Professional Relationships: an interpretive phenomenological analysis
of professional development
experiences and teacher’s self-efficacy

A thesis presented
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Abstract

Federal legislation continually draws attention to public education requiring more assessments, higher standards for learning, and rigorous instruction. To address this concern, emphasis is placed on increasing professional development for teachers. By their own admission, elementary school teachers seek and attend professional development to increase his or her own level of education and performance. Since teacher’s self-efficacy has shown to affect instructional practices and professional knowledge, recognizing teachers’ self-efficacy when planning, designing and implementing professional development is essential. Capturing the professional learning experiences of teachers it notably absent in the literature concerning the importance of self-efficacy. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), this study investigated the following research question: What is the relationship between teachers’ experiences with professional development and professional efficacy? The findings of this study indicate that there is a distinct relationship between professional development and teachers’ self-efficacy. Consistent with the literature, the participants reported positive professional growth, increased self-efficacy, and a commitment to learning. Despite previous professional development experiences, participants successfully engaged in professional development that has influenced them both personally and professionally.

Keywords: professional development, teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, professional efficacy
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Chapter 1

Background of the Study

In recent years efforts have been launched to improve education by creating fundamental shifts in what children learn and how they are taught. If children are to achieve at levels demanded by the high standards adopted by states and districts, teachers will have to help them do so. Teachers are the most critical and influential individuals in public education, for they must carry out the high standards in the classroom. Thus, the success of ambitious education hinges, in large part, on the qualifications and effectiveness of teachers. As a result, professional development is a major focus in meeting these standards.

However, although teachers generally support trends in education, many teachers are not prepared to implement practices based on those trends. Many teachers learn to teach using a model of teaching and learning that focused on memorizing facts, without also emphasizing a conceptual understanding of content. Shifting to a more rigorous balance of teaching, which emphasizes content, teachers must learn more about content, how students learn, what assessments will be required of students, administrative expectations, and their own sense of professional efficacy. For most teachers, support and guidance provided by professional development experiences is a valuable tool for learning content, experiencing new instructional practices, and developing the confidence and self-reflection that facilitates professional efficacy.

Educators’ pedagogical beliefs and practices, teaching practices, and professional learning comprise each individual’s ability to meet the administrative, instructional and personal demands of education. Experiencing professional development is necessary to implement and execute some type of learning process. According to Senge (1990), this process occurs “over time whereby peoples beliefs, ways of seeing the world, and ultimately their skills and
capabilities change “ (p.23). In order for this type of learning to occur, it must be embedded into the lives of individuals and be given time and effort.

School systems are constantly changing and are using professional development opportunities as a tool to support the training needs of teachers. The demand for excellent teachers and teacher education, along with the training that accompanies both, demands more rigorous training. In order to maintain the cornerstone of education, which is the classroom teacher and the instruction that he or she provides, teachers should have a critical voice that directly impacts professional development needs, opportunities, and exposures that will benefit the teacher both professionally and personally.

Statement of the Problem

The Topic. Federal legislation continues to draw attention to the professional development that is required for in-service and practicing teachers. Local education agencies are responsible for this maintenance of the instructional service for teachers. As local school systems attempt to provide effective professional development, many teachers still indicate professional needs in areas specific to their instruction and professional growth. The most contributing factor for the decreased efficacy among teachers is their feeling of not being prepared and/ or equipped to deliver instruction aligned to the professional practice and student academic achievement standards (Murphy & Turf, 2014). Bandura (1997) asserted that positive modifications in self-efficacy are only achieved with “compelling feedback that forcefully disrupts the preexisting disbeliefs in one’s capabilities” (p. 82). Research links the motivation to learn, attempt, and master new skills to levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, Schaefer, 2010).

Ross (1994) posits that teacher efficacy “is increasingly recognized as a pivotal variable influencing teacher practice and student outcomes” (p. 381). The assumed benefits of positive
teacher efficacy are believed to derive from the critical role that teacher efficacy is thought to play in teacher cognition and motivation – “Certainly one’s personal teaching efficacy governs one’s motivation, thought processes, and willingness to expand energy (Weasmer & Woods, 1998, p. 245).” Teacher self-efficacy has come to be one of the most commonly examined factors believed to influence pre-service and in-service teacher commitment, burnout, and student achievement (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, 2007; Wheatley, 2000, 2002; Woolfolk Hoy & Davis, 2006). In his seminal work, Bandura (1997, p.3) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.” In essence, self-efficacy is an individual’s belief about what he or she can do successfully (Bong, 2006). Little empirical evidence exists to guide administrators in providing effective professional development and the effects of professional development on teachers’ self-efficacy. Revealing these beliefs can prove beneficial to researchers, teachers, and staff development coordinators because they represent the underlying self-beliefs of teachers regarding what can be successfully done in the classroom and how teachers view their professional efficacy.

**Research Problem.** Teacher efficacy beliefs are essential for the widespread success of public education – particularly education that promotes progressive, meaning-centered education (Wheatly, 2002). Currently, Educational systems are under pressure to implement changes and achieve greater efficiency (Buchen, 2003; Desimone, 2009; Fullan, 1999; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 2007; Gerstner, 2004; O’Brien & Christie, 2008; Perkins, 1992). Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) state that the recurrent demand for educational reform is both fundamental and systemic. Such changes often require teachers to restructure their professional practices, regardless of the dynamics of the institution or grade level that they teach. Instructional revisions encompass
practices to reflect shifts in societal structure, values, and resources (Rennie, 2001). In addition, teachers are expected to realign practices in light of evolving learning theories (e.g., behavioral, constructive, and sociocultural). Therefore, the burden of implementing and maintaining a progressive educational system has been placed on teachers instead of administration as public educational remains at the forefront of federal, state, and local political platforms, new challenges and policies emerge for administrators and teachers across the nation. The result has been the recurring interest of ongoing professional development for teachers, particularly high-quality in-service training, and a concern about professional development design and delivery in ways that will improve teaching and learning.

Professional development is about teachers learning content, learning how to teach, and transforming knowledge into practice for greater teacher effectiveness and student growth (Avalos, 2011). Administrators and teachers call for professional development that is ongoing and dynamic. Yet a teacher’s contribution to effective professional development goes beyond the content of the professional development, their instruction or their level of training. Teachers’ perspectives and perceptions of their own teaching, by extension, and their student’s learning, are an integral part of successful education, however these components are rarely considered in professional development opportunities.

Since the late 1970s, researchers have considered teacher efficacy – teachers’ beliefs in their ability to affect student outcomes – to be a critical factor for improving teacher education (Ashton, 1984; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Ramey-Gassert & Shroyer, 1992; Ross, 1998; Scharmann & Hampton, 1995). DeMesquita & Drake (1994) and Sarason (1990) provide insight through scholarly research and have concluded that educational trends do not address teacher self-efficacy and therefore may be
doomed. In contrast, the claim has been made that teacher beliefs about their teaching efficacy have important benefits for teacher learning and education as a whole. Therefore the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between teachers’ experiences with professional development and their professional efficacy.

**Justification for the research problem.** Research on teachers’ sense of their self-efficacy has mainly focused on what affects – the development of – teachers’ professional identity (Hamman, Gosseling, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010). To a lesser extent, more outcome-oriented studies exist. Professional development researchers are criticizing conventional approaches and advocating for newer, more collaborative models (Collins, 1998; Scott & Weeks, 1996; Simmons, Kuykendall, King, Cornachione, & Kameenui, 2000; Stein et al., 1999). Conventional models include one-stop workshops, with a top-down approach to disseminating knowledge, in which teachers are provided with information and resources that they are expected to translate into action (Gersten, Vaughn, Deshler, & Schiller, 1997). In contrast, collaborative models emphasize the importance of nurturing learning communities within which teachers try new ideas, reflect on outcomes, and co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning in context with authentic activity (Borko & Putnam, 1998; Perry, Walton, & Calder, 1999). Teachers want and need practical in-service activities that address his/her genuine needs in the classroom, make them better teachers, and that improve student outcomes (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Professional development should include coherent, relevant coursework that ties to real-world practice and that includes learning experiences that build both teacher competence and confidence (Wested, 2000).

**Deficiencies in the Evidence.** Current trends in education require all students receive instruction by highly qualified teachers (NCLB, 2001) and teacher professional development is
widely viewed as the most promising intervention for improving existing teacher quality (Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010). While resources are being poured into professional development, evidence for the effectiveness of these programs is uneven. Large-scale studies that examined professional development typically only examined the relation of the program to student achievement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) argue that professional development should explicitly recognize that teacher self-efficacy should be included as a central focus in the professional development of teachers. Models of professional development should not only develop and implement activities aimed at building positive efficacy beliefs but should also use such beliefs as indicators of success.

Professional development and in-service training efforts have tended to lack continuity across time. For example, Senge (1990) notes that one serious deficiency has been school districts unexamined and fragmented adoption of fads, fancies, and popular (but unproven) innovations. Compelling evidence has been accumulating over the past three decades that research a relationship between teachers’ beliefs about their capability to impact student’s motivation and the achievement of important processes and outcomes in schools (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teacher’s self-efficacy has been related to their behavior in the classroom and to student outcomes such as students’ achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy beliefs (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Ross, 1992). A growing body of empirical evidence supports Bandura’s (1977) theory that teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs would be related to the effort teachers invest in teaching, the goals they set, their persistence when things do not go smoothly, and their resilience in the face of setbacks (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1988).
Relating the Discussion to Audiences. Incorporating a focus on the development of teacher self-efficacy represents an important evolution in teacher in-service training and professional development opportunities that can improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement. With new research that explores teacher self-efficacy, professional development may allow teachers to reflect on instructional practices, prior experiences, and personal professional needs that will successfully and unsuccessfully engage teacher behavior that they will be expected to adopt. Understanding and incorporating self-efficacy in professional development, schools and staff development specialists will have the needed tools to design effective teacher training, improve teacher competence, and, by extension, enhance student learning outcomes.

Significance of Research Problem

Studies of teacher-efficacy effects of professional development are rare (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Despite recognition of its importance, the professional development currently available to teachers is inadequate (Borko, 2004). Each year, schools, districts, and the federal government spend millions, if not billions, of dollars on in-service seminars and other forms of professional development that are fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account what teachers know and how teachers learn (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Putnam & Borko, 2000). The continuing professional development opportunities available to teachers have been criticized as generating little or no improvement on subsequent student learning (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Exploring teacher efficacy as an organizing concept around which professional development can be designed and evaluated, as a viable means for professional advancement is a logical next step.

Positionality Statement
Introduction. My experiences and background in education have influenced my perceptions of teaching and developed some knowledge of professional development practices implemented in public schools. It is essential for me to recognize the influences of my experiences, both past and present, and the required professional development mandated by the local education system to maintain personal objectivity throughout my research study. The purpose of this section is to address essential questions related to my perspectives and biases about the effectiveness of professional development, professional development implementation, and the desired outcomes to be gained from attending professional development.

Perspectives and Biases. I am a 44-year old male living in rural Maryland and I currently teach kindergarten at an elementary school that serves a diverse community with grades Pre-K through 5. There are 240 students enrolled in the school. I returned to the kindergarten classroom following a two-year position as a building level administrator. Prior to being an administrator, I was a kindergarten teacher for nine years. My classroom experiences have been very broad. I have been a special education teacher at a high school and a middle school. In addition, I was an Infant’s and Toddler’s Program instructor and an Adult Basic Education teacher for a local college. This diverse exposure to public education and multiple learning environments made me aware of the professional development needs for teachers and educators. I reflected back on the pre-service teacher training that I received in college and concluded that it prepared me for teaching but it did not prepare me for the conceptual understanding of the curriculum and instructional practices that I would need to become an effective teacher.

Self in Relation to Administration. As a teacher, I must provide an instructional environment to support the educational needs of the students enrolled in my classroom. As
education is constantly changing with new standards, textbooks, technology, and evaluation models being adopted into the public school system, I need to familiarize myself with the instructional materials and administrative expectations that are required to effectively teach my students, as well as remaining current with trends in education. Remaining current with trends in education is done by attending professional development opportunities. Therefore, my building administrator needs to have an understanding of the curriculum materials, technology, and instructional practices associated with education reform, as well as provide the professional development needed so that I understand the organizational changes being implemented and can remain effective in my position.

**Self in Relation to Teachers.** As I oversee the educational programs within my classroom, I must be aware of the pressures and expectations that are being placed on my students. Since the expectations are set high for my students, it is only right that learning expectations are set high for myself. Educational change requires me to place more emphasis on instructional planning, expanding my knowledge of new educational standards and learning outcomes, learning objectives, and professional development and collaboration. Providing an instructional environment that will allow my students and myself to attain success and other teachers to recognize how success is formed is important to me.

**Self in Relation to Students.** Being an educator in a public school system, it is my duty to provide a quality education for all students regardless of ability level. I must remain a lifelong learner and prepare myself for the continually changing environment of public education. I must commit myself to attending professional development opportunities and familiarizing myself with the trends in education in order to meet the educational needs of my students. I have never entered my classroom with the mind-set that I had all of the answers or knew
everything there was to know about teaching. I continually look for ways to inspire my students, teach them new concepts, and differentiate my instruction to meet their individual needs. I see professional development as an opportunity to advance professionally, not only to benefit my students, but also to benefit myself.

**Research Questions.**

The research question that follows this problem of practice is: What is the relationship between teachers’ experiences with professional development and professional efficacy?

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between professional development experiences and teachers’ sense of professional efficacy. The guiding theory and underlying seminal works that provides the framework for this study is Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy theory is part of Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory and is viewed as a part of the Social Learning Theory which dates back to the late 1800’s (Bandura, 1986, 1987).

Miller (2002) reports that Bandura has contributed three key concepts to the behaviorist movement in which Self-efficacy Theory is a part. First, observational learning is much more than imitating another person’s behavior. Next, individuals are self-regulatory, and devise goals for themselves to meet personal expectations for behavior. Finally, behavior is changed through triadic reciprocal causation where “the person, the behavior, and the environment – interact” (Miller, 2002, p. 210).

