DEVELOPING SELF-EFFICACY: MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND

PRACTICES AFTER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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Abstract

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This qualitative case study explored how middle school English teachers in one North Texas school district perceived professional development grew or hindered their self confidence. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy provided the framework for this study. Five participants from various middle schools in Southwest Independent School District (a pseudonym) engaged in semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences with professional development and how those experiences impacted them in relation to the four sources of information (i.e., enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological states) as defined by Bandura (1977). Findings from this study revealed that while teachers' self efficacy grew in response to professional development, oftentimes they had to supplement their growth by seeking out their own opportunities for collaboration with colleagues or attempting to implement what they learned with their students without the support of professional development facilitators. The participants desired for professional development to take their perceived classroom needs into consideration when planning for the training events and provide more opportunities for observation and feedback. This research contributes to the limited literature

regarding middle school English teachers and how professional development can be used to impact their self-efficacy, and therefore, student achievement.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to

my mother, Sandra Jeanne Reid, & to my father, Corey Daniel Reid,

for their unwavering emphasis on education and their unending support in my pursuit of

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Introduction

A significant issue in the United States K – 12 educational system is the student achievement gap. The achievement gap, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), occurs when "one group of students (such as, students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error)" ("NAEP Achievement gaps," 2015). While the data reflect that all racial groups have shown improvement in math and reading since the national assessments began, achievement gaps persist (Hemphill, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009; Hemphill, Vanneman, & Rahman, 2011).

Specifically, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has assessed students on the national level in fourth and eighth grades in math and reading since 1969. Historically, in these assessments, White students have out-performed Hispanic and African American students in fourth and eighth grades in both reading and math at the national level (Hemphill et al., 2009; Hemphill et al., 2011). Between 2007 and 2009, Hispanic fourth graders scored lower on math assessments than fourth grade White students by 21 points and Hispanic eighth graders scored lower than their White eighth grade peers on the math assessment by 26 points (Hemphill et al., 2011). The gap between Black and White students is 26 points in fourth grade and 31 points in eighth grade (Hemphill et al., 2009).

The gap exists in reading scores as well. For example, in 2009, fourth-grade Hispanic students had a 25-point gap and eighth graders showed a 24-point gap with White students. African American students had a 27-point gap in fourth grade and a 26-point gap in eighth grade with their White peers (Hemphill et al., 2009). Therefore, even though racial groups continue to

make progress, the achievement gap either increased or stayed approximately the same when students reached middle school.

In Texas, the achievement gap is measured by the passing of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Students are assessed in math and reading annually beginning in the third grade. The 2016 Comprehensive Report on Texas Public Schools (Texas Education Agency, 2017), which disaggregates students' STAAR scores statewide for the 2014-15 school year by race and ethnicity, shows that the African American and Hispanic population consistently score lower than their White counterparts. For example, 88% of White students passed the 2014-15 seventh grade reading STAAR test compared to only 69% of African Americans and 70% of Hispanics. The statistics are similar for sixth and eighth grades.

As a result of these persistent gaps, teachers, school districts, and local, state, and federal policymakers constantly reassess how education should be approached and measured. One of these reassessments culminated in 2001 with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), which had the overall intent of closing racial and socioeconomic educational achievement gaps (Anderson, Medrich, & Fowler, 2007). The act also placed new emphasis on standards-based classroom instruction and more stringent expectations for attaining and maintaining teacher certification (Hirsh, 2005; Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013) because teachers are central to student success (Koellner, Jacobs, & Borko, 2011).

NCLB (2001) stated that once teachers passed the appropriate licensing exams and qualifications (which may vary by state) and had attained their bachelor's degrees, they were considered *highly qualified* and were able to accept a teaching job (Karelitz et al., 2011). It also required states to make available to all teachers "high-quality" professional development (PD) on a yearly basis in order to maintain their teaching credentials and their *highly qualified* status (No

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Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). These trainings were intended to increase a teacher's knowledge about the subject he or she taught and skills as an educator (Borko, 2004; Hirsh, 2005). Title IX of the Education Amendments Act, which focused on equal education rights for students of all sexes, defined PD, as "high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom" (Title IX, 2006, 34(AvI)).

Yet, NCLB did not provide details about what constitutes a high-quality PD or how these trainings should be made available to teachers (Borko, 2004). Further, some critics contended that, "not all teachers are adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of today's students" (p 38) despite meeting the minimum teacher qualifications (Hirsh, 2005, p. 38). As a result, in 2015, NCLB was revised and renamed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* [ESSA]. This adjustment offered a more specific definition of PD, stating that they are "activities that … are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom focused" (Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015). In addition, the law mandated that these trainings should be designed to increase teacher knowledge of academic subjects, how students learn, and how to combine evidence-based and technology-fueled lessons into their daily instruction. These PD were required to be part of the district-wide improvement plan and teach teachers how to analyze student achievement from multiple data sources as well as on the use of data assessments. Furthermore, these trainings were to be regularly evaluated for effectiveness and provide follow-up instruction for teachers who needed additional support.

Although ESSA provided more details regarding the purpose of PD, it still offered only general guidelines for trainings. As a result, there were wide variations in PD by state. For instance, every four years, New York required teachers obtain upwards of 175 PD hours while

Missouri required only 30 hours of PD. In comparison, Texas state law asked that teachers complete 150 professional development hours every five years to maintain their *highly qualified* status (19 Tex. Admin. Code § 232.13). In addition, the PD requirements can vary between school districts in a state. For example, for the 2017-2018 school year, Southwest Independent School District (the site for the present study) required 48 hours of professional development, while a neighboring district only required teachers to obtain 18 hours for the same academic year. Because there tends to be no uniformity between states and no standard between school districts in a state, there have been some concerns surrounding the delivery, content, and effectiveness of PD.

Too often, PD are criticized for being "fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account what we know about how teachers learn" (Borko, 2004, p. 3). Also, Hill, Beisiegal, and Jacob (2015) contended that PD are often designed to meet district needs and interests rather than those of teachers. Sanders and Rivers (1996) and others (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 1990) found that teachers participating in PD often displayed a temporary decrease in self-confidence or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), as they struggled with new concepts introduced in the trainings. This is a critical concern, because teacher self-efficacy is important to successful classroom practice: When teachers feel confident they tend to foster the most growth in their students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 1990, Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Yet, even though PD is intended to improve teachers' practice, limited research has focused on how these trainings influence teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness in their classrooms (Allinder, 1994; Stein & Wang, 1988). Further, most of the studies on PD did not focus on the middle school level where students often lose their motivation in reading (Allinder,

1994; Stein & Wang, 1988; Goker, 2005). Finally, previous research was based on PD as described in NCLB, so there is little to no research on teachers' perceptions of the new PD practices as redefined by ESSA. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how middle school English teachers in the Southwest Independent School District (SISD[1]) perceived the PD affected their self-confidence and their classroom practices.

Specifically, this study investigated the PD offered by the SISD. In this district, teachers attended a weeklong program in August, prior to the start of school, called the Summer Professional Development Series (SPDS). These trainings were then reinforced in workday trainings (referred to as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) throughout the duration of the school year for a total of 48 hours of PD annually. In summer 2017, the weeklong SPD covered topics such as effective instruction of classroom curriculum, classroom management, and new assessment practices. The administration evaluated the teachers' implementations through formal and informal observations throughout the school year. This approach reflected this district's attempt to respond to the legislative demand to provide quality PD in order to help produce a qualified teacher workforce.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1989; Block, Taliaferro, Harris, & Krause, 2010) provided the framework for study. For the purposes of this study, self-efficacy relates to the teacher's confidence in their ability to implement what they learned in PD in their classrooms. Bandura (1977) defines four information sources that teachers utilize when building self-efficacy. The first, and most important source of efficacy according to Bandura (1977) is the

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[1] A pseudonym for this district.

enactive mastery experiences, which have to do with gaining or losing confidence when attempting personal mastery experiences. In other words, individuals learn something and then use it. If their efforts are successful, it will increase their expectations for success, whereas those whose actions fail are more likely to expect poor results. This sense of confidence translates to related areas as well. So, if teachers gain a sense of self-efficacy in one aspect of their practice it will likely make them feel more confident in other areas as well. People gain their skill through observing modeling of various skills and being given the opportunity to practice those skills (defined as treatment), which would be akin to the exposure in PD (Bandura, 1977).

The second most important source of self-efficacy is the *vicarious experience* in which the participant observes the act being completed by another person then uses that as a model for his or her own behavior. Seeing others complete an action successfully can result in the observer gaining confidence that they would also be able to achieve the same result (Bandura, 1977).

Verbal and social persuasion is the third information source and it relies on the power of suggestion to influence the participant's confidence to successfully accomplish a task. It is not as powerful as the previous sources, because suggestions of potential success do not override a "long history of failure" (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). Even if it is not as powerful as the other sources, it can support increased self-efficacy if it is offered with the other information sources. In other words, if you tell someone they can achieve a goal and model the action, they will feel more confidence in their ability to succeed.

The final information source, *physiological states*, recognizes that feelings of stress, anxiety, or other extreme emotion can diminish a person's self-efficacy instead of enhancing it. This does not mean that people should avoid stressful situations. Rather, it is valuable to confront these challenges and learn how to cope, so that these circumstances "can be controlled" and

"construed as less threatening" in the future (Bandura, 1977, p. 199). Therefore, teachers should be provided with skills, strategies, and a support system that help them to manage their emotional responses to implementing professional development in their classrooms.

The four sources of information help to determine the levels of efficacy expectations or how likely each source is to build or hinder a person's self-confidence. Efficacy expectations can vary by magnitude (e.g., simpler tasks lead to lower levels of self-efficacy), generality (how specific or general the expectation is), and strength (strong expectations of mastery tend to elicit positive results) (Bandura, 1977). Viewing this study through the lens of self-efficacy helped illuminate teachers' perceptions of how their experiences in PD contributed to their classroom practices and confidence in themselves as teachers directly and their students' achievement indirectly.

Statement of the Problem

There is a persistent achievement gap regardless of the educational reforms that have been put in place. Those gaps are particularly visible in middle school English, as students too often lose their motivation for academics. According to Hirsh (2005), professional development that is of the utmost quality is designed to help teachers improve their teaching skills, which will, in turn, increase student learning and narrow the achievement gap. However, researchers have noted several reasons PD are ineffective, from being fragmented (Borko, 2004; Nishimura, 2014) to being focused on meeting district needs rather than the needs of its teachers. In addition, limited research has studied PD designed to follow the more detailed guidelines offered in ESSA to see if teachers perceive they are effective in increasing their classroom skills and knowledge. Finally, questions remain about the extent to which PD influences the four factors of self-efficacy for teachers (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), which also support classroom effectiveness.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to come to a clearer understanding of how middle-school English teachers from one North Texas school district perceived the PD contributed to or hindered the development of their self-confidence. Further, it explored how their perceptions of self-efficacy did or did not affect their practice, such as how they chose to implement (or not) the content of the PD in their classrooms.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study focused on the perceptions of five middle school English teachers who attended professional development in Southwest Independent School District (SISD) through the lens of self-efficacy theory to determine whether their PD experience contributed to their self-efficacy and, in turn, their practice.

The research addressed the following research questions:

1. Do middle school English teachers perceive PD enhances or hinders their self-efficacy and in what ways?

   a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their self-efficacy?

2. Do middle school English teachers perceive their self-efficacy affects their classroom practice positively or negatively and in what ways?

   a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their classroom practice and in what ways?

3. What other factors of professional development do teachers perceive contributed to or hindered their sense of self-efficacy?

Personal Biography

As a middle school teacher in Texas, I maintain that in order for teachers to be effective, they must never become complacent in their own learning. I cannot expect my students to learn from me if I am not continuing to learn and grow myself. With that being said, teachers have a large number of demands placed upon them every day. The PD training offered by school districts must be worth the teacher's time. However, I have witnessed first-hand the general discontent teachers experience upon the conclusion of professional development, but wondered if the teachers thought these trainings were helping them become better practitioners. In fact, I have frequently left PD feeling like my time was wasted, that the strategies presented were irrelevant to my classroom environment, or that the training failed in its goal of making me feel confident in using what I learned in PD with my students. For these reasons, I chose to study how teachers perceive the current unique PD offerings in SISD and if they believe these offerings support (or not) their classroom effectiveness and self-confidence.

It is important to acknowledge my biases regarding PD because I taught in the district and in the grade levels in this study. The participants in this study are my colleagues and the professional development practices I researched are ones that I have experienced. However, I suspect that issues related to the effectiveness of PD go far beyond our district and our teachers. My intent in this study was not to prescribe a professional development program for a district to follow, but to conduct an examination of the professional development practices in a district as they occur naturally. I aimed to determine the areas of professional development in which this district excels at building teachers' self-confidence and diagnose the areas of professional development in which improvement is necessary with the hope that these findings shed light on potential issues and solutions for other districts as well.

Significance of the Study

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The study is significant for several reasons. One key reason is that even though public school districts in the United States must adhere to the professional development demands of *ESSA*, limited research has explored if teachers perceive these trainings result in improved teaching and student achievement. Other research has linked teacher self-efficacy to student achievement, but has not explored in what ways PD has contributed to teacher self-efficacy. This exploratory case study begins to address this need by focusing on a specific district in Texas and how the information presented in these sessions does or does not affect middle school English teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy. In addition, this study explored how teachers perceived their self-efficacy has improved or hindered their own classroom practice. The implications from this qualitative study should lead to research-based policies and practices to improve or support the current PD processes.

Summary

The demand for high quality, effective, and diverse teacher professional developments are prevalent in today's society due to the ever-increasing demands and standards placed upon teachers and schools in an attempt to address the achievement gap. The achievement gap tends to widen, especially in reading, as students advance from elementary to middle-level grades. In addition, Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy helped us to understand how teachers gain confidence and perceive their influence on their students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to apply the theory of self-efficacy to teacher professional development to better understand whether teachers perceive PD has helped build or diminish their self-confidence and how that confidence has positively or negatively impacted their classroom practice.

