Improving Teach Professional Development
With Appreciative Inquiry and Emotional
telligence

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ABSTRACT

Creating meaningful and effective professional development (PD) programs for K-12 teachers is an ongoing challenge. The problem is exacerbated when PD models are implemented without fully aligning PD resources and plans with the training needs of teachers and the organization. This study sought to understand the experiences of teachers about the implementation of PD as a means for improving student outcomes. The purpose of the study was to find ways to enhance PD in order to improve student outcomes at the school. The conceptual framework for this study is interwoven through the constructs of student-centered learning, adult learning theory, transformational learning, self-directed learning, and emotional intelligence (EI). A qualitative case study was used in an appreciative inquiry approach that included a document review, written response survey, a positive assessment of EI skills, and focus group interview with 5 teacher participants. The EI data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to create an average EI profile for the group, and qualitative data were analyzed using inductive and comparative techniques. The results indicated that the teachers desired more focused PD that aligns to organizational goals, is collaborative, and includes support from leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States has increasingly emphasized accountability and student achievement as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, popularly referred to as NCLB. Under NCLB (2002), all students must be proficient in math and English Language Arts by 2014, and schools must make annual yearly progress towards this goal. In California, students’ proficiency was measured annually through the California Standards Test (CST), now the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System. The challenge many schools face in the era of accountability is how effectively to develop teachers as the primary resource for improving student learning (DeWitt, 2013).

Professional development (PD) is an essential factor for student achievement and improved student outcomes (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), in collaboration with several national and state organizations, created standards for professional development for educators (NSDC, 2001). The purpose of these standards, in part, was to facilitate the design of quality professional development experiences that would improve student outcomes (NSDC, 2001). In 2001, the NSDC revised the standards to express more explicitly that high quality professional development should be driven by outcomes and occur as embedded activities of the day-to-day job of the participating teachers (NSDC, 2001). In the recently published Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), there is an even stronger call for educators to take an active role in their professional learning and development.

Although criteria for effective PD for teachers have been established, there is not a single model for how those criteria may be implemented. Learning Forward (formerly NSDC) created a formal definition of professional development for use in the reauthorized version of NCLB: “The term ‘professional development’ means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (Learning Forward, 2012, para. 2). Professional development can occur in many forms, including individually guided activities, an observation and assessment cycle, teacher-
developed school improvement efforts, training programs and workshops, or research (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Effective PD programs share common elements; they (a) link to schoolwide improvement efforts, (b) conduct activities within the context of a support network from school leadership and other participating teachers, (c) teachers select appropriate goals and activities to meet their learning needs, (d) the training is ongoing over time, and (e) there is ongoing support and feedback (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). It is critical that schools implement a PD model that follows these criteria, a model that is focused on improving teachers’ skills and knowledge to improve student learning and school outcomes.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The problem that prompted this study is one that affects many underperforming schools nationwide: the school is far from achieving the NCLB goal that all students score proficient in math and English Language Arts. But another requirement under NCLB is that teachers be highly qualified. All teachers at the charter school in this study were teaching within their credentialed areas, as required under NCLB. The teachers were not, however, receiving ongoing, high-quality PD to maintain and enhance the knowledge and skills they need in content and pedagogy to improve student outcomes (DeWitt, 2013); they were not receiving the kind of training described by Moore, Kochan, Kraska, and Reames (2011) that links student outcomes, PD, and financial resources for curriculum, trainings, and student intervention programs, to name a few. Quality PD programs are essential components in improving school outcomes and meeting the goals established by NCLB. Yet “professional development practices have historically been unplanned and haphazardly implemented in schools” (Moore et al., p. 66). Even though the nature of quality PD has been well-established, schools continue to implement it the same way they always have, regardless of any measurable impact on student learning or teacher effectiveness.

RATIONALE

The purpose of this study was to clarify and understand the experiences of teachers about current and past professional development (PD) implementation as a means for improving student outcomes at their school. By identifying positive aspects of past PD efforts and connecting new initiatives to student outcomes, it could focus future approaches to increase teacher and institutional effectiveness. Yoder (2005) provided a framework for a similar study that employed the construct of emotional intelligence to provide a common language for the appreciative inquiry. Based on research about the connections between Emotional Intelligence (EI), intelligent self-direction, leadership skills, and teacher effectiveness (Ghamrawi, 2013; Jha and Singh, 2012; Muller, 2008; Nelson & Low, 2011; Nelson, Low, Nelson, & Hammett, 2015; Nelson & Reynolds, 2010; Nelson, Sen, Low, Hammett, & Surya, 2009; Putman, 2010), this study also used a measure of EI to introduce the construct and vocabulary of emotional intelligence to participants. The results from the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) (Nelson, Low & Vela, 2003) were used to enhance discussions surrounding the role of EI in PD as a way to indirectly and positively impact student outcomes.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Perkins and Cooter (2013) stated that professional development which is tailored to address content and is aligned with school improvement needs enhances student achievement. Yet many school systems provide teachers with limited professional development opportunities each year, numbering just a few days per school year (Perkins & Cooter, 2013). When compared to other professions, the field of education falls short in developing the skills and knowledge of the teacher, its most valuable asset for improving student achievement (Patti, Holzer, Stern, & Brackett, 2012). While professional development requires a significant use of a school’s resources in terms of finances, time, and effort, the assumption is that it will be a worthwhile investment through improved teaching and learning (Dean, Tait, & Kim, 2012). Strong connections exist between
effective professional development experiences for teachers and improved student outcomes. According to Spelman and Rohlwing (2013), “highly qualified, effective teachers are the most powerful factor in increasing student achievement” (p. 155). This made it incumbent upon school organizations to provide opportunities for quality PD for teachers.

However, educators also need to be able to identify their professional learning needs in order to take steps to improve their practice. Bouwma-Gearhart (2012) emphasized that PD should not be treated as a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, educators should learn to assess their own learning needs in order to seek out meaningful and effective PD activities (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2012). According to Patti, Holzer, Stern, and Brackett (2012), PD is effective when the learner connects to the new learning on a personal level. They also claimed that a PD program “anchored in compassion versus compliance has a greater probability of promoting desired, sustainable change in attitudes and behaviors” (p. 265).

Teachers need support to refine and improve their instructional practices (Bostic & Matney, 2013). According to Spelman and Rohlwing (2013), in order to enact sustainable changes to teacher practices to improve student outcomes, there must be strong leadership and an organizational climate that supports professional growth. Students who have an ineffective teacher for even 1 year will experience a drop in their later achievement; yet as the level of teacher effectiveness increases, students of lower achievement improve the most. Studies like this led to a dramatic shift in thinking about PD from the traditional one-day workshop model to ongoing, embedded learning experiences (Spelman & Rohlwing, 2013). Further, PD and the continuous strengthening of teachers’ skills is not just a personal responsibility, but a critical organizational responsibility.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION

In alignment with the research problem and purpose, I posed the following guiding question: What are the experiences of teachers at a school regarding the implementation of PD as a means for improving student outcomes? One broad, open-ended guiding question was posed in order to focus the study while remaining open to what might emerge from the data (Cavanaugh, 2012).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature focuses on PD approaches for cultivating individual teaching practices, improving student outcomes, and supporting school improvement efforts. The review includes literature that positions PD for teachers in the wider context of student-centered learning, adult learning theory, transformational learning, and self-directed learning. A connection is made among developing efficiency in self-direction, leadership abilities, and transformative EI for improving teaching practice. Transformative EI puts the learner at the center of the theory and combines positive assessment with EI learning models to facilitate personally meaningful (individual) growth and development, particularly in learned EI skills and abilities. Finally, the review addresses the established criteria for an effective PD program for adult learners.