**Self-Efficacy Theory.** Schunk and Pajares (2009) posit that self-efficacy refers to the capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels. Self-efficacy has been shown
to be a powerful influence on individuals’ motivation, achievement, and self-regulation (Bandura, 1997; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991; Pajares 1997; Stajovic & Luthans, 1998). In education self-efficacy has shown to affect teachers choices of activities, effort expended, persistence, interest, and achievement.

By definition, self-efficacy is “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 131). Self-efficacy is hypothesized to influence behaviors and environments and, in turn, to be affected by them (Bandura, 1996, 1997). Teachers who are efficacious about learning should be more apt to engage in self-regulation (goal setting, using effective teaching strategies, and evaluating their goal process) and create effective environments for learning (research based practices, interventions, and current instructional trends). Bandura (1997) postulates that individuals acquire information to gauge their self-efficacy from interpretations of actual performances, vicarious or modeled experiences, forms of social persuasions, and physiological indexes. Therefore, self-efficacy theory serves as a lens to better understand the factors and perceptions leading teachers to implement professional development content into their classrooms.

Through the researchers application of Bandura’s self-efficacy theory, teachers’ perceptions of self – efficacy will be examined as a result of participating in professional development. According to Bandura (1986), many things influence individuals and provide the framework for their understanding of the world. He describes three factors that continuously influence learning. Those are personal, behavioral, and environmental. These factors are referred to as either Triadic Reciprocal Causation or Triadic Reciprocal Determinism in the literature. This is the foundation of self-efficacy theory. In theory, the environment, personal
factors, and behaviors interrelate and influence each other throughout life. Tademy and Clark (2008) describe this triadic reciprocity as relevant to understanding human nature.

**Triadic Reciprocity.** This model demonstrates Bandura’s relationship between personal, behavioral, and environmental (Bandura, 1997) influences adapted to teachers’ perception of self-efficacy following participation in professional development opportunities.

Triadic reciprocity gives representation to the interdependency of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that impact self-efficacy. As noted, personal factors, including cognitive, affective and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental events are directly related to self-efficacy. All of these factors will be examined from the perspective of each of the participants in the study.

Bandura proposes another relationship between the environment and behaviors. Robinson (2010) describes people as both influencing and being influenced by the environment in which they find themselves (p. 2-3). Bandura expressed that individuals learn from watching what others do in social context in three domains: the environment, personal, and behavior. He states, “Exposure to actual or symbolic models who exhibit useful skills and strategies raises observers’ beliefs in their own capabilities (Bandura, 1986, p. 93).

Bandura’s (1990, 1997) triadic reciprocity furthers social cognitive theory and justifies the relevance of cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes within all individuals (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 361.) Cognitive and other personal factors, as well as environmental and behavioral events, all contribute to the impact that professional development has on teachers and work interactively to produce change.

Throughout Bandura’s work, self-belief is strongly influenced by efficacy. He postulates that individuals are producers and products of their environment (Bandura, 1990), and defines
perceived self-efficacy as “personal judgments of one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 83).

**Self-Efficacy in Professional Development.** Research on cognitive motivators has been applied to how self-efficacy dynamics operate in personal accomplishments. However, professional development is directed at group goals that are achieved in organizational structures that address multiple individuals at the same time. To exercise control over such groups of individuals, decision makers must rely on the concerted efforts of others, whereas the individual level, they must regulate their own efforts (Bandura, 1991).

Teacher (or instructional) self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about one’s capabilities to help students learn (Pajares, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Social cognitive theory predicts that teacher self-efficacy should influence the same types of activities that student self-efficacy affects: choice of activities, effort, persistence, and achievement (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with high self-efficacy are apt to develop challenging activities, help students succeed, and persist with personal professional development.

Bandura (1977) proposed that the belief in one’s ability provided a powerful drive to influence motivation, effort and persistence. This belief has driven research into how teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs are relative to their actions and to the outcomes that they achieve (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies, validating beliefs or capability.

**Synthesis of theoretical framework**

Bandura’s theories are relevant to this study because they focus on teachers’ self-efficacy and how it enhances human accomplishment and well-being in many ways and influences the choices that people make to pursue courses of actions for achievement (Bandura, 1986, 1997).
The supporting theories of training, as defined by Day (1999), or as inquiry described by Sparks and Simmons (1989), discuss the potential effects that professional development has on teachers’ sense of efficacy.

Key constructs in Bandura’s (1978, 1997) self-efficacy theory illustrate that three interrelated forces motivate humans: external environmental influences, internal personal factors (cognitive, affective, and psychological process), and current and past behaviors. This view of human motivation is a key component to the work that applies to this study. Bandura (1977) solidified self-efficacy as a behavioral change, describing self-efficacy as a probable determinant of our actions when presented with complex situations and how effectively those steps are pursued to such situations. Joyce and Showers’ (1988) research demonstrated that professional development must recognize attitude, theory, and practice to provide skill development. Tikunoff and Ward’s (1983) model of interactive research and development promotes teacher inquiry as a vital component of professional development to ensure that professional development is relevant.

These researchers found that using teacher self-efficacy as the organizing concept for professional development can be directly linked to teacher effectiveness, behaviors, and performance. (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003).

**Conclusion/Forward**

This chapter has provided a summary of the research problem, a positionality statement and an overview of the theoretical framework used to conduct a research study. The remainder of this dissertation contains four chapters: a literature review, a description of the research methodology, data collection and interpretation, and a summary and discussion. Chapter two, the literature review, outlines the seminal works and current studies on professional development, teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, professional development and the influence of efficacy on
teacher performance. The section on professional development and the influence of efficacy on teacher performance is provided to identify the rationale for studying the integration of both topics. A synthesis of the literature provides the key highlights of the investigated research. Chapter three contains an overview of the research design, a description of the qualitative research and the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach. The explanation of the data collection and data interpretation methods follow. A description of the trustworthiness, limitations, and ethical treatment of the research subjects, as well as weaknesses within the study are discussed. Chapter four explains the themes that emerged from the interviews and observations. Chapter five provides a discussion of the data and its importance to current educational practices. Sample letters that were sent to the participants, the interview questions and supporting diagrams are contained in the appendices.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Considerable research has been conducted on the professional development of teachers. Guskey’s (2003) investigation of effective professional development found conflicting results of what made professional development effective; however, there is evidence that quality professional learning is directly related to teacher efficacy (Bray-Clark and Bates, 2003). Professional development impacts instruction and teachers’ self-efficacy. The challenge is finding an approach to professional development that is meaningful to teachers and parallels their beliefs regarding perception in their self-efficacy and instructional practices.

Teacher efficacy is a simple idea with significant implications. A teacher’s efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her own capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning (Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Bandura, 1977). This judgment has powerful effects. Teachers’ efficacy beliefs also relate to their behavior in the classroom. Efficacy affects the effort teachers invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their levels of aspiration. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization (Allinder, 1994). These teachers are also more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new instructional practices to better meet the needs of their students (Berman, McLaughling, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Guskey, 1988; Stein and Wang, 1988). Researchers and practitioners are continually adding to the knowledge of teaching and learning as professionals. Professional learning changes as new practices and approaches are researched. This review of literature examines professional development and what motivates teachers to apply their professional learning to practice. To that end, the literature review examines the following: professional development, teachers’ perception of self-efficacy as it relates to professional development
experiences, the importance of professional development, effective professional development, and barriers associated with professional development.

**History of Professional Development**

The public education system in the United States has been facing calls for reform from politicians, active community members, educators, and the public since the early 1980’s. In 1983, *A Nation At Risk*, was published by the National Commission on Excellence and pinpointed the public education system’s substandard delivery of educational services and the potential risk to national security (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). As a result of this report, public education reform initiatives have focused on existing practices of the educational system that include more testing to assess student learning, the adoption of new educational standards, and more professional training for teachers. Although the country was addressing the needs of the report produced by the commission, the education system continued to produce inadequate results.

In 1986, a second report, *A Nation Prepared*, was made available and addressed restructuring teachers by giving them greater academic freedom to determine how to effectively provide instruction according to the needs of the students (Harris & Levin, 1992). In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This became the legislative blueprint to serve as the reform and structuring initiative that would serve to improve education by 2000. Goals 2000 advocated for universal preschool education, an increase in high school graduation rates, student competency in key academic areas, adult literacy, drug free schools, parental involvement, teacher professional growth and continual opportunities to develop knowledge and instructional skills for teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fine, 2011; Goals, 2000).
Ongoing legislative attempts to reform education have continued to address the role of the educator and the professional development that is provided for educators’ growth. President George W. Bush signed into law the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001* otherwise known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. NCLB included the term “professional development” and characterized it as activities that made positive contributions to teachers’ content knowledge and subjects they teach; are significant parts of the school and system-wide educational plans; give teachers skills and knowledge to improve student’s opportunities to meet content and achievement standards; are high-quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused; are not short, one-day events; and support the recruitment and hiring of highly qualified teachers (NCLB, section 910 (34)A; Tugel, 2004; Viadero, 2007; Walker, 2010). Although NCLB provided high standards for teachers, empirical evidence to lead professional development decisions to meet the standards was lacking.

Learning Forward: The Professional Learning Association, previously known as The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), historically investigated policy through research and drove educator professional development opportunities. Hirsch (2006) posits that “Effective professional development is not about meeting the requirements of a list, it is about carefully considering and planning according to desired outcomes and standards that will contribute to success (p. 59)” Originally, NSDC had 27 written standards for professional development and then revised the standards to 12 for professional development. In 2011, a final revision was completed and there are currently seven standards for professional learning (Learning Forward 2011). Learning Forward utilized a professional support system of 40 professional educational associations and organizations to develop and update the seven professional development standards that are: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs,
implementation, and outcomes (Learning Forward, 2011). Learning Forward and its professional support system have taken the research on best practices during the past decade and utilized it to provide guidance in current professional learning.

In 2009, Learning Forward, previously known as the National Staff Development Council, recognized the need to ensure high-quality professional development for every teacher. The establishment of a current agreement in definition, with the emphasis to drive current educational reform efforts, remains nonexistent. Therefore, the NSDC began to advocate for a new definition of professional development by seeking amendments to NCLB. Learning Forward defines professional development as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving the teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (Hirsh, 2009 p. 12). The amendments recommended offered clarity for funding purposes, but most importantly, to focus on professional development that directly impacted classroom teachers’ practices (Hirsh, 2009). By aligning the definition of professional development in legislation and research, there is potential for an impact on educational reform.

In 1983, A Nation At Risk began addressing educator learning and professional growth as part of a nation-wide educational reform initiative. Through Goals 2000 and NCLB, legislative changes enforced professional learning and development among teachers. Currently, the standards of learning and the delivery of instruction have become more rigorous and teachers require more intensive training and results-driven opportunities to increase their professional knowledge. Such goals for professional development and learning exist between legislation and educational entities; however, a unified definition of professional development and learning does not currently exist. In order for professional development and learning to continue to impact educators’ capacity for instruction, a common definition of professional development is needed.
Teacher Training and Needs

The theoretical and research underpinnings for the training model come from several sources, but the most recent and intensive research has been conducted by Joyce and Showers (1988). Sparks (1983), Wu (1987), and Wood and Kleine (1987) investigated the diversity of trainings and presentation styles and the influences each have on meeting the goals of the professional development. The call for inquiry–oriented teachers is credited to Dewey (1933) who wrote of the need for teachers to take reflective action in their profession. Zeichner (1983) cites more than 30 years of advocacy for “teachers as action researchers,” “teacher scholars,” “teacher innovators,” “self-monitoring teachers,” and “teachers as participant observers.” Bandura (1977) investigated the task-specific belief of self-efficacy as it regulates choice, effort, and persistence in the face of obstacles and in concert with the emotional state of the individual. The topic of training and self-efficacy are fully defined as sub-sections that follow.

Training. In the minds of educators, training is synonymous with professional development. Several related terms appear in relevant literature, such as teacher development, in-service education and training, staff development, career development, human resources development, professional development, continuing education, and lifelong learning (Bolman & McMahon 2004). These terms have overlapping meanings and are defined variously by different writers. For this study, a working definition was adopted by Day (1999):

Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of the direct benefit to the individual, group, or school and which contribute through these to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives (p.4).
This definition highlights the separate but inclusive aspects of continuing professional development, the relationship between the individual and the collective, and professional development activities. Teachers’ professional development may have different functions, oriented towards maintenance, improvements, or change (Day & Sachs, 2004). Teachers must learn continuously in order to stay up-to-date on new trends, methods, techniques, and strategies to meet the challenges of the classroom, to improve themselves and to turn the schools into learning communities. Most teachers are accustomed to attending workshop-type sessions in which the presenter is the expert who establishes the content and flow of activities (Sparks, 1989).

The more recent studies of Joyce and Showers (1988) have determined that, depending on desired outcomes, professional development might include exploration of theory, demonstration or modeling of a skill, practice of the skill under simulated circumstances, and coaching in the workplace. Their research indicates that a combination of all components may be necessary if the outcome is skill development. Joyce and Showers (1988) cite changes in attitudes, transfers of training, and “executive control” (the appropriate use of new strategies in the classroom) as additional outcomes. In this study, professional development refers to the in-service training where it is the trainer’s role to set instructional objectives, activities, and lectures that will aid teachers in achievement and desired outcomes.

**Inquiry.** Inquiry-oriented teaching is not new to education. Inquiry is the systematic, intentional study of one's own professional practice. It is a stance, a way of learning both about teaching and from teaching, with genuine inquiry conceptualized as a transformative force for teacher development, student learning, and school change (Schulz, 2010). Theorists and researchers have advocated for various forms of inquiry. Tikunoff and Ward’s (1983) model of
interactive research and development promotes teacher inquiry into the questions that they are asking through close work with researchers (who help with methodology) and staff developers (who help share results with others). Lieberman (1986) posits on a similar process in which teachers serve on collaborative teams and pursue answers to school-wide rather than classroom issues. Watts (1985) discussed the roles of collaborative research, action research, and teacher support groups in encouraging teacher inquiry. Simmons and Sparks (1985) describe the use of action research to help teachers better relate research about teaching to their own unique classroom settings.

