

Lessons Learned from International Education: Three Educators' Perspectives on Heutagogical Practices in Pennsylvania Public School Teachers

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Abstract

Three American educators at a rural school district in Western Pennsylvania present the conduct of a research study and application to a professional development initiative inspired by international educational research on heutagogy, a theory developed in Australia and practiced in the United Kingdom that centers on self-determined learning. In this article, we share our inspiration for changing teacher professional development by: introducing heutagogy, exploring implementation of self-directed professional development, and reporting findings. Case findings reveal that the teaching profession needs a major change with regards to professional development and learning, as teachers must be permitted to self-determine the learning process. Thus, school districts must carefully consider how professional development is structured and how best to promote self-determined learning within the staff. Through this article, we hope to inspire educators to seek and pursue self-determined learning opportunities and encourage implementation of a personalized model of professional development in American public schools.

Keywords: *heutagogy, teacher professional development, self-determined learning*

“Professional learning should be applicable, authentic, and teacher-driven. Oftentimes, the teachers are left out of the process and the planning when they, in fact, are the ones to whom the development is presented.”
- Anonymous research participant (Miller, 2016).

Although the challenges of teacher recruitment, support, and growth seem to always be a part of the national discussion, one place to look for evidence of improvement is international experience. While culture and context play a role and are difficult to transfer, looking to the international community can provide inspiration about how to design solutions to the problems facing American education. The practical application of heutagogical practices by classroom teachers as they grow in the implementation of self-determined learning demonstrates significant positive self-efficacy characteristics. Research from Australia and the United Kingdom significantly influenced the thinking and learning experiences of three American educators in a rural school district in Western Pennsylvania. Throughout the article each educator reflects from her unique perspective as a director of education, a researcher, and a teacher.

Director Reflection: As a director of education in a small, rural Western Pennsylvania public school for the last seventeen years, frustration, bewilderment, and anxiety describe my reaction to the professional development sessions I planned for the teaching staff. I knew the sessions I planned were inadequate at best. I knew the sessions I planned did not meet the needs of the teachers and I knew the teachers resented the time spent on professional learning that they had no say in planning and no intention of implementing. For years, the one thought that kept running through my mind was the incredible amount of time and money spent on unfocused and unwanted initiatives that had no chance of implementation to truly improve student achievement.

Throughout the article, the importance of Miller's 2016 research study is examined to identify characteristics of Pennsylvania teachers who engage in a high degree of heutagogical practices. Three major themes from the study survey emerge as integral components to understanding the professional learning needs of public school teachers. The first theme the survey indicated discusses how teachers yearn for self-directed professional development opportunities. Teachers and administrators realize that change is necessary for true reform to happen. Relevance in learning highlights the second theme identified where the teacher decides what topics are relevant and worth precious time and resources. The third theme describes teachers' need for professional development results to be applicable to everyday classroom activities with real world application. As self-determined learning practices are expanded into public education systems, the opportunity to truly improve student achievement will increase exponentially. One valuable result of the study and work leading up to it was the creation of a first-of-its-kind heutagogical-based professional development plan created by the researcher and director and implemented in their home district.

Inspiration for Changing Public Kindergarten-Grade 12 Teacher Professional Development

Professional development for teachers in the United States fails to do its part to ensure the preparedness of teachers to teach all 21st century students who must exist in a global society because simply integrating technology is insufficient to prepare students adequately (Rotherman & Willingham, 2009). Opportunities for true teacher collaboration where the opportunity to work together and learn from each other are rare. Conversely, often teachers must go through one-size-fits-all professional development programs that do not focus on individual teacher need or interest (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008). The opportunities for professional development and learning do not take into account the difference in professional need between a kindergarten teacher and a calculus teacher, often placing these teachers in the same trainings. Várela (2012) argues that the "one-size-fits-all mentality of many in-service sessions goes against the concept of differentiated instruction. Just as educators strive to individualize instruction for their students, teachers also have unique needs and strengths" (p. 18). Yet traditionally, kindergarten teachers and high school physics teachers and everyone in between participate in the same professional development.

The National Staff Development Center (NSDC) (2008) reports that on average, teachers participate in eight hours of professional learning each year. This statistic becomes alarming following the NSDC estimate that it takes between 49-100 hours of focused professional learning to affect student achievement (2008). With these figures in mind, it would take a teacher between six and 12 years of professional development on the same topic to truly affect student achievement. This model could perhaps succeed if districts maintained the same focus for several con-

secutive years, but long-term, sustained professional development on the same topic is not currently the norm. Instead, teacher professional development often changes focus annually, if a focus exists at all.

Historically, the United States' k-12 public educational system has been pedagogical in its construct, with the teacher deciding what the learner should be taught and the learner playing a passive role in receiving the knowledge (Kenyon & Hase, 2001). Students were perceived as empty vessels that teachers would fill with knowledge.