Literature Review

In general, research on teacher professional development (PD) provides evidence that trainings with integrated coaching and collaborative models, such as in a professional learning community (PLC), are more effective in building teacher self-confidence than their traditional "sit and get" counterparts (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Burridge & Carpenter, 2013; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Meister, 2010; Nishimura, 2014; Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cuminskey, 2013; Stewart, 2014). When teachers are expected and able to collaborate with other teachers, administrators, and PD facilitators, it allows for a collective teacher ownership for implementing new strategies in the classroom (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Burridge & Carpenter, 2013; Nishimura, 2014). It gives teachers the opportunity to figure out how the strategies would work initially with their students and to collectively analyze the success of the strategies after they have been implemented (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013). Because of this, researchers have looked at specific PD to see which were the most helpful in developing a teacher's skill and confidence in the classroom. Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, and Cobb (1995), for example, asserted that teachers need both theoretical knowledge and rich classroom experiences to be effective in their instruction. Other researchers found that teachers are more likely to implement teaching strategies discussed in PD if that particular approach is aligned with his or her personal learning style (Burridge & Carpenter 2013). Therefore, in this literature review, I will first provide an overview of the various outcomes that result from professional development (PD) followed by a review of school leadership as it applies to PD. I will then conclude with an examination of self-efficacy in the context of teacher professional development.

Teacher Professional Development

This section will begin by providing an overview of research associated with PD and then discuss the benefits of professional development and the likelihood of implementation.

Teacher Benefits

Typically, traditional approaches to teacher PD, referred to as "sit and get" professional development, involve a one-time meeting in which a professional development facilitator presents new information to teachers while the participants passively receive the information (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). In this PD format, teachers typically do not get the opportunity to practice with the strategies being taught, nor do they receive follow-up support as they attempt to implement their learning in their classrooms (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Despite research finding that "prolonged interventions are more effective than shorter ones" (Avalos, 2010, p. 17), PD is oftentimes approached in this limited manner (Nishimura, 2014). In addition, the passive learning tactics used in most PD (Darling-Hammond et al. 1995; Meister, 2010; Taton, 2015; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007) do little to motivate a change in the teachers' mindsets and approaches to classroom instruction.

In spite of the inherent weaknesses in the "sit and get" approach, research shows that teachers can benefit both personally and in their teaching strategies from alternate approaches to PD (Avalos, 2010; Beach & Willows, Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; 2014; Giraldo, 2014). Meister (2010) found that teachers gained the most knowledge from unstructured approaches to PD. In her 2010 qualitative study that focused on the perceptions of 10 secondary teachers with at least 21 years of teaching experience each, Meister found that all of the participants described PD as a self-journey, meaning they sought out the information, relationships, and strategies that they deemed important to their classroom instruction. These teachers chose and attended PD that they saw as a benefit to them in their classroom instructions. In this study, the participants engaged in in-depth

interviews in order to discuss their PD journeys. The teachers reported that their collaborative efforts with other teachers were more valuable to their teaching practices than any one PD they attended over the course of their careers. These teachers' focus on teamwork ranged from modeling a mentor's teaching style to partaking in both formal and informal conversations regarding subject area knowledge and teaching strategies with their peers (Meister, 2010). The participants largely had no strong opinions on their campus administrative teams (i.e., principals, assistant principals) being beneficial to their professional growth because they did not perceive them as influencing their teaching practices. Meister (2010) concluded that the formal PD their district offered was much less meaningful to their confidence and skill in the classroom than the relationships and informal learning they sought out and cultivated themselves with their peers.

Bifuh-Ambe's (2013) research specifically investigated the development of writing skills through PD. In this study, teachers participated in 10 writing workshop PD sessions and were expected to apply their new knowledge of the writing process in their classrooms. These writing workshops were geared specifically towards growing the teachers' content knowledge and personal writing abilities. Despite gaining writing skills through the trainings and becoming more confident in their ability to write academically, the teachers still did not feel adequate in their ability to effectively organize and implement writing workshops in their own classrooms. Those skills did not transfer to their classroom practices because the teachers did not have the opportunity to practice teaching the skills they were learning in the workshop (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013).

Some research did reveal several successful approaches to PD that benefitted teachers pedagogically as well as personally, however. For example, Giraldo's (2014) qualitative study explored the effect of PD on six new in-service English language teachers' classroom

performance in an English language institute. The participants engaged in a weekly workshop model of PD, and the impact the PD had on the participants was determined through two interviews and two classroom observations. The workshops entailed elements of reflection and collaboration among the participants and focused specifically on training the teachers on best practices in teaching English (i.e. teaching methodologies, student motivation, teaching grammar, and accounting for different learning styles) (Girlado, 2014). The researcher assumed the role of participant-observer and presided over the workshops.

Giraldo (2014) found that participation in the PD workshops had a direct, positive effect on the teachers' classroom performance and caused teachers to alter the way they taught in their classrooms. The teachers recognized their personal and pedagogical gains in areas such as grammar instruction, language instruction, and tailoring lessons to meet individual learning styles as a result of their participation in the PD. In summing up his research, Giraldo (2014) acknowledged three reasons why the PD workshop the teachers participated in was effective. The first reason was the marriage of theory and practice. In the workshop setting, teachers were able to apply what they learned about language acquisition in their classrooms with their students. Secondly, the workshop setting coaxed the teachers to participate in reflective practices, which allowed them to make sense of the growth their students were making. Finally, the researcher/PD facilitator was consistently available to discuss teaching strategies and implementations with the teachers, allowing them to determine how to approach what they learned in the workshop setting in their own classroom. The reason Giraldo's (2014) approach to PD was more successful than Bifuh-Ambe's (2013) could be attributed to the fact that Giraldo's PD allowed teachers to implement what they learned in their classrooms with support. Bifuh-

Ambe's (2013) study, in contrast, focused solely on building teachers' knowledge of the writing process with no structured classroom implementations.

In addition to providing some insight into PD strategies that led to concrete gains for teachers, these studies also illustrate that PD have been offered in a range of formats (e.g., writing workshops of different lengths of time, ongoing conversations) on varying topics that have influenced teachers' classroom implementations. In 2014, Beach and Willows conducted a qualitative study that evaluated how teachers pursue and experience online professional development. Seven pre-service student teachers in a Master of Arts teacher certification program and four in-service elementary teachers were asked to spend 10 minutes perusing The Balanced Literacy Diet website (www.litdiet.org.). Participants were not told which parts of the website to visit and their time spent on the site was completely unstructured. Afterwards, the participants were videotaped as they discussed their thought processes while exploring the website. The researchers found that teachers gravitated towards information that they perceived would benefit them in their classroom instruction. They concluded that teachers gain more from PD when it relates directly to their teaching goals and interests, suggesting that interest plays a significant role in whether a teacher will implement a PD in his or her classroom or not.

Likelihood of Implementation

Teachers who perceive their PD to be beneficial are more likely to implement what they learned in their own classrooms (Burridge & Carpenter, 2013; Giraldo, 2014). So, in addition to observing positive student growth, research shows that whole school participation in PD, particularly participation by campus principals, is influential in whether or not teachers willingly implement PD in their classrooms (Ringler et al., 2013). Ringler et al. (2013) conducted a study on PD involving two principals, one from an elementary school and one from a middle school,

and 14 teachers from those schools partnering with a local university. Two university professors whose specializations were educational leadership and English, respectively, implemented the PD, called Project CEO. Project CEO's overarching goal was to change the perceived role of the principal from the one who runs the campus to an instructional leader who is an active participant in the PD process (Ringler et al., 2013). The principals' participation in the campus PD created buy-in from the teachers, spurring them to more fully participate in the PD and gain knowledge and confidence in their abilities to teach in their classrooms and become leaders among their peers (Ringler, 2013).

Similar to Beach and Willows' work (2014), Collins and Liang (2014) focused on another online PD model and its impact on classroom instruction. They surveyed 13 female educators (4 classroom teachers and 9 literacy coaches/professional developers) to determine the effectiveness and relevancy of the Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) in the Classroom (SELC) online PD module. Participants were asked to rank 36 items related to online professional development and then had the opportunity to justify their decisions through semi-structured interviews. According to the teachers participating in this study, the most important PD modules had "relevance to classroom instruction" (p. 273). In short, the findings in both Beach and Willows' (2014) and Collins and Liang's (2014) studies reveal that PD needs to be immediately identified as related and applicable to a teacher's classroom procedures in order to be considered useful for teachers.

Research into PD also credits co-teaching as a way to help teachers confidently implement new strategies into their classrooms (Shaffer & Thomas Brown, 2015). This approach pairs a veteran teacher with a less experienced teacher in the classroom. Both Nishimura (2014) and Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of ongoing, embedded PD in

a co-teaching environment. They both found that having multiple points of view in a classroom in addition to being given free time to discuss, plan, and reflect on lesson implementation resulted in positive perceptions of co-teaching as a professional development process.

Nishimura (2014) studied PD in a qualitative format to determine the effectiveness of the Inclusive Professional Development (IPD) model, which focused on peer coaching and supporting teachers of students with disabilities. Eight teachers volunteered to participate in a collaborative PD in which they planned for lessons and conferenced with the researchers (who implemented IPD) as well as co-taught with them. Of those who participated, three reported that they were likely to continue utilizing strategies learned in the PD and 100% of participants agreed that the entire IPD process was enjoyable. Nishimura concluded that the participants found a collaborative model of PD to positively change how they viewed and interacted with students with disabilities.

In Shaffer and Thomas-Brown's (2015) study, two secondary social studies teachers and one special education teacher participated, with the special education teacher working closely with both social studies teachers as the co-teacher. The two teams of teachers collaborated in PD to create an effective co-teaching environment in the classroom utilizing the Co-Teaching Professional Development (CoPD) model. The CoPD model allowed for the classroom teachers to work directly with the special education teacher to "determine how teachers felt about working with students with disabilities as well as in a teaching team" (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2019, p. 120). The classroom teachers were able to provide their thoughts on both teaching special education students and on working closely with colleagues. The content area teachers met with the special-education co-teacher daily to plan lessons and debrief on the day's activities. The goal was for the facilitators to grow the social studies teachers' abilities to modify their

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instructional techniques to fit the diverse needs of their students. It was found through semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and self-reports that the teachers who voluntarily engaged in a co-teaching model of PD were more likely to implement strategies in their classroom practice. Both Nishimura's (2014) and Shaffer and Thomas Brown's (2015) findings help to illustrate how co-teaching can be applied as a form of PD that teachers find beneficial to growing their confidence in their abilities to incorporate what they learned with their students.

Teacher Collaboration and Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are an approach to PD that aligns with the guidelines set forth by *ESSA* (2015). In this model, teachers frequently meet with each other to discuss their teaching practices, student achievement, and assessments. Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, and Wallace (2005) noted that PLCs have "the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning" (p. 145). This goal is reached by " by improving teacher practice" (Vescio et al., 2007).

Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) utilized a mixed-methods research design to confirm their theory that "a school must understand and practice the five disciplines of a learning organization to be a true professional learning community" (p. 5). The five disciplines that the researchers subscribe to are *systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning* (Senge, 1990). *Systems thinking* is defined as "a body of knowledge and tools that help us see underlying patterns and how they can be changed" (Thompson et al., 2004, p. 1), meaning that one must first understand how the system works in order to affect change. *Personal mastery* is the belief that changes are made as individuals gain new skills, while *mental models* are the ingrained assumptions that a person has. *Shared vision* and *team learning* both rely on

peoples' relationships and ownership of ideas. These five disciplines work together to foster effective PLCs, according to Thompson et al. (2004). In this study, six schools from six different districts were involved. Three schools were urban and three were suburban and the data were collected through principal interviews, surveys, and a focus group of teachers. The researchers found that through their participation in PLCs, the teachers and principals all believed their schools to be a learning organization and that having a strong foundation in the five disciplines of a learning community was crucial to the health of an effective PLC.

In another mixed-methods investigation of the relationship between PLCs and teacher improvement in a middle school, Graham (2007) surveyed all of the core subject teachers (English, math, science, and social studies) at one predominately middle class, White, middle school. In addition to the survey data, 10 of the educators participated in qualitative interviews to determine their perceptions of PLC processes. Graham (2007) found that several factors influenced the degree to which the teachers improved, such as collaboration, common planning times, campus leadership support, and organizational support. Graham (2007) also noted that PLCs were most effective when teachers worked with colleagues in the same grade level and subject area, as opposed to being grouped into core content teams (i.e. a team of one math, one science, one social studies, and one English teacher) or other groupings. These factors, to varying degrees, served as the catalyst for the teachers' ability to improve their collaboration and classroom practice abilities.

In their 2013 study, Burridge and Carpenter (2013) set out to investigate the influence that the Evolve Education Development and Engagement Program (Evolve), a program designed to support students from disadvantaged homes, had on teacher PD, and therefore student learning. In this program, teachers worked with the Evolve program staff in an ongoing PD that

was embedded throughout the workday in the form of collaborative teaching efforts. Through the course of semi-structured interviews with teachers, Evolve staff, and high school students, it was revealed that the collaborative PD efforts, in the form of sharing resources, participating in constructive conversations, and co-teaching (in which teachers and Evolve staff worked with students in tandem) of the Evolve staff and participating teachers yielded an increase in student learning and attitudes about education. Burridge and Carpenter (2013) came to the conclusion that observing positive student outcomes as a result of a successful transfer of professional development knowledge to classroom practice was key in influencing teachers' continued implementations of the learned strategies in all areas of their curriculum. Burridge and Carpenter (2013) also found that the longer teachers participated in the professional development program the more likely it was that they changed their teaching practice. Ultimately, teachers were more likely to continue to utilize strategies that were presented in PD when they saw tangible evidence of their students' learning and growth.