Glickman (1986) provided advocacy for action research in the forms of quality circles, problem-solving groups, and school improvement projects as a means to develop teacher thought and input. Cross (1987) proposed classroom research to help teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their own instruction and teaching. Glatthorn (1987) provided insight on action research teams of teachers that were peer-centered to promote professional growth. Loucks-Horsely (1987) discussed teachers-as-researchers as a form of professional development that narrows the gap between research and practice. Sparks and Simmons (1989) proposed inquiry-oriented staff development as a means to enhance teachers’ decision-making abilities.

Inquiry focuses on the notion that research is an important activity in which teachers should be engaged, although they rarely participate in professional development other than as “subjects.” Gable and Rogers (1987) conducted studies that provided specific strategies for teachers’ use in classrooms and described ways that inquiry can be used as a resource and staff development tool. Watts (1985) presented evidence that supported teachers acting as researchers and the direct impact that this has on teacher efficacy.
Teacher Self-Efficacy Relating to Professional Development

The most important factor affecting educational reform and student success is the classroom teacher (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, 2001; Marzano, 2007; Reeves 2010). It is therefore, vital that teachers view themselves as the driving force for student success. Teachers must realize that they are the responsible for their own professional learning that in turn, impacts students’ growth.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory explains human behavior as a dynamic, reciprocal interaction of three sources: personal, behavioral and environmental factors (Bandura, 1997). Future behavior is determined by the interaction of these sources in a triangular experience. Consequences and previous experiences combine to predict both future behaviors and how a person regulates his or her continuous behaviors. Grounded in Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy is a self-reflective thought that impacts a person’s behavior based on a person’s perception of his or her own capabilities and is shaped through experiences and social, physiological or emotional situations. According to Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) a person develops beliefs about his or her own capabilities and characteristics that influence his or her behaviors:

Perceived self-efficacy occupies a pivotal role because it acts upon the other classes of determination. By influencing the choice of activities and the motivational level, beliefs or personal efficacy make an important contribution to the acquisition of knowledge structures on which skills are founded. (Bandura, 1997, p. 35)

Bandura is a leader in research on personal efficacy and states “belief’s” or personal efficacy constitutes the key factor of human agency. If people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Human agency is the intentional action as opposed to the effects of the action. Self-efficacy is a judgment or belief of a person’s ability to act. For teachers, self-efficacy is the judgment or
belief concerning his or her ability to teach. Student learning is the effect or consequence of that judgment ability (Bandura, 1997).

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) connected high levels of efficacy beliefs to greater efforts and performances by teachers. Bandura (1997) dissected the influence of self-efficacy beliefs on behaviors into four processes: cognitive, motivational, affective and selection. The cognitive aspect of self-efficacy occurs first by the individual setting goals and later as reflection. “Personal goal setting is influenced by self-appraisal of capability. The higher the self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to achieve them” (Bandura, 1991). Motivation occurs by forethought. Bandura posits three forms of motivation where self-efficacy beliefs occur: casual attributions, outcome expectancies, and cognized goals. People’s motivation, or lack there of, is based on their level of self-efficacy. Those who have high self-efficacy relate failure to effort and those with low self-efficacy relate failure to personal ability. People are motivated by their self-efficacy and behavior will lead to results. Finally, individuals are motivated as a result of planning and reflection on their personal goals (Bandura, 1993).

Bandura (1997) identified four categories of efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Of those four, mastery experiences or personal attainments are the most significant (Usher, 2008). When individuals are developing skills and recognizing personal improvements over time, his or her self-efficacy is increased. “A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort” (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). Facing challenges and persevering through them builds self-efficacy because individuals experience mastery of the skill and are confident in their ability to meet that challenge again. The second greatest source of efficacy
information comes from vicarious experiences when individuals observe another modeling an action. A trainer or instructor will model a behavior and thought in obtaining information of knowledge, skill, and strategies in vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1997).

Efficacy also stems from social persuasion. This source is particularly evident in studies of pre-service teachers. In this career stage, social persuasion is very impactful upon one’s belief about self. Teachers may compare themselves to peers and colleagues and make judgments about their own abilities (Usher, 2008). “People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master a given task are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it then if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficult tasks arise” (Bandura, 1997, p. 101). People also rely on information from physiological and emotional states to judge their capabilities. A person may read his or her body language to a stressful situation as capable or as incapable. Emotional states also provide efficacy information through indications in the change of functional quality. More intense positive interactions are usually related to past accomplishments and negative interactions are typically associated with past failures (Bandura, 1997).

There is strong evidence that self-efficacy influences performance and achievement within the classroom environment (Bandura, 2007). Self-efficacy and implementation from professional development experiences have significance to research. According to Woolfolk and Hoy (1991), teachers with high teaching efficacy and high personal efficacy correlated to teachers who were more effective in classroom instruction. To Bandura (1997), “Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capacity” (p.11). Various factors influence a teacher’s feeling of self-efficacy; “Beliefs of personal capabilities affect the goals people select and their
commitment to them” (Bandura, 1995, p. 219). A teacher’s belief in his or her abilities, along with his or her motivation, impacts instruction.


If the expectation is for teachers to implement professional learning in their everyday practice, they need motivation (Beltman, 2007). Teachers are the vital link to educational reform. According to Pink (2009), the 21st century requires people who are motivated and who approach work and life with the desire to do a satisfactory job intrinsically, not because of rewards or consequences. Deci’s (1995) research supports Pink’s work and quantifies people’s successes at changing behavior when they identify their own motivation.

In order to make lasting change, it is essential for teachers to understand their own motivation and level of self-efficacy. According to Deci (1995), “human behavior is purposive and motivated behavior is directed toward outcomes” (p. 152). Deci (1995) further suggested people are goal oriented and work best when they are involved in the planning, goal setting, and monitoring of the achievement associated with the process. Goal setting is practiced as part of self-efficacy and educational reform.

According to Deci, Valerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) individuals are best motivated when their sense of autonomy is supported and they are allowed to have flexibility in making choices to perform tasks. Having goal-oriented practices and the ability to make choices for individual growth support Bandura’s Self-efficacy Theory. Hoy and Miskel (2008), state
“people seek to be in charge of their own behavior” (p. 145) and “resist and struggle against pressure from external forces such as rules, regulations, and orders imposed by others because it interferes with their self-efficacy” (p. 145).

**Importance of Professional Development**

Professional development opportunities are essential to the teaching profession in order to increase efficiency and compete in a global economy (Walker, 2010). The teaching profession is not beyond the need for improvements. Legislation has structured education reform to require educators to receive professional development as student teachers, in-service teachers, and licensed teachers. A professional development opportunity has the potential of addressing the needs of the teachers and students through meeting legal requirements, expanding content knowledge, developing and implementing curriculum, and encouraging high quality instruction within the classroom. Highly qualified teachers provide excellent learning opportunities that yield students who are successful life-long learners (Kaplan & Owings, 2004).

The purpose behind quality professional development is to positively impact behaviors of teachers and, in turn, have a greater impact on the quality of instruction provided to students to increase achievement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Jakes, 2008; Walker, 2010; Wenglinsky & Silverstein, 2006). A school district will wisely invest in the development of educators to bring about reform and increase the educational quality of the system and student learning (Kaplan & Owings, 2004; Linn, Gill, Sherman. Vaughn, & Mixon, 2010). Donaldson (2010) posits a rigorous teaching evaluation system that provided feedback and was linked to professional development in order to increase effective educational practices. Learning Forward recommends that school districts spend approximately 10% of their annual budget on professional development (Vogel, 2010). Increasing financial resources for professional development, accompanied by employing quality programs and activities, will strengthen
educational reform efforts (Braden, Elliott, Huai, & White, 2005; Dede, Ketehut, Whitehouse, & Breit, 2008).

Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) noted that a challenge for teacher professional development is to provide the opportunity for teachers to deepen their understanding of the learning processes and continually develop skills to adapt to educational reform (Walker, 2010). Students’ success is largely dependent on teachers’ abilities to instruct, collaborate with fellow educators, and continue to develop and build their own abilities, skills, and knowledge.

Sallee (2010) reported a direct correlation between effective professional development experiences and teaching practices by describing the activities of distinguished status schools. Those schools that received distinguished status provided professional development activities that included an analysis of instructional practices, and data, emphasized collaboration, used similar instructional strategies, and allowed for evaluations of the activities by the participants. “Schools and school districts should challenge each teacher to develop, apply, and reassess beliefs and knowledge gained in professional development experiences in the content of their own classroom so that attitudes, knowledge, and practices are truly integrated (Weiner, 2003, p. 18). Bandura echoes this description of the development of self-efficacy through mastery and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1997).

Preparing educators for every situation and experience that may occur is impossible when training teachers. Professional development plays a crucial role for educators by continuing to increase their knowledge and the instructional skills needed for the current reforms of education, the needs of students, and best practices research. The practice of a “one-size-fits-all” has been replaced with the restructuring of the public education system, procedure, adoption of new curriculums, and high-stakes testing. Educator support and guidance required to meet the
demands of educational reform is necessary and supported by effective professional development opportunities and experiences.

**Effective Professional Development**

Teacher professional development is an essential component of the successful implementation and sustainment of educational reform. Not only does effective professional development allow teachers to increase their knowledge and develop new instructional practices (Gore & Ladwig, 2006), it can and should lead to improvements in student learning (Alberta Education, Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia, Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta Teachers’ Association, College of Alberta School Superintendents, & Faculties of Education, 2006). Traditional approaches to professional development have proven ineffective and teacher education is unable to prepare teachers for every challenge they may face throughout their career (Schleicher, 2011).

For years, professional development consisted of presentation style workshops that left little room for teachers to apply new information to their instruction while receiving on-going support for those changes to take effect. Mcleskey & Waldron (2002) posit that presentation style professional development experiences have minimal effects on participants and students. Hunzicker (2011) relates the ineffectiveness of workshops to the great amount of information disseminated during the workshop with little time for real classroom application. The lack of desired outcomes from workshop style professional development attendance stems from transferability of unfocused content, lack of intensity, and lack of continual uniformity found to produce changes in participant’s behaviors (Braden, Elliott, Huai, & White, 2005; Choy, Chen, & Bugarin, 2006; Linn, Gill, Sherman, Vaughn, & Mixon, 2010). Self-efficacy is influenced by these various experiences. Mastery experience is maintained as the most beneficial way to impact self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).
Historically, professional development has not met the needs of teachers (Schleicher, 2011). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development conducted the Teaching and Learning International Survey in 2007-2008. This survey consisted of 2 million teachers from 23 countries. The results identified by participating teachers included unmet needs in instructional preparations and other challenges they faced by educators (Schleicher, 2011). These results supported the growing concerns with professional development quality, sustainability, and intensity. Therefore, finding new tools for teacher professional development is a necessity for the improvement and effectiveness of public education. There is a movement away from workshop type professional development experiences, where the style is presentation centered and focused on providing a vicarious experience, to a more interactive and collaborative approach. “The most useful professional development emphasizes active teachers, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than abstract discussions” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 46). Studies suggest that effective professional development is: content and curriculum focused, based on teacher’s needs, delivered in ways that are meaningful and relevant through active learning, collaboration, and provide opportunities for practice and feedback (Blank, de las Alas & Smith, 2008; Borko, 2004; Bredeson, 2002; Desimone, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Killion, 2002; Nir and Bogler, 2008; Quick, 2009).

No one specific type of professional development has been found to be most effective (American Federation of Teachers, 2002). Research has shown, however, that successful professional development programs have clear, specific goals and objectives; engage teachers intellectually; actively involve participants; consist of multiple sessions over an extended period of time; allow teachers to learn with and from their colleagues; and provide the opportunity for
Designing professional development involves identifying the desired outcomes and then selecting training strategies that will achieve those outcomes. Professional development that is based on a fixed set of rules about what teachers should say or do and that presents them with highly detailed lessons and activities does not prepare them to deal with the complex and unexpected classroom situations they will encounter or the varied backgrounds of their students (American Federation of Teachers, 2002; French, 1997).

Teachers need to see that what they learn in training sessions produces results in the classroom (French, 1997). Some professional development outcomes are easier to achieve than others because they are closer to teachers’ existing practices. In general, newer or more complex outcomes are harder to achieve and require more training before teachers can implement the new strategies in their classrooms. Professional development planners must gauge the difficulty level of the training program to help plan the duration and intensity of the training (Joyce and Showers, 2002).

Professional development should be aligned with other components of the educational system, such as student performance standards, teacher evaluation, and school and district goals (Odden, Archibald, Fermanich, & Gallagher, 2002). Priorities should be limited to three or four major efforts every four years so teachers don’t see the training as just a fad that will come and go. Teachers need to be provided with the necessary support to introduce new ideas and strategies into classroom practice (American Federation of Teachers, 2002; Goldberg, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1996).
Increasing time spent on professional development does not, by itself, increase the quality of training (Guskey, 2009). Reform activities and increased contact hours have had a positive influence on teachers’ skills. Master and vicarious experiences or, “hands-on work that enhanced teachers’ knowledge of the content and how to teach it produces a sense of efficacy – especially when that content was aligned with local curriculum and policies” (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, p. 47).

The most effective predictor of educational success is the teacher and the quality of instruction provided (Kaplan & Ownings, 2004). Traditional style workshop approaches to professional development of educators have proven ineffective (Schleicher, 2011). Workshop methods disseminate a great deal of information in a short time span, allow for little, if any, real time application (Braden et al., 2005; Choy et al., 2006; Linn et al., 2010). Research is guiding professional development experiences to emphasize active participation, review and use student and teacher data, and to allow time for reflection and evaluation (Holmes, Signer, & MacLeod, 2011). These characteristics are important to effective change in teacher instruction and efficacy and require additional resources and time. Administrators and professional development planners need to understand the importance of teacher input in planning developmental opportunities in addition to understanding the barriers of professional development (Chauvin & Eleser, 1998; Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Nieto 2009).

**Barriers of Professional Development**

Colleges and universities that offer education training have the responsibility of establishing a professional relationship of collaboration of delivery of educational services to students (Schlauch, 2003). Public education systems and districts should follow suit with continuing professional development experiences with supportive collaboration of educators to
meet professional development requirements of *No Child Left Behind*. Snow-Renner and Lauer (2005) reported that a substantial change in teacher behavior occurred with 160 hours of professional development.