Research over the past 40 years has led to radical changes in the theory of how people learn (Kenyon & Hase, 2001, Knowles, 1970). Prior to the early 1970s, there was little theory or concept that differentiated that adult and children learn differently and as such should not be taught in similar ways. Malcolm Knowles' (1970) theory of andragogy was groundbreaking and sparked a new field of research. Andragogy is defined as the theoretical perspective that adult learning is distinct from juvenile learning, due to the matured thought process and varied experiences of adults (Stocia, 2008). Knowles' theory, while originally controversial, eventually became the standard on how adults learn. His work, while seemingly obvious, was anything but that at the time. He theorized that adults do not learn in the same ways that children do (Knowles, 1983). Adults have vastly differing experiences in education, life, and work; they bring experience-based knowledge to a learning situation. Knowles (1983) suggested that as a whole, adult learners are more prepared to learn, experienced, task-oriented, self-directed and intrinsically motivated than child learners. It stands to reason, then, that adults should not be taught in the same ways as children.

Researcher Reflection: While sitting in a professional development session, I looked at the teachers sitting a few rows ahead of me and had a realization. Because I live and work in the district from which I graduated, I have the experience of working alongside some of my high school instructors. Sitting in the same row several seats apart were my son's pre-k teacher and my Physics II instructor. While I cannot recall the topic of the professional development, I remember clearly thinking these two teachers could not possibly have their professional learning needs met in the same session. I knew at the time the pre-K teacher's instruction focused on buttoning pants, zippering coats, scissor safety, and letter recognition. I remembered vaguely the deep and sophisticated formulas and concepts taught to me in Physics II. How could these teachers, whose jobs were alike only in their titles, learn and be challenged by the same material? There had to be a better way, and I sought to find the answer. Unfortunately, there was no clear answer in the United States' literature on teacher professional development. Instead, the missing link was found in an emerging theory from Australia that is gaining momentum in Europe.

Introduction to Heutagogy

The study of heutagogy, while gaining popularity in Australia and the United Kingdom, is not currently conducted in the United States. Heutagogy (Kenyon & Hase, 2001), also called self-determined learning, differentiates the traditional learning model of acquiring knowledge and skills from deep learning that challenges the values and assumptions of the learner. In this model, the learning is determined by the learner and facilitated by the instructor resulting in deep engagement, flexible curriculum, experiment, research, individualized learning, and ability for the learning to conceptualize concepts, knowledge, and new understanding (Hase, 2014).

Researcher Reflection: When first introducing the topic of heutagogy, I find it helpful to discuss it in one of its most natural occurrences, that of parents learning to guide the learning of their children. For example, my six-year-old son has two great passions in the world—soccer and

sewing. Neither of these are areas where my husband or I excel (or even have more than a basic functioning knowledge). It is our job, however, as his parents, to facilitate his knowledge and passion in these areas. We cannot teach him, as we do not possess the knowledge he needs. We can, however, facilitate his learning by determining our own learning. We guide him through his natural learning process and expose him to a variety of resources to encourage his progress. We watch YouTube videos, attend seminars, ask experts, gather information ourselves, and help him overcome challenges when he is “stuck” in his learning. More importantly than teaching the basics of soccer or sewing, however, is teaching our son, through our own modeling, how to acquire knowledge and skills he needs. Doing so has led him to believe there is nothing he cannot learn or master, if he decides to do so. Unfortunately, this self-determined, facilitated process typically does not occur in teacher professional learning.

Heutagogy derives its name from ancient Greek for “self” and capitalizes on the theory that people want to learn and have a natural tendency to do so (Kenyon & Hase, 2001). The theory challenges the notion of teacher-centered teaching, arguing that learning should be facilitated by the instructor who is not the keeper or sharer of the knowledge, but rather the guide. The facilitator provides resources, but the learner takes those resources and determines the direction of the learning. In a formal learning environment, the facilitator and learner work together to determine and negotiate the continued direction as well as the assessment (Kenyon & Hase, 2001). The two also collaborate to determine what will be learned, the facilitator’s role in the learning, how the learning will occur (by what means), how the learner will guide the learning, and the proper way to assess whether or not the learner has been successful (Kenyon & Hase, 2013). The process allows for the learner to self-determine the learning while still being responsible for meeting the requirements of academic rigor in a formal education process.

Hase and Kenyon (2013) clearly define the reasons why the education world is unlikely to ever revert to an era where it is necessary for a student to sit in the presence of a teacher in order to learn. They state:

The “now” generation don’t want to wait to find things out when they have a need, the motivation to seek. Using their wireless devices they can search the internet, read the latest research, listen to the latest talks on topics via TED or YouTube and follow opinion. If the “student” needs information to be deciphered or clarified in some way they can search out a facilitator, an expert. Alternatively they can talk to their colleagues or friends, a major source of learning for people, even in traditional education settings. (p. 208)

Building on the work of Malcolm Knowles (1970), and others related to andragogy and adult learning, the concept and practice of heutagogy attempts to redefine the learning process by moving it from a system where the teacher serves as the keeper of the knowledge, and the student operates as a passive participant, to a learner-directed system that operates with the assistance of a facilitator (Kenyon & Hase, 2001). A teacher as “keeper of the knowledge” is unnecessary in 2017, when information is available via the smartphones carried in most pockets. Experts are available in most imaginable fields, and connecting with them is often as simple as sending an email or making a post to a blog or wiki. The change in the way information is stored and acquired calls for a change to what is considered learning. Blaschke (2012) argues that today the ability to synthesize and evaluate information, as well as build capacity and competency, is valued in learners since information can be so easily obtained. After building the capacity to synthesize and

evaluate information, the learner, who is self-determined, is able to assess how best to learn the necessary information and solve the problem at hand, whatever it may be (Blaschke, 2012). The process allows for truly self-determined learning that is guided by need and interest, and not surface-level learning that does not impact the learner long-term.

