

Casey believes that people learn through hands-on experiences and by actually practicing what is learned. Learning involves struggling, making mistakes, and
experiencing some setbacks. A teacher or a facilitator should create an environment where learners have opportunities to engage in and learn from hands-on experiences.

Casey also thinks that a PD facilitator should be continuously learning to keep up with the changing needs in school districts as it is an integral part of their job. Casey describes teachers as learners and the way teachers learn is based on hands-on experiences and trial-and-error where they can improve and grow. This type of learning can take place in a professional learning environment where teachers exchange ideas and experiences with colleagues.

I think you need knowledge of the content. So, that’s continual learning for me. I don’t think there is going to be a PD trainer not needing to learn because the needs of the school districts change so I’m continually learning which is good; I like doing. (Casey)

A lot, a lot. Well, so, teachers are learners and you can’t get better at what you’re doing if you don’t have time to reflect and if you don’t work in an environment where it’s okay to try something to have it not go well and then get after it again and try it again. And I think that requires time. I think ideally weekly and I know that doesn’t always work but when I worked in buildings where we had weekly time, not just PD necessarily, but we had time weekly to check in with their colleagues, to learn something new, to talk about how it was going is where I really grew as an educator. (Casey)

Similarly, Kara states that learning should be a continuous activity for teachers as it is a professional and personal must for teachers to update their knowledge and skills. Teachers need to provide relevant experiences for their students and to be able to do so they need to grow and build their knowledge and skill sets. Kara gives the example of a medical doctor who is not informed about the latest developments in medicine. She thinks that teachers have a similar task in updating and enhancing their instructional repertoire, which can be achieved through ongoing learning. Kara also believes that,
regardless of their learning styles, many people learn by putting what they take out of the classroom into practice and by actually experiencing it.

I think learning is important and being a continuous learner. So, whatever format that is for each person, that’s fine but I think we continually need to keep growing. And thinking about teachers, we need our teachers to be the best. We need that for our kids. It would be like I expect the doctor to up on the latest medical techniques. I don’t want to go to a doctor that stopped learning back in 1990. I want the one that knows the latest strategies and that’s the same for our teachers. (Kara)

In my experience, the majority of people learn by doing. You can hear something in theory but till you actually go through the process of figuring it out, implementing it, it doesn’t have the long-term effects. It doesn’t stick. (Kara)

Likewise, Jamie emphasizes the importance of teachers being continuous learners in order to best support students who experience change at a faster rate than teachers do. She thinks that for teachers to improve and to fit in this change environment, they need to be life-long learners. What’s complimentary to learning, on the other hand, according to Jamie, is about putting what you acquire through PD into practice.

If we're not continuously learning as adults, we're not going to be able to serve our students. Life is changing so quickly that technology has changed and what students have access to. If we are not those. Lifelong Learners and we are not continuously trying to keep up, then we are not relevant anymore. (Jamie)

That’s, that’s the most important part – the practice. If you look at the, you know, I can read a book and I can have a recipe to something but didn’t actually tried it out and used it with people and see how they react, I don’t know if it’s going to work. That’s the most important part – it’s practice ... (Jamie)

Casey, Kara, and Jamie also talked about the need for being continuous learners to grow as competent professionals who can address students’ instructional needs confidently and effectively. They also stated that it was essential for teachers to engage in
hands-on experiences, to put their knowledge into practice, and see if it works in the classroom. In the context of hands-on instruction, Casey, Kara, and Jamie also expressed their views on teaching, which we discuss in the next sub-theme.

Views on Teaching

Participants shared their views of what teaching entails. They think that teaching children and teaching adults may not be so different in terms of engaging the learners, with the main difference being that adults have far more experiences to draw upon than children and adolescents do. Casey points out to this similarity in teaching adults and children in the following quote:

So, my educational leadership degree, I think, was great training because I learned about curriculum and development, leadership, leadership styles, and engaging people…I am relying really heavily on that training in work, so I also think that teaching adults is not that different from teaching kids. And so, I mean I think there are different rules and there are different nuance to it but I am relying on my teacher training. (Casey)

Jamie also stated that when facilitating a session, she approaches adults the same way she does with children. She also agreed with Casey that adults draw more on their experiences when learning.

…but if I'm delivering professional learning I treat it much like I do when I used to teach kids with just an adult lens. So, I try to make it highly engaging that really based on what they're about. I think the difference between adults and students is the adults have experiences that they can draw from. (Jamie)

With regard to why teachers should participate in professional learning activities, Casey emphasizes that teaching can be an isolated experience in the absence of a professional-learning community of teachers. This is, among many other reasons, why teachers need to attend PD:
To learn. To grow their practice, uh, and because I feel like I’ll learn from them and they can learn from me and we get to be in this together. I think that teaching can be a very isolating, solitary experience. (Casey)

Kara said that she supports ‘differentiation and choice’ in instruction and does not make any distinction between teaching children and adults in her approach:

I am a big proponent for differentiation. So, I will always structure in a way that provides choice and differentiation. (Kara)

The third and last sub-theme in this section deals with participants’ views on facilitating professional development sessions.

Views on PD Facilitation

PD facilitators have awareness of the expertise that teachers who attend their PD sessions bring to their classroom. All participants stated that facilitators may not readily know everything while facilitating a PD, and they appreciate and honor the teachers’ expertise. Thus, the facilitators look for and invite active participation and input from their teacher audiences. Casey believes that a part of her job is to honor and credit the experiences and expertise that teachers have and bring to the PD sessions:

And I can’t be the keeper of knowledge and I can’t know everything; so, I at least try to comment, to honor, that there is a lot of experience in the room; I feel like one of my jobs is to bring that out. (Casey)

Similarly, Kara says that PD facilitators may not possess all the knowledge while providing PD; however, this does not prevent them from facilitating learning. She added that it is her approach, rather than knowledge ready to be used, that helps facilitating PD.

I think the other one would be, for transition; I’m really trying to encourage my trainees. You don’t have to be the expert in the room. You can facilitate and guide the learning without having to be the end all-be-all holder of all knowledge. (Kara)
...so, if you came to one of my training, I would not be the sage on the stage. I am going to get you engaged; I am going to get you talking to your peers. I really use collaboration and I’m going to differentiate. (Kara)

Jamie, on the other hand, feels that she needs to honor the time that teachers allocate for PD, by providing PD material and skills relevant to their needs and interests. Again, Jamie also believes that she may not necessarily be the only person with expertise among the teachers while facilitating PD. She emphasizes the wealth of teachers’ experiences and the need to tap into them. Jamie views herself as both a teacher of teachers as well as a student of the teachers she teaches.

Well, anytime that somebody is giving up their valuable time, I want them to walk out with something that’s relevant (Jamie)

So I might not be the expert in the room but I’m just as curious to learn from the people in the room as they are to learn from each other. So, I try to make it very open. I try to understand the group that's coming together so that I can draw on their experiences as well… (Jamie)

All participants described their views of what facilitating PD is about including the ability to engage a group of teachers during a session, paying attention to learner characteristics, being on sidelines to create opportunities for the attendees to discover and learn on their own, and letting the learners improve their skills.

I think you have to understand facilitation skills so how do I engage a group and then I think there is something to personality types and generation types. That is important to my work. (Casey)

I think a facilitator needs to fly under neutral flag. So, often times it’s bringing the right conversation to the group and then being neutral about it and letting them work through the content. (Kara)
I'll teach I'll work with anybody that wants to come in and be a learner. I don't look for specific skill sets in the crowd. I think what I bring to the table is I’d like to ask a lot of questions so that I could find out where they are. Based on where they are in their thinking or their skill set. I try to find out what they think they need and provide opportunities in that classroom to either stretch them in an area that maybe they're not strong in or reinforce an area of strength that they might have. (Jamie)

Casey, Kara, and Jamie had their own views of learning, teaching, and PD facilitation. About learning, they emphasized the need for continually learning to grow as competent professionals. They believed it was essential to engage learners when teaching. They thought that adults and children did not differ much in terms of engaging them in learning. Casey, Kara, and Jamie felt that PD activities kept teachers away from being isolated professionals and PD facilitators used differentiation, in addition to choice, in their instruction. About learning, teaching, and PD facilitation, PD facilitators relied on their expertise which we turn to in the second theme.

**Theme 2: Expertise**

Closely related to the major theme of participants’ expertise are the following three sub-themes: background influences, PD strategies, and program development. Each sub-theme is discussed in the following sections beginning with background influences.

**Background Influences**

When participants talked about their background, they referred to the type of education or training they received early on in their PD career. They described how they were involved in facilitating PD. and their descriptions include some emotional influences that guided their career. Descriptions of early influences that shaped the
thoughts, feelings, attitudes, dispositions, and practice of each of the three facilitators are reported next.