Teachers report that there is little incentive to participate in professional development experiences that support reform efforts (Schleicher, 2011). Lyndon and King (2009) posit that time to implement, support from school administration, and financial constraints are all barriers that contribute to the professional development opportunities. School culture is another limitation to effective professional development. Teachers and students have various needs that impact the strengths and weaknesses of the educational setting as a whole. This data should assist administrators’ decisions concerning professional development. Strategies that prove effective in one school or grade level may not be applicable in another based on the uniqueness of needs, beliefs and student population. Many teachers are accustomed to working alone and this approach to instruction places limitations on their knowledge, experience, and implementations of best instructional practices (Guskey, 2009; Jolly, 2007).

The barriers to successful implementation of effective, reform centered professional development must be understood and applied in order for the public education system to conform and transition beyond its current situation. Stronger partnerships between public schools and universities, in addition to more collaborative relationships in and between the school building, district, and professional development planners may allow for greater support of educators (Guskey, 2009; Jolly, 2007). The school system should support high priorities including effective professional development and time for implementation. As administration considers a school’s cultural needs and long term professional development plans, efforts to provide
additional incentives in the form of support or recognition for education participation in
development experiences should also be considered (Lyndon & King, 2009; Schleicher, 2011).
School districts that implement reform type professional development plans must take numerous
considerations into account.

Summary

which focused on the substandard and declining delivery of educational programs as a risk to
national security (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Federal legislation began to focus on teacher training
and development through the passage and adoption of Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind.
Legislation and professional organizations guiding educator professional development did not
establish a current agreement of definition. Research continues to recognize the inefficiencies of
reform-based professional development.

Federal legislation continues to address the needs and education of students along with
professional development requirements. Through legislative policy and educational reform,
teachers are faced with new challenges relating to educational requirements, instructional rigor,
and professional development requirements.

Teachers may believe that they are not prepared to teach effectively during current
educational reform. This belief of inadequacy negatively affects the teacher’s self-efficacy
revealing the need for additional training and support (Wood, 2007). Studies outlined the
characteristics and components of effective professional development that is available in
nontraditional forms of delivery. Effective professional development experiences are critical to
the strengthening of current and future educators’ instructional skills, knowledge, and efficacy.
Chapter 3 – Qualitative Design

Methodology

The concept of education reform and teacher accountability began to heighten with legislative changes and the passing of the federal law No Child Left Behind. Most recently, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards has changed instruction within the classroom and the content that students must learn. As a result of this, teachers have been called upon to restructure their professional practices, and an increased emphasis on professional development has been placed within schools, pushing teacher effectiveness to the forefront of public education. To explore these educational changes, I investigated the self-efficacy beliefs of elementary school teachers and the correlation such beliefs have on professional development experiences and teachers’ confidence.

The overarching research question guiding this study was: What is the relationship between teachers’ experiences with professional development and professional efficacy? This research study was designed to explore and identify how professional development increased teachers’ abilities to implement research based teaching strategies and increase their perceived sense of self-efficacy to become highly effective. Attention focused on the lived experiences of the teachers and how their perception of professional development experiences would impact their professional growth and instructional effectiveness.

Paradigm

The social constructivism, often described as interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), paradigm complimented the topic and research question pertaining to this study of the self-efficacy beliefs of elementary school teachers because the interviews that were conducted focused on the lived experiences of teachers in their professional setting on a daily basis.
Creswell (2012) posits that a developed subjective meaning of these experiences is varied and multiple and will lead the researcher to look for a complexity of views rather than narrow the meaning into a few select ideas. The teachers selected for this study shared their views as experts within the field of education and provided a vivid picture of the lived experiences of professional development and how such experiences affected their sense of self-efficacy, instruction and student performance. In this study, familiarization of the interviewees was obtained by conducting a structured interview and the analysis of responses that each individual shared with me. This paradigm supported the IPA methodology because of my interaction with each participant throughout the interview process. Ponterotto (2005) substantiates these thoughts by noting, “The researcher and his or her participants jointly create or co-construct findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretations” (p. 129).

**Research Design**

*The Qualitative Research Design.* This is a study of human experiences. Qualitative research is used to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I studied a problem that called for an exploration, asked broad general questions, gathered data from the experiences of the participants, described and analyzed words for themes, and conducted an inquiry in a subjective and reflective manner (Creswell, 2012). As the researcher, my primary focus of this study was to analyze the problem of teacher’s self-efficacy and the impact that efficacy beliefs had on the success of professional development participation and experiences. In-depth interviews with elementary school teachers provided a foundation for gathering data and attempting to find commonalities and themes that contributed to teachers’ self-efficacy as they directly related to professional development. This approach to gathering data,
reflecting on individual experiences, and empowering participants to share their voices provides data that quantitative or statistical analysis would not provide.

**Research Tradition**

*Phenomenology.* Education is comprised of human interactions. A phenomenological study allowed me to explore the lived experiences of teachers as they participated in professional development and focused on describing what all of the participants in the study had in common as they experienced a shared phenomenon. Phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also an interpretative process in which the researcher will make interpretations of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative, phenomenological approach enabled me to delve into the human story behind teacher’s experiences of professional development and the impacts that such experiences had on teachers’ self-efficacy.

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.* Rooted in phenomenological studies, interpretative phenomenological analysis, commonly referred to as IPA, is “concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experiences” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, Chapter 2, “IPA and Theory,” para. 1). IPA differs from phenomenological studies by focusing on the detailed examination of the human experience and conducting the examination in a way that enables the experiences to be expressed in its own terms.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) outlined the two axes underpinning IPA – the experience of the participant and the interpretation of the experience by the researcher. This process, known as “double hermeneutic” (Smith & Osborn, 2003), is explained as “the researcher trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith et al., 2009, Chapter 1, “What is IPA?” para.8.). Relying on the lived experience of the phenomenon, rather than an account or retelling required me to reflect on the phenomenon in order to make meaning of the studied experiences. This allowed me to examine the
phenomenon’s own context, rather than confining the study to predefined categories. A small sampling of participants ensured me that I could closely review details in order to understand the particulars of the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Participants**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend purposive homogeneous participant selection in IPA since the goal it to gain insight into a particular, shared experience. Therefore, the sample population studied comprised of elementary school teachers in public schools in a small rural area of the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

The goal was to select participants “who ‘represent’ a perspective, rather than a population” (Smith, Flowers, and Larking, 2009, Chapter 3, “Finding a sample.” para. 2). I worked with six (6) teachers, thereby allowing me to uncover the essence of each individual’s experience. The participants studied teach in elementary school (K -5) classrooms, had at least five (5) years of teaching experience, and have attended mandatory professional development opportunities and/or have volunteered to attend professional development of the individual’s choice. This sampling strategy was limited to elementary school teachers in an attempt to minimize the variables that might affect the study’s trustworthiness.

**Context**

This research was conducted within the public school network in a small rural school district. The sampling population was homogeneous with same genders participating and all participants have years of service exceeding five (5) years. I limited my study group to public elementary schools due to recent administrative changes, the adoption of new teaching standards, and higher stakes testing that measures learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness.

**Recruitment and Access**
By talking about my study with colleagues, and allowing them to inquire about it, a list of teachers shared interest in participating. From that list of teachers, as well as other names suggested by colleagues, recruitment letters were sent to those interested elementary school teachers. This letter described the study and asked for their willingness to participate. Had this recruitment letter not provided an adequate sample size for the study, additional elementary school teachers would have been contacted via phone, email, or letter to discuss the study and ask for permission to send recruitment letters.

Once the letters of recruitment were sent and the individuals agreed to participate, interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the individual participant at a neutral location of the participant’s choice. While no incentive was being offered, each participant received a basket filled with teacher supplies as a form of gratitude at the end of interview process.

Data Collection

Rubin & Rubin (2012) described responsive interviewing as a qualitative interview technique that emphasizes the importance of building relationships of trust between the researcher and interviewee that leads to a more give-and-take conversation. Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2012) posit that a qualitative in-depth research interview can be described as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (p. 57, para. 4) with an aim to facilitate interaction which permits the participant to tell their own stories, in their own words. Most interviews are between 45 and 90 minutes of conversation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012). The stages of the interview are typically an introduction and topic disclosure, followed by questioning, and then conclusion.

The first interview was comprised of familiarizing the researchers with the interviewee, suggestions of the research role, and purpose of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Establishing trust during this first interview allowed the interviewee to feel comfortable and
willing to share personal feelings by acknowledging his or her experiences. I was vital to remain attentive to the dialogue and show empathy, both physically and verbally, to the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

During the second phase of the interview, I began by asking the interviewee questions that provided comfort and self-assurance to the interviewee. These questions were easy to respond to and provided comfort to the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Once a level of comfort was reached, I began to delve into more sensitive questions that were conceptually more difficult to respond to. Difficult questions were only discussed later in the interview process. All questions were open ended and allowed the participants to expand upon their ideas and experiences (Creswell, 2012). Probing questions were used to draw the interviewee back into the interview when deviation from the topic occurred. I remained consistent with the interview using this form of questions and balanced transition (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

The closure of the interview was less serious and focused on simpler questions to see if the interviewee had any additional information that he or she felt that I may have neglected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The conclusion of the interview remained open ended to allow myself for member checking or clarification of ideas.

Data storage

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants of the study, all individuals were given a pseudonym. Recordings of the interviews were collected on two separate devices to ensure loss prevention. The recordings and the transcripts are locked in a fire-safe vault and on a password protected Macbook Pro in my home. The password to the laptop is not shared. All interview notes and paperwork are kept in the vault as well. The interview materials will be kept for three years and then will be permanently deleted and destroyed unless advised otherwise.
Data Analysis

Characteristic of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, data analysis of human participants’ lived experiences directs the analytical attention towards making sense of the experiences (Smith, et al., 2009). It was my role to reflect on my own experiences as I interpreted the event being observed (Smith, et al., 2009).

Data analysis in the IPA study did not have a single method for working with and interpreting the data. Common processes (moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretive) and principles (commitment to an understanding of the participant’s point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning – making in particular contexts) were applied so flexibly and analysis became interactive and inductive (Smith et al., 2009).

Following the transcription of the interviews, I followed Cresswell (2007) and Smith et al.’s (2009) steps in interpretive phenomenological analysis. The first step of analysis was to read and reread the transcribed interview and data. This ensured that the participant became the focus of the analysis and maintained the rapport and trust that had been built across the interview and thus highlighted the location of richer and more detailed sections of the data (Smith et al., 2009). While the researcher recorded some of his or her initial responses for the purposes of bracketing, the repetition of reading highlighted the structural and narrative accounts of the participant’s responses. This concentrated focus on the content of the interviews illustrated connections and discrepancies within the data which are often overlooked with once-over reading.

While engaging in the data reading, I transitioned into the second step of the IPA data analysis. During this step, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) posit the researcher focused on the roots of IPA by indicating, in descriptive comments, the “things that matter” (p.84) and the
“meaning of the objects” (p. 88). Step two was described as initial noting which was the most detailed. Semantic content and language usage were examined on a very exploratory level. This ensured the growing familiarity of the transcript and, moreover, began to identify ways by which the participant talked about, understood, and thought about the research questions. Moustakas (1994) identifies this initial noting as horizonalization. Therefore, the use of first cycle coding or In Vivo coding was used (Salana 2013). Saldana posits that using the exact or ‘literal’ phrases of the participant enable the facilitator to frame the interpretations of terms used in everyday lives, and away from professional and academic language. Using In Vivo coding showed the value of the participants and respect for their experiences.

During step two, I looked at the language used by the participants and made notations and comments in the following three areas: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Descriptive comments recognized the “face value” or objects, events, and experiences described by the participant as important in her or her relationship with the world (Smith, Lowers & Larkin, 2009 p. 84). I was then able to construct and examine the deeper meaning of objects through interpretative analysis of the significant and recurring statements revealed in the data. Following descriptive comments, analysis of the linguistic content allowed for a deeper conceptual meaning derived from the transcript. Patterns of repetition and tone were concealed aspects of language that highlighted the importance the participants placed on objects and experiences. Additionally, the use of metaphor described what something was like or comparisons and provided links from the descriptive to the conceptual by recognizing the direct claim that could be further explored through the text (p. 88).

Finally, the third aspect of the initial noting and conceptual comments considered the interpretive nature of IPA. I employed conceptual annotations where I engaged with the text
through personal experience. At this point, the text analysis shifted from the individual parts to the whole in search of common themes among the data. This stage of analysis featured deviations from the In Vivo coding techniques used earlier; however, a relationship continued to exist between the original data and the theoretical connections.

After the first two steps of data analysis, I searched for connections across the emergent themes, discovered interrelations and patterns and then postulated those findings into emergent themes. Fragments of the original text were considered in an interpretive manner to produce themes that contained enough essence to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptualized. Charts and maps were used to demonstrate how the themes are interrelated. The themes reflected the original words of the participants and the interpretive reflection of myself in a collaborative effort that represented an understanding of the experiences from both my own and the participant’s perspectives.

Once themes were postulated, grouping techniques helped to identify patterns and connections based on the research question. As an IPA researcher, I had a number of grouping techniques available. These included: (a) abstraction, (b) subsumption, (c) polarization, (d) contextualization, (e) numeration, and (f) function. Abstraction allowed for themes to be grouped under a new heading or ‘super-ordinate’ theme (p. 96). Subsumption groupings appeared when an emergent theme encompassed a number of related emergent themes and reached ‘super-ordinate’ status itself (p. 97). Polarization occurred when themes focused on differences instead of similarities. A contextual approach was a useful way of looking at the connections between themes as the result of narrative structures that provided a local understanding of the elements. Organization by numeration referred to the frequency themes presented themselves or the value of a single revelation had for further exploration. Finally,
organization by function indicated the positive or negative manner in which emergent themes presented themselves.

Step five transitioned myself from the first participant’s data into the next data set. It was critical to treat each case on its own term (Smith et al., 2009) to ensure justice of the individual. When possible, bracketing the emerging ideas from the first case analysis ensured that the research continued with the IPA’s idiographic commitment. Once all of the data was analyzed, I looked for patterns across each individual data set to discover the particulars shared by all cases. Finally, I returned to the interpretive nature of IPA to present an even deeper analysis of the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual parts as they worked together to strengthen and support the underpinnings of IPA.