The goal of heutagogy extends beyond helping the learner acquire competencies such as knowledge and skills. It aims to reach a deeper cognitive level of capacity building which results in the learner being able to apply the competencies in new and unfamiliar situations (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Implementing heutagogy into professional development for teachers may help them to navigate the K-12 public education system in the 21st century.

Double-Loop Learning

Hase and Kenyon (2013) state that, “Double-loop learning often occurs spontaneously and involves internally challenging our deepest values, beliefs and ways of knowing. While it is difficult to change any of these schema that drive human behavior, it is at this level that the deepest learning occurs” (p. 22). The concept of double-loop learning strengthens the argument that learning is not linear, but rather a process that occurs when the learner is ready and the environment is correct. This sentiment echoes the 6th century B.C. teachings of the philosopher and poet Lao-Tzu who said, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

The following example (personal communication, January, 6, 2016) clarifies how double-loop learning manifests in a real-life situation. In this example, the superintendent allows for her staff to determine their own learning within the confines of particular topic–inclusionary practices. In doing so, the staff engages in learning that changes deeply rooted beliefs and values. A former superintendent of a 5,000 student district, described the design and implementation of a strategic plan. Her first year in the district she worked with all stakeholders designing and adopting a strategic plan focused around the concept of “success for all students.” This process occurred years before the regular implementation of inclusionary practices that is now commonplace in the United States. While some teachers believed in the concept, they felt they could not implement it without more training.

The superintendent had previous experience leading this kind of effort and knew that training must occur in a real context with students. She stated that research indicated that, unless teachers had direct experience with exceptional students in their own schools, they would never feel sufficiently trained to educate such students. She arranged a school visit to a district where she previously created a model program of inclusionary practices that received guidance from regional and national experts, including teacher leaders in the field of inclusionary practices.

Following this site visit, the district administration, including the superintendent, worked in teams with teachers, students, parents, and board and community members to determine what they needed to support the inclusion of these exceptional students. As a result, the interdisciplinary teams worked on such concepts as adapting flexible curriculum. To do so, schedules must provide for daily meetings for teams of teachers, including special education teachers. This would provide opportunity to develop instructional plans based on real-time student progress. The interdisciplinary teams also designed ongoing programs and student assessments to report progress so everyone would know, in real time, how individuals and subgroups were progressing. These actions took place through spring and summer of the school year, and students who had previously received their education in separate schools arrived the following fall for the start of the next school year.

Problem-solving and program development were ongoing. There were times when the superintendent interacted as a counselor with individuals or groups of teachers, as did teacher leaders. The result showed teachers and administrators that where there was a will, there was a way, and indeed that was true. They worked their way through problems and opportunities that arose. By the end of the second year, the teachers had coined the phrase, “All students belong to all teachers.”

The superintendent stated (personal communication, January 6, 2016) that she could have provided years’ worth of workshops without ever changing the deeply held belief by the educators that they were not prepared. But by engaging in double-loop learning, challenging those deepest beliefs even as they engaged in interdisciplinary planning and action among adults, the district was able to change the belief system because of the real interactions and context. In this example, if the district had engaged in single-loop learning, the result most likely would have been as follows in Figure 1. The result of not engaging adults in their own learning is that no change in beliefs occurs.

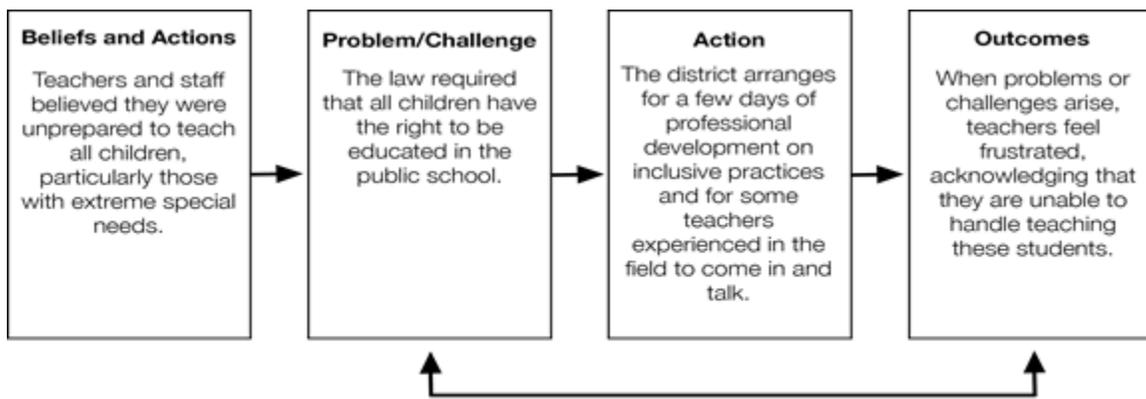


Figure 1. The process of single-loop learning. This figure illustrates the process of single-loop learning as it pertains to the example provided in the above text.