School Leadership and Teacher Professional Development

Leadership, as defined by Northouse (2013), "is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 5). In the instance of teacher professional development (PD), school leadership (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and curriculum writers) work with teachers to achieve the shared goal of increasing student achievement. Payne and Wolfson (2000) echo this sentiment, asserting "because teacher professional development is critical for the success of school improvement initiatives and student achievement, the principal must place a high priority on the continual professional development of the adults in the school" (p. 15). A school's leadership team serves as the backbone of the campus. The principal, assistant principals, subject area department chairs, and academic

specialists all come together as a unified front to offer teachers much needed support as they complete their daily responsibilities. With a large part of a teacher's duties being the classroom implementation of what he or she learned in PD, it stands to reason that a strong, solid, and supportive leadership team is crucial in the successful use of PD strategies.

Building on Northouse's (2013) definition of leadership, Youngs and King's (2002) qualitative study focused on the effectiveness of school leadership on different approaches to PD. Nine public elementary schools participated in the study. Each school had consistently low student achievement, but had been showing progress due to participation in PD. Each school approached PD differently, which helped researchers study the relationship of school leadership to PD and how this relationship addressed teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; professional community; and program coherence (Youngs & King, 2002). They determined that despite each school's approach to PD, principals who enforced qualities such as collaboration, shared vision, and opportunities for reflection were the leaders who were most likely to stimulate change in their schools.

Similarly, in their focus group interviews of school principals, Bredeson (2000) identified four qualities that principals who effectively support teacher PD on their campuses possess. He found that principals must be *stewards of learning* and influence teachers to maintain focus on the ultimate goals of teaching. They must also be *models of continued learning* and demonstrate their commitment to adult education for their staff. Third, Bredeson (2000) stated the principals must become *experts in the field* and demonstrate their expertise in the PD setting. Finally, principals must be *instructional leaders* by being motivational, available, and thorough in everything they do for their campuses. Bredeson (2000) iterates that "School principals' leadership in the area of teacher professional development is critical to the creation and success

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of a school learning community" (p. 388). Although this research confirms that positive student achievement and growth in teachers' perceptions of PD are occurring at the elementary level as a result of principal participation, little research has explored this gap with middle school students and teachers.

<div align="center">**Teacher Self-Efficacy**</div>

Self-efficacy is defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). When applied to education, self-efficacy is about teachers' confidence in their ability to successfully implement teaching ideas and strategies in their classrooms. The findings from multiple studies reveal that there is a strong relationship between teacher self-efficacy and their teaching styles (Allinder, 1994; Czerniak & Chiarelott, 1990; Goker, 2005; Stein & Wang, 1988).

Stein and Wang (1988) investigated the relationship between teachers' implementation of PD and their perceptions of self-efficacy. Through a yearlong process of ongoing observations, interviews, and questionnaires, the researchers measured 14 elementary teachers' performance and attitudes towards their implementation of the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM). ALEM is a program designed to meet the academic and social needs of both general education and special education students. Stein and Wang (1988) came to the conclusion that teachers place more value on education programs that they perceive to be effective with their students, therefore improving teachers' self-efficacy. So, if teachers witness growth in their students as a result of utilizing a specific educational strategy, they would likely continue with the practice. Further, Czerniak and Chiarelott (1990) explained that there is a strong "connection between the level of control persons have in particular situations and their level of self-efficacy" (p. 52). Because it is commonplace for teachers to "believe that they have little control over

decision making that takes place in schools" (Czerniak & Chiarelott, 1990, pp. 52-53), it is a reasonable conclusion, therefore, that care should be taken to ensure that teachers have a voice in deciding what and how students should be taught so that their self-efficacy increases, and therefore their teaching practices improve (Czerniak & Chiarelott, 1990).

Czerniak and Chiarelott (1990) offer additional insights regarding approaches that can contribute to teacher self-efficacy. They asserted that learning general teaching strategies might elicit more improvements in teacher confidence than an increase in content knowledge alone. PD that focuses on both obstacles in teaching (e.g., classroom management, working with special populations such as special education and English language learners) and content knowledge is key in helping teachers gain self-efficacy (Czerniak & Chiarelott, 1990). Furthermore, if teachers perceive a program or PD to be effective in their classrooms and with their students, then their self-efficacy also increases (Allinder, 1994; Czerniak & Chiarelott, 1990; Stein & Wang, 1988). A peer-coaching (co-teaching) model of teacher PD, therefore, would result in teachers being more equipped to effectively implement strategies. Furthermore, taking inspiration from Czerniak and Chiarelott (1990), strategies that reduce teacher anxiety and increase teacher self-reliance, such as focusing on both growing content knowledge and pedagogical strategies in teachers, are "worthy of attention in teacher education if we wish to improve the quality, quantity, and success" (p. 55) of curriculum and instruction.

Like Stein and Wang's (1988) study, Allinder (1994) took a quantitative approach to similar research questions, examining the relationship between self-efficacy and 437 special elementary education teachers. The participants were of two groups: direct and indirect service providers. Direct service providers were special education teachers who spent all of their time teaching or providing behavioral interventions to students with disabilities. Indirect service

providers split their time evenly between providing direct instruction to students with disabilities and collaborating with other teachers. The goal of this study was to determine the extent to which a teacher's level of self-confidence affected their classroom interactions and practices. The results of the questionnaire revealed that "teachers who had a greater belief in their ability to teach [self-efficacy] were also more likely to try different ways of teaching, to be more business-like in working with students, and to be more confident and enthusiastic about teaching" (Allinder, 1994, p. 92). Both Stein and Wang (1988) and Allinder (1994) have taken different paths to applying self-efficacy to teaching practices and have come to similar conclusions regarding teacher self-efficacy: Interest in PD, perceived effectiveness of PD with students, and confidence in implementing PD with students are key in building self-efficacy in teachers.

Taking a different approach to determining how to influence self-efficacy in education, Goker (2005) conducted a study on the effects of peer coaching on student teachers. These 32 aspiring elementary teachers were in the final stages of completing all of their certification requirements and were tasked with student teaching in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) classes. Half of the participants engaged in a peer-coaching model that operated under a similarly to co-teaching. In this format, two teachers worked together to plan, implement, and reflect on lessons. The team of one pre-service teacher and one experienced teacher met four times per week during the duration of the study to review and analyze the student teacher's approach to instruction. The control group participated in a more traditional approach to student teaching in which a university supervisor observed the student teacher 12 times over the course of the semester and conducted sporadic conversations regarding the student's experiences. Goker (2005) found that the pre-service teachers who engaged with the peer-coaching model developed a higher level of self-efficacy (confidence) by the end of their training than those who

participated in a more traditional model of student teaching evaluations. This research is relevant, because it sheds light on educational approaches that do improve teacher self-efficacy.

Because research shows that an increase in self-efficacy leads to increased conviction in the classroom, it is ideal to analyze the findings of the current study through this lens to determine the extent to which current professional development processes influence teachers' perceptions of success in their classrooms. Finally, research into teacher self-efficacy tends to lean towards elementary-level teachers, leaving much to be explored in the middle levels (grades 6 – 8).

Theory of Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), two cognitively based factors of motivation influence a person's self-efficacy. Outcome expectations are "a person's estimation that a given behavior will lead to a specific outcome" (Soodak & Podell, 1996, p. 401). For example, Janet is a teacher who decides that a grammar practice worksheet will cause her students to pass the test. She will be more likely to utilize that teaching strategy than Susan, a teacher, who does not see the benefits of the worksheet. Susan would choose a different strategy for teaching grammar to her students. Efficacy expectations are "the individual's belief that he or she is capable of demonstrating the behaviors necessary to achieve the outcome" (Soodak & Podell, 1996, pp. 401 – 402). This means that each of the teachers in the example above believe that their particular method of teaching grammar concepts is the most appropriate for the outcome of students passing their tests.

Additionally, people gain and lose self-efficacy in response to the four sources of information: Enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological states (Block, Taliaferro, Harris, & Krause, 2010). Mastery experiences,

according to Bandura (1977), are the most powerful of the four and suggest that successfully participating in a task will enhance a person's self-efficacy, while unsatisfactory performance in a task will diminish it. Returning to the above example, let's assume that Janet, the teacher using grammar worksheets with her students, does not see positive results on her students' tests. Her use of this strategy yielded negative results, and caused Janet's self-efficacy, or confidence in her ability to teach grammar concepts, to lessen. Susan's alternate approach to grammar instruction yielded positive test scores among her students, and therefore would be likely to repeat the successful strategy in the future. Janet, in this example, lost self-efficacy, while Susan gained self-efficacy due to observing positive outcomes.

When a person bases his or her capabilities on the experiences of others, it's referred to as vicarious experience (Block et al., 2010). Vicarious experiences can influence a person both positively and negatively and are the second most influential source of information (Block et al., 2010). Because they are classroom neighbors, Janet would have witnessed the success of Susan's teaching strategies and may choose to employ them simply because she saw that they were more effective than her original approach. Conversely, had a brand new teacher observed Janet's unsuccessful grammar instruction, that teacher would potentially not feel confident in teaching similar concepts as a result of witnessing the ineffective teaching.

Third, verbal and social persuasion is less influential than the first two and suggests that being convinced to do something through conversation can help to increase self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). So, following the assessments, Janet and Susan conference with one another. They discuss their varying degrees of success and Susan shares her teaching methodology with Janet. Janet's self-efficacy can potentially increase if she chooses to take Susan's teaching advice and attempt the successfully implemented strategies in her own classroom. These informal

conversations and the sharing of successes and failures in the classroom allows teachers to reflect on their implementations and determine how to better approach their instruction moving forward.

Finally, emotional reactions such as stress, anxiety, or excitement can serve to increase or diminish one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Janet may become discouraged based on the negative assessment results of her students and experience feelings of inadequacy or anxiety. These feelings serve to lower her sense of self-efficacy and make it difficult for her to want to try a new teaching strategy. Conversely, the sense of pride Susan feels at the success of her students will increase her sense of self-efficacy and cause her to gain confidence in her teaching abilities.

Summary

Research reflects there are a number of ways to approach professional development (PD) (Avalos, 2010; Borko, 2004; Hill et al., 2015; Nishimura, 2014). Extended trainings that span a significant period of time and offer ongoing feedback and opportunities for collaboration have been shown to be elements of the most effective approach to teacher development (Avalos, 2010; Nishimura, 2014). In addition, opportunities to implement PD with support (Giraldo, 2014) and PD that are self-directed (Beach & Willows, 2014; Collins & Liang, 2014) are both approaches to PD that teachers find effective. However, too often, it is approached as a passive exercise that school districts use to rapidly relay information to its teachers (Hill et al., 2015; NCLB, 2002; Nishimura, 2014). Ultimately, a teacher's self-efficacy, or confidence in their abilities to effectively use new teaching strategies with their students, significantly impacts whether or not a PD is considered successful (Bandura, 1977). A gap in the literature that this research seeks to fill is the question of whether PD as offered in one district serves to enhance or hinder middle school English teachers' self-efficacy and their classroom practice.

Method

This chapter covers the overall approach to this study, the research questions, setting, participants, and research design. In addition, I discuss my research analysis procedures as well as the strategies I employed to ensure trustworthiness.

Creswell (2009) explains that qualitative methods are "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate because the purpose of this study was to gain perspective into how middle school English teachers perceived the professional development (PD) process impacted their confidence and abilities in their classrooms. Further, the research is a case study, which according to Creswell (2013), "develop[s] an in-depth understanding of a single case or explores an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration" (p 97). Yin (2014) delineates that a case study explores an event "within its real world context" and "when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). Case study research, then, allowed me to explore an event (e.g., PD experiences) within a bounded setting (i.e., one Southwestern school district) and how that specific context may or may not have influenced middle school teachers' self-confidence/efficacy and practice (Yin, 2014). This means, according to Yin (2014), that data were analyzed at both the subunit (each teacher as an individual) level and at the larger unit of analysis (the teachers' collective perceptions on the district's approach to PD). This single case study approach allowed me to come to shared conclusions regarding how middle school English teachers' confidence was influenced by one school district's approach to PD (Yin, 2014).

Research Questions

The research addressed the following research questions:

1. Do middle school English teachers perceive PD enhances or hinders their self-efficacy and in what ways?

   a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their self-efficacy?

2. Do middle school English teachers perceive their self-efficacy affects their classroom practice positively or negatively and in what ways?

   a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their classroom practice and in what ways?

3. What other factors of professional development do teachers perceive to contribute to or hinder their sense of self-efficacy?

Setting

This case study took place in a Title 1 school district in the North Texas region, which is referred to as Southwest Independent School District (SISD). There are five high schools, eight middle schools, and 23 elementary campuses in this district of more than 35,000 students. More than 70% of students are Hispanic and 80% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. The study focused on English teachers at the middle level for two reasons. First, the state reported that only 51% of sixth grade Hispanic students passed the 2015 Reading STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) while 66% of White students passed the same assessment, resulting in a 15-point achievement gap. Second, SISD middle school campuses reflected a similar gap for the same assessments (www.tea.texas.gov, 2016). While the variance for middle school students was smaller in SISD in aggregate than in the state of Texas overall, SISD's Hispanic and White students still were not achieving at the same rate.

This is an important distinction because the purpose of professional development is to give teachers the tools necessary to lessen this achievement gap and help all students perform at the same rate. In addition, research has noted students' motivation declines in reading during middle school (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). Therefore, it was helpful to better understand how English teachers at this grade level in SISD responded to PD which were intended to help close the achievement gap.

SISD employed a unique approach to teacher PD because it presented everything teachers were expected to know for the school year in a weeklong session before the school year began. Then, the intention of the school district was for each individual campus to reinforce those lessons with teachers throughout the school year. In the middle schools, English teachers were given one class period (approximately 45 minutes) each day, referred to as professional learning communities (PLCs), to meet with one another, focus on student achievement, and extend their PD (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2007). In addition, every six weeks, all middle school English teachers were required to attend a two-hour PD after school to receive additional training in curriculum, teaching strategies, and student data analysis. Finally, teachers in SISD had the opportunity to attend various, stand alone PD throughout the school year. The intention of the PD structure in this district was to both abide by the guidelines set forth by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) and grow teachers' knowledge base and effectiveness in their classrooms.

