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Perceptions of Efficacious Teachers Regarding Their Experiences of Professional Development: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This qualitative investigation followed a narrative inquiry research approach to determine how 5 teachers, identified as efficacious and committed to life-long learning, perceived the experiences of their professional development. In-depth interviews were conducted to answer two research questions: 1) how do efficacious teachers perceive professional development experiences? 2) Which professional development experiences do efficacious teachers consider the most and least important in terms of improving instruction? Data analyses included transcribing, coding, and constructing five narratives. Findings indicated that teachers value professional development experiences that offer relevant knowledge, time for reflective thinking, practical knowledge, and empowerment to make better choices regarding instruction. It was also highlighted that the lack of time and lack of discussing ideas or problems with colleagues was barriers teachers confronted when applying new learning. On these bases some suggestions were made to be given due consideration.

Introduction

Guskey, (2000, p. 16), defined professional development as "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they must in turn, improve the learning of students". These experiences are activities such as teacher research, consultation and planning, student assessment events, staff retreats, school and classroom visits, use of ICT (Internet and Communication Technology) for teacher development, and teacher collaborations or special projects (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein, & Gatti, 2000 Hawley & Valli, 1999; Speck & Knipe, 2005).Similarly, as posited by Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, (2000); Speck & Knipe, (2005), the goal of professional development is to enhance students' achievement. Yet, the relationship between the

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knowledge, skills and attitudes gained from professional development experience and how it influences students' achievement, has been difficult to determine (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004; The Education Trust, 2004).

Previous research found that teachers prefer those professional development experiences that are aligned with their beliefs and standards (Kubitskey & Fishman, 2007), and are learner centered. Research also reveals important aspects of professional development that increased the chances of it being viewed as successful. Studies show that teachers may be given some time to learn the new content and to develop the skills to read and reflect on the knowledge gained by the professional development experiences in the classroom (Smith & Desimone, 2003; Cranton & King, 2003). In addition to adequate time, teachers believe that an effective professional development is such which involves cooperative and up-to-date leadership (Brandt, 2003), an attitude toward continual learning and improvement (Cohen & Hill, 2000), and the formation or strengthening of learning communities and increased collegiality (Lauer & Dean, 2004). All of these findings are viewed as contributing a positive school culture, which may be defined as an environment in which teachers and leaders encourage and assist the learning process in order to practice, reflect, and grow together (Speck & Knipe, 2005). Such a learning culture may be viewed as a necessary element to effective professional development.

Researchers have examined various aspects of professional development, focusing on teachers' likes and dislikes (Buckshaw, 2006; Michel, 2005), barriers to implementing professional development (Justin, 2005; Klinger, 2004), and various approaches to implementing new knowledge and skills (Rock, 2005). Yet, little has been investigated in determining teachers' views of the experiences of their professional development especially of efficacious teachers and its connection to improved student outcomes, indicating a need to examine this connection (Borko, 2004). One key barrier occurs when decisions are made regarding professional development content without input from teachers or without consideration of learning styles (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). As a result, such teachers are often unwilling to participate in the school professional development plan. Darling-Hammond (1998) concluded that teachers need to determine their own professional development rather than having it solely determined by administration. In addition, teachers often become disengaged from any professional development experience that does not take their teaching experiences into account (Klinger, 2004). Despite its importance, there are very few studies examining how teachers actively contribute to a school or district's professional development

plan. Many previous studies examining professional development and outcomes used quantitative research methods to give insight into elements of professional development and enhanced accountability expectations. Such studies were unable to probe deeply into the perceptions of teachers about the impact professional development has on improving student outcomes (Creswell, 1998). In this regard, there is a need of qualitative studies to be conducted so that teachers' professional development experiences are probed deeply and understood through "thick rich" descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Likewise, little has been researched about how efficacious teachers determine the influence of their self-efficacy in terms of their professional development. Previous research on professional development looked broadly at all teachers, rather than focusing more deeply on efficacious teachers. Efficacious teachers can be viewed as "committed" teachers who have demonstrated a life-long love of learning and the willingness to apply the new knowledge or skills gained from their teaching experiences into the classroom. Indeed, such teachers who plan their instructional experiences based on their students' needs and work to improve their teaching skills throughout their careers tend to be life-long learners that are committed to increasing student achievement (Larson, 2003). That is why; the goal of this research is to determine how the experiences of efficacious teachers contribute to their professional development and what impact it has on students' performance.