However, because the district administration engaged the faculty and staff in their own learning and change process, and gave ownership of the change to the teachers and other stakeholders, attitudes changed to reflect the belief that including all students was the right thing to do, and as such, problems that arose were seen as challenges to solve. This change in attitude and beliefs was the result of the double-loop learning that occurred, as indicated in Figure 2.

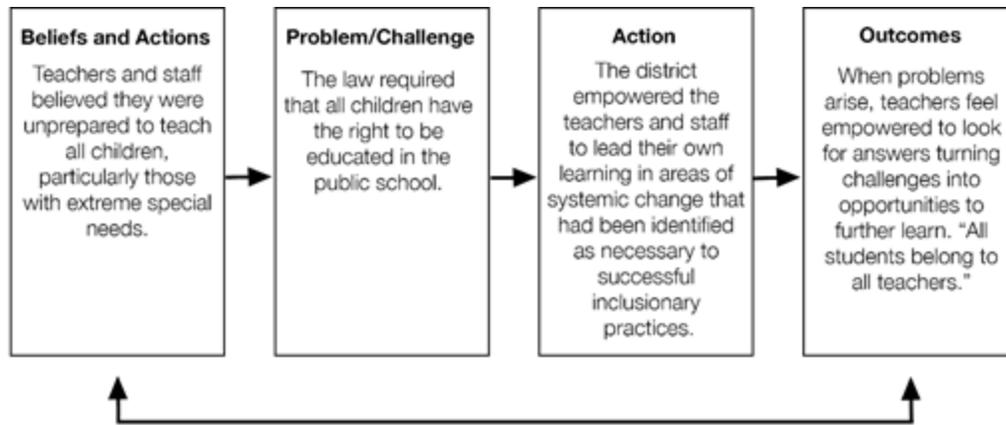


Figure 2. Graphic illustrating the process of double-loop learning as pertains to the example.

The body of knowledge on heutagogy remains small but ever growing; its principles have not been applied to teacher professional development in a formal sense, but may be occurring informally in teacher’s individual professional learning. Traditional professional development does not utilize the knowledge and understanding of how adults learn, but instead continues to rely on the outdated workshop and conference model (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007).

Andragogy-based curriculum often has aspects of self-directed learning; however, the main focus is still on a teacher-student relationship in which one person, the teacher, has the knowledge, and the other person, the student, receives the knowledge (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Teachers are limited in the learning process to simply transferring knowledge and skills. Effective learning must be controlled by the learner and encompass more than acquiring skills and knowledge. It means acquiring competencies that build capacity for the learner to transfer those skills to new and unanticipated situations (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Cordon’s Canadian study (2015) substantiates the idea in her finding that oncology nurses who participated in heutagogical learning reported that they were able to “problem solve new and unfamiliar situations” (p. iii). Teachers often find themselves faced with the need to problem solve in new and unfamiliar situations with regard to their students.

The ability to help direct one’s own learning is central to the idea of andragogy, but it is only part of the continuum of learning that leads to self-determined learning. Thirty years after Knowles introduced the world to the concept of andragogy, Kenyon and Hase (2001) introduced the concept of heutagogy, or the practice of learning in which the learner determines what and how learning should take place, as opposed to the prevalent theories of pedagogy and andragogy, which both focus on the teacher/student relationship. This more progressive concept is a direct result of the possibilities that exist in a world in which information is so readily available. It also focuses on the need to learn how to learn, more than on the need to consume knowledge. It is not meant to replace the theory of andragogy, but rather seen as a natural progression that optimizes learning in the 21st century with resources (Kenyon & Hase, 2001) beyond what Knowles and other earlier theorists could have imagined 30 years ago. Hase and Kenyon (2013) state that “Heutagogy is a stimulus to thinking differently about learning, teachers, and education and training and hopefully will assist in generating new thinking about educational practice” (p. 207).

While research on heutagogy and professional learning in a variety of professions is being conducted in other countries, no such research yet exists in the United States. Some research is beginning to emerge in other professions regarding the positive aspects of implementing a high degree of heutagogical practices in professional learning. A recent study conducted in Canada by Cordon (2015) found that oncology nurses who participated in heutagogical learning reported that they were able to “problem solve new and unfamiliar situations” (p. iii).