Casey has an MA degree in educational leadership and a BA degree in teaching. She taught 6th – 8th grades technology in public schools. When she talked about her background, she described how her degree in educational leadership enabled her to grow in her career, and also how her passion helped orient her toward a professional development career. Casey’s description of the early influences highlight the importance of academic training, on-the-job training and experiences, and, as importantly, her intense desire to grow her expertise. Casey said:

I got involved quite early in my career in being in leadership roles in my building as a teacher and got a leadership degree and so, as part of that work I was asked to start leading the PDs at my building in Michigan as a middle school teacher. And then when my family relocated here to Iowa, I was a teacher librarian and a tech coach and I got to work with teachers and lead PD. So when this institution opened up and I could do a full-time, that just seemed like a good fit. I was really passionate about how the teachers get better at what they do and I feel like this is a great opportunity in a way to do that. It’s just support for teachers at being…at greater skills, feeling more competent… (Casey)

Kara holds an MA degree and taught 7th grade literacy, Spanish, and ESL prior to working as a PD facilitator and, in the beginning of her PD career, she was involved in training her colleagues on how to use Promethean Boards in a pilot project. Later, she discovered that she was enthusiastically inclined to work with adults, which later sparked her career decision in PD facilitation. Kara’s early experiences echo those of Casey’s in that both had experienced the realities of classroom teaching before embarking on the field of PD facilitation. Kara’s career trajectory toward PD is described briefly in the following quote:
Well, when I first started working in my career, I was a classroom teacher. I actually taught middle school and while I was in the classroom, the district decided to pilot some technology. They piloted Promethean Boards. This is in Waterloo and they needed some classrooms and they approached me and said ‘will you be one pilot classroom?’ I said ‘absolutely’ because I have always been interested in technology. So, I participated in the pilot. Then the district came to me and said ‘okay, now we need some trainers to go out and train your colleagues because we are going to proceed with the pilot and every classroom is going to have a Promethean board’. So, I became one of the twelve trainers for the Waterloo school district. (Kara)

Once I started I knew I loved working with adults. It was such a different way to use my education and my training experience and I just fell in love with adults. So, I became a trainer. That spiraled then into my building principal asking me to conduct trainings for other things within our building. Things like Infinite Campus, other technology related… (Kara)

Jamie’s beginning career path was slightly different from Casey’s and Kara’s in that she worked as a corporate trainer and coach for leadership before becoming a 3rd grade teacher. She worked for a corporate entity providing coaching for businesses to develop their employees. She taught 3rd grade for 6 years prior to serving as a principal. She also worked as a school administrator for 16 years. Currently, she is the director of professional learning at an educational institution. When she described how she was involved in PD facilitation, she referred to her concerns about teachers not being able to improve:

I did not get into education right away. I was in the corporate world when I got out of the college. I was in training and development. My degree in college, my undergraduate degree, my first one was actually resource development. And I worked for Dale Carnegie systems which is like providing service to businesses on how to develop their employees. And it really came from an experience I had in college when I had a summer job. And I worked with a lot of people that didn't like what they were doing but that didn't really have a lot of choices based on their skills. And I thought that was a problem because I really liked those people and it bothered me that they couldn't move up the ladder because of skills
development issues so at Dale Carnegie and as I worked with employees at the state of Minnesota, I realized what they shared with me is ‘my gosh our self-confidence has gotten so much stronger. I wish I had this at school. I wish I had teaching experience like this at school. (Jamie)

It is interesting to note that Casey, Kara, and Jamie share several things in common: graduate work in education, classroom-teaching experience, concern and desire to improve teaching and learning through PD, and early leadership roles that gradually lead their career paths toward facilitating teacher professional development. In addition to early influences, Casey, Kara, and Jamie also shared the strategies (second sub-theme) that they learned and continue honing as they implement them in their work. Thus, it is to the second sub-theme that we turn next.

**PD Strategies Used by the Facilitators**

The three PD facilitators also shed light on the three-phase process they use in their work with teachers. The first can be labeled as pre-PD phase and refers to the time when facilitators are contacted by the school leaders with a PD request. After receiving the official request, the three facilitators said that they all conducted some type of needs assessment which ultimately shape and determine the direction, goals, and overall plan of the PD. The second phase is the PD-facilitation phase in which the facilitators use a variety of facilitations methods and techniques. The third phase is the post-PD or PD-follow-up phase where facilitators invariably seek feedback about the effectiveness of the provided PD. Quotes highlighting each of these three phases of the PD process are provided next.
a. Prior to PD sessions, Casey says that she does needs assessment to identify interests and needs of the teacher attendees. Based on the needs-assessment data, she creates a PD plan, as she mentions in the following quote:

Well, planning, so I'd like to start with a needs assessment… Just talking and looking at data; so figuring out what is it that they need; coming up with a plan. (Casey)

Kara defines the goal of the PD, prior to the start of PD sessions, and uses the goals to develop her PD content, activities, and matching facilitation methods. Casey also mentioned that she does needs assessment by reviewing schools’ data that prompt the schools’ request for a PD. Kara explains what she does as follows:

Well, the first thing I would do is I would start with the end in mind. What’s my goal? By the time people leave, what do they need to able to do? I always start with that. Then, I backtrack to how I’m going to get on there. (Kara)

So, usually when a district calls to me with a PD request, so, the district will contact me to say ‘hey, can you come to talk on this topic?’ My follow-up question to them is ‘what data do you have to support the idea that you have this need in the district?’ (Kara)

Jamie’s needs assessment involves communicating with attendees in various ways beforehand. She goes about her needs assessment systematically in order to learn as much as she can about what teachers want to know and be able to do with what they learn in and from a PD. Jamie said:

A lot of times in preparation I'll interview folks and I'll send out a survey ahead of time or I'll send out the actual agenda and give them a power-point or put it together on a Web site so that they can give me feedback and tell me if I'm on track and if it's not meeting what they think it should do, then I change it. (Jamie)
Casey, Kara, and Jamie underscored the importance of conducting a needs assessment prior to the PD to help them develop a PD plan that best matches teachers’ interests, needs, and aspirations. They do so in order to make the PD experience useful and effective. For what the facilitators do in their PD sessions, we focus on the second phase.

b. While providing PD. Casey believes that it’s essential to create opportunities in the PD plan for teachers to learn and, for that end, to step aside to let teachers work on their own. While facilitating PD, Casey introduces herself, she keeps an eye on learners to gain awareness of the group culture and dynamics, monitors learning and the effectiveness of the session as it unfolds, and she adjusts her facilitation focus accordingly. She remains attuned to the tempo and rhythm of the session as she describes in the following quote:

And then I believe really strongly in inquiry base and getting out of the way. So, I try really hard to create opportunities for the staff to dig into learning and make decisions on their own. I don’t like to stand up front talk. So, that takes planning though to make that happen. (Casey)

So, I just feel like whatever I can do depending on the content was to kind of say like this is who I am, this is what I know, this is what I don’t know. That’s how many hands when we don’t know something. And then to share stories to say like I get it; here is what I am experiencing as a parent and here is what I know as an educator, now how do we figure that out? The other thing during the session is I watch body language. I am really intentional about the body language. How are they reacting to me? Do they need a break? Did my directions make sense? Watching the non-verbals between the participants for the same reasons…not only…do I need to change something I’m doing but also like, OK, so what’s the culture? Are they OK with each other? How is that effective? And then watching for learning. So, are they getting it or not? Do we need to go back and re-try something? Like constantly formatively assessing; and then I do try to model using technology tools. So, I might use electronic sticky notes to ask them for
formative assessment and then when we take a break I’m looking at their responses to just figure out if they get it or not get it, what do I need to adjust. (Casey)

Kara deliberately engages all attendees in creating a positive learning atmosphere when delivering PD. She ensures that learners are engaged, she does not want the PD to be a one-person or solo show, so she offers hands-on opportunities and interactive activities and discussions among attendees, and she differentiates, when needed, to provide choice and tailors activities for diverse learners.

I always want to get everyone’s voice in the room within the first five minutes. So, when I start right away, I try to bring them in. I am also trying to control the energy in the room. So, I really want to make sure that there is a positive energy, people are engaged; people are really focused then on the work. I am very hands-on, so, if you came to one of my training, I would not be the sage on the stage. I am going to get you engaged; I am going to get you talking to your peers. I really use collaboration and I’m going to differentiate. (Kara)

Jamie emphasizes the interaction between the learners and the PD provider by referring to adult learners’ experiences when facilitating PD. She specifically pointed out keeping her ears attentive to potential misconceptions about teaching and students and doing her best to address them in a subtle and effective manner, as she describes in the following quote:

So, I try to make it highly engaging that really based on what they're about. I think the difference between adults and students is the adults have experiences that they can draw from. So I might not be the expert in the room but I'm just as curious to learn from the people in the room as they are to learn from each other. So I try to make it very open. I try to understand the group that's coming together so that I can draw on their experiences as well or if there are a lot of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, I know about that too. So, in a non-threatening way I can maybe surface that so that we can all question in a row from up. I used to think this might be now I think this would be the new way and how that might impact their new practice. (Jamie)
All three facilitators employ a variety of methods and strategies to keep attendees actively and meaningfully engaged in the PD session. They plan, design, and facilitate their sessions with the teacher attendees being active participants and not passive recipients. We now turn to the third and last phase that relates to what facilitators do following the PD sessions they facilitate.