Taking this into account, the aim of current study is to conduct a narrative inquiry in order to answer these research questions;

1. How do efficacious teachers perceive professional development experiences?
2. Which professional development experiences do efficacious teachers consider the most and least significant in terms of improving instruction?

The intention was to determine how efficacious teachers perceive their professional development experiences and which of these practices they consider the most important ones that may have positive impacts on students' learning.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research is generally used to develop a profound understanding of human nature or society. According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative researcher conducts his study in a natural setting, develops an inclusive, complex portrait of the phenomenon and makes a detailed analysis of the data to present a comprehensive view of his subjects. Taking this into

consideration, this study aimed to carry out an in-depth exploration of the problem and focus participants' words to present their views comprehensively; therefore, qualitative method was appropriate.

Creswell (2003) has further identified five approaches that may be followed in qualitative studies in order to explore participants' views. These approaches are ethnography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory & narrative inquiry. Each of these approaches may be applied to a specific purpose. However, since, the intention to carry out this particular study was to elicit participants' stories in the form of interviews and then retell their narratives in a collaborative association with their experience, hence, narrative inquiry approach best suited the purpose. Hence, a narrative inquiry approach was adopted in order to offer a comprehensive portrayal of efficacious teachers' perceptions of their professional development. Their narratives presented insights into what they considered appreciated or depreciated with regards to professional development activities and what barriers they encountered in this regard. This study is a blended presentation of these views, ideas and experiences that present significant insights into how efficacious teachers contribute to society by producing better students who might play their roles as better citizens in the positive development and wellbeing of society.

Participants Selection

This study used purposeful sampling to select 5 participants. Criteria sampling was the strategy employed specifically for this purpose (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, each participant was selected on the basis of three criteria: (a) teaching secondary school students (b) having 5 years or more of teaching experience, and (c) having high efficacy attributes. The first criterion was selected because the secondary stage is a transitional phase between the elementary and tertiary education and a significant phase with respect to student academic foundation development. The second criterion of selecting teachers with 5 years or more teaching experience defines a teacher with considerable professional teaching experience presumed to have developed competency in teaching. Similarly, since self-efficacy has been considered as an authentic agent in enabling teachers accomplish intended learning outcomes successfully (Bandura, 1997), that is why efficaciousness has been set as the third criterion to select participants. On these bases, five principals of the purposefully selected government high schools (located within a radius of 20 km from the target school) were approached to recommend potential participants from their respective schools. For this purpose, the principals were asked to identify at least 10 teachers solely based on the first two

criteria and not to use any other factors, such as personality or friendship. Hence, 50 teachers (10 from each school) were identified by the concerned principals. At this stage, the researcher (upon the participants' will and consent) conducted 5 surveys (1 in each school) in order to further select 5 highly efficacious teachers (top 1 from each school) and fulfill the third criteria. Hence, 5 teachers (1 from each school) who showed high self-efficacy attributes on the said scale were selected as efficacious teachers. In addition, participant teachers were asked to choose a (pseudonym) name of their choice to provide confidentiality of their identity. Similarly, the selected schools were also given pseudonyms.

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell, (2003) considers interview as the most recommended data collecting tool among the four primary qualitative data gathering instruments (interviews, observations, documents and audio-visual materials). According to Kvale (1996), interviewing involves an interchange of ideas between two persons discussing an idea of shared interest.

Since, this qualitative study followed a narrative inquiry approach and since such studies need the researcher to retell participants' life stories; hence, we as research team tried to conduct participants' interviews as informally as possible in order to motivate and encourage them express their stories freely. The intention was to let them unfold the meaning of their experiences and understand the phenomenon from their point of view prior to analysis and interpretations. Their fruitful and emotion-laden stories evolved from these interviews made this narrative inquiry research meaningful and significant.