Reaching beyond the formal training environment in workplaces, an Australian project, Mature Men Matter, used heutagogical concepts through interactive theater as a means of reaching retired working-class men, a demographic often described by health professionals and adult educators as difficult to engage in learning (Foskey, 2013). The project, whose aim was promoting health and well-being in older men, designed theatrical events that eliminated the proverbial fourth wall in theater that keeps the audience as viewers. They made the audience participatory members who interacted with the characters to reflect and discover answers to common issues plaguing the demographic. Following the viewing of a scene, the audience engaged with the actors, who were all trained adult educators, in conversations that reflected on “their own experiences, values, and assumptions, as well as those of their characters” (p. 195). It should be noted that participation was strictly voluntary, but many men told their own stories and reflected on similar experiences in their lives. Foskey (2013) notes that “in this process those older men, who may previously have been left voiceless and invisible in expert-led community health information and education events, were often able to contribute their insights, skills, and knowledge” (p. 201). Demonstrating the effectiveness of using heutagogical principles to reach this typically hard to reach demographic paves the way to implement the principles in a variety of contexts both formally and informally.

Implementing Internationally Inspired Teacher Professional Development

Northcote and Boddey (2014) conducted an Australian study that focuses on the development and use of Moodle’s Little Helper, a self-help online resource for instructors at Avondale College of Higher Education, to serve as professional development in becoming more effective online teachers. The study used a utilization-focused design to assist in the development and evaluation of the resource’s structure and content. The methodology encouraged the participants to contribute to the design of the resource as well as have a voice in the modifications via journals and online surveys.

The results of the study, based on heutagogical principles, seem to indicate that the ability to approach professional development from a heutagogical framework increased perceptions of self-efficacy and capacity, specifically in regard to self-consciousness about frequently contacting on-campus support services. A further analysis revealed that both inexperienced and experienced online teachers used the resource regularly. Regular online use is attributed to Hase’s (2009) argument that “learning occurs when the learner is ready rather than when the teacher expects or intends for it to occur” (p. 44). This reiterates Rogers’ 1969 work stating that no one can teach another person directly; learning can only be facilitated (Kenyon & Hase, 2001). By allowing the teachers to access the information on their own terms, in their own time, adult learners were given a greater sense of autonomy. The study noted, however, that the online collaborative piece was least effective, with individuals preferring to speak in person or via email, indicating that a complete shift to online learning and collaboration may not be the best idea. With the results of North-

cote and Boddey in mind, we set out to offer not only online options in personalized, self-determined learning, but also the opportunity to form partnerships or groups that might pursue the same topic. While many teachers opted to work independently in their first year given a choice, the tide changed significantly in the second year. Many small, organic groups formed to study the same topic or tackle a common problem. These groups were not limited by department or grade level. Some of the pairings seemed nonsensical, by any standard means, however, the resulting plans of study not only made sense, but are likely to lead to powerful, organic movement in teaching for the participants.

Director Reflection: In 2002, I participated in a graduate class where we discussed differentiated professional development, but the discussion suggested school administration should conduct a needs assessment with teachers to determine an appropriate program of professional development. Whole group sessions were the norm, with occasional grade level teachers or curriculum department sessions with appropriate topics. As budgets tightened and grants disappeared, even those small differentiated professional development programs dwindled. For more than ten years, I was directed to find free or inexpensive professional development programs that could be provided for all teachers at the same time in the same place. Therefore, the professional development offerings became more and more generic and less and less engaging for the teachers. Fortunately, one of the teachers in my district began to research best practices in adult learning which led us to investigate several international authors of heutagogy. Ultimately, uncovering a significant body of international work in the field of self-determined learning. We discussed practical implications of the findings, culminating in an initial plan. Under this plan, teachers could develop the skills necessary for independent learning, but still be easily monitored by administration. The initial year was a success, and the following year teachers planned for ten hours of self-determined learning.

Researcher Reflection: The director and I spent countless hours discussing first the merits of andragogy and later the international research on heutagogy, as she took interest in my research and work. As I read and consulted with the seminal writers in the field regarding my own instrumentation and research, the director and I talked more and more about the practical implications of this idea. I hoped that we would one day implement the theory in some way into our practice, but had not quite worked out how to do so until the director approached me with a rough sketch of a three-year plan to implement an increasingly heutagogical professional development plan within our district. The plan served as a starting place and we discussed, debated, and revised several times before taking it to the superintendent. The plan was again revised. We began to implement the first steps without revealing the underpinning theory or research to the faculty. While there was some resistance to the initial process from teachers, all teachers successfully completed their first year of independent learning. In year two, after more discussion and revision, we asked the faculty to design an individual professional learning plan encompassing a minimum of 10 hours of learning.

Teacher Reflection: As a self-motivated lifelong learner, I find value in setting and achieving professional development goals that will assist me in my current position as an art and technology teacher. When selecting professional development interests, I am mindful of my goals: 1) continual development of a new media arts program at a rural junior-senior high school, and 2) further growth of my professional leadership skills. Therefore, during the 2016-2017 school year, I planned to achieve Google for Education teacher certification, as I used G Suite for Education as an online course management system for my classes. I also participated in STEM professional learning workshops and stained-glass mosaic training sessions.