c. Following the PD sessions. Casey has an activity that she involves teacher attendees in at the end of her PD sessions to see what they are taking away. She keeps an attentive ear to any mention of knowledge and skills gained and plans implementing them in their classrooms. Seeking feedback from the attendees about her PD sessions is a follow up that she regularly does, which she describes in the following excerpt from the interview:

And then, at the end of a session, I always like to do some sort of a check. Check in with them and have them process it and make a commitment. So like when I use this check, there is heart and feet. So, they find a partner. So, what’s one thing you learned today and how you are feeling about what you learned, and what supports would you need to implement it? Like a red light or like a stop light. What’s one practice you are going to stop about what we learned? What’s one thing you are going to keep doing? What we learned today that validates it? And then, what something new you are going to try? So, I just try to have some sort of a processing tool that acknowledges like what did you get out of this. What are you coming through before the trying? And I try to always ask for some feedback (27:18). Some sort of a survey about the presentation, what they liked, didn’t like. Sometimes it’s on paper, sometimes it’s electronic. It just depends. (Casey)

Similarly, Kara concludes her PD sessions with a check for understanding and getting an idea of attendees’ takeaways. Following the PD, she seeks input, feedback, and reactions about the PD in various ways. She specifically wants to find out if anything learned spurred change in teachers’ thinking about their classroom practice. Kara added
that a face-to-face follow-up session is sometimes scheduled to solicit feedback and hear firsthand what teachers thought and felt about the PD session. Kara describes her follow-up approach as follows:

I typically end with some kind of a recap, review, and I always want feedback. Typically, I am trying to elicit feedback either through a Google form, a follow-up survey or some kind of way for them to give me feedback on how they changed in their thinking and in what they’ve been able to do. (Kara)

Sometimes, a follow-up is actually not me coming back, that might be me working with an instructional coach in this school. (Kara)

Jamie’s post-PD session activity, on the other hand, involves visiting the schools where the teacher attendees work, and assessing teachers’ practice of newly acquired knowledge and skills. Jamie describes what she does for a follow-up as follows:

An example of that would be what we’ve done with teacher leadership and we used a coaching model we had rubric that they use. We actually go and visit their schools later on. And they show us what they’ve been doing and we actually watch them in action and that's been very effective. (Jamie)

Based on the quotes, the three facilitators are aware of how feedback informs and improves their PD facilitation. They use a variety of ways to get feedback immediately following or after PD session. Research and development are also related to the “expertise” and they are discussed next.

R&D

Casey, Kara, and Jamie also mentioned involvement in some type of research or development activity as part of their job, which contributes to their professional growth and effectiveness. Casey helps schools to devise improvement plans and, in the process,
engages them in research (i.e., collecting, analyzing and interpreting data and using data in decision making).

Yes and it’s… the state just calls it DA – differentiated accountability and it’s research-based about scalable school improvement across the system. And so, right now that on the state level is really focused on elementary, pre-K to elementary literacy. So, a lot of the PD I am doing is helping schools to get systems in place like ‘Do you have a schedule that allows for enough instructional time about literacy?’ ‘Then what the instruction look like’, then, ‘what the second level instruction looked like, what collaborative time looked like so it’s walking schools through that. And then helping them to collect and analyze data that helps to make decisions. Uhm…and then any other support that they need with school improvement things. (Casey)

Kara is involved in the development of a support system for facilitators based on what is learned from PD attendees. She collaborates with the PD director at her institution to develop this program, which she describes in the following quote:

So, no one was telling me ‘Hey, you are doing a great job in adult facilitation here. But you need to improve…’ I was not getting that kind of feedback. We didn’t have a structure in place. So, I brought that need to our administration and said ‘hey, we don’t have this but I think this’d be very valuable’, and they agreed. So, they actually created a position for me. So, now I am working with the director of professional development and we are developing a program to support our instructors. (Kara)

Jamie developed “Professional Learning Series” called “Admin Support Program” that provides mentoring and support in leadership. It is supported by the legislation and is still in use by the School Administrators of the state. Jamie describes her involvement with research and development and her Professional Learning Series in particular as follows:

So, I have developed Professional Learning Series, here, at our agency for leaders, principals and the leadership team about five years ago. And we took that structure and when the teacher leadership legislation came through we presented
that structure to the state team for teacher leadership. We implemented it; it’s called the Admin Support Program. And now school administrators of Iowa have adopted it. That has had a growing number of principals engaged in that since 2014. (Jamie)

In summary, Casey, Kara, and Jamie are involved in different research and development activities that further deepen and broaden their expertise. Now, we turn to the third major theme: relationships.

Theme 3: Relationships

PD facilitators build and maintain relationships with colleagues, teachers, and school leaders for various purposes while doing their jobs. These relationships allow facilitators exchange support and resources. Three types of relationships under the theme of relationships were identified: relationships with the colleagues, relationships with the teachers, and relationships with the school leaders.

Relationships with the Colleagues

Casey, Kara, and Jamie co-facilitate PD with their colleagues and build relationships with them. Casey believes that it is better to collaborate with her colleagues because it provides them an opportunity to combine their knowledge and skills to better serve the needs of their attendees. Casey explains her reason for developing collaborating relationships with her colleagues as follows:

...and then I try really hard to collaborate with my colleagues that I work with so, like there is special ed consultant, literacy consultant in the service, in the buildings. I try to work with them too. So, if I can do it together, I’d like to. I feel like that’s better. (Casey)

I would say the positive about collaborating with other people is its someone else’s perspective and knowledge base, and so I think and believe what I am
getting is more robust learning experience for participants because you have a larger knowledge base to draw from. (Casey)

Kara co-facilitates PD with her colleagues in the workplace as it allows her to differentiate and to provide the participants with choice-based training directly related to their content area and grade level. Kara also collaborates with her PD director in the development of support systems for instructors. Kara talks about her keen interest in differentiation and her desire for collaboration in the following quote:

I am a big proponent for differentiation. So, I will always structure in a way that provides choice and differentiation. Sometimes, that can get tricky when I am all by myself; so, in those scenarios I do like a co-facilitator but it may be that we are not in the same room but we actually split off into separate rooms. (Kara)

As an administrator, Jamie builds relationships with all PD facilitators in the professional learning department. Her position provides ample opportunities for building and maintaining relationships with all her colleagues, including those who do not work closely with her in program development. As Jamie mentions in the following quote, she co-facilitates PD with her colleagues and believes that doing so improves learning.

Sometimes I’m alone and sometimes collaborate with others, but I do prefer to collaborate with others. Just because I think it enhances the learning for everyone. I feel like I learn a lot when I provide opportunities for professional learning and I learn just as much from the other people as they might learn from me so I prefer the collaboration. (Jamie)

The second type of relationship, which we turn to next, deals with relationships facilitators build with teachers.

Relationships with the Teachers

Teachers constitute the largest segment of professional development participants. Casey, Kara, and Jamie build and maintain relationships with teachers in order to
advance teachers’ instructional knowledge and skill sets. Casey said that she has been working with teachers in six school districts for two years. In her work with school districts, she has developed and maintained relationships with teachers in all districts she has been working in. In the following quote, Casey specifically referred to the importance of relationships with teachers and to receiving honest and useful feedback about the PD sessions she facilitates:

So, how can I take my style and tweak it based on their feedback. I think that’s essential to the work we do. And I can’t build relationships with them if I don’t ask them what they think. That’s a big piece of our work. Or at least, from my experience here it has been building relationships and getting the adults I work with to trust me and then maintain that trust. (Casey)

Kara says that the PD should be long enough to provide hands-on practice time for teachers. The practice time provides the opportune time to develop one-on-one connection with teachers. This relationship enables the PD facilitator to check with teachers about additional needs and support as they implement what they have learned in the PD session.

Ideally, I would always provide implementation time. It needs to be long enough to play around the new idea, new concept or the new tool and actually start using it. (Kara)

As Jamie mentioned, PD facilitators’ relationship with prospective PD teacher attendees begins way before the PD sessions begin. Relationship-building begins the moment PD facilitators embark upon the PD needs assessment process. They communicate with teachers regularly to narrow down both scope and focus of a given PD event. This evolves into a relationship between the facilitators and the teachers and goes on as long as facilitators work in their district.
A lot of times in preparation I'll interview folks and I'll send out a survey ahead of time or I'll send out the actual agenda and give them a power-point or put it together on a Web site so that they can give me feedback and tell me if I'm on track and if it's not meeting what they think it should do, then I change it. (Jamie)

The third type of relationship deals with relationship-building with school leaders, to which we turn next.

