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FACTORS LEADING EDUCATORS TO PURSUE A DOCTORATE DEGREE TO MEET PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	This study investigates the professional development needs of educators with a Master's degree and seeking or having a doctoral degree in education.
Background	Understanding the professional development needs of educators is important for meeting these needs. The literature focuses on post-bachelor education but does not address professional development and doctoral degree needs.
Methodology	Educators with a Master's degree in education seeking or having completed a doctoral degree participated in one 30 minute semi-structured interview.
Contribution	This research can be used as a guide for how to support Master's-level educators seeking doctoral degrees.
Findings	Master's level students earning a doctorate degree in education found professional development satisfied through their programs when experiential learning opportunities were provided and in-depth institutional support.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Educators seeking a doctorate degree in education to meet their professional development needs should seek out higher education opportunities that include mentorships and experiential learning opportunities.
Recommendations for Researchers	Further research is necessary to understand how additional professional development needs can be met in higher education and in the creation of successful professional development partnerships.
Impact on Society	Required teacher professional development can increase classroom performance if necessary educator needs are met.
Future Research	Additional research on professional development successes in schools partnering with higher education institutions potentially for a dual purpose of obtaining doctorate degrees may provide an invaluable increase in classroom performance.

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Keywords professional development, doctorate success, doctorate barriers, doctorate program, education doctorate, doctorate

INTRODUCTION

Research related to the professional development needs of graduate students who hold a Master's degree is scarce. Understanding the growing professional development needs of this population using adult learning theories is important for continued enrollment in these programs (Sheridan, 2007). The value attributed to professional development within a doctoral education program is linked to the pursuit and satisfaction of the degree, especially for students pursuing a Master's degree. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 145,781 and 11,829 students earned Master's and Ph.D. degrees in education, respectively, from an accredited institution in the United States from 2015 to 2016 (NCES, 2017). Many factors contribute to this discrepancy between earning a Master's versus a PhD in education.

The professional development that is required of all teachers in public schools motivated this study. The professional development needs impacting educators' decisions to pursue a doctoral degree within the field of education was investigated. Understanding these needs has the potential to increase the likelihood of teachers seeking a Ph.D. in education. Doctoral degrees in education extend research in education and increase the likelihood that educators will apply what they have learned through professional development in educational settings.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to investigate the factors that influence a person's decision to pursue a doctoral degree in education. The research focused on the lived experiences of graduate students in the process of completing a Ph.D. and students who have completed their PhD in education. Each year, educators seek professional development for a variety of purposes (e.g., contractual obligations and professional goals). According to the results of a 2006 Regional Education Laboratory (REL) report investigating the impact of 1300 professional development studies on the academic achievement levels of students, only nine studies yielded significant gains (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). It took, on average, 14 hours of focused teacher professional development to achieve statistically significant student gains. Furthermore, most professional development activities in the United States take place within a much shorter time frame (i.e., less than a day), especially those offered in a K-12 elementary school context. Focused professional development can foster academic growth in a Ph.D. degree program in education over the course of 30 semester hours undertaken after a Master's degree. This process involves a comprehensive examination, as well as the opportunity (or requirement) to contribute original research in the field. This study focuses on understanding how professional development and Ph.D. degree requirements can be merged. Secondary goals include understanding Ph.D. students' perspectives of higher education and how the professional development needs or goals of these students can be met.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

Professional development is an educational requirement for teachers throughout the United States and Canada to improve student learning in schools (Day & Sachs, 2004). For teachers in the United States to renew their teaching credential/licensure, they must complete professional development each year. Professional development has been linked with improving student academic outcomes (Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, the breadth and depth of what qualifies as professional development vary widely among schools (Jaquith et al., 2010). Teachers are at liberty to determine how to incorporate professional development to meet licensure/credential requirements with post-Master's degrees (Corcoran, 2007). Continuing education as required by law and