**Trustworthiness**

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers which are directly related to the efforts that teachers invest in professional development and how instruction reflects teacher’s confidence to promote student learning. Research in this study used human subjects and is sensitive in nature as it explored the reflective experiences of elementary school teachers. The triangulation of this study is outlined, as well as the internal and external threats to validity.

Reliability in qualitative research can be addressed in several ways (Silverman, 2005). Researchers use triangulation (locating and documenting emergent themes) to provide corroborating evidence to show more truthful results from the various data collection (Creswell, 2012). In member checking, I solicited participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Merriam, 1988). This approach involved taking the data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2012). Each participant was able to sit down with me to
approve whether the account of the interview was accurate as to what he or she has experienced. This non-biased and non-threatening meeting allowed the participants and myself to discuss any unclear or undefined themes that have emerged.

**Limitations**

This study was restricted to six (6) public elementary school teachers. Bias consideration was taken into account because of the familiarity that the researcher has with the participants. To prevent this, I ensured that I approached the study with an unbiased perspective. Being a teacher, I posit that professional development is essential to ensure the success for all students but does not necessarily impact each teacher in the same manner. Participants did not choose to leave the study.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This study did not present any obvious risks to the participants. Formal written permission was given from the superintendent and the building level administration to allow the individuals to participate. Recruitment and participation was voluntary and initiated through the IRB process. A letter was sent to each individual explaining the purpose of the study and requested voluntary participation. This letter addressed the following ethical concerns:

- Participants would not feel in any way coerced into participating in this study.
- Participants would not feel that their position within the school or any relationships established with the administration or colleagues will be compromised in any way by participating in the study.
- All participants and their participation in the study would remain confidential and their true identities would never be disclosed or discussed before, during or after this study.
All willing participants were asked to sign the IRB approval, agreement to participate, and a letter of consent. The letter of consent explained the purpose, research process, confidentiality, and voluntary participation in the study. Participants were also informed that their willingness to discontinue participation would take place at their discretion. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all participants, each was given a pseudonym and all final reports were given to each participant to read to ensure authenticity. All information is being held in confidence.
Chapter 4: Findings

Despite Mushayikwa and Lubben’s (2008) claim that professional development is taken as an accumulation of skills, values, professional knowledge, and personal qualities that enable teachers to continually adapt to their educational system, the relationship between teacher’s self-efficacy and professional development remains an under researched concept of obtaining the needed information necessary for implementing professional development. Additionally, this implies that professional development is experimental. With a significant portion of school budgets supporting professional development, training and learning opportunities for professional growth are abundant. Therefore, school districts must incorporate learning opportunities to meet the professional needs of teachers.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teacher who have participated in professional development and the relationship such experiences have on his or her sense of self-efficacy. Six elementary school teachers participated in the study.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) allowed the participants to share their lived experiences, in detail, about their participation in professional development and how such experiences influence their sense of self-efficacy. While the participants shared their experiences and attempted to make sense of these, the researcher was also trying to make sense of their experiences. A small sample size of teachers was purposely selected to reveal patterns and themes related to their shared phenomenon, attending to self-efficacy.

During the semi-structured interview, participants provided biographical information and responded to the question, “How did you become to be a teacher?” The participants provided a rich description of their journey to being a teacher and growing professionally. Specifically, they
were able to provide an account of their own learning styles and professional development experiences as it directly related to their teaching assignment.

Through the analysis of these shared stories and reflections, five themes emerged: (1) What does this have to do with what I teach?, (2) one size doesn't fit all, (3) responsibility for learning, (4) learning from peers, and (5) the questioning self. For this research study, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, past and present school districts or school names were not referenced.

**Participant Profiles**

Six teachers agreed to participate in this study, as can be seen in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>4th / Intervention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>5th / Academic Coaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Delilah.** Delilah has been teaching for a total of 22 years with all of those years in the district where she is currently employed. In addition to earning her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education, Delilah has a master’s degree in curriculum development. Her teaching credentials include early childhood and elementary education. She has experience teaching pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and math. She is currently teaching pre-kindergarten, a position that
Delilah spoke of her journey to become a teacher with great enthusiasm and compassion. She has known that she wanted to be a teacher since she was very young. She loved teaching children in the neighborhood to read. Amidst all of this creative play, Delilah explained that her younger brother struggled to learn. His learning challenges were the true inspiration for Delilah’s career choice. From this experience, she always knew that she wanted to teach in an elementary school. Delilah was committed to helping young children and fostering a love of learning in them from the beginning of their formal education.

Delilah stated that the reality of teaching has somewhat met her expectations. She expressed some frustration when she spoke of the excessive amount of assessing that goes on in the classroom. She felt that instruction was being minimized to collect data that wasn’t always useful. Another concern that she had was the lack of resources to perform the duties of being a teacher. Delilah’s childhood educational experiences were in affluent city schools where resources were more abundant. Therefore, she expected that those resources would be provided in all school and districts. Aside from this, Delilah felt that she was a life-long learner and had a strong desire to continue her own personal and professional learning.

**Vivian.** This is Vivian’s 14th year of teaching. She has been in the same school district since the start of her career and has been teaching third grade for the past four years. Prior to her current placement, she was a math specialist. Funding cuts and job transfers resulted in Vivian being assigned to a classroom. She holds a master’s degree in guidance and counseling. Her certification is for elementary education and middle school.
Vivian decided to become a teacher after her own children entered school. Vivian’s first adult exposure to public education was volunteering in her son’s Pre-k classroom. At that point, she had an “a-ha” moment and started thinking about her own potential of becoming a teacher. Vivian remembered disliking school as a student and then becoming passionate about loving it after her exposure to public education as a parent. She felt most comfortable working with younger children and therefore, chose elementary education as her major.

After completing college, Vivian was enthusiastic and excited about getting a job. She thought that it would be great to work with children because that was where her heart was. Vivian’s first job was teaching first through fifth grade math and found that age and ability range presented a challenge. Writing lesson plans took a lot of time and preparing instructional materials for each class required additional hours of work each week. This caused some concern for Vivian as she felt that teaching required more work than she ever imagined. She thought back to why she chose to become a teacher and uses that reasoning to continue to work hard to meet the educational needs of her students.

**Stacy.** This is Stacy’s first year teaching fourth grade and academic intervention. She has been a teacher in the district for 20 years. She credits her love of teaching to her own fourth grade teacher. She remembers him allowing her grade papers and how “cool” it was. She grew up thinking that she wanted to become a teacher. When starting college, Stacy knew that she loved children and she wanted to pursue a degree so she enrolled in the education program. Her choice to teach elementary school came after completing observations in high schools and middle schools. She wanted to work with students who put her on a pedestal and would always think that she was wonderful. Elementary school was her choice and that is where she remains. She continued on to graduate school and received her degree in administration and supervision.
Stacy has a diverse background in public education. She began her career as a long-term substitute teacher working with severe and profound special education students. This experience allowed her to be hired in that position the following year and remain there for five years. She then taught first grade reading and went on to become a reading specialist. Due to budget constraints, she was assigned to fifth grade. Then, due to budget cuts again, the district re-assigned Stacy and she was placed in a kindergarten classroom for several years. Then, by choice, Stacy applied for a principal position and became an administrator for one year. After one year, Stacy returned to the elementary school classroom. Her current position is labeled a reading content specialist and academic intervention teacher for grades Pre-K through 5.

Stacy talked about her first years of teaching and how she perceived teaching to be a good job. At that time, she thought that she had chosen the best profession in the world. She held out hope that her teaching would remain beneficial for students and society. She further explained that her perception of teaching is changing with the new government regulations and curriculum. Stacy also discussed the difficulties and challenges that teachers currently face. Amidst her concerns, she still works for the betterment of children and the improvement of their learning.

Sarah. Sarah is a 13-year veteran to teaching. She is currently assigned to the position of fifth grade teacher and academic specialist. Sarah has always had a love of children. Her mom worked in the summer with children at a summer camp and Sarah fondly remembers going to the camp to read with kids. As she got older, her love of teaching and children grew stronger. At the age of ten, Sarah made up her mind that, without a doubt, she would be an elementary school teacher. As of the interviews Sarah stated, “I am really happy with my choice and I never regret becoming a teacher.”
Sarah chose to continue her graduate studies at the same university where she completed her elementary education degree. Sarah’s undergraduate experience and the convenience of the university assisted her in deciding to pursue her master’s degree at the same university. She transferred campuses and completed her degree in reading which was the main reason that she fell in love with teaching many years ago.

Sarah started her career as a kindergarten teacher who later “looped” with her class and taught the same students in first grade. Sarah and her family moved frequently during the early years of her career; therefore, her teaching assignment changed as well. She has taught every grade in elementary school except for Pre-K and second grade. Budget challenges and decreasing student enrollment resulted in Sarah’s current assignment.

Maria. Maria knew from a very young age that she wanted to work with children. She was the oldest of three children and always assisted her parents in taking care of her siblings. Maria started her career as a babysitter and later became a nanny. These experiences of working with children inspired Maria to go to college and pursue a career working with children.

Maria attended college and obtained a bachelor’s degree in psychology and sociology. She was fascinated with how children’s brains worked as well as childhood behaviors. Her first job was a teacher in a center for behaviorally challenged juveniles. The primary age of these children was 13 – 18 and each child already had a criminal history. The position created a lot of joy for Maria and provided her with an extensive experience of adolescent behaviors and childhood brain activity and function. Being a teacher in a juvenile facility required year-round contracts. Maria knew that she did not want to work in that environment forever, especially when she wanted a family of her own.
Maria’s first public school teaching assignment was in a middle school teaching special education. She was excited about her position and felt comfortable working with middle school aged child. Then Maria relocated a year later and accepted a position teaching special education at an elementary school. She has remained there for eight years and is currently teaching inclusion and pull out services primarily in the early childhood classroom and fifth grade. Maria stated that the guidelines and regulations for special education have changed and the focus is on inclusion services and making the needed adaptations and modifications within the regular classroom environment.

**Georgia.** Georgia had always aspired to become a commercial artist. The thoughts of teaching had never crossed her mind until she was contacted by her hometown Christian school. They knew that Georgia was going to be an artist and they asked her to provide some art enrichment lessons at their school since they did not have an art teacher. Georgia’s love for children persuaded her to agree. She fondly talked about preparing the lessons and gathering the materials that she would need to conduct her lesson. This experience changed Georgia’s outlook on being an artist. At the end of the day she was hooked on teaching and providing art experiences for children. Georgia completed her commercial art degree but concentrated in education.

Georgia has an extensive background and experience teaching in education. She has taught at every level. Georgia was excited about teaching and accepted a position to enter the public school system. She talked about working at the college, high school, middle school, and elementary school level. Her true desire and passion is teaching elementary school because “I just like the excitement with the students and the creativity that they express.”
Georgia confirmed her passion for students and teaching with a story about a child who was non-verbal and extremely sad. As Georgia shared a teaching experience that she had working with this child, she held back her tears. She said, “I am always silly with my motivation when I introduce a lesson. When I looked out at my students my sad, young man was smiling.” She went on to say how that only made her sillier and sillier. As a result, Georgia was able to bring expression of art and language to this child. From that point forward, Georgia knew that she made the right career choice.

**Research question:** What is the relationship between teachers’ experiences with professional development and professional efficacy?

Upon a deliberate and intentional analysis of the participant’s transcripts, the following five themes emerged from the interviews in relationship to the research question and are discussed in the remainder of chapter 4.

**What does this have to do with what I teach?** When participants were asked to describe the professional development experiences that they have participated in, all participants unanimously noted the lack of content and purpose that many of the experiences provided to meet their own needs. Some teachers described school based and content specific experiences, while others spoke of systemic program models that supported the current trends in education. As a whole, the participants explained that a lot of professional development opportunities that they attend are geared towards meeting the needs of some teachers who are participating but it does not meet the needs of everyone and they find themselves asking, “What does this have to do with what I teach?” Georgia quickly identified herself as “the red-headed stepchild that they (administration) didn’t know what to do with us but they make us attend professional development all of the time
because the district says we have to. They need to realize that the cookie cutter approach does not work.” Vivian also shared, “I need professional development that will make me grow as a teacher, not just take up valuable time.”

**Relevancy.** When asked to identify what would be described as the most important professional development contribution to their teaching confidence, each participant’s experiences varied, but the common thread was the need for topic relevancy to further develop their skills as needed. Delilah conjectures, “I get so frustrated with professional development that is disconnected from my grade level or classroom.” For her, such experiences made her question the need and purpose of professional development and more resistant to participate in future experiences. Other participants shared similar stories to Delilah. Vivian spoke openly, “It has to be relevant and if I find that it is not relevant to what I am needing or doing in my classroom, I sometimes tune it out and ask myself, ‘What does this have to do with what I teach?’” She went on to say, “I get frustrated with professional development that is disconnected from my grade level or classroom.” She concluded by stating that she would rather stay in her room teaching her students than going to professional development that she gains very little from.

Through Stacy’s experiences as a teacher and an administrator she continues to identify the need for professional development. Stacy referenced her previous role as an administrator and planning professional development for her staff. She acknowledged the diverse needs of the district, school, teachers and students as it related to planning experiences for the teachers. She continued her story by clearly stating, “Many of the professional development opportunities that you sit through aren’t very beneficial because they are irrelevant. They are not aligned with your own professional goals or where you want your students to go.” She objectively talked about the difficulty of meeting everyone’s needs but referenced the many different possibilities available
for professional learning. Stacy went on to discuss the need for the presenters to be knowledgeable and practical and be realistic in their topic of discussion. She continued by stating, “Negative experiences with professional development create a lack of trust and enthusiasm for attending any more.” To support Stacy’s description of negative experiences with professional development, Georgia shared a similar concern about her experiences with professional development. Georgia stated, “I question presenters who, for example teach math, are providing me with professional development when I teach art. It doesn’t make sense. But I still have to sit there.”

**Long lasting impressions.** Participants shared a reflective account of at least one specific professional development that provided them with a strong sense of confidence and excitement about their teaching. When asked what set these experiences apart from the others, Delilah quickly explained in detail and referenced a specific professional development experiences that impacted her the most. The one in particular that she mentioned was the annual conference that is specifically structured to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. She commented on how practical and useful the training sessions were. She said, “For two days I get to be immersed in content, strategies, ideas and colleagues that support what I do every day.” Delilah continued to share her experience and reflected on how excited she was to return to her classroom to implement and try the various strategies with her students. She continued by saying, “I wish that all professional development would be just like that.”