Designing the Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was started with greetings, description of research purpose, research questions, and key questions followed by probes. Spaces were allotted to follow up questions as well as to reflective notes (Creswell, 2003). The open-ended interview questions were framed on the research questions and probes were developed for deeper understandings accordingly.

Pilot Study

In order to bring confidence to our interviewing skills by practicing face to face meeting and to refine the interview protocol (Kvale, 1996), pilot interviews were conducted with two teachers. During piloting, our learning was that the participants might be listened more carefully and intently. This caused in gaining a deeper insight into their experiences and a richer story of their perceptions. In the light of the pilot study, the study questions were

rephrased in order to refine them. For example, a participant narrated a recent event; then talked about an older one and again described some detail of the already narrated recent event. This led us reflect that we should focus an orderly timeline in designing the interview protocol for this narrative study.

Interviewing

The interviews were exploratory in nature with semi structured and open-ended questions. Following the recommendation of Kvale (1996), regarding the interpersonal behaviors necessary to conduct a good interview, we posed clear and concise questions, and remained gentle and sensitive to the participants. This attitude let the participants listen carefully and talk at their own pace. As researchers and teachers, we understood the subject area in order to steer the participant into the area of knowledge. It was important that we kept an open mind when interviewing participants. This study required teachers to recall their past experiences. Hence, we used field notes and follow-up questions to probe for consistency in the response, and reexamined an area in order to check for consistency.

When interviewing, it was important to take notes in order to recall information that may not be part of the recorded conversation. In this way, we were able to clarify what the participants said and checked with the participants for the accuracy of the paraphrasing.

Preliminary Phase

In the preliminary phase, direct interviews were conducted after school hours in the participants' school buildings. The purpose of these interviews was to begin the discussion of the participants' experiences. These interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, determined by the time the participant needed to finish relating their experiences. Following the initial interviews, we asked each participant to reflect more deeply upon the impact of the experiences. It was important that each participant took the time to reflect upon their experiences to recall events, beliefs, or impressions over a longer period of time. Each participant responded positively before the next face-to-face interview.

Follow-up

A follow-up meeting allowed us to check the accuracy of our notes, clarify the participants' responses, and ask any follow up questions that arose after reviewing the transcripts of the initial interviews. This meeting was between 45 minutes and an hour long. Narrative stories were handed over to all participants with a request to report to discuss corrections, clarifications, and elaborations.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Merriam, (1998) posits that being a complex process data analysis involves profound reading of the text in a search for the abstract concepts through inductive and deductive approach towards a systematic description and interpretation. Having said that, for the purpose of analyses, data was transcribed, coded, and then five narratives were constructed. The following steps were followed;

Transcribing

The data was transcribed after every interview. This made it easy for us to manage the transcriptions to be reviewed for emerging themes. The transcripts were saved in a secured file in my personal computer.

Coding

During coding, individual transcripts were described, classified and interpreted. Pattern coding was initiated that involved identifying, inferencing and configuration of an emerging theme (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The individual narratives were then constructed on the bases of the emerging themes.

Constructing Narratives

Interview transcripts were used to identify discrete experience segments of text in which the participants talked about a single event or experience. We reviewed the transcripts for places where there was change from one experience segment to another. We reordered the segments so that a logical sequence or story is created. Individual segments were used to demonstrate particular themes. The constructed narrative highlighted a sequence of experiences that reflected the experiences of the participants and the themes that emerged from them. Member checking with the participants added accuracy to confirm the reconstruction of these experiences.

Accuracy and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability were used to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study findings. Credibility, conventionally known as internal validity, establishes the participants' perspective as the determinant of believability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to five ways to produce credible data and interpretations. These are: an extended period of involvement, continuous observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. The utilization of all these five means is not necessary to check for credibility; however, to

achieve this end, member checking was conducted by having participants review the transcripts of the interviews (although 2 chose not to comment on them). The research achieved triangulation of data by using the field notes, and the interview transcripts. According to Creswell (1998), data triangulation is using several sources of evidence to determine a theme or perspective.