stipulated under NCLB can be delivered in a variety of formats and modalities, but research suggests participants should be consulted to ensure the most effective programming for effective classroom instruction (Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006). Content, length of professional development, multiple learning opportunities, goals, and collective participation have been identified as keys to successful professional development and a natural progression of learning within a Ph.D. program (Blank & de las Alas, 2009). Even so, research is inconclusive as to whether there are incentives for completing professional development needs before engaging in doctoral programs after earning a Master's degree. Adult learning theories are important in understanding what motivates adults to complete tasks. Given that it is one of the largest investments made for schoolwide teacher effectiveness and classroom improvement, schools often partner with universities to provide professional development (Desimone et al., 2006). Professional development can result in classroom improvement if teachers' needs are met (Barnett, 2003). Ph.D. programs are among the strategies educators are choosing to complete their professional development requirements. There has been a steady increase in the number of teachers seeking to complete a Master's degree in higher education with or without their district's support. The NCES reported a 102% increase in the number of conferred Ph.D.'s in education between 2010 and 2017 (NCES, 2017).

Adult learning theories are important in understanding what motivates teachers to pursue a higher education degree as part of their professional development needs. Adults juggle many roles, and learning opportunities must be valued to be undertaken. Guskey and Yoon (2009) reported that teachers value research-based professional development with opportunities for experiential learning and classroom applications. Finn, Jackson, and Purvis (2019) pointed out that effective professional development must be sustained and meaningful. Adult learning theory stresses the importance of experiential, synonymous with active learning within the context of professional development (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005). Active learning is widely accepted as the key to successful professional development (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001), the following six traits are essential for professional development and can be applied to classroom practices: "reform type, duration, active learning, collective participation, coherence, content focus" (p. 102). Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner, M. (2017) found through completing extensive research on what is transferable during professional development to classroom improvement is for teachers to have multiple opportunities to engage in learning a set of concepts (p. 15).

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

There are numerous theories addressing how adults learn. Considerations of meaningful connections, application of concepts, load/power, motivation, and learning through experience/reflection are all aspects of what adults seek when pursuing the next step in their learning (Knowles, 1980). Knowles' Andragogy Theory is applicable to understanding adult learning theory related to this research study's focus (Knowles et al., 2005). Andragogy Theory helps explain how students who have completed a Master's degree in education continue on for a terminal degree and/or seeking professional development through other avenues. The theory purports that when optimal adult learning conditions are met, learning is self-directed, experiences are combined with learning, and a direct application between learning and life experiences occurs (Ausburn, 2004). Furthermore, Knowles' Andragogy Theory focuses on the assumptions that adults' intrinsic motivation and desire to learn creates a unique self-motivation to succeed. According to this adult learning model, learning must be facilitated rather than directed. Learning, according to Knowles' Andragogy Theory, must be applied through experience and directed by the individual via a growth mindset (Knowles, 1975).

Knowles' Andragogy Theory also purports that, to be successful, learners must be self-motivated to approach their learning as individuals and work collectively by taking ownership of personal responsibilities within the framework of classes. Knowles' Andragogy Theory is closely tied to this investigation to understand graduate students' future professional learning needs and what variables help

advance their decisions to pursue a doctoral degree. Knowles' Andragogy Theory focuses on adult learning success. Adults must see real-world applications to concepts learned, be self-starters, and be intrinsically motivated (Knowles et al., 2005). Individual organizational skills aligning with the orientation to learn are paramount to successful adult learning (Knowles et al., 2005). According to Knowles et al. (2005, p. 3), "There are six principles of andragogy (1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn".

Although Knowles' theory is important to understanding adult learners, McClusky's (1963) Theory of Margin should be considered to understand the value adults place on work in relation to power. McClusky's Load to Power Theory acknowledges that adults learn by considering the ratio of the workload to the power necessary to complete it (McClusky, 1963). Learning varies dependent on their understanding of the work, motivation to complete it, and the ability to self-direct their learning (McClusky, 1974). Adults juggle larger loads when tasks are considered meaningful and important. McClusky (1970) noted that "Education could, if properly conceived and implemented, be a major force in the achievement of this outcome" (p. 2). "This outcome" signified a high level of margin. McClusky claimed that the value adults place on education affects the load/power ratio. If teachers value a given "load", they use coping mechanisms to reconcile the amount of time that will have to be devoted to obtaining the degree (and thus taken away from other valued aspects of their life). Educators need more than a pay scale increase to see the value of devoting the time necessary to complete a terminal degree in education or to create a meaningful connection between professional development and classroom growth. It is useful to research individuals who have sought out these degrees to determine what the tipping point was for them and how they felt about the process. Such research will help to increase the likelihood that more educators will intrinsically value their professional development process. Determining what these people valued and sought that was not provided in the way of professional development is priceless for continuing to meet the needs of future educators seeking a doctorate or terminal degree in education and/or those continuing to provide expertise to students.