Finally, while all three campuses were in the same district, not all campuses received the same resources and professional development support. For example, of the three campuses, only Lincoln Middle School was a recipient of a grant through Verizon Wireless enabling each teacher and student to have one-to-one iPad assignment. Both Washington and Edison Middle Schools had technology on their campuses but students were not given devices of their own.

Research Design

After obtaining IRB approval from The University of Texas at Arlington on December 15, 2017, I submitted my research proposal to the research department in SISD. I secured SISD' permission to conduct my study on January 18, 2018. Data were collected from two sources through the course of this study: interviews and a demographic survey.

I planned to conduct one semi-structured interview with one district leader in charge of developing and implementing yearly PD for teachers (appendix D). The purpose of this interview was to determine how and why the PD planners selected PD topics for the school year. Two PD leaders in SISD responded to my request for participation in this study and I interviewed both to gain this contextual information regarding district training. Unfortunately, they both withdrew from this study within one week of participating in their interviews, providing no explanation for their decisions, and rendering their interview data unusable.

After conducting the leader interviews, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five middle school English teachers who were tasked with receiving and implementing PD in their classrooms. I contacted approximately 110 middle school (grades 6 – 8) English teachers via email (appendix A) who attended SISD PD and invited them to participate in an interview regarding their PD experiences and their perceptions of how PD had helped or hindered their classroom experiences and self-efficacy. The recruitment email identified the criteria for participation: (a) three or fewer years of teaching experience and (b) participation in SISD PD. The reason for choosing newer teachers is because it is not uncommon for newer teachers to leave the teaching profession within three school years (Eberhard, Reinhardt-Mondragon, & Stottlemyer, 2000). Also, researchers (i.e. Eberhard, Reinhardt-Mondragon, & Stottlemyer, 2000) have noted that PD elements such as observation of more

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experienced teachers and mentorship that extend into the second and third years of teaching are influential in retaining new teachers. In contrast, veteran teachers may already have a strong sense of self-confidence honed from years in the classroom. Therefore, the PD may have less of an effect on their perceptions of self-efficacy and classroom practice than with newer, less self-assured teachers. In addition, because I taught in the district, I did not recruit participants from my own campus. I did not have relationships with teachers from other campuses. All of the teachers who responded to my email were asked to complete a brief demographic survey. Of the nine volunteers for this study, only five fit parameters set forth. I conducted each interview, in person, at a place of convenience for each of the participants (appendix C). Each interview lasted no longer than one hour, and all occurred after the school day ended. Four participants asked that I meet them in their classrooms, and one participant chose to meet in a local coffee shop.

The five participants in this study were all women with two or three years of experience teaching in the district. They ranged between 27 and 44 years of age. (See table 3.1 for the participants' background information.) They represented the following three different middle school campuses in SISD: (a) Washington Middle School, (b) Lincoln Middle School, and (c) Edison Middle School[1]. Regina and Alison were both eighth grade English teachers at Washington Middle School. Monica taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade English Deaf Education and Reese taught eighth grade English at Lincoln Middle. Greta was an eighth grade English teacher at Edison Middle School.

[1] The names of the schools and teachers are pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Table 0.1

Participants' Personal Information

Participant	Campus	Teaching Assignment	Years of Experience	Ethnicity	Age
Regina	Washington Middle School	8th Grade English	2	African American	33
Alison	Washington Middle School	8th Grade English	2	Hispanic	27
Monica	Lincoln Middle School	6th, 7th, & 8th Grade English (Deaf Education)	2	African American	27
Reese	Lincoln Middle School	8th Grade English	2	White	27
Greta	Edison Middle School	8th Grade English	3	African American	44

Data Analysis

Upon the conclusion of each interview, I wrote a detailed reflection of the interview process as well as documented any immediate thoughts I had about potential themes that may be significant. For example, upon the conclusion of my interview with Regina, I came to the conclusion that the ideas of observation and feedback were much more prevalent than I had originally hypothesized. In addition, I learned in my interview with Monica that relevance to the teacher's classroom environment was a key component to successfully growing a teacher through professional development.

In addition to writing the reflection, upon completing each interview, I transcribed them verbatim within one calendar week. Coding occurred immediately (Glesne, 2011), which Glesne

(2011) described as the "progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting of scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose" (p. 194). I coded each line of the interviews and my initial codes included topics such as teaching strategy, engagement, communication, observation, and feedback. I began organizing my codes into themes after the completion of the second interview. My code for engagement, for example, evolved into a theme that encompassed engagement based on learning style and engagement based on perceived need. Differentiation was another theme that emerged from the coding process as I discovered that teachers desired PD opportunities that fit their unique classroom environments.

I used the constant comparative method for analyzing data. This approach involves "taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories" (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). This means that I analyzed each interview independently, and then compared them to one another. In other words, I used the first interview as the basis for coding the second. As I coded the second interview, I also looked for new codes to emerge. When I identified new codes, I returned to the first interview to determine whether or not those same ideas were present there. I repeated this process with all subsequent interviews.

Throughout the process, I assessed the interviews for congruencies and contradictions to determine how the teachers' perceived the PD, utilized the four sources of information, and if the information influenced (or not) their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). For example, I found that each of the participants experienced PD in different ways based on their unique classroom and student situations. While there were aspects of PD that all five participants agreed were beneficial to growing their confidence as teachers, such as trainings that focused on classroom management, there were others that yielded mixed results. The goal was to build a rich

understanding of how the participants perceived the Southwest Independent School District's PD affected their sense of self-efficacy and helped or hindered their classroom practice.

Ethical Considerations

In any research study, it is crucial to protect the identities of the site, participants, and other sensitive data. I took several steps to ensure my research followed ethical guidelines. First, I sought IRB approval from The University of Texas at Arlington. Following IRB approval, I acted in accordance with SISD's research request policies by submitting my research proposal, evidence of IRB approval, and necessary documentation to the administration office. In addition, measures were taken to ensure anonymity of both participants and study setting (Yin, 2014). The participants, the district, and the teachers' specific home schools were given pseudonyms to protect the identities of all parties involved.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2009) detailed eight strategies for ensuring the validity of qualitative research. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that qualitative researchers "engage in at least two of the validation strategies" as a means to "check for accuracy" (p. 259). I employed five of them as I analyzed my data. First, I conducted member checks, in which I solicited feedback from my participants by inviting them to review preliminary findings to ensure my interpretations of the data were clear and correct (Creswell, 2013). I also recruited a peer with experience in conducting qualitative research to review my coding to make sure my interpretations were accurate. We discussed points of disagreement and came to a resolution regarding coding and themes. For example, I though a line in my data as being about teacher learning styles, while my peer saw the same line as having to do with the teacher's PD needs. When I read the line again, my peer's perspective became clear to me, and I revised the coding accordingly. These efforts

helped to mitigate any of my own biases as a teacher in this district and a participant in these PD

trainings (Maxwell, 2013). Next, I provided rich, thick description in my analysis and discussion

of data, which afforded me the opportunity to accurately portray the teachers' perceptions of

self-efficacy (Creswell, 2009). In addition, according to Creswell (2009), reporting any

interview data that is negative or discrepant to overarching themes that have emerged from the

data helps to ensure that the researcher remains unbiased in the analysis of the data. When

analyzing my data, I had to recognize my own biases and determine if they were preventing me

from seeing the full picture of the data. It was my assumption that all teachers perceived PD

similarly to me, and that was not the message from the data. In fact, the data oftentimes diverged

from my own beliefs and I made sure to report ideas that do not align with my personal views.

For example, the PD that occurred after school once per six weeks was not beneficial to me, but

some of my colleagues lauded the experience as instrumental to their confidence in teaching

concepts. Finally, although with the withdrawal of the PD leaders, I was unable to triangulate the

data, I did collect data from two sources: the background survey and the interviews, which

allowed me to "build coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). All five of my

participants teach the same grade level and have similar years of experience with teaching, so I

was able to come to a better understanding of how these teachers' self-confidence was impacted

by PD in this district.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to utilize case study methodology in order to accurately

describe how the participation in one district's professional development affected teachers'

perceptions of self-efficacy and their classroom practice and, in turn, their perceptions of student

achievement. This chapter explains the setting, the research design, data sources, and analytic

strategies that yielded rich, thick descriptions of the teachers' perceptions.

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this case study was to come to a better understanding of how five middle-school English teachers from a Title I school district in the North Texas region, known as Southwest Independent School District (SISD), perceived the professional development (PD) they attended contributed to or hindered the development of their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). For the purposes of this study, self-efficacy relates to the teacher's confidence in their ability to implement what they learned in PD in their classrooms. Teachers gain and lose self-efficacy in relation to the four sources of information: *enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion,* and *physiological states* (Block, Taliaferro, Harris, & Krause, 2010). As described earlier, *Enactive Mastery Experiences* are events in which a person has experienced success or failure upon the completion of a task, therefore increasing or decreasing their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). *Vicarious experiences* occur when a person observes the successes or failures of others and therefore bases his or her own abilities on the actions of other people (Bandura, 1977). *Verbal and social persuasion* refers to the conversations that people share and the willingness to attempt an action based on the advice of others (Bandura, 1977). Finally, people gain and lose self-efficacy as a result of their *physiological states*, or the emotional responses they have to an idea or event (Bandura, 1977).

SISD employed multiple approaches to PD during the 2017 school year. All teachers in the district attended a weeklong PD conference called the Summer Professional Development Series (SPDS) prior to the beginning of the school year. SISD used this conference as a springboard for the district PD foci for the school year. It covered topics such as classroom management, curriculum, and teaching strategies. In addition to SPDS, teachers attended a

curriculum support PD once every six weeks in which the facilitators introduced teaching topics and strategies. The district also provided daily Professional Learning Community (PLC) time during the school day for teachers to meet with their grade level and content area colleagues to discuss student achievement, assessment, and teaching strategies. Finally, teachers in SISD had the opportunity to attend various other stand alone PD that aligned with their perceived needs as educators.

SISD required teachers to attend PD that occurred both during the school day (as in a PLC) and outside of contracted teaching hours. However, teachers were required to attend 48 hours of PD outside of school hours, so any training that occurred during the regular school day when children are on campus did not count towards the 48 required hours. This distinction led to some feelings of resentment as explained by Reese:

> I'm on contract. From 7:45 am when my contract starts to 4:15 pm when I'm contracted
> to leave, those are their [SISD] hours. I don't want to say I'm a slave to them during
> those times, but I'm paid for those times, so they can say, "Here, cover this classroom.
> Get your 30-minute lunch. Get to your conference, but you are to do this at this time," so
> I don't get professional development hours for that because those have to be done outside
> of contract hours.

In addition, this district made a PD calculating error for the 2017–2018 school year. The original number of PD hours required for teachers outside of contract hours totaled 36. "Then, this year," Reese admits, "they last minute, kind of decided, we got to do 48. It was a calculating error." So, the district changed the PD hour requirements after the school and contract year began.

It is within this context that I explore three themes that emerged from the teachers' experiences with professional development in SISD and the impact it had on their self-efficacy:

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(a) engagement in the professional development process; (b) relationships with peers, leadership, and professional development; and (c) classroom application and perceived student achievement.

Engagement in the Professional Development Process

The first way in which teachers' self-efficacy was grown or hindered in response to professional development was by their engagement in the PD events they attended. While attendance at various PD sessions was mandatory for the participants, their engagement varied based on a variety of factors. The participants in this research reported two different ways their engagement in PD and their self-confidence as educators could be enhanced or hurt: learning style and perceived need.

Engagement based on Learning Style

The participants in this study were able to gain self-efficacy through PD when the trainings were taught in ways that engaged them as learners. Regina, Alison, Greta, Reese, and Monica all said that they learned best when they saw the PD facilitators model specific teaching strategies and were then able to practice those techniques before implementing them in their classrooms. This perspective was captured by Alison, who admitted, "I think I learn best when I can actually conceptualize things, when I actually see something laid out for me." She added, "Once I practice with something once or twice, I just get it." Therefore, when she could see the methods in use and then attempt them herself, she felt like she truly learned them and that she was ready to implement them in her classroom.

However, PD in SISD was not always approached in a manner that appealed to the learners. Several of the participants criticized the facilitator's delivery of information. Regina, for instance, felt that the PD coordinators should design the trainings so that they were more focused on "the teacher's learning style or interest, make it a little more specific," in order to

gain "a little more" excitement about [the content]. Similarly, Monica described PD as

oftentimes being "old school" and wanted coordinators to "get a little more creative" in their

delivery because "yes, we're teachers, but we also don't want to be bored to death." In fact,

Regina said the entire PD process "kind of wasted an hour of my time," because she felt she

retained very little from all the hours of PD.

Regina, like her fellow participants, felt that she generally benefitted very little from the

PD she attended. She said she preferred to leave PD "armed with strategies" she could

immediately apply to her classroom the next day after the training; however, she found that

opportunity rarely occurred. She suggested PD facilitators could do the following:

Give me some scenarios. Give me something I can actually say, take back, and chew on,

and really kind of mull over it and say, "Okay, this is how I'm going to deliver this," or

"This is how I'm going to apply this with my English language learners."

When she was unable to easily translate the strategies to her classroom, Regina typically forgot

about the training and did not make many classroom applications as a result (Bifuh-Ambe,

2013). She spoke about one particular PD that she attended during the SPDS that "had

something to do with the brain." She said that she had just been reviewing her notes the day

before our interview and realized she could not recall much of the information as follows:

It's probably going to sound bad. In terms of the information, we kind of do not retain it

because it's just like a one day, one-and-one-half hour, two-hour meeting. It kind of goes

out the window when you leave the training.