**Relationships with the School Leaders**

Casey, Kara, and Jamie build and maintain relationships with school leaders including the school principals and instructional coaches. Through these relationships, they are able to check if PD sessions they lead address teachers’ needs. Relationships also help with getting more transparent and timely feedback to PD facilitators. Follow up visits and activities are organized with assistance from school leaders. Thus, the more connected a PD facilitator is to the school leaders, the more cooperation s/he is likely to receive. Following are examples of these relationships Casey forges:

I try really hard to collaborate with people in district like the principal and the instructional coaches to make sure it fits to what they’re working in… (Casey)

And then, at the end of a session, what I also try to do is some sort of a follow up with whoever asked me to come. So, if it’s principal or coach, it would be like OK so, in a month, can I come with you to walkthroughs and see how it’s going or in two weeks, they are going to email, so what…what is the next step? (Casey)

Kara similarly talks about her relationship with the instructional coach at a school that she works with. Through her collaboration with the instructional coach, she is able to organize a follow up activity after her PD sessions. Kara said:

So, I actually partnered with an instructional coach and we went through each staff member and put them in three categories. If this is somebody that’s doing OK, they are going to go on their own, is this somebody that the coach just touch-
As an administrator at her institution, Jamie maintains relationships with school leaders at all levels and these relationships enable her to organize various activities prior to, during, and following PD sessions.

In summary, all three facilitators consider relationship-building as an essential part of their professional role. Hence, they invest time and energy in building close connections with their colleagues, teachers, and school leaders.

The fourth theme concerns roles. Thus, it is to a discussion of this theme that we turn next.

Theme 4: Roles

There are some roles and responsibilities that PD facilitators assume when doing their jobs. The roles that Casey, Kara, and Jamie played when facilitating PD consist of the following: facilitator, model, relationship builder, life-long learner, and developer. Each role is elaborated next.

Facilitator. As can be seen in Casey and Kara’s descriptions below of what they do, their main role in their job is that they are PD facilitators. They guide, lead, and facilitate professional learning in their assigned school districts. Their assignment is often over a long period of time, which allows them to build a relationship with the teachers and to identify and understand their needs. They collaborate with their colleagues and instructional coaches at schools when facilitating PD.

I do a lot of training around the State of Iowa’s differentiated accountability model. (Casey)
…I am assigned to six districts and I’ve been assigned to them for the last two years. (Casey)

It was such a different way to use my education and training experience and I just fell in love with adults. So, I became a trainer. (Kara)

So, for example sometimes I am leading a workshop and sometimes it’s just me and sometimes I’ll bring in my colleague. Her and I will co-facilitate and sometimes we actually divide the group in half. (Kara)

In addition to facilitating PD sessions, Casey, Kara, and Jamie also model learning, teaching, coaching, and facilitating. We present what the three facilitators say in this regard next.

Model. PD facilitators, Casey, Kara, and Jamie see themselves as setting an example for effective learning, teaching, coaching, and facilitating. They assume this role in the classroom, among colleagues, and at schools when interacting with instructional coaches. As we read in the following quote, Casey strongly believes that she needs to provide exemplary experiences to teachers and also serve as a model of change for them. Casey said:

Well, I feel like, if you don’t model it and give kids, or teachers for that matter, an experience then how can you ask them to do that in their classroom and… (Casey)

And I have to model that. So, my job is asking teachers to change what they are doing and so if I’m not willing to do that, then I lost all credibility and I think that’s how you get better at this (Casey)

When asked why teachers should attend her PD sessions, Kara emphasized her role as a model of professional learning as follows:

I feel like I do a job of modeling. (Kara)
Likewise, Jamie is aware of this role of being a model for teachers when she mentions teachers influencing one another for change in their practice through coaching. In Jamie’s words:

You can have your crews come and talk. There’s only about 5 percent transfer to the classroom where it actually helps kids, inform better at school. But once you can develop it into a point and I use teacher leaders again where you can get them where they’re coaching each other and helping each other change their practice. And then you see kids in the classroom doing that and that’s in 95 percent. The affect is 95 percent transfer over to the classroom and you see students have taken the lead in their learning. (Jamie)

Relationship-builder is another role facilitators assume. In the next section, we will provide supporting quotes from all three facilitators pertaining to this role.

**Relationship builder.** As can be seen in the different types of relationships described in the afore-mentioned Relationships theme, one of the roles that Casey, Kara, and Jamie undertake when facilitating PD and organizing PD activities is that of a relationship builder. They build relationships with colleagues, with teachers that attend their sessions, and with school leaders in their districts. Considering the length of period of time they facilitate PD in their assigned districts and schools, there seems to be ample chance for them to develop relationships that support PD purposes. The following are Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s own words about these relationships that they build. Casey describes her continuous relationship with the teachers and specifically mentions her deliberate efforts to build relationships with them:

…but to me that’s been the most positive experience I’ve had with them is that I’m their person, they know I’m going to be there to help them. (Casey)

And I can’t build relationships with them if I don’t ask them what they think (Casey)
Kara talks about her relationship with her colleague and how beneficial relationship-building is to co-facilitating PD sessions:

One thing that I do like about co-training – if I am the one that’s speaking or leading, I want you as a co-trainer to collect valid data for me. So, what I want you to do is you are going to be telling me “hey, these people over here, they are really struggling with this, hey, these people over here just shared a really good comment or connection, you might want to call on them”. So, as my co-trainer, I need you to bring me the data because I can’t always see everything. (Kara)

Jamie describes how she uses her continuous relationship with teachers or school leaders while planning and facilitating PD:

Usually I could decide based on conversations I have with participants or people that work with participants. So, a lot of upfront conversations about why it is relevant and what should happen as a result of it. Kind of like your strategy for like basketball or baseball, kind of like your game plan. And you know that you want to have this outcome in the end. And then, the gift there, you might have, strike out some missed shots but in the end as long as people are working to process and to get that outcome, that either builds on to the next time or they can just say ‘OK, I can use this tomorrow’. (Jamie)

Another role the facilitators are expected to take is that of a learner, and we discuss that role next.

Learner. The role of being a learner is naturally taken up when facilitating PD.

Casey, Kara, and Jamie mentioned that they are continuously learning to keep up with the demands of their job. In the following quote, Casey refers to the changing needs in school settings and, hence, the need for PD facilitators to keep learning:

I don’t think there is going to be a PD trainer not need to learn because the needs of the school districts change so I’m continually learning which is good; I like doing. (Casey)
Kara considers learning as an integral part of improving what one does as a facilitator. She believes that it is not about whether one is skilled or not in the profession, but rather it is about growing through learning: Kara said:

You’re not either born a bad trainer or a good trainer; you can learn a set of skills. Uh, so when I instill on them that ‘hey, there is place to go to, let’s say, struggling with grouping, you don’t know how to group adults appropriately, for adult audience, that those are the things you can learn. So, I want to instill on them that this is, I keep going back to that Growth Mindset; you can grow your skills as a trainer. You are not either good or bad. (Kara)

Jamie believes that it is important for a PD facilitator to be a continuous learner. Similarly, she believes that a teacher needs to continually learn new ideas and acquire new skills in order to serve students effectively. In this regard, Jamie said:

If we're not continuously learning as adults, we're not going to be able to serve our students. Life is changing so quickly that technology has changed and what students have access to. If we are not those. Lifelong Learners and we are not continuously trying to keep up, then we are not relevant anymore. (Jamie)

The role of a developer is the last role Casey, Kara, and Jamie talked about. Thus, it is to this last role we turn to next.

Developer. Another role that PD facilitators assume is that of a program developer. Casey and Jamie are involved in developing PD programs in their institution. As developers, PD facilitators grow professionally and also continue to contribute to their profession through programs they develop. Kara is involved in the development of a support system for instructors with a focus on feedback at the work place. She works with the director of PD at her institution in developing this program. Kara describes herself in this role as follows:

So, no one was telling me ‘Hey, you are doing a great job in adult facilitation here. But you need to improve…’ I was not getting that kind of feedback. We
didn’t have a structure in place. So, I brought that need to our administration and said ‘hey, we don’t have this but I think this’d be very valuable’, and they agreed. So, they actually created a position for me. So, now I am working with the director of professional development and we are developing a program to support our instructors. (Kara)

Jamie developed “Professional Learning Series” which is referred to as the Admin Support Program. The program provides mentoring and support for school leaders, and is supported by the legislation. It is currently in use by the School Administrators of the state she works in. When talking about the program she developed, Jamie said:

So, I have developed Professional Learning Series, here, at our agency for leaders, principals and the leadership team about five years ago. And we took that structure and when the teacher leadership legislation came through we presented that structure to the state team for teacher leadership. We implemented it; it’s called the Admin Support Program. And now school administrators of Iowa have adopted it. That has had a growing number of principals engaged in that since 2014. (Jamie)

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the professional development trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development. PD facilitators that participated in this study were involved in PD activities in a school district in the Midwest. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?
2. How do trainers facilitate professional development?
3. How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives of their professional development?
4a. Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?
    b. Why do they think their approach is effective?