Transformational learning theory connects Knowles et al. (2005) and McClusky's (1963) theories. In order for transformation to occur, individuals must reach a tipping point in their thinking that triggers reflection and results in growth. Mezirow (2000) wrote that transformational learning occurs when learners change what they know by reflecting on meaningful experiences. Educators critically reflect on their prior learning challenges and current learning experiences (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Critical reflection incorporated within doctoral coursework can play a role in simulating future professional choices. Additionally, experiential learning opportunities provided in doctoral programs positively affect future professional choices (Merriam et al., 2007). A paradigm shift occurs when a learner reflects and reacts differently based on new experiences (Merriam et al., 2007). Higher education has the potential to assist learners through this transformation. It is necessary to understand what experiences are powerful enough to attract students to seek out a doctoral/terminal degree program to become better educators. This study contributes to our understanding of the professional development needs of adult learners completing a doctoral degree in education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative descriptive analysis was used to find meaning within the collected data and used codes to develop relationships and, eventually, themes (Given, 2008). Basic questions enable a broad-stroke understanding of graduate students' thoughts and the ability to follow up with probing questions to delve deeper and interpret perceptions and textual data (Given, 2008). Given that analysis of transcripts was the data collection method utilized to understand a specific connection between graduate student experiences with doctoral programs and professional development, content analysis is inde-

pendent of a methodological framework but is best suited to understanding the professional development needs of graduate students who had earned a Master's degree in education. The content was used to analyze both explicitly stated and unconscious messages (Given, 2008) of what these individuals experienced and to make sense of their experiences with professional development needs after completing a Master's degree in education (Given, 2008, p. 2).

The guiding research questions below were addressed via telephone interviews (after an initial field test of the questions for content validity). Questions were revised based on the response from an educator with the same qualifications as the sample group. The questions were formulated to generate a base response before specific probing questions, which delved into an understanding of the lived experiences of graduate students in education during or after the completion of their doctoral degree.

- What are the professional development and learning needs of students pursuing a Master's degree in education?
- What are the barriers, real or imagined, that Master's degree students in education hold before continuing towards a terminal degree in education?
- What are the key motivators that lead Master's degree students in education to pursue a doctoral degree?

DATA COLLECTION

Nine participants were interviewed for this study, at which point data saturation was reached. Seven participants from varying professional backgrounds were found to address the same concerns in regards to professional development needs and doctoral programs. Two additional participants were selected to ensure data saturation was met (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). One field test participant was interviewed to check that the interview questions were aligned with the research questions. All of the participants had earned a Master's degree in education and had continued their professional development learning – they had either completed or were working towards a terminal degree (i.e., Ph.D.) in education. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling and, subsequently, through the snowball method. All of the participants were contacted via telephone to ascertain their interest in the study and their suitability for participation. Participating subjects received letters of consent via email and returned them via the United States Postal Service. Interviews were set up via telephone at a convenient time for participants upon receipt of written consent. Each interview consisted of a 30-minute telephone conversation that was recorded to ensure accurate verbatim transcription. Participants received copies of their interview transcript, which allowed them to make any necessary changes to their oral responses before their data were included in the larger transcript pool. Participant selection continued until data saturation occurred, and it was felt possible to “understand and portray the full range of contexts within the study” (Charmaz, 2006, p.18). Data saturation was achieved once the interviews no longer contributed any new data that would either create new categories of emergent themes or explain the lived experience; no new information was being provided that would further explain existent themes within the data set (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The saturated categories of data were analyzed, sorted, and compared to explain the professional development needs of doctoral students who had earned a Master's degree in education (Charmaz, 2006). Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities.

ANALYSIS

A qualitative descriptive design was used to systematically develop an understanding of the professional development needs of graduate students who had earned a Master's degree in education (Mayring, 2010). According to Krippendorff (2004), context gives meaning to the content and enables an understanding of how these individuals experienced (and made sense of their experience with) professional development needs after completing a Master's degree program in education (p. 24).