Similarly, Reese concluded that, "I think staff would be more eager to go to professional

development and do more hours if they felt like they were getting something out of it, that it was

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tailored to them." However, in general, the participants felt the PD did not meet their needs as learners.

Nevertheless, there were some more nuanced views. Greta shared a story about a PD she attended during the weeklong training about reaching students at a cultural level. Like many of the PD sessions offered by SISD, the first part of class was presented as a lecture with minimal participant interaction. As a result, Greta stated that she had trouble staying focused. She offered, "If it's a long training class, more than an hour, get my juices flowing [and tell us] to get up and say, 'Talk to somebody about this." However, Greta added that the second part of the session consisted of "a game designed to bring students out of their shells" that she could use in her classroom, but "it was too short." Although she had issues with the pacing and delivery of the entire session, only this culturally focused training stood out to her as memorable, engaging, and useful in her classroom setting out of the 15 or so hours of PD she attended during SPDS.

Greta also recognized a positive evolution of certain professional development opportunities from year to year. She attended a training about teaching students how to show their thinking about a text two years in a row and described her first experience at this PD as "very, very painful." In the first version of the training, Greta and the other participants were asked to go through the reading exactly as their students would as the facilitator stood at the front of the room and modeled how to teach the lesson. During the second experience, however, the PD was reimagined and, according to Greta, more successful. She recalled, "Rather than having us taking a day and a half to go over this [material] as the students would do" in the second training, the facilitators showed examples of the completed product. Greta's attitude regarding this PD improved because she was being treated like a teacher instead of a student. She said, "The text that we're reading may take two days to go through [with my students], but the training

shouldn't take two days to teach me how to do it." In essence, Greta did not need the same amount of time to process the strategy for ensuring reading comprehension that her students would need. Therefore, by streamlining the PD, Greta's engagement in the process increased, as did her sense of self-efficacy, and she gained the opportunity to figure out how the strategy could benefit her during classroom instruction.

Alison discussed the curriculum meeting PD that all English teachers attend once every six-week grading period. In this PD, all teachers of the same content area and grade level in the district discussed what and how they would be teaching in the upcoming grading period. Unlike the more negative views for the weeklong PD, she found this meeting helpful because "they actually let us practice a lot of the strategies they were presenting" before having to attempt them in the classroom. The practice helped her feel comfortable implementing the techniques and brought her "more of an understanding of if I felt like it's going to work for my students or not." In this instance, Alison's needs as a learner were met and grew her sense of self-efficacy because she was able to practice with the strategies and take her student population into account while doing so.

All five participants agreed that their expectations and engagement while attending PD could have been significantly higher if the PD met their needs as learners and teachers. They admitted that, too often, the structure and delivery of the PD did not take into account their learning styles. As a result, they were unable to retain much of the content.

Engagement Based on Perceived Need

In addition to the desire to attend PD that aligned with their individual learning styles, the participants also wanted the trainings to address their individual classroom concerns. However, a few participants found that the sessions rarely did so. Alison admitted, "Sometimes, I

almost feel like it's an information dump," meaning that she oftentimes walked away from PD feeling overwhelmed. According to Alison, "They give us the learning plan for the entire six weeks. I can read it on my own. I don't need someone to read it to me or spend time doing any of that." She would prefer that this PD time was treated as a time geared towards "finding more specific ways to address certain populations." Because Alison did not feel like her time was well spent in this particular PD, her sense of self-confidence did not grow.

Regina held different opinions regarding the curriculum PD. She remarked that it was "probably one of the best PD that we have here because the information is shared in so many different ways." This PD appealed to her because it gave her ideas that she could physically see and take back to her classroom. She explained that the PD allowed her to say: "Okay, this is what that person did, so now I know exactly how to apply it." She also had the opportunity to discuss the lessons she would be tasked with teaching while in the PD with her colleagues, which she found to be instrumental in helping her become more confident in her ability to deliver successful instruction. Being able to discuss the successes and struggles of being a teacher with her colleagues helped Regina gain confidence in her abilities to try new teaching strategies with her students.

However, the curriculum sessions were not always as helpful as Regina would hope. She admitted, "Sometimes we miss some of the things [we] need to cover because we're focusing on other things, other skills." Regina noticed over the course of the school year that some strategies were not addressed during PD because the facilitators deemed other skills and concepts more necessary. In these instances, Regina felt the PDs were less effective due to the "shortsightedness of the facilitators' own agenda." Regina and Alison, then, both wished these PD sessions addressed all of the concepts they were tasked with teaching for the school year.

Monica, an English teacher of the deaf, also reported it was typical for her not to have a positive attitude about PD meeting her unique needs as a teacher. She admitted, "I haven't had very good ones [professional developments] because unfortunately a lot of the ones that have been offered to me don't take into consideration my special population." She shared that she was largely unable to see the connection between the content in the trainings and the student population she was tasked with teaching. Monica expressed the need for more PD regarding special student populations as follows: "If there are special populations in a school, I feel like those people should get special professional development, and if they find it on their own, then the district should reimburse them for it." Monica's impression of isolation in the PD process eliminated her from collaborating with her peers at times in discussions about how certain strategies would manifest in her classroom. She had to figure out for herself how to modify PD to accommodate her deaf education students. Oftentimes, her seclusion from these important conversations served to lessen her sense of self-efficacy, as she was unable to collaborate with peers on how to utilize learned strategies with her special education deaf students

However, she did speak of one particularly enlightening PD that helped her experience learning through her students' perspectives. In this PD about English language learners, the instructor handed out a text in a language Monica did not know where she had to pick out familiar looking words and was taught how to build connections and relationships among words in the foreign language and her native English. Monica explained, "As a hearing teacher of the deaf, it's oftentimes difficult for me to put myself in my students' shoes." However, this exercise allowed her "to see what it would be like to actually be in the child's position. That was beneficial for me. I'm a visual learner, hands on; I've got to feel it." This helped Monica gain confidence in bridging her deaf students' learning gaps because she could more effectively

empathize with the difficulties associated with learning a new language. These kinds of PD events met Monica's perceived needs and she left the trainings ready to use the strategies she learned in her classroom.

In a different PD she attended, Monica became excited about utilizing the strategies and resources presented, only to find out that she would be unable to obtain them. She spoke about one mandatory PD for an online special education program called iReady and described it as a "webinar, but [the participants] all had to meet up at one place then watch the webinar. You couldn't see the person, you could just hear them." In this PD, the experience did not engage her as a learner, nor did it provide her with any applicable strategy to take back to her classroom. Despite her lack of engagement, Monica thought that the program would be beneficial to her special population but soon found out that "the district only bought seven licenses [for the program], and they're only going out to the people who need them the most," which did not include the special education deaf students. Monica did not know which seven students, out of the entire district, were chosen to use this particular computer program, but she expressed her disappointment in having to attend a PD that she could not use in her classroom. So, for Monica, this PD ended as a "frustrating waste of time."

Monica and Reese both agreed that PD on classroom management tended to meet their needs as classroom leaders because it was one of the priorities of campus administrative teams. Monica said, "I always feel like behavior managing professional development; no matter who you are as a teacher, it's always going to be beneficial to you." The specific strategy explored was called, Love and Logic (Fay & Funk, 1995). It is a method of classroom management that focuses on teaching teachers how to respond to inflammatory situations in their classrooms by

speaking logically to students and allowing them to make their own decisions while reminding them that there are consequences for their actions (Fay & Funk, 1995).

Reese's "big takeaway" from this PD occurred because "you have to remember you're the adult in the room. You can't be impulsive and get on their [child] level." She spoke of a situation with a difficult student who had been cycled through all of the English teachers at her campus because of his behavior issues, and he finally landed in her classroom. When he threatened to walk out of class, Reese offered him the door and calmly reminded him that there would be consequences for his actions. The child ended up staying in class and completing his assignment. Reese said, "I think just being calm and rational in situations where you can flip so easily was the biggest out of any professional development I've ever gone to, the biggest thing that I walked away with." She credited the presenter's specific examples and ability to engage her as a learner as the reason why she retained her learning and was immediately able to apply it in her classroom to diffuse challenging situations.

As far as resources were concerned, Greta attended a PD focused on providing additional reading resources to her students, but was unable to use one of the resources discussed. She explained:

> I know one of the books we tried to get on campus, but because we have to many mandatory novels we have to read, I think we just haven't found a way to incorporate it into the curriculum this year right now.

Unfortunately, due to the rigid nature of SISD's curriculum and teaching expectations, Greta was unable to obtain the novel and use it with her students.

Reese's campus was the recipient of a grant that enabled each student to be assigned his or her own iPad. She said she benefitted most from the PD about using the iPads because "it's

teaching me to use the technology as a student would use it versus the way I would use it." The clear focus of the iPad instruction led her to have to an overall positive attitude about attending that particular professional development.

Though the iPad-focused training proved to be beneficial to Reese and increase her confidence as a teacher, Alison found that similar trainings focused too much on logistics rather than effectively implementing the technology in the classroom setting. Alison spoke specifically about two different iPad training courses she attended: one that she experienced with her teaching team and the other she attended independently. She reported that the facilitators needed to employ differentiated instruction during technology-based PD, meaning that the PD should be based on the audience's needs. Alison noted that the first of the iPad training courses were "all just logistics and here's how it works, but I already knew all" those things. Alison admitted she did gain some good ideas about using iPads with her students out of the training, but that was "mainly just because I talked to the instructor a lot afterwards." Alison had to recognize her own needs as a teacher in order to advocate for the type of development she needed in order to confidently implement iPads in her classroom.

Alison attended the second iPad training by herself because her principal expected her to return to campus and relay the information she learned to her teammates. She expressed disappointment that others from her team had not been able to attend the PD: "I'm glad I got to go, and I learned a lot of things, but I have to relay that information to my team and they have to understand it." In this instance, Alison became the middleman, both learner during the PD event and PD trainer to her colleagues. Because her teammates had not attended the PD, Alison could not effectively collaborate with her teammates based on the lessons of the PD. She was able to relay the information to her team, but was discontent that she unable to share her experience with

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her teammates during the PD event. In addition, Alison was unable to focus her attention on the parts of the training she deemed most applicable to her own classroom environment because she was expected to recreate the event for her colleagues. In this situation, Alison's sense of self-efficacy grew only marginally due to the nature of her focus on the training. Unfortunately, the majority of both iPad trainings focused on the logistics of using an iPad and an overview of the apps that she could use in her classroom, but neglected to focus much attention on showing her teaching strategies and allowing her to experience them during the PD. Alison expressed her disappointment that both the PD's focus on strategy and classroom application did not come until the final two hours of the full-day iPad training courses.

Greta also spoke of a mandatory PD she attended that specifically targeted assessment requirements for her honors classes, but the connection was not clearly made for her and the other attendees. The facilitator focused the training on the AP English exam that students take in their senior year. The attendees reacted as though they came to the wrong training room, and Greta even asked, "Did we come to the right training? Because our kids are eighth graders. They're not taking AP tests yet." Though the session did not initially seem relevant, hindering her engagement at first, Greta quickly realized that it was imperative for her to know what her students would be expected to accomplish as they advanced to high school. In retrospect, Greta "thinks the class was awesome" and was able to take the knowledge back to her classroom and tell her students, "If you're going to stay in honors, we want you guys to take that test and feel confident that you had years of modeling" the right strategies for the AP English test. Greta concluded that if the English AP facilitator had enunciated up front how the course applied to her eighth grade English students, she would not have been confused about why she was in that particular PD session and perhaps her engagement in the training might have been better.

Although such a large part of the teacher's school year was consumed with professional development opportunities, they were not always the most impactful avenue of pedagogical learning for them. Alison said that the biggest influence on her classroom practice were not the PD that she attended as a teacher, but the college courses she had taken as a masters student. She remarked, "A lot of my [master's level] classes required me to implement the things I was learning about in my [middle school] class." Also, when working on her master's degree in education, Alison was required to formally reflect on her experiences with implementing what she learned for a grade. This practice of reflection in her college classes helped her to grow as an educator, but she did not have the same experiences when applying what she learned in PD. The lack of focus from the district and campus leadership on making sure that she used the strategies she learned about in PD caused her to miss out on some opportunities to make implementations. She commented, "I feel like the temptation whenever you go to a PD is like, yes, that sounds really great but then you never really get around to actually implementing it." Alison, then, did not make a conscious effort to implement what she learned at PD in her classroom.

Although the teachers felt that the PD offerings were uneven, Reese said she tried to "get something out of every PD." The teachers believed the connections between the PD content and actual pedagogical practice were not always apparent, but Reese admitted, "Even if it's the worst thing I've ever attended, there's got to be something I can walk away with and use in the classroom." Most of the teachers held similar views, in spite of their frustrations.

Relationships with Peers, Leadership, and Professional Development

In addition to expressing the desire to be engaged in professional development and to attend trainings that fit the needs of their classroom environments, the participants also regarded relationships as a crucial aspect of how their confidence was impacted as a result of PD. The

ability to discuss teaching strategies with one another and share struggles and successes became an integral part of how they gained self-efficacy. Unfortunately, however, opportunities for formal feedback from school leadership tended to be scarce despite being highly preferred by the teachers.

Collaboration

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are an approach to professional development that occur within the school day and bring teachers together to collaborate on lesson design and professional growth (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace (2005). Since PLCs occur during teachers' normal teaching hours, they do not count towards the 48 required PD hours set forth by SISD. Instead, they occur in addition to these hours and take place daily in SISD. PLCs were a consistent part of the school day for all five participants in this study instruction.

At Washington Middle School, Regina and Alison both praised the PLC model of during-the-school-day PD because "we all bring a different lens to planning what we think works in our classrooms." Since Regina and Alison met with their team daily, they had the opportunity to effectively attend to their students' needs. Regina realized that the PLC empowered the team to focus on daily content and said, "We're not so focused on the six-week exam. I think that has happened as a result of all of us teachers going in PLC and saying, 'Okay, this is way too much [assessment].'" Alison spoke of the benefits of her campus' PLC model and the value of collaborating with the instructional coach and said, "[Small group instruction] is a really cool part of what we've been talking about in our PLC with [our instructional coach] about how to not only select groups but use the data to fill in their learning gaps where we can." Alison added that these goals are met by "collaborating together on lesson plans" and by the instructional coach

"providing resources." Ultimately, the conversations that Regina and Alison engaged in during daily PLC enabled them to develop their practice and build their confidence.