Professional Development Program Findings

The researcher relied heavily on information gathered from Pennsylvania public school teachers during her 2016 study. The original purpose of this survey was to identify the characteristics of Pennsylvania teachers who engage in a high degree of heutagogical practices.

Because no instruments existed to capture the practice of heutagogy in a quantitative manner, Miller conferred with several experts in the field, including Stewart Hase, Trevor Kerry, Melanie Booth, and Lisa Marie Blaschke, to review and modify an instrument. At the suggestion of these researchers in the field, a qualitative piece was added to provide more depth and context to the research.

The qualitative portion consisted of one open-ended question where participants could respond in up to 100 words their preferred professional development and learning practices. This was not a required question on the survey and participants could leave it unanswered.

Although optional, 221 of the 268 ($n=221$, $N=268$) participants offered a response. The researcher employed an iterative process of open coding and analyzing the data based on Tesch's 1990 (Creswell, 2014) eight steps in the coding process. The process includes clustering similar topics and reducing them down to categories. In this study, the researcher reduced the themes, but nuances in the answers provided by participants meant there were many categories where only one answer qualified. This process ensured no answers or valuable data were missed. While seven major themes occurred, for purposes of this article, only the top three will be discussed.

The participants used the terms "self-directed" and "self-determined" interchangeably, though when examining the context, the vast majority of the responses referred to self-determined learning. Self-determined learning has roots in heutagogical learning and involves building capability in the learner, being directed by the learner, and facilitated by the instructor. Self-directed learning has roots in andragogical learning and is interested in being content and teacher-focused.

Theme 1: Self-directed

21.7% of the participants in the study gave answers represented by the theme self-directed. While the literature indicates this is not currently how professional development and learning is done, it is what the surveyed teachers desired the most in their professional learning.

One participant said,

I have strong motivation to learn and I am a lifelong learner. I believe most teachers are. However, we are rarely given VOICE in our professional development. So, first, generate professional development from the needs/desires/interests of the staff. The other issue is giving a staff the TIME to engage in self or group learning. I see huge benefits from networking with colleagues, reading and responding to blogs, or doing a book study together. More time in a less structured environment!

A second participant wrote that choice is necessary, saying, "Meaningful professional learning involves teacher choice over what to learn and how to learn it." Another participant indicated that when directives come from the administration, instead of teachers, it is less effective by

saying, “The key to PD [professional development] is sustainable, teacher-driven directives without the “top down” approach that suggests little to no teacher input before implementation.”

Other participants shared a sense of frustration toward involvement in professional development in areas where the teacher is already experienced. This concept is a reality when districts practice the kind of professional development that puts teachers, with decades of experience, in the same professional development sessions as brand-new teachers, and do not account for differentiation of the learners. One participant wrote, “There is almost nothing more frustrating to a professional educator than to sit through a lecture-type presentation covering topics in which she is already well-experienced. The opportunity for teachers to choose the best fit in PD [professional development] is vital to effective individual growth.”

One participant said, “Self Directed Professional Development [sic] is important as no one knows better than the employee themselves what weaknesses they have or interests they wish to develop.” This same sentiment was echoed in the response to provide “Choice for teachers to pick what will best help THEIR students.” Similarly, another participant shared, “professional development would involve my input what I find/deem necessary for me to be successful in my classroom not necessarily [sic] what the administration feels I need.” Likewise, one participant said that the ideal professional development experience “would be my choice, not something the district says I have to do.” In the same way, another participant stated that the ideal experience would be “Self-directed! I feel most of us are aware of our strengths and areas of need. We would utilize freedom in this area to best enhance our instruction.”

One participant who called for individual choice in professional development then stated that the district had forced all of its teachers to participate in a non-applicable training for five days the previous year. This same frustration was echoed by several other participants, further demonstrating what the literature reveals about the current ineffectiveness of teacher professional development. One participant explained why forced professional development is ineffective, but when given a choice, there are more opportunities for motivation and collaboration. The participant wrote:

I would consider the best professional development to be a self-directed idea or concept that the teacher engaged in. Each individual has very different professional development needs depending on their own educational background and teaching area. Understanding is a key component to professional development, and if I am placed in a situation in areas which I have no interest, that form of professional development is useless to me. Teacher-centered professional development is more effective, and it provides more opportunities for collaboration in each area. If we expect our educational system to improve we need to motivate our teacher's [sic] to be the best they can in their classrooms. After all, we are teachers not administrators and we have very different job descriptions. In other words, as a teacher I know what I need to be more effective.

While the participant did not use the term “self-determined” to categorize a preferred learning practice, the answer touches on elements of heutagogical learning and goes to the nature of self-determined learning.

Theme 2: Relevant

A total of 20.4% of the participants in the study gave answers that demonstrated the theme of a desire for relevance, making it nearly as important to the participants as the ability to be self-directed in their professional development. The idea of relevance in learning closely relates to self-determined learning since it is the learner who subjectively decides the relevance of a particular topic. In the case of this survey, many participants used the term as a proxy for self-determined learning.

