

New Staff Professional Development: Self-Selection

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Introduction

Like many other professionals, teachers face a consistent stream of opportunities for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Most, if not all, school leadership entities require some amount or type of professional development (PD) attendance/completion each academic year. While many PD opportunities are tailored to the entirety of the staff, there are specific opportunities required for new staff. This is true of Tecumseh Junior High School, where new staff is comprised of any staff member that is a newly hired certified (teaching) staff member.

The week directly before the start of the academic year provides Tecumseh's new staff their first exposure to Tecumseh PD, in which the new staff has a one-hour PD introducing some of the tools and technologies available to the staff. All other new staff PD takes place during after school meetings. For any first-year teacher, the new staff PD is a monthly 1-hour meetings after school; however, any new hire that has prior teaching experience only joins the first-year teacher meetings every other month. Some of the PD opportunities are geared towards technologies and associated tools, while other opportunities are geared towards best practices regarding student discipline and classroom instruction. Unfortunately, many of Tecumseh's new staff members have expressed that they find it difficult to find the significance of the new staff PD meetings/opportunities.

The problem of creating PD that has *significance* lies in the fact that “we often ask questions about how students learn, but not often about how teachers learn” (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 1). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *significance* is “the quality of being important” (Significance, n.d.). The prior mentioned new staff PD system for Tecumseh is flawed. New staff struggle to see *significance* to the new staff PD opportunities that are

offered/required. The purpose of the following analysis is to address a solution to the PD dilemma, so that *significance* is foundational to the new staff PD opportunities, specifically in regards to the constructivist learning theory underlying PD opportunities for technologies and associated tools.

Review of Literature

As Gulamhussein (2013) states, “it is not just about providing professional development but about providing effective professional development” (p. 1). PD cannot be effective without having *significance* to the learner (teacher). This begs the question: “How does one create *significance*?” The root of *significance* lies not in merely “learning a new skill but in implementing it” (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 11). Creation of PD that has *significance* is rooted in confronting the reality that one must build in “a significant amount of support for teachers during the critical implementation phase” of the newly acquired knowledge or skill (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 12). Gulamhussein (2013) describes five principles that are foundational to effective PD.

Professional Development Principles (Gulamhussein, 2013):

- Principle 1: “The duration of professional development must be significant and ongoing to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with the implementation problem” (p. 14).
- Principle 2: “There must be support for a teacher during the implementation stage that addresses the specific challenges changing classroom practice” (p. 15).

- Principle 3: “Teachers’ initial exposure to a concept should not be passive, but rather should engage teachers through varied approaches so they can participate actively in making sense of a new practice” (p. 16).
- Principle 4: “Modeling has been found to be highly effective in helping teachers understand a new practice” (p. 17).
- Principle 5: “The content presented to teachers shouldn’t be generic, but instead specific to the discipline (for middle school and high school teachers) or for grade-level (for elementary school teachers)” (p. 17).

The implications of these five principles are: learner (teacher) choice, multiple engagements, and mentorship.

New Staff Professional Development (PD) Opportunity Outlined

Historically, during the technology PD, teachers were introduced to various tools and technologies that were available to the staff, specifically Office 365 and Microsoft tools.

However, after a brief introduction to these tools and skills (in which some of the new staff were already knowledgeable), the new staff were quickly ushered into the start of the academic year without the opportunity to revisit the topics to address questions or plan how to begin implementation of the tools within their classroom instruction. In addition, under the previous PD opportunities, new staff were not encouraged to reflect and redesign implementation as needed.

Microsoft offers educators a virtual professional community called the Microsoft Educator Community (MEC). The MEC offers various resources, including quick tip videos, lesson plans, courses, Skype connections, etc., that mirror many of the technology tools that were

previously introduced during the new staff technology PD before the start of the academic year. By utilizing the resources of the MEC, the *new* technology PD solution is founded upon self-direction and self-reflection.

The new staff PD training opportunity is comprised of three stages:

Stage 1 (Figure 1)

Pick one *Quick Tip Video* to watch from each of the four categories:

- Skype
- OneNote
- PowerPoint/Sway
- Microsoft Office/Windows

Each video is between two and five minutes in length. The staff member may choose videos based on their desire or felt need. The videos chosen by the staff member will be noted with completion checks in the staff member's individual section of the shared OneNote staff notebook.

Stage 2 (Figure 2)

Pick one *Course* from two of the four categories:

- Skype
- OneNote
- PowerPoint/Sway
- General

The staff member may choose two courses based on their interests or felt need after completing Stage 1. This allows for personalization and self-regulated learning. The courses chosen by the staff member will be noted with completion checks in the staff member's individual section of

the shared OneNote staff notebook. In addition, the staff member will screenshot their final score and completion status as shown on the MEC, and paste it in their individual section of the shared OneNote staff notebook.