Participants’ answers to the interview questions showed that the trainers’ goals and objectives of professional development included recognizing, affirming, and
honoring teachers’ expertise, keeping teachers on task and focused on the PD objective, making training sessions engaging, stimulating, and fun, promoting professional growth, fostering learning, encouraging collaboration, promoting differentiation, providing hands-on experience, and making the PD sessions relevant to teachers’ needs and interests. PD facilitators facilitated PD by conducting needs assessment and setting goals prior to their PD sessions, using afore-mentioned PD facilitation strategies during PD sessions, and seeking feedback after facilitating their PD sessions. PD facilitators knew they achieved their goals and objectives when they received feedback from teachers and school leaders who requested the PD sessions and also when they actually visited schools to see teachers implementing what they gained in PD. PD facilitators facilitated PD in the manner they did for valid reasons including carrying out needs assessment, setting goals, engaging all attendees in PD sessions, providing choice, tapping into teachers’ experiences, addressing teachers’ PD needs, and seeking feedback to ensure that their PD sessions were effective. PD facilitators also believed that planning interactive and hands-on PD sessions made their PD facilitation effective.

The four themes that emerged from the above-mentioned findings included: PD facilitators’ views, their expertise, the relationships that PD facilitators build, and the roles that PD facilitators assume when doing their job.

In the next chapter, the findings reported in this chapter will be discussed, implications of the results will be given, and recommendations for practice and future research will be provided.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate trainers’ perspectives on teacher professional development. Professional development is believed to have a positive impact on teachers’ attitudes to learning, teaching, and their own instructional practices. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?
2. How do trainers facilitate professional development?
3. How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives of their professional development?
4. a. Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?
    b. Why do they think their approach is effective?

The findings for these questions were reported in the previous chapter and are discussed in this chapter. This chapter concludes with implications and suggestions for future research directions. The discussion of findings for each question is presented next.

Discussion of Findings per Research Question

Research Question 1: What goals and objectives do trainers set for their professional development sessions?

Findings of this study showed that PD facilitators set goals and objectives for PD prior to their specific PD sessions based on the PD needs of school districts and teachers. When the facilitators receive a PD request from a school district, they first conduct needs
assessment and base their PD goals on the needs of schools. Hence, there is an alignment of PD goals and PD needs. The facilitators who participated in this study plan and execute their professional development activity with a focus on teachers’ targeted needs, which is much more valuable for teachers than a professional development with a general content focus. Their philosophy and practice are in keeping with what researchers have found to be most effective (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2011). These researchers have emphasized the importance of shared goals in a PD partnership, which means that professional development achieves its goals as long as goals are shared by the PD provider and the PD requesting parties. Considering Casey, Kara, and Jamie as one party of such PD partnership, it can be said that they based their goals and objectives of specific PD sessions on the PD needs of teachers, the other party in the PD partnership. Determining the goals before their specific PD sessions, Casey, Kara, and Jamie communicated with teachers and school leaders during their needs-assessment process. In a school district where teachers and school leaders work to improve professional development, teachers’ classroom practices are often aligned with the educational goals of the school district. So, Casey, Kara, and Jamie who communicated with both teachers and school leaders reported considering the educational goals in school districts in their professional development plans. The facilitators’ practice is in accord with best practices found and recommended by researchers. For example, Avalos (2011) and Wei et al. (2009) found that change in teachers’ practice is triggered when PD developers consider educational goals that school districts adopt in planning PD. Educational goals in schools and districts may include closing the
achievement gap between low-SES and more advantaged students, improving literacy levels, or increasing accountability. Teachers’ classroom practices and curriculum objectives play a central role in terms of PD. Teachers often tend to embrace new ideas and concepts provided in PD when they believe the content of PD is consistent with their curriculum goals. They also think that PD is congruent with their curriculum goals when it is aligned with school district goals. Similarly, Garet et al.’s, (2001) results showed that teachers improved their knowledge and skills through PD when PD was consistent with teachers’ instructional goals and aligned with district and state standards as well as coherent with their other PD activities.

Casey, Kara, and Jamie used their needs-assessment process to make their PD sessions consistent with attendees’ PD needs and, throughout the entire sessions, ensured that teachers get what they need in PD. In this regard, findings of the relevant literature support the current study findings about how PD facilitators determined goals and objectives for their specific PD sessions.

Current study findings also showed that Casey, Kara, and Jamie had some general primary goals for PD, which they incorporated in the goals of specific PD sessions. Their general primary goals were about prioritizing teacher growth and learning, recognizing the expertise among teachers, making the sessions engaging and stimulating, ensuring differentiation and relevancy, facilitating learning through hands-on activities, obtaining better student outcomes, and collaboration among teachers. All these primary goals that PD facilitators had seem to focus on improving teacher quality and bringing about change in teachers in general. Literature review in this study indicate that partnerships for PD,
such as the partnership between PD facilitators and school districts discussed in this study, aim at improving teacher quality and student learning as well as triggering change in teaching profession (e.g., Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009). Teacher change, on the other hand, is about positive change in teachers’ practice and attitudes toward teaching and learning through PD and, ultimately, improvement in student achievement.

As described above, Casey, Kara, and Jamie engaged in a bi-directional goal setting for their PD sessions: (1) they conducted needs-assessment to know what teachers needed and based the goals for PD on their needs and (2) they also incorporated what they thought were general primary PD goals in goals and objectives for specific PD sessions. As can be seen above, PD facilitators’ goal setting paralleled goal setting practices found in the literature. The way facilitators facilitate PD and why they facilitate it the way they do is discussed next.

Research Question 2: How do trainers facilitate professional development?

Goals and objectives that PD facilitators set for PD have been discussed above. Based on those goals and objectives, Casey, Kara, and Jamie facilitated their PD.

First, Casey, Kara, and Jamie described the work setup in which they offer PD facilitation as a long-term-assignment environment. Casey, for example, said that she worked in her current school district for the last four years (p.1) and she worked with some other schools separately for the last two years (p.10). Jamie also said that she developed a professional learning tool, named Admin Support, and they have been using it for about 5 years. She has been in her administrative position, in the same area, long enough to develop and use a professional learning tool. From this, we understand that their work
environment allows long-term relationships in PD. This finding is corroborated by many researchers who emphasize the importance of sufficient amount of time that teachers need when they participate in PD (e.g., Borko et al., 2000; Boyle et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) in order for change to take place in their attitudes, beliefs, and practice. Also, the three facilitators recognize that adequate participation duration in PD activities positively impact teachers’ preparedness, classroom practices, and attitudes. Such positive results are not possible to take place when PD sessions are short. Research reported by Bullough (2009) confirms the fact that short-term PD workshops do not help create meaningful and positive change in teacher practice. In this regard, it can be said that Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s work setup allowed their teacher participants to engage in PD long enough to internalize the knowledge and skills shared in the PD thereby leading to a change in teachers’ classroom practice. Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s PD approaches align with teacher change research findings. Researchers (Boyle et al., 2005; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Dyson, 2007; Guskey, 2002; Parise & Spillane, 2010) found that PD must prompt change in teachers’ attitudes towards teaching and learning and in their classroom practices.

Secondly, when facilitating PD, Casey, Kara, and Jamie used various strategies and focused on honoring and involving each teacher’s voice; removing themselves from the stage and making the teachers be at the center of the stage; tapping into teachers’ experiences and expertise; promoting active and transparent participation; and considering themselves as sharers, but not the only source, of knowledge. They set up PD activities to let teachers share ideas and experiences as in peer-coaching that involves
improving teaching practice and encouraging collaboration among teachers. Thus, by removing themselves from the stage and placing teachers at the center of the PD, the facilitators create an environment where teachers can share expertise, classroom strategies, and peer-coach each other. In this way, they help create a culture of collaboration among teachers. Being at the center of the stage provides the opportunity for teachers to focus on the subject matter that teachers value and make them, in a sense, co-facilitators of the discussion. Casey, Kara, and Jamie communicated with teachers in their needs-assessment process to ensure that their PD sessions addressed teachers’ PD needs and interests. Hence, before beginning their sessions, facilitators focus on the PD content and later, the content focus is centered around teachers’ discussions. Again, the practice of the three facilitators align with findings researchers reported about focusing PD activities on content including enhancing teachers’ knowledge, instructional practice, and student outcomes (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Desimone, 2009; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005). Also, the immediate feedback during PD, discussing instruction with other teachers, and reflecting on instruction in Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s PD sessions can be considered active learning opportunities, which is an important aspect of PD.

Finally, Casey, Kara, and Jamie collaborated with their colleagues and school leaders including administrators, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches when facilitating PD. With their colleagues, they shared PD duties, did differentiation, and were able to reach wider audiences. To identify teachers’ PD needs, understand the culture among teachers, and follow up with schools after PD, all three PD facilitators collaborated with school administrators, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches in
school districts. Their collaborative activities are similar to those found in PD partnerships such as professional development schools (Martin et al., 2011) university-school partnerships (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012; Crawford et al., 2008) and also in professional learning communities (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2017; DuFour & DuFour, 2013). In such partnerships, PD activities range from solving issues and addressing challenges that teachers encounter daily to supporting teachers’ continuing professional growth and helping them to be more reflective.

As mentioned above, PD facilitators set goals and objectives for their PD sessions based on teachers’ needs and interests, and their facilitation is closely guided by these goals and objectives. The facilitators, however, do need to know when and if they have achieved their PD goals, and that is the question that we discuss next.

