Chapter 106

Sharing Expertise Gained From Online Self–Directed Professional Development:
One Teacher's Journey From Classroom Teacher to Teacher Leader

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ABSTRACT

Evidence suggests that increasing numbers of teachers are initiating their own professional development through online channels, including social media, blogs, and websites. While research indicates that online self-directed professional development impacts teachers' classroom practice, it provides limited information about whether and how teachers share their learning with colleagues. This chapter examines one teacher's experiences engaging in online self-directed professional development, first as a teacher, and then in the new district role of Master Technology Teacher. The study found that, without the formal position, few mechanisms existed for him to share his learning. However, once formal mechanisms existed through his position as MTT, he was able to effectively share and impact teaching. The study reveals that his actions fell into three categories: reflection on practice, acquisition of knowledge, and distribution of knowledge, from which a teacher leadership cycle was constructed. The study also addresses the contextual factors that impacted his effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

While much has been documented about professional development (PD), its challenges and benefits, the research is clear that a one-size-fits-all model of PD does not yield the desired results: change in pedagogy, change in school culture, or increased student achievement. (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013; Hawley & Valli, 2007). In an effort to address the limitations of one-size-fits-all

PD, schools began offering job-embedded PD (Little, 2002). Job-embedded PD has many iterations including but not limited to professional learning communities, grade-level meetings, and the introduction of content area coaching positions. However, research again has demonstrated that many of these job-embedded initiatives have had limited success due to interconnected and sometimes competing factors, such as unwritten rules and cultural norms (Kurstedt, 2007).

As such, a new paradigm has emerged in professional development, which is sometimes referred to as online self-directed PD (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013; Flanigan, 2011; Lu, 2011). Online self-directed PD consists of teachers connecting with educators from around the world to improve their practice by engaging with social media sites, like Twitter or Facebook, blogs, webinars, and podcasts. The promise of this type of PD is that it addresses teachers' immediate needs, and is available to them on demand. Ferriter and Provenzano (2013) and others (Flanigan, 2011) assert that online self-directed PD impacts teachers' classroom practice and allows for those teachers to engage with colleagues from around the world. However, a void exists in the research with regards to whether and how teachers who engage with online self-directed PD share their new learning, and thus increase the expertise of their building colleagues (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Visser, Evering, & Barrett, 2014). Using literature and theory on professional development, teacher leadership, school structure, and teaching and learning models, this chapter describes one teacher's journey as he engaged with digital tools to support his understanding of pedagogy, and in turn, supported his students' learning and engagement. The chapter further explores how the experience helped him become a leader, sharing his learning with colleagues, when he took on the role of Master Technology Teacher, a new district position. In addition, this chapter highlights the need for literacy programs and other subject areas to incorporate 21st century tools to support students' development of 21st century literacy.

BACKGROUND

Prevailing professional development practices, teacher leadership, school culture, and teaching and learning models ground the chapter.

Professional Development

Traditionally, professional development occurred outside the classroom and has consisted of topics that may or may not be pertinent to teachers' current work. District offices or administrators often select the focus, form, and time of the PD and require teachers to participate, in other words, for the most part, "professional development [has been] done to people" (Flanigan, 2011). Not surprisingly, traditional PD has had a limited impact on teacher learning or student achievement (Fullan, 1995; Russo, 2004; Sparks, 2003). Many educators posit that the limited success of traditional PD rests on the beliefs that development and learning should be situated in teachers' day-to-day work (Education Week Research Center, 2004; Richardson, 2003). In addition, since the one-size-fits all model of PD supports the individualistic culture of teaching by occurring outside of teachers' classrooms—keeping teachers safe from scrutiny—shifts in school culture, pedagogy, or student learning rarely occur. Wood (2007) argues that effective PD should do more than just "…equip teachers with techniques, but widen their professional responsibility and hone their professional judgment" (p. 8).

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