ADULT LEARNING THEORIES

The PD model that existed at the school in this study was an individually guided staff development model. This model assumes that teachers are capable of self-direction, adults learn most successfully when they initiate the activities, and individuals are most motivated to learn when they articulate their own learning goals based upon a personal needs assessment (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). The individually guided staff development model is based on the theories of student-centered learning and andragogy.

Student-Centered Learning

Rogers (1969) presented the student-centered learning theory, which is based upon five elements that result in significant learning. The five elements help to explain why individuals will seek out learning opportunities and personal growth under certain conditions. According to Rogers (1969), a significant learning experience is characterized by a level of personal involvement, is self-initiated, is pervasive, and is evaluated by the learners themselves. These elements work together to underscore the importance of the
relevance of learning experiences to the learner and are integral to our definition of transformative EI. Additionally, the aspect of self-evaluation is important in minimizing a sense of external threat to the learner, allowing the learner to fully assimilate the learning experiences and move forward in the learning process. An individually guided PD model, it seems, should contain all of the elements to potentially result in significant learning.

**Andragogy**

Knowles’s theory of adult learning, known as andragogy, is based upon several assumptions about the adult learner. The first assumption is that adults need to see a reason or purpose for learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) stated that when adults are aware of the gaps between where they are and where they need to be in their knowledge or skills it operates as a motivator to undertake the learning experience. Additionally, adult learners have a concept of being responsible for their own lives and will resist efforts by others to impose an agenda on them. It is from this assumption that Knowles put forth the idea of adults as self-directed learners. Knowles went on to explain that in any group of adult learners there will be a wide variety in the quantity and quality of experiences, therefore, learning experiences have to vary greatly in order to address the specific needs, interests, and goals of the individuals. Adult learners have to be ready to learn, or as Knowles explained, they have to see a need in their own lives for the purpose of effectively remedying real-life issues. Further, learning experiences for adults need to be task-centered or problem-centered based on what the learner perceives as useful and necessary for performing tasks or resolving problems they encounter in their daily lives. Knowles’s theory of andragogy explains why individuals have different professional needs that they want addressed in the learning experiences for PD. Andragogy also helps to support how an individually guided PD model can be powerful in enabling teachers to problem solve in the areas which negatively impact their professional practice, organization, and students. A PD model that is individually guided requires the participants to be self-directed learners. All participants may not have reached a level of self-directedness required for this type of PD to be successful to positively impact organizational and student improvement efforts. As Merriam (2001) pointed out, levels of self-directedness can also vary for learners depending on the topic or skills that need to be learned. Merriam further stated that one should not assume that because a learner was self-directed in one situation that they will also be equally successful in a new area. Steinke (2012) stated that it takes time for individuals to become proficient in the process of self-directed learning. An important aspect for developing an effective PD program for teachers, therefore, may be how to accelerate the development of self-directedness in ways that will positively impact the participants and ultimately, organizational performance.

**Transformative Learning**

Mezirow’s (2003) theory of learning posits that transformative learning is a uniquely adult form of reasoning in which a paradigm shift occurs, whereby we critically examine prior interpretations and assumptions in order to form new meaning. Transformative learning is in contrast to instrumental learning, which focuses on the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Transformative learning focuses on why, whereas, instrumental learning focuses on how and what. Qualities of EI are assets for developing the ability to recognize and appreciate alternative beliefs and to participate in critical reflection, which can result in transformative learning experiences (Mezirow, 2003). Organizations which focus on transformative learning activities are able to accomplish positive transformation by building on people’s strengths (Steyn, 2012). One method for capitalizing on the strengths of individuals and organizations is through appreciative inquiry (AI).

Teeroovengadum (2013) argued that many organizations focus on training and instrumental knowledge as a means to improving the abilities of the employees, while lacking a needed focus on their personal development. The concept of a learning organization was proposed as a way to address the transformation of employees as a means to improving organizational performance through the process of learning (Teeroovengadum, 2013). Learning organizations strive to...
allow all people, as individuals as well as collectively, to reach their full potential (Teerooovengadum, 2013). By cultivating individual transformation through self-development it aids in the learning at all levels of the organization thus resulting in transformation at the organizational level.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is one method to support individual transformational learning, but also to encourage positive organizational growth that align both individual and organizational goals. According to Evans, Thornton, and Usinger (2012), “Appreciative inquiry is a positive approach to solving organizational problems and is centered on the belief that inquiry into and discussions about organization strengths, successes, and values will be transformative” (p. 169). Steyn (2012) identified several requirements for effective PD programs through the perspectives of AI and continuous PD. Participants described their experiences with PD as a way to construct meaning about positive experiences with PD and strategies to improve it.

The use of appreciative inquiry as a method for approaching organizational change in practices focuses on what is working in order to learn from and build upon those strengths. Therefore, if organizations inquire into their strengths and positive qualities, then those strengths can be a starting point for creating positive change (Evans, Thornton, & Usinger, 2012). By using AI as a method for identifying what works well for PD, it should create a foundation for developing a shared vision for what makes an effective PD model.

**Emotional Intelligence**

EI was originally developed as a psychological theory by Salovey and Mayer (1990). According to Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, and Seung Hee (2008), “EI refers to the ability to process emotion-laden information competently and to use it to guide cognitive activities such as problem solving and to focus energy on required behaviors” (p. 185). EI is thought to be an important predictor of successful relationships, both personal and professional (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Seung Hee, 2008). Further, it is believed that EI abilities can be developed in individuals. Salovey and Mayer’s theory of EI has four branches; perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Salovey, et al., 2008).

Goleman (2001) suggested that emotional competencies are learned capabilities. The four sets of EI competencies proposed by Goleman are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills (Goleman, 2000). According to Goleman (2001), individuals with higher EI have a stronger foundation for developing these emotional competencies, which can be predictors of job performance. Jha and Singh (2012) showed connections between EI and teacher effectiveness. Benjamin, Gulliya, and Crispo (2012) argued that an organization that emphasizes the development of EI skills in its employees can increase its performance potential. Yuan, Hsu, Shieh, and Li (2012) found that EI plays a role in predicting an employee’s task performance, and that improved task performance may result from developing an individual’s EI. Therefore, a school could pursue PD of teachers and school improvement from the perspective of a learning organization by focusing on individual development of EI skills, content, and pedagogical knowledge through a variety of learning methods, including self-directed PD.