Transferability, conventionally termed external validity, is the second source of maintaining accuracy and trustworthiness in a study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is accomplished by a profuse portrayal of a wide array of information from the data collected in order to make transference. This study created five narratives to provide a thick description of the teachers' professional development experiences and perceptions.

Dependability involves noting down any changes that occur during the study. Two sources are suggested for maintaining dependability: field notes and an external audit. In this study, we kept field notes of the observations and interpretations to be depended during analysis to reach valid findings accordingly.

Confirmability, conventionally termed objectivity, refers to the confirmation of a study's findings by others. An audit trail and the inclusion of the field notes used to establish dependability may demonstrate confirmability by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are six steps in the audit trail i.e. raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information. Taking this into account, the raw data in this study were recorded interviews and field notes. Data reduction and analysis products included summaries from field notes, transcripts and preliminary coding and thematic analyses. Reconstruction and synthesis of data products were the narratives, descriptions of cross narrative themes, and conclusions. Process notes were research strategies and rationale, audit trail notes, and trustworthiness notes relating to credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Lastly, the materials relating to intentions and dispositions were taken out from personal notes, and predictions.

Findings

The five narratives served as key findings. All narratives revolve around two main areas i.e. i) participants' perceptions of professional development experiences, ii) the most important and the least important experiences of professional development. The narratives highlighted a third aspect as 'barriers to applying new knowledge' as well in this regard.

Sardar's Story

Sardar has the experience of more than 20 years at Government High School Charsadda. He enjoyed the challenge of teaching to a below average class that demanded individual students needs to be aligned with the course objectives.

Professional Development Experiences

He considered professional development experiences as learning opportunities. In addition to workshops and refresher courses, Sardar's view of professional development experiences included meetings with colleagues to discuss curriculum and participation in mentoring a colleague. For Sardar, the main reasons for participating in such experiences were to expand his knowledge of the field.

Sardar viewed diverse instructional experiences as opportunities to facilitate professional development. He believed that the collective impact of his diverse teaching experiences had been such that molded his entire thinking about instruction. He viewed many types of experiences as learning opportunities that led to his professional development. For Sardar, these experiences expand his knowledge as well as positively impact students. He said, "My professional development has helped my student outcomes by helping me view each student as an individual. Because I value the direct link to students, I am always mindful of assessing where each student is, his individual strengths and goals, and subsequently, knowing the next level to which I will support his achievement".

The Most Important Experiences

Although Sardar did not refer to any specific type of professional development experience as the most important one, he did indicate that he valued such professional development experiences that were aimed for a diverse classroom; let him to reflect on his teaching and how it impacted students and the one that involved group work. Moreover, Sardar appreciated veteran teachers, who provided practical information, and he valued open discussions with his colleagues targeting improvement in instruction. Sardar stated, "The learning I received from a master's degree in education combined with my practical knowledge of the field really changed my attitude towards literacy and assisted me a lot during instruction. So that was a real big part of professional development".

The Least Important Experiences

Sardar considers the instructional experiences that would not stick around to be exercised again, and those that did not provide preparation or support when applying new programs as

the least important ones. He did not like professional development experiences that do not involve administration in supporting the teaching staff and promoting an environment favorable for learning.

Barriers to New Learning

Sardar's process of applying new learning in the classroom included the ability to adjust any program to make it work in a diverse classroom. However, there were the things that impeded Sardar's ability to make those needed adjustments. Class size, bulky courses, and not enough training were these barriers. Sardar found that new and emerging instructional programs were designed for ideal teaching conditions, such as a class size of 18 to 24 students. In this regard he said, "Over the last few years, the class sizes had been 70 to 90 students. These extra numbers of students make a big difference in a teacher's ability to apply new learning programs. In addition, teaching the newly introduced text books that have many components is too weighty for the teacher. That is why, the paperwork involving certain types of assessment take too much time". These are the things Sardar considers as the main barriers to new learning.

Sultan's Story

Sultan had taught 7th at grade Government High School Pir Sabaq for 31 years. He believed that he would teach for 2 more years and then retire. As he reflected over his career, he felt that throughout the teaching career he has never felt that he has learnt the art of teaching perfectly. With every new day he comes across something that he has never experienced before. These experiences focused on improving the instruction and students' outcomes. Sultan felt that he is a life-long learner and understood the importance of continual improvements and learning because "teaching is an ever-changing art."

Professional Development Experiences

Every time Sultan reminded the students "It doesn't matter what your age is, you're going to be learning your whole life." Sultan viewed professional development experiences as not just a day away from the classroom, but an opportunity to learn something new and take it back to the students.

According to Sultan the term professional development is something that is going to improve him as a teacher. He said, "Improvement in my teaching skill has a better chance of improving my students' experience too, if I can bring it back to the classroom in some way,

shape, or manner.... specifically, to teaching and me ... it's workshops; it's courses; it is anything that will come together and help me grow as a teacher".

Sultan viewed professional development experiences as "getting exposure to a lot of different things" and as "opportunities to try different things." He believed that he tried to draw from the many professional development experiences he has been exposed to as he taught. And that he developed the conclusion what is of practical consideration for one student may not have such practicability for another and what works for one class may not work for another. The more experiences a teacher had to continue to gain during his journey as a learner, the more he had to offer the students.

The Most Important Experiences

Sultan recalled valuable elements of professional development experiences and application of these learning to the classroom over the course of his career. He was amazed at how much he could remember about his experiences and how, in some cases, he continues to apply some of these strategies today. Themes that emerged from Sultan's valued professional development experiences were meaningful and comfortable pace for learning. Meaningful events involved learning new skills and having the opportunity to practice these skills during the professional development experience.

Sultan's exposure to different experiences of professional development suited his belief in life-long learning. These experiences were those that enabled him maintain a comfortable learning pace, and provide continuous support. These valuable professional development experiences focused on him and the students. Sultan felt that these opportunities made him learn new skills or knowledge which he applied it right away.

The Least Important Experiences

Sultan devalued professional development experiences when they were difficult to be applied in the allotted time or lack a sense of a professional development plan. He also ignored programs that do not apply to the classroom setting.

Barriers to Applying New Learning

There are many frustrations when applying a new program or learning from a professional development experience. For example, lack of time, lack of knowledge when applying new learning, need for support from colleagues, coaches, or administration, and those programs of the professional development that do not satisfy students' needs.

Iftikhar's Story

Iftikhar has been teaching to 9th class since 1999 at Government Higher Secondary School Akora Khattak. He felt fortunate to live and work in the same town. His location provided Iftikhar to remain connected to the school even for sometimes during summer vacation as well.

Professional Development Experiences

Iftikhar defined professional development as "an activity that will improve my teaching." He believed that professional development experiences expanded his teaching skill, yet unfortunately, he could not connect these experiences to student outcomes. He reflected, "I never really think about the connection between the professional development and the outcome I get with my students, because once you're with the students you're not thinking". I don't know if that's a normal thing, but I just don't think about it, as far as the outcome as concerned.

The Most Important Experiences

Although there was no specific type of professional development experiences that Iftikhar preferred, he felt that he was at a point in his career where he could pick and choose the types of professional development experiences that he took interest in. Iftikhar was selective in the professional development experiences he attended, in part because when he started teaching, it was not a requirement. To maintain his teaching certification, he had to learn professional development course by attending professional education colleges.

Iftikhar likes experiences that opened a new door for teaching core areas like mathematics, writing, and reading. He said that it is not that he is not interested in the sciences or the social studies but he really thinks that he just wants to get students move along with the reading, the writing, and the mathematical skills.

The Least Important Experiences

Iftikhar does not like professional development experiences that represented ideal conditions and that involved training that did not match exactly how the school wants to use it. Many of the workshops he attended presented wonderful ideas but they couldn't be delivered in reality. The reality included large class size, emotionally and academically challenging students, and a daily schedule that was already overloaded. He provided an example of a specific reading program where the administration changed the design of a program so that it could apply to all students. At the training, he was instructed to use this program only for a

specific type of student. Yet, when it was time to apply the program in the classroom, administration required him to use it with all students which was slightly difficult because of overcrowded classrooms.

Barriers to Applying New Learning

Iftikhar felt that barriers to applying new learning happen due to over burden and facing students with disobedient behaviors.

Aftab's Story

Aftab has been teaching at Government High School Mani Khel for the past 25 years. He is teaching to seventh and eighth grade students.

Professional Development Experiences

Aftab stated that professional development is an experience or coursework that aims to enrich an understanding or develop a new understanding. In addition, professional development should support the individual teacher's meaningful acquisition of skills and understandings vital to developing the unique learning of every child.

In the past 5 years, Aftab had participated in 10 workshops and training sessions, and he believed that all professional development experiences were helpful. He never attended a professional development experience that did not offer new learning or skill.

The Most Important Experiences

While reflecting on professional development experiences which Aftab believed as the most important ones, are those which increased his knowledge about how children learn, as well as those which increased his personal understanding. He also appreciates the coursework which helped him gain insights into development of materials and content as well as into assessment tools and practices. Aftab attached importance to these experiences because they made him a better teacher.

The Least Important Experiences

Similar to Iftikhar, Aftab does not like professional development experiences that do not match with the school's needs.

Barriers to Applying New Learning

Just like Iftikhar, Aftab also considers over burden and teaching students with disobedient behaviors as barriers to applying new learning in the classroom

Sikander's Story

Sikander has been teaching eight class at Government Higher Secondary School PirPai for 1 year. Prior to that, he taught seventh grade for 4 years and sixth grade for 3 years. With 8 years of teaching in education, Sikander had participated in many professional-development experiences.

Professional Development Experiences

Sikander's philosophy of professional development centered on students. He chose to participate in professional-development experiences that strengthened and expanded his teaching abilities. Sikander felt that, professional development is the constant pursuit to become better and better. It is consistent learning, communicating, exploring, revising, challenging, and acquiring skills to best serve all students. It is team-teaching, peer-coaching, mentoring, creating and implementing for both students and teachers.

Sikander understood the importance of participating in professional-development experiences to improve student outcomes. He reflected about successful and unsuccessful teaching experiences to improve his teaching strategies. Sikander relied on the knowledge he gained from college courses, classroom experiences, and professional development to improve his instructional skills and improve student outcomes.

The Most Important Experiences

Sikander believes the most effective experiences have been those that are research-based and practical in nature. He explained that the advantage of a research-based course is that new knowledge has been presented to work effectively after having been careful studied and discussed. Sikander valued those courses that allowed the students to be their own captains of their ships to guide them.

The Least Important Experiences

Sikander did not like workshops or courses that don't directly improve teaching style. Specifically, Sikander did not like things, questions that are not answered at workshops as well as one-size-fits-all professional - development experiences. Sikander devalued professional-development workshops that do not promote asking questions.

Barriers to Applying New Learning

The barriers Sikander experienced when applying new learning for a professional-development experience were harsh realities, not being properly coached, and not being allowed to have conversations with peers. Sikander found that not being properly coached

before applying new learning was a barrier. Feeling comfortable and prepared were important traits for Sikander to be successful. Another barrier was not being allowed to have conversations with peers as part of the professional-development experience. He believed that conversations with peers were one way he learned how to properly apply new learning.

Interpretations and Discussions

This section describes and interprets the findings derived from the teachers' insights about their professional development experiences in light of the available current research. Based on the research questions, the discussion addresses three main themes (professional development experiences, the most important and the least important experiences and barriers to applying new knowledge).

In this study, teachers perceive content as an important component of professional development experiences. Teachers describe their most important professional development experiences occurred when the content was aimed to improve teaching strategies, and offered relevant and practical knowledge. Themes reflect both most valued and least valued elements that would affect the success of new learning and its application. Garet et al. (2001) supported this study's findings by suggesting there should be a balance between improving teacher knowledge and how students learn from their teacher's knowledge. Empowerment, working with colleagues, reflective practice, and applying learning are all areas that teachers believed engaged them in new learning. One key area of concern involves current practices of planning, because teachers' needs are not always considered. In a similar manner, Garet et al. (2001) found teachers perceive active learning as an important component of the professional development experience.

The findings of this study are also supported by Guskey's (2003) review of the 21 characteristics that teachers cited as most effective. Guskey's study suggested that enhanced content and pedagogical knowledge were the most important qualities for teachers. Related to these findings, Klinger (2004) suggested that all teachers do not have the same needs based on their teaching experiences and classroom expectations. Klinger suggests that planning carefully considers the "complex factors" of teachers' needs.

Teachers also do not like professional development experiences that do not include sufficient time to learn before applying it to the classroom. The study finds that teachers feel most professional development experiences too short to learn all the components of a new program. In a similar manner, Boardman and Woodruff (2004) suggested that teachers are likely to apply new learning if they are given time to learn as well as ongoing support and

feedback while applying that new learning. In addition, Smith and Desimone's (2003) study proposed that teachers preferred sustained professional development rather than the ones that only last a day or less. Smith suggests that teachers are most likely to link with student outcomes if teachers have long enough time to learn.

The finding of this study suggests that teachers highlighted the barriers that impede the application of new learning. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs, time restraints, and challenges regarding classroom management are examples of these barriers. The findings of the study concur with those of Justin (2005), who suggested that teachers experience personal, professional, and institutional barriers. Personal barriers that interfere with the successful implementation of a professional development plan make it hard to try out a new strategy. Professional barriers are the result of development experiences that do not meet the needs of the teachers. Institutional barriers, such as school culture, support, communication, and time, existed when colleagues or administration did not support professional development experiences.

Implications

Being a study with a small population makes it somewhat hard to generalize the findings to a larger population; even still there are implications which are theoretical and practical in nature.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study suggest that when applying new learning in the classroom, teachers were most likely to experience some barriers. Some teachers did not feel ownership of new learning whereas others did not feel they gained enough knowledge to apply new learning in the exact way the program was designed. Teachers decided to pick and choose "pieces" of the new learning, and therefore did not always realize the full benefits of the new programs. Kubitskey and Fishman (2007) supported the need for a follow-up workshop to review concerns and successes of the application of new learning and to review student assessments. They found that the follow-up workshop was a key element to long-term support. Clearly, teachers in this study echoed the need for this type of follow-up. Perhaps the lack of follow-up accounts in part for the inability of many of the teachers in this study to draw the connection between their practices and student outcomes. What was missing from the Kubitskey and Fishman (2007) model were some of the other influences on teacher practices reflected in the narratives of the 5 teachers in this study. The findings indicated that teachers desired more time with colleagues to conduct ongoing and informal dialogue to support their

application of new learning. Findings suggested that colleagues, coaches, administrators, and the professional development plan influenced teacher practices. Therefore, those influences also had an indirect impact on student responses.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings of this study, the following are practical implications.

1. Teachers define professional development experiences to include only in-service days. This finding suggests that teachers limit what they consider to be professional development experiences and that they need to develop a broader definition to include experiences that are outside of the in-service days. Without this broader definition, teachers miss the value of professional development experiences that occur beyond in-service days.

2. Teachers applied their observational skills opposed to formal assessment to evaluate the impact of new learning. This suggests teachers should receive more training and be held accountable for administrating more formal evaluation to provide more precise and consistent feedback, informing their practice as well as identifying potential needs for instructional adaptations and professional development design.

3. Some teachers did not connect teaching professional development experience to student outcomes. This finding suggested that more follow-up is needed to connect student data with a new program's intended outcomes to increase teachers' focus in student outcomes as feedback for the success of their instruction.

Recommendations for Further Research

On the grounds of theoretical and practical implications, future research is suggested in the following areas:

1. Replicate this study with a different profile of teachers, such as those randomly selected from staff rather than purposely selected committed teachers or teachers who perceive professional development as a waste of time.

2. Conduct a study to evaluate ways teachers could contribute to the professional development planning process.

3. Conduct a study to look for ways to strengthen teachers' connections of professional development experiences to student outcomes.

Conclusion

In this narrative inquiry, 5 secondary school teachers, identified as efficacious shared their professional development experiences. These teachers reflected on how they ensured student-learning outcomes by utilizing these experiences and how they encountered barriers during this process. The findings of this study suggest that secondary school teachers require greater input into professional development planning.

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