Basic and specific questions were used to ensure the triangulation of the data. Data analysis involved what Mayring (2010) described as subsumption and progressive summarizing. Subcategories were developed once the main categories were discovered through the data by re-reading each section of the transcripts, finding categories already discovered, re-reading again for emerging sub-categories, adding to already discovered categories, or creating new categories through continual emergence of new codes until the data is understood, thereby developing a detailed understanding of the successes and concerns of the population.

DATA COLLECTION LOGISTICS

This study involved tape-recorded telephone interviews that allowed for a natural rapport between the interviewer and the study participants. Data collection was aligned with what Carlson and McCaslin (2003) advised as best practices. This entailed the use of a meta-inquiry approach to the interview protocol to code, interpret, and value a small homogeneous group of interview respondents (p. 550). All of the participants were interviewed under reliably consistent conditions using the same pre-approved questions. Participants were asked ice-breaker questions to develop rapport. Interviews began with guiding questions intended to get the participants to reflect. Subsequent questions moved from general to probing specific questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on their professional development experiences aligned with doctorate coursework and programs. The guiding open-ended interview questions and corresponding probing questions were as follows:

- A. What are the professional development and learning needs of Master's degree students in education?**
 - 1. What types of professional development learning needs are important to you in terms of your professional growth in education?
 - 2. Looking back, what were the key classes or professional development needs that you sought in your doctoral program?
 - 3. Please describe how your professional development needs were met (or are being met) in your doctoral-level program in education.
- B. What are the barriers, real or imagined, that Master's degree students in education hold before continuing towards a terminal degree in education?**
 - 1. What barriers, if any, did you face before beginning your doctoral program in education?
 - 2. How have these barriers changed since enrolling in or completing a doctoral program in education?
 - 4. What barriers, if any, do you think others have when moving towards a terminal degree in education?
- C. What are the key motivators that lead Master's degree students in education to pursue a doctoral degree?**
 - 1. What was the tipping point for you to move forward in your doctoral journey in education?
 - 2. What factors, such as professional growth, pay increase, etc., impacted your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?
 - 3. Looking back, would these motivators be different if you were to begin your professional growth/coursework again?

RESULTS

OPEN CODING

The open coding process revealed some noteworthy results about what professional development needs were important for professional growth.

Research Question #1: What are the professional development and learning needs of Master's degree students in education?

Interviewees were asked about the types of professional development learning needs that were important to them when seeking a doctoral degree to fulfill their professional growth in education. Professional development in schools helps fulfill the required contractual obligations necessary for licensure renewal. However, individuals who sought out higher education for their professional learning needs after completing a Master's degree (according to the qualitative line coding process) divulged that they received a whole lot more. Key classes that met students' professional development needs focusing on the writing/research process, educational policy, leadership styles, finances, collective bargaining, law, assessment, and curriculum development. However, line coding revealed other less traditionally thought-of professional development needs that incorporated important skill sets, such as sharpening abstract thinking skills, developing an understanding of democracy in education, the role of the educator, terminology growth, contacts with others, and bridging the gap between theory and practice. When the participants were asked whether their professional development goals were satisfied after they completed their program, many responded that their goals were addressed through classes like those noted above. However, what they found priceless was learning about making data-driven decisions, the psychology of learning, gaining the ability to collaborate with like-minded individuals, exposure to mentorship opportunities, networking access, the psychology behind learning, learning via professors' experiences, the ability to think bigger and deeper, understanding the voices of students and those unable to share, understanding who is left out of the conversation in education, and truly having experiences with people.

Research Question #2: What are the barriers, real or imagined, that Master's degree students in education hold before continuing towards a terminal degree in education?

Line codes revealed that time, money, family balance, commitments, a feeling of being overwhelmed, a lack of support, health, balance, work ethic, and the quick turnover between coursework and expected dissertation completion were responsible for the low rate of enrollment in doctoral programs in the field of education. Once students entered or completed their doctoral program, the barriers remained the same but also included the need to multi-task beyond one's capabilities, the feeling of having more questions than answers, intensified family obligations, and finding the time to complete one's dissertation. Many of the participants felt that other individuals had the same apprehensions as they did towards entering a doctoral program. New thoughts included not being self-motivated, not seeing the big picture, life happenings getting in the way, not being interested in the personal sacrifice, and the dissertation alone being too much to handle. Although time and money were stated as barriers throughout the interviews, Jon's representative statement, "There were classes that were more applied with the research ... Going through those courses would have helped to have a deeper background, but I still got through from the leadership and support I had", revealed how positive support dissipated existing barriers within the program.