Stage 3 (Figure 3)

Pick one new knowledge area or skill to implement within classroom instruction. The staff member will choose one new knowledge area or skill to implement within their instruction. The Digital Instructional Coach and the staff member will meet prior to implementation and after implementation of the skill. If desired by the staff member, the Digital Instructional Coach will be present, and available for support, during the implementation. The pre- and post-implementation self-reflections will be recorded in the staff member's individual section of the shared OneNote staff notebook.

Professional Development (PD) Solution Based on Constructivism

It is important to create teacher training and PD through the perspective of an instructional designer. No two instructional situations are exactly alike, and therefore, cannot be exact design replications. Not altering the design of instruction ignores the learner and the environment in which the instruction occurs. For example, the original PD opportunity for new staff did not take in to account the learner's prior knowledge and experience. Not all of the new staff needed introductions to the exact same technology tools, which causes a lack of *significance* for some new staff. Within the framework of constructivism, it is necessary to take "into account the learner's prior knowledge, understandings, and interests", which leads to personal choice or direction in learning (McLeod, n.d., p. 41). Staff members have little motivation to attend/complete PD centered on subjects/skills for which they have already

achieved success; therefore, there is no or little *significance* to the PD. Achievement motivation, the human need for achievement, can foundational encourage “humans to manipulate, dominate, or otherwise master their environment” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 311).

Personal choice leads to a sense of *significance*. Because of the human need to achieve something new, the solution, founded in constructivism, addresses the need for staff to have the ability to choose instruction that meets their individual technology PD needs. According to McLeod (n.d.), the principles of the constructivist learning theory “are found in experiential learning, self-directed learning, and reflexive practice” (p. 40). In this solution, “learning objectives are not pre-specified” for the learner, which in turn causes the learner to create the meaning of the instruction (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, p. 58). As McLeod (n.d.) states, “constructivism is more open-ended in expectation”, thus the learning outcomes of the PD opportunity will vary from learner to learner (p. 41).

Since learning outcomes will vary from learner to learner, and no two learning situations/environments will be alike, it is vital that there “be support for a teacher during the implementation stage” (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 15). An authentic learning environment is necessary for stage 3 of the new PD outline, “pick one new skill to implement within classroom instruction.” Authentic learning environments lead to PD *significance*. This stage is completed under the mentorship of the Digital Instructional Coach, in essence forming a cognitive apprenticeship. This model promotes “scaffolding and coaching of knowledge” and strategies while the learner is applying the new technology skill/knowledge to their classroom instruction (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2005, p. 20). Through this stage, the Digital Instructional Coach has the ability to recognize the new staff member for their effort and achievements connected to their effort in stage three. As Mager and Pipe (1997) noted, “desirable consequences have to follow

desirable performances” (p. 55-56). For some, a positive impact on their classroom instruction would be enough of a positive consequence to continue implementation their newly acquired skill/knowledge; however, some individuals thrive on mentor/leader affirmation and need recognition as a positive consequence.

Constructivism leads directly to *significance* within instructional design, specifically through personal choice and authentic learning environments. When learners have personal choice within authentic learning environments, “they are actively involved in determining what their own learning needs are and how those needs can be satisfied” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 399). Learners begin to lose the importance, or *significance*, of the instruction when it is designed without personal choice and authentic learning environments as vital elements.

Quick Tip Videos

Choose 1 Video From Each Category
(All between 2 and 5 minutes in length.)

Skype

Teacher Tips: Skype in the Classroom	https://education.microsoft.com/courses-and-resources/quick-tip-videos/teachers-tips-on-skype-in-the-classroom
Organize Your Skype Lunchtime Club	https://education.microsoft.com/courses-and-resources/quick-tip-videos/organize-your-skype-lunchtime-club
Skype Notebooks	https://education.microsoft.com/courses-and-resources/quick-tip-videos/skypenotebooks

OneNote

Using OneNote Class Notebooks with Students	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Using-Class-Notebooks-with-Students
OneNote for Individualized Learning	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/OneNote-for-Individualized-Learning
Record in OneNote to Provide Student Audio Feedback	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Record-in-OneNote-to-Provide-Student-Audio-Feedback

PowerPoint/Sway

Create and Share Ideas Using Sway	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Create-and-Share-Ideas-using-Sway
Create Infographics Using PowerPoint	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Create-infographics-using-PowerPoint
Flip Your Classroom by Creating Office Mix Lessons	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Flip-Your-Classroom-by-Creating-Office-Mix-Lessons

Microsoft Office/Windows

Save Time with Outlook	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Save-time-with-Outlook
Office 365 Versus Office 2013 - What is the Difference?	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Office-365-vs-Office-2013-What-is-the-difference
Introducing Ease of Access to Students with Disabilities	https://education.microsoft.com/GetTrained/Introducing-Ease-of-Access-to-Students-with-Disabilities

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

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