Several participants simply listed the word “relevant” when asked for their preferred practices in professional development and learning. A few participants expanded a bit further, saying the preferred practice would be “something that is well worth our time.” Another participant said his/her preference was for something “relevant and not redundant to your specific subject matter.”

One participant was explicit in voicing some frustration in current professional development models, but praised what he/she considered a particularly relevant professional development experience in saying:

The best professional development has been presenters that don't just read to you from a Powerpoint [*sic*]. They can engage the audience. Their topic also needs to be something relevant. I think the best professional development we have had have been when we practiced for a shooter in the building and new ways students hide/use drugs. These are current problems; not just writing curriculum for the 17th time!

Another participant seemed to agree, stating,

Just teach us about something we can utilize effectively that we have not already been trained in many times before. Do not force teachers to take training that will not ever pertain to their subject area. Gym teachers don't need to know the ins and outs of Study Island [test-preparation software].

One participant encompassed the top three themes when stating:

I feel the best professional development is designed for the specific school and teachers, and is followed up by administrators. Our PD [professional development] is rarely applicable to most teachers in our school and is never followed up. Our PD is often chosen based on grants received by administration and although everyone is required to attend, less than 5% of the teachers are involved in the actual project. It is often a waste of time.

Theme 3: Applicable

19% percent of participants echoed the theme of applicable learning, which closely tied to the theme of relevance and served as another proxy term for self-determined learning, since again, the learner is the one making the decision as to the applicability of the topic.

As in the previously discussed themes, some participants simply used the term “applicable” to describe their preferred professional development practices, while some expanded further on the topic. One participant put it simply by stating the desired activity was “something that is useful in the every day [*sic*] classroom,” while another shared that the preferred activity “involves real

application.” One participant was more specific in stating, “A key characteristic would be meaningful learning opportunities that are applicable within my classroom.”

Another participant repeated the same concept and tied it to self-directed learning by stating a preference for “applicable, self-directed professional development that provides opportunity to learn the most effective, and up to date teaching strategies.” While this respondent did not use the term “self-determined learning,” the description of his or her learning preference encompasses the ideas of heutagogical learning. Yet another stated professional development should “have components that are easily replicated in the classroom.”

One teacher explained:

Giving a teacher things that are applicable to the classroom is the best kind of professional development. New ideas and the technology needed to implement them are key points. Each teacher will take what they've learned and develop their own new strategies from there but sometimes you just need a little kick start and ideas.

A similar belief was heard in the statement, “The best professional development is something where you are learning hands on and can use that knowledge gained in the classroom.” Some participants felt that “applicable” meant having professional development experiences tied to their own content area and grade level. One said, “I want specific strategies for my content area and appropriate for high school.”

An art teacher had similar thoughts and expressed, “The best professional development would be learning skills that can be applied within the classroom on a daily basis. I teach art and many of the professional development learning provided does not apply to the arts.” This participant’s answer expresses a desire to self-determine what is applicable and practical to the learning he or she deems relevant to the specific content area taught.

In considering the participants as a whole, teachers expressed a preference for heutagogical practices in professional learning. Pennsylvania K-12 teachers surveyed overwhelmingly preferred self-direction and other heutagogical principles in their professional development. Many of the themes discussed by participants point to this idea, yet districts nationwide continue to engage in professional development practices that do not demonstrate the intended outcome of effecting change within the teacher and ultimately improving student achievement. The sense that failing to adjust teacher professional development practices wastes the teacher’s time was clear. Often districts and administrators have no clear path to eradicating this issue. A lack of money, time, and expertise keeps substantive change from happening.

The researcher and director made several rounds of revisions to the heutagogical-based professional development plan, relying heavily on these participants’ words to guide the program to become a productive and less frustrating experience for teachers.

Year one (2015-2016) involved a whole-district goal to study a particular topic that aligned with current needs within the district. Teachers were told what topic to study, and given resources from which to work, but were then left to direct their own learning regarding whether to work individually or collaboratively. They also chose when they preferred to work, whether it be at home, during preparatory periods, or scheduled in-service days. Doing so led to more independence in learning but within strict guidelines. It removed teachers from a dark auditorium with a speaker on stage and engaged them in their own professional learning process.

Year two (2016-2017) continued on the continuum toward heutagogical learning, allowing teachers to develop their own plan of study for 10 hours of independent learning throughout the

school year. Time was carved out of in-service days and dedicated to individualized learning. No meetings or other assignments were given during this time. Teachers worked with their immediate supervisors to determine what they wanted to learn and how they would accomplish the learning. While there was trepidation, as often occurs with policy shifts, the majority of the response was overwhelming positive. There were no limits initially placed on the learning topics—if a teacher could justify the topic to an administrator it could be approved.

Teachers buzzed while discussing what line of learning they would pursue with their new-found opportunity. Several discussed forming their own professional learning community to study a particular topic, while another rejoiced in the ability to study something so very specific that it could only apply to his curriculum. One teacher approached the researcher and gave a generous thank you. She stated that her entire career as a special area teacher has been spent in professional development sessions that have little to no application to what she does daily in her classroom. She said that she and her colleagues in similar departments in her district and many others have been asking for just this type of program for a very long time, and while it would not have much bearing on her career, she was thrilled that it would affect future teachers in her field. Likewise, two other specialty area teachers, who work diligently to stay at the top of their fields, inquired about whether or not they would be permitted to count upcoming studies they already had planned for their teacher professional development requirement. When met with a yes from the administration, their energy and enthusiasm was palpable. Both stated that it was thrilling to finally be recognized for the hard work they put into being excellent at their craft and instruction of it. In the second year, topics ranged from stained glass making, welding, technology certification, studying the Zika virus, improving classroom management, and questioning.

The burden is on the district and schools to do away with professional learning that does not have a lasting impact on teachers and clear the way for true, deep, meaningful self-determined learning in which teachers willingly engage.

Teacher Reflection: I relished participating in the 2016-2017 professional development initiative, as I was able to focus on my subject-specific interests and further increasingly acquire knowledge and skills that will advance my practice as a new media arts educator. My school district's new professional development requirement provided me with a sense of local encouragement and support that was lacking in previous years. Being able to spend in-service time focusing on what matters to me was a welcomed change. During the 2016-2017 school year, I surpassed my professional development goals by achieving Google Certified Educator Level I, Level II, and Trainer status. In addition, I participated in multiple other art and technology workshop opportunities. My professional development hours at the end of the school year totaled 126 hours, far exceeding our 10-hour professional development requirement.

Director Reflection: As I reflect on the state of our district's professional development initiative, I am overwhelmed with the positive results. Individual teacher plans demonstrated thoughtful and progressive modes of self-determined learning. The topics aligned with current trends in classroom practice as well as explorations in innovative tools and methods. Teacher collaboration between and among grade level teachers and curricula increased two-fold, without administrative intervention. The 84% of the entire teaching staff who reported their total hours, 64% participated in more professional development hours than the 10 hours required. The average number of hours reported by teacher was 18.3 hours, 8.3 hours more than required. Both administrators and teachers seem genuinely engaged with the process and satisfied with the results. In a teacher's reflection she said, "I feel better able to communicate with my students, use meaningful

questioning and discussion techniques, and create a deeper level of learning by engaging students. All of this is done while continuously being flexible through constant lesson adjustments, responding to students' needs and assessing throughout each step of the lesson.”

Researcher Reflection: The first year of relying on heutagogical principles in the teacher professional development program far surpassed my expectations. The plans developed and implemented by a large portion of the staff demonstrated high levels of interest and learning. The creativity and diversity of the plans developed indicated our thinking was moving in the right direction. Beyond the submitted plans were the conversations throughout the year about what next year's plans might look like and include. Teachers planning ahead for their own professional learning, and developing long-term plans, was exactly the response we hoped to achieve.

Teacher Professional Development Initiative Revisions

As the professional development program within the district continues to grow, and teachers become better practitioners of heutagogy, the professional development model has to change and expand. One area that continues to require revision is training the principals and supervisors to better understand the facilitation process. We also are encouraging teachers to think holistically in their professional learning plans, considering the district's differentiated supervision plan, and state-required performance tasks. In keeping with the spirit of heutagogical practices, we do not force teachers to reflect on those areas before choosing, but we are advising principals and supervisors to query the teachers about the intersection of these elements during annual review meetings.

While the majority of teachers developed thoughtful, rigorous, interesting plans, some relied on simple and non-challenging learning objectives and plans. Opting to take an online course to which one had no particular ties or interests does not exemplify the practice of heutagogy. Whether teachers chose the simple path because of its ease or a lack of creativity was not investigated, but the director and researcher did set out to alleviate the issue. One practical solution involved writing sample professional development plans teachers could pull from a shared Google folder and either adjust to fit their own interests and needs or use exactly as written. The director and researcher began by writing these sample plans for teacher use or inspiration, but soon other teachers and professionals authored their own to be shared with the faculty. The resulting plans expanded even the director and researcher's thinking about professional learning opportunities.

Call for Future Internationally Inspired American Teacher Professional Development

The teaching profession in the United States desperately needs radical changes in the area of professional development and learning. One solution to the one-size-fits-all model that currently exists is the implementation of heutagogical principles. This allow teachers to self-determine their own professional learning. A facilitator assists in setting goals, determining appropriateness of subject matter, and negotiating artifacts that demonstrate mastery of the concepts chosen for individualized learning. The proposed change is likely to be met with hesitation from top-down districts which historically controlled the learning environment for teachers. District administrators and school board members must understand and embrace the heutagogical principle that learning must belong to the learner, not to the facilitator. This does not mean the district and administration retain no oversight of the process, but rather work collaboratively with individual teachers to set appropriate learning goals and criteria for each teacher.

The time has come to make self-determined learning a reality. The field of education has only just begun to uncover the basics of the heutagogical theory of learning, which will certainly continue its evolution as the world and technology change. As the availability of information and communication technologies rapidly increase, the heutagogical approach to learning will continue to evolve. Therefore, school districts must embrace progressive change toward a self-directed model of teacher professional development in order to benefit student learning and achievement.

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