Research Question #3: What are the key motivators that lead Master's degree students in education to pursue a doctoral degree?

The tipping points towards pursuing a doctoral degree that most educators shared were both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Line coding revealed that professional changes, external pay, job security, title changes, personal fulfillment, knowledge advancement, talking with like-minded individuals, life goals, being equipped for education conversations, perfect skills, institutional support and encouragement within the workplace and at higher education institutions all contributed to students enrolling in a doctoral program. Factors that affected pursuing a doctoral degree included professional development, encouragement from superiors, a need to be a part of the learning process, career advancement, the ability to pursue additional building-level positions, life goals, cerebral depth, the terminal title, and developing a skill set that distinguishes one's self from others. There were some consistent results when participants looked back on their motivators and determined whether those motivators

had changed since entering or completing their doctoral programs. Participants shared that they were better equipped for conversations and would not have done anything differently, some shared they wished they had started earlier in life, and some commented on how motivating the process was in terms of encouraging them to apply their skills. A few commented on how their interests changed as they progressed through their program and how their professional development process led them to want to move in another direction that was not consistent with their degree program. Jenny stated that the doctoral journey, “opened doors ... I’m learning so much from the coursework ... I think it has really helped me grow as an educator”. Jeremy stated, “I’m better equipped to have conversations”. Lastly, Jenny shared that, “I wouldn’t have gotten the knowledge and experience at the same time. I would have been one of those that had gone through and thought I knew everything when I knew nothing”. The line coding results yielded consistent outcomes: that the professional development sought through a terminal degree in education fulfilled both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational needs.

REFLECTIVE CODING

The reflective codes yielded a thorough understanding of the professional development needs of Master’s students in education seeking a terminal degree in education. These codes were formed by reviewing the line codes and analyzing ways to sort and connect them in meaningful ways. Codes came together as intrinsic/extrinsic, barriers/successes to degree completion, positive/growth needs within doctoral programs, technical skills (courses/training), and meaningful classes/mind shift (paradigm shift). Sue shared that “The first thing that was really important for me was looking for a program that builds that bridge between theory and practice because I feel like in education it doesn’t always transfer”. It was interesting to note that most motivators to entering a program and completing a program were similar and included both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Barriers and successes to degree completion included family, administrative, and mentor support but also program cohesiveness and cohort connectedness. Meaningful class highlights included writing classes in support of dissertation writing, law, research, policy, finance, and facilities. Paradigm shift and degree success variables also included being self-motivated, respecting the process, a commitment to the unknown, seeing the bigger picture, having a voice heard by teachers, ambition, health, cohort, family support, and making sacrifices for a means to an end. Jon shared that “What was really important and meaningful for me was the theory to practice and understanding them, and what I really wanted to implement was the practice”. The reflective process helped to identify key points for the selective coding process of synthesizing the information and formulating an understanding of the professional development needs of Master’s students pursuing a terminal degree in education.

SELECTIVE CODING

The selective codes derived from the reflective/axial/line coding process align with the literature review of theories proposed by Knowles et al. (2005), McClusky (1974), and Mezirow (2000). These codes included professional learning quality, networking, collegial support, meaningful classes, and a love of learning. Adult learners expressed, through similar comments, what was important initially, during, and after their terminal degree programs. Jen shared what others voiced as being essential to the successful completion of a doctoral program: “mentorship from administrators and faculty”. Participants shared personal degree program constraints, and those they believed prevented others from taking the next steps to completing a terminal degree in education. Success variables were established within programs. Jon shared that “Many struggle with coursework being completed, but the final stage is the dissertation ... If you took advantage of the steps along the way ... you actually ended coursework well into your dissertation ... It comes down to seeing the big picture in the end”. Ultimately, the quality of collegial support was key to motivating Master’s degree students in education to continue on towards a terminal degree. Master’s degree students who had the opportunity to engage in experientially meaningful classes that enabled them to ‘see the big picture’ and collaborate with

