

**Professional learning standards in practice: A study of how the standards develop
professional capital and collective efficacy in mid-career teachers during change**

by

Laura Ellen Hurla

B.S., Kansas State University, 2005
M.S., Emporia State University, 2011

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

In the spring of 2022, Learning Forward released an updated version of their professional learning standards. The concepts and research highlighted in the 2022 version of the standards are not necessarily new to the field of education. However, orchestrating the standards to create conditions for success and enact transformational processes for teacher learning and student achievement can be challenging. Combine that challenge with the stress of a global pandemic and rapid changes in public education, and the impact on teachers is significant. This interview study explored the results of applying the concepts underscored in the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning on the professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers.

This study engaged four mid-career teachers, two administrators, and two professional learning trainers in interviews and focus groups. Each participant was instrumental in a Midwestern elementary school's professional learning and development process for becoming the first Quantum Learning Distinguished School in the United States. The participants shared their perspectives on their professional learning experiences guided by leadership. The interviews and focus groups were coded for intersecting themes.

The mid-career teachers and leaders involved in the study confirmed the concepts included in the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning. The emerging themes were ongoing, connected professional learning with consistent positive feedback and collaboration, as well as showcasing the need for leaders to maintain quality communication, a shared vision, and a focus on change. It was evident that mid-career teachers need to feel a strong sense of belonging in the school culture to continue to blossom in professional capital.

This study highlights what mid-career teachers value when undergoing high levels of stress, such as the Covid-19 Pandemic while thriving in professional learning settings. Leaders

can reference this study to better understand how to create a culture to support the growth of mid-career teachers.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Donna Augustine-Shaw

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, my colleagues, and the memory of my grandmother. To my mother, husband, and sons who always believed in my goals and gave me the courage to achieve them. To my colleagues who inspire me daily with their collective efficacy and love for children in the public-school setting. To my grandmother who always stressed the importance of education and adoration for teachers.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

“When teachers strengthen their practice together, students are always the winners.” (Pitchford, 2021).

The most important investment in education is the classroom teacher. Nothing is as impactful as a high-quality educator in the classroom (Marzano, 2003). John Hattie (2003) identified teachers as contributing the most variance and greatest impact on student achievement. The influencers on student achievement with the highest effect sizes are primarily teacher driven. Therefore, it is important that educators develop their craft. High-quality professional learning and development (PLD) nurtures both the individual and collective capacity of educators. Learning Forward (2022) states when school systems leverage standards to increase equitable access to professional learning, the organization is transformed into an environment where high-quality leading, teaching, and learning takes place.

While guideposts for professional development have been in existence for decades, Learning Forward (2022) recently revised its standards for professional learning with a desire to increase the implementation of the standards and capacity of all educators. Learning Forward (2022) identifies 11 standards for quality professional learning. The 11 standards are split into three categories: (1) Conditions for Success; (2) Transformational Processes; and (3) Rigorous Content for Each Learner. Standards considered to be part of the Conditions for Success category include Equity Foundations, Culture of Collaborative Inquiry, Leadership, and Resources. It is within this category that one can find examples of collective trust and change principles. The Transformational Processes standards incorporate Implementation, Learning Designs, Evidence, and Equity Drivers. In this category, feedback is highlighted as an important tool for change and implementation. The section on Rigorous Content for Each Learner encompasses standards on Equity Practices, Curriculum and Instruction, and Professional Expertise. It is important to

understand the standards overlap and are interdependent. Each standard interacts and intertwines with another, as they work in concert and in the context of the local environment. Learning Forward (2022) explains how the standards lead to high-quality professional learning for educators which in turn lead to growth in educator skills, knowledge, and beliefs. This growth yields positive development in educator practice and therefore constructive effects on student learning. All standards are built on a common foundation that high-quality professional learning leads to improved practices. Another foundational belief is professional learning should be a comprehensive system approach. One can assume that equity is improved through professional learning. The standards are also built on the implication that quality resources are critical. An additional widespread belief is educators lead and learn from each other. Finally, readers can appreciate all standards are research-based.

This study looked at how the professional learning standards are operationalized to impact the development of individual professional capital of mid-career teachers and yield a strong school culture empowered by collective efficacy. As a result of this individual professional capital, collective efficacy, and alignment to the focus areas of professional learning outlined in the standards, educators can more successfully move through high levels of change and times of stress as experienced in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conceptual Framework

The structure presented in the revised Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) is considered the conceptual framework for this study while also cogitating some additional research emphasis on professional capital and collective efficacy. Specifically, this research study focused on the Conditions for Success and Transformational Processes defined in the Standards for Professional Learning. It investigated how a culture of collaborative inquiry,

leadership influence, and equity create conditions for success for mid-career teachers. The study also explored how evidence and feedback, research-based learning designs, and understanding change during implementation increase the professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers.

Collective teacher efficacy is embedded in understanding conditions for success. Through additional meta-analysis, Hattie (2018) adds collective teacher efficacy to the top of the list of factors influencing student achievement, with the potential effect size of having multiple years of student achievement growth in just a year's time. As Donohoo (2017) explains, collective teacher efficacy is a shared belief of confidence and competence among a school's staff, and "efficacy beliefs are very important as they guide our actions and behaviors" (pp. 6-7). Efficacy is a prophetic indicator of how a staff will respond to challenges (Donohoo, 2017). While a pandemic like Covid-19 is unprecedented in the challenges faced by school leaders and in the daily operations of schools, scholars have noted change is a constant rather than rarity for today's educators (Ellsworth, 2000). As such, it is essential for teachers to develop strong individual professional capacity and collective efficacy.

Trust is the main ingredient that yields successful collective efficacy in a group of practitioners. Hoy et al. (2012) underscore the importance of collective trust: "Trust in schools is important because it facilitates cooperation; it enhances openness; it promotes group cohesiveness; it supports professionalism; it builds organizational capacity; and it improves student achievement" (p. 123). We must have trust among colleagues and administration to develop more effective classroom instruction. Teachers who work in a climate of collective efficacy with deep collegial trust possess greater amounts of professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe professional capital as "the capital that

teachers need to develop if they are to be at the peak of their effectiveness” (p. 80). In theory, when professional capital is high, it yields higher trust; when trust is high, it creates higher collective efficacy; and when collective efficacy is high, the conditions are right for school colleagues to willingly participate in professional learning and reflection to improve student achievement (Lambert et al., 2016). Therefore, professional development must be intentionally designed to enhance collective efficacy, collective trust, and professional capital. According to Cardoza (2021), during the Covid-19 Pandemic, teachers were left burned out and exhausted when such efficacy, trust, and capital were absent.

When teachers need a confidence and morale boost, it can come through high quality and meaningful professional learning. The professional learning standards for educators have evolved from traditional professional development as depicted in the 1994 standards to the ongoing professional learning depicted in the new 2022 standards. Professional development, in a traditional sense, is characterized by stand-alone, sit-and-get lectures, and a lack of application to practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The movement towards professional learning communities (PLC) has helped educators create better practices of inquiry and collaborative growth (Lambert et al., 2016). Learning Forward’s (2022) new standards explain that learning communities bridge the knowing-doing gap and increase the implementation of PLD. When colleagues learn together, they do together.

In addition to creating a culture of collective efficacy, individual efficacy is necessary for growth. Developing individual professional capital is a goal of quality PLD. Professional capital is when teachers are at their very best – all of their instinct, training, and efforts are working in sync to produce positive outcomes for teacher practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Teachers who have an abundance of professional capital, know their students – both personally and

developmentally (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Barfield & Burlingame, 1974; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Consequently, professional development providers need to know their teachers – both personally and developmentally. One way is to understand the teachers’ career stage and develop professional learning activities accordingly. Like stages of human development, as teachers progress through their careers, they process information and experiences differently. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest understanding in what stage of life or career an educator is, helps meet his or her professional needs. There is a strong correlation between professional capital and the in which stage of career a teacher is. Professional capital greatly impacts one’s commitment, capability, and efficacy.

One very important career stage is the mid-career teacher. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) described mid-career teachers as confident but not complacent, open but not innocent, and questioning without being cranky. Mid-career teachers, defined as having eight to fifteen years of experience, demonstrate some of the highest levels of commitment, which is foundational for understanding the contributing factors of collective teacher efficacy, building trust, and producing professional capital (Day, 2012). However, this group tends to receive the least attention and focus from most established professional-development models. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) indicated, “In developing professional capital, this is perhaps the most neglected group in the entire teaching profession” (p. 72). Subsequently, there is a need for more attention to this teacher demographic possessing the highest potential.

This study explored the intersection of the mid-career teacher and the development of individual professional capital and collective efficacy through conditions that promote a culture of trust by leadership and through professional learning conditions and structures. Observations from the pilot phenomenological study highlighted later in this research, showed that the mid-

career teachers' career stage played an important factor in their resiliency during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In this pilot study, it was revealed that the teachers had experience on which to draw on for decision making and maintaining commitment to their goals and the profession.

In addition to the concepts of teacher efficacy and professional capital, leadership is essential for effective PLD. Research conducted by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) International outlines the leadership responsibilities that provide building principals and instructional leaders with an understanding of leading during first and second-order change (Goodwin et al., 2015). During constantly shifting change, it is necessary for leadership to understand how establishing a culture of learning can help teachers navigate the complexities and dynamics of change. Using the twenty-one leadership responsibilities outlined in Waters and Cameron (2007), Marzano et al. (2005), and Goodwin et al. (2015), leaders can incorporate instructional leadership skills that are needed during times of change. When the leader has a firm understanding of first- and second-order change, the process of leading change can be planned and more easily managed by all. First-order change is an extension of previously held knowledge, values, or practices. In contrast, second-order change is a perceived break from the past (Marzano et al., 2005; Goodwin et al., 2015). Understanding how people react to change and the support necessary to move people through change is important for leaders.

McREL International's 21 leadership responsibilities is an embodiment of high-capacity leadership. When schools engage in high-capacity leadership, they experience the positive consequences of a shared vision and gain collective agency. They also experience growth in knowledge and improved practice. Schools led by principals who develop structures for collaboration and work to establish trusting relationships enable teachers to feel an additional sense of collective responsibility and willingness to engage in innovative practices and ongoing

improvement (Lambert et al., 2016). Specifically, when mid-career teachers engage in PLD that arises from a culture of trust and sense of collective energy, teachers can continue to thrive and excel even amidst change and turmoil.

As schools began to prepare for returning to in-person classes for the 2020-21 school year, following the shutdown of schools the previous spring due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, stories circulated of teachers who were anxious and struggling to come back to work amongst all the changes and uncertainty. In contrast, the teachers at the elementary school chosen for the study were nervous but seemed to be willing to work with their leadership to re-engage and gear up for the start of school. Throughout the 2020-21 school year, I continued to hear extreme stories of teacher burn out and teachers choosing to leave the profession with rare instances of positive teacher engagement. Uniquely, the school chosen for the study experienced no turnover during the 2020-21 school year and even more remarkably, the staff appeared to maintain a sense of positivity and professional growth. As the researcher, I became increasingly curious as to why there existed such a notable difference between national trends and this school's ability to weather the storm and continue to move forward. It is this curiosity that led to the premise of this study and desire to investigate the conditions that allowed this school to flourish during such a challenging time.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study was to explore how four mid-career teachers in a suburban Midwestern elementary school perceived the role of PLD as it related to their individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy. The study explored the conditions preceding, during, and following the Covid-19 Pandemic. The overarching research question guiding this study was:

How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and development and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

The elementary school was chosen for its participation in a two-year PLD experience with Quantum Learning Education in which it became the first Quantum Learning Distinguished School (QLDS) in the United States. The four mid-career teachers selected for this study participated as teacher lead-learners during the QLDS experience; hence, providing an important perspective as to what conditions and processes drive a mid-career teacher to be committed to professional growth and to build strong relationships with colleagues.

This study also examined how leadership established conditions for success and employed transformational processes to enact change and build capacity in the school's staff. The researcher interviewed the current and past building principals to tell the story of leadership practices during the last decade. School principals are second in impact to student achievement, just behind the classroom teacher (Goodwin et al., 2015). Therefore, it was important to understand how leaders influence student and teacher success through their actions.

Finally, this study interviewed the professional development trainer who provided professional learning and support to the instructional coach as part of this school's QLDS process as well as included perspectives from the building's instructional coach. These interviews defined what professional learning experiences were provided and why these learning designs were chosen.

The purpose of the study was to find the intersection of themes between the perceptions and actions of mid-career teachers, principals, and professional learning trainers as they developed the individual professional capital and collective efficacy in a system of school-based

educators. The study will help other leaders identify how professional learning standards are utilized to improve classroom instruction and cause positive change. Additionally, this study explored the specific categories of creating conditions of success and transformational processes for PLD. While this study could be replicated in multiple contexts, it is important to note the uniqueness of the context in which this study took place.

Context of the Study

As the elementary school was undergoing structured adult learning as a part of the QLDS process, it also experienced an unprecedented global pandemic. The Covid-19 Pandemic ushered in several unanticipated changes to public education as well as fear, anxiety, and stress. During the 2020-2021 school year, teachers had to reimagine how they did their jobs and were at the mercy of local health agencies, governments, and local school boards to determine what school would look like and how students would receive instruction. Teachers had to turn on a dime and shift their instructional practices quickly to meet ever-shifting public health policies.

Teachers experienced more stress than ever before. In an interview with National Public Radio's Cardoza (2021), Lisa Sanetti, a professor from the University of Connecticut said, "Chronically stressed teachers are just less effective in the classroom...And we have a huge teacher turnover problem in our country" (p. 3). When teachers are stressed, their performance often declines. The focus is on survival rather than professional learning and growth. This study considered how conditions for success and transformational processes as outlined in the professional learning standards can be employed during times of intense stress to support continued growth in the individual professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers.

Methodology

This study applied qualitative interview study methods to understand mid-career teachers' experiences with PLD practices during times of significant change. The study operationalized standards of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022) and the impact of these structures on the individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy of mid-career teachers. The methodology of a responsive interview study allowed the researcher to dive deeper into each participant's individual meaning-making around given teaching experiences and discover the contributing PLD and leadership factors that influenced his or her professional growth.

The participants were recruited from a suburban Midwestern elementary school where a consistent, extensive, and measurable professional development model was in place from the 2019-2021 academic years. This school was chosen for its work with the Quantum Learning Network for Teachers to become a QLDS. Four participants who met the following criteria were recruited: general education classroom teachers with eight to fifteen years of experience and participated as lead learners in the QLDS (2019) process for professional development. The lead learners helped building leadership facilitator professional learning; of the six lead learners, four were considered mid-career, therefore, all four served as participants for the study. Each participant was interviewed individually twice and met once as a focus group. The past and present building principals were interviewed once and participated in a focus group to describe the role of leadership in creating conditions for success and leading transformational processes. Finally, the Quantum Learning professional development facilitator was interviewed to provide an understanding of learning designs in PLD. I, as the researcher, am a member of the school's faculty and during the time of the study, provided professional development as the school's

instructional coach. Because of this role, I answered the same questions I prepared for the Quantum Learning professional development facilitator. I recognize that my own interpretation of the professional learning had a constant presence in the research process. I continually recognized my own perceptions and understanding through taking analytical notes.

Lastly, the study's findings were developed and coded by themes to describe and represent the data collected. The thematic intersections of the three participant groups are presented. The study's findings will assist the educational community in better understanding the role of professional learning standards in creating conditions for building individual professional capital and collective efficacy in mid-career teachers.

Limitations, Possibilities, and Subjectivities

Limitations

Peoples (2021) acknowledges a small participant pool is the norm in interview studies; however, this is a small study with limited participation. As designed, the context of this study was very narrow. This study only focused on teachers in the mid-career category. Therefore, it limited who could be a participant. The study further narrowed by selecting participants from the same suburban Midwestern elementary school. There was no racial or gender diversity in this study because the mid-career teachers in this elementary school were all White women. The participant experiences in this study might contrast greatly with urban or rural teachers, secondary teachers, teachers of other ethnic groups, or teachers of other career stages.

As participant-researcher, I carried my own assumptions about what makes a good teacher with high levels of professional capital. I had my own interpretations and understandings, as do the participants. My relationship with the participants may have caused limitations in their willingness to share. Although participants were asked to reflect and describe their own

professional capital, commitment, and capabilities, one's ability to self-assess was also a limitation. Personalities might have caused participants to be modest about their own successes or some might not have had a true understanding of to what degree he or she had developed professional capital.

Collective teacher efficacy can be challenging to identify as well. Often times educators might attribute success to their students' efforts rather than acknowledging their own efforts (Guskey, 2020). Teachers might have limited understandings of what collective teacher efficacy is and how it impacts students, therefore, they might not have acknowledged all the sources of success. Collective efficacy is also reliant on supportive leadership (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Thus, another limitation for collective efficacy is the leadership of a given organization. These are considered limitations in that participants who have less experience with the concept of collective efficacy might not be able to clearly verbalize the components such as shared beliefs that contributed to the development of collective efficacy over time.

This study concentrated on interview and focus group methods as the main source for information. While some observation occurred within the interview settings, the study was limited to that time and place.

Possibilities

This study provided a deeper understanding of mid-career teachers' perceptions of the influential frameworks of collective efficacy (Hattie, 2018), organizational trust (Hoy et al., 2012), and individual professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The findings of the study personified the ideas about effective leadership, change, and professional development. It provides educators with a description of vicarious experiences of professional growth; and tools to help enhance the collective efficacy of others (Donohoo, 2017). This study is also significant

to improving leadership practices that develop school cultures that allow teachers to maximize productivity during times of frequent and stressful change as well as an understanding of meaningful and impactful professional development. The findings should empower leaders to better understand how the development of collective efficacy in a school's culture can serve as a conduit to carry people through times of intense stress.

Subjectivities

I recognize that I have strongly held beliefs about professional learning, collective efficacy, and professional capital. I identify strongly with the mid-career teacher as I have just recently moved from that stage in my career. I had chosen a path to develop my professional capital during the mid-career stage when experiences have proven to be so important (Day, 2017). Since I served as the participants' instructional coach, I acknowledge my opinions on the participants' professional capital and the group's collective trust. Finally, I acknowledge my participation in the QLDS process used to help validate or refute the data from the interviews and focus groups. I was one of the individuals to complete walk-thru observations and identify teacher growth. I also worked with cohorts to develop goals and guide reflection as a part of the professional learning design. My subjectivity was addressed through journaling analytical notes (Dibley et al., 2020; Peoples, 2021; Van Manen, 2016). Due to my closeness to the data and participants, my perspectives played a large role in the coding process. The researcher employed qualitative coding techniques that allowed the data to identify themes.

Operational Definitions

Professional Learning and Development (PLD): This is a term coined for this study to highlight the break from traditional professional development (PD) and the paradigm shift to professional learning.

Collective Teacher Efficacy: An “attitude that together they [teachers] can make a difference for students” (Donohoo, 2017, p. 3). This definition contains teachers’ perceptions about their confidence and competence in their shared ability to reach students. The researcher used this lens for collective teacher efficacy since the interest of this study lies in the interpretation of the teachers being interviewed. Donohoo and Katz (2017) espouse that the four sources for collective teacher efficacy include master experiences, vicarious experiences, affective states, and social persuasion.

Career Phases: Based on Huberman’s research in the 1980s, Hargreaves and Fullan define early-career as Phases One and Two, mid-career as Phases Three and Four, and late-career as Phases Five and Six (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Specifically for this study, the focus was on Phase Three which is defined as eight to fifteen years of experience.

Professional Capital: Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) define professional capital as “the confluence of three kinds of capital: human, social, and decisional” (p. 88).

Human capital is the return on investment in educational training and development of knowledge and teaching skills.

Social capital refers to “how the quantity and quality of social interactions and relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information” (p. 90).

Decisional capital is the aggregate wisdom that comes from experiences and circumstances over time; it may be generated for an individual or enhanced through social capital.

Summary

The Covid-19 Pandemic was difficult. It challenged educators beyond their existing capacity to deal with change, resulting in teachers leaving the profession more than in previous

times (Hess, 2021). Yet other teachers have been able to look beyond surviving these challenges and even thrive during this time. This study explored how four mid-career teachers who taught during the 2020-2021 school year in a suburban Midwestern elementary school perceived the role of intensive professional development as it related to the development of their individual professional capital during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The researcher attempted to better understand how the conditions promulgated by the principals (former and current) in developing a perceived sense of collective efficacy, collective trust, and a collaborative culture preceding the pandemic, allowed these mid-career teachers to maintain positive professional growth. The researcher also further sought to understand the critical role of PLD in contributing to the positive outcomes of this school and sustaining this culture over time.

Previous studies have provided a baseline understanding of what cultural factors create or impact collective teacher efficacy (Donohoo, 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Lambert et al., 2016). This study employed responsive interview methods to provide a deeper insight into the mid-career stage teacher's perception of what it was like to undergo intentional PLD while also teaching during the pandemic. This study informs school systems, administrators, and instructional coaches how during extreme stress, systems can still serve to help teachers work together to build professional capital and collective efficacy. The study also contributes to the continued research on professional development for mid-career teachers and substantiates that educators can continue to grow if the conditions are right in the culture of a school.

Additionally, this study utilized the conceptual framework highlighted in Learning Forward's (2022) Standards for Professional Learning on Conditions for Success and Transformational Process. It provides a context for how leaders can develop a culture in which professional learning is the norm and how and why mid-career teachers seek to take a path

towards growth rather than one of professional plateau. It describes how using a framework for professional learning can increase positive outcomes for students and educators. Chapter two will dive into the conceptual framework used in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) and expound on the research behind professional capital and collective efficacy.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Since 1965 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which provided federal funds for professional development, the learning activities and allocated time for teachers to participate in professional development has been scrutinized and structured in hopes of providing high-quality learning to develop high-quality teachers. In 1994, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) released standards for teacher professional development for the first time, outlining the importance of providing quality professional development. With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, professional development standards were revised to include more meaningful and lasting work than a one-day or short-term conference. By 2010, the NSDC changed its name to Learning Forward to support districts across the country striving to create opportunities for teacher growth and to increase positive student outcomes. Updated standards for professional learning were released in 2011. The 2011 Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning contained seven standards for implementation of effective professional development. The seven standards included a focus on learning communities working toward shared goals and adept leaders developing the capacity of those in their system. The 2011 standards prompted systems to acquire and monitor resources while analyzing and employing data to inform decisions. School systems used the standards to implement research-based learning designs to reach goals and assess outcomes of professional learning (Garret et al., 2021). In 2015, the passage of President Obama's ESEA revisions prompted the inclusion of job-embedded coaching and collaboration to quality professional development (Frontline Education, 2021).

Learning Forward revised its standards most recently in 2022 and identified 11 standards for professional learning. The 11 standards are categorized within a three-prong framework:

Rigorous Content for Each Learner, Transformational Processes, and Conditions for Success.

The intent of these new standards is to successfully orchestrate in concert with one another with the result in effective and impactful learning for students and educators (Learning Forward, 2022). These new standards provide a logical conceptual framework for the purpose of this study as it relates to the overarching research question and sub-categories of inquiry.

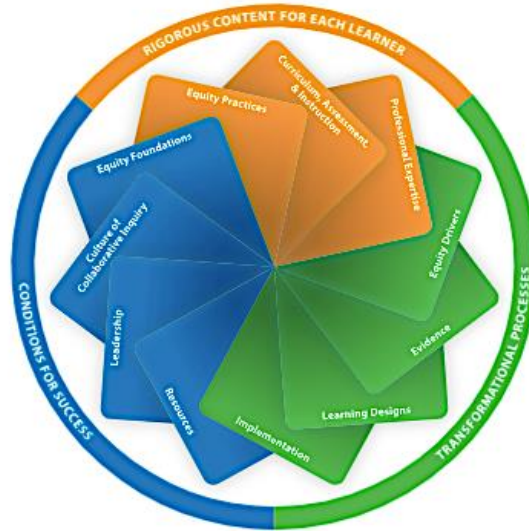
In collaboration with Learning Forward, Garret et al. (2021) at the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institute of Research, completed a substantial meta-analysis of classroom teachers' perceptions of professional development. They looked at 48 studies of professional development published from 2010-2020. The analysis included identifying and assessing the effect sizes of the 2011 standards as well as areas of interest Learning Forward was planning to add to the 2022 standards revision. As a result, Garret et al. (2021) found that the 2011 Learning Forward standards were still relevant and had positive effects on teachers' perceptions and student outcomes. Yet, there needed to be more consideration given to the Conditions for Success and Leadership being developed for inclusion in the 2022 standards. These concepts were underrepresented in the studies used for the meta-analysis. Therefore, Learning Forward developed their research base from other literature to deepen the knowledge and insight needed for the areas of Conditions for Success and Leadership. The literature review for this study incorporates a focus on these two strands and the literature base in the 2022 Learning Forward standards due to the strong connection to the study's purpose and research question.

This literature review will use the conceptual framework of the Learning Forward 2022 Standards to explore how high levels of individual professional capital and collective efficacy in mid-career teachers developed before, during, and after extraordinary stress and change resulting

from the Covid-19 Pandemic. It will concentrate on two of three categories from the new 2022 Learning Forward standards: Conditions for Success and Transformational Process. Within these two categories, the literature is further sorted by defining the standards for professional learning under each. Category One: Conditions for Success includes the standards of Culture of Collaborative Inquiry; Leadership; Equity Foundations; and Resources. This literature review omits Resources as a focus simply to emphasize behaviors of colleagues and leadership in a collaborative culture. One should acknowledge the significance of providing and supporting adequate resources to enact change. However, it is not elaborated upon here. Category Two: Transformational Process includes the standards of Learning Designs; Implementation; Equity Drivers; and Evidence (see Figure 1). The researcher has also identified the focus areas of inquiry for this specific study appropriately after the discussion of each framework. These research topics include Professional Capital; Collective Efficacy; Collective Trust; Mid-career Teachers; Feedback Processes; and Change Theory. Finally, an explanation of the Covid-19 Pandemic context will be provided.

Figure 1

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning 2022



Note. This figure of the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning highlights the integration of each standard as a whole system for professional learning. From *Standards for Professional Learning*, Learning Forward, 2022. Copyright 2022 by Learning Forward BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Conceptual Framework: Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning 2022

Learning Forward (2022) uses the diagram shown in Figure 1 to elicit the image around the standards' interconnectivity and cyclical nature. The framework of the three main sections named along the outer circle of the image must work together to create quality professional learning for all. Without one of the main categories of the framework, the system is found lacking. Just as the standards overlap in the figure, they overlap in practice as well. The essence of one standard permeates into the practice of another. No standard is meant to stand alone. Neither is the process linear.

Learning Forward Category One: Conditions for Success

The revisions of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning (2022) make it clear that several assumptions can be made when considering quality professional learning. One of which is “educators create and sustain professional learning and professional learning systems” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 5). These standards seek to end any remaining silos in the professional learning occurring for teachers in education. The focus of the new standards is to provide opportunities for educators to learn together and from one another. Thus, the standards regarding conditions for success paint a picture of what is needed for healthy professional learning: collaborative cultures and quality leadership.

Learning Forward (2022) includes standards around collaborative inquiry, leadership, and equity foundations as conditions for success. Whereas each standard can stand independently, they are intimately interrelated. Without quality instructional leadership, schools cannot create collaborative cultures (Parlar et al., 2021). Without considering equity foundations, professional learning is not accessible to all educators. Even though this literature review has separated each idea, one must remember how reliant and connected each standard is to compose the best possible scenario for professional learning.

Conditions for Success Standard One: Culture of Collaborative Inquiry

When the culture is right, cognition thrives. This is true for any learning culture – adults and students (DePorter, 2016). A school’s culture consists of its foundation for how learners and professionals treat each other; its climate and atmosphere throughout the whole organization, its attention to its vision, and its energy to meeting goals. As the literature addresses cultures for collaborative inquiry, teacher to teacher relationships matter in professional learning communities. Teachers must trust each other to learning with and from each other (Hoy et al.,

2012; Lee et al., 2011). For schools to move forward in learning and instruction, the whole school must be invested in improvement. While leadership must clearly communicate and inspire around agreed upon goals, leadership must be shared with all stakeholders (Marzano et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Therefore, teachers must become leaders (Berry et al., 2010).

Culture also has a correlative relationship with the school's collective teacher efficacy and individual teachers' professional capital (Day et al., 2020; Donohoo, 2014; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017; Lee et al., 2011; Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). Trust is both a cause and an effect of a healthy school culture. This section will look at how individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy build trust within the school climate to create a culture conducive to high levels of collaborative inquiry.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Individual Professional Capital

Each school district strives to have the highest quality teacher in front of every classroom. Hattie's (2018) meta-analysis indicates the greatest impact on student learning is the teacher. Hattie cites collective teacher efficacy and teacher expectations as having the highest effect sizes on student achievement; nearly triple the average growth students make in a single year. In research among schools with large populations of students in lower socio-economic classes, collective teacher efficacy and healthy school cultures overcome the economic challenges on student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000, 2001). Simply put, when teachers believe, students achieve (Donohoo & Katz, 2017).

It is the school context, however, that plays an important role in developing and maintaining teachers' efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). Bandura (1997) espoused, teachers "are not social isolates immune to the influence of those around them" (p. 469). The school

environmental factors that lead to promoting the development of high-quality teachers include the concepts of individual professional capital, collective efficacy, and collective trust. These factors collectively empower teachers to increase their knowledge, skills, and daily practice to ultimately impact student learning.

Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) proposed seven markers for professionalism which began to shape the concept of professional capital. While their list defines self-improving systems, it includes markers about teachers' willingness and commitment to collaborate on problems and participate in joint work, as well as teachers' self-directed searches and struggles for continuous learning. As these concepts were refined from the original definition of teacher professionalism and the subsequent development of the concept of professional capital by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), the idea of professional capital was expanded to include teacher career stages (Day, 2017). Professional capital defines a highly qualified teacher who is consistently improving his or her craft.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) composed the following list of characteristics for a highly qualified teacher in a supportive school culture:

- Specialized knowledge, expertise, and professional language
- Shared standards of practice
- Long and rigorous processes of training and qualification
- A monopoly over the service that is provided
- An ethic of service, even a sense of calling, in relation to clients
- Autonomy to make informed discretionary judgments
- Working together with other professionals to solve complex cases, and
- Commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading. (p. 80)

This extensive list has been headlining teacher evaluation rubrics and protocols, professional development standards, and teacher preparation programs for many years. These areas of defining teacher quality and expertise cumulatively aggregate to the building of individual professional capital occurring through intentional, purposeful, and supportive leadership.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) further expound teaching like a pro is when training and knowledge merge with “the disciplines you have learned and the thousands of hours you have invested to apply them in practice, bear fruit in the quality of how you teach and in what your students can learn and achieve” (p. 83). The authors offer three ways in which professional capital occurs: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital.

Human capital is not solely an educational concept. Companies have been trying to maximize their human capital for years. In short, human capital is hiring well and investing in the development of your employees. In the article, *How to Increase Your Company's Value*, while discussing human capital, Safina (2020) very plainly states, “your company value is also anchored on its ability to hire and retain great staff...The right workforce helps retain a company's ethics and culture, among other vital aspects” (pp. 17-18). A teacher's talent, passion, and skill make up his or her human capital.

When human capital is shared with others, it is considered social capital. Fullan (2016) states that “social capital in a school affects teachers' access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust; and their commitment to work together for a common cause” (p. 44). Collective teacher efficacy is typically highest in schools that cultivate their social capital. Education has many strategies and terms for social capital building. Examples of these strategies include the incorporation of critical friends' networks, professional

learning communities, and other structures that promote collaboration and teamwork. Critical friends' networks allow teachers to observe and provide feedback for each other (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; L. Lambert et al., 2016). Professional learning communities promote ongoing collaboration around data and instructional practices (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Marzano, 2003). Regardless of what it is called, collaborative teams build social capital within a school. They are necessary for building professional capital. As the standards are extremely interrelated and reliant on one another, the concept of collaborative teams and learning communities will be revisited when the literature discusses professional learning strategies and designs.

The third dimension of professional capital is decisional capital. Decisional capital is explained by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) as “the capital that professionals acquire and accumulate through structured and unstructured experience, practice, and reflection – capital that enables them to make wise judgements in circumstances where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence to guide them” (pp. 93-94). Some might call this ‘teacher intuition’ or a teacher who instinctually knows how to handle a situation based on his or her past experiences. It is important to note decisional capital takes about eight years of experience to grow and cultivate (Day, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) confirmed if a teacher leaves the profession before eight years, they will not have secured the development of decisional capital or be able to work towards the achievement of professional capital at its highest level.

Day (2017) analyzes multiple research studies on the correlation between teachers' professional capital, teacher retention and commitment, and student achievement. Figure 2 explains the relationships and sequences between professional capital and teacher effectiveness (Day, 2017). The components of professional capital include decisional capital, human capital,

and social capital. These are developed in tandem to increase teacher quality which directly influences the effectiveness of classroom instruction. The outcome of these processes is measured by student learning and success.

Figure 2

The Relationship between Professional Capital and Teacher Effectiveness



Note. This figure describes the hypothesized relationship between professional capital, teacher quality, and teacher effectiveness. From *Teachers' Worlds and Work: Understanding Complexity, Building Quality* (1st ed., p.12), by C. Day, 2017, Routledge. Copyright 2017 by C. Day.

Studies on teacher retention and school improvement named social capital and relationships among staff members a contributing factor to a school's success (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). While it is difficult to pinpoint a clear cause and effect relationship, Leana's (2011) research examined the relationship between teachers' human and social capital and the mathematics scores of their students. Students whose teachers displayed high social capital outscored students with teachers of lower social capital by 5.7% (Leana, 2011). Professional capital does matter, positively impacting student learning. However,

for professional capital to develop and impact student learning, the culture of the school must be a place where trust exists among the adults.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Collective Trust

All components of professional capital build on the cornerstone of collective trust. Hoy et al. (2012) explained “a strong culture of organizational trust in schools is one in which the faculty trusts the principal, faculty members trust each other, and the faculty trusts both students and parents; all groups work together cooperatively” (p. 194). Without this trust, teachers cannot excel. In guiding administrators to develop professional capital in their teachers, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) shared “usually, trust and relationships come first” (p. 114). A school culture where strong relationships and trust is fostered can make an incredible impact on learning. Bryk and Schneider (2002) found schools reporting strong positive trust were three times more likely to see improvements in student learning. Even ‘pro-teachers’ cannot grow in a place without trust.

Research studies have helped explain and operationalize what trust is and how one can best cultivate it. Through their research, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) identified five facets of trust: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. Correspondingly, Hallam et al. (2015) identified benevolence, reliability, and openness as the most influential among their focus groups of teachers. Benevolence is the care of one another and the presumption of positive intent. When benevolence is shared, people feel valued. The teachers in Hallam’s (2015) study reflected they responded best to teammates who offered patience and understanding during professional learning. Honesty and openness provide a level of transparency and consistency to school climates. Similarly, relational trust is characterized by openness, caring, and honesty, which promote vulnerability between and among others through influence (L. Lambert et al.,

2016). Vulnerability is necessary in school cultures because it is from where innovation and creativity flow (Brown, 2018). If there is going to be learning and progress in a school, there must be trust. Trust has been especially important during pandemic teaching. Teachers have never felt so vulnerable. Without trust, commitment and performance plummets.

Educators need to feel enough trust to embrace the vulnerability of PLD and changes together. In a study on organizational trust and its impact on self-efficacy and workplace performance, Ozyilmaz et al. (2018) found an employee's job satisfaction, performance, and self-efficacy were contingent upon the amount of trust they had in their organization. Thus, trust in the organization relies heavily on the behaviors of employee supervisors. The leadership styles exhibited in the workplace greatly impact teachers' willingness to collaborate and work together in meaningful ways. The relationships established by a leader provide the foundation in which teachers feel safe and are more apt to foster trust in each other. This results in fostering collective trust among teachers and leadership.

Conditions for Success Standard Two: Leadership

The quality of leadership in schools is second only to the quality of teachers in the classroom when it comes to a school's success (Fuller et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2021; K. Leithwood et al., 2008; Mattos & DuFour, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008). For decades, educational researchers have attempted to define what kind of leadership yields the best results in student performance, teacher efficacy, and healthy relationships that establish collective trust.

In the 1970s, instructional leadership was borne from studies in low-income schools (Edmonds, 1979). School leaders were called to be instructional leaders and to take a more active role in strategies used in the classroom. Hallinger (2011) reviewed the literature around school leadership from the 1980's to 2011 as well as several empirical studies from multiple countries.

From the extensive review, he found three focuses of instructional leaders: (1) visions and goals; (2) academic structures and processes; and (3) people (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). These three facets of instructional leadership provide direction to increase the effectiveness of teacher instruction. The leaders know what they are working towards, with whom they are working, and clearly share common goals and vision. Additionally, Rigby (2014) identified three logics of instructional leadership from her research: prevailing logic, entrepreneurial logic, and social justice logic. Prevailing logic states that principals are both instructional leaders and managers. Entrepreneurial logic suggests that school leaders have adopted multiple innovative and flexible leadership models and strategies from the private sector. Finally, social justice logic is instructional leadership for *all* students; finding instructional practices which will support student growth in all subgroups. These three components of instructional leadership should be exemplified in the daily actions of school leaders to increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

Around the same time instructional leadership models were gaining momentum in education, so was the development of transformational leadership. Bass (1985) took the ideas from Burns (1978) and created protocols and performance measurements for transformational leaders (Bass et al., 2008). Bass began with a two-factor leadership comparison: transformational versus transactional leadership. Transformational leadership was found to be more successful (Kwan, 2020). Later, more researchers developed the idea of transformational leadership in education as well as tools for measurement. Transformational leaders operate from the assumption that given the right support, teachers will be motivated and equipped to meet the organization's shared mission (K.A. Leithwood, 1992; K. Leithwood & Sun, 2012). K. A. Leithwood (1992) named three fundamental goals for transformational school leaders: (1)

helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; (2) fostering teacher development; and (3) helping them solve problems together more effectively. As a leader develops school culture, teacher learning, and problem-solving skills, they are more likely to experience greater success in leading transformative shifts that positively impact student learning.

While the debates about instructional leadership and transformational leadership were taking place, the researchers at McREL International were developing the model of balanced leadership from a meta-analysis of leadership qualities that proved most prevalent in situations with the highest rates of success (Marzano et al., 2005). McREL International's balanced leadership model identified 21 responsibilities from the meta-analysis of leadership studies. The 21 Leadership Responsibilities (Goodwin et al., 2015; Jacob et al., 2015; Waters & Cameron, 2007) depicted in Figure 3 operationalize the expectations of the actions and behaviors most closely associated with leading today's schools.

Figure 3

The 21 Leadership Responsibilities

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| • Affirmation | • Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment |
| • Change Agent | |
| • Communication | • Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment |
| • Contingent Rewards | |
| • Culture | • Monitor and Evaluate |
| • Discipline | • Optimize |
| • Flexibility | • Order |
| • Focus | • Outreach |
| • Ideals and Beliefs | • Relationships |
| • Input | • Resources |
| • Intellectual Stimulation | • Situational Awareness |
| | • Visibility |

While the leadership responsibilities are meant to be used in tandem with one another, it can be challenging to do. A study conducted by Cetin and Kinik (2016) identified eight responsibilities that should be emphasized to create the most purposeful community for student success. A purposeful community provides a safe and encouraging environment that allows people to share openly, challenge assumptions, and move towards shared purpose and productive outcomes. The key factors in creating a purposeful community coded from the teacher perceptions in the study included: (1) culture; (2) ideals and beliefs; (3) communication; (4) visibility; (5) relationships; (6) situational awareness; (7) input; and (8) affirmation (Cetin & Kinik, 2016). According to Cetin and Kinik (2016), the elements of communication, relationships, and input correlate to aspects of shared leadership. Shared leadership is not a new idea or specific to education. In the education arena, shared leadership is more complex than just democratic decision making (Hallinger, 2011; L. Lambert et al., 2016). Le Tellier (2007) describes shared leadership as a concept “which sees leadership as a group activity working

through and within relationships throughout the entire organization” (p. 8). It is a belief that there are multiple instructional leaders in varying roles within the school setting (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; L. Lambert, 2002; L. Lambert et al., 2016; Marzano et al., 2005).

The 21 Leadership Responsibilities also intersect with qualities of adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership as a leadership style picked up steam in the 1990s. Authors such as Parks, Williams, Foster, Kaplan, Laurie, and others wrote about how this framework could be applied to different contexts (Heifetz et al., 2009). Heifetz (2009) describes adaptive leadership as “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p. 14). Adaptive leadership is all about leading through change. An adaptive leader uses the 21 Responsibilities from McREL International to enact change. Tenets of leading change include change agent, communication, flexibility, situational awareness, and contingent rewards. These strategies provide an understanding of leading change important to mobilizing the efforts of teachers to connect their experiences with defined goals in achieving higher levels of success during times of change.

Leadership skills can be developed and honed to impact the overall conditions for success (Hallinger, 2011; L. Lambert et al., 2016; Le Tellier, 2007). The quality of the school leader and his or her leadership style and framework matter. In their meta-analysis on the impact of leadership, Robinson et al. (2008) summarized that an integrated approach to leadership is crucial for developing effective shared leadership. Similarly, DuFour and Marzano (2015) pointed out “a leader’s own leadership is essential for developing the leadership of others” (p. 138). Leadership is critical in developing conditions for professional learning and building capacity. Leadership is as complex as the system it serves. No single leadership framework will provide a complete answer to the needs of the system; therefore, leaders must be trained and

savvy enough to apply what is needed in specific contexts. The skillfulness of the leader and individual performance traits can influence the PLD and growth of teachers and establishment of purposeful community during change.

Conditions for Success Standard Three: Equity Foundations – The Stakeholders

By making professional learning equitable and accessible to all staff members, equity becomes a central focal point that permeates and benefits the whole system. A study in Finland (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012) highlighted the country's progress in providing equitable access to high-quality education, resulting in a perceptual change in how teachers were viewed by the general population. Teachers are viewed as one of the most sought-after professions and encouraged at any career stage to continue their own education in pedagogical practices or content. A large population of Finnish teachers earn advanced degrees and stay in the classroom to apply their learning (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). By creating a system where professional learning is equitable and accessible to all teachers, it produces a highly qualified educational system which in turn, provides access and equity for all students. Thus, the professional learning standard on equity foundations challenges professional learning providers to look at the accessibility of high-quality and meaningful professional development for all populations of educators. Professional learning providers must consider the career stage and needs for whom the professional learning is designed. At different stages in their careers, teachers have varying needs. A professional learning plan should include accessible points for multiple career stages. When planning, leaders should have a conceptual understanding of these career stages and the needs present at each level.

Huberman and Guskey's (1995) research revealed that during the middle career phases, seven to eighteen years, teachers are likely to find themselves either on the road to continual

growth or stuck on a professional plateau. The plateau is not inevitable for mid-career teachers. The school's climate, professional learning opportunities, and leadership support can steer mid-career teachers down the road of continual growth (Kraft & Papay, 2014; Ladd & Sorensen, 2017). Due to the nature of the precarious middle career stage, this study and research inquiry focused on the needs of the mid-career teachers.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Mid-Career Teachers

This study focuses on the mid-career teacher. Mid-career teachers possess the most potential to demonstrate increased effectiveness in classroom teaching based on their desire to grow and learn (DeMoulin & Gutyon, 1987; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Ubben et al., 2016). DeMoulin and Guyton (1987) identify four levels of teacher maturity: provisional, developmental, transitional, and decelerating. The mid-career teacher is at the developmental stage and is characterized by self-confidence, direction, and structure. Teachers in this stage are interested in exploration and growth. It is this group of teachers from which we expect the highest potential.

Similarly, Huberman (1989) defined five stages of teacher development: survival and discover stage (one to three years); stabilization stage (four to six years); experimentation and activism stage (seven to eighteen years); serenity/relational distance and conservatism stage (nineteen to thirty years); and the disengagement stage (thirty-one to forty years). Huberman attaches years to the stages; however, not all teachers progress at the same rate or in the same sequence. For mid-career teachers in stagnant or unsupportive environments, they are likely to find themselves stuck in a previous stage or in the disengagement stage (Day, 2017). Mid-career teachers in the experimentation and activism stage typically experience high levels of growth.

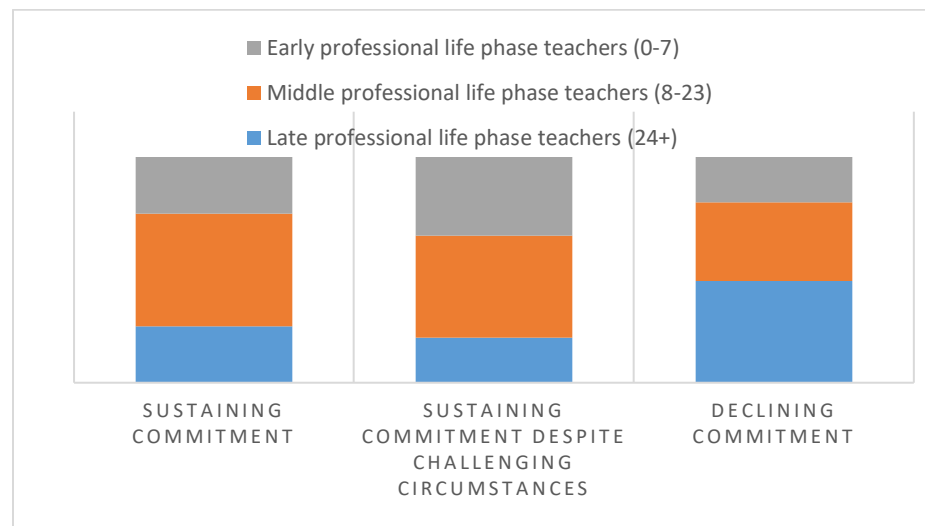
DeMoulin and Guyton's (1987) developmental stage and Huberman's (1989) experimentation and activism stage share many commonalities of teacher need: voice and opportunity in decision-making, collaboration, and action research. Together these stages of teacher development define important considerations for school leaders as they design and lead PLD. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) stated that mid-career teachers have the highest potential for professional growth and yet are the most overlooked group; "like the middle child in the family, they often feel left out" (p. 70). Typically, most of the mentoring and coaching is focused on earlier career stages, and leadership roles are given to later-stage-teachers. However, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) continue to describe mid-career teachers as a valuable focus of professional development as they exhibit the characteristics of being "confident but not complacent, open but not innocent, [and] questioning without being cranky" (p. 71).

Huberman and Guskey's (1995) research also cautions that "trajectories in the middle phases of the career cycle are more diverse than earlier or later ones" (pp. 197-198). Therefore, the school's culture plays an even more substantial role in promoting growth and experimentation rather than resulting in professional plateau for teachers at the mid-career stage. It is possible to witness teachers in less ideal cultures experience a mid-life teaching crisis where they feel disenchanting and frustrated. Without a supportive culture and impactful professional development, disengagement may occur (Day, 2017). Research shows this disengagement and plateau is not inevitable and can be avoided. In fact, schools rated in the 75 percentile for their professional environments demonstrate that teachers are significantly more likely to continue to improve their effectiveness in substantial ways from schools rated in the twenty-fifth percentile for their professional environment (Kraft & Papay, 2014).

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) rely heavily on Day’s (2012) study, *New Lives of Teachers*, in which the qualitative stories from a four-year study of 300 primary and secondary teachers in 100 schools in different career stages were coded and shared. The study on career development in the United Kingdom, known as the VITAE project, concluded that teachers’ capacities, commitment, and passion matter. As noted in the graph below, teacher commitment was highest from the mid-career teacher sample. In Figure 4, it is important to highlight those teachers described as being in the middle phase, eight to twenty-three years, exhibited the highest sustained commitment even during challenging circumstances (Day, 2012).

Figure 4

Teachers’ Commitment by Professional Life Phase



Note: Mid-career teachers demonstrate more sustaining commitment than early professional life phase teachers or late professional life phase teachers. Adapted from “The New Lives of Teachers,” C. Day, 2012, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 39(1), p.13. Copyright 2012 by C. Day.

In this research on career development from the United Kingdom’s national research project (VITAE), teachers in their eighth to fifteenth year of experience struggled with work-life

tensions (Day, 2017). In addition, a study by Kirkpatrick and Johnson (2014) suggests there is insufficient support in schools for mid-career teachers facing the challenges of their career stage in tandem with challenges outside of school. Educational leadership and professional learning developers must consider the trials teachers are facing at each career stage and what support teachers need to stay committed. A survey done at the close of the 2020-2021 school year by the RAND Corporation found that one out of every four teachers was considering leaving the profession at the conclusion of the school year (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Stress ensued from the Covid-19 Pandemic likely exasperated an existing struggle with juggling personal life demands with a demanding career (Kush et al., 2022). Therefore, this study looks at how mid-career teachers' commitment weathered the Covid-19 Pandemic and the challenging circumstances during the 2020-2021 school year. It also focuses on how professional development opportunities in a supportive school culture tap into the potential of mid-career teachers, eight to fifteen years, to create highly effective and collaborative teams focused on student learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013).

Learning Forward Category Two: Transformational Processes

The Transformational Process category in the Learning Forward 2022 framework is built on the assumption that educators will change their beliefs and/or their practices through impactful professional learning designs and implementation. Clearly defined structures and implementation plans for PLD provide a platform to show evidence of professional growth. Day (2017) claims that although supportive leadership, colleagues, and school culture do benefit teachers who balance personal life and a demanding career, it is not enough. Teachers must have regular participation in high-quality formal and informal PLD. These PLD structures must be designed to be timely, relevant, and beneficial to teacher learning (Evans, 2008). The following

section highlights the literature around transformational processes in professional learning: learning designs, feedback, and evidence of implementation.

Transformational Processes Standard One: Learning Designs

Learning Forward (2022) developed the standards for professional learning with successful student outcomes as the main goal. For students to learn and achieve through quality instructional activities, educators must first learn and experience quality professional learning activities. Much like classroom instruction is planned around student needs and the understanding of how they learn, teacher instruction must also be developed around their needs with an understanding of how adults learn. Therefore, the standards address learning designs for PLD.

Learning Forward (2022) considers setting relevant and contextualized learning goals, grounding work in research and learning theories, and implementing evidence-learning designs in PLD as well as the classroom components of the learning designs standard. Learning designs can happen at the individual teacher level in the form of personal learning plans, the team or building level when using problem analysis and inquiry practices, or from a strategic plan for PLD at a district level. Learning Forward (2022) suggests that learning designs include time for collaboration, feedback, coaching, and reflection. The learning design for PLD is the conduit of the whole system.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Evidence-based Professional Learning Designs

Not all PLD opportunities contribute to the individual professional capital building of teachers. Herrmann and Grossman (2021) identified five laments to traditional professional development. First, traditional professional development (PD) lacks an ambitious vision of teaching and learning. It can feel like a quick time filler for a calendar day. Second, it often fails

to cultivate teacher ownership. The decisions about PD are many times made without teacher input. Additionally, traditional PD is known to be short, sporadic, and disconnected from the classroom. Once the session is over, the learning is over. Participants are given information but often lack any plan for implementation. Therefore, implementation rarely happens. Fourth, PD is usually designed as a one-size-fits-all approach. This approach does not consider the stakeholders and does not encourage equity or accessibility. Finally, traditional PD does not provide opportunities for collaborative work. The research encompassed in the revised professional development standards (Learning Forward, 2022) provides the opportunity to improve the conditions under which professional development is offered and impacts teacher and student learning.

One significant professional learning design is for teachers to learn from one another. Opportunities to develop social capital is significant for teacher learning and collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Leana, 2011). There is ample research that supports learning team structures that strategically build social capital, although *how* to design learning teams is not yet understood by all educators. In fact, not all collaboration is helpful in building social capital or conducive to professional learning. Some educators participate in faux collaboration. Oftentimes, there are not structures or norms for professional disagreement, solving hard problems, or challenging the status quo. Teachers often prefer to avoid conflict and just co-exist, a sort of contrived collegiality. Therefore, it is necessary for professional learning to move beyond simply pretending to work in collaboration as colleagues (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Owen, 2014). In the last few decades, research on professional learning communities (PLC's) has produced protocols and processes to offer guidance on forming effective and meaningful learning teams. DuFour and Fullan (2013), long-time advocates for

PLC's, understood the need to continue the work to build on the initial success initiated in the study of PLC's . Even with overwhelming research and resources focused on the implementation of professional learning communities and collaboration, teachers are often found working in isolation. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, teachers were required to work from home and in isolation for long periods of time. Regardless which designs or protocols are used to collaborate, schools must engage teachers in working with one another in meaningful ways. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) clarified

strong and positive collaboration is not about whether everyone has a word wall, or a set of posted standards, or not. It's about whether teachers are committed to, inquisitive about, and increasingly knowledgeable and well informed about becoming better practitioners together, using and deeply understanding all the technologies and strategies that can help them with this. (p. 127)

Herrmann and Grossman (2021) suggested additional ways to offer opportunities for teachers to work together through common planning times or participating in peer observations. Cohort learning experiences also enhance a school's social capital around specific goals and a clear vision. In addition, teachers must be involved in the processes that include setting goals and working towards them together. Knight (2021) explained "when professional development begins with teachers identifying a goal *they* really want to meet, the professional developer's role shifts from directing to supporting and helping teachers achieve what matters deeply to them" (p. 5). As leaders strive to craft and implement effective learning designs, the shift from stand and deliver PD to coach and provide feedback is imperative. When cohort learning is at its finest, everyone becomes an equity driver.

Transformational Processes Standard Two: Equity Drivers

Learning Forward (2022) describes equity drivers as “professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators prioritize equity in professional learning practices, identify and address their own biases and beliefs, and collaborate with diverse colleagues” (p. 13). This description of equity drivers is very similar to the definition of collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is shared belief in the attainability of goals (Goddard et al., 2004). When collective teacher efficacy is present, teachers are confronting previously held biases and beliefs in collaboration to help students succeed. In her analysis of the research of schools in diverse settings and student achievement, Donohoo et al. (2020) identified that teachers’ perceived themselves as having an impact over systemic biases. The mindset of teachers matters when confronting their own biases and overcoming disadvantages students face. Therefore, collective teacher efficacy contributes to and serves as an equity driver.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Collective Teacher Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy is built on the social learning theory and self-efficacy concepts pioneered by Bandura (1977). Bandura’s original works around self-efficacy made it a focal point for behavioral change. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy, also known as agency, helps describe how someone might approach a challenge while under stress (Bandura, 1977). Later, Bandura and others combined individual agency with collective beliefs and set out to determine collective teacher efficacy’s effectiveness in regard to student achievement (Hoogsteen, 2020). Bandura (1997) defines collective efficacy as a shared belief in a group’s capabilities to design and carry out an agreed upon purpose and the related actions that lead to positive results.

The popularity around teacher collective efficacy grew to exponential levels when Hattie's (2018) metaanalyses defined impactful strategies in education. Hattie's (2018) research on collective teacher efficacy suggests that its presence can accelerate growth three times as much as is typical for an academic year with an effect size of 1.57. Since Hattie's meta-analysis, several studies have shown a correlation of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement; however, it is important to note there are nuances in each study. In some cases, comparative data was not available and in other cases, the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and achievement is oversimplified (Hoogsteen, 2020; Wrigley, 2018). Still, several studies were able to provide a correlation between collective teacher efficacy and desired outcomes. Eell's (2011) meta-analysis highlighted how collective teacher efficacy and achievement aligned for successful outcomes. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) found a significant relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement in math, writing, and English. Sørli and Torsheim (2011) demonstrated an inverse relationship between collective teacher efficacy and problematic student behaviors. When the standards align to create the conditions for success and transformational processes, collective teacher efficacy can have a positive impact on a school's attainment of goals.

Collective teacher efficacy is the shared belief of the attainability in an organization's goals (Donohoo et al., 2018; Goddard et al., 2004). A system's collective teacher efficacy is a deciding factor as to how groups of teachers will handle difficult situations (Donohoo, 2017). Collective teacher efficacy is not simply wishing you and your colleagues will achieve an agreed upon goal, it is a multifaceted sequence of beliefs which ultimately influence behaviors and yield results. In this process, teachers are seeking solutions to problems before they happen, learning

from mistakes, acting as critical friends, and challenging each other to work towards positive solutions (Preston & Donohoo, 2021).

Donohoo and Katz (2017) noted “effective professional learning taps into the sources of collective efficacy: master experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states” (p. 23). These four factors of collective teacher efficacy are intentionally included in school contexts where a positive impact is realized. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) further described social persuasion as positive peer pressure. In PLD, educators should feel pressure from those around them to join the efforts. Social persuasion and positive peer pressure can also be an equity driver. These are strong strategies for challenging biases and overcoming challenges. Goddard (2001) tested the hypothesis of mastery experiences as an indicator and a source for collective efficacy. He concluded that it is one of the most powerful sources of collective efficacy. Simply put, when teachers experience success because of their efforts, they have more efficacy. It is important to note that success must be from factors that are controllable rather than from luck or factors outside one’s immediate control (Goddard et al., 2004).

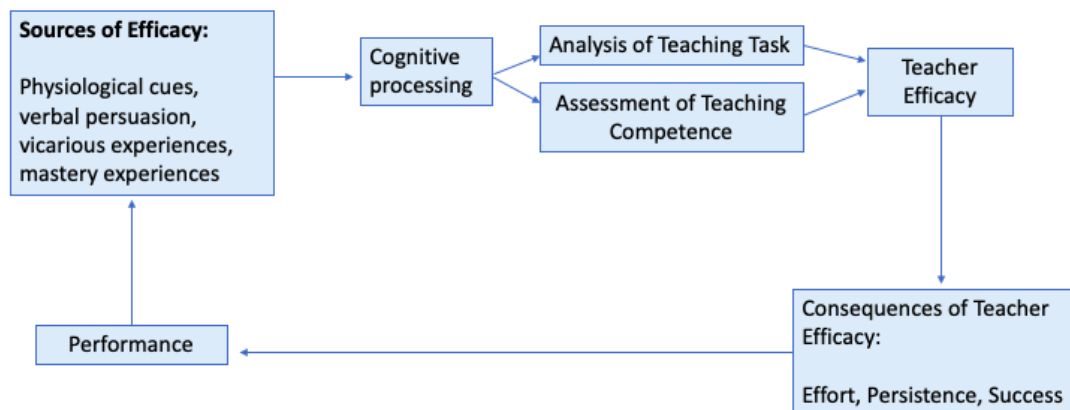
Vicarious experiences are those modeled by someone else. It is the notion that when teachers observe other quality teachers who they perceive to be similar to them, they are able to replicate these observed practices into their own classrooms (Donohoo, 2017; Goddard et al., 2004).

Finally, the idea of affective states stems from Bandura’s (1997) work on self-efficacy. When presented with a challenge, individuals feel anxiety or excitement based on their perceptions of their own capability or incompetence. Therefore, it is essential to not only increase educator competence but also purposefully create mechanisms to boost teacher confidence. Figure 5 presents a model of how efficacy is cultivated, nurtured, and used for performance in schools in a cyclical pattern. When quality PLD incorporates the sources of efficacy, as seen in this example,

it leads to cognitive processing for the educator. This cognitive processing is demonstrated by the educator, or team of educators, spending time analyzing their practice(s) and assessing their competence. Feedback happens within this process. As teacher efficacy is developed, one can expect to experience increased commitment to shared goals (Goddard et al., 2004).

Figure 5

A Model of Teachers' Perceived Efficacy



Note: The process by which efficacy is nurtured in a school setting. Adapted from “Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning, Its Measure,” by M. Tschannen et al., 1998, *Review of Educational Research*, 68(2), p. 228. Copyright 1998 by American Educational Research Association.

Hite and Donohoo (2021) describe how supportive leadership can develop collective efficacy in an organization through creating goal consensus, empowering teachers, establishing cohesive teacher knowledge, and embedding reflective practices. Setting clear goals motivates groups to make progress (Locke & Latham, 2019). When teachers have ownership in their learning and can learn from one another, they feel empowered. There needs to be consistent knowledge of effective instructional strategies, and teachers must feel competent about what is best praxis. Establishing a clear system for how students learn and what teachers can do to best support learning is necessary for both teacher and student growth (Given & DePorter, 2015). As

demonstrated in Figure 5 above, collective efficacy is a cycle. Therefore, when supportive leaders provide opportunity for reflection, educators can identify what factors best impact student growth (Adams & Forsyth, 2006).

Donohoo and Katz (2017) emphasize the power in intentionally designing PLD to influence what educators believe is possible. Thus, this study looked at teacher perceptions of the impact PLD had on the sources and outcomes of collective efficacy. It also considered how the actions and support by leadership impacted the establishment of collective efficacy.

Transformational Processes Standard Three: Evidence

The goal of PLD is application through practice of designated skills and outcomes. Lambert et al. (2016) suggest “an infrastructure for capturing and creating knowledge is essential so knowledge can be shared and accumulated in meaningful patterns, thereby allowing teachers to immediately practice what they are coming to understand” (p. 89). As teachers gain new knowledge, they apply it to their classroom practices.

Educators are more likely to see evidence when learning communities choose to acknowledge teachers’ efforts as part of student success. Foster (2019) reviewed previous studies around teacher perceptions and student success. Foster shares that most teachers do not contribute student success to the implementation of strategies learned during PLD. Rather, teachers give credit to the efforts of students. Even though student effort may be a contributing factor, teachers need to see a correlation between what they are implementing in the classroom and what their students can achieve. Schools can align evidence of classroom instruction to evidence of student achievement to better establish and communicate this correlation and help teachers and leaders continue to invest in quality PLD.

Transformational Processes Standard Four: Implementation

The goal of any professional PLD are changes in practice and student growth. Implementation is a long and often individualized process (J. Lambert & Mitrani, 2012). The 2012 Learning Forward professional learning standard for implementation states that constructive feedback and time for reflection are necessary supports for implementation to occur. Similarly for the 2022 Learning Forward Standards, feedback must be part of the transformational process for implementation.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Feedback Processes

Hattie's metanalyses have long claimed the impact of effective feedback to be substantial for learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Although Hattie primarily discusses feedback in the learning process for students, feedback is also impactful for andragogy (J. Collins, 2004). A report by The Learning Policy Institute on effective teacher professional development states that 34 of the 35 studies it reviewed included feedback as a necessary component of effective PLD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Feedback provides teachers with real-time assessment of their own teaching and learning, giving opportunity for continual improvement.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) clarifies effective feedback answers three main questions. These questions include a focus on goals, progress towards accomplishing the goal, and activities or supports for ongoing progress. Dewitt (2017) shares a Cycle of Collaborative Teacher Observation which includes constructing a goal, observing student learning and teacher instruction, giving and receiving feedback, finding resources, and repeated observation cycles. In a recent study, Liu and Gumah (2020), share that feedback must be perceived as beneficial and accurate to be accepted by its recipient. For feedback to impact the self-efficacy of the individual receiving it, it cannot only be given in managerial situations. There must be trust and a

shared belief that failure leads to success. When teachers receive feedback during ongoing PLD, it impacts teachers' perceptions of their confidence and competence.

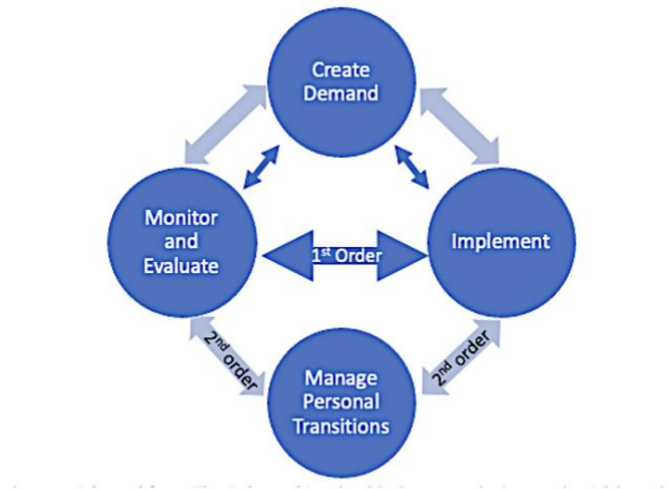
The Learning Forward (2022) standards include change management with implementation because without an understanding of change theory, implementation of new learning would be challenging or nonexistent. In this standard, PLD uses change theory to initiate and sustain professional learning strategies, capitalize on energy created by collective teacher efficacy, and continual teacher growth that results from ongoing feedback.

Research Inquiry for this Study: Change Theory

Effective change is not just happenstance. Goodwin et al. (2015) insist that “effective change leadership requires a deep understanding of the change process” (p. 48). Waters and Cameron (2007) developed the phases of change which model an interdependent, recursive, and complex process. To achieve implementation of professional learning, leaders must walk educators through the phases of change during PLD. When leaders are familiar with the phases, they can plan accordingly and anticipate the needs of their staff.

Figure 6

The Change Cycle: 1st and 2nd Order Change



Note: Change management processes for second-order change are highly personal. Adapted from *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting Vision with Action* (p. 33) by T. Waters and G. Cameron, 2007. Copyright 2007 by McREL International.

In this model, change cycles through the following stages: create demand, implement, monitor and evaluate, and manage personal transitions which includes varied responses to change. Creating a demand is establishing the need for change to happen and understanding why change is needed. The implementation stage is when PLD is provided to address the needed change. While in the process of change, it is important to monitor and evaluate the selected implementation initiative. Throughout the cycle, individuals are responding to the change in one of two ways as personal transitions occur. One of the responses to change can be described as first order change. First order change is the perception that change is “an extension of the past, within the existing paradigm, consistent with prevailing values and norms, and implemented with existing knowledge and skills” (Goodwin et al., 2015, p. 40). It does not feel threatening or

difficult for the participant. Second order change is when an individual's beliefs or values are challenged. It is far more complex. Marzano et al. (2005) describes the differences as

The phenomenon of first- versus second-order change is an internal event. It is defined by the way people react to a proposed innovation. Whether a change is perceived as first-order or second-order depends on the knowledge, experience, values, and flexibility of the individual or the group perceiving the change.... Depending on how they perceive the change initiative, some staff members may experience the initiative as first-order change and others will experience it as second-order change. (pp. 112-113)

Oftentimes, second order change creates increased anxiety and stress because it feels like a break from the norm, the past, or previously held values (Goodwin et al., 2015).

When considering PLD and implementation of new initiatives, leaders must consider what stakeholders are perceiving and experiencing during change initiatives and how the change is impacting staff; as a first or second-order change. During second-order change, individuals experience a transition between resistance and exploration and these transitions are highly personal. Stakeholders are typically more uncomfortable during second-order change, and thus, a leader must be flexible in their approach. Goodwin et al. (2015) caution “poorly managed personal transitions are likely to exacerbate the feeling of loss that people may experience when engaged in what they view as second-order change” (p. 64). When this happens, implementation of the change initiative is threatened.

During times of extreme stress, it is imperative that leadership know, understand, and anticipate how teachers will react to first- and second-order change as individuals. Leaders must create feasible opportunities for teachers to participate in engaging PLD. Leaders must also have tools to support change and understand the impact the school culture has on the ability of

individual teachers to react and respond during times of imposed change for PLD to be well received. Fullan (2001) explains that this is when it's essential for leaders to understand change processes and capitalize on moral purpose. Moral purpose is a component of collective teacher efficacy in which teachers believe that they can overcome challenges created by change. When change occurs in a culture where collective teacher efficacy is high, teachers have more optimism towards achieving challenging goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

In his work, *The Six Secrets of Change*, Fullan (2008) described six underlying concepts to help businesses and schools manage large scale change. These concepts overlap with McREL International's 21 Leadership Responsibilities and transformational leadership qualities. Relationships and affirmation are part of McREL International's 21 Leadership Responsibilities and clearly align to the essence of Fullan's (2008) concept to love your employees. To do good work, employees need to experience fair treatment, recognition for achievement, and camaraderie. This is especially true during times where extreme stress is present.

For organizations to weather change, adults must clearly relate to the organization's purpose (Fullan, 2008). Alper et al. (2012) explains that human connection is based on brain-research in that we need to connect with others to make meaning of new learning. Interpersonal connections are also necessary for building relationships and for trust to develop during change. Investing in an organization's social capital, it's people, is an investment in professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). According to Guskey et al. (1995), "the most successful professional development programs are those that provide regular opportunities for participants to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems in an atmosphere of collegiality and professional respect" (p. 121). Connecting peers with purpose yields successful change. Peers need to have a sense of trust with one another while undergoing challenging change.

A school culture rooted in trust and efficacious behaviors, enables teachers to see failure as new learning and furthermore, feel a sense of psychological safety to try new things (Preston & Donohoo, 2021). This is especially important during change. In a school where teacher collective efficacy is at its best, the individual strengths of teachers combine with a strong sense of community that demonstrates strong moral purpose, shared commitment, alignment of resources, and prevailing optimism. Fullan (2008) described this ‘capacity building’ as the need to invest in people – to view failure as an opportunity for success. In his book, *Drive*, Pink (2011) shared that “control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement...Only engagement can produce mastery” (pp. 108-109). If leaders want innovation, then they need to create a culture where failure is expected and encouraged, and engagement is fostered. Dweck (2008) reminds us that capacity can be built by plunging into the unknown and yet-to-be developed skills. Leaders should be willing to make mistakes and be full of grace and support when others make mistakes. “Everything changes in environments that celebrate creativity, welcome innovation, and accept setbacks as part of progress” (Dintersmith, 2018, p. 192). Fullan (2008) goes on to share that for systems to create successful change, they need to embrace learning as the work. Lifelong learning needs to be an orchestrated effort and a common goal by individuals in the organization. Lambert et al. (2016) noted, “Ensuring high participation in a skilled organization means that professional learning is integrated and occurs in community” (p. 52).

A final component critical to leading change is ensuring transparency in communication. In her book, *Dare to Lead*, Brown (2018) preaches “clear is kind;” to reinforce this important point (p. 44). Fullan (2007) cautioned change agents about the prevalence of false clarity and the importance of making clarity an ongoing goal as ideas are developed and investigated. When

systems are undergoing change, great ideas aren't enough. "Great ideas must also be communicated effectively and persuasively for them to take hold" (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 229). During complex change, transparency and clarity about progress and results should be both expected and desirable. Navigating the multifaceted terrain of change requires leaders to be focused on their communication strategies. Collins and Porras (2013) expound that managers of visionary companies have to "be ready for the long, hard pull. Success is never final" (p. 199). There is no easy button or shortcut in communication or in leading change in today's complex systems. Leaders must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to promote an attitude of continual learning and explore new ways of doing things, to be versatile in communication strategies, and to develop a supportive culture that allows people to maneuver through change with positivity. Their keen attention to fostering relationships built on trust, alignment to organizational purpose, and understanding of the change process itself, can make or break the ability of staff to embrace needed change.

The Learning Forward (2022) Standards for Professional Learning remind us that all educators have a responsibility to continue to improve their craft. This responsibility necessitates a strong understanding of what high-quality PLD includes and looks like in organizations. The next section will highlight the professional learning systems provided by the Quantum Learning Network.

Quantum Learning Network

Quantum Learning found its beginning from the success of the Burklyn Business School, a residential accelerated business education program in the 1970s and 1980s. This program was rooted in the principles and concepts from R. Buckminster Fuller and Dr. Gerogi Lozanov, as well as other current brain-based practices and research. In 1982, Bobbi DePorter, Eric Jensen,

and Greg Simmons created a similar program for teens called SuperCamp. SuperCamp is a program focused on student-learning and life skills and is held on college campuses. SuperCamp later evolved into the Quantum Learning Network (QLN) and has provided professional development through the *Quantum Learning Excellence in Teaching* program since 1991. QLN has expanded into an international company, reaching teachers and students across the globe (Given & DePorter, 2015).

While reviewing the progress of its programs and making program updates in 2015, the QLN closely reviewed the level of implementation of its *Quantum Learning Excellence in Teaching* program from data yielded over multiple years. As a result, the QLN determined it would strengthen the implementation process in its program and incorporate additional and more current research on professional learning. This resulted in the creation of the Quantum Learning Distinguished School (QLDS) process.

The first school to earn the QLDS status was Taylor's International School in Malaysia, Singapore. To be considered for a QLDS, 80% or more staff must become level three distinguished educators through a process of collecting individualized artifacts and participate in ongoing professional learning such as reflection and coaching practices outlined in the QLN system. The QLN system organizes brain-based practices and strategies into four balanced components: (1) foundation, (2) atmosphere, (3) environment, and (4) design and delivery (Given & DePorter, 2015). A QLDS works together to set goals, identify success, and reflect monthly while implementing the QLN professional learning system. This extensive process must be completed in combination with observations and feedback. This process is projected to take two academic years to complete.

The participants of this study are part of the first school in the United States to become a QLDS. The structure of the QLDS aligns with the 2022 Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning. The practice of learning in a cohort and setting goals is outlined in the standard which supports a culture of collaborative inquiry. The leadership and feedback strategies fall within the conditions for success. QLDS's process also includes rigorous learning designs which are evidence-based. It is important to note that the time during which the school was participating in the QLDS process occurred during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Although the school in this study utilized the professional learning structure provided by QLN, this study's focus is on the new professional learning standards (Learning Forward, 2022) and the development of professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers. This context will be described briefly in the following section.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

In January of 2020, the world began to hear about a new virus causing major disruptions in Wuhan, China. Two months later, the world began to shut down. The first cases of the Covid-19 virus had also been detected in the United States and health and government officials began to take drastic precautions. In response to these warnings, countries closed their borders, businesses sent employees home, schools locked their doors, [and] sports teams canceled seasons (Katella, 2021).

During the first week of March 2020, teachers and students at a Midwestern elementary school went on spring break. They would not return in person until the following August, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. After a temporary closure, on March 18, 2020, Governor Laura Kelly of Kansas was the first governor to close public schools for the remainder of the school term (Dwyer, 2020). Many states mirrored this decision for the remainder of the

2019-2020 school year and some schools faced ongoing closures in the 2020-2021 school year. Health and safety protocols changed how teachers did their jobs during the 2020-2021 school year to minimize the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The virtual teacher's lounge, WeAreTeachers, blogger Julie Mason (2020) shared some of the teacher vulnerability she witnessed on social media; describing that teaching during the pandemic was the hardest thing teachers had ever done and often resulted in feelings of failure and high stress.

During the 2020-2021 school year, teachers had to reimagine how they did their jobs and were at the mercy of local health agencies, governments, and school boards to determine what school would look like and how students would receive instruction. At times, teachers had to turn on a dime and shift their instructional practices quickly to meet the requirements of public health policies. Teachers taught in ever-changing learning scenarios during the 2020-2021 school year, moving from in-person, to remote, to versions of instruction that included both in-person and remote learning. Local school boards tried to calm anxiety and stress by trying to give teachers notice before an instructional modality change was enforced, but sometimes, these recommendations came without notice. Stress was inevitable and extraordinary.

Teachers everywhere experienced more stress than ever before. In an EdWeek Research Center Survey conducted in July 2021, "41 percent of teachers said they felt like they're less effective at their job when they're stressed, [and] research shows that when teachers are stressed out, the quality of their instruction, classroom management, and relationships with students all suffer" (Will, 2021, p. 3).

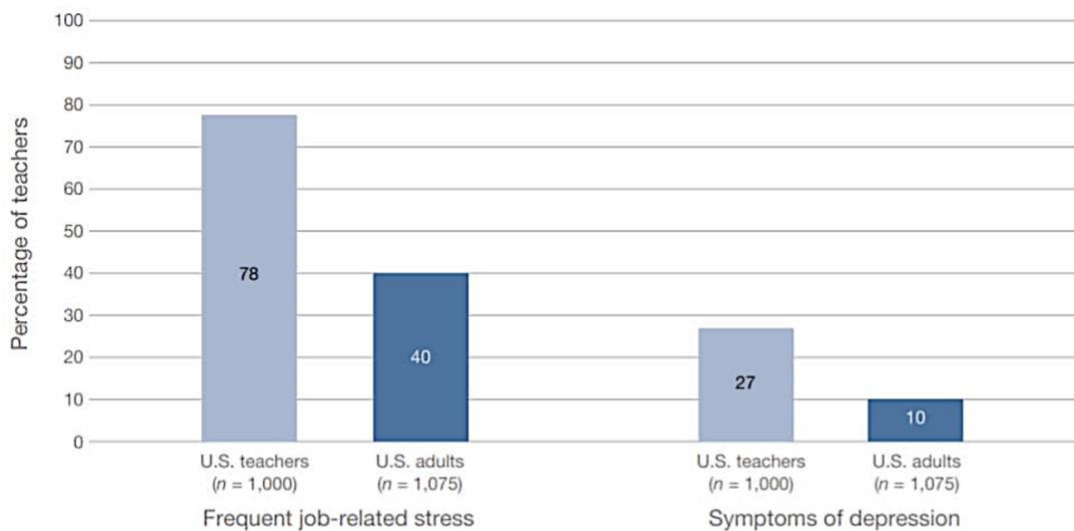
The mental health of adults worsened, exacerbated by prolonged stress and difficulty in being able to problem-solve without opportunity to work face-to-face (Yarrington et al., 2021). The American Psychological Association conducted the *Stress in America* poll in late February

2021. This poll showed that 31% of adults reported their mental health had declined since the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This prolonged stress created a secondary crisis for many adults.

Figure 7 shows a job-related stress and depression chart of United States adults during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The RAND research group (2021) compared U.S. teachers to the general population. The percentage of teachers who were stressed was astounding. In this state of mind, teachers did not feel competent or confident and merely focused on surviving.

Figure 7

Job Related Stress and Symptoms of Depression Among Teachers and Among the General U.S. Adult Population



Note: Teachers felt more job-related stress during the pandemic than the average adult. From *Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey* (p. 7), E. D. Steiner and A. Woo, 2021, RAND Corporation. Copyright 2021 by RAND Corporation.

Teachers experienced significantly higher stress and depression than other professions during the first year of the pandemic, having long-lasting impact on the educational system.

At the open of her *Education Week* series on teachers during the pandemic, Bartlett (2021) stated, “There is convincing evidence that pandemic working conditions have exacerbated teacher dissatisfaction and related turnover. But not for everyone. Some schools and teachers have weathered the pandemic better than others” (p. 4). In a study of schools in Africa, Kwatubana and Molaodi (2021) describe the types of leadership which were most constructive for leading through the Covid-19 Pandemic. These authors identified shared leadership and leading with empathy and compassion as the most important factors exhibited by leaders that allowed teachers to better manage pandemic working conditions. Principal interviews conducted by *Education Week* (Prothero, 2021) identified five ways leaders turned the Covid-19 crisis into opportunities for professional development. First, leaders considered the needs of those they were leading by getting feedback. Next, leaders recognized they could only control so much and therefore, maintained a focus on their main goals. Third, leaders stayed committed to the shared vision and beliefs of their school systems, not on the many distractors. Fourth, professional communities and networks opened online collaboration opportunities to learn and gain ideas from others. Lastly, it was important to prioritize self-care (Prothero, 2021). During the Covid-19 Pandemic, it was imperative that school leaders looked for ways to increase the resiliency of their staff and to find new ways to create a caring culture. Slade and Gallagher (2021) concluded, “education is a human endeavor, and learning is built on relationships. Creating a culture of care in our schools is a necessary endeavor in the best of times and an imperative when times are tough” (p. 5). This study sought to examine leadership practices and behaviors that developed a school culture where individual professional capital, collective efficacy, and PLD contributed to the success of mid-career teachers’ ability to endure the Covid-19 Pandemic with positivity and resiliency.

Conclusion

Fullan (2008) claims “theories that travel well are those that practically and insightfully guide the understanding of complex situations and point to actions likely to be effective under the circumstances” (p. 1). The framework of the new Learning Forward Standards (2022) for Professional Learning presents and discusses important literature relative to this research study and illustrates the elements of effective PLD. The revised standards are arranged in a framework of Rigorous Content for Each Learner, Transformational Processes, and Conditions for Success to establish a system for PLD. The research highlighted in the literature review is focused on the standards under Transformational Processes and Conditions for Success with additional research foci relevant to the study.

Collaborative inquiry with a focus on individual professional capital and collective trust defines necessary conditions for interactions which produce the most professional growth. An overview of the literature around leadership highlights characteristics proven to provide the best conditions for success. The Learning Forward standards challenge leaders and professional learning providers to consider equity as a condition for success. Therefore, this literature features how PLD is made accessible and meaningful. The literature describes how teachers experience career stages and how tailoring professional learning to career stage can gain more individual professional capital. Focusing on the mid-career stage is a novel idea, but this focus can yield more professional capital due to the commitment and schema mid-career teachers exhibit.

Standards in the Transformational Processes category emphasize the actual implementation of new professional learning. The literature review introduces several concepts the research suggests help affect change. Leading and learning is a process done together; therefore, evidence-based learning designs center on cohorts and professional learning

committees and the impact collective teacher efficacy has on shared goals and beliefs. It is important that change theory be understood and applied when creating the demand for and traveling through the cyclical process of change. Implementation also requires ongoing feedback and evidence. While each idea is separated in the literature review, it is important to note the interconnectedness of the parts in producing meaningful change and impactful results. Everything must work in concert to produce the greatest possible outcomes.

The literature presented lays an important foundation for PLD that – when effectively structured and supported – builds teachers’ individual professional capital and collective efficacy. This study painted a unique picture of the tremendous impact that collective efficacy had in one Mid-western elementary school and how these ideas traveled during teaching during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The focus of this study was on the mid-career teachers and their experiences before, during, and after the pandemic to uncover how professional learning aided and supported their ability to be productive, thrive, and lean on their professional capital during crisis.

This study will also serve as a lighthouse illuminating the leadership moves which stand out to teachers as most helpful during times of stress as well as times of vast growth. The stories from this elementary school undergoing transformational professional development emphasize how professional development praxis is exercised and the resulting impact on student learning. Chapter 3 will present the methodology used for the study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative lens into PLD during a time of immense change and stress. It examined what teachers and leaders perceive as most valuable when creating ongoing professional learning experiences to cultivate individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy. Specifically, this study explored the mid-career teacher's perception of developing high levels of individual professional capital if given the right experiences.

In the field of education, quantitative research has taken center stage when assessing effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and teachers; hard data is desired to see results. While quantitative research plays an important role in defining the effect size of educational concepts like collective teacher efficacy (Hattie, 2009), it is not the only lens through which one can see the impact of lived experiences. It is important to understand that natural and social realities are different kinds of realities and need different research methods (Crotty, 1998). Social realities are reliant on how an event is interpreted by individuals and/or groups of individuals. Qualitative research provides a different investigative approach for the social reality and human sciences. It is the social reality of leadership and professional learning with which this study was concerned.

In addition to differing epistemologies, Bhattacharya (2017) describes the difference between quantitative and qualitative research as wide versus deep. Qualitative research conducts in-depth inquiries within a small sample of population to offer the opportunity to study shared themes. Interpretive constructionism suggests that “individuals and groups see and interpret reality through their own lens” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 21). While there are several theories

and practices in professional learning, this study sought to determine what is the perceived reality of professional growth for the mid-career teacher: what do they see as most important to building their professional capital and collective efficacy?

The pandemic was a challenging and unprecedented time. The Covid-19 Pandemic forced several unexpected educational changes in a short amount of time. This study took a fresh look at the impact PLD had on teachers' individual professional capital and collective efficacy during the Covid-19 Pandemic as well as how leadership styles impacted change. The important issue is not necessarily what or how the PLD took place, but rather the teachers' perceptions. The research dug deeply to uncover the essence of participant experiences. This chapter will explain the philosophical underpinnings of this study, the purpose of this study, the research study design, the subjectivities within the study, and how the study adhered to research ethics and praxis.

Philosophical Underpinnings

This study was built upon a social constructivism epistemology. Interpretive constructionism is a way to better understand the social world and how it is perceived by its participants (Bhattacharya, 2017). A person's past experiences, culture, and context weave a fabric of meaning around an object or concept. Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe how constructivists are not only concerned with how individuals view events but how they make meaning as a group and share their understanding with one another. In this study, the climate and culture of the school played such a large role in developing teachers' collective efficacy that this epistemology is necessary in understanding the social construction of meaning around professional learning.

The primary tool of this study was in-depth qualitative interviewing. The researcher looked for rich and detailed information from open-ended questions. There were times that the researcher deviated from the original questions or followed up in a later interview to develop new insights. The researcher used a responsive interviewing style in which questioning is flexible and the style is casual to build trust through conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

While it is not a phenomenology in theory, this study used some of the same methods regarding monitoring one's own perceptions and subjectivity while conducting research. One must embrace the researcher's interpretations as part of transparent analysis. Due to my close involvement with the study and living the shared experience with the participants, my own perceptions are a part of the study. Schwandt (2000) states "reaching an understanding of is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing, or tracking one's own standpoint, prejudgments, biases, or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires the engagement of one's biases" (p. 195). To be completely transparent with my own biases and standpoints, I followed the suggestions Van Manen (2016) suggested to write analytical memos throughout the research process about my own perceptions and thoughts.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study was to explore how four mid-career teachers in a suburban Midwestern elementary school perceive the role of PLD as it relates to their individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy. The study explored the conditions preceding, during, and following the COVID-19 Pandemic. The overarching research question that guides this study was:

How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and development and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

Research Design

This study applied the methodology of a qualitative interview study as it required participants to reflect in depth on an experience (Bhattacharya, 2017). Methods for gathering data included responsive interviews, focus groups, and an analysis of artifacts from the professional learning process. The goal was to keep conversations focused on the depiction of the shared experience and allow abstract concepts to bubble up from the participants' descriptions (deMarrais, 2004). The researcher dove deeper into the individuals' meaning making around given teaching experiences and discover the contributing factors to their professional capital and collective efficacy.

I recruited four participants for interviews and a focus group who met the following criteria: 1) mid-career teachers from a suburban Mid-Western elementary school, and 2) classroom teachers who served as instructional leaders for the QLDS process. The lead learners served as additional facilitators for professional learning; of the six lead learners at this elementary school, four were considered mid-career, therefore, all four served as participants for the study. I also enlisted the participation of the former and current building principals, as well as the Quantum Learning trainer involved in the QLDS process. I served as a researcher-participant as the instructional coach during the time of the QLDS process.

Each participant received a letter describing the study and signed a letter of consent using the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) acknowledging the benefits and risks of the study. There was minimal anticipated physical or

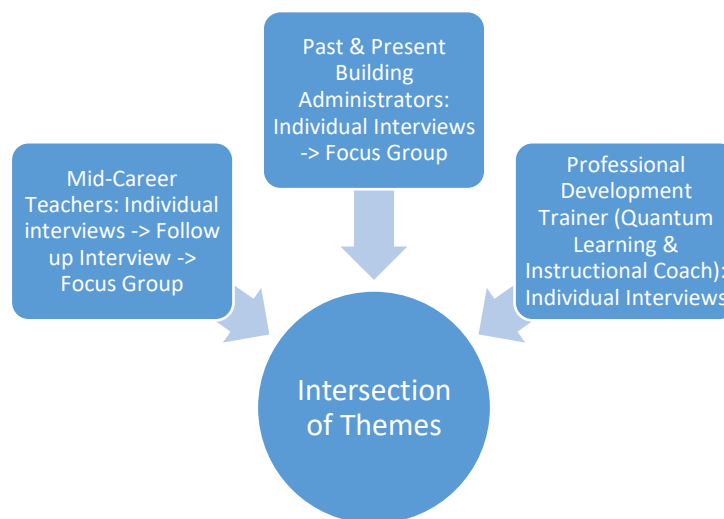
psychological risk for the study participants. While confidentiality was observed and participants were not named, the researcher did not guarantee confidentiality during the focus group. Participants were made aware of all risks during the informed consent process. Individuals were only allowed to participate in the study if they gave prior written consent. Participants were advised they could leave the study at any time.

The teacher participants were each interviewed individually twice and then participated in a shared focus group conversation. The first interview addressed a specific set of interview questions (See Appendix B). Then a follow-up interview with each participant was conducted as an opportunity to ask for clarification or more explanation on what was said in the first interview. Finally, a focus group was held to offer an opportunity for participant reflection on a set of questions focused on individual professional capital, collective efficacy, and collective trust (see Appendix C). The perceptions of the teachers are the focus of the study, and therefore, the researcher elected to take a deeper dive into their experiences as a part of the study's design. The former school principal and the present school principal participated in one individual interview (see Appendix D) as well as a focus group together (see Appendix E). Finally, the Quantum Learning trainer was interviewed with a set of open-ended questions on the QLDS process (see Appendix F). Each participant received the interview protocols and background information on Learning Forward's (2022) Professional Learning Standards and research definitions for professional capital, collective teacher efficacy, collective trust, and meaningful feedback (see Appendix G) prior to each interview or focus group. Appendix G also provides background information on McREL International's 21 Leadership Responsibilities for the principals. Due to my personal involvement in the process as a professional development trainer and instructional coach, I also responded to the same questions provided for the Quantum

Learning representative interview. The perceptions of the leaders (i.e., principals and professional development trainers), are subsidiary but critical to understanding the school culture and intimacy of the professional learning experienced by the mid-career teachers in the study. Therefore, the researcher included only one interview with the principals and trainer. Below is a graphic representation of the interview and focus process for each participant group.

Figure 8

Interview and Focus Group Process



Van Manen (2016) explains “it is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories” (p. 47). Therefore, I kept analytical memos to record my own preconceptions and knowledge throughout the process. I kept these memos before, during, and after interviews as well as during the coding process to increase the transparency of my perceptions. However, the bulk of my perceptions were in response to QLDS trainer questions due to my role as a researcher-participant.

During the focus groups for all participant groups, the researcher listened for the unique interaction of participant responses pertaining to the descriptive questions as they share lived

experiences. The researcher was an observer of collegial interactions among the participants. The interviews and focus groups were conversational in nature and took place at the elementary school or another agreed upon location when it was convenient for the teachers and leaders. It was essential that the interviews and focus groups felt conversational in manner, as it yielded more meaningful participation when the atmosphere was comfortable (Van Manen, 2016).

Specifically, open-ended, semi-structured descriptive questions were prewritten for interviews; however, the researcher probed for more information when necessary (Bhattacharya, 2017). As the researcher, I focused on my own brevity and was conscious of my own subjectivities. Observations were made about the participants' mannerisms, emotional states, and body language. The observations for the mid-career teachers and building administrators were conducted face-to-face. The interview for the professional development trainer from Quantum Learning was also conducted in-person when she was present at the school. All interviews and focus groups observations were recorded in field notes and coded along with the interview transcripts. Interviews and focus group conversations were recorded using an iPad and transcribed in Microsoft Word on a personal computer which was password protected. The researcher adhered to the ethical practices espoused by Dibley et al. (2020) and following each interview and focus group, created an interpretive summary. These practices are described by Dibley et al., (2020):

We must be moral in how we interact with participants; we must listen to the stories, without prejudice or judgement, no matter how difficult. We must be open to what is being said and what is to come, for it is upon these principles that trust is built and that the meanings and understanding that participants give to the situations they find themselves in will emerge. (p. 88)

Participants were allowed to have the space they needed to share openly and without judgement. They were treated with dignity and respect. A crosswalk of the conceptual framework of the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022), the research question and foci, and the interview prompts are provided in Appendix G. This table of connections supported the researcher by connecting the interviewing and coding processes to the research purpose.

Finally, documents from the experience were reviewed either to validate or contradict themes identified from interview coding. During the professional learning experience, cohorts kept logs of their shared goals, plans for implementation, and shared reflections. The building principal and instructional coach also kept walk-thru data from quick observations over the two-year process. This data demonstrated the level of teacher growth utilizing a rubric identifying the implementation level of exposure to training to mastery to leadership. Both sets of documentation were analyzed to support or challenge the claims found during the interviews and focus groups.

Describing the Context

In 2019, a Midwestern elementary school of approximately 500 students and 80 certified and classified staff members made the democratic decision to undergo the professional learning process of becoming a QLDS. QLDS was a newly established professional learning process by the *Quantum Learning Network for Teachers*. The process had only been used by one other school – Taylor’s International School in Malaysia, Singapore. It is important to note that while the process for the QLDS was created by Quantum Learning, it contains conditions and processes explained in the standards for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022) and is applicable to a variety of professional learning settings.

This elementary school would also acquire a new principal during the 2019-2020 school year while the school's former principal of twelve years was promoted to the role of district elementary curriculum director. During her tenure at the elementary school, the former principal was able to build a culture centered on PLD. There were several shifts within her time as principal. Perhaps the most important being that the teachers began to actively seek ongoing professional development opportunities and engage in district-level learning activities. The principal actively encouraged her staff to try new things, viewed failure as learning, and shared those successes with others. Under her leadership, multiple teachers earned district teacher of the year awards; one was a state finalist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching; and another was a Milken Award winner. Her longevity and dedication to creating a culture of collaboration generated the conditions for success for individual teachers to thrive and the school to experience the power of collective efficacy first-hand. As the principal leadership changed, it was determined the building would begin the QLDS process with the new principal as its lead learner to continue the focus on PLD and the observable growth in teachers. The principal of 12 years, together with the instructional coach, shared the information with the teachers and a total staff commitment was reached for engaging in the QLDS process. The new principal, hired from outside the district, became immersed in the energy created by the staff commitment and began to learn about the program requirements and worked with the instructional coach and Quantum Learning professional trainer to begin implementation in their first year as principal. Therefore, during the fall of 2019 and with the help of a Quantum Learning facilitator, the new principal and instructional coach began leading the school through a rigorous professional learning process for the next two years.

The process included the formation of six cohorts with every certified staff as a participant. Each cohort was led by a “lead learner” who was a volunteer teacher-leader. The instructional coach led ongoing professional learning around strategies for instruction and classroom culture. Cohorts would also set monthly goals around various concepts. Each cohort would define the why for the goal’s concept or strategy, the success criteria for implementation, and the plan for implementation. At the end of each month, the cohort would rate their confidence and competence around their goals and write a collective reflection. Additionally, every certified staff member collected artifacts of implementation and provided an individual reflection on their growth. These artifacts were defined by the teachers, and feedback was provided from the Quantum Learning representative. Finally, observations from the instructional coach and principal were ongoing. A rubric for implementation was calibrated and applied to each observation. Feedback was given on a regular basis to individual teachers and to the cohorts. Towards the end of the process, teachers agreed to also observe peer classrooms and provide feedback to each other to elevate their sense of commitment and progress to defined goals.

In the spring of 2020, the school would feel upended by the global Covid-19 Pandemic. News from across the world was growing bleak when students left for spring break and didn’t return for the remainder of the academic year. The state of Kansas was the first to officially close schools to students until the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic school year. In spring of 2020, teachers scrambled and began working from home to try and provide classroom instruction in a virtual format.

The 2020-2021 school year began with uncertainty and stress. Rather than press pause on the QLDS process, the principal and teachers in this elementary school made the decision to stick

with the professional learning process outlined by Quantum Learning, regardless of the pressure, uncertainty, and stress of the pandemic. During the 2020-2021 school year, this school's district changed instructional delivery approaches six times due to the health concerns caused by the pandemic. First, a hybrid approach was used where half of the school's population attended in-person for half the week while the other half was learning remotely. Second, all students returned to in-person learning for four days a week while one day of instruction was delivered virtually to allow for deep cleaning at the physical school site. As the Covid-19 virus spiked, the district then returned to remote learning for all students. As the district was able to gradually return to a hybrid-learning format, some students deemed most at-risk attended school in-person four days. Eventually, all students attended school again in-person four days a week. The district finished the year with all students attending school in-person five days a week. Throughout all these pivots, it is important to note that there were students/parents who chose to attend school remotely for the entire year. This elementary school had two of its teachers provide online only instruction for these students while completing the QLDS process while all other teachers worked through and experienced the multiple changes and learning scenarios previously described. During times of shut-down or virtual instructional delivery, teachers received their professional learning remotely and participated in dedicated professional development time for one-half day during the week. During the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years, this building was able to retain all its certified staff. More positions were added during this time; therefore, the building welcomed some new staff members, yet no one left.

The 2021-22 school year allowed a return to some sense of normalcy as teachers reverted to face-to-face instruction in this district. However, the return to face-to-face instruction was not without daily challenges as the pandemic continued to impact personnel school-wide due to

illness. During the 2021-22 school year, the school in this study had 52% of its student population affected by Covid – either the student was diagnosed with Covid, or they were in quarantine as a close contact. 46% of its students were absent for ten or more school days. Similarly, the certified staff of the building also continued to be impacted by the effects of Covid. Approximately 31% of the certified staff were diagnosed with Covid during the 2021-22 school year and 24% missed 10 or more school days due to personal or family illnesses. The culture of the building was challenged by the pandemic. From the 2021-22 to the 2022-23 school years, the building retained approximately 89% of its certified staff. It lost five teachers to either retirement or change in districts due to location. None of the teacher movement was due to issues with the building's culture, and the teachers leaving openly shared their upset with having to leave a building with such a strong climate and culture. The building retained all its mid-career teachers.

Even though the school officially completed and received the honor of becoming a QLDS in May 2021, the principal and teachers continued to use and sustain the knowledge and processes gained during the two-year program. During the 2021-22 school year, the cohort structure used for PLC's and self-reflection refined from the Quantum Learning strategies and skills continued to be in place. The building continued to use the common language from the QLDS system to create shared goals and a vision for student learning and teacher collaboration. Additionally, new-to-the-building teachers continued to work towards the attainment of becoming a Quantum Learning certified educator to sustain program implementation. The entire QLDS process was maintained but occurred within a smaller group ratio.

The benefits of the QLDS process became evident while conducting a pilot study of two mid-career teachers who participated in the cohort and professional learning process. The pilot

study prompted the desire to dig deeper into the PLD and its impact on individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy.

Description of the Pilot Project

A spring 2021 pilot project performed at the same elementary school with two participants informed the construction of this phenomenological study. In summary, the building had just begun the rigorous collective professional development journey to become a QLDS when we were shocked by the Covid-19 Pandemic in the spring of 2020. The immediate reaction was to cancel everything “extra” and just focus on what would be essential for survival during this time. However, after careful consideration, the principal and teachers made the decision to persevere with in-depth professional development and implementation of QLDS.

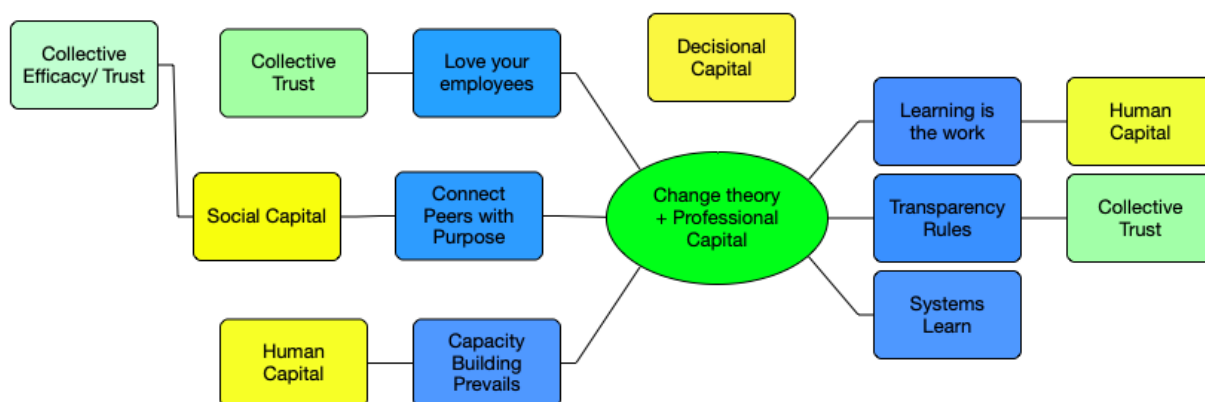
As the 2020-2021 school year progressed, the researcher noticed that while this elementary school and its teachers were exposed to high levels of stress and frequent change, they didn’t appear to be suffering from the same toxicity as other teachers in surrounding schools. The researcher had already expressed interest in examining mid-career teachers and the impact of commitment to professional growth as suggested in the work of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). The researcher began observing and taking note of the mid-career teachers in the building and the alignment to this research. Like Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explained, “The more that teachers progressed through mid-career, racking up their hours of experience and professional development, the more capable they became at using the reforms in practice” (p. 73). The researcher noted that the mid-career teachers in the building were responding similarly, despite the significant alteration of learning structures imposed by the Covid-19 Pandemic response. The fidelity of these teachers to implementation of the professional learning structures and expectations outlined in QLDS were further defined by high levels of success.

The pilot project included two interviews for each of the two participants and one focus group. The open-ended questions for each interview were focused on what general learning and leadership strategies supported their professional capital and growth during the pandemic. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes using the NVivo Software.

The researcher expected to find quality PLD (Learning Forward, 2022), collective trust (Hoy et al., 2012), and collective efficacy (Donohoo, 2017) to reinforce concepts around developing professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, the “ever ready” phenomenological researcher described by Dibley et al. (2020) found in the coding process that evidence of change was especially present in the participant’s lived experiences. Figure 9 explains the themes found while coding the pilot project. At the center of the participants’ experiences was change theory applied by leadership and growth in their individual professional capital. The concepts of both change and professional capital were found in coding the interviews. One can see how the concepts are interwoven and connected.

Figure 9

Pilot Project: The Intersection of Theories



The findings from the pilot project deepened the desire to learn more about how PLD could have a positive impact on the career path of a mid-career teacher. The evidence of the project highlighted the mantra “when the culture is right, cognition thrives.” When education is faced with challenge, we can see what really mattered for a teacher to blossom in their professional capital even under the most intense stress. This study explored the conditions in the selected elementary school before, during, and after the QLDS process that helped its educators grow despite challenges.

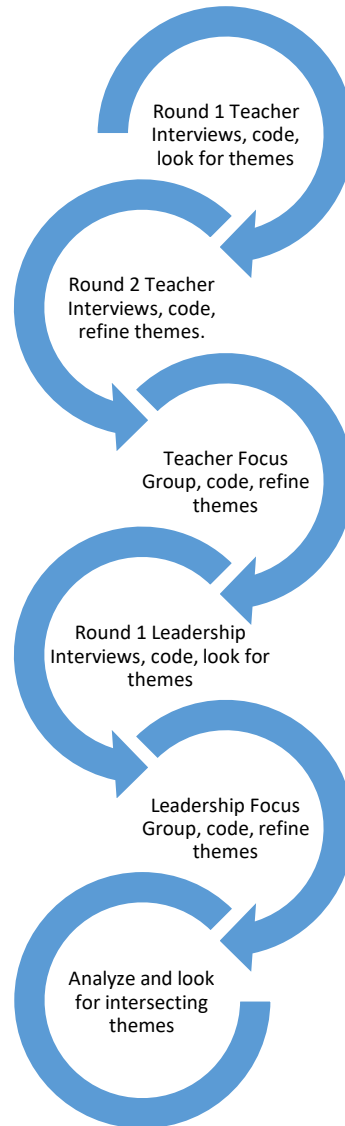
Data Collection and Analysis

The study took place at the completion of the fall 2022 semester. This timeframe allowed the participants an opportunity to reflect on the PLD experiences that shaped their response prior, during, and immediately following the Covid-19 Pandemic. The collected data focused specifically on the 2020-2021 academic year but also sought to capture aspects of the environment shaped by leadership and the QLDS prior to the pandemic and as schools moved into the endemic phase of the pandemic at the conclusion of the 2022 school year. This allowed participants the opportunity to recall specific examples from the experience and was open to the reflection of other PLD experiences. The data collected and analyzed from the pilot study in the spring of 2021 was used to inform this study.

In qualitative research, data is collected from participant interview transcripts, field notes, and analytical memos or reflections created by the researcher while considering his or her data. In a responsive interview approach, the researcher visits and revisits the data to see what theories or themes might emerge. Saldaña (2016) describes theming data as an outcome of coding and that “themes are discerned during data collection and initial analysis, and then examined further as interviews continue” (p. 199). Accordingly, the researcher reflected on possible themes and

followed up with participants. Questions and conversations in later interviews blossomed from the themes starting to take shape while analyzing the data. Codes were clearly defined as themes and categories surfaced from the data. A process similar to Boyatzis's (1998) approach in which consistent definitions are developed to guide coding was applied. The coding process identified intersecting themes on PLD. This study had the flexibility to be very cyclical in nature. Figure 10 illustrates when the coding process took place.

Figure 10
Coding Cycle



For this study, each interview was recorded, transcribed, coded, categorized, and thematized in the NVivo software to discover the essence of the professional learning experiences that contributed to the individual professional capital and collective efficacy of the group. Initially, after each interview, the researcher used in vivo and emotion coding methods as types of qualitative methodology coding. In vivo coding is when the researcher records the

participants' actual words or phrases as codes (Saldaña, 2016). This gave weight to the words of the participants. Emotion coding is when the shared or inferred emotions are labeled as codes. Emotion coding helped to identify the perception of participants in relation to the interview and focus group protocols and the study's purpose and research question.

Saldaña (2016) recommends lumping and splitting the data; therefore, after first-cycle coding, the in vivo codes and emotion codes were lumped into ideas that seem to elicit the image of what the participant was saying about his/her experiences during teaching and professional development. Follow-up conversations with the participants included the themes or notions being formed from the data.

Saldaña (2016), Giorgi & Giorgi (2003), and Smith & Osborn (2008) suggest that theming the data is appropriate when exploring participants' beliefs, identity, and emotional experiences. To aid in theming the data, the researcher employed Saldaña's (2016) advice to consider presentation. Mind mapping was one strategy used for displaying the correlation and intersection of themes.

During second-cycle coding, focused coding was utilized to compare newly constructed codes during this cycle across other participants' data to assess comparability and transferability (Saldaña, 2016). This assessment of new data was done with the caution from Glasser (1978), "data should not be forced or selected to fit pre-conceived or pre-existent categories or discarded in favor of keeping an extant theory intact" (p. 4). Considering this expert opinion, I kept an open mind when coding. Second-cycle coding happened after the second individual interviews and after the focus group. Each time new data was coded, old codes were revisited.

Analytical memos were an essential tactic. Throughout the process, analytical memos were utilized as a strategy to unload everything the researcher could think of when reflecting

about the experiences shared with participants (Saldaña, 2016). Due to the nature of interpretive constructivism and the important role of the interpretation of the researcher, analytical memo writing also served as an avenue for working out patterns and themes, while also reflecting on direct quotes from the participants (Dibley, et al., 2020). The preconceptions the interviewer brought to the process were completely unavoidable (Laverty, 2003). Biases and perceptions were continually kept in analytical memos and a research journal in the NVivo software.

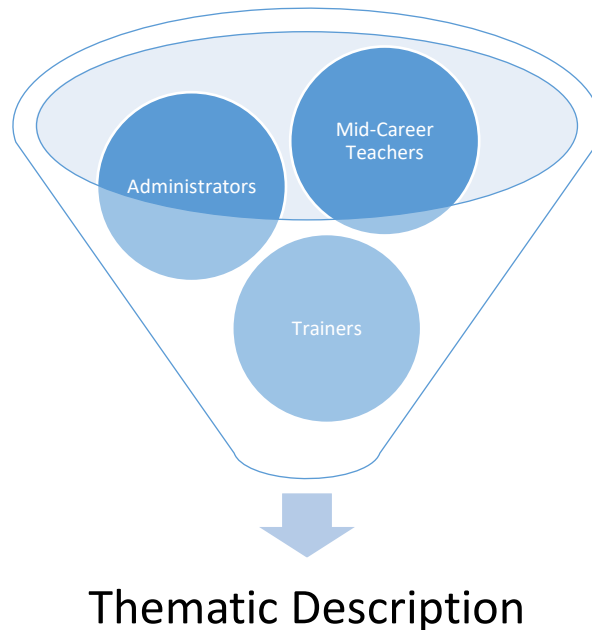
Documents from the QLDS experience were reviewed and analyzed after coding to look for affirming or refutable data regarding the themes from the interviews, focus groups, and analytical notes.

Data Representation

The study's findings were shared in a thematic description of the data collected. Bhattacharya (2017) suggests that the final representation include a structural analysis as well as a thick description of the essence of the experience. To help show the rigor of the data, Dibley et al. (2020) suggest the author keep with tradition and discuss the interpretive results alongside the researcher's analytical challenges. Therefore, as the thematic description takes shape, the researcher's perspective next to the participants' perspectives was included. The teachers' perceptions, the leaders' perceptions, and the trainers' perceptions were cross-sectioned. As the researcher, I included my story alongside the Quantum Learning trainer's. Appendix H provides an alignment of the Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2022), the study's research question, and interview/focus group prompts. This organization was used to represent the study's findings and conclusions.

Figure 11

Components of the Data Represented



The stories, anecdotes, examples, and quotes were carefully selected to craft the description of their experiences. Heidegger (2009) emphasizes how important word choice is in creating an image. The description was written in a way that allows the reader to see and feel as the participants did. As a result, educational leaders will be able to use the study to better understand the individual interpretation of the conditions for success and transformational processes in professional learning which create collective efficacy and build individual professional capacity for the mid-career teacher.

Trustworthiness, Ethics, & Research Standards

Even while seeking to understand perspectives and interpretations, there are necessary steps taken by the researcher to ensure validity. An ethical lens was consistently and constantly applied throughout the research process and data analysis (Dibley et al., 2020). This study

employed multiple strategies to increase its validity, trustworthiness, and ethical practices. These strategies included the use of transferability, rigor, vulnerability and openness, member checking, rich description, clarifying biases, and a robust coding system. First, the general concepts researched in this study (e.g., collegial trust, PD, and change) may be transferrable to other contexts. Second, level of engagement with participants provided a rigorous study which invited vulnerability and openness of its participants. Next, a rich description was created through layers of a robust coding system and verified through member checking with the participants.

Transferability. This study's attention to the development of individual professional capital and collective efficacy during a time of intense change is a very significant and timely topic. It was also a very complex study as it explored the essence of several possible conceptual intersections: collegial trust, collective efficacy, PD, leadership and change, and the individual professional capital of mid-career teachers. Therefore, it applied Tracy's (2010) criteria as a study worthy of investigation and assurance of rigor in the theoretical constructs, data, context, and data collection and analysis. The transferability of this study could be applied to other contexts to help others understand the complexities of these aforementioned ideas (Morse, 2015).

Vulnerability and Openness. Morse (2015) expounds that prolonged engagement and persistent observation are requisite for generating thick, rich data. Prolonged engagement developed more trust with participants. Therefore, the researcher used preexisting relationships with the participants to encourage trust and vulnerability. The vulnerability and openness of the participants met Tracy's (2010) criteria of sincerity and resonance. Participants were treated with dignity and respect. They were encouraged to share with vulnerability, and the researcher suspended judgement. As participants shared, the researcher was present and was aware of their

own preconceptions while giving participants space to share their perceptions without judgment. The researched continued to confront her subjectivities and own thinking throughout the data analysis. This practice continued to provide credibility and transparency to the study.

Rich or Thick Description. A rich or thick description is achieved when the researcher acquires copious notes and transcripts from semi-structured interviews. Through this thorough record of conversation, the researcher can see overlap and verify information and ideas shared in a relatively small sample size of participants. The research actively looked for replication and duplication of ideas (Morse, 2015).

Member checking. Trustworthiness was also achieved through a variation of member checking. Creswell and Creswell (2017) advise that researchers ask, “Is the transcription accurate?” (p. 215). Participants had the opportunity to view transcripts and data analysis not through the means of just member checking but rather to refine the understanding of their perceptions (Birt et al., 2016). Tracy (2010) describes this practice as member reflections: “member reflections are less a test of research findings as they are an opportunity for collaboration and reflexive elaboration” (p. 844). This practice increased the validity and credibility of the study as it allowed for an assurance that the researcher understood the essence of the participants’ experiences. Therefore, each participant had the opportunity to review transcripts as well as the coding of the transcripts. Through this transparent process and feedback, participants were able to offer additional insight and verify the accuracy of the data collected. An additional way to address trustworthiness is the researcher’s consideration of their own subjectivity and role in the study. The researcher built trust through transparency and ongoing communication.

Subjectivity

My subjectivity is both a limitation and a benefit to this study. As an educator who is on the tail end of her mid-career stage, I have empathy and understanding of this demographic. However, I have gained strong opinions through my own professional development experiences. I have a well-established belief system about how students learn, what is best praxis for instruction, and what are the most powerful components of quality curriculum and lessons. Van Manen (2016) reminds us that “it is living human beings who bring schemata and frameworks into being and not the reverse” (p. 45) and we should be careful not to continually return to the essence of the experience. One necessary step in qualitative research is to suspend or bracket our own pre-conceived beliefs. Van Manen (2016) continues, “It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories” (p. 47). I was mindful of the impact of my beliefs on my interpretation of what the participants were sharing about their experiences. I journaled and created analytical memos to check my preconceptions.

As an instructional coach, I’ve been exposed to teachers who struggle to self-assess and reflect. Some might believe they have a high collective efficacy but struggle to work collaboratively. Others might believe they lack professional capital, and yet they are committed to growth and are just modest. My own subjectivity has generated an opinion not only about whether they have professional capital, but whether they are able to recognize such in themselves.

My own subjectivities have an impact on the interpretation of the study. Dibley, et al., (2020) espouse “that subjectivity has to be managed, of course, but being ‘inside’ and connected in some way to the phenomenon of interest, can bring huge benefits in terms of ability to uncover meaning” (p. 73). Having served as the participants’ instructional coach during the 2019-2022

academic years, I was an insider. I had a lot of “skin in the game,” although I remained open while interviewing to truly understand how the mid-career teachers and leaders perceived professional learning rather than how I assumed they interpreted or experienced it.

Summary

This is an interview study built upon an interpretive constructivist epistemology. The purpose of the research is to illuminate the perceptions of mid-career teachers on how professional learning during a time of immense change impacted their individual professional capital and the collective efficacy in the school culture. It included the perceptions of the school’s principals to highlight the role of leadership in professional learning and educational change. Four teachers and two administrators were interviewed about their experiences during their QLDS professional learning experience which collided with the Covid-19 Pandemic along with the QLDS professional development trainer. I also participated in the interview stage of the study as the building instructional coach. One focus group was also conducted with the mid-career teachers and one focus group with the administrators.

This study serves as social reality for the concepts of professional capital, collective teacher efficacy, and professional learning. It provides a real-life experience for the constructs in the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning. Finally, it provides feedback and support to future challenges in education and how a focus on professional learning during crisis can positively impact a school’s chance to thrive rather than just survive the crisis.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter reviews the research purpose and questions, shares the findings, and analyzes the findings into themes. The chapter describes how the interview responses were coded through the conceptual framework of the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) and tenets surrounding professional capital.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study was to explore how four mid-career teachers in a suburban Midwestern elementary school perceive the role of PLD as it relates to their individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy. The study explored the conditions preceding, during, and following the Covid-19 Pandemic. The overarching research question that guided this study is:

How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and development and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

The purpose of the study is to find the intersection of themes between the perceptions and actions of mid-career teachers, principals, and professional learning trainers as they developed the individual professional capital and collective efficacy in a system of school-based educators.

Participants

The participants included four classroom teachers, ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade, who also served as “lead learners” during professional learning from 2019-2021. This team formed a cohort who previewed professional learning content and then led an additional cohort of peers through setting monthly goals. Everyone who participated in this study had

between eight and eleven years of experience and were considered mid-career teachers (Day, 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Huberman, 1989).

The leadership interviewees included the past and present building principals. The past principal served the building from 2007 to 2019. The present principal has been serving the building since 2019. Both principals are women who provide perspective on how to create quality professional learning experiences and building culture for mid-career teachers to grow.

Finally, the interviews with the professional learning facilitators included a training consultant hired to support the professional learning process for becoming a QLDS and the other is a self-interview of the researcher-participant who acted as instructional coach for the building from 2018-2022. The leadership team interviews and focus group provide a supplemental perspective of learning designs for adults and what they believed was important when meeting the professional needs of mid-career teachers.

Teacher Interview Findings and Themes

Each interview was conducted in person. The first interviews with the teachers were conducted individually using predetermined questions (see Appendix B). The second round of teacher interviews were also individual, and the questions were follow-up questions based on some common themes that emerged from the first round of coding. The focus of follow up interviews were primarily around feedback and trust. This gave the researcher the opportunity to clarify with teachers and the results were coded separately from the first interview. The leadership team and professional development providers also had individual interviews around predetermined questions (see Appendix D and F). As researcher-participant, I answered the questions created for the professional development provider due to my role as instructional coach. After coding all individual interviews, focus groups were conducted. One with the

leadership team (see Appendix E) and one with the teachers (Appendix C). Since only one professional development provider was interviewed, there was not a need for a focus group. Rather the conversation between instructional coach-researcher and outside provider was sufficient.

Coding was done with an in vivo style method to really capture the perceptions of the interviewees (Saldaña, 2016). Coding was also approached with some conceptual frameworks already in mind; therefore, priori codes were set around the key concepts in the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) and professional capital. The following is a summary of the most important and prevalent codes and themes which emerged from each set of interviews and focus groups. Responses and in vivo codes are displayed as “key insights” in the tables of interview and focus group responses. Codes were lumped together and categorized, as displayed in the mind maps, and as themes emerged. The themes are represented as bolded subheadings throughout the interview narratives. For each group of participants, this pattern is repeated until the final analysis when themes are narrowed and displayed in a final mind map.

Individual Teacher Interviews

Individual interviews were informative. These interviews were focused on questions around Conditions for Success. Conditions for Success are the professional learning standards that create a culture conducive for professional growth. It was important to understand what mid-career teachers see as necessary components contributing to a school culture. Interviews were conducted individually so that teachers could share openly about both positive and negative aspects of school culture without worrying about group dynamics. Initial responses are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1*Individual Teacher Responses: First Interview*

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?		
Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participant Responses
Conditions for Success		Individual Teachers
Culture of Collaborative Learning Professional Capital	Think about your experiences from the fall of 2019 to the present around professional learning. How would you describe the climate in your building? How has this climate impacted your personal growth?	Key Insights: - Eagerness to learn (Human Capital) - Excited to learn together (Social Capital) - High levels of trust and vulnerability (Collegial Trust) - Supporting and pushing each other (Collective Efficacy)
Capacity Building/Professional Capital	Tell me about what professional learning experiences have provided the most growth for you professionally. What did it look like?	Key Insights: - Interactive - Social - Relevant - Connected to previous learning - Purposeful - Processing-time - Goal-oriented - Peer-observation - Reflective - Feedback - Chunked - Ongoing overtime
Leadership	Describe how leadership has crafted and/or supported your professional growth. How would you describe the focus of the leadership during professional learning and the pandemic and its impact on your responses?	Key Insights: - Relationship - Feeling valued - Distributed leadership - Listening - Shared decision-making - Cared for personally and professionally - Workload reduction - Maintaining a positive focus - Clear vision
Equity Foundations	Give me an example of how professional learning has been adapted or made more accessible to you as a mid-career teacher.	Key Insights: - Following Interests - Opportunities to lead or present - Relationship-building - Varied experiences - Building on previous knowledge - Research-based - Targeted

Conditions for Success

Cohort-Learning. Mid-career teachers expressed the desire to learn in cohorts. They stated that cooperative learning as adults positively impacted the culture of the building. Two of the teachers shared an observation that the staff is eager and excited to learn together. They spoke with admiration about the vulnerability and trust among their collegial relationships. All of the teachers mentioned that while they learned in teams during the pandemic, they also felt supported both professionally and personally.

Ongoing Chunks. One approach to professional learning that continually stood out in the conversations with teachers is that the professional learning be chunked and overtime. Teachers explained that when professional learning content is delivered in effective chunks and consistently revisited, their implementation is greater. They shared that when they are allowed to set goals around professional learning, look for implementation results, get feedback, and reflect, they also have high levels of implementation. One teacher explained that setting short-term goals and reflecting made it so they “could really focus in on that skill which allowed it to become more of a habit or stored into your long-term memory, and then we just became masterful at whatever that was and could now focus on something else.” From the mid-career teachers’ perspectives, there needs to be a level of accountability that feels non-judgmental and supportive.

Time is also of the essence. One cannot go too long without revisiting the professional learning objectives before even the best facilitated professional development is forgotten. One teacher explained, “And I think some of the trainings just kind of drop off because we’ve just got so much on our plate.” It was mentioned that teachers also need some time to process their new learning. One teacher felt like professional development providers often move on too quickly, and thus they did not have a chance to process or consider how to implement the new initiative.

However, when time was added for next steps and reflection, they were more likely to implement and improve. Time allotment was also a popular response when asked about what leadership can do to support teacher learning and support during extreme stress. Time to collaborate is necessary. Time becomes even more imperative during times of strain or complex change.

Feedback. During both the initial and the follow up interviews, the mid-career teachers talked about feedback from peers and from leadership. Feedback needs to feel genuine and include both praise and opportunities for growth. It was important that there is a level of trust with whomever is providing feedback so that opportunities for growth are shared and accepted openly. It was also important to these teachers that feedback be clear and specific. One teacher elaborated, “that's what helps me grow because I walk away knowing exactly what I could work on.” Three of them also shared that it is best when the feedback follows the professional learning or situation quickly. When the feedback was more immediate, they felt as though they had a better understanding of how to use what they had learned and could elevate their craft even more.

Leadership Communication and Focus. While discussing what school leadership does to support their professional learning, all four included how critical the relationship is with leadership. It was important that they felt cared for both professionally and personally, especially during something like the pandemic. Listening was mentioned multiple times. It was essential that the teachers felt heard and understood during the challenges of the pandemic and as professional learning occurred. One teacher explained that when it got really challenging “I think just being real and authentic with us and just listening” was vital.

One talked about feeling valued and given opportunity to lead provided exceptional growth for her. Another mentioned being given power to choose her own learning and share that with others helped grow her efficacy. She said, “When it felt like the world was kind of out of control, giving us the power to focus on one little piece of our instruction at a time [with professional learning] really made a big difference.” Similarly, a teacher shared, “We had something else to focus on by meeting with our cohorts and setting our goals.” Professional learning helped to provide some control and progress during the pandemic.

When it came to the extreme stress brought on by the pandemic, each teacher expressed gratitude for what building-level leadership did to support them with everyday challenges and continued professional learning. It was clear that accessibility to the administrators and PLD providers was crucial for feeling supported. Empathy was felt by the mid-career teachers, for both their stage of life as well as feelings of safety when experiencing challenges. One mentioned the leadership’s willingness to take things off the plates of teachers. They spoke about how fruitful it was for administrators to alleviate stress by removing some of the less important or clerical tasks of teaching, so that they could focus on what was deemed priority. All four mid-career teachers mentioned that it is necessary for leadership to maintain a positive focus during stressful times. A teacher explained, “I think the biggest was [the leadership team] stayed calm, so then we stayed calm. And [the leadership team] helped us and supported us as we all navigated through the pandemic and our professional learning.” Another said, “I think especially during the pandemic, they kept a positive focus for us. Everyone felt like they were drowning, or the world was changing constantly, and we still had that constant positive reassurance and positive focus.” It was evident that the mindset of the leadership team impacts the mindset of the mid-career teacher.

Mid-career Honing of Skills. Finally, the mid-career teachers were asked to share how professional learning had shifted from previous career stages. They spoke of their own passions and interests. Now that they had a better understanding of basic praxis, they could chase some of the things that interested them most. Learning was also constantly connected to improving practice rather than learning from one's baseline. One teacher stated, "I think just looking back at your own personal facilitation and comparing it, you can see a huge difference. Just even like your classroom environment." Two teachers shared how they more effectively made connections between their classroom pedagogy and professional learning. Another mentioned that she sees herself continually stretching and growing. Several of them shared that big changes are more manageable as a mid-career teacher because it does not change everything in their practice but feels more pinpointed. One explained, "if you're able to build and add to something that's already a strong foundation, then you're feeling successful and able to implement it easier, and the kids feel that and see it." However, they had a caveat that substantial changes, such as from a balanced literacy model to a structured literacy model of reading instruction, felt like a substantial change from past practice due to expert knowledge gained from experience and training. One participant exclaimed, "I've been doing that wrong for so many years!" Meaningful change takes more time to process, practice, and reflect. It was also evident that as mid-career teachers they expected to participate in more decision making, committees, or presentations. They felt as though they had developed enough experience, that leading peers helped stretch them.

Teacher Follow-up Interviews

Each teacher was given a follow up interview. The follow up interview asked for clarification about how trust is developed during professional learning, how feedback should be

given, and how their perception of professional learning has changed as they've grown into the mid-career stage. Their responses are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2*Individual Teacher Responses: Follow-up Interview*

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?		
Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participant Responses
Feedback	Tell me more about feedback and how that plays a role in creating changes in your practice – what feels best, how and when should it be given?	Key Ideas: - Positive – Celebration/Elevation - Builds on strengths - Focus on areas of growth - specific - Immediate/timely - Relationship matters – trust - Time to practice - In writing
Collective Trust	How is trust created during professional learning?	Key Ideas: - Positive Atmosphere - Leaders/Teachers taking ownership - Norms for communication - Everyone feels valued/safe - Time for collaboration/relationships - Clarity of vision, goals, expectations - A sense of community - Shared experiences - Vulnerability - Meaningful team building - Visible leadership
Mid-Career Phase	Has your view on professional learning or your needs for professional learning changed as you’ve gotten beyond 7 years of practice?	Key Ideas: - More in-depth learning - Specific instructional practices - Still excited for new research and changes in practice - Finding places for growth and setting goals - Easier to apply new learning - Connecting learning to prior teaching experience

Trust and Belonging. The teachers stressed again how fundamental trust is for vulnerability when teachers are learning together. We discussed what leaders can do to build trust. One teacher said, “I would say by creating a positive atmosphere and [leaders] taking ownership of mistakes and the new knowledge [they are] learning, so then people can have trust

in [them] and take a risk to share new ideas.” Modeling trust and vulnerability came up multiple times among the individual teachers.

Trust needed to feel authentic to the mid-career teachers. One shared, “It must be meaningful team building. Not just team builders to be silly and say that it is team building, but ways to get to know each other on a deeper level knowing that people truly care.” Leadership can support trust-building by making sure everyone feels safe and valued.

Two of the participants mentioned that agreements or norms help create a sense of safety in school cultures. One shared that clear goals, learning targets, and expectations support adult learners as well as students. Another expressed that norms of collaboration increased participation because they knew that they would be heard and had an equal voice.

One thing that was acutely clear for mid-career teachers was the need to continue finding success, being excited for professional learning opportunities, taking risks, and accepting feedback, was built on establishing trust. Trust was multi-faceted. It needed to be between teacher and administrator, teacher and PLD provider, teacher and colleagues, and teacher and self.

Trust and Feedback. As teachers shared more about feedback in the follow up interview, there was a strong connection between trust and feedback. One teacher said regarding feedback, “it really just comes down to how it's delivered, who it's from and the relationship that you have with that person.” A leader builds trust through the delivery of feedback: positive and meaningful feedback from a place of genuine care.

Building on Experience. The mid-career teachers were asked again to think about how professional learning has changed as they've been in the mid-career phase rather than early-career. Several teachers mentioned how learning is more applicable due to their comfort in the

classroom. They felt like they were able to reflect on current practices and implement new learning at a fast rate. “It’s awesome having that stuff again and going deeper with it because I think I can apply it. I have experiences to apply it to. I can think of times or kids or whatever that might be,” shared a teacher.

Teacher Focus Group

For an hour, this group laughed together; complimented one another; built on each other’s stories; and at times had tears in their eyes as they talked about their school and what made learning as a professional educator special. It was evident that these mid-career teachers had spent ample time learning together over the years. They had grown into the educators they are today with each other by their sides. At times they could finish each other’s stories which demonstrated a strong bond between them. The focus group questions targeted Transformational Processes and the concepts embedded in those standards: Learning Designs, Implementation, Evidence, and Equity Drivers. The questions also included open-ended questions around situational awareness and collective teacher efficacy. In an unplanned finish, participants were asked what they like most about their building and what they desire for it in the future. The results of the focus group are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Teacher Focus Group Responses

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?		
Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participant Responses
Transformational Processes		Teacher Focus Group
Collective Teacher Efficacy Learning Designs	Think about your experiences from the fall of 2019 to the present around professional learning. Describe how teachers learn together in your building. Possible Prompts: Collective Trust	Key Insights: - Cohorts – expanding connections - Time to discuss and apply - Felt safe - Common vision - Lead learners – peer leadership

		- Shared beliefs/values - Agreements - Shared experiences - Supporting each other - Bite-sized chunks of PDL - Connections between PDL topics - Positive focus during Pandemic
Learning Designs	Describe what type of experiences have been most influential for your professional growth and growing together as staff.	Key Insights: - Book club environments - Common language among staff and students - Volunteered interest - Cognitive dissonance with mutual respect - Visible purpose and impact - Collaborative - Peer observations and feedback - Consistent throughout the year
Implementation (Change) Situational Awareness	Consider professional learning while experiencing the pandemic. Tell me how professional learning impacted your commitment during the pandemic. How did the pandemic impact your professional learning?	Key Insights: - Connections-based PDL equaled stronger commitment - Kept a positive focus which increased commitment - Believed in achieving goals - Continued having fun which increased commitment - Felt like family
Equity Drivers	Describe a time when professional learning really challenged your previous beliefs as a group and brought you closer together.	Key Insights: - Conceptual Math: Asked to explain thinking and the purpose behind pedagogical decisions - Structured Literacy: Complete change in instructional practice and identity as a teacher required resources, time to process, and empathy.
Evidence	How do you know that professional learning has impact on your career and/or your students?	Key Insights: - Quick implementation - Gauging student reactions - Growth as a teacher – year to year - Strategies become unconscious/habitual.

The mid-career teacher focus group was delightful to facilitate. There was a high energy in the room. The mutual respect was almost tangible. When posed with the planned questions, the teachers would easily build on the answers of the person before them. There was a lot of laughter, nodding, and some challenging of individual ideas as one could see they were comfortable stretching each other's thinking.

Transformational Processes

Cohort Learning. When asked about what needed to be included in PLD designs for mid-career teacher growth, it was unanimous that co-learning needed to be a component. Teachers in the focus group talked about the cohorts they had learned with from 2019-2021, and their new cohorts that had been mixed up to increase connections in the building. The group valued learning from other grade-level teachers and teachers of other disciplines. They also discussed the importance of time with grade-level colleagues. The underlying factor for cohort success is trust. One shared, “I think the cohorts have been built to make everyone feel safe.” Everyone then explained that the building has a set of guiding principles and character traits they use with students, but that these guiding principles had also been applied to their collegial relationships. One of the teachers explained, “in our own classrooms like we build our foundation around our agreements and the keys, and I mean, it's kind of like practice what you preach, I guess.” It was evident this group shared common values and held themselves to a high standard.

Ongoing Chunks. The mid-career teachers also agreed and expanded on the ideas from their individual interviews that professional learning needed to be delivered in smaller chunks which are reviewed and revisited. They talked about the importance of a school calendar and ongoing staff meetings to support their growth. The teachers felt like there needed to be time allotted for application of new skills and learning and based on goals they set as a team. One described, “I think it helps that we see the power in it, like when we really broke it down into our few goals a month and really focused on it.” This approach seemed purposeful and helped highlight their impact and growth.

Shared Vision and Shared Leadership. While the teachers shared that they liked the opportunity to have a voice in the professional learning, they felt it was important for the staff to have a strong shared vision. Professional development and learning opportunities needed to connect and fit together on a theoretical level. If something doesn't fit the common vision, they felt like it should not be considered.

The teachers shared multiple forms of professional learning that had been impactful for them. Volunteering to take graduate program courses together and learning as a group created bonds among several colleagues. Attending conferences together where they could present or participate and then share with more colleagues upon returning made a difference for many. One of the favorite learning experiences shared by the whole group was staff book clubs hosted in homes during the school year and over summer break. This relaxed, off-campus learning allowed them to develop strong bonds around common instructional strategies as well as leadership qualities.

The group reflected on their time learning while also experiencing pandemic teaching. At one point they became solemn in sharing about the challenges they faced personally and professionally, but always came back to the feelings of support they had with their colleagues and leaders. One shared, "I think being away we just realized also how much we probably missed each other; I remember coming back it was just like the best feeling and everybody kept saying it feels like I'm home." Over and over the group kept relating the school staff to a family. Smiles were also shared when discussing the pandemic. They shared fun memories of failures and learning curves with remote learning. Another shared, "we could have just been totally negative, which would have been super easy to do, but we weren't. The fact that we knew what

we were headed towards, and we still had goals, kept us committed to our cohorts.” This positive focus saved their commitment to learning and gave them some control over their circumstances.

Change Management. When we discussed complex changes that they had experienced as mid-career teachers, they shared paradigm shifts in reading or mathematics instruction. One teacher discussed how easy it is to get caught up in feelings of guilt about past instructional practices. However, she gave the advice that, “I tell myself – that’s the best we could do at the time with the knowledge and the resources that we had.” They continued to share their commitment to staying current with research-based and evidence-based practices. Several shared that when change is especially complex, they need high levels of empathy from leadership and colleagues. It takes a level of vulnerability to undergo second-order change, and thus the teachers expressed they needed to feel like they are not being judged in the process. One teacher shared that she needs time to process and implement which requires a level of patience from others.

Evidence. The mid-career teachers dialogued about the different ways in which they measure the impact of new learning and professional growth. They listed student achievement scores as one small observation. They expounded on how they can observe growth in themselves. They see growth from year to year in themselves by the accomplishment of building-level goals; development of habitual behaviors; student engagement; and improvement of their physical classroom environment.

The focus group concluded on two additional questions: (1) What is it about your school that keeps you engaged and growing? (2) What do you want for the future of your school? The first question elicited a lot of smiles. The first teacher shared that she feels comfortable with her colleagues. She believes that everyone is all living by their shared values and wants to learn together. “We can all celebrate each other,” she concluded. The second teacher added, “I don’t

feel like it's a competition. It's like we all want the best for each of us, and so we just keep pushing each other.” The third teacher’s comments on how the school continues to desire what’s best for students and push each teacher elicited other comments of agreement. The fourth teacher looked at her colleagues and said, “I see the examples of teachers here are just so exceptional. I mean, I could look at each one of you in here and I'm just in awe.” This comment led to several others concurring that they all enjoyed learning together. They finished with how they find joy in each other even on difficult days.

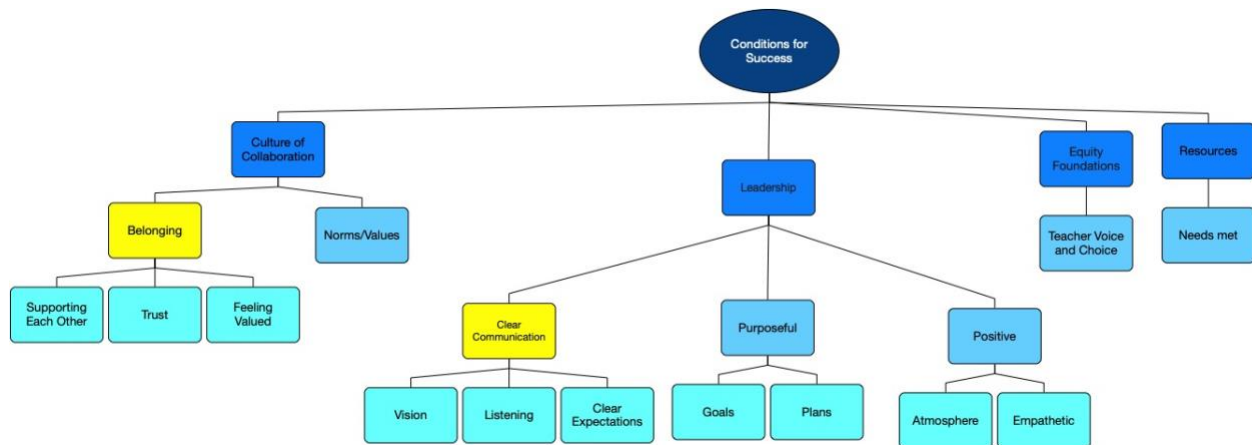
For the school’s future, the mid-career teachers desired to continue to have shared leadership. They would like to increase leadership opportunities for all students as well. The group wants all teachers and students to find and follow their passion. They believe it is important to continue to hire employees who fit the culture and respect the values of the building. Finally, they want to continue to find fun ways to learn together.

Themes from the Teachers’ Perspectives

As the teacher interviews and focus group data was coded, themes emerged from this participant group. Some responses were repeated from participant to participant or emphasized by certain participants. These responses garnered more significance in the coding and theming processes. Below is a mind map of the themes that surfaced from the teachers’ perspectives on concepts aligned with Conditions for Success (Learning Forward, 2022). The major themes emerging from this data were a culture of belonging and leadership with clear communication.

Figure 12

Teacher Themes: Conditions for Success



Note. Figure 12 is designed from the codes created in NVivo. The sibling nodes are color coded by level of node. Highlighted in yellow are themes that stood out as most important or frequently mentioned by the mid-career teachers.

There was substantial evidence from the teachers that the culture of a school must be optimal for adult learning as well as student learning. While this claim is not new to research, the mid-career teachers in this setting discussed how it is paramount to achieving high levels of professional capital. It is also key when experiencing epic levels of stress and change such as teaching during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Without a strong sense of belonging, these teachers would have burned out quickly during the most trying time of their careers rather than thrive. Therefore, a supportive culture where mid-career teachers feel trust and belonging is the major theme of their data. Belonging can be described as every teacher having a voice, feeling valued, and supporting their colleagues. Collaboration is regarded above competition. Teachers interact in ways that demonstrate mutual respect and values.

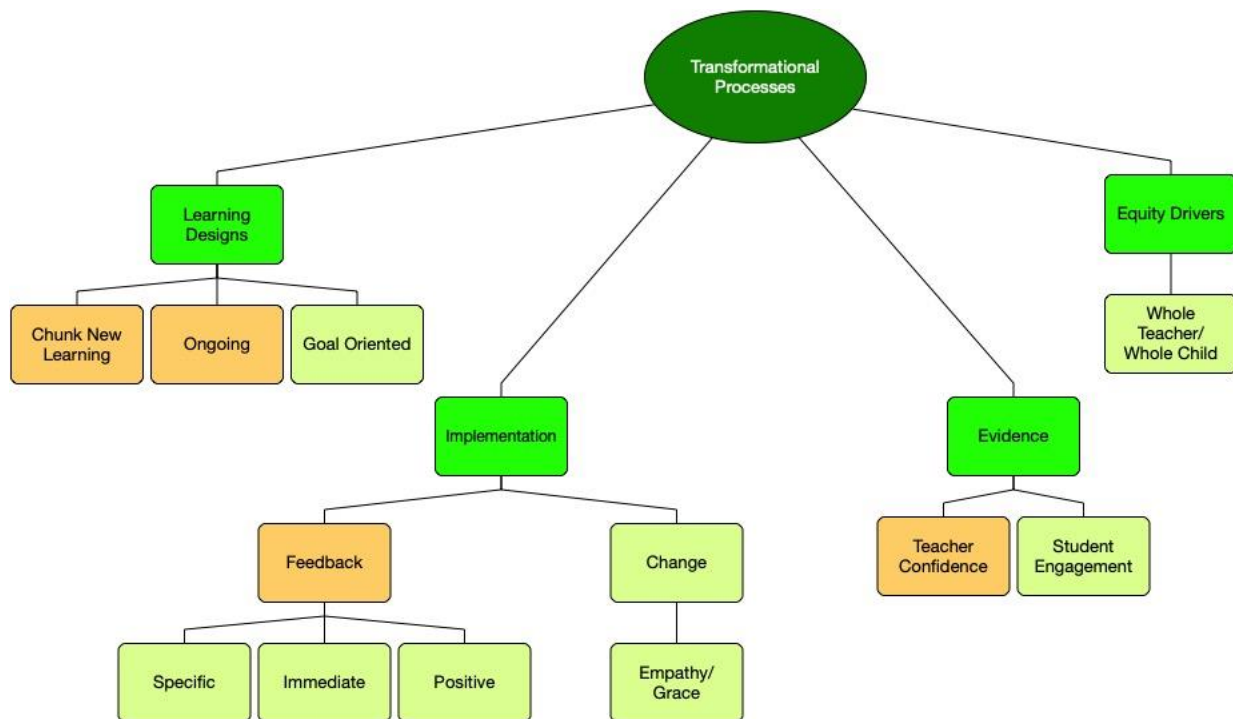
For the culture to be right, the leadership carries great responsibility in creating the optimal setting for adult learning. What mid-career teachers valued most from their

administrative and professional learning leadership teams was clear communication. Clear communication is multi-faceted. Clear communication is exemplified by purposeful vision and goal setting with the entire staff, overt and consistent expectations, and ongoing modeling of behaviors desired from colleagues. There are not mixed messages or hypocrisy. Clear communication is also demonstrated by accessibility and listening to understand the perspectives of the mid-career teachers. They need to feel heard. It is necessary that the leadership remain positive amid challenge and crisis. Therefore, communication needs to be positive.

The data from the teachers' interviews and focus group was also grouped into parent codes around the standards in the Transformational Processes frame. Transformational Processes standards explain what teachers need to sustain substantial changes in their practice (Learning Forward, 2022). The major themes which held more significance for the mid-career teachers interviewed were (1) ongoing, chunked professional learning opportunities, (2) quality feedback on how they are implementing and performing, and (3) evidence in their confidence. The figure below highlights these themes as well as others of consequence.

Figure 13

Teacher Themes: Transformational Processes



Note. Figure 13 is designed from the codes created in NVivo. The sibling nodes are color coded by level of node. Highlighted in orange are themes that stood out as most important or frequently mentioned by the mid-career teachers.

The most reoccurring theme when it came to preferences for learning designs was for content and trainings to be narrowed in focus as well as reviewed over time. The PLD providers chunk the information they want to deliver to educators in more manageable pieces. PLD opportunities and days should be more narrowly focused than traditional professional development or workshops. It was also mentioned that content and skills be reviewed and revisited. PLD should happen in an ongoing manner where educators can reflect on skills gained and implemented. This format of learning design is what these mid-career teachers felt made the most impact for them.

Another major theme was feedback. The mid-career teachers acknowledged that feedback was necessary for learning and growing. This theme could easily be lumped with clear communication on the part of the leader. It also corresponds with a culture of trust as mid-career teachers most appreciate feedback from leaders they trust. Feedback needs to be timely, specific, and positive.

Finally, regarding evidence of transformation, an emerging theme was teacher confidence. As the mid-career teachers' responses were coded, it was evident that for professional capital to be developed, a teacher must feel confident in what he or she is doing. This confidence is created through a culture of support and effective learning designs.

Leadership Interview Findings and Themes

To understand the culture and experiences of these mid-career teachers, interviewing the leadership provided a more complete recognition of the factors identified by the teachers and the important perspective of the principal. The past principal served this elementary building from 2007 to 2019. She hired all four of the mid-career teachers interviewed. The current principal began her service when her predecessor became the district's elementary curriculum director in 2019. The current principal was the leader in place during the immediate time before, during, and after the pandemic. Each of them was interviewed individually once and as a focus group once.

Individual Leadership Interviews

The data collected from individual leadership interviews was helpful information to better understand the teachers' perspectives and the perspectives of the leaders around PLD and building trust and a positive school culture. The perspectives of the principals provided an understanding of what those guiding the school culture believe as important components and

what mid-career teachers need. Below are the responses summarized by question and alignment to the professional learning standards.

Table 4

Leadership Responses

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participant Responses
Conditions for Success		Individual Leadership Interviewees
Culture of Collaborative Learning	Describe your observations of how teachers at this site interact with one another. Tell me about how you create strong relationships among your staff members, especially mid-career teachers.	Key Insights: - Positive interactions/pleasant - Fun Together - Problem-solving/Solution-seeking - Supporting one another - Taking ownership - Building them up - Required collaboration time - Hiring the right people for the culture
Leadership Professional Capital	Describe how your leadership style supports the learning and growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompts: McREL International's 21 Leadership Responsibilities	Key Insights: - Continuing the grow and maintain your relationships - Balanced leadership - Heightened connectivity - Provide ongoing support - Research and data driven - Impact teacher beliefs - Collaboration - Minimize micromanagement - Willingness to try and fail - Exploring interests
Equity Foundations	How do you make high-quality professional learning accessible for all staff, especially mid-career teachers?	Key Insights: - Plan most PD for mid-level teachers - Job embedded - Cohorts – colleagues learning from each other - Action research

A Culture of Collaboration. While the interviews of the past and present principals are supplemental, it was fascinating to see the overlap or the influence on mid-career teachers and their responses. The former principal spoke very positively of the staff interactions, admitting that it hadn't always been so positive. To create a collaborative culture, she began with

conversation around teaching. She explained, “[I started] talking about teaching, talking about the positive things kids were doing. I started purposely with just talking about what kids were learning and what I was seeing kids were doing while being in classrooms.” Then she shared that she began to have deeper conversations about why teachers were doing certain things and what successes they saw or changes they made. Collaboration was not a choice but a requirement, however, she carefully worked to develop the relationships among her staff so that they felt supported and safe to problem solve together. She called this “storming and norming” as they worked to set agreements for how collaboration should feel. Finally, one thing that was essential in changing the culture of her building was her hiring practice. She began to look for candidates who would fit her culture and planned to train them in pedagogy if needed. She explained, “I would hire people who I felt like would be a good fit for the family, not a good teacher because you can have good teachers without being able to be a fit.” The idea of hiring for fit refers to considering how a potential teaching candidate’s belief about learning and best practice align with the school’s common vision and shared values.

When posed with the question about what makes quality professional learning for the mid-career teacher, the present principal had very insightful things to say about what she has seen as successful on this campus. She discussed the positive effect cohort learning has made on the staff. Cohorts, she said, “provided regular opportunities for staff to learn from colleagues who are far more experienced than they are and colleagues who are far less experienced than they are so that everyone is sharing input.” It brought together each career stage of teachers and demonstrated the value of every stage. The principal also shared that job embedded learning is impactful, whether it is from instructional coaches providing feedback and suggestions or action research on the part of the teacher. Regarding the mid-career teacher, this leader sees them as

more willing to try something new whether they fail or succeed. Mid-career teachers seem to understand that failure is part of learning and that their next attempt will be even better. The present principal espoused, “the value is really letting them do the heavy cognitive lifting and letting them do the designing and exploring.”

There were connections between the perspectives of the mid-career teachers and that of their past and present leaders. Both groups valued relationships first and foremost. As the interviews continued, the overlap in ideas and insights increased.

Leadership Focus Group

The interviewing process concluded with a focus group of the past and present building principals. The perspectives of the administrators provided additional insights in the building’s culture and leadership practices to support transformational processes for mid-career teachers.

Table 5

Leadership Focus Group Responses

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participant Responses
Transformational Processes		Individual Leadership Interviewees
Collective Teacher Efficacy Evidence	Describe how you motivate mid-career teachers to believe in the power of their influence. Possible prompt: how do you help them see their influence?	Key Insights: - Sharing data - Self-monitoring/reflecting - Shared leadership opportunities - Peer observations – formal and informal
Learning Designs Equity Drivers	Describe what type of experiences you’ve found to be most influential for the professional growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompt: how do you challenge their thinking?	Key Insights: - Ongoing daily conversations - Open experimentation with instructional practices - Finding interests - Desirable working conditions - Mentoring opportunities
Implementation (Change)	How do you manage complex change for your mid-career teachers?	Key Insights: - Know your staff needs – temperament/personality - Give plenty of time

		- Consider constants - Reduce workload
Situational Awareness	How do you support mid-career teachers in sustained professional learning and implementation?	Key Insights: - Identify passions - Embrace differentiation - Increase excitement - Safe collaboration - Alignment - Higher-level thinking

Data Focused. The leadership focus group provided perspective into the background and beliefs driving the experiences the mid-career teacher focus group had lived. While both principals shared from their experiences at this building, their influence is seen in the responses from the teachers. The past principal spoke about how she had to turn the culture around and undergo some difficult transformational processes. Data was often a tool used to help teachers see the need for change or the effects of change.

Teacher Interests. As the leaders discussed mid-career teachers, they agreed that it is important to differentiate your approach on an individual basis due to personality, interests, and abilities rather than just career stage. They found success in helping teachers identify what they are passionate about in education and explore those passions. They've seen benefit in having mid-career teachers give back to the profession through leading, mentoring, or modeling to peers or preservice teachers. It was suggested that teachers have deep conversations with higher order thinking around pedagogy and beliefs. The past principal shared, "keep feeding them that high level stuff and then they're satisfied and that goes a long way to keep them positive and learning." The current principal explained that as staff members start to chase their passions, one will see a natural alignment of all their passions. Their passions relate to the building goals which are related to the district goals and focused on student well-being and academic progress.

Both administrators shared that it takes time, effort, and effective communication to accomplish change. They explained that they are more likely to cause change and growth in teachers when they know and understand them as learners. The current principal described how she uses her mid-career teachers as a gauge during change. “Your mid-career folks are good people to hone in on: how they're going to feel about this change, and if they're going to have big feelings.” While the past principal cautioned that meaningful change is different from compliance.

Finally, they discussed the necessity of forming effective teams. They shared from experiences that mid-career teachers can easily be dragged down by negativity of late-career teachers or even each other. They also cautioned that mid-careers needed to see their mentees as capable and competent, otherwise, they get frustrated in mentoring roles.

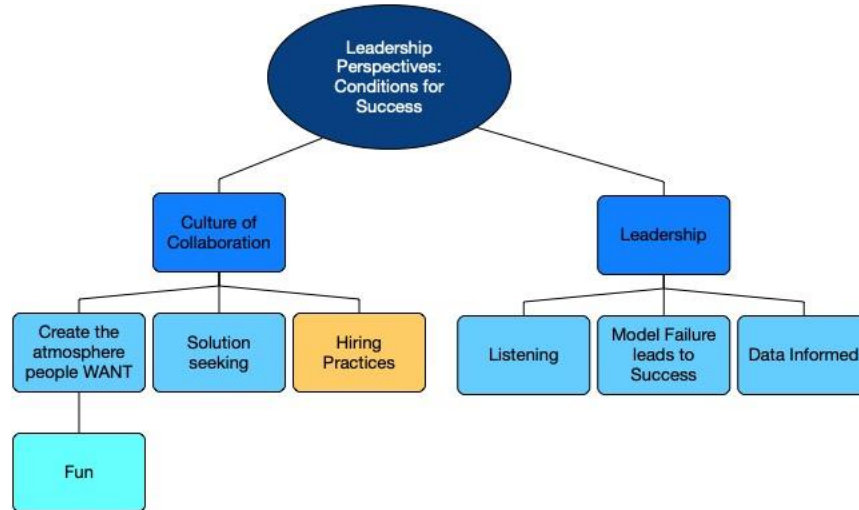
Themes from Leaders’ Perspectives

The coding process for the leaders’ interviews and focus group was similar to the teachers. Prior codes were used to make connections to the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). While the standards were present in the leaders’ responses, there were some reoccurring themes that held significance.

Under conditions for success, the leaders shared from their experiences as aforementioned. Below is a mind map of the themes from their responses.

Figure 14

Leadership Themes: Conditions for Success



Note. Figure 14 is designed from the codes created in NVivo. The sibling nodes are color coded by level of node. Highlighted in light blue are themes that stood out as most important or frequently mentioned by the leaders.

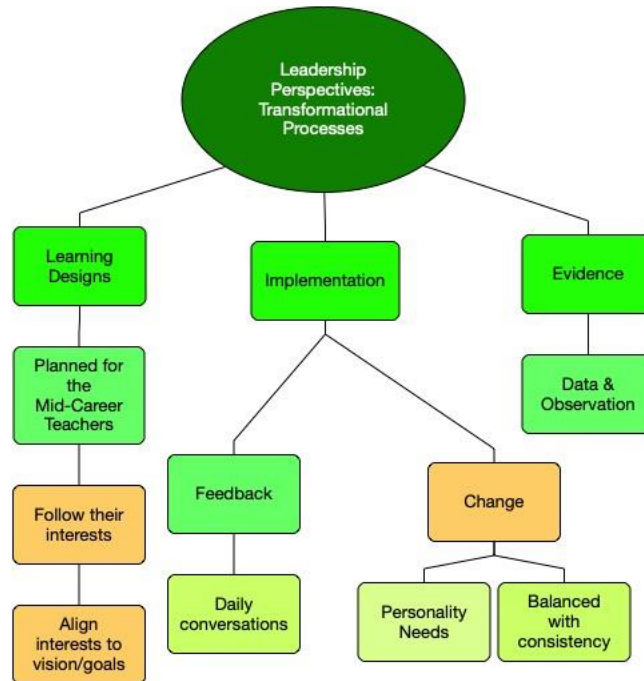
The parent codes of a culture of collaboration and leadership practices stood out as most significant from the standards. The child codes were grouped together in three themes for each parent. For a culture of collaboration, it could be boiled down to three important leadership moves. First, create the atmosphere in which people want to work. This includes making it fun and enjoyable to be at work, but also taking an interest in each employee. Next, be solution-seeking and teachers will follow suit. Finally, hire for the culture. Each of the mid-career teachers were hired for their attitudes not necessarily their ability at the time of hire. When someone is hired with the right kind of human capital and personality, they can be molded into a dynamic teacher.

The three main themes for leadership included listening, modeling failure leads to success, and being data informed. As mentioned prior, listening was an effort each of the leaders felt was worth their time. It was also important that they be vulnerable with their staff so that the staff would be willing to take risks as well. Lastly, using data to begin and continue conversations around improvement creates a need for professional learning and implementation of new skills.

The focus group yielded additional themes in the standards frame of Transformational Processes. As illustrated in the mind map below (Figure 15), the themes of encouraging the mid-career teachers to follow their interests, having ongoing conversations about learning, and how to differentiate change for staff emerged.

Figure 15

Leadership Themes: Transformational Processes



Note. Figure 15 is designed from the codes created in NVivo. The sibling nodes are color coded by level of node. Highlighted in orange are themes that stood out as most important or frequently mentioned by the leaders.

As the themes from leadership began to take form, they were related to the themes from the teachers' data and those from the professional learning provider's interview. The leaders' themes aligned with the Standards for Professional Learning. Within each standard, the leaders emphasized important concepts displayed in orange in Figure 15.

Professional Learning Provider Interview

The interview with the professional learning provider was in-person. In addition to her responses, I've also included my own as participant-interviewer since I served as instructional coach to this staff and helped plan and provide professional learning.

Table 6*Professional Development Trainer Responses*

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participant Responses
Conditions for Success		Professional development trainer
Culture of Collaborative Learning	Describe your observations of how teachers at this site interact with one another. Tell me about how you strengthen relationships among staff members during professional learning, especially mid-career teachers.	Key Insights: - High levels of mutual respect - Ask questions - Purposeful phrasing - Listen and empathize - Share personally and professionally
Transformational Processes		
Learning Designs Equity Drivers	Describe what type of experiences you've found to be most influential for the professional growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompt: how do you challenge their thinking?	Key Insights: - Understanding the major theory behind the training - Teachers must feel heard - Time to listen - Focus on growth - Masterful with own content - Have clear outcomes - Understand the "why"
Collective Teacher Efficacy Evidence	Describe how you motivate mid-career teachers to believe in the power of their influence. Possible prompt: how do you help them see their influence?	Key Insights: - Acknowledge uniqueness of their stage - Models to others - Point to successes
Implementation (Change) Situational Awareness	How do you manage complex change for mid-career teachers? How do you support mid-career teachers in sustained professional learning and implementation?	Key Insights: - Pay attention to the team on the ground - Check-in often - Use timely research - Keep things fresh - Take things off their plates - Find comfort in change - Build belief in change

The interview with the PLD planner and provider who was hired by this school campus from fall 2019 to present helped provide additional insight to the concepts in the Standards for Professional Learning (2022). When asked about some of the most important components of

quality professional learning, she capitalized on giving teachers a chance to feel heard. She explained, “Our job as PD professionals is to shut up and listen to these teachers. Because unless we're listening, it doesn't matter what we say up in the front of the room.” The trainer described how important it is to phrase things positively for teachers; phrasing that leaves the teachers feeling positive. For example, the trainer might say, “In your instruction, think about those things that you're doing well. Now share that with others.” Simple semantics that support a positive mindset and open conversation to learning from the expertise in the room is key. It is important to portray that their opinions and experience count, not just the expertise of the PLD specialist. It is especially important for the mid-career teacher to acknowledge their experience and energy and allow them to model or mentor others.

In my reflection as instructional coach and providing local PLD, I believe it is key for mid-career teachers to see where they can make a tweak or add a new piece of research to strengthen what they already do. Like the outside trainer, it was important for me to have teachers share their expertise or work from their experiences when refining their practice.

It was stressed that whoever is providing professional learning also needs to stay current with research and knowledge of best praxis. They need to be a lead learner. The PLD trainer expressed that the trainer needs to have clear learning outcomes and a plan. “It's like using MapQuest. I put in the destination and then whatever path is going to get me there. There might be a wreck one place and a roadblock another, but you are redirected,” she explained. When the presenter is masterful with the content and facilitation, they can get a group to desired outcomes with an approach the group will respond too.

Another insightful comment was about how this trainer stays in tune to whatever group she is working with. Because she designs learning that lasts overtime, she watches for the ripple

effect. She compared it to throwing a stone into a pool of water. It is tempting to focus on just where the stone hits the water, however, one must watch the ripples in the water. Paying attention to the ripples is where change is made. Watching the ripple effect takes management and rapport so that teachers feel comfortable to follow up and continue to grow as PLD is carefully planned.

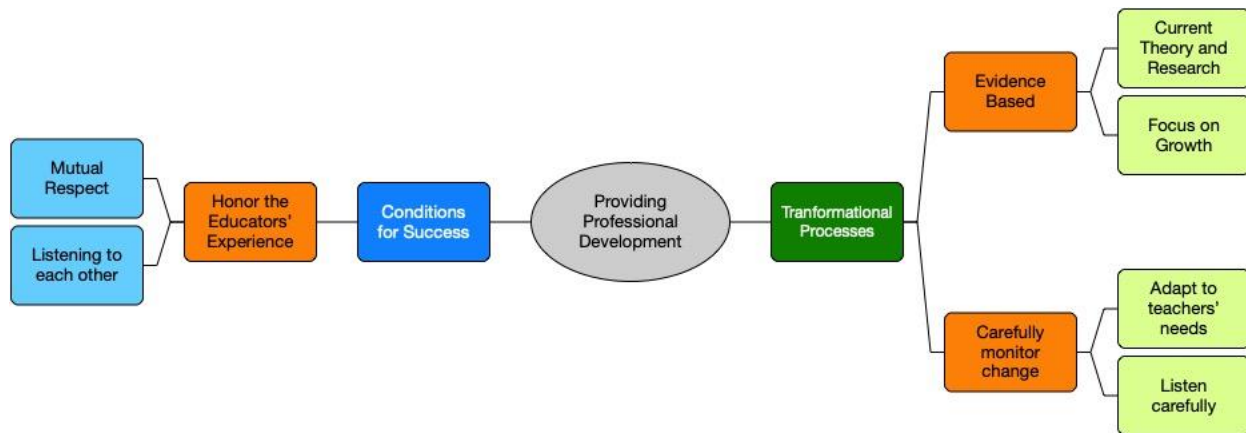
As someone who is leading PLD firsthand, helping teachers through change is important by honoring where they are. Teachers are more likely to stay engaged in a change initiative if they feel comfortable with the direction and understand why. Principals and PLD providers can help teachers focus on necessary changes and not get bogged down by mundane tasks by finding things that can be eliminated from their plates. Another common strategy to support change voiced by leaders was to create hype and excitement around the vision or the belief in necessary changes. When teachers believe strongly that the change needs to happen, they will do what it takes. The PLD trainer comments informed the researcher in finding meaning in the data as the researcher moved forward in conducting the two focus groups – the mid-career teachers and building leadership.

Themes from the Professional Learning Provider

The trainers' interviews could be simplified into three basic themes: (1) honor teachers' experiences, (2) be evidence-based, and (3) carefully monitor change. When trainers honor teachers' experiences, they listen carefully to their insights. When teachers are used as models for one another, they feel valued. When trainers are evidence-based, their knowledge of relevant research is current and gains respect among teachers. Through their understanding of best praxis, the trainers can help others understand as well. Finally, when situational awareness is effectively applied to change management, teachers sustain engagement in change.

Figure 16

Professional Learning Provider Themes



Note. Figure 16 is designed from the codes created in NVivo. The sibling nodes are color coded by level of node. Highlighted in orange are themes that stood out as most important or frequently mentioned by the professional learning trainers.

The themes from the professional learning trainers were tied to those from the leaders and mid-career teachers. In addition, the professional learning trainers provided key documentation about the PLD process that offered examples of teacher goals, reflective statements, and evidence of implementation. These documents provided accountability for sustained PLD work aligned with the agreed upon goals. The next section provides the overarching themes combining data from all participant sources.

Overarching Themes

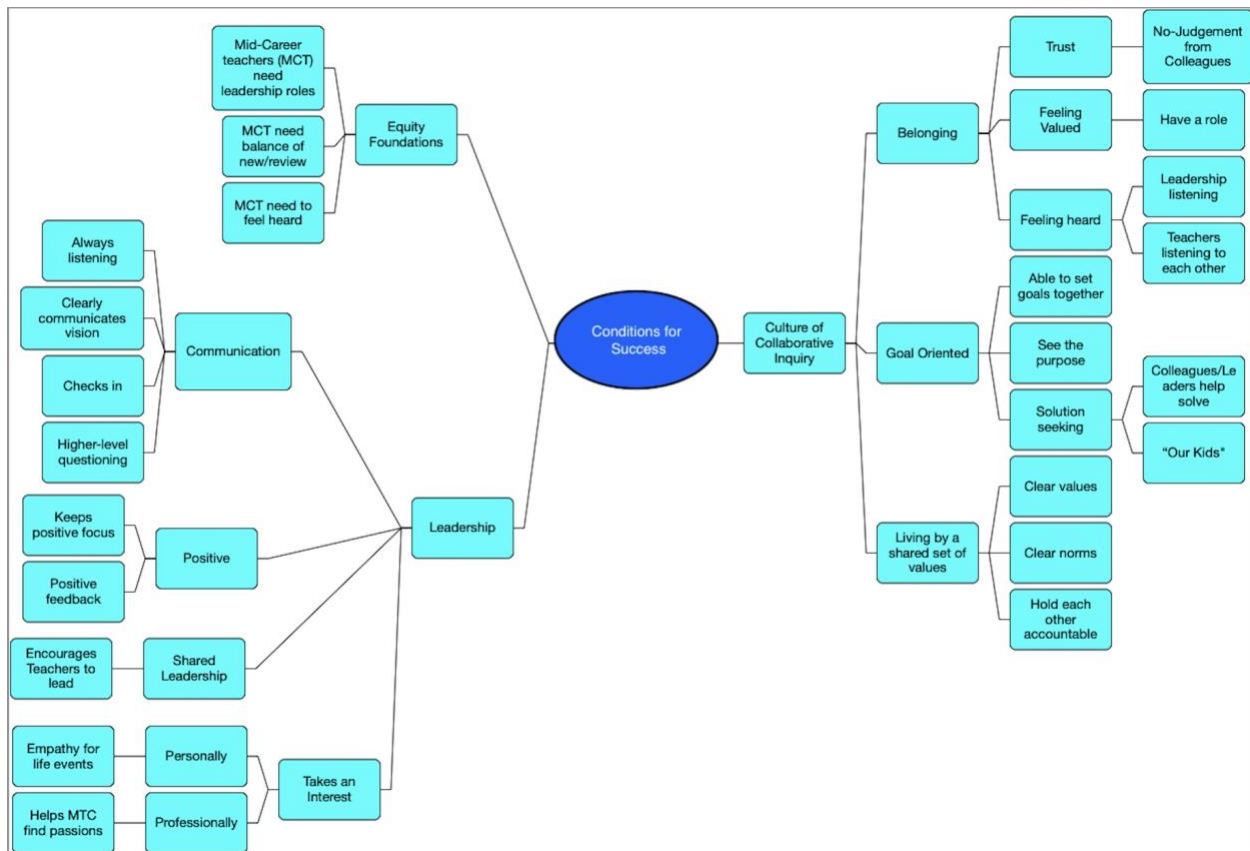
As mentioned in Chapter 3, the researcher routinely revisits the data to see what theories or themes might emerge. While theming the data, priori codes from the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) were applied to the interview transcripts and notes. Both priori codes and in vivo codes were grouped together to create overall categories and

parent codes. It was evident that the mid-career teachers, leaders, and trainers value much of the same concepts and theories expressed in the standards. However, not all standards or frames carried the same weight with the participants. It was also evident that while each group of participants had unique perspectives, there was overlap and relation between them.

Figure 17 is a mind map of the data from all participants connecting with the professional learning standards in the Conditions for Success frame. As the data was revisited, codes nested within others. This mind map incorporates all the codes created within the frame from each group of participants. The significance of the Leadership and Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standards in the Conditions for Success for these participants was evident. The codes grouped under Equity Foundations had a smaller presence in the data.

Figure 17

Conditions for Success Coding Mind Map



Note: This mind map shows the connections of priori and in vivo codes created from all the data sources in the study.

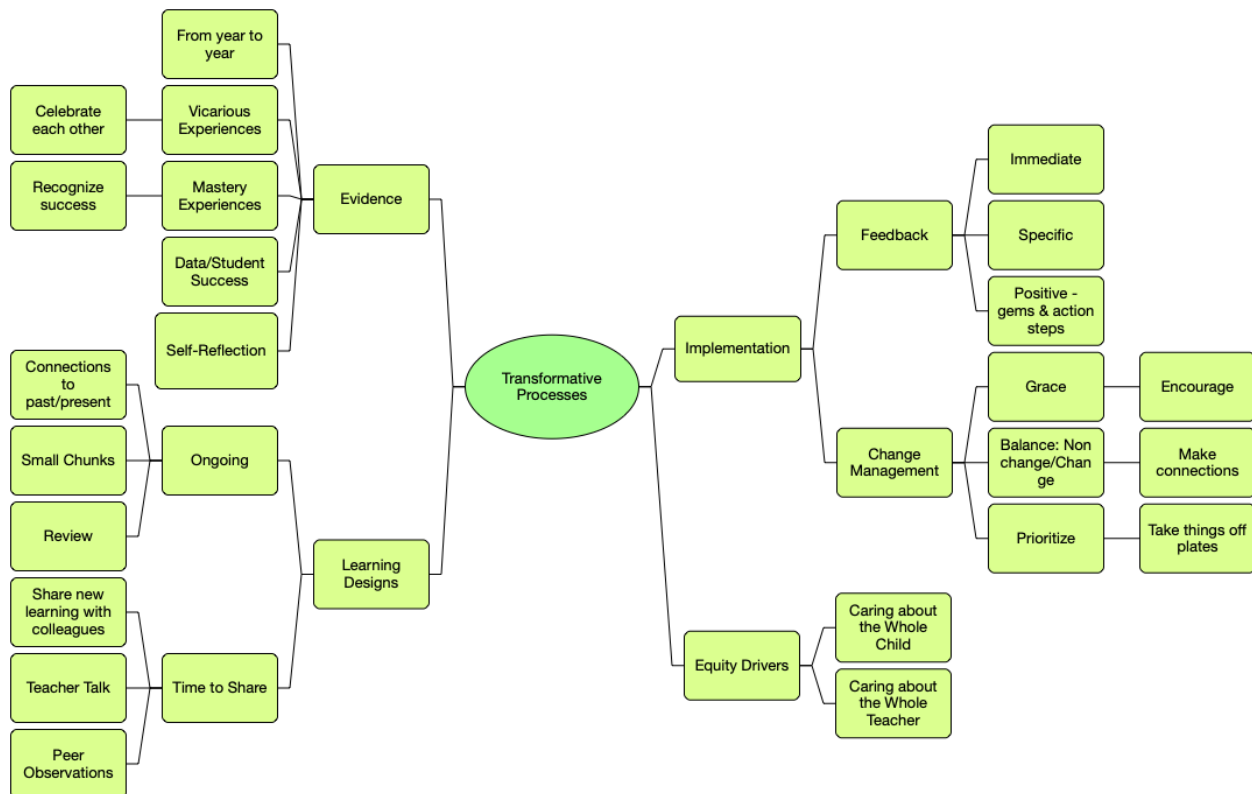
Under the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry category, it was clear that mid-career teachers need to feel valued and that they belong in order to take risks and be vulnerable with their colleagues. Communication and listening fell under multiple categories. It is essential that mid-career teachers feel heard, and leaders listen and respond with clarity. Resources were mentioned in an interview and acknowledged in the coding process; however, its status did not hold the same weight in the Culture for Collaborative Inquiry category. Leadership themes and building culture themes dominated the perception of importance to mid-career teachers' growth.

Repeatedly, teacher and leadership participants shared how the professional health of a mid-career teacher is reliant on the health of the building culture. As one teacher concluded, “It keeps coming back to that shared learning. I really think we learn from each other, and we want to learn from each other. Being in that kind of open community is the place you want to stay.” The culture must be established as a place teachers enjoy learning with and from one another.

Figure 18 highlights the collective responses and codes from all interviews and focus groups around the Transformational Processes frame. Transformational Processes contain categories of evidence, implementation, learning designs, and equity drivers. While equity drivers’ codes were not coded with the same frequency as feedback and different aspects of learning designs, it is important to note that when professional learning is equitable for teachers, it promotes higher levels of equity for students. As mentioned previously in the chapter, when teachers consider evidence of their own learning, they point to more sources than student achievement scores. It is also evident in the parent code that evidence of each other’s successes was celebrated by colleagues and positively impacted their culture.

Figure 18

Transformational Processes Coding Mind Map



Note: This mind map was created from all data sources to illustrate the themes of Transformational Processes in what mid-career teachers need to develop professional capital.

Feedback was mentioned with such prominence during discussions around implementation, that it became the focus of follow up interviews. It was evident that teachers valued feedback, but also had specific approaches they preferred to receiving it. Three main ideas formed under feedback: (1) timing matters, (2) specificity matters, and (3) format matters. Teachers wanted the feedback to come early in the implementation process. It needed to feel more immediate while their learning was fresh, and their efforts had momentum. They want feedback to be specific so that they know exactly what to improve on. They preferred feedback

to include both things that are going well and areas for improvement. Finally, feedback was more easily accepted from leaders and peers with whom they have rapport.

Several elements of change theory were also mentioned by leadership and teachers. While not specifically referenced, teachers and leaders feel it is important to recognize when change is going to be second order change for an individual. They acknowledged that the level of change is personal for the individual.

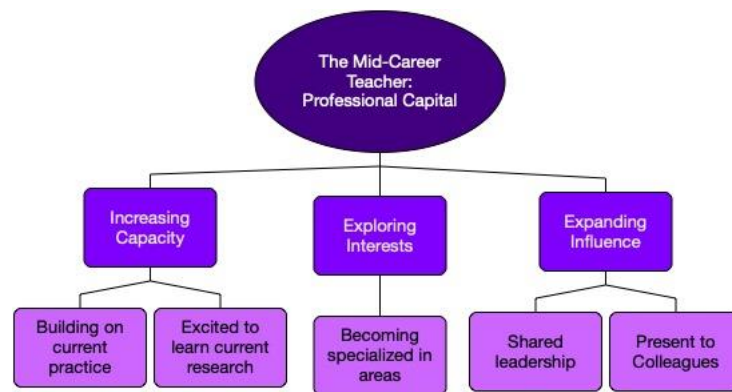
While reviewing the data for learning designs, the dominant idea shared by participants focused on chunk and review. Teachers mentioned with great frequency that their learning needs to be delivered in bite-sized pieces and time must be allowed to digest the new information. Without this additional time to process, they were not as effective at implementing. It was also critical that connections are made to the common vision and other PLD occurring in the school. There was additional overlap with Cultures of Collaborative Inquiry and goal setting. The teachers felt strongly that if they could set goals and have time to implement and practice with feedback, they would have the opportunity to show more evidence of success.

During the coding process, the implication of the mid-career stage became more apparent. The mid-career teachers would have responded differently if they were in their early stages or late stages of the profession. When asked how their current career stage affected their responses to the interview questions, all the teacher participants acknowledged that if they had been in their first five years of teaching, their answers would have changed. At the mid-career stage, the teachers felt the change in perspective was gradual and almost unnoticeable. Being at the mid-career stage, also enabled these teachers to better handle and respond to teaching during the pandemic. The mid-career teachers also reflected on how their needs in professional learning settings changed from stage to stage.

The mid-career stage proved to be an exceptional time for accepting change and applying professional learning. Below is a figure of themes specific to the mid-career stage: (1) increasing capacity, (2) exploring interests, and (3) expanding influence.

Figure 19

The Mid-Career Teacher



Note: This mind map was created from all data sources to illustrate the themes unique to mid-career teachers.

Mid-career teachers view professional learning as opportunities to increase their capacity. They were not as easily overwhelmed with new information as they were in their earlier career stage. Increasing capacity, exploring interests, and expanding influence comprised the three major themes from the data which illuminated the potential for high professional capital in the mid-career stage.

The leaders and professional developers also mentioned the uniqueness of the mid-career stage and the themes were the same (i.e., increasing capacity, exploring interests, and expanding influence). The building principals spoke of the benefit of helping mid-career teachers explore their interests and how this resulted in expanding influences and increasing capacities. The

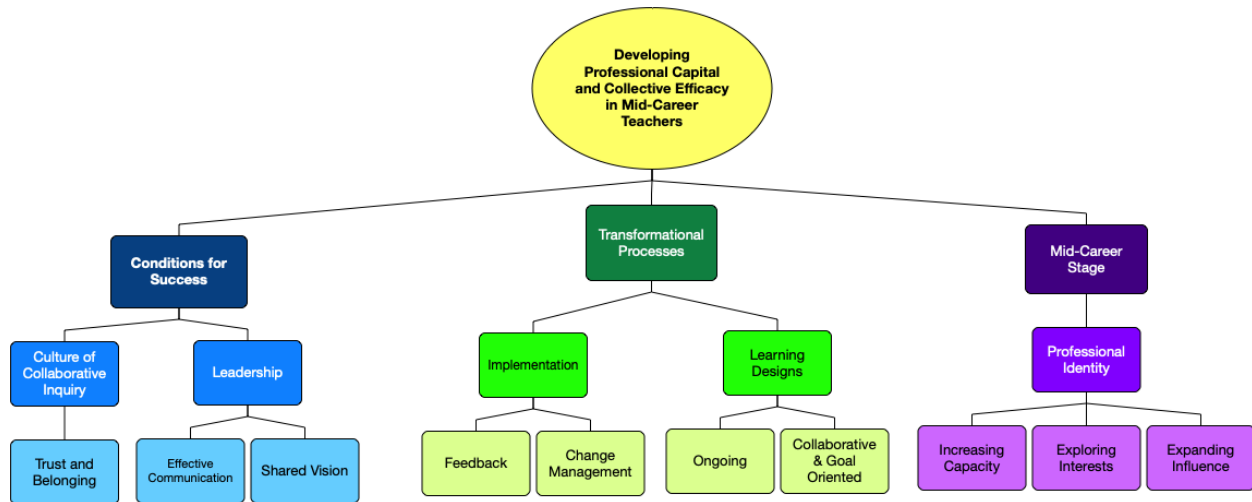
professional development trainer reinforced how impactful mid-career teachers can be as influencers among the staff.

In returning to the data for a final analysis, I followed Saldaña's (2011) process of coding, categorizing, theming, and finding major concepts. I revisited the categories and themes identified in previous figures. The major concepts of the data are included in the conceptual frames, Conditions for Success and Transformational Processes, and corresponding standards in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). While I began coding with priori codes around the standards, nothing was forced in my data analysis process. However, it was evident that many of the concepts in the standards were considerations important to these participants who had little knowledge of the new standards.

A final and meaningful consolidation of the themes representing the most significant codes and categories in the overarching concepts is displayed in Figure 20. Figure 20 illustrates the final analysis of the data. The major concepts: (1) Conditions for Success, (2) Transformational Processes, and (3) The Mid-career Stage each have nesting themes with standout ideas to help define them.

Figure 20

Combined Overarching Themes



Note: This mind map presents the final analysis of the data bringing together Conditions for Success, Transformational Processes, and the Mid-career Teacher.

While there were several codes within each category and more categories were represented in the data, the themes listed under the major concepts in this final analysis were most significant in the data. The themes of this study can be narrowed down to the bottom tier in the mind map. For mid-career teachers to develop their professional capital and collective efficacy even during times of stress, a culture of trust and belonging must be present, and leadership must communicate effectively with a focus on the established shared vision. The data highlights that professional learning is most meaningful and effectively implemented when it is ongoing, collaborative, goal-oriented, and uses constructive feedback. In addition, leaders must have a pulse on what support teachers need to move successfully through second-order change and manage stressors. Finally, the mid-career teaching stage is an optimal time to develop one's professional identity. During this stage, teachers can most readily increase their capacity, explore interests, and expand their influence.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings for the data collected from four mid-career teachers, two building principals, and PLD provider aligned with the themes of the Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2022). Each of the categories for Conditions for Success and Transformational Processes were represented in the data. The participants successfully articulated the significance of a building's culture regarding adult learning success. Above all, they valued a sense of a belonging among their colleagues that pushed them to support one another in continued growth.

The data also expressed significant importance in a leader being able to effectively guide staff through change and transformation. The most significant aspects of implementation were feedback and change management. A leader's approach to either could mean success or failure for the implementation of impactful PLD.

Finally, when designing PLD for mid-career teachers, the teachers preferred that it be clearly connected to best praxis and the vision set collectively by the school. They desired for PLD to be a continual process of manageable content, goal setting, collaboration, processing and time for implementation, and review and reflection.

The mid-career stage is a meaningful opportunity for growth. The teacher participants admitted that their responses would have been different had they been in another career stage during the pandemic or during other intensive PLD experiences. Thus, it is paramount that we examine what makes this stage special for professional growth. When the culture is healthy, mid-career teachers face change and challenge with determination to improve their craft. They seek new interests and specializations. Often, they find ways to increase the influence or impact they have on their profession.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter is a summary of the study and recommendations for PLD practices with mid-career teachers. The chapter will summarize the research purpose and questions, methods used for the interview study, an overview of the data collected, and a synopsis of the major themes. It will conclude with implications for how leaders can effectively facilitate PLD for mid-career teachers to build their capacity for high levels of professional capital and collective efficacy and embrace times of major change. A discussion of future research to guide implementation practices for the betterment of PLD for all educators concludes the chapter.

Summary of the Study

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, educators across the United States endured higher levels of stress than ever before (Haider et al., 2020; Kush et al., 2022). The staff at the elementary school highlighted in this study experienced a strong sense of collective efficacy and professional growth during this same time. While acknowledging the stress happening at this time in education, the mid-career teacher has the greatest capacity for professional growth if in the right setting (Day, 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; L. Lambert, 2002). Therefore, this study examined mid-career teachers' perceptions on the development of their individual professional capital and cohesive collective efficacy from an elementary school which saw noteworthy professional growth during trying times. The data is anchored in the conceptual framework of the professional learning standards.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study was to explore how four mid-career teachers in a Midwestern elementary school perceived the role of PLD as it related to their individual professional capital

and collective teacher efficacy reflective of the time before, during, and after the Covid-19 Pandemic. The overarching research question which guided this study was:

How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and development and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

The four mid-career teachers selected for this study participated as teacher lead-learners during a two-year PLD experience. The past and present building principals were also interviewed for this study to give perspective on how leadership creates an optimal culture and PLD experiences for mid-career teachers to reach higher levels of professional capital. Additionally, perspectives from the professional development trainer who provided professional learning and support to the school's QLDS process as well as the perspectives from the building's instructional coach provided additional information on what is important in PLD designs for mid-career teachers.

The study found intersecting themes between the perceptions and actions of mid-career teachers, principals, and professional learning trainers as they developed the individual professional capital and collective efficacy in a system of school-based educators. The study also explored the specific categories of creating conditions of success and transformational processes for PLD and identified which held the greatest value for the mid-career teachers, building leaders, and PLD providers.

As a result of the study, teachers expressed that professional learning and development needs to occur in a supportive culture where mid-career teachers feel valued and a strong sense of belonging. Leaders need to be clear communicators who help manage change by understanding the individual needs of their staff while keeping the focus on a positive shared

vision. When adult learning is facilitated with best praxis, mid-career teachers have transformational experiences that grow their professional capital and produce collective efficacy. This study is a positive example of how staying committed to the professional growth of mid-teachers, providing experiences which align to concepts of the Learning Forward (2022) Standards for Professional Learning, and cultivating a supportive culture can help weather the most chaotic change.

Overview of Methods and Data Collection

Each mid-career classroom teacher was interviewed twice individually and once as a focus group. Similarly, the building principals were interviewed once individually and once as a focus group. The first interviews for both teachers and principals were designed with open-ended questions around the Standards for Professional Learning category Conditions for Success (see Appendix H). These questions were designed to better understand the impact culture has on PLD. A follow up interview was given for each teacher to elaborate on their comments in the first interview, specifically with a deeper dive in the areas of feedback and trust. The focus groups examined the concepts included in the standards' Transformational Processes category to better understand how leaders can support teachers through complex change, such as the Covid-19 Pandemic with effective PLD. Finally, the outside professional development provider was given one in-person interview with a set of questions around both Conditions for Success and Transformational Processes to help understand what should be considered when designing PLD for mid-career teachers.

After each interview and focus group, transcripts were coded. The codes were grouped with similar concepts and prevailing themes. The data was revisited numerous times to consider and weigh the findings in the data analysis process.

Synopsis of Major Findings Related to the Literature

It is evident that the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) are readily considered meaningful by practitioners in the educational setting. The standards as a conceptual framework for this study allowed the emerging themes from the data to be categorized across the standards. However, as the data were analyzed, there were various degrees of significance for standards contained within the Conditions for Success and Transformational Processes. The findings from the themes are summarized below.

Trust and Belonging. The most significant theme from the data from all participants was that the building culture must support adult-learning through trust and belonging. A healthy building culture is multi-faceted. A sense of belonging is one of the contributors to a strong school culture. However, it was clear that a sense of belonging was valued by the mid-career teachers above all else. The literature supports this idea. A sense of belonging and collective trust has proven to have many beneficial outcomes in promoting collective efficacy. Forsyth et al (2011) explains, “high collective efficacy, in turn, stimulates teachers to set challenging student goals, to work harder, to persist longer in their teaching, to be resilient when they confront difficulties, and to seek and use constructive feedback” (p. 89). The teachers at this elementary school saw similar positive consequences due to the trust and belonging they felt among the staff.

As the literature stated, trust can be exhibited by benevolence, honesty, reliability, competence, and openness (Hallam et al., 2015; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Benevolence is the care of one another and the presumption of positive intent. When benevolence is shared, people feel valued. Feeling valued by colleagues and leadership was mentioned multiple times in the findings. Similar to the teachers in the Hallam et al. (2015) study who responded best when

teammates offered patience and understanding during professional learning, the teachers in this study also explained that they needed grace and understanding from their peers and leaders. They expressed how having a non-judgmental team was necessary for taking new risks. The mid-career teachers in this study also shared how they value honesty and openness from their teammates and leaders. They valued the expectations held for working together to be overt, clear, and consistent, so that everyone could be honest and open with one another. As Lambert et al. (2016) hypothesized, this transparency encouraged vulnerability in these teachers; and therefore, they were able to be more innovative with their PLD.

While trust is important laterally among colleagues, it is also imperative that employees trust their supervisors (Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). Each teacher expressed that the trust and belonging they felt with the school's leadership allowed them to grow professionally at greater rates. The leaders in this study also shared how important it was to build trusting relationships with staff to nurture this growth. The principals suggested doing this by taking invested interests in the personal and professional lives of teachers.

Leadership and Change Management. While the standards separate leadership and change management into the Conditions for Success and Transformational Processes categories respectively, one cannot ignore the overlap. Mid-career teachers need leaders with whom they feel belonging to effectively lead them through times of change.

The participants of this study shared how important their leaders' clear communication style was especially while undergoing significant change. The literature confirms that leading change successfully must include clear communication as detailed in McREL International's 21 Leadership Responsibilities (Goodwin et al., 2015). Clear communication is also prominent in major leadership styles indicative of transformational leadership or shared leadership (Goodwin

et al., 2015; Waters & Cameron, 2007). The principals in this study spoke about how important ongoing conversations and accessibility is for teachers' continual growth. Similarly, the mid-career teachers appreciated how accessible their leaders were during the pandemic especially.

Furthermore, the communication from the mid-career teachers' principals exemplified a clear vision and constant reinforcement of agreed upon values. This enabled teachers to set a purposeful path forward, connecting new learning to desired goals as well as intentionally looking for evidence of their efforts. The critical role of a shared vision is another prominent leadership skill in the literature. Cetin and Kinik (2016) espoused how leadership should focus on using a common set of beliefs to build a purposeful community. A purposeful community provides a safe and encouraging environment that allows people to share openly, challenge assumptions, and move towards shared purpose and productive outcomes. Interviews with leaders in this study who saw success during the pandemic stayed committed to their shared vision and beliefs of their school systems, not on the vast number of distractors (Prothero, 2021). Similarly, the teachers in this study felt that they were able to accept change, focus on what they could control, and stay committed during the pandemic because their leadership continually directed the focus towards professional learning and their shared vision and goals.

When considering change, the leaders in this study discussed the importance of knowing the preferences of their staff and adapting to what each individual needed. This form of change management employs the Balanced Leadership's situational awareness responsibility (Waters & Cameron, 2007). It is also necessary for administrators to understand what constitutes first-order and second-order change for each teacher and adjust accordingly. While the principals in the study did not explicitly discuss first- or second-order change, they alluded to the concepts when they explained how some changes require more of their teachers' time and perseverance than

others and commented on how they adjusted as leaders. The mid-career teachers also discussed how it was impactful for their administrators to recognize when change was really challenging their identities. As explained by Goodwin et al (2015), individuals experience a transition between resistance and exploration during second-order change and these transitions are highly personal. Therefore, the teachers shared how different PLD experiences or shifts in praxis had caused the greatest challenge for them during change. When undergoing second-order change, these teachers needed their principal to be aware of the challenge, exhibit patience, and provide lots of positive feedback.

Feedback and Evidence. While the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) expound on feedback under the implementation standard, feedback is mentioned in several of the standards. Leaders must give consistent, positive feedback for implementation. Feedback should be part of the culture of collaboration, even when exploring peer feedback models to improve practice and solve problems (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). Feedback is part of a learning design that increases efficacy (Goddard et al., 2004). Feedback can also be a catalyst for identifying evidence.

Feedback was mentioned over and over by the mid-career teachers as a necessary ingredient to their professional capital. This concept of feedback as an adult-learning strategy has been reported by The Learning Policy Institute's meta-analysis of effective teacher professional development strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2019). The teachers discussed how feedback needed to be consistent, timely, and positive.

Similar to the study by Liu and Gumah (2020), the mid-career teachers explained that the feedback must be perceived as beneficial and accurate to be accepted by its recipient. The teachers in this study preferred that the feedback be strongly connected to recent professional

learning and given in a positive manner. If the feedback was worded poorly, teachers shared that it did not have the same impact. Therefore, the teachers suggested that leaders and peers include feedback that highlights what is going well and what needs improvement. Ongoing feedback can be an impactful tool to increase teachers' confidence and competence.

Learning Designs: Sustained Duration and Best Praxis. As the mid-career teachers explained what is important to their growth in PLD designs, a reoccurring response was the need for content to be chunked into understandable amounts and reviewed often. This approach also allowed for processing time, an opportunity to implement new learning, and reflection.

Analogous to what the teachers advocated, the Learning Policy Institute released a report in 2017 which analyzed numerous studies on what constitutes effective teacher PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The analysis identified seven common features for effective PLD. These elements included a focus on content, incorporation of active learning strategies, collaboration, modeling effective practice, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The studies used for the report were never one and done programs but rather week-, month- or year-long programs for professional learning. The teachers' PD providers in these studies agreed that adult learning needs to happen over extended time to influence classroom practices.

Goal setting and reflection are central factors to ongoing, quality professional learning. Authors confirm there is a strong link between collective goal setting and collective efficacy (Hite & Donohoo, 2021; Locke & Latham, 2019). The standards suggest that "educators develop shared goals and then document, collaboratively analyze, and improve their practices, reflecting together along the way" (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 60). This practice establishes a process for continued growth and teacher effectiveness. The mid-career teachers in this study shared how

being goal-oriented and reflective allowed them to focus their efforts, build confidence, and move toward mastery sooner.

The standard for Learning Designs (Learning Forward, 2022) also insists that professional learning for teachers be built on the same theories as student learning. Multiple times during the interviews, the teachers referred to their classroom practices as a guide for adult learning. Hattie (2009) stated that if we expect learning targets and objectives to be a beneficial practice in the classroom, we can expect it to be a beneficial practice for professional learning among teachers. Understanding what is best for student learning is key to understanding best praxis for teacher growth (Given & DePorter, 2015).

The mid-career teachers in the interviews and focus group also talked about the power of peer observations and learning as collaborative teams. Peer observations is a popular approach to professional learning. The sources of efficacy – physiological cues, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and mastery experiences – are tightly connected to peer interactions and observation (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). When opportunities for collaborative learning are available to teachers, their social capital is growing.

Professional Identity and Expertise. Both the leaders and the mid-career teachers acknowledged the benefit of autonomy in PLD practices. Knight (2021) advocates the importance of allowing teachers some autonomy in setting professional goals. However, the data from the participants in this study revealed some incongruency and unexpected findings on honoring individual teacher goals and interests. The mid-career teachers admitted that they became more divergent from basic pedagogy and more specialized in certain areas as they gained more experience. They voiced appreciation for the opportunity to chase an interest, attend outside conferences or trainings, and have a say in what they are learning as professionals.

However, they also saw great value in learning together around common goals and receiving related training in their school building. The teachers affirmed feelings of frustration when they did not see new professional learning connected with agreed-upon goals or relevant to their building.

The leaders had a very similar dissonance allowing teachers autonomy and presenting common learning experiences. This can be a juggling act for leaders. The leaders explained that it is necessary to have a shared vision, but that it is just as important to push teachers to find their individual passion. The leaders in this study alluded to helping teachers find their professional identities and professional agency as an important part of PLD practices and growth.

Though the impact of teacher autonomy to follow individual interests and goals as a means to build commitment and engagement cannot be ignored, some authors refer to providing professional teacher choice and the power to act on them as a means to developing teacher agency (Vahasantanen, 2014). Professional agency can be built by giving teachers a voice in participating in educational efforts and acknowledging that each adult learner has different needs (Etelapelto et al., 2013). The school in this study sought teacher input and commitment prior to embarking on the QLDS journey and in other professional development trainings. Professional agency and efficacious behavior go together; when one believes in what they are doing, they find a way to make it happen. This sense of agency is related to a teacher's identity.

Day et al. (2005) describes teachers' values-based identities as "strongly held purposes and principles of care and commitment to pupils' learning and achievement" (p. 575). These identities are developed in early career stages, but the health of the individual can determine if a teacher will grow or plateau in the mid-career stage (Day et al., 2005; Huberman, 1989). The principals in this study supported the teachers in finding their professional capital ensuring

teachers did not plateau during the mid-career stage. The principals established consensus on the agreed upon goals for the QLDS platform and then balanced these common goals with developing individual teacher strengths and interests. Through this process, the principals increased teacher commitment to the QLDS goals, respected individual teacher passion, and supported commitment to the profession during the challenges of change (Day et al., 2005).

In addition to focusing on a teacher's individual capital, the principals in the study also continued to focus on continual improvement. The teachers discussed how having well organized and ongoing professional learning around pedagogical goals during the pandemic gave them a positive focus. Similarly, Gu and Day (2006) discussed that a "shift in focus from teacher stress and burnout to resilience provides a promising perspective to understand the ways that teachers manage and sustain their motivation and commitment in times of change" (p. 1302). Again, individual capital and agency is an important factor for perseverance (Bandura, 1989). Understanding how a teacher's efficacy and identity impact his or her motivation and commitment is crucial. And the greatest underlying influencer is the environment (Gu & Day, 2006). Within the environment, teachers need meaningful events and positive influences to shape and mold resiliency and commitment (Seemiller & Priest, 2015). Thus, a school leader must strive to develop a positive culture with embedded professional learning opportunities where teachers can find a way to contribute in unique and expressive ways.

Even though the Rigorous Content for Each Learner frame and standards were not a focus in this study, the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) still embrace concepts to support the creation of educators' professional knowledge. The Professional Expertise standard is comprised of strategies to build individual and collective efficacy: applying relevant research, strengthening discipline-specific expertise, and sustaining coherence and alignment. It suggests

that professional learning is differentiated to match the distinct needs of each educator. Educators should also set and work towards their long-term career goals by embracing professional challenges and new roles to match their goals. While this standard branches into other concepts, it would assist mid-career teachers' desire to follow specialized interests or experiment with new strategies and research.

Implications

This study has significant implications for current practice. It solidifies the research and practicality of Learning Forward's (2022) Standards for Professional Learning. It highlights the effects of a healthy culture on professional capital. It provides leaders with strategies to support mid-career teachers during times of change and it gives insight into learning designs for ongoing, meaningful PLD. The following are implications for mid-career teachers and leaders: apply the professional learning standards, integrate the professional learning standards, increase teacher commitment with trust and belonging, provide the gift of time, meet the unique needs of mid-career teachers, provide quality feedback, and plan and facilitate purposeful PLD.

Share, Apply, and Integrate the Professional Learning Standards. It is important for educational leaders to harness the expert knowledge included in the professional learning standards and share these with teachers. When teachers are introduced to the current standards for professional learning, they can be advocates for research-based professional learning. With this knowledge, teachers will have the tools to build their teacher leadership capacity and become instructional leaders.

Even though the experiences of the participant group happened prior to the release of the 2022 Standards for Professional Learning, this study provides an example of how best practice includes the concepts, theories, and strategies mentioned in the standards. The participants

displayed a preference for particular components in the standards; however, each standard in the Conditions for Success and the Transformational Processes categories were mentioned. It is explicit in the findings that the standards around collaborative inquiry is foremost in developing collective efficacy.

There is also evidence that the standards are intricately connected and reliant on one another. Without competent leadership, a culture of learning cannot be developed or sustained. Without effective learning designs, professional learning will not be implemented in ways which result in improving selected strategies or school improvement initiatives. Without effective implementation and feedback, there will be no evidence of effective teaching practices or change. The standards must be applied in complete orchestration.

Increase Commitment with Trust and Belonging. The participants in this study made it apparent how critical a healthy building culture is for teacher success and thus, student success. The teachers expressed a strong desire to feel belonging in the community of learners in order to be completely vulnerable in embracing new ways of thinking and doing. If teachers do not feel safe to take risks, their learning is stifled. This sense of community contributed to the acquisition of professional capital and collective efficacy amongst these mid-career teachers. Due to the expressed concern for one another and their commitment to the profession, the professional learning goals and strong learning designs provided the impetus to weather teaching during the pandemic with continued growth. This study confirms that investing in building relationships that create strong professional and personal bonds between colleagues is an imperative task for school leaders.

The study suggests that a sense of belonging begins in the hiring process. Leaders should hire for *fit* regarding shared vision and beliefs about learning, classroom culture, and agreed upon

goals. However, it is important to be mindful that hiring for fit does not limit opportunities and representation of diversity and divergent thinking. Leaders must recognize the need for a diverse staff and how inclusion builds an even richer culture. The healthiest cultures maintain a sense of belonging and promote value among all while encouraging the exploration of new ideas and innovative practices.

Provide the Gift of Time. In creating a culture of belonging, time is a key ingredient. The school schedule must allow for common plan time, time to learn together, and time to socialize. Communication is also essential in healthy learning communities. There needs to be clear, explicit, and consistent transparency between staff and leaders. The leaders need to be accessible to the staff especially when managing complex change. Listening to one another is paramount.

Meet the Needs of the Mid-career Teacher. Mid-career teachers are unique. They have a level of decisional capital that teachers in earlier career stages do not (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Sometimes mid-career teachers have more outside pressure that can sometimes distract from career goals, such as raising families. This knowledge requires empathetic administrators to help mid-career teachers find balance between work and home (Day, 2012, 2017; Day et al., 2005). However, when mid-career teachers are in the right culture, they can grow exponentially and find their professional capital and provide the leadership necessary to help others build collective efficacy (Day, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; L. Lambert et al., 2016). Mid-career teachers tend to be more comfortable in their professional identity but are also more excited to learn new strategies (Hargreaves, 2005). Therefore, it is vital that PDL providers plan with the mid-career teacher in mind. In practice, PLD might look like differentiation to meet the needs of the mid-career teacher, specialization to allow them to

explore interests, or additional roles and leadership opportunities for them to expand their professional influence. If leaders want to retain teachers, they should consider effective PLD and other impactful experiences that will increase teacher commitment and growth rather than result in a missed opportunity and plateaued progress.

Provide Quality Feedback. Another way to encourage mid-career teachers in continued growth is to provide frequent, positive, and pointed feedback. Setting and reflecting on goals keeps learning fresh for teachers. If leaders want to see implementation of building initiatives, they need to be in classrooms providing observation and feedback to teachers. Creating the conditions for teachers to observe one another is another beneficial approach to increase understanding of current practice. This learning design will build collective efficacy through vicarious experiences and social persuasion (Donohoo & Katz, 2017, 2019).

Plan and Facilitate Purposeful PLD. A final implication of this study is the awareness that PDL must be purposeful and meaningful for classroom teachers. The study reveals there needs to be a distinct link between the shared vision, teachers' goals, and professional learning. Effective PDL should be given in understandable amounts that allow teachers time to process and implement before moving on to other initiatives. Professional learning, therefore, should occur for a sustained duration. When leaders observe signs of distress or feelings of being overwhelmed, they should respond with the necessary adjustments indicative of understanding and managing complex change.

The professional learning standards (Learning Forward, 2022) provide school leaders with an essential guide for what matters most in developing quality professional learning opportunities for teachers. This study confirms the practical foundation on which the standards reside when applied to real teachers and real principals. Mid-career teachers develop strong

professional capital and collective efficacy when they feel a sense of belonging and support allowing them to take positive professional risks to benefit student learning. No learner develops or thrives without a supportive culture made possible with the foundation of well-implemented professional learning standards.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study highlighted numerous opportunities for further research. In summary, there are additional opportunities for interview studies focused on the other standards; research for effects of ongoing professional learning; research of how other career stages respond to PLD and process significant changes in practice; research of the standards in more diverse groups of teachers; and interview studies on developing belonging among staff.

Focus on Additional Standards. This study focused on two of the three frames in the Standards for Professional Learning (2022). The standard for Rigorous Content for Each Learner was not a focal point of this study. Although this study touched on building capacity through research, trainings, and leadership roles, the standard specifically aligns with research on professional expertise and individual identity development. Therefore, it is important to delve deeper into how this professional learning standard specifically impacts the professional capital of mid-career teachers through the development of “professional judgement that deepens their expertise and informs habits and practice” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 28). This deeper focus aligns with Hargreaves and Fullan’s (2012) equation for how decisional capital contributes to the development of professional capital. The researcher suggests the following question to explore this complex intersection: How does developing a mid-career teacher’s professional expertise impact the trajectory of their career and their professional identity?

Investigate the Impact of Calendars and Schedules. A second recommendation for research centers around the question: How does a school system determine how often and how long should PLD be in place to be effective? From this study, mid-career teachers determined that sustained duration is preferred for PLD and clearly identified that implementation effectiveness is impacted by consistent and frequent use of new learning. The Midwestern elementary school in this study has eight days devoted to collaborative PLD along with monthly staff meetings devoted to professional learning. Participation in year-round book studies is also an option. Some schools or districts do less, and others do more. It would be beneficial to see more research on what is ideal for school systems and building leaders to achieve results on target goals from sustained PLD. This has an impact on calendar development, teacher unions, and funding.

Explore the Perspectives of Other Career Stages. The third recommendation for research is an examination of how a teacher's career-stage impacts their perception of the quality and effectiveness of various professional learning experiences. The focus of this study was on mid-career teachers. Professional learning providers and school leaders would benefit from an examination of how PLD impacts each level of the specific career stages of teachers. A study of this type would help clarify equity for staff development based on career stages and offer insight into how providers and leaders can best differentiate their approach, content, or feedback as needed.

Another helpful angle would be to consider how teachers at each career stage process and deal with major changes in their practice. An example for the mid-career teachers in this study was the shift from balanced literacy instruction to structured literacy instruction. Day (2012) and the VITAE project suggests that a teacher's years of experience and the types of experiences

have some effect on their resilience and professional identity. Thus, it would be important to deepen our understanding of this connection to provide the best experiences for each career stage and understand what contributes to the quality of teachers' professional lives.

Apply the Study to a More Diverse Context. A limitation of this study is that it was performed in a rather homogenous setting. The school is a suburban school with a student population 74% white and a staff who is also mostly white and female. Mid-career teachers and leaders in schools who serve more diverse populations and schools indicative of a more diverse staff might have different priorities or perceptions about professional learning that has increased their professional capital. Likewise, the school in this study was not highly diverse in economic demographics (28% economically disadvantaged and 72.5% non-economically disadvantaged). A school who serves in an area with more economic disparity might respond to the research question posed in this study differently. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to perform this study in another school who thrived during the pandemic but in a more diverse setting.

Concluding Statements

The Covid-19 Pandemic was a trying time for education, yet the school in this study recorded a remarkably different experience. The study revealed a professional learning journey marked by a strong and supportive school culture that began before the pandemic. The strong bonds among staff and responsive leadership allowed teachers in this environment to thrive as they pushed through difficult and at times, unknown territory marked by rapidly changing expectations. Despite these challenges, the mid-career teachers studied in this research, continued to grow from identified and sustained PLD that moved their practice to deep levels of implementation. The mid-career stage for educators can be a period of considerable growth when the culture is right and the experiences effective. Therefore, the researcher sought to understand

the perspectives of the mid-career teachers around the professional learning experiences having the greatest impact on their professional capital and collective efficacy during significant change.

The major themes emerging from this qualitative study highlighted the essential role a healthy culture plays in the growth of a mid-career teacher. Teachers must feel belonging and trust to take risks required for learning. Teachers also prefer to learn with peers which is a learning design that demands professional trust. Leaders must be trusted for teachers to follow during times of change. Mid-career teachers identified the importance of a shared vision and the important role of feedback.

In addition to a healthy culture and a strong sense of belonging, themes emerged around quality professional development. Gone should be the days of one-and-done, sit-and-get PD. The PLD practices respected by mid-career teachers in this study consisted of research-based best praxis happening over time. The role of school leaders in developing supportive cultures and effective professional learning experiences is evident. A clear connection between culture and PLD for mid-career teachers exists and serves to develop high levels of professional growth where teachers exhibit resilience, trust, and attitude to cope during high level change.

As the teachers and leaders in this study verified, the Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2022) serve as a solid rock to guide PLD practices that impact schools in positive ways when considered and implemented with fidelity. As the standards work in tandem, they can serve to help leaders create a culture and professional learning experiences which positively impact the professional capital and collectively efficacy of mid-career teachers.

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Appendix A - Informed Consent Letters

Letter to the Teacher Participants

Dear Teacher,

I am conducting research for my dissertation with the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University. My research is an interview study of the leadership practices and professional learning experiences of participating in a Quantum Learning Distinguished School during the 2019-2021 school years. The research purpose is to investigate how the concepts included in Learning Forward's updated Standards for Professional Learning (2022) have impacted your personal professional capital (your growth as a professional) and the building's collective teacher efficacy (how the staff collectively believes they can positively impact students) through your experience.

This study will be used to help professional learning and development leaders understand how to use the conceptual frameworks described in the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) to impact the professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers. Educators could reference this study to see how factors in your experience impacted your personal growth and apply it to a greater context.

You have been selected to participate because you are a mid-career teacher in your 8th-15th year of education who acted as a lead learner during the QLDS process. Should you choose to participate in the study, I will interview you twice as an individual. You will also participate in a focus group which will meet once to respond to additional questions. Background information and the questions will be provided to you upon accepting a role in the study. Each session will be in person unless community health concerns require us to meet online. We will establish a time that will work for all of us.

There is minimal anticipated physical or psychological risk for the study participants. While confidentiality will be observed and participants will be given pseudonyms, I cannot guarantee confidentiality during the focus group. All data will be kept on a password protected computer and destroyed after three years. You will have the opportunity to review the data and transcripts of your interviews. I will share all findings with you.

Please sign the form attached to give written consent. There is no penalty for refusing to participate in the study and you may leave the study at any time. If you have questions or need clarification, you may contact me.

Thank you,

Laura E. Hurla

Letter to the Leadership Participants

Dear Principal,

I am conducting research for my dissertation with the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University. My research is an interview study of the leadership practices and professional learning experiences of participating in a Quantum Learning Distinguished School during the 2019-2021 school years. The research purpose is to investigate how the concepts included in Learning Forward's updated Standards for Professional Learning (2022) have impacted the personal professional capital and the building's collective teacher efficacy of its mid-career teachers.

This study will be used to help professional learning and development leaders understand how to use the conceptual frameworks described in the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) to impact the professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers. Educators could reference this study to see how leadership impacts the professional growth of mid-career teachers and apply it to a greater context.

You have been selected to participate because of your leadership at this elementary school. Should you choose to participate in the study, I will interview you individually once. You will also participate in a leadership focus group which will meet once to respond to additional questions. Background information and the questions will be provided to you upon accepting a role in the study. Each session will be in person unless community health concerns require us to meet online. We will establish a time that will work for all of us.

There is minimal anticipated physical or psychological risk for the study participants. While confidentiality will be observed and participants will be given pseudonyms, I cannot guarantee confidentiality during the focus group. All data will be kept on a password protected

computer and destroyed after three years. You will have the opportunity to review the data and transcripts of your interviews. I will share all findings with you.

Please sign the form attached to give written consent. There is no penalty for refusing to participate in the study and you may leave the study at any time. If you have questions or need clarification, you may contact me.

Thank you,

Laura E. Hurla

Letter to the PLD Trainer Participant

Dear Quantum Learning Facilitator/Trainer,

I am conducting research for my dissertation with the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University. My research is an interview study of the leadership practices and professional learning experiences of participating in a Quantum Learning Distinguished School during the 2019-2021 school years. The research purpose is to investigate how the concepts included in Learning Forward's updated Standards for Professional Learning (2022) have impacted the personal professional capital and the building's collective teacher efficacy of its mid-career teachers.

This study will be used to help professional learning and development leaders understand how to use the conceptual frameworks described in the Standards for Professional Learning (2022) to impact the professional capital and collective efficacy of mid-career teachers. Educators could reference this study to see how leadership and design of professional learning impacted the professional growth of mid-career teachers and apply it to a greater context.

You have been selected to participate because of your role in designing, implementing, and coaching through the QLDS process. Should you choose to participate in the study, I will interview you individually once. We will meet over Zoom due to our differences in location. We will establish a time that will work for both of us. Background information and the questions will be provided to you upon accepting a role in the study.

There is minimal anticipated physical or psychological risk for the study participants. While confidentiality will be observed and participants will be given pseudonyms, I explicitly identify Quantum Learning throughout the dissertation. All data will be kept on a password

protected computer and destroyed after three years. You will have the opportunity to review the data and transcripts of your interviews. I will share all findings with you.

Please sign the form attached to give written consent. There is no penalty for refusing to participate in the study and you may leave the study at any time. If you have questions or need clarification, you may contact me.

Thank you,

Laura E. Hurla

IRB Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE:

Professional Learning Standards in Practice: A Study of How the Standards Develop Professional Capital and Collective Efficacy in Mid-Career Teachers During Change

**PROJECT
APPROVAL
DATE:**

8/2022

**PROJECT
EXPIRATION
DATE:**

8/2023

**LENGTH OF
STUDY:**

1 year

**PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR:**

Laura Hurla

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR
PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

PROJECT SPONSOR:

Dr. Donna Augustine-Shaw

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this study is to explore how four mid-career teachers in a suburban Midwestern elementary school perceive the role of PLD as it relates to their individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy. The study will explore the conditions preceding, during, and following the Covid-19 Pandemic. The overarching research question that guides this study is:

How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and development and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

This study will apply a qualitative-interview study of mid-career teachers' experiences with professional development and learning practices during times of significant change. The study will operationalize standards of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022) and the impact of these structures on the individual professional capital and collective teacher efficacy of mid-career teachers. The methodology of a responsive interview study will allow the researcher to dive deeper into each participant's individual meaning-making around given teaching

experiences and discover the contributing PLD and leadership factors that influenced his or her professional growth.

The participants will be recruited from a suburban Midwestern elementary school where a consistent, extensive, and measurable professional development model was in place from the 2019-2021 academic years. This school was chosen for its work with the Quantum Learning Network for Teachers to become a QLDS. Four participants who meet the following criteria will be recruited: general education classroom teachers with 8-15 years of experience and participated as lead learners in the QLDS (2019) process for professional development. The lead learners helped building leadership facilitator professional learning; of the six lead learners, four are considered mid-career, therefore, all four will serve as participants for the study. Each participant will be interviewed individually twice and meet once as a focus group. The past and present building principals will also be interviewed once and participate in a focus group to describe the role of leadership in creating conditions for success and leading transformational processes. Finally, the Quantum Learning professional development facilitator will be interviewed to provide an understanding of learning designs in PLD. I, as the researcher, am a member of the school's faculty and provided professional development as the school's instructional coach. Because of this role, I will answer the same questions I have prepared for the Quantum Learning professional development facilitator. I recognize that my own interpretation of the professional learning will have a constant presence in the research process. I will continually recognize my own perceptions and understanding through taking analytical notes.

Lastly, the study's findings will be developed and coded by themes to describe and represent the data collected. The thematic intersections of the three participant groups will be presented. The study's findings will assist the educational community in better understanding the role of professional learning standards in creating conditions for building individual professional capital and collective efficacy in mid-career teachers.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in person on the school site unless local health protocols require differently or long-distance, then interviews will be conducted over Zoom.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There is minimal anticipated physical or psychological risk for the study participants. Each participant is encouraged to share honestly and openly.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

This study will serve as social reality for the concepts of professional capital, collective teacher efficacy, and professional learning. It will provide a real-life experience for the constructs in the 2022 Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning. Finally, it will provide feedback and support to future challenges in education and how a focus on professional learning during crisis can positively impact a school's chance to thrive rather than just survive the crisis.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

While confidentiality will be observed and participants will be given pseudonyms, I cannot guarantee confidentiality during the focus group. I will mention Quantum Learning throughout the dissertation; therefore, I cannot guarantee anonymity.

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research could be used for future research studies or distributed to other investigators for future research studies without additional informed consent.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT
NAME:**

**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:**

**WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)**

DATE:

DATE:

Appendix B - Teacher Interview Protocol

Introduction to be shared with the interviewee:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am interested in learning about your perceptions of the leadership practices and professional development experiences as a mid-career teacher participating in a QLDS in 2019-2022. I really want to hear about what you felt was most important in the leadership practices and how you were impacted by the professional learning. Our time is meant to feel like a conversation. Please remember that I will keep what you share with me confidential, though I cannot promise anonymity. I encourage you to share your perceptions openly and honestly. There are no consequences or penalties for what you choose to share.”

Mid-career teacher participants will be asked the following descriptive and example questions:

1. Think about your experiences from the fall of 2019 to the present around professional learning. How would you describe the climate in your building? How has this climate impacted your personal growth?
2. Tell me about what professional learning experiences have provided the most growth for you professionally. What did it look like?
3. Describe how leadership has crafted and/or supported your professional growth.
4. How would you describe the focus of the leadership during professional learning and the pandemic and its impact on your responses?
5. Give me an example of how professional learning has been adapted or made more accessible to you as a mid-career teacher.

Debriefing Statement:

"Thank you for your time today. I'd like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study at any given time. A pseudonym will be used to help protect your confidentiality. Data will be stored in a password protected computer and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. I will allow you to view the transcript of each meeting to check for accuracy and proper representation. Our second interview will be an opportunity to expand upon or follow up on anything mentioned in the first interview. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me through email, lehurla@ksu.edu, or by phone."

Appendix C - Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Introduction statement for the focus group:

“Thank you for joining us today. Our goal is to share our stories and experiences about the leadership practices and professional learning as you participated as mid-career teacher in the QLDS process and pandemic. We will conduct today’s focus group as a dialogue with everyone participating as they would like. Please feel free to expand on each other’s thoughts. I will record our session.”

The focus group of Mid-Career Teachers will answer the following in a group dialogue setting.

Observations of interactions will be added to research notes.

1. Think about your experiences from the fall of 2019 to the present around professional learning. Describe how teachers learn together in your building. Possible Prompts: How would you describe the trust between teachers in your building?
2. Describe what type of experiences have been most influential for your professional growth and growing together as staff.
3. Consider professional learning while experiencing the pandemic. Tell me how professional learning impacted your commitment during the pandemic. How did the pandemic impact your professional learning?
4. Describe a time when professional learning really challenged your previous beliefs as a group and brought you closer together.
5. How do you know that professional learning has impact on your career and/or your students?

Debriefing Statement:

"Thank you for your time today. I'd like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study at any given time. A pseudonym will be used to help protect your confidentiality. Data will be stored in a password protected computer and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. I will allow you to view the transcript of each meeting to check for accuracy and proper representation. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me through email, lehurla@ksu.edu, or by phone."

Appendix D - Leadership Interview Protocol

Introduction to be shared with the interviewee:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am interested in learning about your perceptions of your leadership practices and the professional development experiences outlined in the QLDS process impacted mid-career teachers in your building during 2019-2022. I really want to hear about what you felt was most important in these leadership practices and how teachers were impacted by the professional learning. Our time is meant to feel like a conversation. Please remember that I will keep what you share with me confidential, though I cannot promise anonymity. I encourage you to share your perceptions openly and honestly. There are no consequences or penalties for what you choose to share.”

The past and present building principals will be asked the following descriptive and example questions:

1. Describe your observations of how teachers at this site interact with one another.
2. Tell me about how you create strong relationships among your staff members, especially mid-career teachers.
3. Describe how your leadership style supports the learning and growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompt: Which of the McREL International’s 21 Leadership Responsibilities do you feel support the learning and growth of mid-career teachers?
4. How do you make high-quality professional learning accessible for all staff, especially mid-career teachers?

Debriefing Statement:

"Thank you for your time today. I'd like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study at any given time. A pseudonym will be used to help protect your confidentiality. Data will be stored in a password protected computer and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. I will allow you to view the transcript of each meeting to check for accuracy and proper representation. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me through email, lehurla@ksu.edu, or by phone."

Appendix E - Leadership Focus Group Protocol

Introduction statement for the focus group:

“Thank you for joining us today. Our goal is to share our stories and experiences around the leadership practices and professional learning experiences of mid-career teachers participating in the QLDS process and pandemic in your building. We will conduct today’s focus group as a dialogue with each of you participating as you would like. Please feel free to expand on each other’s thoughts. I will record our session.”

The focus group of the past and present building principals will answer the following in a group dialogue setting. Observations of interactions will be added to research notes.

1. Describe how you motivate mid-career teachers to believe in the power of their influence.
Possible prompt: how do you help them see their influence?
2. Describe what type of experiences you’ve found to be most influential for the professional growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompt: how do you challenge their thinking?
3. How do you manage complex change for your mid-career teachers?
4. How do you support mid-career teachers in sustained professional learning and implementation?

Debriefing Statement:

"Thank you for your time today. I'd like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study at any given time. A pseudonym will be used to help protect your confidentiality. Data will be stored in a password protected computer and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. I will allow you to view the transcript of each meeting to check for accuracy and proper representation. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me through email, lehurla@ksu.edu, or by phone."

Appendix F - Professional Learning and Development Trainer

Interview Protocol

Introduction to be shared with the interviewee:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am interested in learning about your perceptions of the leadership practices and the professional development experiences outlined in the QLDS process impacted mid-career teachers in the selected building during 2019-2022. I really want to hear about what you felt was most important in these leadership practices and how teachers were impacted by the professional learning. Our time is meant to feel like a conversation. Please remember that I will keep what you share with me confidential. I encourage you to share your perceptions openly and honestly. There are no consequences or penalties for what you choose to share.”

The Quantum Learning Network’s trainer and the building instructional coach trained as a Quantum Learning facilitator will be asked the following descriptive and example questions:

1. Describe your observations of how teachers at this site interact with one another.
2. Tell me about how you strengthen relationships among staff members during professional learning, especially mid-career teachers.
3. Describe what type of experiences you’ve found to be most influential for the professional growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompt: how do you challenge their thinking?
4. Describe how you motivate mid-career teachers to believe in the power of their influence. Possible prompt: how do you help them see their influence?
5. How do you manage complex change for mid-career teachers?

6. How do you support mid-career teachers in sustained professional learning and implementation?

Debriefing Statement:

"Thank you for your time today. I'd like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study at any given time. A pseudonym will be used to help protect your confidentiality. Data will be stored in a password protected computer and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. I will allow you to view the transcript of each meeting to check for accuracy and proper representation. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me through email, lehurla@ksu.edu, or by phone."

Appendix G - Background Information: Standards for Professional Learning, Research Definitions, and McRel International's 21 Responsibilities

Learning Forward's (2022) Standards for Professional Learning

Transformational Processes
Equity Drivers Educators identify and address their own biases and beliefs while collaborating with diverse colleagues.
Evidence Educators use data to plan and monitor learning and assess the impact of professional learning on educators and students.
Learning Designs Educators set goals and implement evidence-based learning designs.
Implementation Educators understand and apply research on change management; engage in feedback processes; and implement and sustain professional learning.
Conditions for Success
Equity Foundations Educators create structures so that all staff have access to learning and sustain a culture of support for all staff.
Culture of Collaborative Learning Educators commit to continuous improvement; build collaboration skills and capacity; and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.
Leadership Educators establish a vision for professional learning and sustain coherent support for professional learning.

*Note: Adapted from the Learning Forward (2022) Standards for Professional Learning
(Reduced for study's focus)

Research Definitions

Collective Teacher Efficacy: An “attitude that together they [teachers] can make a difference for students.” (Donohoo, 2017, p. 3).

Collective Trust: Teachers trust the principal and view administration as open and honest; teachers trust their colleagues and see them as competent (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

Meaningful feedback: Feedback given to improve instruction which answers for the recipient: (1) where am I going? (2) how am I going? (3) where to next? (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 87)

Professional Capital: Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) define professional capital as “the confluence of three kinds of capital: human, social, and decisional” (p. 88). *Human capital* is a teacher’s training and development of skills; *social capital* is when teachers are learning together through quality interactions; and *decisional capital* is the wisdom that comes from experiences over time.

McREL International’s 21 Leadership Responsibilities to be included for the leadership interviews and focus group (Waters & Cameron, 2007). The researcher will clarify any terms unfamiliar to the principals.

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| • Affirmation | • Involvement in Curriculum, |
| • Change Agent | Instruction, and Assessment |
| • Communication | • Knowledge of Curriculum, |
| • Contingent Rewards | Instruction, and Assessment |
| • Culture | • Monitor and Evaluate |
| • Discipline | • Optimize |
| • Flexibility | • Order |
| • Focus | • Outreach |
| • Ideals and Beliefs | • Relationships |
| • Input | • Resources |

- Intellectual Stimulation

- Situational Awareness

- Visibility

Appendix H - Alignment of Conceptual Framework, Research

Question, and Interview/Focus Group Prompts

Research Question: How do mid-career teachers experience professional learning and respond to leadership practices to develop individual professional capital and collective efficacy during times of change?		
Professional Learning Standards and Conceptual Frameworks	Interview Questions	Participants
Conditions for Success		Individual teacher interview 1
Culture of Collaborative Learning <i>Educators commit to continuous improvement; build collaboration skills and capacity; and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.</i>	Think about your experiences from the fall of 2019 to the present around professional learning. How would you describe the climate in your building? How has this climate impacted your personal growth?	
Professional Capital <i>The confluence of three kinds of capital: human, social, and decisional</i>		
Capacity Building/Professional Capital <i>The confluence of three kinds of capital: human, social, and decisional. Human capital is a teacher's training and development of skills; social capital is when teachers are learning together through quality interactions; and decisional capital is the wisdom that comes from experiences over time.</i>	Tell me about what professional learning experiences have provided the most growth for you professionally. What did it look like?	
Leadership <i>Educators establish a vision for professional learning and sustain coherent support for professional learning.</i>	Describe how leadership has crafted and/or supported your professional growth. How would you describe the focus of the leadership during professional learning and the pandemic and its impact on your responses?	
Equity Foundations <i>Educators create structures so that all staff have access to learning and sustain a culture of support for all staff.</i>	Give me an example of how professional learning has been adapted or made more accessible to you as a mid-career teacher.	
Transformational Processes		
Collective Teacher Efficacy <i>An "attitude that together they [teachers] can make a difference for students."</i>	Think about your experiences from the fall of 2019 to the present around professional	

Learning Designs <i>Educators set goals and implement evidence-based learning designs.</i>	learning. Describe how teachers learn together in your building. Possible Prompts: Collective Trust	Teacher focus group
Learning Designs <i>Educators set goals and implement evidence-based learning designs.</i>	Describe what type of experiences have been most influential for your professional growth and growing together as staff.	
Implementation (Change) <i>Educators understand and apply research on change management; engage in feedback processes; and implement and sustain professional learning.</i> Situational Awareness <i>Aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</i>	Consider professional learning while experiencing the Pandemic. Tell me how professional learning impacted your commitment during the Pandemic. How did the pandemic impact your professional learning?	
Equity Drivers <i>Educators identify and address their own biases and beliefs while collaborating with diverse colleagues.</i>	Describe a time when professional learning really challenged your previous beliefs as a group and brought you closer together.	
Evidence <i>Educators use data to plan and monitor learning and assess the impact of professional learning on educators and students.</i>	How do you know that professional learning has impact on your career and/or your students?	
Conditions for Success		Leadership individual interview questions
Culture of Collaborative Learning <i>Educators commit to continuous improvement; build collaboration skills and capacity; and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.</i>	Describe your observations of how teachers at this site interact with one another. Tell me about how you create strong relationships among your staff members, especially mid-career teachers.	
Leadership <i>Educators establish a vision for professional learning and sustain coherent support for professional learning.</i> Professional Capital <i>The confluence of three kinds of capital: human, social, and decisional</i>	Describe how your leadership style supports the learning and growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompts: McREL International's 21 Responsibilities	

Equity Foundations <i>Educators create structures so that all staff have access to learning and sustain a culture of support for all staff.</i>	How do you make high-quality professional learning accessible for all staff, especially mid-career teachers?	
Transformational Processes		Leadership focus group
Collective Teacher Efficacy <i>An “attitude that together they [teachers] can make a difference for students.”</i>	Describe how you motivate mid-career teachers to believe in the power of their influence.	
Evidence <i>Educators use data to plan and monitor learning and assess the impact of professional learning on educators and students.</i>	Possible prompt: how do you help them see their influence?	
Learning Designs <i>Educators set goals and implement evidence-based learning designs.</i>	Describe what type of experiences you’ve found to be most influential for the professional growth of your mid-career teachers.	
Equity Drivers <i>Educators identify and address their own biases and beliefs while collaborating with diverse colleagues.</i>	Possible prompt: how do you challenge their thinking?	
Implementation (Change) <i>Educators understand and apply research on change management; engage in feedback processes; and implement and sustain professional learning.</i>	How do you manage complex change for your mid-career teachers? How do you support mid-career teachers in sustained professional learning and implementation?	
Situational Awareness <i>Aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</i>		
Conditions for Success		Professional development trainer interview
Culture of Collaborative Learning <i>Educators commit to continuous improvement; build collaboration skills and capacity; and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.</i>	Describe your observations of how teachers at this site interact with one another. Tell me about how you strengthen relationships among staff members during professional learning, especially mid-career teachers.	
Transformational Processes		
Learning Designs <i>Educators set goals and implement evidence-based learning designs.</i>	Describe what type of experiences you’ve found to be most influential for the	

Equity Drivers <i>Educators identify and address their own biases and beliefs while collaborating with diverse colleagues.</i>	professional growth of your mid-career teachers. Possible prompt: how do you challenge their thinking?	
Collective Teacher Efficacy <i>An “attitude that together they [teachers] can make a difference for students.”</i> Evidence <i>Educators use data to plan and monitor learning and assess the impact of professional learning on educators and students.</i>	Describe how you motivate mid-career teachers to believe in the power of their influence. Possible prompt: how do you help them see their influence?	
Implementation (Change) <i>Educators understand and apply research on change management; engage in feedback processes; and implement and sustain professional learning.</i> Situational Awareness <i>Aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems</i>	How do you manage complex change for mid-career teachers? How do you support mid-career teachers in sustained professional learning and implementation?	