Maria also talked about the on-going professional development that supported her needs to assess and build a foundation of skills for her students. She spoke about various ways of strategically obtaining baseline data for her students to better understand “where they are and where and how I can get them to move forward.” She openly talked about using the instructional
strategies that she learned years ago in her current teaching position. Maria spoke firmly about the beneficial resources that she received at the training and how those materials are referenced often in her classroom. She was excited to talk about all of the examples of her experience and how she felt confident in using them with her students.

Sarah specifically recounted one specific reading/writing workshop that she was actively engaged in. “I spent one week in a reading and writing workshop. I learned many things that week that I could use within my classroom to support my language arts program.” Sarah was excited to share that she keeps the workshop handouts and information on her desk and references them often. She continued:

It was such a great experience for me and I learned so much. I can remember everything about that week. The activities, strategies, modeling and application of what I learned. I was so prepared to implement what I learned that week immediately when I returned to my classroom.

Sarah continued, “I wish that the district would allow us to pick one or two professional developments to attend instead of spending time in meetings that do not pertain to us in any way. If they did, I would be able to meet my personal and professional needs.”

All participants clearly stated that children, education and instruction are always changing and there is a need for professional development. However, the experience must meet the relevant needs of the participants in order for it to be effective.

**One size doesn’t fit all.** When asked about individual learning styles and professional development preferences, five participants stated that they were kinesthetic learners and one was a visual learner. Sarah preferred to watch and listen and then apply what she learned
independently. Individuals described the presentation style that influenced how and what they learn. Having the opportunity to watch what was being taught and having the opportunity to practice those skills resonated highly with the participants. Georgia quickly responded by stating, “One size doesn’t fit all.”

The participants discussed how the topic of professional development is very intriguing and will make them want to attend. They went on to state that once in the meeting, the agenda and presentation style is misleading. The participants shared various examples of how professional development does not always meet the intended learning expectations based on individual learning needs. Delilah shared:

When I see a professional development topic that appears to be have great potential and credibility, I get discouraged when the presenter reads a power point presentation verbatim to me. I obviously know how to read. So the topic has potential but the presentation itself challenges my professionalism.

Three other participants discussed their disappointment for the same reason. Sarah also felt that when the agenda outlines an extensive amount of content, time is a factor and having a brief overview of content serves little purpose for implementation and usefulness. Therefore, materials are read and handed out to save time for the presenter. Sarah went on to state, “I prefer depth of content over a brief introduction.”

Since professional development covers many broad topics, all of the participants recalled various types professional development experiences. Some of these were required by the school district, some were self-selected, and others were administrator directed. According to the participants a large amount of time has been spent on professional development. Vivian recalled
attending professional development for various subjects. She provided the following examples, “Essentially every year we have to go to trainings about school gangs, blood-borne pathogens, cyber security, child abuse and neglect, and other topics like that.” She went on to state that these were modules on the Internet and took an extensive amount of time to complete. Vivian concluded, “I get very little out of that. Seven hours of modules is a bit much.”

Georgia spoke in detail about being a content specific teacher. She discussed professional development as a whole. Georgia stated,” I am a visual learner, as most people are. I think there is a disconnect with professional development because what they tell us about instruction and how kids learn, they don’t model that.” She continued, “It’s not productive to have a full lecture. People need to move and be motivated with visuals.” Georgia summed her story up by saying, “You could kill two birds with one stone. Model for us what you want us to do with the kids, and just like them, we will get more out of it.” Maria justified Georgia’s claim, “I have to teach many students with many different abilities. We must differentiate our instruction to meet the needs of all of our students. I have to wonder why that doesn’t happen with professional development.”

A time to refresh. All participants cited their assumption of professional development is to review, refresh, renew and rejuvenate those in attendance. Delilah explained her expectations of professional development clearly when she explained, “I expect it (professional development) to be practical. I expect it to be useful. I don’t want a lot of fluff. Even if it is just a review of something that I already know, it is always nice to have that refresher.” All of the participants commented on specific professional development experiences that had left a long-standing impression for them. Most specifically, they spoke about professional development that was structured for each participant to choose a topic of interest or content area of focus, and the
professional development that incorporated lecture, application, and reflection. Sarah recalled attending professional development to enhance writing in her classroom. She explained, “I still use resources from that workshop. They gave me time to learn and practice the specifics of implementing writing centers in my classroom. It was easy to apply what I learned because I was able to complete the whole writing process for myself.”

Maria continued on the same path by stating, “When I attend a professional development training it reminds me of things that I don’t use any more or strategies that I forget about. It makes me feel like I have new ideas again even though I had learned about them in the past.”

**Reflection after experience.** Despite the experience not meeting the individual learning styles and needs of the teachers, each participant talked about being able to take one thing away from the experiences that they had. Sarah, whose assignment made her wear many hats, said, “I feel like I can walk out of there knowing at least one thing. I can always find something to learn.” Even Maria stated:

Regardless of how they present the content to me, I can take something out of there and use it in my classroom. I may not be fully engaged in the presentation itself because of the way the materials are presented but that doesn’t necessarily stop me from taking something from it.

Although the participants did not cite one specific style of professional development, their stories clearly indicated that differentiated instruction is a necessity for professional development. Teachers are like the students in their classroom; each requires different teaching styles to accommodate the individual learning styles found within any group of learners.
**Responsibility for learning.** All six participants displayed a strong cognizance toward their own responsibility for learning. When describing why they wanted to teach, the participants unanimously recognized their own personal desire to learn. By taking responsibility for learning, teachers quickly gained ownership of their professional development experiences and needs. This ownership in turn, appeared to be manipulated to meet their own professional learning needs. While reflecting on professional development itself, participants repeatedly mentioned how they learn from their own reflective teaching and each displayed a willingness to embrace various learning opportunities.

**Reflective teaching.** The participants in this research study were familiar with their content and curriculum as well as previous experiences with professional development. When asked how they prepared for teaching, all six indicated they reflect upon their teaching as a source of professional growth. Their responses were similar, but yet different, to their purpose for individual learning. It became evident during the interviews that the teachers remained dedicated to their profession and actively engaged in professional development or used various resources that would provide them with cognitive and emotional growth to remain successful in their assignment. References were made to various websites, professional journals, webinars and professional development experiences. For example, Georgia said:

> I can be objective enough to say, ‘I can get my kids where I need them to be and where I want them to be.’ But, there is always a part of me that thinks, you know, ‘How can I do better?’ I have always been a self-motivator. I have a need to learn new things and try different strategies with my students.

Delilah expressed similar feelings reflective of her daily instruction and wanting to keep herself up-to-date with her teaching. She commented:
Sometimes you get stuck in a rut and you teach the same things over and over the same way. Students change and so should my instruction. I need to meet the needs of my students.

Stacy also recognized her students as constantly changing. As she continued, she captured the relationship between her own professional learning and growth and how it inspires her to want to learn more. Watching my students learn and grow encourages me to find something new. Whether it is a strategy to teach, a concept within a subject area to learn about, or even a new novel to read, I like finding new things to bring into my classroom.

Maria produced another account of why she continues to grow professionally. She went on to say:

Students come to school with new diagnoses that we are not familiar with. The diagnosis spectrum is becoming broader and it is our challenge to teach each child who enters our school. I am constantly thinking about my teaching and deciding if I am effectively teaching my students and if they are learning the material. Not only do I have to learn new ways to teach but I also have to learn about each diagnosis and how it effects the child. Learning is never ending for me. As far as how to best teach these children, I have to learn new strategies and come up with different ways to work with each new learning style and remain up-to-date on scientific and medical research.

**Adaptive to change.** Since education is constantly changing with new initiatives, staffing transfers, and new groups of students, the participants explained how their flexibility and adaptability directly influenced their need to learn new materials. Vivian explained her change in placement as a new beginning. “Every time I changed grade levels or was re-assigned to a new position, I felt like a brand new teacher. I started out at square one and had so much to
learn.” She went on to say, “There is no way that the district could provide me with the support that I needed. I had no choice but to learn what I needed on my own.” Vivian credited her placement changes to making her a stronger teacher and cognizant of the curricular highlights and expectations of various grade levels.

Georgia resonated well with being adaptive. “I work in two school with two very different populations. What I do in one school doesn’t always work in another school. I have to tweak my lesson and ideas to meet the needs of my students.” She continued, “My insomnia gives me the perfect time to adapt my lesson and reflect on what I can do to provide engaging lessons for all of the kids.”

Sarah related well to adapting her teaching and professional knowledge into many grade levels. “I have to shift from fifth grade to pre-k in a matter of minutes. I know that what my students can do in fifth grade is very different from what the kids in pre-k can do.” She continued, “So not only do I have to learn the curriculum and content, I have to shift my own expectations to meet their needs.”

Maria provided a similar account of her adaptability and multiple grade levels of teaching. “I teach all over the building and kids from every grade level. I use kindergarten strategies with fifth graders and fifth grade strategies with kindergarteners. I have to be flexible to have this job.”

Regardless of the assignment or placement, the participants recognized how important learning is for them as well as their students. The confidence that each teacher gained from their own learning and the learning of their students became evident in the interviews and responses. The smiles of the participants and excitement in their voices defined who they were as a professional and the compassion that they shared for students.
Learning from peers. While engaging in professional development experiences, the participants of the study repeatedly mentioned the confidence they felt when they were provided opportunities to network with their colleagues. The details offered by the participants resembled each other suggesting the importance of collaboration in professional development.

Collaboration. All participants indicated collaboration is needed for professional and personal support, from large group collaboration meetings to individual observations. Collaboration was not only mentioned horizontally within each grade and specialist area, but also vertically by reaching out to other grade levels within and between elementary schools. Collaboration between special education, resource, and classroom teachers was suggested as a needed support.

Delilah talked about collaboration in general and reflected on a time when teachers collaborated within the district. She valued that experience and expressed a growing concern for more collaboration. Delilah explained:

The meetings that we had where we got together to discuss our needs as teachers are gone and it is unfortunate that those meetings are filled with topics that are not supporting us as teachers. I think that there is power in numbers and we can express our ideas and concerns better as a group than we can individually.

Stacy provided examples for the desire and need to collaborate. She went on to explain:

The most effective professional developments that I have gone to have been designed to allow for collaboration among the participants. You get to talk with people who have vast experiences, broader ideas, and can provide insights on how to implement
new ideas and instructional practices. I learn a lot from being able to mesh my ideas with others.

Georgia agreed with Stacy, “Ideally, they should get all of the resource teachers together, share a content area and make our time spent learning worthwhile.” She further explained this by providing the following examples:

You know, I get more from watching someone in their own classroom. I gain so much from seeing someone teach a lesson. I can see how they organize their learning, the structure of the classroom, the capacity to assist children, and most of all I get new ideas to implement into my own classroom. To me, that is more beneficial than listening to a presentation that has nothing to do with my classroom content or subject. This experience will make me a better teacher and will inspire me to do more.

Maria agreed with Stacy and Georgia:

I need practical experiences and multiple ideas to assist with my teaching.

Sometimes they forget about special education teachers and the fact that I work with varying age groups and grade levels. I have to rely on my colleagues for instructional ideas, content, and grade level expectations in order to teach to the ability levels of my students.

Vivian described how she felt after engaging with her colleagues and how such experiences provided an increase to her confidence as a teacher. “When I talk to other professionals and we are able to talk about what is going on in our classrooms, I feel like I am with the rest of the herd. She continued:

My challenges seem to be their challenges as well. Our discussions provide me with the confidence I need to know that I am no different that anyone else and we all feel the same
pressures. After that, I can go back to my classroom and continue to teach my students with the idea that I am doing what I am supposed to be.

The questioning self. The final theme pertained to the unanswered questions and the void that the teachers continue to feel after participating in professional development experiences. Professional development that extended beyond the “one-stop-shop” resonated with the research participants as they described their concerns and continuing professional needs.

Who am I? All of the participants expressed that they continue to struggle with instructional and curriculum knowledge related to their current position. The participants unanimously persisted, “Some days I struggle to figure out who I am, what I am supposed to be doing and how I am to get it all done.” Although most have participated in various professional developments over the years relating to instruction, they feel they are missing a deeper level of understanding of educational expectations. Without this deeper level of understanding, misconceptions of instructional and learning outcomes are evident in each classroom. “I am continuously questioning my ability to teach. Some days I feel like I really know what I am doing and other days, not so much,” said Vivian.

Sarah offered insights into this struggle, “I really don’t know what I’m doing because I didn’t have any training. The expectations of my job are not clear to anyone, let alone me. It has been disappointing to me that I cannot offer more to the students.” Just as Sarah’s struggle, Georgia felt that her struggle was complex. “The professional development that is offered makes me think that I am a content area teacher. They forget that I teach art and some days I am not sure that I teach art.” She continued, “I wish that they would not make my job harder. Some days I don’t know if I am coming or going. I don’t need more things added to the plate of instruction.”
**Time.** Four of the six participants commented that they receive a lot of professional development but there is little time to implement the new strategies and ideas that they have learned. This, paired with a lack of additional or follow-up training creates a barrier of competence, delivering adequate instruction and providing feedback to the teachers. Sarah said, “When I get back to my room I put the materials that I received from the professional development in a file because I don’t know how to incorporate the new things into the structure of my day.” When asked about additional details regarding the concept of time, Sarah also stated that the time is two-fold. As mentioned previously, one was the time needed during the instructional day to implement new ideas and concepts and the second was the time of year that professional development is offered. She continued by saying, “I always have a thousand things on my mind and the last three weeks of school is not a good time to send me to a meeting to learn something new. I am not thinking about something new that late in the year.” Sarah was unable to comprehend how or why the district planned and offered professional development at what seemed to her to be inopportune times. Delilah and Stacy also felt that planning professional development should be scheduled to accommodate the instructional year and teachers’ schedules.

Stacy shared:

We are always getting new ideas and materials tossed at us. This year alone we are getting a new math series. The district has provided very little professional development to learn the new material or to evaluate all of the resources associated with it. But we are required to teach it.