This study sought to operationalize Nelson and Low’s work because of its skills-based, educational, transformative approach (Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010). Nelson and Low’s (2011) theory of transformative EI seems to validate Steinke’s (2012) claim that it takes time to become an efficient self-directed learner. According to Nelson, Low, and others, intelligent self-direction is the ultimate manifestation of EI and a critical skill for success in the 21st century (Nelson & Low, 2011; Nelson, Low, Nelson, & Hammett, 2015; Nelson & Reynolds, 2010; Nelson, Sen, Low, Hammett, & Surya, 2009). Another important connection between Nelson and Low’s approach are the learning principles related to other important theorists. Nelson and Low borrowed from Rogers (1969) in their advocating that adult learning environments should ensure permission, protection, and potency (empowerment) for the development of critical EI skills and abilities. They also borrow from both Rogers and Knowles by emphasizing the importance of a person-centered framework for meaningful
learning to occur. A summary of benefits provided by an EI-centric PD program is conceptualized and presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. A rationale for integrating EI in professional development programs.](image)

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

While no single model of PD for teachers has been established as most effective, there are established criteria for what an effective PD program should consist of. Blank (2013) provided a summary of recent research that measures the effects of PD on student achievement and identified several characteristics in professional learning that leads to positive results for students and teachers. Blank’s findings echoed many of the findings by Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011). According to DeWitt (2013), the “common elements of effective PD programs included focus on core content and modeling of teaching strategies for the content over a longer duration of professional learning, including follow-up assistance, coaching, and feedback” (p. 3). The PD should involve a variety of learning activities and types, with the learning experiences selected to align with the learning goals of the participants and the school’s growth goals. DeWitt (2013) asserted that “PD should incorporate collective participation by teachers and provide opportunities for collaboration among teachers” (p. 3). None of the studies specified a specific model of PD for incorporating these elements, and most ranged from all school training sessions, to coaching, teacher teams, and self-guided learning. Figure 2 illustrates the characteristics associated with effective PD programs.

Kelly (2012) endorsed the ideas presented by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) for what makes effective learning experiences for adults by outlining how to implement effective PD for teachers. Kelly argued that for PD to have a lasting impact on student outcomes the teachers must recognize the need for improvement that is addressed by the PD activity. Kelly asserted that training is typically organized to improve teaching practices based on the assumption that improvement is needed. However, if teachers do not see the need for improvement there is small likelihood for long term change to result from the training (Kelly, 2012). Additionally, any PD training must meet teacher’s individual needs. Those planning PD must recognize this need is essential for commitment from the teaching staff. Kelly suggested organizing a committee to explore options for PD based on school-wide identified needs to present to the staff to review and select from. Kelly (2012) added a new element for PD implementation, suggesting that teachers and administrators should participate in professional learning activities together, to form what DeWitt

![Figure 2. PD model stabilized with effectiveness characteristics.](image)
(2013) referred to as a community of interest, which is committed to the long-term implementation of new skills and programs.

Moore, Kochan, Kraska, and Reames (2011) indicated that PD is most effective in an organization with strong leadership. The findings suggested that one factor in student achievement may be having a principal who recognizes the benefit of implementing high quality PD. The PD could vary from workshops, to coaching, to collaborative teamwork, and self-directed models. The common factors were that the PD aligned to the needs of students and to the goals of the school, that it is long-term and ongoing, embedded in everyday practice, and that it is a collaborative effort.

Lutrick and Szabo (2012) found three themes regarding what instructional leaders viewed to be traits of effective PD. These themes were that PD should be ongoing, collaborative, data-driven in design, and interest-driven in design. These themes echoed both Knowles’s and Rogers’s assertions about adult learners, as well as the key factors for effective PD (Archibald, Cogsshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011; Blank, 2013; Hirsch, 2009). Lutrick and Szabo argued that ongoing PD allows new knowledge and skills to be integrated with existing knowledge and skills that served to promote change in teaching practices. Collaboration involved those participating in PD engaging in conversations in a nonthreatening environment to discuss what is and is not working and to problem solve. These discussions led to reflection and change, both key factors in transformational learning. A data-driven design involved using student outcome data to design PD for various levels of participation and need. For example, they found global topics for school-wide needs, grade level or departmental needs, and individual needs. Interest-driven PD allowed the teachers to get involved in the planning process and led to more buy-in from participants.

Steinke (2012) pointed out that learning experiences vary by learner: The flaw of the one-size-fits-all approach to PD assumes that everyone learns at the same pace. With self-directed learning (SDL), the learner determines how much practice he or she needs in order to grasp a skill. An SDL model for PD accounts for varying degrees of self-directedness in learners. Steinke refers to a three-phase learning cycle to move learners towards self-direction, which includes evaluations by an administrator, as well as developing a process for self-evaluation. The process of systematic self-assessment creates a system for individuals to improve their own performance. Steinke’s model of encouraging self-direction fits with Nelson and Low’s (2004, 2011) emotional learning system (ELS) consisting of the five steps for person-centered development. The ELS is discussed in more detail later in this article as the primary learning process for person-centered PD. A goal for including the transformative model of emotional intelligence is to encourage more reflection and wiser intelligent self-direction; to build quality from within (Nelson, Low, Nelson, & Hammett, 2015).

The organizational culture within a school was also found to impact PD outcomes (Geer & Morrison, 2008). The perceived collective-efficacy of teachers to influence student learning had a significant effect on the gains made by individuals through PD (Geer & Morrison). In other words, the extent to which a school organization supports the pursuit of PD by its teachers effects the impact that PD has on student learning. A school attempting to implement a program for improvement, therefore, should tend to both the collective and individual needs of teachers in terms of their professional learning needs. This would be difficult to accomplish in a one-size-fits all model of PD, and speaks to the value of implementing a self-guided model that also incorporates a collaborative element to maximize the implementation of the individually learned knowledge and skills (Bouwma, Gearhart, 2012; Steinke, 2012).

Siegrist, Green, Brockmeier, Tsemunhi, and Pate (2013) argued that improvement strategies that focus on an organization’s culture were able to produce the most improvement with the least amount of effort. When leaders approach managing organizational change from the perspective that the organization is a social system, in which all parts of the system function as a whole, significant gains in performance became possible (Siegrist, Green, Brockmeier, Tsemunhi, & Pate, 2013). Therefore, when school leadership
facilitates an increase in the number of meaningful interactions that occur between teachers in a school it increases the system’s potential. A shift to a more collaborative approach to school improvement, which speaks to the characteristics of effective PD presented in the literature (Altun & Cenzig, 2012; Archibald, 2011; Blank, 2012; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Moore et al., 2011; Patti et al., 2012), could result in improved student performance. According to Siegrist et al. (2013), student achievement is a reflection of the tools that are provided to teachers and how those are used. When school leadership understands the capabilities of these tools, and focuses on the selection of the most effective tools, while providing PD opportunities which focus on maximizing the knowledge about the use and implementation of the tools, significant increases in organizational performance can occur (Siegrist et al., 2013).

An organization that has leadership with strong EI competencies has a climate in which individuals are empowered and seek to collectively succeed. The EI competencies displayed in what Yoder referred to as a “leaderful” organization are those that when present may also lead to successful PD programs. For example, developing others through the ability to mentor or coach, relates to Putnam (2010) and Patti, Holzer, Stern and Brackett’s (2012) argument in favor of a change agent as vital to successful PD. The ability to forge relationships for the purpose of creating an environment favorable to teamwork and collaboration is important as collaboration was shown to be a factor for a successful PD program (Altun & Cenzig, 2012; Archibald et al., 2011; Blank, 2013; Ghamrawi, 2013; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012).