In one such PLC time, Alison said her instructional coach, a leader on her campus who acted as a support to all teachers in the areas of pedagogy and curriculum, created a specific resource to help teachers understand and visualize how to implement small group instruction within their classrooms. At first, when the academic specialist presented the idea, Alison thought, "It sounded really great, but none of us really knew exactly what that would look like [in a classroom implementation]." The academic specialist recognized the teachers' apprehensions and created a guide to give teachers examples of how to use small group instruction as a beginner and as an expert. The document helped to reach all of the teachers on Alison's team as individuals based on their skill level. This attention to each individual's needs caused Alison to comment that the document was "the most helpful thing because we've had a lot of success doing interventions, but we wouldn't have had as much if people didn't have a clear picture of what we should actually be doing" based on their circumstances. In this PLC model, the teachers had a safe space to voice their concerns and the academic specialist was able to take them into consideration in order to alleviate the teachers' stress and apprehension regarding implementing small group instruction.

In Greta's PLC at Edison Middle School, "one of the goals is to get focused on data and see where our students are, to share concepts of scaffolding, as well as increase the rigor for students and share actual lessons." These goals were largely met, according to Greta. She thrived on being able to ensure that she was "on the same page" as the rest of her team. During these sessions, they "definitely unpack the standards together so that we know for these six weeks these are the standards we're going to teach." She and her teammates, then, were able to teach

their students at roughly the same pace, which allowed them to more easily share their struggles and successes on different activities as they occurred with their colleagues. Unlike Alison's positive experience with campus leadership during PLC, Greta did not report her principal or other campus leaders as influential in the success of PLC on her campus. Instead, Greta and her teaching partners stepped up and became leaders among themselves. However, this collaboration still served to influence Greta's desire to please her campus administration team, who was required to observe her and the other teachers at her school throughout the school year and said, "if they come through, they may see us all at least on the same week ['s standard], so I do like that. It gives you a common purpose." This common purpose helped tie Greta's team together and contributed to their success and confidence in their classrooms.

At Lincoln Middle School, Reese had a different experience with collaboration during PD, specifically during PLC. She commented, "It feels like there are very different neighborhoods in the room." By this, she meant that sixth, seventh, and eighth grade English teachers met in the same room daily for this PLC time, but the conversation was limited to just their immediate grade level teaching partners. The teachers at all the levels did not often discuss teaching practices together, and this model did not seem beneficial for Reese. She had an idea of how this time should look, as follows:

> We should be all working together, planning with the end in mind, discussing ways we
> can engage the students, we can have them driving their learning and in control of their
> learning, and [talking about] strategies we can use to be successful in the classroom.

Reese attributed this disconnect to the instability of leadership during PLC. Last year, their academic specialist, a person whose job was to support teachers in their classroom instruction, in Reese's opinion, "was not a specialist at all" and "when there was conflict, she would shut

down." This year, however, Reese's team acquired a new academic specialist partway into the school year. While this new leader was working to build relationships with the department on a personal level, her vision for change would not be carried out until fall 2018. Furthermore, this individual was frequently absent from PLC. Reese admitted, "[During PLC] our academic specialist is gone. She's not even in the room. She's at some meeting with administration." So, her time and ability to foster conversations, collaboration, and cohesiveness among the team members was significantly limited. The teachers, then, in Reese's PLC had to become leaders among themselves absent of campus leadership guidance.

In addition, Regina was very enthusiastic about a book they were reading in their PLC about having a "growth mindset." The teachers studied the book on their own time and then responded to questions the facilitator posed via an online forum. Regina thought the online discussion was helpful. As she explained, "It's always useful to see what another person is thinking about [the book] and say, 'Oh, okay, this is what I thought, and this is what I've been doing.'" Though she employed a different approach in her classroom than her colleagues, Regina found the ability to engage in a discussion with them about her experiences invigorating. She enjoyed learning new ways to be effective in her classroom, and regarded this online forum as "one of the best" PD trainings she had attended.

Observation and Feedback

A critical aspect of collaboration in PD for the teachers was the opportunity to gain self-efficacy through *vicarious experiences* and *verbal and social persuasion* in a formal manner. All participants in this study agreed that the PD process became more effective for them as they engaged in critical observations and were provided with feedback. Watching another teacher implement an academic strategy or classroom management skill was an informal approach to PD

that teachers found to be helpful. Generally, the participants desired to be observed by both their peers and school leadership. They also preferred to be provided with immediate, direct feedback on how well they utilized strategies they learned in PD.

Several of the teachers spoke about the benefits of observing and learning from their peers. At Washington Middle School, there was a campus-wide initiative that formally encouraged teachers to enter one another's classrooms to learn from each other's different teaching styles and environments. According to Regina, during this time, "a teacher comes in maybe 20 minutes during their conference and they observe your class." Feedback for this came in the form of unstructured emails that discussed, "this is what I saw, this was great. This is what I think could maybe help more." Alison added, "We either send the teacher an email just noticing the really cool things I saw in your class, or we can Tweet them and put some pictures in that we took." As Alison enthused, "Watching other teachers is "the best way for we teachers to learn, honestly." Unfortunately, even though "It's always open for anyone to come in, get ideas, see what students are doing," Alison said it was rare that teachers took advantage of these opportunities, because they were not mandated. Regina and Alison had to take the initiative when participating in these practices.

Regina discussed another avenue for feedback. However, according to Regina, the feedback could be inconsistent and vague when offered regardless of the circumstances. For example, she admitted receiving helpful feedback from an administrator responsible for formally observing her teach at least one lesson and walking through her classroom occasionally during the school year, but that's where the feedback from the leaders on her campus ended. Whenever this administrator noticed that she was struggling, they would say "I want to see more of this when I come back next time." Regina reported that she recognized when she met the goals set

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forth by her administrator on her own despite not receiving much follow-up from regarding the matter.

Monica had few opportunities to observe other teachers and obtained limited feedback from those who observed her. This school year, she had only three opportunities to observe other teachers because, "not many people can communicate with my students." In addition, her administrative team rarely came to observe her classroom, and surmised that it was because her campus leadership was "afraid of her classroom". In fact, according to Monica, "I think a lot of times, the district just trusts us to know what to do with our kids but that's not okay". She commented that she received her annual observation and feedback, but "that's a snapshot of one day, one lesson, one moment in time." She did not believe the one-day observation event was adequate and stated:

> I want support. I want to know that I'm doing the right thing by these kids. I want somebody who knows my job better than me, to be walking through, to make sure that I'm doing the right thing when I'm instructing my kids, [and let me know] whether it's meaningful.

Monica wanted direct feedback, and she especially wanted her "negative feedback blunt." However, the feedback on her teaching practices, classroom management strategies, and content knowledge was non-existent.

Lincoln Middle School approached teacher observations differently. While it had no formal system in place mandating that teachers observe their peers, it did allow teachers wanting to be observed to place a sign outside their doors welcoming visitors. Reese often took advantage of this opportunity and gained valuable feedback from both her peers and campus leadership. In one instance, she gained insight into restructuring her classroom to better accommodate station

work, which is when the teacher sets her classroom up so that students work in small groups on different activities and rotate through all of the lessons. She learned that station work for students did not have to be completed in one day, and that carrying them over made it "more in depth and rigorous." This feedback made an immediate impact on her teaching.

However, not all of the observation and feedback opportunities were positive for Reese. She told a story about an incident on her campus that caused feelings of animosity among her colleagues. In this situation, Reese and a few of her colleagues observed two teachers teach their lesson with the intention of "recreate[ing] the lesson[s] in a more engaging way using technology." As directed by campus leadership, "we went back into the original teachers' classroom and retaught the lesson[s]." The observed teachers were not told about the purpose of the observation until the end, when the lesson was being retaught with their students. Both of the observed teachers were "pretty upset" at this situation. Reese reported, "I got to hear how they really felt about it." The observed teachers felt "demeaned" and according to Reese said, "You come into our room and redo our lesson, and our kids can see that. They think less of us because you're having to come in and redo our lesson." Reese felt that the teachers were undermined in their classrooms and disagreed with how observation and feedback were approached in this situation.

When it came to observations and feedback from campus leadership, Reese also admitted that it was inadequate. Too often, she has to initiate the process, which she felt she should not have to do. Further, it was unclear from the feedback what she "can do better." She expressed distaste at the types of feedback administrators on her campus provided and described it as an, "I'm here to *get* you," instead of "[I'm] here to *help* you" attitude.

At Edison Middle School, Greta was also oftentimes disappointed with the feedback provided by her administration team as well. She commented, "I don't know if [with our yearly evaluation] our teachers leave truly knowing what they need to work on." When administrators walked through to observe her room, she either received little or no feedback. She commented:

> I think a lot of teachers leave signing their paperwork for the next year going on to their next contract not knowing, "Well, do they think I did a good job last year? Am I on track? Can I be even better?" If you don't ask, I don't think you'll find out.

Despite her disappointment with the feedback from her administrative team, Greta insisted that observing one another was the best way for teachers to learn. "It's not only from reading books, it's not only from going to [formal] PD" Greta iterated, and said that the opportunity for peer observation was out there, but "you're going to have to take it." At this point in time, teachers, at Greta's campus had to advocate for themselves, become leaders among themselves, and create opportunities for observation, learning, and communication on their own. Campus leadership did not do that for them.

Finally, the teachers expressed their distaste at how SISD handled the provision of feedback to professional development facilitators after formal PD events. According to Alison, there was not "a good platform" to provide constructive feedback. She advised that PD facilitators offer "more opportunity for teachers to give them feedback and let them know what they feel like would be meaningful." This information would help the facilitators know what subjects to include when they plan the PD, which would make the trainings more relevant to the teachers.

In addition, a few of the participants voiced concern about how their feedback might lead to negative consequences for them. Reese, in particular, remarked, "I was afraid to be honest

[about her feelings on professional development] because it's coming through my school account, and they can see it was me who said that." She added, "I don't see changes happening until people feel comfortable expressing themselves honestly." Therefore, not only were the teachers given minimal opportunities to provide feedback, several of the participants worried that their comments might lead to negative ramifications for them.

In summary, communication is an aspect of professional development that the teachers all believed to be crucial to building their pedagogical self-efficacy. As evidenced by Bandura (1977), verbal and social persuasion is an impactful aspect of building self-efficacy, but in SISD, the teachers' voices were not always heard. In some instances, this was the result of a lack of communication between school leadership and the teachers, themselves. This impasse led to feelings of anxiety and frustration, serving to lessen the participants' confidence in making changes in their classrooms.

Classroom Application and Perceived Student Achievement

The overarching goal of PD in SISD was to provide teachers with the knowledge, strategies, and resources necessary to foster an increase in their students' academic achievement. Regina felt a result of her collaborations in PLC led to higher "test scores …in our district assessments." Through conversations and collaboration in PLC, her campus had decided to move away from "being so [reading] passage heavy" and transitioned to a focus on using visual cues and fostering conversation among students. This transition from teacher-led activities to ones that are more student-led have also revealed an increase in student achievement for Regina's students. Observing these positive changes in her classroom has caused Regina to reflect and say, "Let's see more of this. Let's see what else we can impact or affect." She asserted, "I think student achievement is a big way, a big telltale sign that professional development works," and

her confidence in her classroom has increased as a result of observing her students do well on the tests.

Monica had strong opinions surrounding her application of PD in her classroom. She struggled on her campus with obtaining resources, specifically resources that would help her implement PD in her classroom. When she attended the iReady webinar, she was excited to use the program with her students despite the training's failure to engage her as a learner. She saw the program as immediately applicable to her classroom setting. She found out, however, that the district only purchased seven licenses, and none of those licenses were assigned to her deaf education students. The PD left Monica asking, "Did I really need to learn it if I can't even use it?" In this instance, Monica was required to attend PD in which the resources were not allocated to her student populations. In another technology PD, Monica felt armed with strategies and resources she could immediately implement with her students. Because of this, Monica said, "The different programs [on the iPad]… I have been trained for have been very beneficial to my classroom and my kids as far as asking them to be more self-sufficient and independent." For instance, she learned how to film herself signing and speaking instructions, so her students could watch and complete assignments at their own pace. Because she was able to translate the information from this technology-based PD to her classroom, Monica has grown more confident in her ability to foster independence and academic achievement in her students.

Reese has also had a mostly positive experience implementing iPads in her classroom. For example, in PD she learned about a program on the iPad called, Keynote. She described it "like PowerPoint, but you can animate things and make it digital." Reese used this program with her students after a reading. She wrote six questions based on the reading and then "manipulated them to fit Keynote, so they [the students] were able to use symbols and attach videos for video

responses." She reported that the students were engaged in the activity and she saw them learning. However, she still faced challenges. Even though all students on her campus were assigned iPads, sometimes students would forget to bring them and not all devices would come to class fully charged. As a result, Reese always had to have a pen and paper back-up plan for students who did not have their technology. Overall, on Reese's campus, she believed her students had been positively impacted by her attendance at PD geared towards technology.

In another, more positive situation, Monica applied a strategy she learned through PD that she felt would work well with her students, who were visual learners. The approach she used "was to give [students] a roadmap [of the curriculum], show them where they're starting and where they're going to end up, and then help them fill in the gaps in between." She took this roadmap strategy one step further by incorporating the Yellow Brick Road and other images from The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (Baum, 1900) to help her students visualize their learning journeys. Monica reported that the students "would say things like, 'I thought we were supposed to be doing character analysis this week,'" because that was the path set forth by the Yellow Brick Road exercise. Monica, through her participation in PD, was able to increase her self-efficacy, because she saw positive results in her students.