Stacy was unsure about the content, materials, and resources that would be provided with the new materials. She expressed concerns about when she would have time to learn everything that
she would need in order to teach from the series at the beginning of the next school year. Delilah shared the same concern. She stated, “I do not feel that I will be prepared to teach something that I don’t know and meeting throughout the year isn’t going to help me or my students. I want to know the “ins and outs” of the series before I have to be accountable for teaching it.”

**Summary.** Being unsure caused teachers to question their abilities and professional judgment, and to say the least, leaves them feeling less than confident. Constant change is inevitable for teachers. Professional learning is a continuous process for teachers to understand curriculum changes, educational standards, and to create more rigorous learning environments for students. Therefore, clear expectations have to be set, opportunities and time for learning new materials is essential for teachers to successfully implement new and existing ideas.

**Conclusion**

The stories and findings of this chapter attempted to understand the perspectives of teachers on their experiences in professional development opportunities. The findings also attempted to better understand, from a teacher’s perspective, how professional development influences his/ her own sense of professional efficacy. Although each participant described in detail their own unique experiences, several similarities in experiences and perspectives were present.

In particular, the analysis uncovered five superordinate themes and nine sub-themes that characterized the relationship between professional development and teachers’ sense of self-efficacy. There was a general consensus that the experiences influenced teacher’s confidence. All participants described various professional development experiences and concluded that some were memorable and others were not. They realized which professional development
experiences provided a direct benefit to them, personally and professionally, as well as provided
enrichment to the students that they teach. It became clear that the participants had evaluated on
their own learning style and professional needs and sought professional development to meet
their own needs. Even with the support of colleagues and professional development
opportunities, participants continue to question their teaching and sense of professional efficacy
due to the ever-changing expectations of public education.

Six participant interviews were conducted to explore the relationship between
professional development and teachers’ self-efficacy. One focus was on the individual learning
styles of the participants and how professional development influences their learning and
professional confidence and growth (self-efficacy). The second focus was on the experiences of
professional development. Throughout the interviews, teachers were asked to reflect on what
they felt influenced their self-efficacy by participating in professional development. Teachers
were asked to describe whether the professional development helped them feel more confident
and competent in their work, and if they did, how so.

All participants expressed their own desire to learn and grow professionally. Professional
development, on-line classes, professional journals, and webinars were cited as the main
opportunity for professional growth and essential opportunities that helped teachers feel more
confident about their instructional responsibilities. Self-selected or state/district mandated
experiences each provided the teachers with at least one learning outcome. In particular,
teachers spoke of topic relevancy as being a vital component of any professional development.
As Georgia shared, “The cookie cutter concept does not work. One size doesn’t fit all.”

Another strategy that helped teachers feel more confident about their work was
collaborative environments. The collaborative environment was not only among grade level
peers, but also with constituents from other schools, counties, and states. Teachers indicated that they felt well supported and more confident about their own experiences after they discussed their professional needs with individuals who were experiencing the same challenges and learning outcomes. Teachers described the uncertainties they feel about the ever-changing educational system and the continuous need for professional development and support. Therefore, the participants continue to seek resources to assist them in their professional environment. The impression was given that professional development does not fill in all of the needed learning gaps for teachers, however, there would always be a desire for teachers to feel professionally adequate.

These factors, the participant’s responses to the questions, and the themes that emerged point to the justification for professional development and the relationship that foster and influence teachers’ self-efficacy. The following final chapter explores the implications of these themes and the strategies for practice. Suggested conclusions are compared with the reviewed literature to identify areas of consistency and of divergence. The limitations of the study and some recommendations for further research are discussed as well.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Research Findings

Brief Overview

This study engaged in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the relationship between professional development and teachers’ sense of professional efficacy. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is rooted in the belief that humans gain meaning from relationships with their world. Therefore, priority was placed on interpretation of the participant as well as the researcher. This qualitative study attempted to gain meaning and understanding of the phenomenon of professional development experiences and the influence these have on teachers’ self-efficacy. This study sought to understand how teachers make sense of professional development phenomenon, and how, if any, a relationship of such experiences influenced their professional efficacy. The research that guided this study was formulated by the following research question: *What is the relationship between teachers’ experiences with professional development and professional efficacy?*

Research findings supported much of the literature that was reviewed in chapter two; however, new findings were supported by additional literature. The study is significant because it focused on a diverse group of teachers who engaged in multiple forms of professional development that were either required by the school district or self-selected by each participant. The findings offered a unique perspective on the benefits and challenges of professional development. Nine subordinate themes emerged from the narratives under five super-ordinate themes including: (1) what does this have to do with what I teach? (2) one size doesn’t fit all; (3) responsibility for learning; (4) learning from peers; and (5) the questioning self. This chapter summarizes the significance of the findings of chapter four, the correlation of these findings to
the relationships developed between professional development and self-efficacy literature as well as future implications and practice.

**Interpretations and Relevance to Literature**

**Relevancy.** All six participants acknowledged their inquiry to develop personal skills was directly related to their confidence level based on the relevancy of the professional development experience. The participants specifically mentioned how easily they became discouraged with professional development when they questioned why they were participating in professional development that did not directly impact his or her ability to grow both professionally and personally. Such negative experiences created a lack of trust and enthusiasm where positive experiences were deemed the opposite.

Likewise, the participants had engaged in multiple professional development experiences throughout their tenure as teachers. This personal engagement combined with a self-fulfilling prophecy to learn, were instrumental for understanding when the participants discussed their experiences. While the participants revealed that learning took place in all professional development experiences, they did not report what was learned. However, a profound significance was placed on topics of relevancy to each participant’s needs.

These findings support Hunzicker’s (2011) claims that effective professional development is supportive when it considers the needs, concerns, and interests of the individual teachers along with those of the school and district. These considerations included personal and professional needs that are job embedded, making them relevant and authentic. Hunzicker (2011) posits that professional development becomes relevant when it connects to the teacher’s daily responsibilities and becomes authentic when it is seamlessly integrated into each school day.
**One size doesn’t fit all.** Participants indicated learning styles resonated with their active participation, professional growth, and outcomes associated with professional development experiences. Five participants recognized their learning style as kinesthetic and one recognized hers as visual. The participants were excited to participate in professional development that offered a “make and take” concept. Taking this into account, one participant clearly identified how professional development, in order to support her classroom and teaching situation, needed to be extremely diverse. Although the participants described their own learning styles, they clearly recognized the challenges of planning and implementing professional development that would meet the needs of all participants. The necessity to differentiate professional development was revealed to be a primary factor contributing to the engagement of each participant.

Dixon, Yssel, McConnell and Hardin (2014) posit that diversity in learning abilities, the idea that individuals learn differently from one another, is not a new concept. As Tomlinson and Jarvis (2009) recognized one size does not fit all when instructing individuals because everyone differs in many ways. Therefore, professional development needs to be cognizant of kinesthetic, auditory and visual learners.

Participants in the present study revealed through dialogue that their professional needs are not always met during professional development because they do not always interact or become involved in the presentation of the content based on the style of the experience. The participants articulated the desire to have the opportunity to choose the topic, presentation style and presenter of future professional development in order to support their professional needs. Likewise, they indicated that selecting professional development to meet their needs, both personally and professionally, influenced their efficacy to a positive higher level. The participants explained that they know their own needs as well as the needs of their students. An
understanding of both personal and student needs is supported by the research of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) and therefore, the personal judgment of his or her own capabilities to bring about desired outcomes for learning are influenced by the individual seeking to make such changes.

**Adaptive to change.** Each of the participants in this current study was involved with some type of educational and systemic change within public education. Analysis of the participants’ dialogue revealed the changes were associated with the implementation of new instructional materials, the adoption of a new curriculum or by simply receiving new students in the classroom. It was noted that teachers often require on-going support since professional development alone has proven ineffective in supporting teachers as they implement change (Joyce and Showers, 1982).

Vivian expressed gratitude for her reassignments as they made her feel like a new teacher thus creating an opportunity for her to advance her own professional learning. Georgia and Maria followed up with their scenarios of teaching multiple students in multiple learning environments. Chival, Arbuagh, Lanin, van Gardeen, Cummmings, Estapa, & Huey (2010) supported change for teachers by stating that professional development is not enough to enable teachers to make improvements in their teaching practices. Furthermore, the research of Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) found that teachers’ self-efficacy could weaken with change, but that “professional development that supports change, through follow-up, had the strongest effects in self-efficacy beliefs.”

The participants recognized the need to constantly change for the enrichment of teaching and learning for themselves as well as for their students. Each individual in this study recognized his or her own innate desire and ability to grow and learn.
**Collaboration.** When properly implemented, collaborative learning provided teachers with a venue and opportunity to engage in continuous improvements as they reflect on their own practices (Sergiovanni, 1996). This study supports that collaboration, as a learning experience, can be used as a tool for teachers in their desire to discuss, share, reflect and improve their sense making capability of instructional and professional needs. Particular to their claims was a repetitive use of the terms “collaboration, working with peers, and networking.”

Showers and Joyce (1996) also showed that teachers who work together, plan together, and share aspects of their teaching experiences with one another are more likely to practice newly learned skills and apply new strategies more frequently than teachers who work alone and in isolation. Analysis of the participants’ responses in the current study displayed attitudes of willingness to learn from others within the context of professional development as well as within the confines of their teaching assignment. Participants indicated that through collaboration they made sense of their own phenomenon and developed a sense of confidence knowing that others shared similar concerns and challenges.

Collaborative learning, as a model or component of professional development, fosters and encourages teachers to share learned information with each other in the true professional learning environment (Showers and Joyce, 1996). This means that teachers work collaboratively to develop a shared vision and value system (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Dufor, 2004; Hord, 1997; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994), as well as shared personal practices (Hord, 1997; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004).

**Time.** Participants in this current study recognized time as a challenge they faced to implement new strategies and concepts learned during professional development. Time was also explained in multiple facets of the analysis of the data collected during the interviews. The main
theme that emerged associated with time was the lack thereof within the instructional day to try new instructional strategies and implement new ideas. Participants explained that there is not enough time in the day for new ideas and the struggle to adjust the daily schedule to allow for this is overpowering because of the quantity of material that is required to teach. Research studies conducted by Bloom (1964) concluded and supported the responses of the participants that schools are organized to give group instruction with definite periods of time allocated for particular learning tasks.

Participants in this current study revealed a desire to have additional time to reflect on learning and to have follow-up trainings to ensure content and strategy implementation with fidelity. Additionally, time was discussed as it related to the calendar year and when professional development was appropriate for instructional implementation and mastery. Carrol (1963) posits that individuals learn when time is devoted to their learning and are allowed enough time for learning to take place. Direct analysis of the participant’s responses matched such research claims. However, the amount of time needed for learning has not been studied in depth. Most research focused on allocated instruction time and time spent on mastering learning.

It cannot be determined that the sheer amount of time spent on learning and professional development accounts for the level of learning that takes place. However, each participant required different amounts of time to learn new material. The time needed to learn is directly related and affected by each individual’s level of self-efficacy.

Interpretations and Relevance to Theory

Long lasting impressions. All six participants in this current study responded with at least one professional development experience that supported their instructional needs and increased their self-efficacy. Five of the participants specifically mentioned professional
development that captured their attention, motivated them to learn, and were deemed highly effective for their professional knowledge. The participants briefly discussed the content of the professional development but focused more on how the information was disseminated, the activities that supported the dissemination of the information and how relevant the information was. The participants continued by describing how immediately attainable the information was and how easily the content was to implement in the classroom. The receptive response from the students and the level of learning each demonstrated proved the effectiveness for the teachers. These positive outcomes became embedded in the professional success of the teachers as they reflected on the frequent use of the materials or strategies.

These findings correlate directly to Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy. First, the participants engaged in an opportunity to advance their own personal and professional skills. Second, the behavior engagement of each participant along with the interactions with the learning environment allowed each individual to enter the learning and increased self-efficacy stage of the theory. Through such interactions the participants demonstrated the highest level of self-efficacy, influence.

Next, the participants allowed the positive influences of the experience to provide individual professional growth and knowledge. By establishing this purpose and autonomy, they were able to fully participate in the cycle of self-efficacy according to Bandura. In addition, the participants were able to fulfill their own commitments of being life-long learners and in return, establish higher goals for personal and professional learning.

Meaningful learning in professional development has been documented as a positive outcome in theory. Patton, Parker, and Pratt’s (2013) research supports the growing recognition of the importance of providing teachers with professional development opportunities that are
aligned with teachers’ needs and are coherent, resulting in what Hargraves and Fullan (2012) deem professional capital. The findings of this current study support the creation of professional capital. Therefore, professional development should be focused on meaningful tasks where teachers are viewed as learners coinciding with recognition that the role of the teacher is a learner and not a mere technician providing knowledge.

**A time to refresh.** Participants in this current study were united in their claims that attending professional development was a time to renew and rejuvenate their professional knowledge and efficacy. Operating under Bandura’s theory that self-efficacy beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies validating human beliefs and capacity, participants indicated that professional development provides an opportunity to review skills and concepts that are currently being implemented, but to also learn new materials. Additionally, the participants revealed the experiences reminded them of materials and strategies for teaching that they may have learned, but did not currently practice. These experiences made them feel a renewed confidence in their profession.

Within the context of professional development, the analysis revealed that the participants’ individual learning needs and desires, as well as their motivation to learn, was centered on their willingness to increase self-efficacy. One participant was diligent in the pursuit of feeling refreshed, which she indicated as she recalled being in a “rut” and teaching “the same way over and over.” She indicated that she relied on professional development to provide her with the extra “push” she needed to advance beyond the stagnant teaching practices in which she would find herself. The other participants specified that they were interested in reviewing concepts that they were familiar with, but had forgotten about and did not use.
These findings reveal positive learning in the cognitive and behavioral domains of self-efficacy and are supported by the research of Fishman, Marx, Best and Tal (2003) that aligned teacher and student learning outcomes to professional development in systemic reform. Fishman, et. al. (2003) posit that content for professional development and professional learning is what designers hope that teachers learn. This study concluded that two main categories for professional development exist; the first category is the general enterprise of teaching such as assessment, organization, management and teaching strategies, and the second is content. Therefore, the content of the professional development is reflective of what teachers already know and what they need to know.