For any PD program to be effective it has to equate to meaningful learning experiences for the participants. Having strong EI capabilities align with traits of adult learners who participate in meaningful learning experiences, as defined by Knowles (2011) and Rogers (1969). Strong EI capabilities also align to individuals undergoing transformative learning experiences as defined by Mezirow (2003). By developing teachers’ EI capabilities it may create a more effective PD program in order to improve student outcomes.

Benjamin, Gulliya, and Crispo (2012) asserted that by developing employees’ EI competencies, an organization can ensure more success from their employees and therefore more success from the organization. Benjamin et al. (2012) described several traits, such as self-awareness, which enables an individual to accurately self-assess their strengths and limitations, showing initiative, self-management, and achievement orientation which are all valuable assets for self-directed learning. Muller (2008) found that “a significant positive relationship between self-directed learning readiness and emotional intelligence” exists (p.19).

Jha and Singh (2012) found a positive correlation between EI and teacher effectiveness. “Among ten components of EI considered in the study; emotional stability, self-motivation, managing relations, self-awareness, and integrity emerged as the best predictors of teacher effectiveness” (Jha & Singh, 2012, p. 667). EI is important for teachers to possess because an effective teacher needs to understand the emotions of the students in order to create a positive learning environment and motivate students to perform at their best. Teachers can do this through their understanding of how their students learn. Therefore, developing teacher’s EI may increase effectiveness and lead to improved student learning (Jha & Singh, 2012).

Nelson, Low, and Nelson (2005) and Nelson, Low, Nelson, and Hammett (2015), cited evidence to show the value of EI in teacher preparation programs. The research links EI to teacher performance, therefore, providing training in EI skills could be a benefit to teachers for both personal and PD (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005; Nelson, Low, Nelson, & Hammett, 2015). According to the authors, EI is a set of learned abilities which require a person-centered process for growth. When EI skills are part of the focus of learning it relates to positive outcomes of achievement, classroom management, and teacher retention. “Becoming an emotionally intelligent teacher is a journey and process, not an arrival state or end result” (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005, p. 4). A focus on EI skills in PD is part of a transformative learning experience (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005). “Transformative learning provides a focus on the development of
knowledge, behaviors, and skills” that could be beneficial to teachers to improve their teaching practice and advance their careers (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005, p. 3).

Nelson and Low’s (2004, 2011) formal definition of EI is the confluence of learned skills and abilities that facilitate four success dimensions in life. The EI success dimensions facilitated by EI skills include (a) an accurate self-knowledge and self-appreciation, (b) a variety of healthy relationships, (c) working productively with others, and (d) healthily managing the demands and stressors of everyday work and life. Nelson and Low have published a five-step, systematic learning process for developing EI skills to improve academic and career performance. The emotional learning system (ELS) is a positive learning model that simultaneously engages the experiential (emotional) and cognitive (rational) systems to develop EI skills through (a) the authentic exploration of key skills, (b) identification of strengths and areas to improve, (c) better understanding key skills and abilities, (d) learning to incorporate new skills, and (e) applying and modeling new skills. The ELS is illustrated in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. The five steps depicting Nelson and Low's (2011) emotional learning system. From “Leadership and emotional intelligence: A phenomenological study on developmental experiences of effective federal government leaders” by D. A. Rude, 2013, George Washington University dissertation, p.51. Adapted with permission of the author.](image)

Nelson and Low (1977-present) have developed a family of positive assessment models that measure and assist with the first explore step of the ELS. Transformative EI has been found significantly related to a variety of performance outcomes using Nelson and Low’s assessments. Tang, Yin, and Nelson (2010) found and reported EI to be positively related to the practice of transformational leadership among leaders in higher education. Rude (2013) found EI to be an important factor in leadership excellence at the highest levels of federal government executive service. Hammett (2007) found EI to be significantly positively related to satisfaction with career PD and advancement in professional adults. Finally, Hammett, Hollon, and Maggard (2012) found EI to be highly and significantly related to leadership performance among mid-career officers in the U.S. Air Force. To the degree that these findings relate to school and classroom leadership, career progression and satisfaction, and personal/ PD, many of these findings may translate well in support of constructing effective PD programs for teachers as well.

There are connections between EI and a productive organizational culture, strong leadership, and teacher efficacy (Benjamin, Gulliya, & Crispo, 2012; Hammett, Hollon, & Maggard, 2012; Jha & Singh, 2012). Therefore, using an approach similar to that modeled in Yoder’s (2005) research, the use of the transformative theory of EI operationalized through the ESAP (Nelson, Low & Vela, 2003) may be helpful for creating awareness in individuals for the purpose of developing PD activities to influence career effectiveness, facilitate mentoring and collaborative work relationships, and identifying relevant focal points for learning activities.
Coaching

Coaching or mentoring as a component of a comprehensive PD plan aligns with the standards set forth by Learning Forward (2011), which called for PD to be ongoing, job-embedded learning that focuses on student learning, promotes teacher reflection, and creates an environment of collaboration. Several studies have supported the use of coaching as an effective means of improving teaching practices (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Sailors & Price, 2010; Steckel, 2009; Tschannem-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010). Other studies have supported the claim that when coaching is added to a professional learning program, teachers are more likely to implement new teaching strategies (Heineke, 2013). Heineke argued that coaching is a way to increase both collaboration and reflection as components of job-embedded PD for teachers. Additionally, both Heineke (2013) and Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2009) argued that mentoring or coaching can positively impact the PD of the coach or mentor, as well, through professional renewal, more reflective practices, and enhanced leadership skills.

Coaching is defined as a reform PD activity and has been found to directly impact teachers’ knowledge and skills because of the increase in duration the coaching aspect brings to the professional learning experience (Batt, 2010). Sherris, Bauder, and Hillyard (2007) defined coaching as “a process between two people in which exploration, critique, and reflection transform practice” (p. 3). Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, and Tomlinson (2009) defined mentoring as “the one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee’s expertise” (p. 207). Wong and Wong (2008) made a distinction between mentor and coach, with a mentor being available for a short period of time, and a coach being available to help even veteran teachers for many years. We side with Murray (1995, 2001) that in the most effective mentoring programs, the mentor remains available for as long as they are needed based on a formal agreement between the mentor and protegee. For the purpose of this study, however, coach and mentor are used synonymously to refer to what Deussen et al. (2007) called “teacher-oriented categories” (p. ii) of coaching that work mainly with individual teachers or groups of teachers. Further, in this study coach was used to describe the role of a teacher leader within the school community who has knowledge of the big picture goals at a school in order to make connections between schoolwide goals, curriculum, program implementation, and PD needs of teachers.

Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapely (2007) stated that PD affects student achievement in several ways, including the enhancement of teachers’ knowledge and skills, then by utilizing those knowledge and skills to improve their teaching practice. However, if one of those steps is missing, then likelihood of increased student learning diminishes. Therefore, the impact of the one-shot workshop will be minimal if teachers are not able or willing to apply what they have learned. The use of coaching as a form of ongoing professional learning, therefore, is an effective way to increase the probability that skills and knowledge are applied in the classroom. Batt (2010) found that workshops were effective in arousing interest, but that interest did not translate into implementation without coaching used as follow-up. Knight and Cornett (2009) stated a similar position with regards to workshops, indicating that workshops are a successful way of introducing new ideas and practices. However, to gain the largest benefit from workshops, the experience needs follow-up support for participants in the form of instructional coaching for the transfer of new knowledge into practice (Knight & Cornett, 2009). Knight and Cornett echoed the findings put forth by others (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Neufeld & Roper, 2003) that implementing coaching as a component of PD does not mean that other forms of teacher learning should not be used, because there are benefits to instructional models designed to introduce educators to new concepts. Rather, coaching aides in embedding these newly learned practices and ideas into teacher’s everyday practice and connecting the learning to wider aspects of school improvement. Neufeld and Roper (2003) argued that coaching is part of developing organizational
capacity for improvement efforts. This aligns with the need for capacity building expressed by Corcoran, McVay, and Riordan (2003) that can be achieved through the use of teacher leaders in the design and implementation of PD in schools. Coaches can serve to provide administrators the link to classroom-based knowledge to effectively direct resources needed for PD in instructional practices by determining teacher’s learning needs. Further, when training included some form of coaching, the teachers’ integration of new instructional approaches increased and was more effective (Sherris, Bauder, & Hillyard, 2007).

Neufeld and Roper (2003) suggested that coaching leads to better teaching and increases in student achievement when it is included as part of a sustained, coherent, plan to develop instructional practices. Coaching as a component of wider PD planning meets many of the criteria of essential elements of effective PD. Additionally, Batt (2010) found that teachers who were coached developed greater skills in the execution of new strategies than teachers who were not coached, and the coaching aspect aided teachers in achieving the full impact of a PD activity.

Coaching also serves to increase collaboration during professional learning. According to Neufeld and Roper (2003), one goal of coaching is to get educators to participate in professional collaboration. Jewett and MacPhee (2012) suggested that a community of practice can be built through the use of peer coaches, in which the members of the community of practice are more likely to critically question and problem solve aspects related to teaching and learning. Coaching is collaborative with a focus on shared learning within the community of practice. It provides a means to collectively solve specific problems of practice. It also helps to connect teachers’ work with their students and connects professional learning to other aspects of school change (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Saunders (2009) showed that opportunities to engage in dialogue with other practitioners provided structured opportunities to understand the need for regular, systematic review of professional practice, thus stimulating a reflective practice. Heinke (2013) pointed out that the goal of teachers becoming reflective practitioners is not new and can be traced back to Dewey (1933) and Schon (1987). Further, the goal of developing a reflective practice is in line with developing strong EI skills, which is linked to teacher effectiveness (Jha and Singh, 2012).

Onchwari and Keengwe (2008) argued that implementing new skills and knowledge can be met with resistance. Furthermore, resistance to change can be mitigated by regular discourse between the mentor and teacher to make the notion of change in instructional practices more acceptable (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Addressing the teacher’s need to know why they are learning and implementing new practices also supports Rogers’ (1969) and Knowles, Holton, and Swanson’s (2011) assertions about meaningful adult learning.

EI assessment conducted in safe environments can make the pursuit of positive change more meaningful and relevant from the teacher’s perspective. For example, the problematic ESAP scale of change orientation is a measure of dissatisfaction with EI skill performance (Nelson & Low, 2011). To the extent that a person with high change orientation is prepared to work toward positive change, EI skills coaching by a competent mentor could be very helpful in developing teaching excellence. Additional research-derived justification for including EI in PD training for teachers is provided in the thematic results outlined in Tables 6 and 7 of this study.

All of these elements of effective professional learning must be anchored in a well thought out, intentional plan that links the goals of the organization to the individual learning needs of the teachers. PD that addresses the needs of teachers to enable them to effectively teach students, improve student outcomes, and collectively attain organizational goals is vital to improving education. PD programs within schools should address the identified organizational goals based on close analysis of student outcome data. However, an effective PD program must also seek to develop the individual needs of the teacher learners, as well (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2012). As teachers are able to become more attuned to their learning needs through the development of EI skills, they may be able to become more proficient self-directed learners, too.
Nelson and Low’s short definition of transformative EI is “the learned ability to think constructively and act wisely” (EITRI, 2011, para. 5). If EI is a reflection of wisdom, wisdom is developed through life experiences, and EI is reflected in intelligent self-direction, then it follows that intelligent self-direction would take time, based on one’s individual experiences, to develop in the natural world. As illustrated in Figure 4, following Nelson and Low’s person-centered approach for developing EI skills in individuals, it should be possible to accelerate the development of intelligent self-direction by incorporating elements of transformational EI into PD in order to positively impact the effectiveness of individual teachers and their schools.

As teachers develop intelligent self-direction, they become better problem solvers to more effectively address the gaps in student learning, thus improving student outcomes. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, a sound direction for the project for this study was the use of appreciative inquiry to pursue a PD program to improve teacher knowledge and skills. Transformative EI was incorporated to give a common voice and positive framework through which a more effective PD program could be explored and developed (Yoder, 2005).

As the NCLB target date of 2014 for all students to be proficient in English Language Arts and mathematics has passed, it is imperative for underperforming schools to take steps to develop their greatest asset for improving student performance, the teachers. Teachers cannot continue to pursue PD as individual efforts that are not directly connected to student outcome data or organizational goals. Additionally, individual learning needs of teachers need to be considered, as individuals will experience varying degrees of skill and knowledge on a wide variety of topics throughout their careers (Torff & Sessions, 2008). Therefore, PD designs must create meaningful learning experiences for the participants. The PD must also meet the established criteria for effective PD (Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011; Blank, 2013; Hirsch, 2009). Research shows that these criteria can be met through a variety of PD models. Additionally, PD may be more effective for the learner if it is designed to address their self-identified learning needs. To support teachers in the process of developing this self-knowledge, the use of mentors, coaches, or other leadership support may be effective if used in conjunction with efforts to develop individuals’ EI skills. EI skills are associated with effective teachers (Jha & Singh, 2012) and effective organizations (Benjamin, Gulliya, & Cripso, 2012).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

In order to thoroughly address the research question, I used a qualitative case study because I sought an in-depth look at the PD experiences of the teachers at the charter school (Stake, 1995). As an in-depth look at a bounded system, the emphasis was on the subject under study, rather than a particular methodology for data collection or analysis (Stake, 2005; Merriam, 2009). The unit of analysis in this study was the experiences of the teachers at the charter school where the study took place.

A framework was sought that would keep the research proceedings in the school’s PD program positive and productive (Yoder, 2005). For this study, an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach was
used to provide insight into how to effectively use PD as a means to improve student outcomes. AI is an accepted research methodology, and widely used as a process for organizational development (Knibbs et al., 2010; Reed, 2007). AI is an alternative approach to traditional action research, which is often used as a transformational approach for developing leadership capacity (Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008), and is most frequently used for inspiring organizational change (Hart, et al., 2008). AI seeks the positive aspects of lived experiences in order to provide a foundation for creating the possibility of transformation and improvement. The goal is to build shared meaning out of the experiences so that collective action can be taken for personal and organizational improvement in service of a shared goal (Hart, et al., 2008). Further, AI is emerging as a useful approach to school improvement (Willoughby & Tosey, 2007), the underlying purpose for improving PD, as well as the genesis for this study. AI, therefore, was thoroughly aligned with and an appropriate model for this study.

In this case study, the qualitative method of appreciative inquiry is the primary orientation that guides the research. As modeled by Yoder (2005), a measure of EI was used to introduce the construct and vocabulary of EI to help maintain the positive, appreciative nature of the study. The positive assessment instrument of EI skills, the ESAP, was embedded within the qualitative method, and sought to inform the study on a theoretical and level. While descriptive statistics are reported for the results of the EI instrument used in this research, the small size of participant sample and population for the charter school under investigation ($N = 5$) did not meet a threshold for quantitative research (Creswell, 2012).

The research findings emerged from a document review, email interview, and a focus group interview. To develop the findings, I began by reviewing the PD record documents, looking for information about the types of and topics covered by PD activities that participants had engaged in during the prior two years. Prior to the email and focus group interview, participants were asked to complete the online ESAP. A group profile was created from the individual results to identify current strengths, and skill development priorities for the dream and design phases of the appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle. Participants were then asked to respond to four questions as written responses via email. These questions were part of the discovery phase of the AI 4-D cycle. These responses were used to gather descriptive information, which was then coded and categorized to be compared with the analysis of the data from the document review and the focus group interview. The focus group interview was the final stage of data collection. The focus group interview contained six open-ended questions focused on the discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases of the AI 4-D cycle. The categorical findings from the document review, email responses, and focus group interview transcript were analyzed and compared to formulate the themes presented in the findings section of this study.

**Sampling Method**

The population from which the sample was drawn was K-12 teachers. The sampling procedure purposeful sampling. Purposeful, or criterion based sampling is most appropriate for this study because I sought to discover what occurs, as well as the implications of what occurs (Merriam, 2009). The purposeful sampling strategy I utilized was convenience sampling to focus on the experiences of teachers at a single school site.

The sample for this study included five teachers who worked at the charter school being studied. All of the teachers taught classes online for grades that ranged from kindergarten to 12th grade. The participants were selected for invitation to participate based upon their role as teachers at the online charter school. All five teacher participants were licensed to teach in the state of California. One teacher held a multiple-subject credential, and four held single-subject credentials. Two of the teachers with single subject credentials were licensed in English Language Arts, one was licensed in Mathematics, one was licensed in Science, and one was licensed in History and Social Science. Four of the five teachers had clear credentials, and one had an introductory credential. Teaching experience ranged from 1 year to more than 10 years.
**Data Collection**

The qualitative data collection for this study utilized an appreciative inquiry approach. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is “a cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8). Appreciative inquiry seeks to systematically discover what is most effective about an organization to build upon those traits to create a climate of positive change. Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011), emphasized that when something appreciates it increases in value. The power of using appreciative inquiry, therefore, is the potential increase in the value of the organization through the process of identifying factors within a system that we want to enhance. Successful organizations create a climate of change by learning from successful practice and building upon those strengths (Anderson, 2010).

AI is a problem solving approach utilizing an appreciative framework (Michael, 2005). Appreciative inquiry is a narrative-based process of positive change consisting of a 4-D cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2009). The four key phases of an AI process include (a) discovery, (b) dream, (c) design, and (d) destiny.

**The AI Protocol**

The following questions were asked as part of the appreciative interviews, in email, and in focus group formats. These questions were adapted from Yoder (2005) and modified to incorporate the essence of an appreciative inquiry, while addressing the specific conditions of this study.

**Discovery.** Think back through your career as a teacher. Describe a high point when you felt most effective and engaged. How did you feel? What EI skills, competencies, or abilities in yourself or others made that situation possible? Describe a time when you were part of a PD experience that was valuable to you as a professional educator? What made it valuable? List and describe any experiences you consider PD that you have participated in while employed at the Charter School. Describe the most valuable aspects of this school’s approach to PD, both past and present. What makes it valuable?

**Dream.** What applications of EI are most relevant to your position at the school? What dreams do you have for your school’s greater effectiveness and outcomes? What dreams do you have about your personal effectiveness as a teacher?

**Design.** What would be the ideal PD program for teachers?

**Destiny.** What would be the most desirable outcome of this appreciative inquiry for the PD program at this school? If you had three wishes for future directions of PD at this school, what would they be?

**Emotional Skills Assessment Process**

The education version of the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP; Nelson & Low, 1998), a quantitative measure of EI skills, was used to create a common language and experience around EI during the appreciative inquiry and study. This process was first modeled by Yoder, (2005) using a different EI assessment. While the ESAP is a quantitative, 3-point Likert-scale measure, the positive assessment instrument was used in this study as a means to inform, guide, and give an EI voice to an AI qualitative process and design. The ESAP was used to establish a universal experience around EI for participants, to encourage cognizance about EI, and to enrich the discussion of EI during the appreciative-inquiry sessions. Four of the five participants completed the ESAP. It was the intention of this study to use the written responses from participants and focus group interviews, informed by EI and ESAP skills, to reveal participant’s perceptions about current and past PD activities, as well as provide insights about avenues for improvement. The technical aspects of the ESAP are addressed in other articles in this volume. In the interest of saving space, the technical and psychometric aspects of the ESAP will not be repeated here. The ESAP is a valid and reliable measure of 13 scales that measure emotional intelligence.

As a resource and tool for developing EI awareness, it was not the intent of this study to develop and evaluate hypotheses using the ESAP data results. Rather, the ESAP data were analyzed, presented, and used throughout the study by employing descriptive statistics to create a group profile and provide a foundation of positive EI-centric language for the participants. Upon
completion of the online ESAP, each participant received a profile of their EI skills based on their scores in each of the 13 scales measured by the ESAP. The participants also received a printable file with the research-derived composite scale and subscale definitions.

An average ESAP profile, a horizontal bar graph based on ESAP results, was created to illustrate the group’s overall scores and allow for self-comparison of individual participants to the overall group results. One of the participants elected not to participate in the ESAP online assessment. The ESAP provides a personal profile of self-estimates for the respondent's ten EI skills and three potential problem areas. Interpretation of the profile is focused on three score ranges identified as develop, strengthen, or enhance (O’Block, 2007). The potential problem areas were interpreted on the profile the ranges of desired, average, and problematic. The ESAP profile was used to give participants a guide for identifying current strengths, and prioritizing those skills in need of further development for the purpose of discussion throughout the dream and design phases of the appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle portion of qualitative data collection.

**FINDINGS**

Incorporated into the discussion of the findings is an analysis of how the literature and theory presented in the conceptual framework aligned with the themes revealed in the data. Each theme offers implications leading to the design of the project. The project was designed to provide a research-derived response in a genre suitable to the educational problem that gave rise to the study. In this case, a new comprehensive PD planning workshop was created as the project for this study. The project proper is available for review in Appendix A of the original study (DeWitt, 2014).

The document review revealed 50 separate professional learning instances from eight categories of PD activities participants took part in over two school years (2012 - 2013 and 2013-2014). The types of PD identified include Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment (BTSA), Induction program, college/graduate courses (for credit), webinars, independent research including reading books, journal articles, and websites, conference attendance, workshops, in-house training provided by school leadership, and curriculum product training. Table 1 provides the distribution of training reported by the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of PD Activity</th>
<th>% of Total PD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTSA</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference attendance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/graduate courses</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent research/reading</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum product training</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house training provided by school leadership</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages calculated based on 50 separate recorded learning instances as PD from participants.*

Of the eight types of PD engaged in by teachers, the top three types of activities were in-house training (listed 13 times), curriculum product training (listed 11 times), and independent research including reading books, journal articles, and websites (listed 10 times). The number one category of in-house training consisted of mandatory in-service days for all teaching staff that included meetings, planning time, and presentations by key staff. The second highest category of curriculum product training consisted of training for product use and implementation for school-adopted curriculum products. This was required training for all teaching staff. Of the 50 activities listed by participants, 52% of the activities were mandatory for all teaching staff and were not self-selected learning activities by participants, which included BTSA, in-house training, and curriculum product training. The other 48% of the activities reflected a self-guided PD model, in which participants self-selected the type and topic of the learning activity. The document review also indicated that the topics of the PD varied greatly, revealing thirteen different topics covered by the 50 separate learning
instances. The topics shown were content specific trainings (math, ELA, and Social Science), new teacher support, charter schools, assessment, data, curriculum, mastery-based learning, pedagogy, Common Core Standards, technology, and instructional design.

**EI Skills Findings**

The Emotional Skills Profile revealed strengths in four areas: (a) Interpersonal Communication, (b) Leadership, (c) Self-Management in Life and Career, and (d) Intrapersonal Development. The Emotional Skills Profile also provided participants with a self-assessment of three potential problem areas in life, which individuals should strive to convert to EI skills (Nelson & Low, 2011). Four of the five participants completed the ESAP. The descriptive statistics for the ESAP results were computed using a spreadsheet and are provided in Table 2. The group profile reflecting the mean scores for the four participants was provided during focus group interviews.

As a group, scores for all ten of the emotional skills were in the normal (strengthen) to high (enhance) range, two of potential problem areas were in the normal range (aggression and deference), and one potential problem area in the low range (change orientation). Most notable for the purpose of this study were the three skills on which the group scored the lowest. The emotional skills of assertion, decision-making, and self-esteem received the lowest scores. While all three were still in the normal (strengthen) range, decision-making and assertion were both in the low end of normal. These three areas, therefore, represented candidate areas to be addressed in future PD activities, should the participants agree. Being assertive facilitates effective communication even in challenging situations involving strong emotions. Decision-making is a skill related to problem solving, as well as planning, formulating, initiating, and implementing solutions; which could be a key factor in school improvement efforts. Positive self-esteem is part of the achievement of professional success. Each of these emotional skills, if developed in teachers, could have a connection to improving student outcomes, improving organizational culture, and strengthening organizational success as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESAP Skill Assessed</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Theoretical</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Min Score</td>
<td>Max Score</td>
<td>Min Score</td>
<td>Max Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deference*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive Strength</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Ethic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Orientation*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates a problematic area as opposed to a skill area.
Correspondence Interview Findings

Each participant was emailed four sets of questions asking them to describe aspects of their perceived effectiveness as teachers, PD experiences, and connections to EI. The themes unpacked from the responses are discussed below.

First questions. Think back through your career as a teacher. Describe a high point when you felt most effective and engaged. How did you feel? What EI skills, competencies, or abilities in yourself or others made that situation possible?

The responses to this question revealed three themes regarding a feeling of effectiveness as a teacher. The participants revealed feeling most effective when engaging students, connecting with students, and being innovative as a means to reach students effectively. P4 spoke of what it felt like to have all students engaged, “It was almost overwhelming to have every student connected and committed to what was happening in the class and willing to be a part of it.” P3 elaborated on this feeling by explaining how she knew all students were engaging with her, “What also made it effective is that the students were engaged and asked question, after question, wanting to know more.” P1 shared an experience also about what it meant to connect with students on several levels, “I effectively met the students at the right place… by meeting the students, I mean that I understood exactly where they were at in terms of academic progress and emotional progress. Because of this I was able to design a lesson and engage the students at that happy medium where learning was most effective.” P2 expressed feeling effective when her own innovation led to student success and how this led to a sense of leadership.

The emotional skills described by the participants to identify feelings of effectiveness included the ability to self-motivate and be self-driven (Participant 1), the ability to problem solve (P5), listening (P1), confidence (P3 and P4), and communication and sensitivity (P4). The EI-centric language of the teachers used to describe their feelings of teaching effectiveness was evident even though they did not use the exact skill labels assessed by ESAP in their responses. Table 3 provides connections between the EI-centric effectiveness themes identified by the teachers and eight of the ten research-derived EI skills assessed by ESAP

Table 3
Theoretical Links Between Themes of Teacher Feelings of Effectiveness and EI Skills (N = 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Effectiveness Theme(s)</th>
<th>Related ESAP Skill(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-Motivation</td>
<td>Commitment Ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-Drive</td>
<td>Drive Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Self-Esteem / Stress Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Communication / Sensitivity</td>
<td>Assertion / Empathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second questions. Describe a time when you were part of a PD experience that was valuable to you as a professional educator? What made it valuable?

The types of PD the participants described as valuable included ones in which the reason to learn was made clear (P1 and P5), and in which the content was viewed as useful and applicable to their teaching practice (P2 and P4). Additionally, participants described learning experiences as valuable when they involved discussion and collaboration (P2, P3, and P4), observation and modeling (P3 and P4), and support or mentoring (P 3 and P4).

Third question. List and describe any experiences you consider PD that you have participated in while employed at the Charter School.

The types of experiences the teachers participated in that they considered to be PD included in-house mandatory in-service days, staff meetings, seminars, webinars, curriculum demonstrations, BTSA induction, teacher led presentations, workshops, and conferences. The
reported training experiences were triangulated by the findings based on a records analysis that revealed the percentage of training completed by category during the school years between 2012 and 2014 (see Table 1).

**Fourth question.** What applications of EI are most relevant to your position at the school?

The EI applications the participants felt were most relevant to their position as teachers included empathy and comfort (P1 and P4), interpersonal skills (P3 and P4), leadership (P4 and P5), and drive strength (P5). P2 expressed that assertion was important in teaching, yet expressed that this is an area that they lack, which causes some struggles in their professional role.

In contrast to the answers provided by the participants for the first research question (EI skills related to feelings of effectiveness), the teacher responses to this research question used the skill labels more closely aligned with the scales assessed by the ESAP. Interestingly, the two ESAP skills not mentioned in the responses to the first research question were brought out as relevant skills for teaching at the school. All ten ESAP skills were identified as important by the teachers. Connections to the last two ESAP skills are highlighted in Table 4.

### Focus Group Results

Three of the five participants agreed to take part in a focus group interview. Prior to beginning the interview, I explained the confidentiality and voluntary participation agreement, as well as a brief overview of the study. Participants were then shown the group profile from the ESAP results and were given a brief explanation of the emotional skills strengths that the group possessed, in order to frame the interview in the context of EI. The focus group interview followed an appreciative inquiry format, which moved through the discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases of the 4D-cycle to discover the most positive aspects of PD, as it currently exists at the charter school. Participants were then asked to express their “dreams” about greater personal and organizational effectiveness. Finally, participants were asked to share ideas about what their ideal PD program would look like. The interview was transcribed immediately following the interview, then coded for reoccurring themes. The researcher identified the following four themes.

**Increasing student engagement and connectedness.** Some of the ideas that arose were to increase teacher and student contact, improve student’s emotional skills as they relate to intelligent self-direction, and improve communication with both students and parents. All participants identified some challenges in the online teaching environment related to being an effective teacher resulting in student achievement. When asked the question about dreams for greater personal and school effectiveness, P1 stated “for me to be more effective would be to increase the student involvement in class.” Another statement was “some sort of community needs to be developed” and “some sort of connection with the school” for students. P3 identified the need to “do a lot better with communicating with parents” and “partnering with parents.” P2 participant stated, “I just really want to teach them to learn on their own and how to achieve more than they think is possible to achieve.” There was much agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Relevance Theme(s)</th>
<th>Related ESAP Skill(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>Empathy / Comfort</td>
<td>Empathy / Social Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td>Assertion / Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Positive Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Drive Strength</td>
<td>Drive Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>Assertion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Connections Between Reported Job Relevance Themes and EI Skills (N = 5)*
expressed by participants during the interview that if they could be more effective at getting students engaged by communicating with students and parents in a productive way that these connections to school would lead to improved student outcomes. Importantly, the participants expressed a desire to develop the ability to facilitate these types of connections with their students and students’ parents.

**Leadership in PD directed toward institutional improvement.** A second theme that emerged from the interview was the need to have greater leadership involvement in PD. Several participants expressed a desire to see PD for the year to be designed around an organizational goal related to schoolwide improvement. There was some expression about the lack of focus the current PD model provides. P2 stated the need for “a clear laid out goal for a year. For example, what we want to achieve at the school that’s very focused...then we would provide PD to that specific goal and objective.” P3 expressed that she would appreciate having an administrator assist them with the selection PD activities and with establishing a PD plan.

**Self-Directed Meaningful PD activities.** A third theme that emerged was the positive aspects of being able to self-select PD activities. All felt that they could benefit from PD that was individualized to meet their own learning needs, both in content and style. However, there was also a strong desire to see connections between personal growth PD and larger organizational goals. P5 stated, “I kind of like the idea of it being individualized just because everybody is in a different spot in their growth.” While another participant pointed out that teachers should have personal goals “because sometimes those smaller goals can then sometimes achieve the greater goal of a content area.”

**Collaborative PD.** The fourth theme that emerged was related to the desire for collaboration in PD. P5 expressed the need for collaboration in identifying what the school’s needs are around which to design PD activities. P3 liked the idea of a mentoring program for teachers to help guide their individual growth goals, but also their implementation of learning towards the larger organizational goals. P3 stated, “I like the idea of having some sort of mentoring program because personally I learn fast when I’m able to talk with other people.” All participants expressed a desire to work with other colleagues in the context of PD, in some capacity whether through PD planning, implementation, or follow up.

**SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTION**

This study sought to capture the experiences of teachers regarding the implementation of PD as a means for improving student outcomes. The findings necessitated triangulation from a group profile generated from the ESAP, appreciative inquiry through email and focus group interview responses, and a document review. The findings showed that the teachers have been participating in a wide variety of PD activities, both in type and topic, and their ESAP profile results revealed an overall strong EI skill set for the group.

Participants expressed a strong desire to see PD with more focus. They described the focus as tying the PD activities to a larger organizational goal while still allowing for some choice in the types of activities they pursued. The underlying theme was to move their personal growth in a direction that aligned with the larger organizational goals for school improvement and growth.

The balance of mandatory, school-selected PD to self-selected PD found in the document review (52% and 48%, respectively) seemed consistent with the interview findings wherein participants expressed a desire to see PD directed by school leadership and to be collaborative, yet allow for some self-selected growth opportunities. However, the wide variety of topics covered by the PD indicated in the document review seemed to support the participants’ perspective that more focus on the planning of PD activities should be centered on organizational goals for improvement, and individual growth goals that align with those larger organizational goals. Interestingly, none of the PD activity topics indicated in either the document review or email interview responses suggested a focus on building student engagement, though all participants stressed this during the focus group interview as one of the primary aspects of teaching which made them feel effective as an educator. This was also something they
would like to see more of as an avenue for improving student outcomes. PD that focuses on the EI constructs involving communication skills may be another way to increase teachers’ abilities to engage students and build the partnerships with parents that they seek.

The results from the ESAP which revealed that the group could most benefit from development in the areas of assertion, decision-making, and self-esteem seemed to fit with participant desire to see more leadership and mentoring used in the school’s approach to PD. Stronger leadership and the use of mentors would be a way to model important emotional skills and serve as a means to developing these skills further in the teachers.

All of the data considered together align with the participant’s desire to see a PD program implemented at the school that fits the parameters of effective PD, as outlined in the literature (Archibald, Coggshall, & Goe, 2011; Blank, 2013). The connections between EI and teacher effectiveness (Jha & Singh, 2012) support the participants’ descriptions of feeling most effective as a teacher and the emotional skills involved in those instances. Participants’ descriptions of the factors that made these learning experiences valuable align to the assumptions about adult learners asserted by andragogy, such as adults needing to see a purpose for the learning, and adult needs to perceive the learning experience as useful and necessary for performing tasks and resolving problems they encounter in their daily lives (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Further, the need to have more leadership for PD supports the findings of Moore, Kochan, Kraska, and Reames (2011) who argued that PD yields the most effective outcomes in an organization with strong leadership. The additional assertion by participants that having some room for personal development and self-selected learning experiences supports Geer and Morrison’s (2008) idea that a school should address both the collective and individual needs of teachers in terms of professional, ongoing learning.

The data from this study indicate that changes to the PD program that include bringing more focus to the PD plan through linking learning activities to organizational improvement goals, as well as individual growth needs, would be welcomed. Incorporating a PD program that included leadership in the form of mentoring with the intention of guiding the process of identifying individual goals for learning as they relate to the larger organizational goals, selection of learning activities, and support through the learning process would also be valuable. Further, connecting PD to improving individual EI skills in teachers, it seems, could further benefit the professional growth of the individual teachers, as well as help facilitate improvement in student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REMEDIATION OF LIMITATIONS

This study was challenged by two limitations. One was the size of the sample (N = 5) and the narrow scope: only one small charter school. Although the survey responses aligned with the literature on various elements of PD for educators, data from other schools or more participants could have revealed more about what teachers would like from a PD program based on alternative PD paradigms. The other limitation was the lack of school administrators’ perspectives. This project could have been approached by considering the needs of school leaders when planning PD for teachers at their school site. By including the gaps in knowledge and practice of those who plan PD, the workshop could have expanded to include other topics or directions. Two directions are recommended for future research: increase the sample size and including appropriate quantitative analyses based on a larger sample.

IMPLICATIONS, APPLICATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is my hope that the research findings from this study will inspire school leadership to recognize the importance of planning and implementing a strong professional learning program for teachers. With intentional professional learning designed to address the needs of the school and teachers the result will be a collaborative effort to achieve the same goal, which is ultimately to provide the best possible education for students. All stakeholders within a school can benefit by understanding how providing opportunities for professional learning...
for teachers results in improvements that affect all those in the school community.

One direction for future research could be to investigate the needs of school leaders who are responsible for planning PD for teachers at their school site to include examining the gaps in knowledge and practice of those who plan PD. Another direction for possible future research could be to examine how various professional learning events impact student outcomes or student learning experiences. According to Yoon, (2007), only 9 of more than 1300 studies examined met What Works Clearinghouse’s evidence-based standards for studies that directly study the affect of teacher PD on student achievement. There is a clear need for further studies in this area in order to further strengthen the argument in favor of expending resources for teacher professional learning.

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