**Research Question 3: How do trainers know they achieved their goals and objectives of their professional development?**

Following their PD sessions, Casey, Kara, and Jamie shared that they organize a variety of post-PD activities to determine if they have achieved their PD goals and objectives. They said that they used a variety of methods including: checking with the attendees for immediate feedback at the end of their PD sessions; visiting schools and observing teachers when applying new strategies and concepts they have learned in their classrooms; reviewing data to see change in teachers and search for indicators of positive student growth; administering surveys; and collaborating with instructional coaches to schedule follow-up sessions. These post-PD activities are an ongoing part of PD process for teachers. PD facilitators used feedback from teachers and school leaders as one way
to determine effectiveness of their PD. These facilitators’ feedback gathering and giving is in accord with researchers who assert that a clear sign of PD effectiveness can be obtained through feedback in follow-up activities (Ingvarson et al., 2005; Shortland, 2010). Also, feedback obtained in follow-up sessions means that teachers continue to actively engage in PD, and it becomes an integral part of their profession. The feedback is instructive to the facilitators because it tells them whether or not teachers continue to discuss and share ideas and experiences they learned from PD.

Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s relationships with teachers in their assigned school districts enabled them to communicate with teachers both prior to and following their PD sessions. Facilitators’ relationships with the teachers were based on trust and support, which welcomed both positive and negative feedback. The PD environment the three participants create encourages teachers to provide honest feedback. All three PD facilitators chose to act as a sharer of knowledge rather than a single source of it. This manner provided comfort and trust for teachers that attended the PD sessions. PD facilitators’ search for feedback on the effectiveness of their PD sessions and their follow-up activities indicate that PD they offered was a continuous effort which provided consistency between PD and teachers’ instruction. Wei et al. (2009) stated that non-continuous PD workshops do not usually offer an alignment between the PD content and teachers’ practice.

As can be seen, PD facilitators searched for feedback to ensure they achieved their PD goals and objectives. Feedback also meant that they continued to work with their school districts: their PD sessions were not one-time workshops but ongoing and
supportive efforts. In this regard, feedback becomes an integral component in continuous professional learning. Next, we turn to why PD facilitators do what they do and in the manner they do it.

**Research Question 4a: Why do trainers do what they do and in the manner they do it?**

Casey, Kara, and Jamie conduct needs assessment prior to their PD sessions in order to align their PD goals with teachers’ PD needs and interests. They do this so as not to create a disconnect between the content of their PD sessions and teachers’ PD needs. Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s needs-assessment processes aim at providing consistency and relevance with teachers’ PD needs.

Also, while facilitating PD, Casey, Kara, and Jamie wove teachers’ experiences into the PD sessions, which help connect teachers’ practice with the PD content. Facilitators provided hands-on opportunities to engage the attendees with the content and to provide them with examples of how to implement them. These hands-on activities and relevant content were directly tied to teachers’ instructional needs. Kara underscored the value of relevance in PD by saying that teachers should be able to “take away something they can apply in their classroom tomorrow” (p.14). The issue of relevance has been addressed by researchers such as Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) who stated that effective PD addresses teachers’ instructional needs. Other researchers (e.g., Loucks-Horsley, & Matsumoto, 1999; Wayne et al., 2008) echo Darling-Hammond’s sentiment in considering relevant PD content that addresses teachers’ needs as an essential characteristic of effectiveness in PD. Hence, it can be said that all three PD facilitators take into account the relevance of PD when facilitating their PD sessions. PD they
offered not only addressed teachers’ instructional needs but it also was consistent with school districts’ policies and expectations.

Casey, Kara, and Jamie viewed PD as both an important part of the teaching profession as well as an opportunity to grow in the profession. That’s why the PD facilitators continuously strived to support teachers’ professional growth by facilitating PD in the manner discussed so far. The way they facilitated PD supported professional growth and engendered positive change in teachers’ instructional practice. Casey said that PD “creates a support structure for teachers to change the way they do things and the way they engage kids” (p.12). Teachers’ continuous improvement through PD is aimed at supporting student learning. This type of positive change in teachers’ instructional practice is mentioned in the literature as a result of effective professional development (e.g., Boyle et al., 2005; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Dyson, 2007; Guskey, 2002; Parise & Spillane, 2010).

Next, the reasons why PD facilitators considered their PD sessions effective are discussed.

**Research Question 4b: Why do facilitators think their approach is effective?**

Casey, Kara, and Jamie believed that their PD facilitation was effective based on their PD goals and planning. They planned their PD sessions based on goals generated through thoughtful and careful assessment of teachers’ PD needs and interests. Kara considered interactive and concrete PD sessions as effective, and all three facilitators mentioned the need for including hands-on activities for teachers to engage in during PD
sessions Through hands-on activities, teachers are able to construct relevant knowledge in effective PD as emphasized by researchers such as Hausfather (2001).

Based on the feedback that they get from teachers, PD facilitators can determine the strengths of their PD session. It also gives them insights into adjustments that need to be made in future PD activities. PD facilitators in this study conducted a number of post-PD, follow-up activities including use of surveys, communicating with school leaders, and observing teachers in their classrooms. The three facilitators evaluate effectiveness of what they do by how well teachers implement what they have learned from the PD activity. Researchers (e.g., Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2002) assert that observed change in teachers’ instructional practice is one way to evaluate PD effectiveness.

PD facilitators, Casey, Kara, and Jamie, used surveys to get feedback from teachers, visited schools to observe teachers in classrooms, and collaborated with instructional coaches to organize follow-up sessions. They triangulate the data they glean from these different sources to determine their PD effectiveness. The three facilitators’ methods of gathering feedback are in keeping with research recommendations. For example, Ingvarson et al. (2005) and Shortland (2010) pointed out that different models of PD include feedback as an indicator of PD effectiveness and a source of sustained support. Researchers also believe that post-PD support is based on feedback provided by the attendees at the end of the PD sessions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Shortland, 2010).
Hence, both in the beginning and at the end of their PD sessions, the three facilitators ensured that their PD was effective, based on their own views of effective PD and the feedback provided by attendees.

This section included a discussion of the study findings in reference to the major research questions. Next, themes that emerged from the data are discussed.

**Themes and Key Elements of Effective Professional Development**

Based on the participants’ responses to the interview questions, the following four themes emerged: PD facilitators’ *views*, their *expertise, the relationships* that PD facilitators build, and *the roles* that PD facilitators take up when doing their jobs. These four themes and their sub-themes will be discussed in light of the elements of effective professional development theorized by Desimone (2009).

Desimone (2009) proposed a theoretical framework for increasing the quality of professional development provided to teachers (Desimone, 2011; Desimone & Garet, 2015), consisting of the following key elements: *content focus, coherence, active learning, duration, and collaboration*. Figure 2 shows the themes corresponding to Desimone’s five key elements.
Facilitators’ Views Related to PD Content

Views theme is among the themes that emerged from the findings of this study, and refers to how the participants considered learning as an ongoing endeavor that ultimately supports students. They also think that people learn best by doing through hands-on experiences, and what teachers learn from PD must be relevant and applicable to their classroom practice. Hence, the content of PD must be relevant to teachers’ classroom needs and interests. Heller et al. (2012) found that teachers made the most of professional development with a content focus as it supported their instructional needs.

Content is the first key element in Desimone’s (2009) theoretical framework of effective PD. Researchers (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Thurlings & den Brok, 2017) support Desimone’s inclusion of content as an essential element, and contend that content refers to teachers’ gains through professional development, the subject matter knowledge, and the knowledge of students’ ways of learning Knowledge of students’
ways of learning and teachability of the content refer to the pedagogical content knowledge (Deng, 2018), which is described in the literature as among the most important categories of teachers’ professional knowledge base. In this study, Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s views on PD learning align with the findings about PD content-focus in the literature. Based on analysis of their responses, Casey, Kara and Jamie plan the content of their PD sessions on the goals and objectives that they develop after assessing teachers’ PD needs and interests. That is, their PD is focused on content that is closely aligned with teachers’ needs and interests.

Facilitators’ Views Related to Active Learning

Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s views on learning and teaching in PD propel the active engagement embedded in the PD learning opportunities. All three facilitators emphasized the importance of hands-on experiences as they prove them with ways to thoughtfully apply the minds-on knowledge they gained in the PD sessions. After the hands-on practice, teachers feel more comfortable to implement their newly acquired knowledge and skills in their own classrooms. Makopoulou and Armour (2011) viewed active engagement in learning as an active construction of solutions to instruction-related questions and believed promoting active learning underpins effective professional development programs.

Active learning constitutes another key element of effective PD in Desimone’s (2009) framework. Active learning opportunities include observing teachers, being observed by teachers, reviewing works by students, developing class sessions, discussing instruction with other teachers, and similar activities to improve teaching. The
participants’ views on learning and teaching in this study indicated that all three participants believed in stepping aside and placing the teachers in the center of PD sessions and honoring the teachers’ expertise. Making the PD session teacher-centered enabled teachers to actively engage in learning. They shared their experiences, discussed instructional methods with colleagues, observed others, and provided feedback to others. Casey, Kara and Jamie’s practice is in line with PD best practices reported by Ingvarson et al. (2005) who found feedback on instruction and teaching practice, identifying points that need to be improved, and reflecting on teachers’ own teaching as active engagement in professional development. Thus, in this regard, PD facilitators’ views and practice address active learning opportunities, a key element in effective professional development.