Thorough analysis of the participant’s responses about professional development in this study support the research findings of Garet, Porter, Desimone, Burman, and Yoon (2001) where content focus is critical to professional development where some content focuses on methods, improving pedagogy, changes in practice and instruction to increase teacher performance and student achievement.

**Reflections after experience.** Participants in this current study produced evidence that suggested full engagement in Bandura’s (1986, 1997) theory of self-efficacy and how it enhanced human accomplishment by influencing the choices that the participants made to pursue their own actions for achievement. First, participation in professional development and engagement in learning indicates the interrelated motivator of external environmental influences. Second, participants demonstrated internal personal factors (cognitive, affective and psychological) through responses when asked about professional development experiences and individual learning needs. The replies of the participants indicated that their professional needs were minimally met with previous professional development, but each individual sought to
independently gain knowledge to advance professionally. Third, current and past behaviors influenced the participants’ self-efficacy.

The learning acquired by the participants was highly individualized and was professionally relevant to each person. This claim was supported by Joyce and Showers (1988). First, the intentional learning or personal engagement in the professional development needed to increase knowledge relied primarily on the part of the participant’s attitude toward learning. Second, the learning was immersed in theory of which the participants had prior knowledge, and they sought to gain more or additional knowledge. Lastly, the practice that provided skill development for the participants resonated with each individual and was deemed effective since the individuals continue to use and implement practices learned.

**Reflective teaching.** Strong commitments to oneself and to the instruction provided to students were profound as indicated in the analysis of the participant’s description of everyday instruction, and learning. All six participants made mention of “how can I improve” in comparison with their years of teaching and the diversity of the students in which they taught. One participant indicated that her insomnia created a great opportunity to reflect on her lessons, instruction and enabled her to devise plans to improve as a teacher. She continued to explain that through this reflection, she was aware of her professional needs and sought to find resources to improve. Reflecting on teaching practices was a familiar practice with participants and researchers.

Furthermore, Dewey (1933) posited, “Reflection in relation to professional activities implies a specialized form of thinking, applied to deal with a puzzling or curious situation to make better sense of the situation.” Schön (1983) called this form “reflection-on-action” and defined it as a deliberate process, developed and purposely used to reconsider existing
knowledge, beliefs, possibilities, ideas and actions. Recognition of similarities in teaching led the participants in this study to try new ideas, seek new instructional strategies and collaborate with colleagues to successfully continue to improve professionally and increase efficacy.

**Who am I?** As Selma Wasserman (1999) declared “teaching is a profession in which there are few, if any, clear cut answers, a profession riddled with ambiguity and moral dilemmas that would make Socrates weep” (p. 466). Wasserman, like the participants in this current study, recognized the complexity of teaching and sought tools and resources to “navigate the murky seas of uncertainty” (p. 464). Contributing to the limited answers about the goals and methods of good teaching, effective curriculum and student learning, the participants in this study unanimously concluded that the “unknowns” and uncertainty of public education makes them question their own theories, practices and professionalism.

The participants articulated their uncertainties and their discourse was directly related to the implementation of new curriculum, new instructional materials and the ever-changing world of education. Uncertainty can be recognized as an important ingredient to improved practices and protection for teachers from pessimism, guilt and frustration. However, the participants paralleled Helsing’s (2007) claim that teachers find reward in reflections of uncertainty, where each participant who, when provided with new occasions and circumstances recognized their own strengths, successes, and skills which enabled them to persevere in teaching.

A variety of factors can influence teachers’ responses to uncertainties. The reduction is possible by increasing the opportunities for collaboration, defining clear goals for instruction and decreasing the number and intensity of the demands placed on teachers. These participants concluded that their desire to learn and overcome their own uncertainties provided a sense of
creativity and ambition needed to attend to the idiosyncrasies of the context in which they work and learn.

**Implications for Research**

Two additional challenges teachers encounter when participating in professional development came to light during the analysis of the data. First, teachers must be given time within the instructional day to implement new ideas and strategies. Second, teachers need to have follow-up trainings and meetings to ensure the successful implementation and fidelity of the professional development content.

Participants felt that the time allotted during in the instructional day did not allow for deviation. However, they felt that implementing new strategies was beneficial for personal and professional growth as well as student achievement. Once the strategies were implemented, the participants felt that they were left unsure of the success of their own content implementation and needed additional support to feel confident in their work. This effort and these relationships place the participation clearly within the criteria of goal orientation and personal growth choices of the self-efficacy framework. Limited literature could be located to correlate these findings, calling for more research in these areas.

**Implications for Practice**

The overarching goal of this study was to understand the relationship that teachers have with professional development experiences and their own self-efficacy. The research sought to uncover the learning styles, needs, and influences that professional development has on teachers. Although literature on professional development is plentiful, it is heavily concentrated on how professional development affects teachers and what teachers need to know, not how teachers learn and what they want to know. Therefore this study provides valuable insights into the lived
experiences of six teachers who have engaged in professional development throughout years of their tenure of teaching.

It is required that teachers maintain their professional credentials and recommended by the educational system that teachers participate in professional learning as supported by Goals 2000. It is understood that education and students are forever changing and meeting the instructional and professional needs of students and teachers is a difficult task. However, schools have the primary responsibility to educate all children with the expertise of highly qualified teachers. Participants indicated that the need and desire to engage in professional development, relevant and important to their own needs, assisted in teachers’ levels of confidence and professional efficacy. As a teacher and educational leader within the school district, it is my responsibility to apply the findings of this study to my own professional learning as well as my colleagues. The “voice” of educators needs to be heard by local, state and federal leaders as they plan the future of public education and execute professional development experiences that will support their initiatives. Therefore, my role is to advocate for teachers to participate and serve on professional development planning committees not only at the school level, but at the district and state levels as well.

Dialogue with the participants acknowledged the cognitive, social and personal interactions of professional development. Participants were aware of their own limitations with professional development experience but sought to gain knowledge and increase their professional efficacy from each experience. As a researcher and leader, the stories shared and findings of this study will provide the platform for my leadership role to ensure that self-efficacy is a contributing factor of professional development. Although self-efficacy fluctuated for each participant based on variables and situations, it is recommended that strategic planning be
involved when creating and offering professional development. This can include, but not be limited to, funding, professional development design, content, collaboration and offering teachers the opportunity to select professional development to meet his or her own needs.

When evaluating the self-efficacy of participants who engaged in professional learning experiences it seemed that professional development experiences were directly related to the increasing or decreasing levels of professional efficacy. Therefore, it is recommended that professional development coordinators, school districts, and in-service teacher training programs seek to create professional development that addresses the individual needs of teachers. Being the new leader of the local education association, my role is to find out what teachers want and need professionally. This could be achieved by reaching out to teachers with the goal of offering professional development that is engaging, relevant and meets the needs of the intended audience. The findings, and research, to support their needs will be shared and used to plan for future professional development. This may appear to be a somewhat simple approach, but by listening to teachers and creating professional development that they are seeking, schools are more likely to see increased participation, higher levels of self-efficacy and increased teacher and student performance. The opportunity for professional development is an element of need and the participants in this study appeared to be interested in their own learning as well as creating the best learning opportunity within their classroom. Therefore, professional development is the best way to reach teachers and students to positively influence public education.

Limitations of the Study

Because the intention of this study was to focus on the relationship between professional development and teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, it is limited in both scope and breadth. The homogeneity of the participants limits the generalizability of the study. Professional development experiences within a rural school district provided the context; studies conducted at
larger districts in other geographic areas may not yield the same results. The focus was limited to one elementary school; middle and high schools have different professional development plans and opportunities with grade level and content specific experiences and these results may not apply to those settings. This study was limited to only six participants from diverse positions within an elementary school. A broader range of participants may yield different results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to uncover and investigate the relationship made and sense making process of teachers’ sense of professional efficacy following professional development experiences. This study’s findings support current literature on professional development and self-efficacy; thereby indicating a relationship is directly established between teachers’ experiences with professional development and their sense of professional efficacy. Participants welcomed professional development and the experiences with a general understanding of gaining knowledge and confidence required to perform their instructional and professional duties well.

Participants revealed they were most confident with themselves when professional development was relevant to their personal goals and the content of their classroom and instructional purposes. Participants were unanimous in stating that collaboration and collaborative experiences offered the opportunities to share ideas, expand knowledge, and reflect on past and current instructional practices, as well as situational occurrences within their classroom. These experiences offered an opportunity for personal and professional growth especially in the area of self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Finally, participants indicated that professional development is an opportunity to renew and refresh themselves as professionals and to increase their sense of self-efficacy. An increase
in self-efficacy is attainable through active participation, a commitment to one’s own learning and a desire to set professional goals that lead to individual change.

This study provides another lens, which examines professional development and is therefore useful information to policy makers, professional development designers, school districts and school administrators to expand their knowledge and understanding of the important role that professional development has on teachers’ sense of professional efficacy. While professional development will continue to be part of the ever-changing world of education, the findings of this study advance the understanding and the importance of professional development planning and implementation and influences each have on the desired outcomes of increasing teachers’ levels of self-efficacy and learning. The findings suggest the need for teacher input in planning and implementing effective professional development. In doing so, both teachers and students will have the opportunity to learn new skills, strategies, and develop positive attitudes required to remain highly effective.
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Appendix 1 – Triadic Reciprocity

![Diagram of Bandura's (1977; 1986) Model of Reciprocal determinism]

Figure 1: Bandura's (1977; 1986) Model of Reciprocal determinism
Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education.
Name of Principle Investigator: Dr. Billye Rhodes Sankofa Waters
Name of Student Investigator: Patrick Damon
Title of Project:

Demographic Information
Date ______________________________
Name __________________________________________
Grade ________________
# of years teaching ____________ Age range __20-34 __ 35-49 __ 50+
Gender __ M ___ F Pseudonym____________

Introduction: The purpose of this interview is to get to know you, your background and thoughts on education. You were selected to participate because you have more than five years of teaching experience in elementary school. As mentioned in the letter, the data gathered will be used for my dissertation work at NEU. No information from you will be publically identified, published or shared with individuals from your school. As you know, the consent letter explains this in more detail. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

Questions:
1) Please could you tell me about how you came to be a teacher?
   (Prompt: How did you arrive at your decision to teach elementary school?)
2) Please could you tell me about your educational background and experiences as they relate to teaching?
   (Prompt: What grade level/ subject do you teach? What other teaching experiences have you had?)
3) Can you tell me about your perception of teaching and how it relates to the reality of teaching?
   (Prompt: What was the source of your expectations? Can you tell me about your best teaching experiences? Can you tell me about your worst teaching experiences?)
4) Can you describe to me how you learn best and include what types of professional learning that you enjoy?
   (Prompt: traditional classroom, webinars, graduate courses, workshops, independent, etc.)
5) Can you describe professional learning as it relates to your current teaching position?
6) Can you tell me about what your perception of the “ultimate” professional development opportunity would be or look like?

7) What motivates you to learn something new?

8) In my research, I am looking specifically about the relationship between professional development and teachers’ sense of professional-efficacy. Could you describe your sense of professional-efficacy?

9) What do you expect of professional development?

10) Explain the purpose of professional development from your perspective.
    (Prompt: What makes it valuable, beneficial, etc.?)

11) What goals do you set for yourself before participating in professional development experiences and why?
    (Prompt: What do you seek to gain from professional development?)

12) Please tell me about your professional development experiences.
    (Prompt: Where the experiences mandatory or self-selected? What made the experiences valuable? What made the experiences invaluable?)

13) To what extent has professional development been what you have expected it to be?

14) To what extent has professional development influenced or changed your sense of professional efficacy?
    (Prompt: What factors do you contribute to this change?)

15) Anything else that you would like to share about your perceptions of self-efficacy and professional development experiences?
Appendix 3 - Teacher Consent Form

Appendix D - Consent Form for Teachers

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Graduate School of Education
Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Billye Sankofa Waters, Principal Investigator
Patrick Damon, Student Researcher
Title of Project: Professional Development and Teacher Perception of Design and Implementation

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this study because you are a teacher at Accident Elementary School and actively participate in professional development.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine what the relationship is between teachers’ experiences with professional development and professional efficacy. The results of the study will provide insight that will ensure the successful implementation of the professional development in the future. By identifying those areas that are problematic for educators, it is my, Patrick Damon, goal to be able to provide administrators, districts, and states with the necessary information to help them plan for the successful implementation of professional development.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to take part in two interviews that will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length. In the first interview I will get to know you and learn about your participation in professional development. The second interview will consist of questions designed to focus on teacher experiences with professional development and what relationship if formed to influences teachers’ professional-efficacy.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interviews can take place, somewhere private and quiet, wherever you feel most comfortable, on or off site. The two interviews will take no longer than 45-60 minutes. Your complete participation in the study will take no longer than two (2) hours.

APPROVED
2/3/10
VALID THROUGH 2/3/11

Northeastern University - Human Subject Research Protection
Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Because this study will be conducted at the school where you are teaching, you may feel uncomfortable discussing issues related to professional development. In order to minimize discomfort, the principal will not know that you are participating in the study, and you may choose to stop your participation at any time.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the information learned from this study may help the administrators, district, and state. They could, however, utilize the thoughts and feelings that the teachers expressed in this thesis to inform their decisions as they seek to implement and offer professional development.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be completely confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. The Northeastern University's Institutional Review Board will also be privy to the information but this is only to ensure that your rights within the study are being followed. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project. The school and participants will only be labeled by using pseudonyms.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
There are no other options if you do not want to participate in the interviews.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No harm is possible in this study.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. You may decline to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Further, you may decline to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, simply by letting me know your decision.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the person mainly responsible for the research, Patrick Damon. You can reach me by email at damon.p@husky.neu.edu or by telephone at 301-616-0073. You can also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Billye Sankofa Waters through email at b.sankofawaters@husky.neu.edu or call 617-390-3852.

APPROVED

Northeastern University - Human Subject Research Protection

NU IRB

VALID THROUGH 8/31/10
**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
Interview participants will receive a gift basket with school supplies and a $15.00 Barnes and Noble gift card.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no cost to you to participate in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
There is no other information that you need to know.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

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<th>Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent</th>
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### Appendix 4 – Themes and Subthemes

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<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
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<td>Responsibility for Learning</td>
<td>Learning from Peers</td>
<td>The Questioning Self</td>
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