Nevertheless, not all of the participants voiced similar views. The entirety of the PD process generally left Greta confused about what and how exactly she should have been applying what she learned in PD in her classroom. For her, that was because, "We're not sure what targets we're supposed to be hitting with it." In spite of these frustrations, Greta did find value in the Love and Logic (Fay & Funk, 1995) training because it gave her specific examples of how interactions with students should be.

Witnessing student success as a result of making PD-based implementations helped teachers to gain self-efficacy. These enactive mastery experiences and elements of verbal and social persuasion (Bandura, 1977) positively influenced the teachers' willingness to continue to implement new strategies with their students. Factors such as observing an increase in student independence and confidence in their learning and listening to the anecdotes of others who had successfully utilized strategies with their students proved to be beneficial to the teachers' overall senses of self-efficacy.

Conclusion

The teachers who participated in this study were learners, first and foremost, and they desired to attend purposeful, beneficial PD that they deemed to be immediately applicable to their classroom setting. They wanted their PD to take who they were as individuals into consideration. The participants wanted to develop as educators and tried to learn from each of their PD experiences, regardless of the approach, content, or perceived applicability to their classroom settings.

All five teachers, from all three campuses, reported very different experiences with PD despite all belonging to the same school district. There seemed to be a lack of continuity between the campuses, with each being free to make its own decisions on how to observe, provide feedback, and support teachers in their application of PD in their classrooms. The general consensus from all of the participants was that the feedback piece was largely missing from their PD experiences. Besides their own observations, they did not know whether their application of strategies was impactful with their students because feedback from colleagues and school leadership lacked critical thought that they could immediately apply to their classrooms.

Summary, Implications, and Conclusion

All Southwest Independent School District (SISD) teachers were required to complete 48 total hours of PD during the 2017-2018 academic year, which began with a mandatory weeklong professional development (PD) conference, called the Summer Professional Development Series (SPDS), in mid-August. In addition, the teachers attended various other PD events throughout the school year. The purpose of this case study was to come to a better understanding of how five middle-school English teachers from this district perceived the PD contributed to or hindered the development of their self-confidence. In addition, this research sought to develop a clearer understanding of how these perceptions do and do not impact teachers' classroom practice and student achievement. This chapter offers the summary of the findings, practical implications, theoretical implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Summary of the Findings

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, defined as, "people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over the events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175) provided the lens for the findings, because teacher self-efficacy has been linked to their classroom effectiveness and student achievement. Bandura (1977) credits four sources of information that impact how people gain confidence within specific domains. These are: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological responses. Although the most powerful contributor to building self-confidence is through enactive mastery experiences, each of these information sources may play a critical role. This section reviews the findings by research question to better understand how the participants' perceived the PD may or may not use these sources to influence their self-efficacy.

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Research Question 1: **Do middle school English teachers perceive PD enhances or hinders their self-efficacy and in what ways? How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their self-efficacy?**

In general, attendance in PD sessions were not perceived as influential in building the teachers' self-confidence. The limited use of the most powerful source of information, enactive mastery experiences, may help explain this result. Instead, the participants credited more informal approaches to teacher development, such as conferencing with colleagues and observing their classrooms, as beneficial to growing their self-efficacy.

According to Bandura (1977), it is through successfully participating in a task that a person's self-efficacy is enhanced, while unsatisfactory performance in a task will diminish it. Researchers have found that PD events that do not allow for teachers to successfully practice skills/knowledge do not result in teacher growth (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster & Cobb, 1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Meister, 2010). In the current study, the participants described a district that offered too few opportunities to work at the enactive level with the strategies presented in PD. While some presentations of strategies lent themselves to immediate implementation with students, such as Monica's roadmap, other training events neglected to provide teachers with any experiences they could successfully take back to their classrooms and, in turn, affect their self-efficacy. Moreover, PD that disregarded teachers' special populations, such as Monica's deaf education students, left the teachers struggling to translate the information to their special circumstances, with minimal opportunities for enactive mastery experiences. So, SISD's approach to PD generally did not allow for growth based on providing opportunities for actual practice to happen.

However, it is significant to note that the teachers who participated in this case study did report growth in their self-efficacy. Block, Taliaferro, Harris, and Krause (2010) suggested that individuals can benefit from witnessing the actions of others, or having vicarious experiences, Bandura's second source of information. Other researchers (e.g., Meister, 2010; Nishimura, 2014) specifically noted that teachers who, for instance, watched a mentor teacher use strategies with their students, can contribute to an increase in self-efficacy. This was the case in this study as well. The participants credited observations of other teachers in their classrooms and the conversations that grew out of those circumstances (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Burridge & Carpenter, 2013) as reasons for their enhanced self-confidence.

The teachers explained that seeing their colleagues' classrooms helped them to both modify their lessons based on what they saw and implement new strategies. Most of the time, the SISD English teachers who participated in the study had to generate their own opportunities for vicarious experiences by actively seeking out ways to observe other teachers' actions in their classrooms. Unfortunately, this finding is also reflected in research. Meister (2010) reported that the teachers in his study also found their independent efforts were more impactful to their self-efficacy than formally offered PD.

As part of verbal and social persuasion, Bandura's third information source, the informal and formal conversations occurring between teachers can help them to grow in self-efficacy as well (Bandura, 1986). All of the participants reported needing more opportunity to discuss strategies with their colleagues and figure out how to make the implementations in their classrooms than were part of formal PD. The teachers found these opportunities were more likely to happen on their own campuses if they initiated the conversations. Therefore, they were not part of a formal PD. This finding is echoed by Meister (2010), who found that his participants

also had to seek our their own opportunities for conversations that would be beneficial to their classroom practice as well.

Unlike the more formal district-level PD, the campus-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were often more successful at fostering conversation and collaboration among the English teachers and school leadership. However, the teachers reported having both positive and negative experiences in their PLCs. Some participants, like Regina and Alison, noted that the common purpose of the PLC enabled them to gain higher levels of self-efficacy because their school leadership enforced teamwork among the teachers during that time. However, others, like Reese, were disappointed in the focus and delivery of the PLCs on her campus.

The final information source of self-efficacy relies on the teachers' physiological states or their emotional reactions to professional development (Bandura, 1977). All of the participants viewed the majority of the training they had attended, both formal and informal, as lackluster or "boring." Specifically, Alison described being frustrated with presentations that she received as an "information dump." Additionally, Regina expressed her lack of excitement about attending PD due to the presenters' presentation styles that failed to engage her and other attendees.

In sum, the five teachers did not gain self-efficacy as a direct result of their formal PD experiences. In rare circumstances, research (e.g., Fay & Funk, 1995) has found that teachers can be excited about professional development and ready to use newly acquired strategies with their students upon the completion of the instruction. However, there were only a few examples in the current study of the participants' feeling equally as enthused about the information they were gaining in their PD, except, perhaps, the Love and Logic method of classroom management

following PD. Critically, it is important to note that negative experiences in PD did not appear to lessen the teachers' levels of self-efficacy either.

Research Question 2: **Do middle school English teachers perceive their self-efficacy affects their classroom practice positively or negatively and in what ways? How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their classroom practice and in what ways?**

The teachers in the current study were more likely to implement newly learned techniques in their classrooms if they first had the opportunity to practice them in the safety of PD. In these cases, the participants reported having increased success in their classrooms and increased self-efficacy. These findings echo those described in research (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Giraldo, 2014).

All the participants reported that they considered how the strategies and knowledge they acquired from attending PD might impact their classroom practice before deciding to try new things with their students. For example, enactive mastery experiences occurring in PD led to Monica incorporating the Yellow Brick Road as a roadmap strategy to help her students visualize their learning journeys. This finding supports previous research (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013), that also found PD that incorporated practice led to higher likelihood of classroom implementation. Enactive mastery experiences in PD, therefore, could improve the participants' self-efficacy and their classroom teaching. The issue for the participants was that there were few examples of this in their PD. Notably, this led the teachers to find the trainings unhelpful. When this was the case, the teachers simply viewed PD as a necessary annual requirement for maintaining certification.

Mimicking the findings of studies completed by Nishimura (2014) and Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015), Alison maintained that vicariously observing other teachers' experiences of success in their classrooms was the best way to learn pedagogy. However, the participants' vicarious experiences both positively and negatively influenced their classroom practice. The participants noted some instances of observation in which a teacher's authority in the classroom was undermined or a teacher failed an attempt at a strategy led to lack of self-efficacy for implementing the strategies observed.

Through social persuasion the teachers did modify classroom practices. For example, through her conversations about technology usage in the classroom, Reese gained the ability to convince her fellow teachers to be more technology-forward in their classrooms. Conversely, when teachers were presented with strategies or resources that they could not immediately use, as was the experience for several of the teachers (i.e., Greta, Monica, and Regina), they were not likely to apply those strategies. Therefore, the information had to be timely and appropriate for them to implement it.

Finally, the teachers reported having physiological responses as a result of PD. These responses, such as excitement, frustration, and fear, influenced the teachers' practice. For example, Greta and Monica became frustrated and lost confidence in PD when the resources being discussed were unavailable or inappropriate for their specific classroom environments. The participants reported having anxiety when they left a PD without being able to conceptualize how to utilize its strategies in their classrooms or when they lacked the necessary resources to successfully implement those strategies. Yet, PD about classroom management techniques elicited the physiological responses of excitement and engagement in the participants and influenced them to change their teaching approaches. In addition, when the participants observed

one another's classrooms and observed positive student growth, it elicited a sense of excitement in the teachers. Teachers, it has been found, are indeed more likely to continue to utilize their newly learned strategies when they see their students grow as a result (Burridge & Carpenter, 2013).

Formal approaches to PD that did not appeal to the participants' needs for enactive mastery experiences during the trainings decreased the likelihood of implementation of the strategies they learned. However, PD experiences that incorporated positive vicarious experiences and social persuasion caused the participants to be more confident in using new teaching practices with their students. Ultimately, the teachers needed to immediately be able to relate their learning in PD back to their classroom environments for their classroom practice, and self-efficacy as a result of that practice, to grow.

Research Question 3: **What other factors of professional development do teachers perceive to contribute to or hinder their sense of self-efficacy?**

This research revealed findings that landed outside the scope of the four sources of information laid out by Bandura (1977). In this section, I will discuss those areas that are relevant to the development of teacher effectiveness. These topics include the important role of feedback to the teachers and to the facilitators.

Research has found that school leadership, feedback, and shared campus goals all contribute to a teacher's sense of self-confidence in their classrooms (Payne & Wolfson, 2000). However, school leadership for the teachers was not as supportive as they would have liked. The participants asserted that they wanted detailed and specific feedback from their campus leaders that is designed to help them grow as educators. Yet, they reported not knowing how school leaders viewed their areas of weakness or struggle. As a result, the teachers were unsure how to

improve because the feedback they received was impersonal and generic. Despite this, the participants persisted in their desire to grow and improve as educators even when their administrators lacked involvement in their classrooms.

Moreover, the research states that school leadership that enforces qualities such as collaboration, shared vision, and opportunities for reflection and feedback are most likely to stimulate positive change on their campuses (Youngs & King, 2002). Yet, the participants reported they had few opportunities to provide genuine feedback about the PD they attended. The two major responses by the participants indicated: (a) they didn't have many opportunities to provide or receive feedback, and (b) they worried if they offered feedback it would have negative consequences. As the teachers described, SISD required teachers to sign into their district accounts to give feedback on the district-level PD. This system meant that any feedback could be traced back to the individual teacher. Reese felt being unable to offer anonymous comments left teachers concerned that there would be negative repercussions from campus and district leaders if they provided honest and detailed feedback. As a natural consequence, they chose to stay silent, so the teachers' needs remained unknown and the PD rarely improved.

In conclusion, PD in this district offered inconsistent and limited opportunities for the teachers to tell PD facilitators about areas in which they needed training. In addition, the teachers expressed concerns about feeling unable to provide feedback regarding the PD they did attend. And, they rarely received feedback that would help their practice. Whatever feedback they received was often brief and unclear. These comments offered valuable insights into specific areas that, if addressed, may lead to improved PD (and consequently, self-efficacy) in the future.

Implications for Practice

This research provided much needed insight into one school district's PD practices and the impact those practices had on five middle school English teachers. Based on the findings, school districts should consider the four sources of information (Bandura, 1977) to PD delivery, because increasing teacher self-efficacy improves their practice and, in turn, student achievement. There are several ways to accomplish this goal. First, professional development should be designed to engage participants in the ways they learn best. In order to do this, PD facilitators should consider Bandura's (1977) first source of information: Enactive mastery experiences. Teachers reported that they desired the opportunity to master the concepts taught in training while under the guidance of the PD facilitator. Unfortunately, the practice piece of PD was frequently neglected and, therefore, the trainings often failed to appeal to the teachers' learning styles. The PD did not provide the necessary opportunities for the teachers to practice how to integrate the strategies being taught in the sessions in their classrooms. Because the enactive mastery experience was oftentimes missing for teachers, they were less likely to attempt implementing learned strategies with their students. Therefore, as the facilitators work with district leaders to determine topics for the next formal PD session, particularly the weeklong workshop, it is critical that they also consider appropriate delivery methods that are engaging and consider the teachers' learning styles.

Second, too often the formal PDs were not designed to address the participants' specific needs. The teachers talked about attending sessions that seemed irrelevant to their classroom environments. Either trainings focused on the facilitators' agendas instead of the teachers' or they lacked an enactive mastery agenda. Correcting this might require surveying the teachers or allowing them to provide critical feedback on the trainings they attend to discover topics of

interest and need. Sessions that are appropriate and applicable will be well received by these teachers.

The teachers also reported wanting more opportunity to provide feedback to presenters to be integrated into PD processes. At present, there is no desirable mechanism in place to offer this type of feedback. The teachers reported that they either thought their voices would not be heard or feared repercussion for providing honest and critical feedback. Therefore, they either provided minimal feedback or none at all. As such, the sessions often did not address the specific needs of the teachers. Surveying the teachers annually regarding their needs could help guide the district leaders and facilitators in determining the topics for the various PD sessions.