**Strategies the Facilitators Used and Coherence as a Key Element of Effective PD**

Casey, Kara, and Jamie used their expertise to design and facilitate PD effectively. *Expertise* emerged as the second theme in the findings. *PD strategies used by the facilitators* while facilitating PD also emerged as a sub-theme under expertise theme. Facilitators used various strategies, within their expertise, to facilitate PD. For example, they conducted needs assessment prior to their PD sessions, which consisted of communicating with teachers and school leaders to identify needs and interests of the PD attendees. Facilitators set their PD goals based on teachers’ needs and interests. Given that this takes place in consultation with school leaders in the district, it implies that both the district’s and school’s educational policies and standards guide this process. So, their PD sessions cohere with the school district’s educational policies and standards and
teachers are aware of it. This coherence is an important concept and constitutes one of the essential elements in Desimone’s (2009) conceptual framework of effective PD. It is important because it refers to the consistency of professional development with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge, learning activities, and school, district or state policies and reforms. According to Desimone (2009), the alignment of professional development with district and state standards and policies and the extent to which these activities helped initiate professional communication among teachers are also considered as manifestations of coherence.

Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s PD sessions meet this essential element of Desimone (2009) since they align their PD objectives with district and state educational policies and standards, consult with school leaders when developing PD goals, and assess teachers’ instructional needs and interests.

Facilitators’ Long-Term Relationships in the School District, Their Expertise, and the Duration of PD

Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s work assignments in the school districts lasted for at least two years. Casey worked with the same schools for the last four years and with other schools for the last two years. Kara has been in the profession in the same area for about ten years. Jamie developed and has been using a professional learning tool for about five years. The third theme, relationships, that emerged from the data in this study showed that, during those long years, facilitators build relationships with teachers and school leaders. Their long-term relationships with teachers and school leaders, such as instructional coaches and principals in the district, help the facilitators when they
facilitate PD. Facilitators work with the same schools and provide PD sessions that are long enough to provide teachers ample time to practice what they learn in a sustained PD program. The more sustained the PD program is, the more likely it is for teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and practice to change.

Desimone’s (Desimone & Garet, 2015) conceptual framework for effective professional development includes sustained duration as the fourth key feature and suggests that ongoing PD throughout the year is effective.

Considering Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s work setup and their long-term relationships with teachers and school leaders, their PD sessions seem to provide sufficient length of time. Participants did not specifically mention a number of PD hours or a specific length for their PD sessions; however, all three facilitators stated that PD must be ongoing in order to bring positive change in teachers’ knowledge, skill sets, and practice. They are clearly aware of the importance of having sustained PD and not a one-time event in the school year calendar.

Collaborative Participation in PD and Facilitators’ Relationships with Teachers and School Leaders

At schools, teachers discuss how they teach their subjects, how students learn, and how teachers support student achievement. Instructional coaches provide support in such discussions, and they also avail themselves to support teacher professional learning. That is why they collaborate with PD facilitators in their districts as can be seen in Casey, Kara, and Jamie’s collaborations with instructional coaches and school leaders. Based on responses of the participants, teachers from the same schools and grade levels or the same
school district participate in the PD sessions that Casey, Kara, and Jamie facilitate. This collaborative participation supports their professional learning. Studies in relevant literature show that a positive correlation is found between teaching practice and collective participation by teachers in professional development activities (Kang et al., 2013; Randel et al., 2016; Voogt et al., 2015). Teachers acquire more in PD through interaction and collaboration with colleagues from the same school, district or grade level.

Desimone’s (2009) conceptual framework includes collaborative participation as another key element of effective PD and describes collaborative participation as participation by teachers from the same school, district or grade levels in professional development activities.

Collaborative participation, that align with Desimone’s description, in PD typify Casey’s, Kara’s, and Jamie’s relationships with teachers and school leaders and in their expertise of PD facilitation. Relationships constitutes the third theme and expertise the second theme that emerged from the data in this study. Casey mentions requesting a school principal to send special education teachers to her PD sessions (p.11); so, PD facilitators promote collective participation in PD. Also, the expertise theme shows that facilitators know how to step aside during PD to open doors to collaboration among teacher attendees. Further, PD facilitators’ relationships with instructional coaches contribute to extended collaboration among teachers when facilitators carry out post-PD follow-up activities at schools.
PD Facilitators’ Assumed Roles

Findings of this study showed that PD facilitators, Casey, Kara, and Jamie, assume various roles, described in the fourth theme that emerged from the data, when facilitating PD. They assume the role of a facilitator to facilitate PD using their expertise and different strategies in their PD sessions. They serve as models for professional learning when they step aside to let teachers use their expertise and learn from them during PD. They are avid relationship builders with colleagues, teacher attendees, and school leaders. By so doing, they assume the role of a learner who continually keep up with changes in their profession. They integrate the new knowledge they gain into the professional learning programs they develop.

In the roles mentioned above, PD facilitators support the key elements of effective PD. As PD facilitators, they ensure that teachers are actively engaged in hands-on experiences, and they provide active learning opportunities in PD. PD facilitators use their relationships building to keep in touch with teachers and school leaders. Also, they maintain the content focus in PD through their relationships with teachers, and nurture collaborative participation in their relationship builder’s role. Their communication with the teachers and school leaders help ensure the consistency and coherence of PD with teachers’ classroom instruction and school district policies and standards. The participants’ responses to the research questions show that their PD practice align with Desimone’s five essential elements for effective professional development.
Conclusion

Findings of this study showed that teacher professional development is an area where beliefs about teaching and learning impact and interact with classroom practice. Change takes place in teachers’ knowledge and skills and translates into their practice through effective professional development. PD facilitators’ views on various aspects of PD contribute to how they design and facilitate PD sessions. The facilitators use their knowledge about how adults learn and what teachers’ needs and interests are to plan the content and focus of their PD sessions. In addition to facilitators and teachers, school leaders are also an integral part of the PD process. Administrators are the ones who make decisions about what type of professional development is needed, how many sessions, and whether to have follow-up sessions so that PD is an ongoing process.

The key features of professional development for teachers include: content focus, active learning opportunities, coherence with school district policies and standards and teachers’ instructional needs and interests, duration as adequate amount of time allocated for PD, and collective participation of teachers in PD from the same school district or grade levels ensuring the effectiveness of PD. Based on the themes that emerged from the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the responses the PD facilitators who participated in this study provided reflect their deep awareness and thoughtful practice of these key features for effective PD.

Researcher’s Post-Study Impressions in Relation to His Pre-conceptions of PD

As I stated earlier in the introduction to this study, I had preconceptions about what PD is and how it should be done, based on my experience as a teacher and department head and, also, based on the literature review I completed for this study. A
number of issues surprised me about PD in the literature review and Desimone’s (2009) model of key elements of effective PD. I became aware that effective PD required enough amount of time for teachers to practice what they took away from PD in their classrooms. The findings of this study surprised me, especially the high level of dedication and commitment of time and effort of PD facilitators who participated in this study. Casey, Kara, and Jamie served the same school districts for more than 2 years. They built and maintained relationships, followed up, and were present for teachers in their position for such a long time. I did not expect the duration of PD was defined by the facilitators, in and through action, as an ongoing process. In a sense, the facilitators’ PD work is not bound by a time frame; it is an ongoing process of conscious and conscientious planning, refining, and integrating feedback so future PD sessions would be more effective than the previous sessions. In short, the facilitators continue to perfect their art and craft of facilitation.

Years ago, when I was teaching, I had the understanding that PD was all a one-way delivery of instruction. How I think about PD has drastically changed now. Now, I know that PD is not a one-direction interaction; it is bi-directional endeavor that involves both the facilitators and the teachers.

Another surprise from the findings of the study is related to the scope of facilitators’ expertise. The three facilitators in this study practically removed themselves from that instructional position to allow room for teachers’ experiences, knowledge, and skills to surface, to be uncovered and shared, to be processed, and to be valued. To me, this was an indication of a higher level of professionalism, and a clear manifestation of
facilitators’ expertise. It taught me the value of honoring the rich and lived experiences of teachers and the importance of tapping into that treasure trove of practical teaching wisdom.

Finally, in the interviews, I saw how powerful PD was. My preconceptions definitely and rightfully led me to believe that PD was both useful and necessary. However, my preconceptions were short-sighted; they could not foretell the power of PD and how interrelated its components were. For example, the facilitators’ relationships were strings that tied everything together: they were long-term, they provided insight into school system and their internal dynamics, and they supported collaborative participation in PD. Collaborative participation was illustrated in Casey’s request that special education teachers participate in PD sessions along with the regular education teachers, and her request was honored by the school’s administrator with whom she established and maintained strong relationships.