professors and other students in valuable ways were more inclined to enter into a Ph.D. in an education program. Barriers included money, time, personal sacrifice, health, and poor life/work balance. However, the value of the program superseded these obstacles and created a tipping point to successfully completing the program.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the important role of technical growth, professional learning quality, collaboration with like-minded individuals, and support that graduate education students consider when seeking a doctoral degree in education to meet their professional development needs. Although research exists on professional development post-Bachelor's degree, little has been documented on post-Master's degree professional development needs. Knowles' (1980, p. 43) theory of adult learning – allowing for rich experiences to be brought into the learning environment – supports the notion that the collegial discussions that occur in educational doctoral programs increase the likelihood that educators will find value in their programs when given opportunities for collaboration through peer support with like-minded individuals (Pilbeam, Lloyd-Jones, & Denyer, 2013). Furthermore, adult learners value experiential learning opportunities that are applicable to their professional roles. Dan shared that “I wanted to have a handle on the bigger piece of the pulse ... I wanted to understand how to take it further”. These meaningful experiences lead to transformational learning when there are opportunities for reflection. Sara shared the following about her professional development reflection with others within her doctoral program: “It gave me a huge wealth of knowledge about what others had done ... That I definitely wouldn't have had otherwise had I not participated in the program”. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) found that although personal sacrifice was a theme that negatively impacted the doctoral journey, personal factors motivated their completion of it (pp. 206-208). Setting up educators to successfully share their understanding through teaching and learning outside the classroom is the intent of all professional development (Clapper, 2010, p. 13).

DELIMITATIONS

The study was limited to a snowball sampling of willing and able participants with a Master's degree in education. It focused on participants' professional development needs when seeking a doctoral degree in education. It cannot be assumed that the results would remain consistent among other populations of students earning their doctoral degree in another field of study. That is, the results cannot be generalized to other populations. It is assumed that participants shared accurate information and that those who responded met the study criteria and shared accurate information. The findings of this descriptive qualitative research study enable a baseline understanding of the professional development needs of education students with a Master's degree-seeking additional opportunities for growth through a doctoral program in education. The findings revealed the importance of collaboration – both with colleagues and professors – as being key to the successful completion of a doctoral program. Additionally, the value attributed to doctoral program professional development was aligned with current or future job applications. Key concepts found through the coding process included technical growth, professional learning quality, collaboration with like-minded individuals, and support. Moreover, educators who felt supported academically through coursework and peer mentorship were successful in their subsequent doctoral cohorts and program completion. This is consistent with the findings by Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, and Hubbard (2018, p. 371), suggesting doctoral candidates need strong supervisors to thrive and complete their programs. Evidence supports a need for additional research on how professional development needs – along with doctoral university support, mentorships, and academic coursework – can attract and retain additional students pursuing doctoral degrees in education.

CONCLUSION

The findings that emerged from this descriptive analysis align with research on effective adult learning theories and the intrinsic/extrinsic motivators necessary for academic success. Technical skills, superior facilitation support from teachers, experiential connections to learning, and the support of colleagues and family are necessary for adults seeking higher education to meet their professional development needs after completing a Master's degree in education. Jon summed up the professional development afforded to him in his doctoral program as allowing for "professional growth". Sue shared that her professional development included "a desire to be beyond the classroom ... be a part of that huge change". A terminal degree program can meet the professional development needs of post-Master's degree students through higher education if addressed through the conclusions.

The findings supported through the analysis reflect the overarching concept that educators contractually and ethically need continual professional development after completing their Master's degree. Why and how education participants chose to fulfill this goal through a doctoral program in education was at the core of this theory development. Most of the interviews and subsequent codes could be grouped into four main foci explaining why the participants chose a doctoral program to fulfill their needs. These foci included technical growth, professional learning quality, collaboration with like-minded individuals, and support. These four concepts explain the finding that the value educators place on working with like-minded individuals to improve their educational knowledge base and skill set outweighs their discomfort with a temporary imbalance in lifestyle. The literature on adult and transformational learning is consistent with these findings (Knowles, 1975). Adults need to experience learning, have autonomy and reflection embedded in their experience with it, and be intrinsically motivated to accept a temporary heavy workload to better and add value to their lives. Jessica shared that "Professional development needs have to be connected to whatever path you are choosing". Developing a growth mindset is something that occurs, according to Jon, "in the collaboration and in sharing information. There was a lot of sharing that went on both in class and out of class between us". Valued and transferable professional development is usually not met through short-term, school-run professional development opportunities. Jon shared that "I was a teacher for 5 years and even though we got ongoing professional development as a teacher in a building it wasn't high quality. There was no one for follow-up. It was very disjointed". Positive external forces, such as family support and administrative and higher institutional mentorship and encouragement, are necessary to successfully complete a doctoral program in education (Chao, 2009). Intrinsically, adult learners seek a higher degree of professional learning, which can create the opportunity to seek new professional positions, increase their salaries, and lead to the achievement of greater future and current professional positions (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). They find value in a terminal degree and having the time and space to collaborate with like-minded individuals who can provide them with invaluable insights and networking connections (Pilbeam et al., 2013). Conclusively, higher education institutions are valued if all the intrinsic/extrinsic variables are in place and students have a positive inner voice that allows for a paradigm shift to occur in learning.

The findings supported through this descriptive analysis reflect the overarching concept that educators (contractually and ethically) require continuing professional development after completing their Master's degree. The education participants were asked why and how they chose to fulfill this goal through a doctoral program in education. Most of the interviews and subsequent codes could be grouped into four main foci explaining why the participants chose a doctoral program to fulfill their needs. These foci included technical growth, professional learning quality, collaboration with like-minded individuals, and support. These findings suggest that the value educators place on working with like-minded individuals to improve their educational knowledge base and skill set outweighs their discomfort with a temporary imbalance in lifestyle. The literature on adult and transformational learning is consistent with this new theory (Knowles, 1975). Adults need to experience learning, have autonomy and reflection embedded in their experience with it, and be intrinsically motivated to ac-

cept a temporary heavy workload to better and add value to their lives. Jessica shared that “Professional development needs have to be connected to whatever path you are choosing”. Developing a growth mindset is something that occurs, according to Jon, “in the collaboration and in sharing information. There was a lot of sharing that went on both in class and out of class between us”. Valued and transferable professional development is usually not met through short-term, school-run professional development opportunities. Jon shared that “I was a teacher for 5 years and even though we got ongoing professional development as a teacher in a building, it wasn’t high quality. There was no one for follow-up. It was very disjointed”. Positive external forces, such as family support and administrative and higher institutional mentorship and encouragement, are necessary to successfully complete a doctoral program in education (Chao, 2009). Intrinsically, adult learners seek a higher degree of professional learning, which can open doors to new professional positions, increase their salaries, and lead to the achievement of greater future and current professional positions (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). They find value in a terminal degree and having the time and space to collaborate with like-minded individuals who can provide them with invaluable insights and networking connections (Pilbeam, Lloyd-Jones, & Denyer, 2013). Conclusively, higher education institutions are valued if all the intrinsic/extrinsic variables are in place and students have a positive inner voice that allows for a paradigm shift to occur in learning.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There were very clear attributes and attainable goals that helped educators meet their professional development needs through their Ph.D. programs in education. However, more research is necessary to understand how professional development requirements can become fruitful for all educators, both in higher education programs and within all professional settings.

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BIOGRAPHY



Erika Burton, Ph.D., is a lifelong educator. For the past 25 years she has worked with doctoral and master's in education candidates teaching a variety of classes surrounding educational research, elementary and early childhood for the University of Phoenix and National Louis University. Prior to higher education, she was an Assistant Principal in River Grove IL. She began her career in the classroom teaching grades K-3. Erika is passionate about early literacy and closing the achievement gap in elementary schools. She co-founded [Orion's Mind](#), a supplemental education company, and founded the pre-emergent literacy program called [Stepping Stones Together](#). Additionally, she practices Transcendental Meditation™ and yoga, as well as teaches private yoga daily to help herself and others maintain balance in their lives. She is grateful for the fellowship awards granted to her by the University of Phoenix, allowing her to continue to research important educational topics such as this one.