Fourth, teachers need campus leaders to provide them with specific feedback more often. The teachers welcomed feedback that was offered in a constructive way. Yet, they complained that they received little to no feedback, so they felt uncertain what they were doing right and what could be improved upon. Therefore, campus leaders need to find constructive ways to provide this type of feedback, particularly to these new teachers who are still developing confidence in their classroom practice.

Finally, the participants appreciated it when the PLCs allowed them to collaborate with their colleagues and share and receive feedback, but this was not the experience at each of the three schools. The PLC is an opportunity to provide needed support and assistance with the specifics of that campus population in mind. School leaders need to make intentional efforts to design PLCs that will achieve these goals. The participants in this case study wanted to grow and improve and too often felt frustrated by PD that did not consider their needs and make the most of their time. These recommendations should help to address these areas of frustration.

Implications for Theory

Applying the lens of Bandura's self-efficacy theory was useful in better understanding if PD helped or hindered the development of the teacher's self confidence, classroom practice, and their perceptions of student achievement. All of the PD that the teachers attended utilized the four sources of information as defined by Bandura (1977) to varying degrees. PD that focused on *enactive mastery experiences* asked the participants to work with the strategies that were being presented in the safe space of the training before using them in their classrooms were the most beneficial in growing teachers' self-efficacy. PD oftentimes presented information using *vicarious experiences*, in which the facilitator presented the information as a teacher would and the participants experienced the information from a student's perspective. *Verbal and Social Persuasion* was also a tactic that facilitators used to persuade the participants to utilize strategies in their classrooms through the sharing of anecdotes. Finally, the PD that the teachers attended appealed to their *physiological states*, or the feelings of excitement or anxiety as they were tasked with implementing PD in their classrooms. In the future, researchers may find the theory helpful as they explore related topics, because of the critical role teacher self-efficacy plays in their classroom effectiveness and student achievement.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study was conducted with middle school English teachers in a large Title I public school district in North Texas. The findings provide a starting point for exploring how PD may help or hinder teachers' self-efficacy. The following are recommendations for future research.

1. Because the current study was limited to five teachers in one school district in north Texas, future researchers are encouraged to recreate or replicate this study with a larger number of participants in any district to generate greater depth about how a single

district-provided PD program impacts teachers' self-efficacy. Expanding the study will produce greater insights into the connections between PD and self-efficacy, which may be the critical component to teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

2. This study looked at the PD provided to one Title 1 district. Future researchers could explore a multiple case study by comparing how Title I and non-Title I districts differ in the approach to PD. This approach would provide rich insight into how school districts with students from different demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds develop teachers' pedagogical confidence and preparedness.

3. The current study focuses solely on middle-level English teachers. Future researchers may incorporate teachers of other grade levels and subject areas to allow for triangulation. Further, looking at a more diverse group of teachers may show that they have different needs, which may affect how they respond to the PD. It may also identify which of Bandura's (1977) four sources of information proved most helpful to their development.

4. Because the current study focused solely on teachers' perceptions at one point in time, it would be helpful to study this topic ethnographically. For example, research might follow of one PLC group through PD over the course of a semester or full school year to ascertain what enhances the teachers' development of self-efficacy. This would help researchers gain a more complete understanding of how PLC practices serve to grow or hinder teachers' self confidence.

5. This study focused on getting an in-depth understanding of teachers from one district qualitatively. This findings from this study could be adapted to a quantitative survey distributed at a national or regional level to determine educators' PD needs, more

broadly. Additional variables based on student backgrounds, years of teaching experience, district makeup, parental income, and so forth could also offer valuable insights. This extension to this current study would be beneficial in helping to inform both national and state level legislation regarding teacher training and development.

The current case study provides a rich, collective experience that allows for determining the effectiveness of existing professional development methods for increasing teachers' confidence. Even though the current study was small, it provided an in-depth examination of one particular set of educators: middle-level English teachers. It concentrated on reading and English teachers because historically, there tends to be a gap in reading achievement in the middle levels (Hemphill, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009; Hemphill, Vanneman, & Rahman, 2011). In addition, it focused on the middle school years precisely because research noted that youth in these years are more likely to lose motivation (Allinder, 1994; Stein & Wang, 1988; Goker, 2005) and as a result PD may play an even more important role here than in elementary or even high school. The research suggestions above are just a beginning to building a well-rounded body of research on this important topic.

Limitations

The scope of this study presented multiple limitations. First, this research included the perceptions of only five teachers. It is possible that the time of year for participant recruitment limited the number of teacher volunteers. During the spring semester, teachers are faced with administering state assessments. This is a period of high stress for both teachers and students. Only nine teachers out of a total of 110 potential English teachers expressed interest in participating, and only five of them fit the criteria of only having taught for three or fewer years. It is possible that other English teachers from this district or other districts would have expressed

very different views from the five participants. In addition, this research only focused on one subject area in one school district. It is possible that other teachers of other subjects from this district or other districts would have different views from those of the participants. Another limitation was that I taught in the grade levels and districts being studied. While I had to work to mitigate any biases this limitation caused, it also provided me with understanding and insight into the nature of PD in Southwest Independent School District. Finally, the district PD leaders withdrew from my study, limiting my ability to triangulate my data and determine whether or not the district goals and foci were met. However, the goal of the study was to explore English teacher perceptions of professional development in depth and come to a strong, shared understanding of how the district-provided PD impacted the teachers' self-efficacy, which this study was able to accomplish.

Conclusion

Previous research has explored the idea of teacher professional development extensively, but little to no research has explored Albert Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy in relation to middle school English teachers' perceptions of professional development and student achievement. The current study focused on Bandura's four sources of information that work to impact a person's self-confidence both positively and negatively. The findings suggest that teachers use the four sources of information in tandem to impact their self-efficacy for teaching, practice, and, in turn, student achievement. As seen in the findings of this study enactive mastery experiences proved to be the most influential source of information in growing teachers' self efficacy, while vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological responses also worked together in impacting the confidence of the participants. Unfortunately, not all professional development in SISD adhered to the tenets of Bandura's (1977) theory. The teachers

in this study largely had to seek out their own opportunities for growth and collaboration in addition to, and sometimes in spite of, the PDs they were expected and required to attend. As a result, these teachers continued to struggle to develop confidence in their practice, which may help explain why these legislated efforts have not led to reducing the achievement gap, which continues to plague our students and our schools.

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Appendices

<center>**Appendix A**</center>

<center>**Educator Email**</center>

Dear Educator,

        Hello! My name is Aleisha Reid. I'm currently a 7th grade English teacher at ▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and am completing my Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Arlington in Educational Leadership and Policy under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky.

        I'm reaching out because I'd like to invite you to be a participant in my dissertation research. I am studying ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ approach to professional development and would love your input.

        I am asking for volunteers to participate in one interview regarding their experiences with professional development and how it may or may not impact your classroom practice. Following the interview, I may need to contact you to clarify statements or your point of view. I am seeking out middle school English teachers with three or fewer years of teaching experiences.

        I will take special care to protect the identity of all who participate. Names of schools, events, and participants will all be changed, and I will make sure to disguise any identifying information in my final product.

        Please consider volunteering your time and valuable insight to my study, as I hope my research will help to improve professional development in ▮▮▮▮▮▮. If you are interested in participating, please follow the link to a Google Form and fill out your information so I can contact you with the next steps.

<center>88</center>

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefI44gCg2iF36d4esjEBamQwtkHF8aAuk_

xyJWhIfrMNkz4w/viewform?usp=sf_link

I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter, and please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Aleisha J Reid

████████████

Appendix B

Facilitator Email

Dear Professional Development Facilitator,

Hello! My name is Aleisha Reid. I'm currently a 7th grade English teacher at ▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and am completing my Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Arlington in Educational Leadership and Policy under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky.

I'm reaching out because I'd like to invite you to be a participant in my dissertation research. I am studying ▮▮▮▮▮ approach to professional development and how it may or may not impact teachers' classroom practice and would love your input.

I am asking for volunteers to participate in one interview to occur during the 2017-2018 school year. Following the interview, I may need to contact you to clarify statements or your point of view.

I will take special care to protect the identity of all who participate. Names of schools, events, and participants will all be changed, and I will make sure to disguise any identifying information in my final product.

Please consider volunteering your time and valuable insight to my study, as I hope my research will help to improve professional development in ▮▮▮▮▮. If you are interested in participating, please follow the link to a Google Form and fill out your information so I can contact you with the next steps.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefI44gCg2iF36d4esjEBamQwtkHF8aAuk_

xyJWhIfrMNkz4w/viewform?usp=sf_link

I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter, and please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Aleisha J Reid

████████████

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Do middle school English teachers perceive PD enhances or hinders their self-efficacy and in what ways?

    a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their self-efficacy?

2. Do middle school English teachers perceive their self-efficacy affects their classroom practice positively or negatively and in what ways?

    a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their classroom practice and in what ways?

3. What other factors of professional development do teachers perceive to contribute to or hinder their sense of self-efficacy?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your learning style. How do you feel you learn best? Please explain.

2. Tell me about your experience with professional development this year.

    • How did you determine which sessions to attend?

    • What topics or district initiatives were covered?

    • How were the trainings presented?

    • What was the most valuable information conveyed? Why?

    • What was the least valuable information conveyed? Why?

3. Have you implemented what you learned in professional development in your classroom?

    • Provide an example of how you used it.

- If not, why not?

4. Have you observed teachers model new teaching strategies with students?

   - When did you do this?

   - What did they do?

   - What are your feelings about these opportunities?

   - Were they helpful? In what way or why not?

   - What did you learn?

   - Did you conference with that teacher regarding your observation? What did you discuss?

5. Did you need resources in order to make implementations based on the PD in your classroom? What resources?

   - Did you receive them?

   - Why did you not receive them?

   - What practice were you trying to employ?

   - What was your experience with the implementation?

   - How did you feel about it?

   - Have you continued using the strategy?

       - In what way?

       - How do you feel now?

6. How would you like to be supported in your implementations of professional developments in your classroom?

   - Would you prefer to observe a master teacher? Why or why not?

   - Would you prefer to receive detailed feedback?

       - What kinds of feedback would you find helpful?

o   What kinds of feedback would you find not helpful?

- What other supports might you find helpful?

7. What feedback have you already received on your implementation of professional development topics and district initiatives so far this school year?

- How did this feedback make you feel?

- Have you used that feedback? In what way?

8. Have you seen evidence of improved student achievement as a result of professional development? Please explain.

- How did this make you feel?

9. What recommendations do you have for the professional development facilitators in this district?

10. How has attending professional development impacted your classroom practice?

- How do you know?

11. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experiences with professional development that we have not already discussed?

Appendix D

Professional Development Facilitator Interview Protocol

1. Do middle school English teachers perceive PD enhances or hinders their self-efficacy and in what ways?

    a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their self-efficacy?

2. Do middle school English teachers perceive their self-efficacy affects their classroom practice positively or negatively and in what ways?

    a. How do they describe the PD' use of the four sources of information in terms of contributing to or hindering their classroom practice and in what ways?

3. What other factors of professional development do teachers perceive to contribute to or hinder their sense of self-efficacy?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with planning professional development this year.

    • How did you determine what topics or district initiatives to cover?

    • Who presented at these trainings?

    • How were the trainings presented?

2. How has professional development evolved from previous years?

3. How do you determine what professional development teachers need each year?

4. How do you differentiate professional development for the different needs of teachers?

5. Do you think that this district's professional development is an effective approach to professional development? Why or why not?

6. What resources will teachers and campuses need in order to effectively implement this year's topics and district initiatives?

   • How will these resources be obtained?

7. How will you ensure that teachers and campuses implement this year's professional development topics and initiatives?

   • How will you collect feedback from campuses?

8. Does the district provide continued professional development and support for campus leaders who are in charge of ensuring district initiatives are met? If so, how?

9. How do you determine whether or not professional development was beneficial to teachers?

10. How has attendance at professional development impacted teacher practice? How do you know?

11. Is there anything else you want to tell me about teacher professional development in this district that we have not yet discussed?

Appendix E

Informed Consent

Hello! My name is Aleisha Reid, and I am requesting your participation in a UT

Arlington research study titled, "Developing Self-Efficacy – Middle School Teachers'

Perceptions and Practices after Professional Development". The purpose of this study is to

explore how middle school reading teachers perceive professional development affecting their

self-confidence and classroom practices. In order to complete this study, I will ask that you

participate in one semi-structured interview at a time and place of your choosing. This should

take no longer than 1 – 2 hours. There are no perceived risks or direct benefits for participating

in this study. Please know that you must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study and

that you may quit at any time.

Any identifiable information will be kept confidential and I will be the only person with

access to this information. I may publish, present, or share the results of this study, but your

name or identifying information will not be used. If you have any questions about this study, you

can contact me at Aleisha.Reid@mavs.uta.edu or at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. For questions or concerns,

please contact the UTA Research Office at (817) 272 – 3723.

By completing the following demographic survey and returning it to me, you are

indicating your voluntary agreement to participate in my study. Thank you so much for your

interest! I look forward to interviewing you!

Regards,

Aleisha Reid

The University of Texas at Arlington

Biographical Information

Aleisha Reid is currently a middle school English teacher in North Texas. She is passionate about sharing her love of literature with her students and helping grow teachers' confidence through professional development and coaching. Her research interests include teacher professional development and best practices in literacy education. Her Bachelor of Arts degree is from Texas Woman's University in English Literature with a minor in Secondary Education. Her Master of Education degree is from the University of Texas at Arlington in Curriculum and Instruction with a literacy focus. Her doctorate degree is also from the University of Texas at Arlington in Educational Leadership and Policy. She plans to become an educational consultant continue to reach both students and teachers through quality classroom instruction and professional development opportunities.