**Implications**

Based on the findings of this study, there are several implications for practice and future research directions. Implications for practice include the following:

The first implication is related to how best to assess schools’ and teachers’ needs for professional development. The more precise and comprehensive the needs assessment is, the more useful and specific information PD facilitators will have to guide their planning.

The second implication is that professional development is most effective when it is ongoing, collaborative where facilitators have long-term relationships with schools and
teachers. Administrators need to be mindful of the need for PD to be an ongoing endeavor, and not a short-term and infrequent activity.

The third implication is related to the critical importance of post-PD session feedback as it can provide facilitators with information about the effectiveness of professional development. More specifically, it can draw facilitators’ attention to what to do more of or adjust in their PD content and activities.

The fourth implication is related to the need for PD facilitators to step aside and put the teacher attendees at the center of their sessions in order to promote active learning opportunities for teachers. PD facilitators must be sharers of knowledge rather than the single source of it. By doing this, teachers who attend the sessions would tap into their knowledge and experience as they are exposed to new knowledge and skills. Thus, an implication for PD facilitators is to make the PD sessions teacher-centered and not facilitator-centered. When teachers are front and center, they are likely to feel that they are co-creators and co-facilitators of new ideas and methods that they and other teachers would use.

The fifth and last implication involves the constraints the public school system puts on teacher professional development. Constraints come in different shapes and forms and include scheduling issues, administrators’ support as well as approach to teachers’ PD needs that may adversely impact the effectiveness of PD provided at schools. These constraints may need to be considered within the conceptual frameworks of effective PD, such as Desimone’s (2009) conceptual framework. A theory, such as Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model (Leonard, 2011), that could help to examine interconnectedness within
the school system may be used to study the systemic constraints that impact the effectiveness of teacher professional development. The systemic constraints can be this study’s addition to Desimone’s (2009) model. PD needs to be studied with teachers and facilitators positioned at the center of the ecological system where each system has its own sets of supports and constraints operating on it. If more needed and necessary supports outnumber unnecessary constraints, PD will have a higher chance of being successful and effective for all the stakeholders.

Now we turn to the implications of this study for future research directions.

Directions for Future Research

The literature review in this study indicates that there is a paucity of research on PD facilitators’ views of professional development. In contrast, studies on teachers’, school principals’, and educators’ views of PD are abundant. Hence, a major implication of this study is the need for more and sustained research related to PD facilitators’ views of professional development. Their insights into issues and opportunities in professional development would substantially contribute to professional learning for teachers and more effective and productive professional development.

The three participants in this study were all from the same area. Future studies on PD facilitators’ views of teacher professional development should be conducted with participants from different areas in order to investigate approaches used by facilitators and teachers in different school districts.

Also, the three participants in this study were from the same institution that support professional learning in school districts. Thus, those PD facilitators were
institution-based. Future studies are needed to investigate views of school-based teachers who facilitate PD in their professional learning communities as well as instructional coaches who support PD at schools.

Another implication for research based on the findings of this study is to conduct a mixed-method study with a large pool of PD facilitators in different school districts in the same or different states in order to learn more about PD facilitators’ styles and content.

A final idea for a future study is to measure effectiveness of PD through systematic study of how teachers process and implement what they learn in PD sessions and how their new knowledge and skills impact students’ learning and achievement. That is, the focus of the study is on the impact of PD on teachers’ teaching and on students’ learning.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND

1. Would you share with me what made you decide to be a PD trainer?
2. How long ago did you decide to be a trainer?
3. How long have you been a PD trainer?
4. What type of training did you go through to be a PD trainer?
5. Who trained you, and where?
6. How long did it take to train to be a PD trainer?
7. Do you lead PD training alone or in collaboration with another or other trainers?
8. Do you prefer to lead PD training by yourself or collaborate with others?
9. What advantages are there to leading PD by yourself? What are some disadvantages?
10. What are advantages to co-training with others? What are some disadvantages?

WHAT

1. Would you share with me what you do as a trainer?
2. What is it that all goes into leading a PD session?
3. What are the primary goals you hope to achieve when you do a PD?
4. What skills do you strive to instill or cultivate in your trainees?
5. What dispositions, if any, do you hope to foster in the professionals you train?
6. What knowledge set, skill-set, and disposition-set must a PD trainer possess?
7. What philosophy, theory, model, and or training practice guides your training?
8. What activities do you like to do when you lead a session? Would you share an example of an activity and how you implement it?
9. In your opinion, what is the ideal length of a PD? And, why?
10. What is the ideal PD group size? And, why? What makes it so ideal?

11. What time of the day do you lead to hold a PD session?

12. What makes a PD effective? What makes it less effective?

13. What is your best PD training experience thus far? What made it so?

14. What is your least favorite PD training experience? What made it so?

HOW

1. How do you lead a PD session?
   a. What do you do before the session?
   b. What do you do at the beginning of a session?
   c. What do you do during a session?
   d. What do you do at the end of a session?

2. How do you decide or determine the objectives of a PD training session?
   a. How do you plan to achieve your PD training objectives?
   b. How do you know when you have achieved your objectives?
   c. How do you know when you have not achieved your objectives? How do you deal with the shortcomings?

3. How often do you lead PD sessions?

4. How do you decide how many trainees will be trained and who the trainees will be?

5. How do you know when some or all of your training has been effective?
   a. How do you know when some or all of your training has been ineffective?

6. How do you define effective PD?
   a. How do you define an ineffective PD?

7. How do you know when trainees are confused, unsure, and or need further guidance?
   a. How do you help them and what different guidance do you provide?
8. How often should teachers have PD opportunities? Why?

WHY

1. In your opinion, why is PD important?

2. Would you tell me why you train the way you do?

3. Why do you prefer to lead PD alone? Or, with someone else?

4. Why should teachers come to your PD training session(s)?

5. Why do you prefer to train in the morning/evening; for half a day; full day, or several sessions over a few or several days?

6. Why do you prefer to hold PD sessions at the beginning of the year? semester? mid year, toward the end of the year?

7. In your opinion, why is it important to have hands-on experience in a PD session?

8. Why is it important to you to get feedback on your training performance from co-trainers?

9. Why is it important for you to get feedback on your performance as a trainer from trainees?
APPENDIX B

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINER CONSENT FORM

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW

You have been invited to participate in a voluntary research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

The nature and purpose of this study is to investigate the trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development. Also of interest is what the trainers’ goals in delivering professional development are; how the trainers deliver professional development; and how they know they have achieved their goals in delivering professional development. It is hoped that their perceptions will provide insight into effective professional development and help improve the design and delivery of teacher professional development.

Trainers who participate will be asked to share their demographic information and to participate in audiotaped interviews. Trainer interviews will take approximately one and a half hours and include questions such as: What do you think the components of effective professional development are? What are your goals in PD as a trainer? How did you decide to become a PD trainer? What are some practices you consider effective in PD training? Why? What are the objectives of professional development? How do you obtain feedback from the teachers that you train?

Risk and Confidentiality

Risks to participants are minimal. The primary risk would include a breach of confidentiality. However, information obtained during this study will be kept strictly confidential. Trainers will not have access to one another’s responses. Only the interviewer (researcher) will know what each participant has said. The information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Benefits of Participation

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, your participation will increase understanding the trainers’ perspectives of effective teacher
professional development. Trainers and facilitators of professional development will be supported in their efforts to improve teachers’ knowledge and skill sets.

Trainers’ Right to Refuse or Withdraw

I, ________________, have been told that my participation is completely voluntary. I am free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, will not be penalized or lose benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Questions

I have been told that the investigator will answer my questions about my participation. I have also been advised that if I desire information in the future regarding participation or the study in general, I can contact Harun Parpucu at 319-830-2695 or parpucuh@uni.edu. I may also contact the University of Northern Iowa Review Board at (319) 273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

____________________  ______________________  ____________
Trainer Name  Signature  Date

____________________  ______________________  ____________
Researcher Name  Signature  Date

Audiotape Consent Addition

What follows is a consent statement for the researcher to utilize audiotaping during interviews.

I agree to allow audiotaping of interviews between the researcher and myself.

___________________________  ______________________
Signature  Date
Hello,

My name is Harun Parpucu. I am a doctoral student at the University of Northern Iowa and I am conducting research, as part of my dissertation study, on the trainers’ perspectives of teacher professional development. I would like to invite you to participate. Your email was provided by the Regent’s Center for Early Developmental Education.

Participation in this study involves meeting with the researcher and filling out a demographics questionnaire, which will take 10-15 minutes. Based on the information you share on the questionnaire, you would or would not be called for an interview. The interview will take about an hour and a half.

I would be happy to provide further information about the research. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 319-830-2695 or email at parpucuh@uni.edu.

Thank you,

Harun Parpucu

Doctoral Student

C&I, COE, UNI
APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Gender:

Degree hold:

Grade taught:

Subject taught:

Years teaching at school:

Years training teachers:

Number of professional development sessions/workshops you participated:

Number of professional development sessions/workshops you led:

Contact information: