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A Mixed-Method Study Analyzing the Impact of  
Continuing Education on K-12 Educators

by

Jennifer Sue Edler

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

A Mixed-Method Study Analyzing the Impact of  
Continuing Education on K-12 Educators

by

Jennifer Sue Edler

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

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## Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Jennifer S. Edler

Signature: Jennifer S Edler Date: 7/31/2020

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blessed to have you both in my life. Thank you also to my siblings, grandma, in-laws, extended family, friends, and colleagues that have helped to encourage me to reach my goal of completing my dissertation. I love you all!

## **Abstract**

Teachers are consistently developing learners that independently seek to gain knowledge and skills throughout life (Blaschke, 2012). Educators must desire to learn new and improved skills to gain knowledge. The new regulations and qualifications, and standards surrounding a career in education require teachers to become continual learners. Professional development is the practice of teachers continuing to grow in their fields and varies depending on personal preference, personal interests, and professional history, as well as addresses issues present in their district or school (Day, 1999).

Educational policies and laws outline the need for high-quality professional development for teachers. However, little evidence is available to determine what aspects make teachers effective. Each school district should examine how they determine a successful implementation (Borko, 2004; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

Professional development, also referred to as continuing education, is important to the organization and to society; and therefore, each should attempt to foster continued learning. Professional development provides satisfying, relevant, and actionable guidance to K-12 educators, so they can keep up with the evolving K-12 world. Professional development has become crucial in the wake of growing teacher shortages, increased student diversity, and school safety and climate concerns. However, offering professional and continuing education opportunities is exactly what educators need most. How can district leaders know if their training programs are meeting educators' needs without this information?

The researcher surveyed K-12 educators and counselors to understand where districts can improve their development offerings. In this study, the researcher examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education courses, by comparing financial support and degree attainment, with improvement in the classroom. This study aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the district's professional and continuing education program. The researcher provided feedback regarding the effectiveness of participating in the professional and continuing education courses and determined if instructional changes or implementations were to create a better learning environment for the students; and if degree attainment had an impact on participation, and if financial assistance encourages educators to continue their education.

Professional development assists with helping teachers stay informed of mandated expectations and requirements for students, increase knowledge of the technology available for teaching, developing new teaching strategies, and learning to teach an increasingly diverse population (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). If teachers are expected to improve teaching strategies, they must be given the required knowledge and skills (Reeves, 2011).

### **Summary of Results**

The researcher examined four research questions and four hypotheses statements. This study examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. Additional statistical analyses, both descriptive and inferential, determined if there was significant support for each hypothesis. The purpose of the professional development session was to provide new ways for teachers to engage their students and assist with



being successful in the classroom. The participants believed that implementation of innovative, creative, and hands-on teaching methods was required to reach the students today.

Qualitative data were developed by interviewing eight participants. All of the participants included a response to each of the 12 questions indicating that professional development should be active, engaging, collaborative, practical, reflective, and reinforced. This point demonstrated that adult learning in a professional environment occurs through the same process as developmental learning theories (Baumgartner & Merriam, 2000; Clark & Cafferella, 1999).

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	xi
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Rationale.....	6
Significance of the Study.....	10
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	16
Research Question 1.....	16
Research Question 2.....	16
Research Question 3.....	16
Research Question 4.....	16
Hypothesis 1.....	16
Hypothesis 2.....	16
Hypothesis 3.....	16
Hypothesis 4.....	16
Study Limitations.....	17
Definition of Terms.....	17
Summary.....	20

Chapter Two: Review of Literature .....	21
Introduction.....	21
Transforming Professional Development .....	22
Teacher Standards.....	30
Historical Perspective .....	32
Theoretical Connections .....	36
Philosophy of Continuing Education .....	46
Legal Considerations .....	47
Funding .....	49
DE and CEU’s Change Agents for Universities.....	55
Benefits for Employees and Employers.....	60
Advances in Technology in Continuing Education .....	64
Conclusion .....	72
Chapter Three: Research Method and Design .....	77
Introduction.....	77
Research Questions and Null Hypotheses .....	77
Research Question 1 .....	77
Research Question 2 .....	78
Research Question 3 .....	78
Research Question 4 .....	78
Null Hypothesis 1 .....	78
Null Hypothesis 2 .....	78
Null Hypothesis 3 .....	78

Null Hypothesis 4 .....	78
Reflexivity.....	78
Demographics – Site, and Participants .....	79
Research Design and Methodology .....	81
Summary .....	83
Chapter Four: Analysis .....	84
Introduction.....	84
Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	85
Quantitative Results .....	86
The Two-Sample t-Test of Means, Independent Samples .....	92
Research Question 1 - Theme 1: Having a Voice.....	98
Research Question 1 - Theme 2: Knowing the Why .....	103
Research Question 2 - Theme 1: Reflection/Observation.....	104
Research Question 1 - Theme 3: Long-Term Vision/Educational Goals .....	108
Research Question 3 Theme 1: Implementation / Training .....	110
Research Question 4 Theme 1: Student Success .....	113
Summary .....	116
Chapter Five: Discussion .....	117
Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	117
Research Question 1 .....	117
Research Question 2 .....	117
Research Question 3: .....	117
Research Question 4: .....	117

Hypothesis 1.....	117
Hypothesis 2.....	117
Hypothesis 3.....	117
Hypothesis 4.....	118
Introduction.....	118
Review of Methodology .....	120
Summary of Findings.....	122
Hypothesis 1.....	122
Hypothesis 2.....	123
Hypothesis 3.....	124
Hypothesis 4.....	125
Research Question 1 .....	128
Research Question 2 .....	128
Research Question 3: .....	128
Research Question 4: .....	128
Research Question 1 - Theme 1: Having a Voice.....	129
Research Question 1 - Theme 3: Long-Term Vision/Educational Goals .....	133
Research Question 2 - Theme 1: Reflection / Observation.....	134
Research Question 3 - Theme 1: Implementation / Training.....	136
Research Question 4 Theme 1: Student Success .....	139
Limitations .....	142
Recommendations for Future Research .....	143
Conclusion .....	145

References.....	149
Appendix A.....	166
Appendix B.....	168
Appendix C.....	169
Appendix D.....	172
Vitae.....	173

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Population of Student Data Analyzed from Continuing Education Courses.....	89
Table 2. Course Implementation.....	90
Table 3. Financial Support vs Professional Improvement .....	91
Table 4(a). Administrative Support and Financial Support .....	92
Table 4(b). Administrative Support and Implementation of Coursework .....	93
Table 4(c). Financial Support and Implementation of Coursework .....	93
Table 5. Emerging Themes .....	94
Table 6. Analysis of Research Questions .....	96
Table 7. Analysis of Research Questions from Secondary Data Questions .....	97

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been growing recognition that teachers are the most important factor in student achievement (Carey, 2004; Haycock, 1998). There are two commonly researched K-12 professional development models – traditional professional development and job-embedded professional development. Professional development can help teachers gain new knowledge and adopt new practices (Whitehurst, 2002). However, professional development is subject to changes in direction, paradigm, philosophy, and approach, sometimes driven by policy changes. Regardless of whether it is the teacher's background and qualifications, teaching methods, or alignment of standards with curriculum and accountability that leads to student success, each of these depends on practical training and preparation of teachers.

Opportunities for professional development created through the expansion of our global economy adds anxiety and stress toward job insecurity. The economic conditions are driving the demand for continuing education courses. Many workers focus on improving skills and acquiring new skills to remain employed or seek new opportunities. Continuing education courses or an advanced degree will stand out and impress the hiring manager. Candidates with a master's degree, certification, or continuing education courses can increase one's marketability in the job market. These accomplishments indicate that a person who is invested in continuing their education is prepared for a professional career. Continuing education is associated with increased employability and also assist the candidate with being more competitive in the hiring field (Loveless, 2019).



Several companies encourage their employees to continue their education and may even offer financial assistance. Financial assistance can benefit both the employee and the employer. The employees are provided an opportunity to acquire new, innovative skills and also develop a positive reflection on the employer if they encouraged and provided the opportunity for continuing education. Employees that choose to participate in these educational courses find that the courses help them to explore their own personal interests, but also sharpen skills that can help them in their daily lives (Loveless, 2019). The employees' confidence stems from learning about the most advanced information in their fields. New found knowledge and skills enhance the employees' chances in a unique position and encourage their self-confidence (Loveless, 2019). The employers consider their employees instrumental for the success of the organization and encourage them to continue to learn.

The researcher examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education courses, by comparing financial support and degree attainment with improvement in the classroom. This study aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the K-12 districts' professional and continuing education programs. The researcher provided feedback regarding the effectiveness of participating in the professional and continuing education courses and determined if instructional changes or implementations were to create a better learning environment for the students; and if degree attainment had an impact on participation, and if financial assistance encourages educators to continue their education.

**Statement of the Problem**

The United States Department of Education (USDOE) issued a report urging schools to hire teachers of the highest quality. The USDOE defined “highly qualified” based on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which clarified requirements stating teachers must possess: “a bachelor’s degree, state certification, and competence in their subject area” (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2003, p. 4).

One of the main goals of NCLB was to ensure every child was included in education. The NCLB required that students be taught by high-qualified teachers and required new teachers to have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, full certification, and licensure, and demonstrate competence in their subject areas. Veteran teachers must have a bachelor’s degree and must meet the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) by demonstrating competency in their subject areas (Sexton & Reichardt, 2006). Even before the NCLB in 2002, teacher shortages were a big concern. The increase in student enrollments and the aging teacher workforce was what has contributed to the shortage.

In 2001, Public Law 107-110, otherwise known as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), was enacted. This legal document of 670 pages mandated that:

- economically disadvantaged students, English Language Learners, and migratory students are provided with opportunities to advance to a level commensurate with their peers; students, staff, and schools would be prepared for education in the 21st century;
- preparation, training, and recruitment of high-quality teachers and principals would occur

- charter schools would be encouraged and supported to provide a choice for students in less than satisfactory schools;
- states would draft annual outcomes for each content area of what students would know and be able to accomplish at the end of each grade.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) would be measured by each state to ensure growth and achievement for all students at a level of proficient or advanced by the year 2014. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) confirmed the jobs that required a higher level of education and skill paid higher wages than jobs that required lower levels of knowledge and expertise (Cunningham & Mohr, 2017). The unemployment rate was significantly lower for those with a higher level of education. However, the earnings increased as a worker's degree of education rises.

School District guidelines, educational technology, and curriculum standards are ever-changing, which challenges teachers to keep up with trends and best practices. Research, provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, concluded that "student achievement can improve by as much as 21 percentile points as a result of teacher's participation in well-designed professional development programs" (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007, p. 4). Educators must continue looking for new teaching strategies acquired through professional development to implement those strategies in their classrooms. The professional Development instructors needed to be thorough when they presented new methods, evaluation styles, and record-keeping strategies. Professional development allows teachers to step away from their day-to-day teaching routine and resume their roles as students. The purpose of professional development is to keep the educators engaged, to nurture the talents of

teachers who aspire to take on educational leadership positions and to become effective future leaders themselves. There are many reasons one should consider additional education. During recessions, for example, many workers look to improve their skills to keep their current position or find new opportunities. Some workers want to continue their education for other reasons, such as to better their wages or personal improvement (Loveless, 2019). Regardless of whether one is working towards a master's degree or a certificate, obtaining additional education can increase marketability. Another option is to participate in continuing education to develop new skills or knowledge for a career transition. However, it is best to find out if additional educational training will help with the change.

Participating in continuing education courses can create a new network of possibilities. These new contacts become essential when conducting business, working on projects, or even landing a new job in the future. Continuing education allows a person to work with like-minded individuals, as well as to network with people they may otherwise have never met, and provides the possibility to explore new career paths, as well as to enlighten them about trends of today, which change frequently. A well-trained and well-educated workforce helps companies to achieve long-term viability and profitability (Cohen, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. The researcher provided feedback regarding the effectiveness of participating in the professional and continuing education

courses, to determine if instructional changes or implementations are evident in the classroom environment; if degree attainment had an impact on participation, and if financial assistance encouraged educators to continue their education. Through this comparison, this study aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses in a district's professional and continuing education program, to better meet the needs of their students.

Research indicated that the United States, as a whole, had more K-12 students in 2017 than in 2008; however, the number of teachers decreased. "The impact of creativity and intellectual capacity of our people will influence the health of the nation's economy and our quality of life. We must not neglect our schools because if you do, we will diminish our future" (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017, p. 3).

### **Rationale**

Educators participate in continuing education courses to grow professionally and learn new instructional strategies. According to Hirsh, the executive director of Learning Forward, "Research confirms that the most important factor contributing to a student's success in school is the quality of teaching" (as cited in Mizell, 2010, p. 1). She also indicated that professional development was considered the most effective strategy for schools and school districts. School districts utilized professional development to encourage educators to strengthen their knowledge throughout their careers. Learning Forward was an organization that assisted with measuring the quality of professional development offered throughout school districts to ensure a successful experience for every child (Vision, Mission, and Beliefs, 2020).

The challenge many teachers faced is the expectation of meeting the high standards, which strengthened their content knowledge, as well as encouraged learning

new ways of teaching to reach their students. They request more time to collaborate, examine the new standards, and revise the curriculum. Most teachers need resources to develop, master, and reflect on new ways to work and educate their students. In the past, state policymakers had not given enough attention to the form, content, or quality of professional development.

The quality of teaching is determined not just by the quality of the teachers—although that is critical—but also the environment in which they work. Able teachers are not necessarily going to reach their potential in settings that do not provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge or reward. (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2005, p. 9)

Teachers began embracing new roles as members of governing school boards, building relationships with their colleagues, parents, and administrators. These new roles demanded updated skills and knowledge. Teachers, parents, and administrators should begin to accept these changes, as they are an essential and integral part of the teacher's work in professional development (Corcoran, T.B. 1995).

Wilson and Cervero, (2001) provided literature and suggested that continuing educators at the university level split between those who wish to respond to market demands and those who advocated a return to our social justice roots. Selman (1985) explained that there was “profession” and the “movement” (p. 30). Our educators live in a market-driven environment, and therefore, whether they like or dislike consumerism and economic globalization, they cannot escape it. “We are in danger of losing the idea that a future is created, bit by bit, out of our political desires and choices” (Kingwell, 2000, p. 221).

Wilson and Cervero, (1996, 1997, 2001), argued that there is evidence to support social justice in the process of planning educational programs and in the products we provide. They indicated that educational program planning is a struggle between knowledge and power, therefore it is political. One of the most significant responsibilities that educators have is to determine what kind of world their practice shapes. “Simply put, adult education cannot be a neutral activity” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p. 5).

Universities have started to use continuing education units (CEUs) as change agents. The new approaches to teaching and learning have increased due to competition, funding issues, changing student demographics and expectations, and the advancement in information and communication technologies (ICT). Initially, CEUs broadened the skills of the students. For purposes of social justice, CEUs must take a leadership role in the adoption and adaption of ICT. The combined efforts of the universities and the CEUs have created change, from student demographics, accountability, financial constraints, globalization, rapid developments, information technology, and the competitors (Cram, 2005).

Teacher education should be considered a life-long experience. The factors by which practicing teachers learn depend on the country’s traditions, the way that the educational system operates, and the existing institutions. Evidence suggested that policy (Ball, 2003) and socio-economic location and environment (Troman & Woods, 2000; Stoll & Louis, 2007) affect the working lives of teachers. Having the schools at the center of continuing training is the best way to restructure schools, and the educational system, as a whole, (2010).

Continuing education, also known as “further education”, refers to a range of post-secondary learning programs, courses, and activities meant to take curriculum-based university level degrees to the next level. Students in a given area of study are looking to expand on their knowledge base. While the exact idea of continuing education is difficult to confirm, the first academic institution to provide education to adult learners who had completed undergraduate degree programs was the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1907 (Glavin, 2014). Continuing Education courses are offered through Universities, specific continuing education schools, training centers, workplace training programs, and professional organizations. Students that participate develop and learn new methodologies and technical possibilities for professional advancement, personal growth, are more aware of the current practices and are more informed and up to date with what is happening within their industry (Day & Gu, 2010).

While the world continues to change and create new resources, employees must embrace the opportunities to learn every day. The government demands, disruptive behaviors, increased paperwork, heavy workloads, and extended working hours created health issues, which caused teachers that had been in the field for 24-30 years to be more resilient. Teachers in their final stage of their professional life may have experienced a disadvantage that consisted of a lack of support within the work environment, lack of staff collaboration, and lack of leadership support. The lack of support, leadership and staff collaboration became a struggle for the teachers, especially those close to retirement. (Orlando, 2014).



### **Significance of the Study**

Financial literacy studies have taken place throughout the United States. A survey conducted for the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE), by Harris Interactive in 2005, indicated that nearly all U.S. adults believe that it is important to have a good understanding of economics (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2007). However, the evidence showed that the actual financial knowledge is deficient for both high school students and working-age adults. The OECD's definition of financial literacy required both financial knowledge and financial understanding of financial concepts and skills. The OECD's definition is:

Financial literacy is knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and risks, and the skills, motivation, and confidence to apply such knowledge and understanding in order to make efficient decisions across a range of financial contexts, to improve the financial well-being of individuals and society and to enable participation in economic life. (OECD, 2012, p. 33)

Knowledge is a fact or a piece of information, and understanding is the ability to explain, interpret, and apply knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). OECD's definition also implied that consumers have the motivation and confidence to apply financial knowledge.

Americans believe that they are financially literate and therefore, they resist the opportunities that could potentially add to their knowledge. Zorn (2017), wrote the article titled, "Coming in 2017: A New Generation of Graduate Students – the Z Generation", which discussed the difference between the past generations and the next generation of students. He provided definitions and facts about each generation of students. Generation X, also known as Xers, were some of the first "latchkey kids," and were born between

1966 and 1976. The Xers are known for their skepticism, and for questioning everything. However, they were also one of the best-educated generations, according to Zorn (2017). He indicated that 29% had obtained a bachelor's degree, which was higher than any prior generation by 6%. (Zorn, 2017, p. 61) The next category discussed was Generation Y, known as "Millennials"; they were born between 1977 and 1994. They proved to be more sophisticated and were the first technologically savvy generation of graduate students. The millennials look up their questions on the internet to get their answers, instead of asking their teachers or peers. The Millennials were the largest generation since the baby boomers and were born between 1995 and 2012. The newest generation, Generation Z, entered graduate school in 2017. Gen Z grew up surrounded by technology, some since preschool, and continuously stay connected, technology-savvy, and heavily dependent on the internet (Zorn, 2017). This generation is accustomed to an individualized learning experience, computerized tests, and collaboration with their classmates and expects to learn the most current information with the newest technology available. The higher education institutions have turned to offer more online courses or hybrid courses, to accommodate the Gen Z generation. Universities have implemented some advanced technology, such as Blackboard, Canvas, or other learning management systems, to offer online collaboration with other students, as well as encourage critical reflection. Due to the resources that these students have at their fingertips, they are held to a higher level, which consists of extensive, challenging research and a higher quality of work. Gen Zers will continue to research and become more knowledgeable about how to keep their education affordable. This generation is consistently on the internet finding answers to questions. When students research different career opportunities, they are looking to

compare what their education will cost, as well as, what the potential salary would be to determine if it is beneficial. They want the best price as well as the most up-to-date technology available to fit their busy, hectic schedules, and this will be the overall factor on whether they spend the money investing in an advanced degree program (Zorn, 2017).

Educators are eager to learn how technology will be used in PK-12 classrooms in the future. Gunter and Reeves (2017), explained that students learn best when the process is hands-on, interactive and authentic. Teachers must not only learn how to use the technologies but also be able to integrate them into the curriculum in order to meet the changing needs of their students. The curriculum should be engaging and offer the latest technological advancement to keep the students engaged and wanting more. Mobile devices have personalized learning and made it more interactive through instructional strategies. Researchers have determined that students enjoy learning when they are actively engaged using hands-on activities. Technology Driven Classrooms (TDC) were developed to engage the iGeneration. The purpose of TDC is to encourage teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists with the necessary skills to create and integrate effective mobile learning content and tools. One participant said that “this is the first class in a long time to truly push me away from my comfort zone, away from what I have known, and provided me with truly new and unique ways of teaching” (Gunter & Reeves, 2017, p. 312). When teachers’ time is spent learning, participating in professional development activities that include planning, designing and integrating technology for their own classroom, it is received better and much more positive (Gunter & Reeves, 2017).

Another opportunity that educators have is the option to earn graduate credit

through Professional and continuing education or participate in non-credit courses to apply toward the number of credits needed for recertification. This opportunity benefits and encourages teachers to gain knowledge and career advancement opportunities, as well as financial benefits. Professional development allows teachers to network with each other and share curriculum and teaching strategies. Once students have acquired their bachelor's degree, students can pursue a master's degree. Students can continue their education by participating in Professional and Continuing Education courses and attending conferences or workshops to earn graduate credit at a substantially reduced rate. Graduate credit is increasing in popularity, and professional development coordinators are creating more and more courses to benefit their teachers and encourage them to continue their education (Manthei, 1995).

Encouraging educators to participate in these opportunities will also assist them financially and will allow them to budget and prepare for the future payments ahead to complete an advanced program. Students that have acquired their bachelor's degree can transfer up to six hours of graduate credit into a Master's of Education; however, this does not count towards certification courses (Continuing Education for K-12 Educators: Professional and Continuing Education (PACE), n.d.). The future of credit and non-credit professional development opportunities has become more competitive for all providers in this field. The programs must be held to high quality and meet the expectations and needs of the educators. Marketing will be the key factor in the competitive market. To gain the confidence in the courses offered, the institution must look at the educators as their customers as well as offer more relevant courses and certifications than their competitors (Manthei, 1995).

Higher education cannot survive or continue to make improvements without money. Therefore, money becomes the root of many issues. The constant search for money is something that affects every university. Having a strategy and a plan is beneficial, but how effective is it? According to Bergman (2012), from the University of Louisville, he said that when it comes to recruiting adult students, colleges and universities should be encouraging them to give us another chance instead of offering them another chance. Bergman's (2012) thought is that students should not be offering to give them another chance, let the university take some responsibility, and prove what they have to offer. However, along with this new way of marketing, colleges and universities must design an opportunity to become more accessible to adult learners. They must realize that a good portion of the adult learners work full-time jobs and have families of their own. The outcome is to find innovative ways to describe how colleges are supporting the economic health and workforce development within the regions (2018).

At times, students are filled with anxiety when discussing continuing education. They have heard the importance and benefits of attending college to continue their education or advance in their careers. Students start to research and find that it costs a minimum of \$300 per credit hour to attend college for undergraduates and \$450 per credit hour for graduate students. Most students realize that there are scholarships and other financial assistance available. The rising costs of college will continue to increase their student loans, which is one of the biggest reasons that students decide not to attend college. How can universities become more attractive and affordable to new and current students? Universities should continue creating corporate scholarships, providing grants,

and offering specialty loan opportunities, third-party education partnerships, and creating new innovative approaches to assist their students. Those students that are attending college for the first time, or adult learners that have a full-time job and a family, may feel better about their investment in a college or continuing their education if some of these innovative ways were incorporated to assist them (Blumenstyk, 2018).

Allowing students the opportunity to work full-time and continue their education creates a balance and encourages the students to continue their education, enter college, or further their knowledge. Students' research career opportunities and look at what their education will cost compared to the potential salary. In most cases, that is how they decide and determine if getting a college education is beneficial. Students want the bottom-line cost, the ability to utilize the technology available to fit their busy, hectic schedules. The criteria mentioned above are what will be the determining factor on whether they spend their money investing in professional and continuing education, or the possibility of pursuing a degree program (Blumenstyk, 2018).

Financial literacy influences enrollment at Mid-Missouri Universities, and education can indeed be quite influential. Research has shown that college-educated students are more likely to own stocks and, as a result, are less prone to use high-cost borrowing (Campbell, 2006; Lusardi & Scheresberg, 2013; Haliassos & Bertaut, 1995). However, there is a positive correlation between education and wealth-holding (Bernheim & Scholz, 1993). General knowledge (education), and more specialized knowledge (financial literacy), both contribute to more informed financial decision-making. There is a connection with financial literacy to the demand for on-the-job training (Clark, Matsukura, & Ogawa, 2013). Despite the need to fill these gaps,

analysts and policymakers need to gain more information about the cost-effective ways to build financial knowledge in the current population. Research suggests that some interventions work well, but additional experimental work is critical (Clark, et al., 2013). Graduate students potentially work full-time, are married, have a family, and, therefore, financial literacy is a need. To decide and pursue their education, students should understand the process.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Question 1:** What are the benefits of Continuing Education?

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support impact a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree, and those who do not, and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a relationship between the amount of time allowed for professional development and implementation into the workday.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a relationship between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of the course content into the learning environment

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a relationship between financial support from the employer and the amount of time employees are willing to participate in professional improvement.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is a relationship between professional support, financial

support, and the implementation of course material in the classroom.

### **Study Limitations**

This study was conducted from Spring 2018 to Spring 2019 through the Professional and Continuing Education Department. The researcher utilized secondary data once approved by the Dean of the School of Education. As with other research, there were limitations that existed in this study. This study was limited to graduate students that participated in continuing education courses in a Midwest university. In addition, the data that was tested only came from courses that were offered in the professional and continuing education program between Spring 2018 and Spring 2019. Since the researcher utilized secondary data, the researcher had no control of the data. Although the researcher was responsible for the development of the interview questions, these questions were formulated to evaluate the program, identify what participants are looking for when considering investing or registering for professional development sessions, and to determine if implementation of what they learned is engaging for the students. Qualitative data came from interview responses collected during the fall semester of 2019. The researcher focused on the most recent participants for the interviews and hoped that the interviewees would be able to respond confidently and provide a clear and concise explanation of their course experience.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Achievement Gap* - Closely related to the learning gap and opportunity gap, the term achievement gap refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-



income households. Achievement gaps, refer to outputs, or the unequal distribution of educational results and benefits (Partnership, 2013).

*Continuing Education:* Formal lectures, courses, seminars, webinars, or any other similar type of educational program designed to educate an individual, and give him or her further skills or knowledge applied in his or her line of work. The programs intend to inform persons on new advancements or to build upon a person's expertise in a given field. These may be optional for some trades, but might be required in other circumstances, to maintain status, certification, or licensure. (What is a continuing education program, n.d.).

*Continuing Education Unit (CEU)* is a unit of credit equal to ten hours of participation in an accredited program designed for professionals, with certificates or licenses, to practice various professions (Peterson, 2020).

*Financial Education:* the process by which financial consumers/investors improve their understanding of financial products and concepts. As well as through information, instruction, and objective advice, develop the skills and confidence to become more aware of financial risks and opportunities to make informed choices, to know where to go for help, and to take other practical actions to improve their financial well-being (OECD, 2005).

*Financial Literacy* is the education and understanding of various financial areas. This topic focuses on the ability to manage personal financial matters in an efficient manner, and it includes the knowledge of making appropriate decisions about personal finances, such as investing, insurance, real estate, paying for college, budgeting, retirement, and tax planning (Kenton, 2018).

*Generation X*: also called the middle child of generations are born between 1965 and 1980. Gen Xers were one of the first latchkey kids and were known for their skepticism and their tendency to question. They are also known as the best-educated generation, with over 60% recorded as attending college. They work to live rather than live to work (Kane, 2019).

*Generation Y* – known as Millennials, were born between 1982 and 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2016, the Pew Research Center found that millennials surpassed baby boomers to become the largest living generation in the United States. They proved to be more sophisticated and were the first technologically savvy generation of graduate students. (Kane, 2019).

*Gen Z*: is the demographic cohort following Generation Y. Generation Z, referred to as iGen or Centennials, were born between 1996 and 2010. This generation has grown up surrounded by technology, some of them since preschool. Gen Z are continuously connected, technology-savvy, heavily dependent on the internet social media, and spend about 15.4 hours per week on their smartphones. They are the youngest, most ethnically-diverse, and largest generation in American history at 27% of the US population. They are sometimes stereotyped as tech-addicted, anti-social, or social justice warriors. (Generations Z, n.d.).

*Professional Development* - In education, the term professional development may be used about a wide variety of specialized training, formal teaching, or advanced professional learning, intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Partnership, 2013).

*A Professional Learning Community*, or PLC, is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. This term applies to schools or teaching faculties that use small-group collaboration as a form of professional development. PLC's have many different events, from school-to-school or place-to-place. Other terms referring to PLCs may be professional learning groups, collaborative learning communities, critical friends, groups, or communities of practice (Partnership, 2014)

### **Summary**

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. The researcher would like to determine if educators who participate in the graduate credit courses improve learning for their students by implementing what they learn and utilizing the innovative tools, as well as if there is financial support provided from the employer for continuing education. Through this comparison, this study aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses in the district's professional and continuing education program to meet the needs of their students. In the next chapter, the researcher will present literature related to the study.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### Introduction

Education professionals are becoming stagnant in their way of teaching in the classroom and claim to be unaware of how to find new, innovative ways to continue to keep the students engaged. Education professionals should look at Continuing Education (CE) as professional development, “which involves learning something new to advance and deepen your capabilities to both contribute to your own and your organization’s success” (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2012, p. 25). Once educators decide to look at Continuing Education as professional development, it does not matter what the event or course is titled, educational professionals will need to focus on what new techniques or strategies that they have learned and how they can implement them into their classroom (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2012).

The importance of participation through professional and continuing education in any profession is an advantage for both the organization and personal skill development. Offering continuing education will assist in gaining the knowledge that the organization values and adds to its success. Some employees believe that having the employer pay for training and allow the necessary time for continuing education is more beneficial to the employee as well as the organization. If it is expected that the employee schedule these on their own time and pay out of pocket, it becomes stressful and frustrating and many employees are not willing to give up time with their family or show interest in continuing their education. Having the employer provide the opportunity within their daily scheduled work time would be more beneficial. The cost of the courses is also a factor when deciding if the employees will be able to take advantage of this opportunity. “The

financial stress is removed from the employee if the employer pays for the training courses” (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2012, p. 20).

During weak economic circumstances, uncertainty tends to reduce the training funds as well as the opportunity to provide training during work hours. During these unfortunate situations, employees will be responsible for paying to participate in these courses. Requiring teachers to pay out of pocket and/or participate on their own time might even mean taking vacation time to attend a session. It is the responsibility of the employee to seek out and find other opportunities, such as, online or weekend seminars, which would avoid having to request vacation or personal time off work (Matarazzo, & Pearlstein, 2012).

The economic and social changes in the world have a significant impact on how districts must attain a better school system. They must start with talented, educated teachers since they are an essential resource in the schools. Therefore, the focus is on the teachers. If they continue to add more responsibilities to the teacher, it only becomes more challenging for the profession. Teachers have become more accustomed to these challenges, which may consist of multicultural classrooms, integration of special needs, use of technologies, demands for more evaluations and holding them accountable, as well as, interactions with the community and parents. The demands and increased responsibility for the teachers have become more complex over time and represent a challenge for the profession itself. The education and training provided for teachers must change; whether it is education or continuing education training (Eurydice, 2004, p. 2).

### **Transforming Professional Development**

Teachers are challenged and expected to meet high quality and standards set by

the United States Department of Education (USDOE); therefore, they need to strengthen their content knowledge and learn new methods of teaching to reach their students. The USDOE issued a report urging schools to hire teachers of the highest quality and defined “highly qualified” based on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which clarified requirements stating teachers must possess: “a bachelor’s degree, state certification, and competence in their subject area” (USDOE, 2003, p. 4).

They need more time to collaborate, examine the new standards and revise the curriculum (Renyi, 1996). Most states affected by high standards will need to assist their teachers with the knowledge of subject matter and the innovative ways to use new strategies. Teachers may want to utilize more hands-on, student-centered approaches when deciding what content is essential. The new assessment probe measures the student’s understanding of content and their ability to implement the knowledge and apply it to real life. Teachers need the resources to develop, master and reflect on the new ways to work with and educate their students. Historically, state policymakers have paid little attention to the form, content, or quality of professional development. The issue is that if teachers today are prepared for the new challenges, this laissez-faire approach needs to be addressed (Corcoran, T. C., 1995).

Teachers are embracing the new roles as members of governing school boards, relationships with their colleagues, parents, and administrators. These new roles demand new skills and knowledge. “By acknowledging and using teachers’ knowledge and expertise, and by giving teachers different forms of leadership positions and control of their learning groups, their knowledge and expertise will grow and deepen” (Kennedy, Deuel, Holmland Nelson, & Slavit, 2011, p. 20). Accepting these changes is an essential

and integral part of the teacher's work in professional development. Districts offer teachers continuing education units for increments on the pay scale when they participate. State and local policies encourage incentives for their teachers to take graduate courses, workshops, and attend conferences (Corcoran, T. C., 1995).

Most states and local districts take the brunt of paying for professional development. Their expenses may include staff costs, opening schools for extra days throughout the year for in-service training, sending their staff to workshops and supervising/evaluating personnel, reimbursing tuition and paying salary increments once teachers complete their graduate degrees, college credits, or CEUs. An estimated 3% to 5% of local operating expenses are what the activities account for in the budget (Miller, Lord, & Doney, 1994; Moore & Hyde, 1981). However, the state budget usually includes the costs of operating agencies, state or federal categorical funds designated for professional development. State investments in professional development probably range from 1% or less to over 3% of total state spending for public education (Miller, et al., 1994; Moore & Hyde, 1981).

The federal government contributes to professional development. According to recent estimated spending, was \$369 million in fiscal 1993 on teacher development programs in science, mathematics, and technology (Federal Coordinating Council, 1993). In 1994, legislation passed an increase in federal support for professional development. Due to the lack of consistency in the quality of professional development, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards has partnered with national teacher organizations and established assessment procedures and standards for recognition of those teachers. The hope is that teachers that receive their national board certification

will mentor beginning teachers and develop curriculum. The process is beneficial for professional development, since, teachers are required to document their practice, reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and illustrate specific knowledge and skill (Corcoran, T. C., 1995).

If professional development is going to strengthen the profession and improve schools then the implementation of new teaching techniques and methods is critical. State policymakers must review their current system and provide the proper framework that will assist with stimulating ideas on improving professional development. The author indicated that the biggest challenge is to develop a system that can share new strategies with 2.4 million teachers working in over 85,000 schools in the United States (Corcoran, 1995, p. 11).

Going to scale requires several changes: such as changing the incentive structure, taking full advantage of every opportunity for professional development, developing new ways to collaborate and build partnerships to mobilize and coordinate public and private resources. It requires greater use of teacher and school networks, educational and cable television, electronic networks that will help with the necessary skills to support teachers and support their efforts to change. The final change is adopting a long-term commitment to reform based on principles and policies and is the first step toward achieving high standards for all children (Corcoran, 1995).

Public investment in K-12 schools is critical for communities to succeed and the U.S. economy to offer a wide range of opportunities. However, the drastic decline in numbers impacted several states in the past ten years. Our country's future depends heavily on the quality of its schools. The financial support will assist with the



implementation in K-12 hiring and retaining excellent teachers, reducing class sizes, and expanding the availability of high-quality early education. Leachman, Masterson, and Figueroa (2017), indicated that “these cuts risk undermining schools’ capacity to develop the intelligence and creativity of the next generation of workers and entrepreneurs” (p. 1).

Academic research confirmed that money matters for educational outcomes. Restoring school funding should be a priority as these cuts have severe consequences. These cuts coming from the state level have caused the local school districts to reduce their educational services, raise more local revenue to cover the gap or both. In mid-2008, was when the first round of budget cuts took effect, and districts began to cut teachers and other employees. As the number of public K-12 teachers and other school workers has decreased, the number of students has increased. This decrease in funding for basic education could potentially have a lasting impression. The impact of creativity and the intellectual capacity of our people will influence the health of the nation’s economy and quality of life. Americans must continue to focus on the education of its people as education is vital to America’s future (Leachman, et al., 2017, p. 3).

States have a formula that they use to allocate money to school districts; all states do not use the same formula. Instead, each state decides which formula is the most beneficial for its residence. Some states earmark funding to districts with greater student needs and those that are less likely to raise funds on their own. In addition to the formula funding, states must allocate funds for bus transportation, contributions to school employee pension plans, and teacher training (Leachman, et al., 2017). Many states have been required or have adopted education reforms that include supporting professional development to improve teacher quality, improve interventions for young children to

raise school readiness, and assisting the lowest-achieving schools and get them on the right track by limiting the funds to improve schools and by terminating or undercutting reform (Leachman et al., 2017, p. 12).

Improving teacher quality has become so important when determining student success due to the high standards that teachers required. School districts are focusing on recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality teachers to improve student achievement. However, district budget cuts have limited the ability to expand teaching positions and supplement wages. Low teacher salaries are a key factor in the shortage of qualified teachers in several schools. Smaller class sizes can boost achievement but when schools cut spending and enrollment rises, it becomes difficult to maintain. Leachman et al. (2017), indicated that the United States has more K-12 students in 2017 than in 2008, however, fewer teachers and other school workers. Providing students more learning time can improve achievement, although, budget cuts have made it difficult to due to the added costs with extending learning time (Leachman et al., 2017).

The education spending cuts have created a downward spiral on other jobs as well due to school districts reducing their purchases and contracts with other companies for materials such as books and supplies. These changes also affect the local businesses and create a slow recovery process. Businesses require a well-educated workforce and these cuts weaken that future workforce by decreasing the quality of elementary and high schools. Employers encourage their workers to master new skills in technology and adjust to the complexities of a global economy. These large cuts in funding for basic education become a crucial building block for the future (Leachman et al., 2017).

Most statewide programs are funded by appropriations or grants from the state

department of education (Watson, Winograd, & Kalmon, 2004). However, the decline in numbers has affected quite a few states in the last ten years (Leachman et al., 2017).

These cuts coming from the state level have caused the local school districts to reduce their educational services, raise more local revenue to cover the gap or both may happen. In 2008, as budget cuts took effect, districts began to cut teachers and other employees.

State funding for public two and four-year colleges in the 2017 school year was nearly \$9 billion below its 2008 level, after adjusting for inflation. The funding issue has contributed to higher tuition and reduced quality on campuses, as colleges have had to balance budgets by reducing faculty, limiting course offerings and in some cases closing campuses. The results are unfortunate because we are at a time when the benefit of a college education has never been greater. State policymakers have in turn made going to college less affordable and less accessible to the students most in need (Leachman et al., 2017).

Teachers must strengthen their content knowledge and improve their teaching skills when they face budget cuts and layoffs (Corcoran, 1995). Teachers expect more time for collaboration, examining new standards, and revising the curriculum. States pressured to meet high standards are insisting that teachers develop their subject matter knowledge and be innovative in the classroom. State spending on public colleges and universities remains well below the historic levels, despite recent increases a decade after the Great Recession hit (Cocrcoran, 1995).

The increased pressure to meet state standards developed by the Department of Education has created an additional need to provide ongoing professional development for teachers. Teachers need preparation provided for upcoming new challenges, then

approach to the professional development needs to change (Corcoran, 1995). A step in the right direction is the shift in decision-making authority, which is moving from the state level and district office to the school buildings. With this change, teachers have a more active voice. Many teachers are embracing their new roles as members of governing boards and are developing deeper relationships with their colleagues, parents, and administrators. This shift has also led to districts offering teachers additional coursework or continuing education units (Cocrcoran, 1995).

Leadership plays an important role and guides the direction and design as well as the growth of professional learning communities in schools. In order to support and encourage teacher professional growth and development over their career will require a fundamental shift in professional development. In order to have an impact for adult learners, the teachers must understand their objectives, compassion for their interest in learning and growing, and a learning structure that uses their time efficiently. One shift requires rethinking and revising the design, content, delivery, and outcomes of teacher professional development. Another shift involves utilizing a new collaborative agreement that reconfigures time, space, resources, and materials to provide learning spaces for teachers. There is an increased, shared accountability from teachers and students as a result of the collaboration required in learning from each other. There is no credible evidence that the best way to improve student learning is to have teachers work in isolation; however, there is plenty of evidence that supports organizing teachers into high performing, collaborative teams. When a school shifts from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration, the teacher's world can change. Finally, school districts must re-brand professional development. That is, they must make the connection between

high-quality schools, student achievement and teacher learning and understanding. This connection is what creates an engaged classroom. Kotter advised that the central challenge of changing culture is “changing people’s behavior” (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 2). He also mentioned that engaging staff in a collaborative process to develop shared values is one of the most powerful tools for changing behaviors that can transform the culture of a school district (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). “If we expect teachers and school leaders to improve professional practice, we must...give them different knowledge and skills than they have received in the past” (Reeves, 2010, p. 15).

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) emphasized that one of the first steps in re-culturing an educational environment is to discuss and uncover the culture of the organization. The next step is to provide identification through the values, beliefs, habits, and expectations that represent the norms for the group, which then becomes the responsibility of the collaboration between teacher unions and school boards to relay the importance of teacher growth and development (as well as the link to school and district goals) to the students, parents, and other community members (Bredeson, 2001). As Blanchard (2007) wrote: “Values provide guidelines on how you should proceed as you pursue your purpose and picture of the future. They need to be clearly described so that you know exactly what behaviors demonstrate that the value is being lived. Values need to be consistently acted on, or they are only good intentions” (p. 30).

### **Teacher Standards**

The Missouri Learning Standards are the knowledge and skills required for students in each grade level and course for success in college and careers (Linkon, 2018). In January 1996, Missouri adopted the Show-Me Standards which were a demanding set

of content and process standards that have proved to be an excellent frame of reference for student performance in Missouri. These expectations were developed for each grade level and are updated regularly by teacher feedback and new research. The Missouri Learning Standards provide school administrators, teachers, parents, and students a road map for learning expectations in each grade and course. The standards are relevant to the real world and reflect the knowledge and skills students need to achieve their goals. Learning outcomes improve when students, parents, and teachers work together toward shared goals (Linkon, 2018).

Demonstrating improvements in student achievement is necessary in response to the increasing expectations from the state and federal level. When results are not immediate or as dramatic as predicted, schools may often change course and modify the program in search of quick, dramatic results. Teachers may feel burdened by too many initiatives in the drive for student success. DuFour et al. (2008) as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) stated,

The message is clear and consistent. The best professional development occurs in a social and collaborative setting . . . [It] is ongoing and consistent . . . [It] is job-embedded . . . and occurs in the context of the real work of the school and focuses on results – improved student learning (p. 369).

DuFour et al. (2008) stressed that district and school leaders must build capacity to raise student achievement through the routine and systematic review of student work by every educator. DuFour et al. (2008) explained that work should be thought of and considered essential by all participants.

Marshall (2009) suggested that the achievement gap widens every day when

children are placed in an ineffective or mediocre teacher's classroom. He believes that one of the administrations/leader's most important tasks is to get teachers involved in professional learning communities as a process of continual improvement. The idea is that teams of teachers are working collaboratively for planning and assessment, encouraging them to focus on "what students are learning and how teaching can be improved" (Marshall, 2009, p. 171).

The states growing role in education is due to several court cases that have challenged the education finance system, which has led to a variety of distributions in spending across the school districts. More recent cases have evolved due to the concern of the adequacy of funding for public education. The last count of litigants, according to Corcoran and Evans, was 45 states that challenged the constitutionality of the state school finance system (p. 4). In the past, the federal government has had a small role in K-12 education finance. Between 1970 and 2008, the average federal share was 7.8 %. However, the federal government supplied significant additional funding at the beginning of the Great Recession. The local governments provide another 45% and the rest come from the federal government. The assistance from the federal government reached 13.0% in 2010. It was interesting to compare the contributions of funds between state government revenues, individual and corporate taxes, and various sales taxes (Corcoran & Evans, 2015).

### **Historical Perspective**

Since World War II, education after high school has become more common for American Life. College gained momentum during the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when both state and federal governments ensured that postsecondary education was available to

all Americans regardless of economic background. However, McPherson and Schapiro (1991), discussed that while the belief that the importance of education remains strong, their concern is about the future of affordability of college and effectiveness of governmental efforts to broaden post-secondary opportunity. Affordability means more than just keeping tuition low, affordability involves the budget constraint facing the nation as a whole and includes the individual families too. A college degree is still an important credential when gaining access to professions and influential positions in public life. Advanced education is an important, and therefore, students should be willing to pay for it just as if they would for medical care and other employment opportunities (McPherson & Shapiro, 1991).

The “professional development of teachers is a lifelong process which begins with the initial preparation that teachers receive and continues until retirement” (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 8). Utilizing training tactics to update, develop, and expand the knowledge of teachers or provide new skills, can lead to better practical resolutions to problems in the classroom. Teachers become aware of the link between techniques and activities, what students are learning, and the way different groups of students may respond to specific situations. Most professional development provided through the school districts utilizes local teachers, district personnel, independent consultants, faculty members, and even curriculum publishers. However, with many school districts in the area, it is easy to see why it is so difficult to keep the training unified and standardized at a national level (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

School districts support high standards for teaching and learning which means the demand for teachers to be able to communicate basic knowledge of their subject area as



well as encourage advanced thinking and problem-solving skills for their students is a necessity. While most teachers believe in the high standards approach, some of them are not prepared to implement the teaching that the students are requiring. Due to the shift of a more balanced approach, teachers must have more knowledge about their subject as well as, how the students learn most effectively. Continuing to gain experience and skills is an integral part of any profession (Garet et al., 2001).

As states adopt new standards, they place more emphasis on the quality of the teacher and the role quality teaching plays in student achievement. Subject matter knowledge is one of the variables discussed that relate to teacher effectiveness. Another variable to consider would be teaching experience. The third variable is the certification status. For example, teachers in high-standard states like Wisconsin or Minnesota, a first-year teacher must have their bachelor's degree, which includes a full major in the subject area, and possibly added for additional coursework in a variety of topics (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

There are many different qualifications a teacher earns when completing their education. Some may have received their bachelor's degree, while others may begin their careers with a master's degree. As these educators join the teaching force and enter the teaching journey, their education and qualifications, play a crucial role when determining the quality and quantity of teachers. For example, if a teacher shortage arises; alternative pathways can be created. As one enters the field, they must realize that continuing their education is critical. Keeping up to date with the newest, most effective learning tools as well as the most innovative ways to engage with their students is beneficial to their school, themselves as teachers, and most importantly their students. Developing training

to assist teachers that are already in-service has an impact on their behaviors, teaching skills and student outcomes (Musset, 2010, p. 5).

Continuing Professional Development (CPD), is a complex concept, which is growing rapidly through new policies and programs. CPD has several meanings, such as, being viewed as training, a way of keeping up with current trends, and some even view it as a way to continue to gain knowledge for their career (Friedman, 2000):

CPD is the systematic maintenance, improvement, and broadening of knowledge and skill and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner's working life.

(Construction Industry Council, 1986, p. 3)

This definition ties professional and technical competencies together with personal qualities. Professional associations are continually trying to incorporate CPD into the working lives of their members.

The National Staff Development Council (2007) created nine standards in which all professional development should include:

- content knowledge and quality teaching
- research-basis
- collaboration
- diverse learning needs
- student learning environments
- family involvement
- evaluation
- data-driven design

- teacher learning

According to Glattenhorn (1987), the more educators increase their experience, the more systematically they gain professional experience through an examination of their teaching ability. “Making teaching less of a job and more of a profession” (p. 35).

### **Theoretical Connections**

Alexander Astin developed the Student Involvement Theory in 1984 and suggested that college stimulates growing cognitive complexity, which leads to learning and development (as cited in Renn & Reason 2013). Student Involvement Theory focused on what the student does instead of the student’s feelings or thoughts; the behavior is this theory’s focus. Continuing to engage students actively in the classroom is something that must happen for students to learn and grow. When students attend colleges or universities, the faculty and staff are essential parts in assisting students with creating opportunities for students to be part of meaningful experiences both inside and outside of the classroom (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

Student involvement is the quantity and quality of the psychological and physical energy that students put forth throughout their college career. Astin defined a highly involved student as one that spends time studying, attends events on campus, participates in activities on campus, and interacts with faculty and other students (Patton, et al., 2016). There are five basic assumptions about involvement, according to Patton et al. (2016). The first is that involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in the various object, whether generalized or specific. The second is that involvement works on a continuum. Students will have different degrees of involvement and at different times. The third assumption is that both quantitative and

qualitative properties are used. The fourth assumption is that the amount of student learning, and personal development from any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that particular program. The final, fifth assumption is the effectiveness of the education policy or practice that directly related to the capacity it has to increase student involvement (Patton et al., 2016).

Astin's theory also focused on three elements: the student's inputs – what students came to college with (demographics, background, and any previous experiences, prior education, etc.), the student's environment – all the experiences a student has during college, and the final element, outcomes, student's characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values that exist after a student has graduated college (as cited in Renn & Reason 2013). Several graduate students work full time and still choose to attend college. Instructors that are friendly, supportive, and accessible to address any concerns or questions create an environment that is relaxed, encouraging, and easy to collaborate with others.

When a student begins a new career, they can build relationships, gain the confidence of peers, learn from others, and juggle the many responsibilities throughout the day. Knowing their strengths and weaknesses is critical in any position that they hope to acquire. Avoiding the negativity that comes from those that do not believe in success, or are not supportive, will require the employee to rebuild himself/herself, lean on his/her faith, and find the strengths to build on to create a better person, a better work environment and become more productive on a daily basis (Patton et al., 2016).

Astin's Student Involvement Theory suggested that students who are more involved on campus and in extracurricular activities tend to perform better in an

academic setting. This theory also says that universities who have highly engaged students tend to have positive educational outcomes (as cited in Renn & Reason 2013). Researchers have continued to study the correlation and received similar results. Student involvement in activities such as student organizations, leadership positions, and activity in campus residence halls connect positively to a correlation with retention and academics (Kuh & Pike, 2005).

Astin's Student Involvement Theory encourages students (no matter their age) to become more self-aware, have a greater awareness of our potential, and to appreciate what we are capable of and proceed from there (as cited in Renn & Reason 2013). His focus on leadership was due to the realization that colleges and universities do not adapt to change, it is very hard for them. He believed it was important to have those interested in change know the process and the appropriate steps needed to see the change. However, the process was not to indicate that they would become leaders. Instead, individuals could bring about change by initiating the process and working collaboratively (Astin & Schroeder, 2003).

There are many advantages to Astin's Student Involvement Theory. The most significant environmental factors apply to students regardless of sex, race, ability, or family background, and have more time and opportunity to get involved in aspects of campus life. The biggest advantage of Alexander Astin's Student Involvement Theory is to focus on the motivation and behavior of the students more than on the subject matter and technique. Activities that are happening throughout the institution need evaluation through the increase or decrease in the student's involvement (Astin & Schroeder, 2003).

The second theory related to this study is Nevitt Sanford's theory of challenge and support. He helped to establish the field of social psychology and the importance of keeping the balance between challenge and support. Challenging to push students and avoid boredom, yet providing support so that they do not get too frustrated and want to give up. Students will go through significant personal growth and development; however, for this to occur they need to have a challenge/support balance. Working together and collaborating is key because it is beneficial for everyone involved. When Sanford offered his theory of challenge and support, he meant for this theory to be used in combination with other theories to help understand how students grow along a certain developmental process (cognitive development, psycho-social development or identity development) (Abbott, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunscik, Levinson, Sanford, Agartan, & Dynes, 2011).

There are three Development Conditions noted by Sanford's theory of Challenge and Support, which are:

- Challenge – a step that pushes a learner to acquire new growth
- Support – an environment that is conducive to student exploration of his or her own identity in a safe and encouraging way
- Readiness – demonstration of the ability to meet the challenge

Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support pairs well with Marcia Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship. Baxter-Magolda is a Professor of Educational Leadership at Miami University of Ohio and is a specialist in Student Development Theory. She identified a gap of gender in the existing work of Perry and Belenky. She believed it would be important to involve both men and women together. Baxter

Magolda identified three dimensions that answer three simple questions that the participant would question during their journey toward self-authorship. The three questions are: how do I know, who am I, and how do I want to construct relationships with others. There are three dimensions of self-authorship: epistemological which helps the participant answer the how do I know the question, intrapersonal the process where the participant finds the answer to the question of who am I, and finally interpersonal, where the participant masters the question of how do I want to construct relationships with others (Magolda, 2010).

There are four discovered phases of self-authorship according to Baxter Magolda. The phases are formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one's life, and internal foundation. The second phase is Crossroads, asking the question: How do I know /Epistemological? In this phase, the students will learn that the plans laid out for them are not working, they may appear to be unhappy or unfulfilled, and they may decide to create new plans to align with their interests. The next question to ask would be: Who am I/Intrapersonal? In this phase, students do not like how they are defined by others and need to create their sense of self. The final step is building relationships/Interpersonal, this is where students seek less approval from others, and they start making decisions on their own (Magolda, 2010).

Becoming the author of one's life is the third phase. In this phase, a person will choose their own beliefs, live by them, and stand up for them. One would also learn those belief systems can change, differ based on context, and not always clear. Who am I/Intrapersonal – strong self-concept? The fourth and final question of this phase is about relationships/Interpersonal. Negotiating in relationships and make commitments that

honor self. The final phase is the Internal Foundation. The three questions and their responses are: How do I know / Epistemological? The student will not be affected by outside authorities and will be grounded in their belief system. The three questions are: Who am I/Intrapersonal – grounded in yourself and feel at peace, content in the situation. The relationship/interpersonal is the idea of mutuality in relationships (Magolda, 2010).

When deciding to incorporate Nevitt's Theory of Challenge and Support, it would be beneficial to combine Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship as well. Learning who you are, where you are, and how to build relationships while balancing challenges and finding support throughout the process is applicable in most situations.

Some strengths of the Baxter-Magolda's self-authorship are the longitudinal approach, detailed analysis, it is easy to understand and observe, and applying to practice. This theory allows participants to gain confidence in themselves, trust their decisions, and feel comfortable with those decisions. They can experience growth in personal and professional lives; and overall, they will have a better quality of life. One of the major strengths of Baxter Magolda's work is its utility. She has done a thorough job in explaining and giving guidance on ways that her theory applies to practice, both in student affairs and in academic settings (Baxter-Magolda, 2008).

Chickering (1969), referred to as the "Father of Theory," provided an overview of the developmental issues faced by college students and identified the environment. Chickering's theory was widely used in student affairs since its introduction in 1969. He proposed seven vectors of development that contribute to the formation of identity. The progression throughout this process is not linear. He referred to these vectors as "major highways for journeying toward individuation" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35).



Students move through these vectors at different rates and may deal with issues related to more than one vector simultaneously utilizing a process of recycling. There are seven vectors which include:

- Developing competence – Intellectual Competence: The gathering of knowledge and skills regarding subjects. Physical Competence: Involvement in athletic activities, attention to health, etc., and Interpersonal Competence: Advancement in communication patterns, leadership, etc. (Nasser, 2018).
- Managing Emotions – In this vector, students develop the ability to recognize and accept emotions, as well as express and control them appropriately. Also, students learn to act on feelings responsibly.
- Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence – Emotional Independence: Increased self-confidence without the expressed support of others, Instrumental Independence: Increased skill in problem-solving, critical thinking, etc., and Interdependence: Understanding of connection to others. This aspect of development results in increased emotional independence, defined as “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117).
- Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships – This vector which in the original version of the theory was titled “freeing interpersonal relationships” and followed the “establishing identity” vector, was placed earlier in the sequence to acknowledge that experiences with relationships contribute significantly to the development of a sense of self (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Mature relationships encompass all types including romantic, friend, and family, as well

as an increased ability to appreciate differences (Nasser, 2018).

- Establishing Identity builds on the vectors that come before it. In Chickering's revised theory, this vector took on added complexity to acknowledge differences in identity development based on gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation.
- Developing Purpose – This vector consists of developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful commitments to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).
- Developing Integrity – This vector includes “three sequential but overlapping stages” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51): humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Developing Integrity is where one decides how their values connect to others, what is the impact to interdependence (Patton et al., 2016).

A crisis is merely something that prompts development and does not have to be negative. Students must take the negative and build on it to make it positive. When utilizing Chickering's theory, students must be careful since using this theory since everyone develops at different times. Chickering argued that the educational environment has powerful influences on student development and proposed seven key influences (Chickering & Reisser, 1993):

- Institutional Objective – Clear and specific objectives that personnel pay attention to use to guide the development of programs and services have a powerful impact.
- Institutional Size – Chickering and Reisser (1993) argued: “as the number of

persons outstrips the opportunities for significant participation and satisfaction, the developmental potential of available settings is attenuated for all” (p. 269).

- Student-faculty Relationships – extensive and varied interaction among faculty and students facilitates the development
- Curriculum- A curriculum that recognizes the individual difference, offers diverse perspectives and helps students make sense of what they are learning is critical to foster development.
- Teaching – for development to occur, teaching should involve active learning, student-faculty interaction, timely feedback, high expectations, and respect for individual learning differences.
- Friendships and Student Communities – Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted, “A student’s most important teacher is often another student” (p. 392). Meaningful friendships and diverse student communities in which shared interests exist and significant interactions encourage development along with all seven sectors.
- Student Development Programs and Services – Collaborative efforts by faculty and student affairs professionals are necessary to provide developmental programs and services (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016, p. 299-301).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) also introduced three admonitions (not to be confused with the seven key influences) that discuss the creation of educationally powerful environments:

- Integration of Work and Learning – Since most students, today work as well as take classes, collaborative relationships are needed between business, the community, and institutions of higher education that will maximize the developmental potential of work and volunteer experience (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).
- Recognition and Respect for Individual Differences – Chickering and Reisser (1993) state, “It is clear that diversity will only increase in the years ahead. It is also clear that if we are unable to deal with it, we are likely to face increasing conflict, a two-tier society, and economic stagnation” (p. 473).
- Acknowledgments of the Cyclical Nature of learning and Development – Learning involves periods of differentiation and integration, equilibrium and disequilibrium.

Chickering’s theory generated several student affairs applications, particularly in the area of programming. His theory is still applicable for working with individual students, programming, and structuring environments to promote psychosocial development (Patton et al., 2016).

The students that participated in Chickering’s seven vectors were challenged by decisions and needed the support of family and friends for encouragement. Making decisions that one follows through with and constantly building relations and connections are two key components of becoming successful. Try to leave a position as positive as possible instead of abruptly and disgruntled. This suggestion is something to live by as well as encourage friends and family to think about before moving on to a new position. Going through the seven vectors helped to determine where one wants to grow and how

they would get there. The process is not easy, but breaking it down and focusing on one thing at a time is how one can achieve their goals.

Americans develop knowledge by asking questions, exploring, and assessing what we know. The vectors provide valuable information to assist in creating environments to help facilitate student development. One advantage of Chickering's Theory is that the vectors provide valuable information to assist in creating environments to help facilitate student development, and they are not linear, therefore, anyone can experience multiple vectors at once (Patton et al., 2016).

### **Philosophy of Continuing Education**

Brodman (1968), delivered a presentation on "Evolving Educational Objectives" at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Medical Library Association in Miami, Florida. She discussed the philosophy of continuing education. Indicating that CE's are a "potent force in the spread of innovation, fostering new ways of thinking and bringing new development of new techniques and methods in creating knowledge that helps determine what functions and methods to keep, what to relinquish, and what questions to ask to help make these decisions" (Brodman, 1968, p. 145 ). She reminded the readers that Philosophy is "the science which investigates the facts and principles of reality and human nature and conduct" (Brodman, 1968, p. 145). Brodman (1968) said that "institutions and society as a whole have a stake in continuing education as well; professionals that study all their lives will bring about the development of new principles, techniques, and methods" (Brodman, 1968, p. 146-147).

Sometimes continuing to study can provide solutions to problems or it can lead to new meanings for the work completed. It is critical to stay knowledgeable and current

with new innovative ideas in the specific area of expertise, as well as the organizational patterns of society. Organizations should encourage their employees to continue their education and learn more about their emphasis area as a daily part of their role. The people that enjoy learning do not find learning a threat; they will embrace the new opportunities to look for innovative ways that improve their current process and new methods to create success. On the other hand, some people do not enjoy learning and feel learning new techniques is a threat to their position. Brodman (1968), said she wanted to encourage those people to try it out. She said, "Learn new things or you'll lose out in salary, in position, and in the respect of your colleagues" (Brodman, 1968, p. 148).

Continuing education is not just attending meetings, courses, seminars, committees, and staff discussions, it is a mental stimulation of learning and thinking that is very beneficial and can encourage one to develop different methods to resolve issues. Some other impactful clearing of the mind to create new ways of thinking is by listening to music, viewing artwork, or finding a quiet spot to reflect. Utilizing techniques that may be enjoyable or one may find calming can help raise the level of the whole approach. It can be very hard to come up with the funding, motivation or time to participate in continuing education, but there are continuous changes and new developments for every career and employees must continue to learn and not get left behind. CE is critical to your ability to advance on the pay scale or maybe a new career opportunity (Matarazzo & Pearlstein, 2012).

### **Legal Considerations**

Researchers, educational policymakers, and practitioners all agree that professional development is vitally important to educational reform especially as we

move into the next millennium (Bredeson, 2001). Professional development is critical to school improvement especially with the high standards and emphasis on student learning outcomes. Continuous learning and development are vital to everyone, not just educators.

This information focused on written teacher contracts, their administration, and the connection specifically on professional development. Professional development often referred to as staff development, skills training, in-service, and continuing education. The author, Bredeson, developed a definition based on research and current literature as; “Professional development refers to learning opportunities that engage teachers’ creative and reflective capacities to strengthen their practice” (Bredeson, 2001, p. 4). The author developed this definition through a combination of three components: the first noted that professional development is learning opportunities; second, if these opportunities must engage teachers’ creative and reflective capacities; and the third component is to strengthen teachers’ practice (Bredeson, 2001).

Since 1959, collective bargaining for teachers has been part of state statutes. In the earlier bargaining days, the focus was on establishing teacher compensation and career advancement in the written contracts along with the development of the teacher salary scale that indicated years of teaching experience and advanced educational training to determine the salary increases. The CBA found the win-win compromise, and advanced training became the answer to satisfy the teachers’ demand for higher salaries and school boards’ desire to have highly qualified and better-trained teachers. Kerchner, Koppich, and Weeres (1997), stated, “After all, unions are potentially powerful collaborators because they negotiate the allocation of time in school and define a

teacher's official duty day and psychological work role relationships" (Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997, p. 173). There are many leverage points or negotiated provisions that directly impact teacher learning in the workplace (Bredeson et al., 2001).

"Teaching has become a unionized occupation in the United States, and local contracts now create a complex system of rules that regulate labor-management relations" (Sykes, 1999, p. 240). The article by Skyes (1999), indicated that three-fourths of the teacher contracts fail to mention detailed language on professional development even though the reform reports indicate how crucial to school improvement and reform efforts.

### **Funding**

It took years to restore funding to pre-recession levels, many states cut school funding after the recession hit. According to data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, 29 states were still providing less total school funding per student in 2015 than in 2008 (as cited by Leachman et al., 2017). However, most states' school funding has slowly improved. The future of education depends heavily on the quality of schools. The financial support can help schools implement reforms for hiring and retaining excellent teachers, reducing class sizes, and expanding the availability of high-quality education.

Most low-income students affected by budget cuts are simply because of the financial risk with increased student loan applications. There is also the cutting of programs to increase the educational gap between students of special needs and other students that fail to comply with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Mitchell, Leachman & Masterson, 2017). The effects of budget cuts also increase in the disparity between lower-income students and higher-income students. Here is the positive news regarding



budget cuts, it will force schools to look at areas where they are spending large sums of money and find efficient ways of using it. Budget cuts help schools more efficiently with simple tasks such as turning out the lights, lowering the air conditioning, and closing the door when the teachers leave their rooms; limiting paper and utilizing technology more, and the most important benefit is that it may allow us to discover an innovative way to educate (Mitchell, et al., 2017).

Budget cuts may not be desirable, but they are beneficial from a systems perspective. It forces the education system to evaluate its entire process for efficiency and areas for improvement. At times processes become mundane and can get overlooked because one is narrow-minded and only sees the process the way it has always been done, gas consumption, paper usage, and energy strategies. Educators help make the world a safer and more environmentally friendly place to live when they evaluate and find new innovative ways of running their schools and classrooms. Cross-training enables one teacher to teach multiple courses. This is a potential solution for filling the void left by teachers who were let go. (Mitchell, et al., 2017).

The curriculum is purchased from a vendor, or created within the district. Although, they must meet the state content standards. Most statewide online programs assure the quality of the courses and teachers. These courses are available to provide opportunities for students with disabilities, low-income families and anyone interested in taking an online course (Watson et al., 2004).

It is complicated to try and achieve the cultural shift in teacher education due to the defunding of public schools and the increasing decline of state support for public universities, which prepare most teachers (Newfield, 2008). We must keep in mind that

it is not about the structure of the program; the important factors to consider are the quality of the knowledge and the powerful relationships that exist. When developing policies and practices districts should consider including incentives as well as, create a shared responsibility for teacher education. According to Zeichner, Payne, and Brayko (2015), at the program level, administrators and educators must offer more opportunities for members of local communities, schools, or universities to be more centrally engaged in all aspects of the program on an ongoing basis.

The opportunity for universities, colleges, schools, and communities to come together and develop new ways to prepare professional teachers with the same high-quality education for all children is available. Together schools, universities, and communities must educate our nation's teachers and remember that one cannot do it without the other. By determining who an expert is and rethinking how universities can collaborate with communities and schools, these teacher education programs can interrogate their challenges and collaboratively offer new solutions to prepare the teachers and the students' needs (Hess, 2009).

The educational spending cuts have created a spiral effect on other jobs due to schools reducing the amount of purchasing and contracts with other companies for books, supplies, etc. The changes in job loss from faculty and staff have had an impact on the local businesses and created a slow recovery process for everyone. The funding savings in K-12 might end up costing the states more in diminished economic growth. These cuts have decreased the quality of elementary and high school education and therefore weakened the future. The nation is encouraging workers to master new skills and adjust to the complexities of a global economy, but then they are reducing the opportunities for

well-educated candidates. These cuts for basic education become a critical building block for a future (Winograd & Kalmon, 2004).

There is a new report released in the United States criticizing the quality of the contribution of colleges and universities to teacher education every week. The Obama administration's education department distributed \$263 million to promote innovation in education. However, the only teacher education project funded was Teach for America, which received \$550 million and The New Teacher Project (TNTP), which received \$20 million dollars. Some federal government officials have voiced that colleges and universities are an obstacle to reform, and if colleges and universities collaborated with the community, they could form a new way to prepare professional teachers with the same high quality of education (Zeichner et al., 2015).

The annual published tuition at a four-year public college has risen by \$2,484 or 35%, since the 2008 school year. These tuition increases have created a decrease in the number of students who can afford to pay tuition. The authors indicated that over the last 20 years, the cost of a four-year public college or university had grown faster than the median income. Even with the rise in federal student aid, it has fallen short of the increase in tuition and other college expenses. In 2016, state and local dollars constituted 53% of the funds that these institutions used directly for teaching and instruction (Mitchell, et al., 2017).

The expansion of K-12 online learning creates threats to growing more rapidly that the state-level policies that serve to fulfill the requirements and standards. Online education programs vary by organization and are split into two dimensions: Cyberschool vs. supplemental and statewide vs. single district. The law defines online learning as “a

program in which a pupil and teacher interact using online resources, including but not limited to, discussion boards, web sites, and email” (Watson et al., 2004, p.21). Watson, Winograd, and Kalmon, (2004), indicate that there are five basic types of online education programs: statewide supplemental programs, district-level supplemental programs, single-district cyber schools, multi-district cyber schools, and cyber charter schools. Due to the diversity of the programs, many are concerned about the role, management, and support of online learning in public education. The state policies should create one online system instead of treating each online program individually. There has not been much research conducted by the state regarding online students; however, many suggest that online programs include students with low and high student achievement. Some states have started to implement reporting requirements for online programs. However, in most states, nothing is mandated for tracking and reporting online student information. (Watson et al., 2004)

The state education agencies vary in how they supervise and regulate the online learning programs by state. A few states have decided to make a policy to fund online students differently from those in physical schools. Many states use the same content standards created in the physical schools for their online programs and have not created their online curriculum standards. Most states require online instructors to be state-certified at the same level as physical school teachers. However, no state requires specialized training for those online instructors. Online students are required to take part in standardized test assessments. The states are also required to comply with non-discrimination laws. Educators see this to be a big advantage especially when meeting requirements for the federal elementary and secondary act of 2001 No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) (Watson et al., 2004).

The turnover is high for all teachers, but especially in high-poverty schools. Urban and rural schools are often known as “hard-to-staff” schools (Ingersoll, 2003). According to Ingersoll (2003), approximately 40% of all teachers leave high-poverty situations. The reasons indicated for urban high-poverty schools was due to poor administrative support (50%), lack of teacher influence and autonomy (43%), call-room intrusions (30%), inadequate time to prepare (31%), poor salary (27%), student discipline problems (26%), lack of opportunity for professional development (12%), and poor student sanctions. The reasons for leaving rural high-poverty schools was due to poor administrative support (49%), lack of teacher influence and autonomy (43%), call-room intrusions (30%), inadequate time to prepare (31%), poor salary (57%), student discipline problems (19%), lack of opportunity for professional development (23%), and poor student sanctions. Students were not motivated, large class sizes, not enough time to prepare, classroom instructions, and the lack of professional advancement (Ingersoll, 2003).

Teachers in urban and rural high-poverty schools are suggesting that the district provides better compensation, smaller class sizes, better student discipline, more parental involvement, and more faculty authority, especially when handling student behavioral rules. There are a several reason across the board for teachers leaving school districts: the pressures of accountability with higher standards for tests, the issue that schools have failed to provide effective training, the lack of valuable first-year teacher programs, as well as, a supportive teaching environment, and some teachers are leaving because of the facility itself. . Due to the growing number of newly licensed teachers, universities and

the K-12 education systems must develop a plan that encourages the teachers to participate in continuing education to meet the high standards set by the NCLB (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006).

The benefits of continuing education are rewarding for everyone involved. The employees are becoming more proficient in their current job by acquiring additional skills and knowledge. The employer that encourages their employees to take continuing education courses to assist with creating a more qualified, educated and well-trained workforce that also helps the company achieve long-term profitability. Many companies believe that they have increased profits because their employees are up to date with the latest trends in their industry thus, allowing them to stay ahead of their competition and increase their profits. Employees provided the opportunity to continue their education feel valued and keeping the employees satisfied is the key to letting a business grown and prosper in today's competitive environment. The university that is offering graduate credit gains the opportunity to enroll students into their masters, specialist, or other advanced degree programs. By offering continuing education courses for graduate credit. The university is reaching out to the community focusing on a specific market that would bring in money that essentially has low-to-no overhead and is more of a profit. The process is beneficial for professionals since they are required to document their practice, reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and illustrate specific knowledge and skills (Corcoran, 1995). Educators need to stay up to date with the technology and other innovative ways to engage with their students.

### **DE and CEU's Change Agents for Universities**

Distance education programs have become increasingly popular and utilized to

educate more people for the economy, and to expand access to education. An article from a 2013 newsletter in the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) cited Schroeder, the chair, and was instructed to choose a task force to monitor online and e-learning. He emphasized the “knowledge and experience of those who represent the college and universities who have demonstrated their commitment to quality and innovation in this field” (University Professional and Continuing Education Association [UPCEA], 2013, p. 1). Universities have been responding to the need for nontraditional education through the offerings of both synchronous and asynchronous DE. These opportunities are due to the barriers of time, place, pace, delivery, capacity, and cost (Ashcroft, 2013).

Before the implementation of DE, it was a vision, a social concept, and a powerful perceived solution to a need. The author discusses three forces that impact the function of a DE:

1. The growth of DE as an educational concept
2. The growth of continuing education (CE) programs within universities
3. The growth of academic departments seeking to develop, administer, and market their own DE course

A distance education course is where the students and instructor are not at the same location for the instruction (Simonson, 2008). Many times, the instructor is teaching online, teaching with media, or teaching by correspondence. Students and universities may refer to continuing education as lifelong learning and adult education. Initially, DE created the opportunity for students that could not be present physically to enroll, engage and participate in coursework. Professors would travel to communities to lecture, and

this was to accommodate a group of students from one area. Institutions in higher education offered opportunities for distance learners. In return, they expanded into noncredit DE courses for professional or personal development that would allow them to earn college credit for completing the course (Simonson, 2008).

The continuing education unit managed the business in a self-funded, or cost recovery model. The reduction in state funding for higher education created a need for new revenue. Businesses joined the education forces with the introduction of online universities as competitors. When the United States economy went into recession, the parallel between for-profits, state universities, and private institutions ended. After the recession, which was a slow recovery in high unemployment rates, additional challenges formed for higher education. Universities began to see the new role that DE would have, creating recurring revenue for the institution. Most CE courses share residual revenue with the institution and academic departments. DE programs worked to increase enrollment; there were still several concerns (Ashcroft, 2013).

Due to the changes and transition in DE, the educational environment is changing too. It is important to find a balance that will continue to meet the needs of state legislators, business leaders, and public education. The government and business have created a curriculum with six key focuses:

1. Fully online courses
2. Proctored online examinations with student verification
3. Competency-based outcomes
4. Accelerated courses of no more than five weeks
5. Concierge student service



## 6. Degrees aligned with workforce demands

The business community needs more individuals with specialized skills. The community hopes for changes that will benefit adults who previously earned college credits, and are looking for ways to help them complete degree programs needed in the professional workforce. Higher education is responding (Ashcroft, 2013).

Determining the effectiveness of corporate partnerships and the acceptable percentage of outsourced work and monitoring is another emerging challenge requiring balance. The role of corporate partners may increase as universities strive to meet the Lumina Foundation's (n.d.) Goal 2025: "to increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality college degrees, certificates, and credentials to 60 percent by 2025." Allen, Tilghman, and Whitaker (2010) point out that CE and DE programs have experience with vendors and consultants but warn that "partnerships run deeper and include the formulation of the strategy, interdependence, and higher levels of trust between organizations" (p. 109). In a partnership with others or alone, CE's continue to provide access to relevant education. CE's have decided to offer specific certificates and courses specifically for their companies needs to meet the individual and community needs. The role of the CE's is expanding as they offer noncredit courses on flexible dates on-site or online (Allen, Tilghman, & Whitaker (2010).

Higher education is continually dealing with challenges but continues to provide quality courses for adult learners as well as traditional students. Distance Education courses (DE) are holding to their initial role, which was to provide quality education. We know it is valid because "globally connected economies still need universal access to create and sustain a large, highly skilled workforce" (Kamenetz, 2010, p. 47). Providing

the most recent and relevant information, instructed by the best thinkers and teachers, available to students near and far, at little to no cost is what individuals need to succeed and growth personally and professionally. The article states, “current changes are driven by the challenge to improve the national economy by preparing highly skilled employees for American business and accelerating the graduation of students who will be in demand for their skills” (Kamenetz et al., p. 47). The DE model offers lessons for success (Kamenetz et al., 2010).

Many universities have started to use continuing education units (CEU) as change agents. New approaches to teaching and learning increased due to competition, funding issues, changing student demographics and expectations, and most importantly, the advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT). Initially, CEU’s were used to broaden the skills of the students. For purposes of social justice, CEU’s must take a leadership role in the adoption and adaption of ICT. The combined efforts of the universities and the CEUs have created the change from student demographics, accountability, financial constraints, globalization, rapid developments, information technology, and competitors (Cram, 2013).

Historically, CEUs were early adopters of ICT and should continue to be on the cutting edge of evolution in higher education and service. Organizations should continue to look for new opportunities to improve service to students and learners. CEUs assist universities in a variety of technical possibilities, but also the new ideas for teaching and learning. One strategy for CEUs to take on a leadership role is in the adoption and adaptation of ICT for purposes of social justice. Maintaining relationships with organizations and individuals in educational programming, providing training for

community groups/organizations that need educational training, and offering support for professional development among staff are examples of the purposes that include socially just initiatives (Cram et al., 2013).

The factors by which practicing teachers learn are: to depend on the country's traditions, the educational system operates, and the existing institutions. Considerations need to be taken before decisions are made. It would be beneficial to see their strengths and weaknesses before determining the perspective certification and accreditation.

Teacher education must be considered and thought of as a life-long experience and will continue from the beginning of the teacher's career until they retire. Having the schools at the center of continuing training is the best way to restructure schools and the educational system as a whole (Musset, 2010).

Even in the challenging times, the university continuing educators can position themselves as the mediator between the community and the university to engage with new adult learners and the government demands for learning opportunities. Continuing education has been around for many years with extensive research continuing to develop new methodologies and technical opportunities for professional advancement as well as personal growth.

### **Benefits for Employees and Employers**

Many organizations offer their employees the opportunity to attend workshops, seminars, or certificate courses to nurture their knowledge personally and professionally. For business professionals, many companies have specific training that fits the company mission and goals. Some universities have collaborated with corporations to provide the necessary training for their employees, which is beneficial to the institution, as well as,

the company and its employees. For educators that have been held accountable for specific credentials to move over on the pay scale or a possible promotion. As well as, for the University, it is a revenue booster with minimal to no overhead.

The above-mentioned opportunity also known as Professional and Continuing Education Courses, which provide graduate credit opportunities for students that have acquired their bachelor's degree, and have decided to pursue a master's degree, or would like to meet state recertification requirements, increase knowledge in a particular subject area, or increase classroom effectiveness. This department supports the university's commitment to assisting educators by extending their learning environment beyond the classroom. Students can continue their education by participating in Professional and Continuing Education courses. This opportunity allows students to attend conferences or workshops, to earn graduate credit at a substantially reduced rate. This opportunity has become increased in popularity, and professional development departments are creating more and more courses to benefit their teachers, as well as encouraging them to continue their education. Another benefit, that students are able to take advantage of if they have acquired their Bachelor's degree would be to transfer up to six hours of graduate credit into a Master's of Education. However, this would not count towards certification courses. Professional and continuing education is a great benefit and encourages teachers to gain knowledge and career advancement opportunities, as well as financial benefits.

According to the article titled *Why is Teacher Development Important?: Because Students Deserve the Best* (2008), a teacher that is inspired and informed are the most important factor in increasing student achievement. New teacher induction programs or Beginning Teacher Assistance Programs have been created in most school districts to

allow first-year teachers the opportunity to receive coaching and mentor with a veteran colleague to learn and bounce ideas off throughout their first year, which is said to be the most impactful in their career. These programs have been such an influence on many teachers as well as the reason that many choose to stay in the field of education. Without these types of assistance programs, many teachers leave within the first five years of starting their careers. These opportunities allow new teachers to learn best practices and reflect on their teaching (Why Is Teacher Development Important?2008).

The article, also mentions that it is just as important for veteran teachers to continue to attend regular professional development/continuing education opportunities where they can learn from each other. These professional development courses allow teachers to keep up with the new research on how children learn: innovative technology tools for the classroom, new curriculum resources, and much more. “The best professional development is ongoing, experiential, collaborative, and connected to and derived from working with students and understanding their culture (Why Is Teacher Development Important?2008).

Professional development is tied to student achievement and success. While many factors have a key impact on the success of professional development and some may include, but are not limited to: school, teacher, student level, parent and community involvement, instructional strategies, classroom management, curriculum design, student background, student knowledge, and student motivation, researchers are still seeking evidence that it ties directly to the achievement of the students. Researchers believe that professional development plays an important part, but are not convinced that it is the only reason (Marzano, 2003).

A major driving force that has increased the demand to offer continuing education courses in the current economic conditions as well as the uncertainty in the global markets. Many people want to improve their skills and find new job opportunities. For educators, continuing education can provide a bump in salary, improved marketability, the opportunity to learn new skills, build peer relationships, and follow your personal interests. There are also major benefits for employers to offer continuing education. Employees may want to improve their skills or might be looking for a promotion. Participating in continuing education may be a chance for the employee to indicate they are ready to move on. Employers are looking for employees to take the lead and be self-starters. Some employers offer full or partial financial opportunities that support training. Companies need to continue to prepare their employees for new technology and the ever-changing markets. If companies offer and promote their skills development and continuing education, they will see a more positive impact on their profits. Employees will stay loyal and increase their productivity. Employees that are engaged and committed to improving their skills by continuing their education; are considered perfect candidates for future leaders throughout the company. A well-trained, well-educated workforce helps to create long-term viability and profitability in organizations (Cohen, 2015).

As mentioned above, continuing education is beneficial to the employee and the employer; however, it is also beneficial to the success of the business as a whole. According to a report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, over 65% of jobs in 2020 will require education beyond high school (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2016). Whether you are a high school graduate or a

CEO, everyone benefits from ongoing training and nurturing your employees goes hand and hand in growing your business too. The company can grow its profits when they employ a workforce that participates in invaluable training, skills, and insights from ongoing education. The organization needs employees that are skilled and know how to build/create products, design presentations, as well as knowing how to serve customers. Employees that are creative, empathic, have a broad imagination, and curiosity will assist with the company's success. By offering professional development, the company is developing a well-rounded workforce of employees. Another big advantage of continuing to look for and offer continuing education/training within the organization is that it remains competitive and will continue to meet your client's needs (Burrows, 2018).

### **Advances in Technology in Continuing Education**

The implementation of online technologies has assisted with more adults accessing continuing education, seeking degrees, and these students are hopeful that this will help with a promotion or another job opportunity. A better-trained staff leads to higher productivity and an efficient working environment. Utilizing the newest forms of media and technology will keep students engaged and improved learning experiences.

Student engagement is a crucial component in the classroom, and when there is a lack of interest or interaction, it can be difficult for an educator to get the desired outcomes for the class. For music classes, if the engagement or the overall enjoyment of the class is low, students will more than likely enroll in other courses when they reach middle school (grades 6-8). In the article *Music Education, Technology, and the new NafME standards* by Criswell (2014), he writes about the problem of today's low interest

and enrollment in music education classes in upper grades of school. He refers to the problem as a dwindling interest in music education in the upper grades of most schools. He continues to write that “even in schools with strong music programs, it is not uncommon to see 20% or less of the student body enrolled in music classes of any kind” (Criswell, 2014, p. 1).

Criswell (2014) believes that one way to offset this dwindling interest is by incorporating new types of music technology such as music composition software like Finale. Criswell suggested that using programs will not only help students to be more engaged in music classes, but it can help meet the new standards. As the old music standards are rewritten with a broad emphasis on the areas of creativity, performance, and response to music, various “modern music software is ideally suited to the task” (Criswell 2014, p. 2). Criswell references a study by Dr. David Brian Williams, Professor Emeritus of Music and Arts Technology at Illinois State University, who believes that appropriately used, music software can revitalize interest in music education classes for students who have retreated from them. Music education in most schools looks a lot like the University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor Robert Woody experience “in school, I played only one instrument, always in large ensembles, always from notation, and always leading up to a concert” (Woody, 2014, p. 1). However, the implementation of new types of technology, music education is changing from such antiquated approaches.

Some other uses of technology that Criswell writes about are composition and arranging software in the classroom, film scoring projects, and teaching audio engineering through musical composition. Ohio Wesleyan University professor writes about a music project with 5th-grade general music students. In this project, the class



employed a form of iconic graphic notation that can simultaneously combine simple creative tasks, note writing, and singing activities in real-time at the tempo of a live musical performance (Edwards, 2015). All of these uses centered on composing music for different mediums or becoming more proficient at compositional techniques. Film scoring can be an excellent medium for students to become engaged in writing music alongside existing pieces of performance art. In this form of writing music, “the movie suggests a tone, tempo, or instrumentation, so they don’t feel so overwhelmed with possibilities” (Criswell, 2014, p. 6- 7). Another critical area of modern music education in audio engineering and Criswell lists ways to incorporate this with music composition. One of the projects that he writes about is having students produce and record school concerts, which requires that students or different classes work in close conjunction with each other to achieve a complete final product. Projects such as these, when many people must work together, can be “just like real life” (Criswell, 2014, p. 7).

As technology continues to shape, influence, and in some ways, define our lives, educators must stay at the forefront of this veritable technological playground. When educators do not adapt to the ever-changing world, they run the risk of becoming irrelevant and out of touch with modern education; and are considered archaic by their students. It is important for educators to view implementing technology and other tools in their classes, not as an either/or scenario but maintaining the best of the traditional teaching methods while embracing the new tools that work in their classrooms with their students. By forging such a symbiotic relationship, student interest, and student engagement will increase according to the research (Criswell, 2014).

In the article *Breaking news: TPCK becomes TPACK!* Found in the Journal of Computing in Teacher Education, written by Thompson and Mishra (2007-2008). They state that “previous approaches to help educators take advantage of technology concentrated more on teaching teachers about technology than on having educators implement the technology in their content area” (Thompson & Mishra, 2007-2008, p. 24). Once the teachers complete the training and are proficient with the technology, they can easily implement the knowledge into their content area. However, as research has shown, this indeed was not the case, and it is now clear “that we need to go beyond simplistic techno-centric approaches because knowledge of technology does not necessarily lead to effective teaching with technology” (Thompson & Mishra, 2007-2008, p. 24). Research now shows that the effective use of technology involves the knowledge of how to take advantage of the technology in support of a content area.

William Bauer believes that for technology to be useful, teachers need to have “well-developed pedagogical content knowledge,” but they also “have to have an understanding of the technology itself” (Bauer, 2014, p. 2). Bauer writes about the TPACK model, which stands for Technological Pedagogical and Content Area. The TPACK model combines technological knowledge (TK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK) to find the place where all three of these concepts meet (Bauer, 2014). The TPACK model can be an excellent way for teachers to implement technology into a more traditional musical setting. For example, a teacher could arrange a piece of music with the music software program. Finally, then have the students learn their musical parts and record the piece using recording software such as ProTools. After the class has an audio recording of the music, they could then have students take video clips

and put together a montage video of the students performing the piece featuring different people and sections at various points throughout. This activity could be a project that the whole class participates in, and each has a specific role. This is an example of one of many different projects that feature the TPACK model at the center of the project (Bauer, 2014).

The article, *Need TPACK? Embrace sustained professional development*, indicated that students in today's society are engaged in technology and there is a need for technology to be in the classroom. The best way to instruct students is with technology and continued to say that teachers should know the TPACK framework. (TPACK stands for Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge). The authors indicate how teachers can relate the gap in instruction with the use of TPACK by providing authentic and sustained professional development. The TPACK model represents what teachers need to know about technology: how to design authentic activities and lessons that include technological knowledge with pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge to provide students with the best experience. For this process to be a success, the professional development opportunities must provide the mechanisms of professional development as well as the continued support to ensure implementation is correctly performed (Matherson, Wilson, & Wright, 2014).

This article confirmed that if professional development is implemented correctly, the student success rate increases. However, to do that, the teachers: must be adequately trained, taught how to embed material in the curriculum, and provide long-term support for those that are not confident with technology. There is also a need to continue the

technical professional development courses for future collaboration (Matherson et al., 2014).

Plair (2008), discussed the issue that legislation and national technology planned to implement technology significantly in the K-12 classrooms. The author indicated that the struggle lay in the hands of the veteran teachers and their difficulty with technological fluency. Educators, especially experienced teachers, are looking for constant support and someone to assist if they are stuck or need help when working with the rapidly changing technology. Veteran teachers resist technology because they do not see how these innovative devices fit into their content areas. Therefore, they do not recognize it as part of their content. Professional development, related to technology, is being transformed. This is not an easy task and requires patience from all parties involved. Students are arriving at school with a higher level of comfort with technology but lack the practical experience of how it supports their learning (Plair, 2008).

This article expressed the need for continuing education, especially for veteran teachers. There is a need to continue learning and keep up with the newest technology so that when the next generation walks through their door, they are ready to confidently engage them to learn more effectively (Plair, 2008).

Vannatta and Nancy (2004), focused on a variety of teacher attributes that included teacher self-efficacy, philosophy, openness to change, amount of professional development, and the amount of technology used in the classroom. The researchers also noted that teachers that were open-minded took the time to practice with technology on their own time, and genuinely wanted to learn the technique to best engage with their students, were the ones that made the most important process. The role of technology is

increasing; the teachers must be educated and trained on how to use these tools effectively when teaching our children. The author stated, only in the hands of innovative, informed, and committed professionals in supportive educational cultures can technology serve as a medium for helping children advance confidently into the future (Vannatta, et. al., 2004).

This study emphasized the importance of continuing education and professional development. Specifically, when discussing technology and the growing need innovative technology to be implemented into our schools for student success. Recommendations that the additional time commitment spent on learning these new skills and resources will build confidence and allow the teachers to become more comfortable when teaching. This article justified the importance of continuing education as well as the benefit to student success (Vannatta, et. al., 2004).

Curricula must be reviewed and evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is rigorous, relevant, aligned, and current. Schools are preparing students for jobs that don't exist, using technologies that haven't been invented, to solve problems we don't know are problems yet (Krueger, 2019). Many of the positions in the fields of technology and engineering will continue to develop into new roles where new skill sets are required. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's students will have 10-14 jobs by the age of 38. According to former Secretary of Education Richard Riley, the top ten jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004 (Meyer, 2008).

The U.S. is 20th in the world in broadband internet penetration, and in 2002, Nintendo invested more than \$140 million in research and development. Meyer (2008) indicated that the U.S. Federal Government spent less than half as much on research and

innovation in education. There are over 2.7 billion searches performed on Google each month. How were these questions addressed B.G. (Before Google)? The technology has become a part of life for the next generation. Every day, the number of text messages sent and received exceeds the population of the planet. Did you know that approximately 1.5 exabytes (1.5x 10<sup>18</sup> bytes) of unique and new information will be generated worldwide this year? The amount of innovative technical information is doubling every two years. For example, a student starting a 4-year technical or college degree, half of what they learn in their first year of study will be outdated by their third year of study. Technology is predicted to double every 72 hours by 2010. The new technology fiber optics push ten trillion bits per second through one strand of fiber, which is equal to 150 million simultaneous phone calls every second (Meyer, 2008). These numbers are tripling every six months and are expected to continue at this pace for at least the next 20 years. Predictions indicate that by 2023, when 1st graders are 23 years old, they will begin their careers; it will only take a \$1,000 computer to exceed the capabilities of the human brain. However, by the year 2049, it is predicted that the \$1,000 computer will exceed the computational capabilities of humans (Meyer, 2008).

Educators are encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities to gain confidence working with technology. Once the educators have learned or been shown new innovative apps, software, tech tools to utilize in their classrooms, they also need to feel confident to teach their students and keep them engaged. Katy Scott (2018), stated that number of internet devices in 1984 was 1,000; in 1992 were 1,000,000; in 2008 was 1,000,000,000, and in 2018 the number of internet devices is 30,000,000,000. The author shared that the amount of data in the world is

doubling every two years and predicts that 91% of smartphone users turn to their phones for answers while completing tasks. Over half of the millennials said that they could find a YouTube video on anything they want to learn. Many jobs did not exist ten years ago that are in-demand today. Some include social media manager, drone operator, app developer, data scientist, and sustainability manager, to name a few. Researchers predict that 65% of today's grade-schoolers will have jobs that don't exist yet (Scott, 2018).

The future does not happen; the future gets happened. Therefore, the new way to work is to embrace technology and social media, but not to become it. The future is in technology, yet the bigger picture lies in transcending it (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

The benefits of continuing education for the employees have become more proficient in their current position by acquiring additional skills and knowledge. Employers that encouraged their employees to participate in continuing education courses created a more qualified, educated, and well-trained workforce helped the company achieve long-term profitability. Many companies believe that they have increased profits because their employees are up-to-date with the latest trends in their industry and thus, allowing them to stay ahead of their competition and increase their profits. Employees allowed and encouraged to continue their education feel valued, and retention is the key to letting a business grown and prosper in today's competitive environment. The university that is offering graduate credit gains the opportunity to enroll students into masters, specialist, or other advanced degree programs. By providing continuing education courses for graduate credit, the university reaching out to the community in a

specific market to bring in money that essentially has low overhead and is more of a profit. Educators that participate in continuing education believe the opportunity encourages life-long learning, as well as benefits are for everyone involved.

It's time for a cultural shift if we hope to really improve the American education system... If we want to effectively tackle such challenges as global warming, poverty, and health care... we must have educated engineers, scientists, economists, legislators, managers, and an educated citizenry to oversee and guide them... We need to rethink how we recruit, train, evaluate, and reward great teachers so that the highest possible standards are created and maintained.

(Chilcott, 2010, pp. 52-53)

Educators should continue to look for ways to grow personally and professionally. It is true when people say that being a leader is an endless job. When you stop working to be better is when you have given up. It is genuinely a tough responsibility, but seeing the results, and meeting goals is a huge accomplishment. Continuing to communicate, listening to your students and colleagues, providing patience throughout the process, gains real success. Theories are applicable in many situations as you might notice pairing them is also very beneficial.

Self-authorship applied in college through communication with peers, faculty, and staff provides constructive feedback that allows students to reflect, develop self-beliefs, and participate in activities. Self-authorship reflects the diverse population of students and their different experiences. This process requires situations that are safe, challenging, and doable for students who are at various stages of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Baxter Magolda argued that self-authorship should be the basis for advance



learning outcomes throughout college adequately prepares students (Walczak, 2008).

Support is critical as students assume meaningful responsibility. “Higher education has a responsibility to help young adults make the transition from being shaped by society to shaping society in their role as leaders in society’s future” (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 630).

Continuing education is valuable for students, employers, colleges and universities. The employees are becoming more proficient in their current job by acquiring additional skills and knowledge. The employer that encourages their employees to participate in continuing education courses is aware that these opportunities assist with creating a more qualified, educated, and well-trained workforce that helps the company achieve long-term profitability. Many companies believe that they have increased profits because their employees are up-to-date with the latest trends in their industry and thus, allowing them to stay ahead of their competition and increase their profits. Employees allowed to continue their education feel valued, and retention is the key to letting a business grown and prosper in today’s competitive environment. The university that is offering graduate credit gains the opportunity to enroll students into masters, specialist, or other advanced degree programs. By providing continuing education courses for graduate credit, the university reaching out to the community in a specific market to bring in money that essentially has low overhead and is more of a profit. Educators that participate in the program believe this is a great opportunity and encourages life-long learning, and the benefits are for all involved. “Educators can clarify a general sense of direction at the onset of an improvement initiative, but a shared vision emerges over time as a result of action, reflection, and collective meaning based upon collective

experiences” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 145). They explained that a clear, shared vision would serve to motivate and energize the staff.

It is complicated to try to achieve the cultural shift in teacher education due to the defunding of public schools and the increasing decline of state support for public universities, which prepare most teachers (Newfield, 2008). Developing policies and practices to include incentives to encourage both early-entry and college-recommending programs that create a shared responsibility for teacher education offered. We must keep in mind that it is not about the structure of the program; the important factors to consider is the quality of the knowledge and the power of relationships that exist. According to the Zeichner, Payne, and Brayko (2015), at the program level, administrators and educators must offer more opportunities for members of local communities, schools, or universities to be more centrally engaged in all aspects of the program on an ongoing basis (2015).

Learning is a lifelong journey, and students must realize they are never too old to learn. It is essential to understand that by participating in the course offerings, students want to improve themselves and increase their knowledge to teach their students better. Continuing education classes help advance your career and stay ahead of the competition in the workplace. Networking or creating professional development communities is a great way to learn new skills in the workplace. Continuing education offers students the opportunity to network with colleagues, other students, and instructors. Professional Development and Continuing Education have several advantages: prepares you for a new position, enhances your skills, furthers your education, and can potentially offer information that you have never seen before. Professional development is critical to school improvement especially with the high standards and emphasis on student learning

outcomes. Hirsh (2010) declares that, “professional development provides teachers with the support they need in order to enhance student learning... Student academic success is enhanced when teachers experience powerful professional support” (p. 11).

### **Chapter Three: Research Method and Design**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to analyze the impact/importance of continuing education on K-12 educators. The study focused on graduate students that participated in a continuing education course between Spring 18 and Spring 19. The researcher focused on the amount of time allowed to attend professional development; if the level of degree attained had an impact on participation in professional development courses; if the employer offered financial support, and if support structures were beneficial for their students. To gather data, the researcher analyzed de-identified secondary data collected by the Professional and Continuing Education Coordinator. The coordinator created the initial survey to improve the process and learn the advantages of professional and continuing education courses. Students that completed continuing education courses were sent an evaluation after completion of the course. The researcher's hypothesis indicated that using continuing education is beneficial to all (the professional, the organization, and the co-workers around them). The researcher indicated that the implementation of continuing education will benefit the university, as well as the professional, and their organizations. The purpose of interviews was to find similarities and differences to create common themes that focused on the questions asked to the eight participants: increase in the utilization of continuing education, degree attainment, financial support, and implementation into the classroom.

#### **Research Questions and Null Hypotheses**

**Research Question 1:** What are the benefits of Continuing Education?

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support influence a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no relationship between the amount of time allowed for professional development and implementation into the workday.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no difference between participants that hold a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment.

**Null Hypothesis 3:** There is no relationship between financial support from the employer and professional improvement.

**Null Hypothesis 4:** There is no relationship between professional support, financial support, and the implementation of course material in the classroom.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexive research brings value to the study through research quality, representation, ethical practice, critical approach, and creativity. Reflexivity in research should be embedded throughout the entire research process and beyond. Reflexivity can produce benefits for ethical and essential research practices, enrich the creativity of research conduct and representation, and increase the quality of qualitative research. Researchers are part of the social world that they want to investigate. Therefore, they are part of the research process that they conduct and report. Reflexivity, "is generally understood as an awareness of the influence the research has on the people or topic being

studied, while simultaneously recognizing how the research experience is affecting the researcher” (Gilgun, 2008, p. 37).

Reflexivity is a concept of researcher bias. In this situation, Professional and Continuing Education is the department that is of the focus of this study. Working with graduate students and assisting them throughout the process each semester that they participate is the main responsibility of this department. Having an interest in their experiences, and having attended the university, the researcher may have a bias.

Reflexivity is a good thing. Probst, the author of *The Eye Regards itself*, indicated that “reflexivity is a valuable tool that enables the researcher to stay engaged in critical self-awareness through the entire research process” (Probst, 2015, 46).

Reflexivity was used to understand the researcher’s background and how it may have affected this study (Darawsheh, 2014). The researcher has an interest in the study, due to the researcher’s profession. As an employee that works closely with the graduate students throughout the process in the professional and continuing education department, the researcher was able to create relevant and detailed interview questions based on professional experiences.

### **Demographics – Site, and Participants**

The study took place at a private, four-year at Midwestern University. The university offers diverse content areas; and worked with multiple organizations throughout the world on a variety of topics. The Professional and Continuing Education Department at the University supports the commitment to assisting educators by extending the learning environment beyond the classroom, serving as the link between school districts and the community by offering lifelong learning opportunities.

Participants (graduate students) are required to meet state recertification requirements, encouraged to increase knowledge in a specific subject area, as well as, increase the effectiveness in the classroom through the opportunity to earn graduate credit. The participants will include working teachers, counselors, and professionals that participate in continuing education. The ages will be unknown to the recipients, as it is not an important piece of information in this study. The population of students that received the survey from spring 2018 to spring 2019 was 1,872 graduate students. However, only 217 students completed the entire survey and represented the quantitative data. The researcher utilized secondary data, *t*-test of Independent Means, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) to create measurement benefits. The researcher used the Likert scale, along with open-ended questions, to capture as much feedback as possible from the participants.

The Associate Dean's student worker randomly selected participants to conduct interviews with for the study. The researcher intended to interview 7-10 graduate students. Once the participants accepted the invitation, and scheduled their interview, the researcher recorded and transcribed the interview. The participants were assigned a letter to protect their identities. The consent form provided a short description of the purpose of the study, the expected duration to complete the survey, and the data collection process. The form explained that the participant's participation was completely voluntary. The researcher provided their contact information if participants had questions or comments. The consent form also explained that the researcher would not share individual responses with members outside the research team. The researcher would only share the summary, findings, and conclusions with members outside the research team,

which will not contain any identifying characteristics associated with the data. The researcher was the only person to have access to this information and this information was stored in a safe, secure, and password-protected account and location.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The researcher utilized a mixed-method for this study that focused on the importance of continuing education. The data provided information to make program improvements that would also benefit the professional and continuing education students. The research spanned one year to collect enough data, which included spring 2018, summer 2018, fall 2018, and spring 2019. During the summer months, continuing education has a higher enrollment number than spring or fall. Therefore, the study began and ended within one year from the date of the first survey completed. The researcher hoped the quantitative and qualitative results would prove to be complementary to each other, while also expanding on the understanding of the results by performing analyses of the two components (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) agreed, “the limitations of one method can be offset by the strengths of the other method, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative data provide a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach by itself” (p. 8). Using both quantitative and qualitative elements added credibility and context to the study, and additionally, the qualitative results assisted in illustrating the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed independently of each other. The quantitative data was represented by secondary data through completed surveys; while the qualitative data consisted of student interview responses.



For the quantitative data collection, existing surveys that were based on a Likert Scale, were analyzed. The surveys collected information from students regarding their experience and ease of implementation after participating in the professional development courses. There were 12 questions relating to their experience, participation and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. For a full list of course evaluation questions see Appendix A. The participants were graduate students that had participated in the Continuing Education courses (current and past students). Secondary data measured the quantitative portion.

The secondary data was washed of any information that could potentially identify the study participants, including the participants name and their school where they are employed. Eichhorn and Matkin (2016) stated, “Any information that can be directly attributed to a student (name, email address, student I.D. number, or pattern of course interaction) must be isolated and protected” (p. 33). The researcher utilized data that had already been deidentified of any identifying information.

For the qualitative portion of the study, the researcher conducted interviews. These questions were organized to include inquiry into students’ attitudes and beliefs about professional development, specifically, efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015) stated, “the object is to get at what people really think about an issue or issues in a social context where participants can hear the views of others and consider their own views accordingly” (p. 455). The process for the qualitative data began with the associate dean’s student worker

randomly selecting the participants from the continuing education data. Once the participants agreed to participate, the researcher emailed those students a copy of the informed consent form, as well as the description of the research project and expectations. If the students were willing to participate, the researcher scheduled a 30-minute phone interview. According to Fraenkel et al. (2015), “purposive sampling can be used by researchers to choose participants, based on their judgment and prior experience, that the researcher believed would provide the information that is needed” (p. 101).

### **Summary**

This chapter explained the methodology for this mixed-method study. The researcher focused the study on graduate continuing education students from a private university in the Midwest, and examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program, through financial support and degree attainment, with improvement in the classroom. The quantitative data were collected from survey results and the qualitative data came from the interview responses. This research study sampled participants from Spring 2018 – Spring 2019 in the continuing education department and aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses in the district’s professional and continuing education program. The statistical procedures that were employed include descriptive and inferential analyses. The “professional development of teachers is a lifelong process which begins with the initial preparation that teachers receive and continues until retirement” (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p. 8). The following chapter will present the results of the mixed-method study.

## Chapter Four: Analysis

### Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. The researcher focused on the amount of time allowed to attend professional development; if the level of degree attained had an impact on participation in professional development courses; if the employer offered financial support, and if support structures were beneficial for their students. Through this comparison, this study aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses in the districts. The study included both qualitative and quantitative elements which were collected and analyzed.

The researcher analyzed de-identified secondary data collected by the Professional and Continuing Education Coordinator. Secondary data from the school of education was utilized, specifically the students that participated in courses between spring 2018 and spring 2019. The researcher's hypothesis indicated that using continuing education was beneficial to all (the professional, the organization, and the co-workers around them). The researcher hoped to indicate how implementation of continuing education benefits the university, as well as the professional, and their organizations. If the results indicated an increase in participation in continuing education, then the researcher planned to gain evidence that by implementing more professional development, continuous learning throughout the organization would increase. The purpose of conducting interviews was to find similarities and differences to create common themes that focused on an increase in the utilization of continuing education,

degree attainment, financial support, and implementation into the classroom. The researcher shared the results of the study with all participating organizations, the dean of education, and all who participate in the research study.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on graduate continuing education students from a private university in the Midwest and examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program, through financial support and degree attainment, with improvement in the classroom. In addition, four hypotheses statements were developed to test any differences or relationships to identify strengths and weaknesses in the district's professional and continuing education program, to meet the needs of their students.

**Research Question 1:** What are the benefits of Continuing Education?

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support influence a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no relationship between the amount of time allowed for professional development and implementation into the workday.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no relationship between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment.

**Null Hypothesis 3:** There is no relationship between financial support from the employer and professional improvement.

**Null Hypothesis 4:** There is no relationship between professional support, financial support, and the implementation of course material in the classroom.

### **Quantitative Results**

The end of the semester program evaluations is anonymous and collected data from students regarding their experience throughout their course. The researcher utilized Qualtrics as a survey tool to analyze the survey data on experiences and other types of survey data, specifically on experiences. The survey consisted of 12 questions that related to their education, experience in the program, and how the program could be improved. For a full list of the questions, please see Appendix A.

As Reeves (2010) reminded educators, professional development must go more in-depth than initial implementation to become sustainable. School improvement, addressed by the strategic plan, must be the goal and focus of professional learning. At the center of the school, improvement is continued improvement in student achievement. Districts and schools that develop professional learning goals and plans are able to align the professional development plans for their staff better. Sharratt and Fullan (2009) shared that consistent implementation with a clear focus on a few critical factors was necessary for success. Although other models exist, the DuFour et al. (2008) model focused on groups of educators utilizing student data to address areas for school improvement. “The work of collaborative teams flows up and down from the challenge of assessing student learning in the most authentic and beneficial ways” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 186). Just as it is a best practice to utilize student data upon which to make

instructional decisions in the classroom, decisions regarding the need for professional learning should be based on student data as well.

The analysis of quantitative data began with descriptive statistical procedures which included calculating the means, standard deviations, and sample variances. A *t*-test of independent means or a *z*-Test of proportions were utilized to test each applicable hypothesis. Establishing the appropriate level of significance and then a subsequent critical value, the data were tested to determine if there were significant differences between students with master's degrees implementing more course content into their daily classroom setting vs. students without a master's degree. The researcher also conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between professional support and financial support. Inferential statistical procedures for Null Hypothesis 3, utilized the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (PPMC) and Null Hypothesis 1, utilized a *Chi-Square* tests that measured if any relationships or correlations existed among the variables. The degrees of freedom, the *t*-score, and the *p*-value were used to test whether there was a relationship between financial support from the employer and professional improvement. The researcher calculated the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient and then ran a *t*-test.

## Results

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no relationship between the amount of time allowed for professional development and implementation into the workday.

To address the first hypothesis, the researcher completed a statistical analysis of end of the course survey results. These surveys collected information from participating students regarding their educational background, course content, district involvement,

time allotted, and overall evaluation of the program. The course evaluations were optional for a student to complete. The end of term survey consisted of 14 questions that included yes and no responses, open-ended questions, a 4-point Likert scale, as well as a 5-point Likert scale. The population of students that received the survey over the specific period of time was 1872.

The researcher began by removing all incomplete survey responses, which resulted in a final count of 217 end of the course evaluation surveys. The analysis of quantitative data began by changing words into numbers. The researcher assigned a number to the data pieces and then created a chi-square test. The researcher ran a chi-square test of independence to determine if the time allotted for professional development was dependent on implementation into the workday. The analysis revealed that the amount of time allocated for professional development was independent of implementation into the workday;  $\chi^2(6.93, n = 217) df = 9, p = .645$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the amount of time allotted for professional development was independent of implementation into the workday.

A confidence level of 95% determined that the researcher should fail to reject the null hypothesis. This analysis indicated no statistical difference. With the level of significance  $\alpha = .05$ , and the  $p$ -value of .645, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is not a difference in the amount of time allocated for professional development was independent of implementation into the workday. Summary of the data in Table 4.1 outlines the number of students that participated in the professional and continuing education survey.

Table 1

*Population of Student Data Analyzed from Continuing Education Courses*

Student Group	Number of Students
Total # of Participants	1872
Total # of participants after removal of incomplete surveys	217

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no relationship between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment.

The researcher began by removing any incomplete survey responses, which resulted in a final count of 217 course evaluation surveys. Analysis of quantitative data began by utilizing statistical procedures including calculating the means, standard deviations, and sample variances for all course evaluations. A *t*-test of independent means was then employed to test each survey. By first establishing the appropriate level of significance, and then a subsequent critical value, the data were tested to determine if any significant differences exist between implementation of course content into their daily classroom setting of those students with master's degrees vs. students without a master's degree.

The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if the students with master's degrees implement more course content into their daily classroom setting. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that the students without a master's degree ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) were not significantly higher than those students with a master's degree ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ );  $t(-0.653) = 0.514$ ,  $p = .614$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students without a master's degree did not implement more course content than students with a



master's degree; they were not significantly different. These results were summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2

<i>Course Implementation Summary</i>								
	Students without a Master's Degree		Students with a Master's Degree					
Aggregate Results	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	d.f.	T	P	Sig?
Hypothesis 2	3.43	.63	3.52	.66	222	0.514	.614	No

**Null Hypothesis 3:** There is no relationship between financial support from the employer and professional improvement.

The researcher chose to utilize the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC) to measure the linear correlation between the two variables. The value is between +1 and -1. A positive linear correlation is 1, 0 is no linear correlation, and -1 is total negative linear correlation. The researcher focused on Questions 6 and 8. The first step was to assign number to the Likert Scales for each question. Once determined, the researcher input the data into an excel spreadsheet to compute the results.

The researcher calculated the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC) and ran a *t*-test to review if there was a relationship between the financial support from the employers and the professional improvement. The research reported the PPMC©, the degrees of freedom, the *t*-score, and the *p*-value, which showed that the coefficient of correlation ( $r = -0.002$ ) was not significant;  $t = -0.03$ ,  $p = .0974$ , and the d.f. = 21. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is no relationship between financial support and professional improvement.

Table 3

<i>Financial Support vs Professional Improvement Summary</i>						
Aggregate Results	R	n	d.f.	t	P	Sig?
Hypothesis 3	.347	218	.216	-0.03	.0974	No

**Null Hypothesis 4:** There is no relationship between professional support, financial support, and the implementation of course material in the classroom.

Analysis of quantitative data continued by utilizing statistical procedures including calculating the means, standard deviations, and sample variances for all course evaluations. The researcher chose to complete three different tests to determine if there was a relationship between professional support, financial support, and implementation of coursework and labeled each test: Hypothesis 4(a), 4(b), and 4(c). A Two-Sample *t*-test of independent means was conducted. The data reported the means and standard deviations for both samples, the degrees of freedom, the *t*-score, and the *p*-value. The data was tested to see if there was a relationship between professional support and financial support.

**Hypothesis 4(a):** The first *t*-test the researcher did was to compare –4 - Does your administration support continuing education / professional development?), and –6 - How much financial assistance does your school offer for your professional growth opportunities? The Two-Sample *t*-test of Means, Independent Samples.

The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between administrative support and financial support. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were not equal. The analysis revealed that administrative support ( $M = 1.023$ ,  $SD = 0.15$ ) was significantly higher than financial support ( $M =$

2.511, SD = 1.39);  $t = -15.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $n = 217$ , and  $d.f. = 432$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no relationship between administrative support and the financial support.

Table 4(a)

*Administrative Support and Financial Support Statistical Summary*

	<u>Administrative support</u>		<u>Financial support</u>		d.f.	t	P	Sig?
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Aggregate Results								
Hypothesis 4(a)	1.023	.15	2.511	1.39	432	-15.63	<0.001	Yes

**Hypothesis 4(b):** The second  $t$ -test the researcher conducted was to compare –4 - Does your administration support continuing education / professional development?), and Q-0 - Do you feel the assignments to earn the credit were easily implemented into your everyday workload?

### **The Two-Sample $t$ -Test of Means, Independent Samples**

The researcher conducted a  $t$ -test of two means to see if there was a relationship between administrative support and implementation of course work. The researcher reported the means and standard deviations for both samples, the degrees for freedom, the  $t$ -score, and the  $p$ -value. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were not equal. The analysis revealed that administrative support ( $M = 1.023$ ,  $SD = 0.15$ ) was not significantly higher than implementation of coursework in the classroom ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ );  $t = -10.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $n = 217$ , and  $d.f. = 432$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no relationship between financial support and the implementation of coursework.

Table 4(b)

<i>Administrative Support and Implementation of Coursework Statistical Summary</i>								
	<u>Financial Support</u>		<u>Implementation of coursework</u>		d.f.	t	P	Sig?
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Aggregate Results Hypothesis 4(b)	1.023	.15	1.48	.64	432	-10.34	<0.001	No

**Hypothesis 4(c):** The third *t*-test the researcher did was to compare Q6 - How much financial assistance makes your school offer for your professional growth opportunities, an- Q10 - Do you feel the assignments to earn the credit were easily implemented into your everyday workload?

The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between administrative support and implementation of course work. The researcher reported the means and standard deviations for both samples, the degrees for freedom, the *t*-score, and the *p*-value. The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between financial support and implementation of course work. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that financial support (M = 2.511, SD = 1.39) was not significantly higher than implementation of coursework in the classroom (M = 1.48, SD = 0.64);  $t = 9.87$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $n = 217$ , and  $d.f. = 432$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no relationship between financial support and the implementation of coursework.

Table 4(c)

<i>Financial Support and Implementation of Coursework Statistical Summary</i>								
	<u>Financial Support</u>		<u>Implementation of coursework</u>		d.f.	t	P	Sig?
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Aggregate Results Hypothesis 4(c)	2.511	1.39	1.48	.64	432	9.87	<0.001	No

### Qualitative Results

After receiving IRB approval, the researcher sent an e-mail to randomly selected participants and invited them to be part of the study. The e-mail also contained information such as the purpose and reason for the research, and the participants' requirements as possible participants of this study. The consent form contained this information (see Appendix C). The consent form also reassured potential participants their participation is voluntary and there was no penalty for withdrawing their responses. Participants received no compensation for completing the survey. Participants were required to sign, date, and return the consent form to the researcher which indicated agreement to the terms and conditions of the study.

The researcher collected qualitative data from interview questions. In order to analyze qualitative data, interview responses were recorded and transcribed for evaluation. The researcher listened to the recordings multiple times and continued to hit pause and replay to confirm that all the information was received and transcribed properly. The researcher combed the data to reveal themes that were found throughout the interview responses which are indicated in Table 5 and further described in the subsequent paragraphs. Patton (1990) described this procedure as the creative process of discovering "patterns, themes, and categories that capture primary meaning of the data" (p. 406).

Table 5

<i>Emerging Themes</i>	
Having a Voice	Long-term Vision/Educational Goals
Knowing the Why	Student Success
Reflection/Observation	Implementation/Training

There were 217 students that completed the survey after the continuing education courses were offered between Spring 2018 and Spring 2019. The researcher worked with the Associate Dean of the school of education to randomly select the students to request participation with the interviews. The first batch of 38 students was sent out with no responses at all. The researcher resent them an email after three weeks since no-one had responded. The researcher had two students respond, one indicated No they would not participate due to time of the year while the other participant said Yes, they would be happy to participate. The researcher decided to send a randomly selected second batch of emails that consisted of 37 emails. The researcher received two responses and both indicated that they would participate. The researcher sent two more batches before finally receiving a total of eight participants. The researcher sent over 135 emails to potential participants in hopes that 7-10 students would participate during the fall semester 2019. Once the researcher had eight participants that agreed to participate and completed their consent form, the researcher scheduled the phone interviews. To maintain anonymity, the participants' names were not used in the study, but rather each was identified by a letter (A-H). This section provides an overview of a summary of the answers.

Table 6

*Analysis of Research Questions*

Research Question	Datapoints Yielded	Data Analysis
Research Question 1: What are the benefits of Continuing Education?	Q: 3, 4, 7, 9	Descriptive
Research Question 2: What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?	Q: 9, 10, 11	Descriptive
Research Question 3: How does financial support influence a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?	Q: 2,12	Descriptive
Research Question 4: What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment?	Q: 5	Descriptive

Table 7

*Analysis of Research Questions from Secondary Data Question*

Research Question	Data points Yielded
Research Question 1: What are the benefits of Continuing Education?	N/A
Research Question 2: What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?	N/A
Research Question 3: How does financial support influence a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?	Q: 4, 5, 6
Research Question 4: What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment?	Q: 2, 9

One of the findings that the data analysis showed was that six out of eight (75%) participants indicated that they felt there was enough time allotted for collaboration and participation in Professional and Continuing Education Courses. There were three male and five women participants in this study. There were two participants (one male and one female) that indicated that they did not feel there was enough time allotted.

Participant C said that "it depended on the content area you teach." Participant C felt that some discipline and some content areas do not get as much time allotted for professional development. Specifically, fine arts and counseling whereas the core content areas like math and reading tend to get more opportunities at least at this specific district. The second person, Participant H, indicated that there was not enough time allotted throughout the regular school day, however, the specialized content teachers were allowed a number of Professional Development (PD) days. Therefore, if they were able to get PD approved, they would possibly be able to attend.

The researcher investigated the first research question by analyzing responses to the interviews. The compilation of data represented in the interviews, which expanded



the ideas and concepts. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, three were applicable to the benefits of continuing education which included: having a voice, knowing the why, and long-term vision/educational goals. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results.

### **Research Question 1 - Theme 1: Having a Voice**

Respondents of the research shared themes of appreciating the ability to choose their professional learning based upon personal needs. Just as educators stress the importance of differentiation for students, adults require differentiated learning as well. School and district leaders must work with teachers to discover a balance between this differentiation and supporting professional learning for the entire staff that meets the goals for school improvement. Furthermore, because adults learn differently from children, we must recognize the best instructional strategies required to encourage each unique group, especially when the adults are well-educated independent teachers (Beavers, 2009). Valuable information is often unheard or overlooked when PD presenters are utilizing ineffective teaching strategies (Beavers, 2009).

The researcher used Interview questions 3, 4, 7, and 9 to answer Research Question 1, What are the benefits of Continuing Education? (see Appendix D). Interview question number 3 – What areas of your career would you like to develop? The eight participants indicated their specific topic of interest and the reason they chose that topic. By allowing them to have a voice and being able to choose the topic for professional development would benefit them more as well as encourage them to attend continuing education opportunities.

When the participants were asked question 4 – What is your long-term vision for your career? Four out of the eight participants (50%) indicated they plan to retire within the next 7-14 years. Participants A, D, F, H were not interested in any other degree programs, although they were interested in continuing their education through professional development and one was possibly interested in a certification program. Two of the participants were interested in becoming curriculum coaches or consultants. For example, Participant A is waiting on results after taking the Nation Board Certification, however, was not interested in continuing education due to no monetary incentive for doing so within the district. Participant D is working on her masters +45 which is the same pay as a specialist degree. Therefore, she does not plan to acquire anymore degrees, however, she would like to retire within seven years and plans to present and possibly consult on professional development or mental health awareness. Participant F indicated that they have a master's degree +40 hours which tops out on the district pay scale and unfortunately due to the cost of a certified degree program, plans to participate in free courses because of money and time spent it doesn't really come back in their favor with regards to the pay scale. . The ideal plan for participant H, would be to participate in a short certification program in curriculum, and would like to retire within seven years and become a curriculum coach or consultant. Several students indicated that they wanted to continue participating in professional development course as well as continue taking PD courses throughout the remainder of their career. Interview Question 7 asked – What steps would you like to take to improve in your developmental areas? When reflecting on areas that these participants would like to improve, eight out of eight interviewees answered the question (100%). Participant A indicated that they “would

like to see a second language acquisition...meaning that every teacher should be proficient in one area and should have something else to offer or be part of their tool bag as a teacher. Some teachers feel they should only teach what they were taught. Not putting them in context.” Participant B suggested that “the needs of students are constantly changing therefore, I’m very flexible with the course of the day and I am open to new ideas and implementation even from one hour (group of kids) to the next if need be. Also, creating assessments and knowing how to access them is something else I’m working on.” Participant C wanted “to do course work or training in social / emotional learning. Content specific and then I’d like to have more hands on in front of students practicing actual teaching skills. As well as more face to face time with the students in the classroom.” Participant G said that they would like to “jump in and get more involved in committees and outside the classroom leadership. Just putting yourself out there and doing things is how you grow in those areas that you are not confident in.” Participant H indicated that “attending a conference that is hands on and includes writing, as well as, collaborating with other schools or teachers of the same grade level is helpful.”

The respondent’s answers consisted of requiring every teacher to be proficient in one area and then having something else to offer or be part of their tool bag as a teacher, learning the right way to teach that gets students to think critically and creating assessments on how to access, developing more in K-12 teaching strategies, course work on training in social/emotional learning, finding something of interest before attending the conference, asking questions, selecting topics of interest where one is not the most

educated allows them to grow and develop. Another option is to attend conferences or workshops that are hands on and include writing.

Interview Question 9 – Tell me about a time when you utilized what you learned and how the students reacted in your classroom. Were the students accepting of the new tools? The responses indicated that seven out of eight (87.5%) expressed that the students were very responsive and more engaged to the task at hand. For example:

Participant A indicated that

“my district did a round of comprehensible input and I implemented it into my classroom.” The results were 95% of the students love that there was no desks – they were allowed to sit on the floor or in chairs and 5% of the students provided negative feedback indicating that they were frustrated with the fact that when responding to a question on the test, there was no right or wrong answer. They did not adjust to the holistic way of thinking, with not a lot of guidelines for length or what to include in the summary. The information was interesting to the instructor. The students indicated that this was too easy, one would only need to speak slowly, use a bunch of hand gestures, draw pictures on the board, and make sure it is comprehensible. The need is to make sure all students understand.

Therefore, there are no worksheets, no need for vocabulary sheets, no grammar worksheets, no need for homework, which is something the students are not used to.

Participant B indicated “that they had attended a conference from the creators of readers/writers workshops and brought back new ideas to the classroom. The students were very receptive. When changing the procedure for the book club, one student

commented “we are reading for the love of reading.” The instructor suggested the need to remove tasks and had the students journal instead. This instructor is always looking for new ideas to implement, but more importantly, looking for ways that the students engage and are receptive to new ideas before moving forward with other classrooms or other topics.

Another example shared regarding implementing new tools and student reactions was from Participant D. “After attending a project-based learning course, the instructor wanted to incorporate SCRATCH. This is where students would read a book and then they would retell the story with a beginning, middle, and end. The students had three scenes in SCRATCH and they had to have the characters and then code the characters to do the things they needed them to do in each scene (beginning, middle, and end). They could have conversations or they include voices and the kids went nuts. The level of learning that happened was incredible.” Participant H, “spoke about a conference where they learned about Plicker Cards, which are a quick way to do a formative assessment; and looks like a QR code. The instructor puts a question on the board and then scans the codes as they answer so it’s very instantaneous. The instructor can view individual student’s responses or the whole class responses. This allows the students to review and go over the choices and answers that were selected.” The interviewees shared great ideas that not only benefit the student’s learning but also kept them engaged and participating in these activities.

All of the responses indicated how the participants utilized what they learned through their professional development and implemented the new tools and innovative ideas into their classrooms successfully. Students were engaged and teachers indicated

that their students wanted to participate, were smiling and collaborating with their peers, as well as having fun while learning.

### **Research Question 1 - Theme 2: Knowing the Why**

Adult learners need to understand why they are learning new knowledge and how the new knowledge is relevant before they will actively participate and prepare to learn (McGrath, 2009; O'Toole & Essex, 2012). O'Toole and Essex (2012) go on to state that adults are easily able to determine the value and relevance of learning. It is noted that adult learners are also receptive to new material when presented as real-life situations (McGrath, 2009). However, adult learners tend to be resistant to learning when it does not align with the personal learning philosophy (Beavers, 2009). Participant B indicated “that while they receive professional development, they would like to have more teacher voice/teacher input on content topics for example special education, math, or English. There are other aspects in ELA happening that could be implemented in a training.” Participant C indicated that “if the staff were asked what type of professional development they would like, possibly being part of the process of developing it to ensure that it is was interactive and it kept their attention. This participant also felt that a successful training would involve being able to participate and be more hands on during the training.”

District leaders and organizations that offered additional funding for professional development could potentially encourage staff to participant more. Encouraging participants to take online courses, seminars, conferences, and other forms of professional development, have more participation if these courses are offered during professional development days instead of taking personal time. Participant D indicated that “opening

one's eyes to different situations and asking questions like why should we participate or how will this improve my classroom allows you to be intentional and think outside the box." Remembering that PD instructors cannot just throw devices at teachers, they need a systematic way of how they are going to teach and train them to effectively use that in the classroom. It is important to understand that if you do not have the professional development part and how to use it for engagement, the process will not succeed. The course that this participant took directly related back to the classroom through developing lessons, appropriate research and implementation into the classroom, the instructor became creative and has seen first-hand how this process has positively impacted students and faculty alike." Another suggestion by Participant H was "to consider instructing the professional development in a hands-on approach, instead of a lecture to increase engagement."

Educational leaders such as district personnel, administrators, policymakers often decide teacher PD without consulting the teachers (West, 2011). Allowing teachers to have input was one of the biggest concerns of all participants that were interviewed. The results were unanimous, eight out of eight (100%) of the participants indicated that they would like to see teachers involved with the decision on what types of professional development to offer. They all suggested that if they have a voice in the decision-making process, and the topics of choice, that would encourage them to attend.

### **Research Question 2 - Theme 1: Reflection/Observation**

Participants shared their personal career development goals, long-term vision for their career, and current strengths when answering Research Question 2, What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning? The

researcher found interview questions 9, 10, and 11 were not applicable (see Appendix D & E). When analyzing question 9, the responses were very informative, 100% of the participants indicated that implementation of new ideas or tools was a success with the students when brought into the classroom. In response to Question 9 – Tell me about a time when you utilized what you learned and how the students reacted in your classroom. Were the students accepting of the new tools? The first response was from Participant A who explained that “the district did a round of comprehensible input that the instructor implemented it into the classroom. The results were 95% of the students loved that there were no desks – they were allowed to sit on the floor or in chairs and 5% of the students provided negative feedback indicating that they were frustrated with the fact that when responding to a question on the test, there was no right or wrong answer. They did not adjust to the holistic way of thinking, with not a lot of guidelines for length or what to include in the summary. The information was interesting to the instructor, the students indicated that the new way was too easy, one would only need to speak slowly, use a bunch of hand gestures, draw pictures on the board, and make sure it is comprehensible. The goal is to make sure all students understand. Therefore, there are no worksheets, no need for vocabulary sheets, no grammar worksheets, no need for homework, which is something the students are not used to. The level of learning that happened was exciting.”

When asked question 10: Have you noticed an increase in test scores when focusing on a specific subject area, 100% of the responses indicated an increase was noticed in the classroom. However, five out of eight (62.5%) participants felt that an increase was determined by test scores. Participants C, D, E, and G indicated that tests



were not taken, although they have seen improvement in their classroom. For example, participant C indicated “they were a school counselor and believed that when they approach their lessons with the students it’s more of a career lesson and they are more engaged because they are providing more individual attention. While there is not specific testing, the belief is that their focus in the classroom and their engagement in the class has improved.” Participant D indicated that “this method of tests was completely old school testing vs. the four C’s that you want the kids to do. Therefore, when working with one of the roughest classes in the school it became apparent that while they were working with one student the rest of the class had become engaged enough that there were no behavior issues and everyone was working. The other teachers in the class were suddenly panicked and then realized that the method of teaching and learning had worked because all students were engaged. The behavior issues had decreased and engagement had increased. While this is hard to directly relate to scores, it has improved and that is critical. However, if it is a project, then students will receive a score.” Participant E indicated that “students enjoyed learning new ways to effectively do a task, however, they were not provided data that supported the opinion based on their responses.”

Those that indicated that test results had increase were Participants A, B, F, and H. Reviewing those results: Participant A indicated that “while the tests had changed the students were still scoring higher on standardized tests. More students scored A’s with this method and is more egalitarian.” Participant B indicated that “yes, scores are continuing to go up year after year. Student’s comprehension of the books they are reading are going up. The districts benchmark scores as well as their MAPP scores are

always very high and in fact are ranked #1 in the country again this year for eighth grade ELA.”

When asked question 11: Explain what metrics you will use to measure success, 100% of the responses indicated their specific tools that are working in their classrooms. While there are several tools to be implemented and more innovated ones being created every day, when teachers utilize comprehensible input, students are happier and they are acquiring more of the language and allows students to freely work on their own. Another tool is by building metrics to measure success in order to continually evaluate the progress of the program as well as to prepare or adjust / refine current procedures based on the results. Districts typically utilize pre and post assessments, however, for one participant, their district focus on the benchmark data tracker for a couple of their Math classes. They have a whole spread sheet of how much students grew and what their results are (exceptional, attainment, acceptable or insufficient). This instructor does a lot of summative assessments at the end of the unit and formative assessments throughout the unit so little tickets and quizzes to confirm that students are understanding the material and trying to figure out the best solution to reteach if needed. The formal assessment is the benchmark data tracker where this instructor scored an 84% met the target goal which was in the acceptable range. Participant H indicated that “USA Test Prep was the preferred assessment tool in their building. It is awesome because it aligns to the Missouri Standards and gives students immediate feedback on their score but it also has the type of questions that are asked on the end of the course exam. The questions are higher level and are more interactive on the computer, which is beneficial because you can see all their scores and how it aligns to specific standards as well as

color coordinates the results indicating which students are meeting standards and those that are not.”

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support influence a teacher’s decision to participate in continuing education courses?

The researcher investigated the third research question by analyzing responses to the interviews and secondary data. The compilation of data represented in the interviews and secondary data expanded the ideas and concepts. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, one was applicable to determine how financial support influences a teacher’s decision to participate in continuing education courses which included: Implementation / training. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results.

### **Research Question 1 - Theme 3: Long-Term Vision/Educational Goals**

Adults possess 80% of the knowledge presenters want them to learn (ASSE Training & Communication, 2013). However, the challenge is getting learners to understand that PD programs and sessions are truly effective, and presenters need to understand the learning styles, values, and preferences of each generation (Holyoke, & Larson, 2009). Having several different generations in the profession becomes important to acknowledge each carefully so that they all receive useful information. When presenting to different generations, it is important to remember that each learn differently and are at different stages in their career. Therefore, knowing who the audience is and including examples of implementation is beneficial to all participants as well as the presenters.

When asked the question, “What is your long-term vision for your career, and What are your educational goals”, seven out of eight (87.5%) indicated that they want to continue to learn. Participant B indicated that they had been thinking about this a lot. “I enjoy being in the classroom and the goal is getting to my masters +30 and possibly pursuing an Ed specialist degree. I ‘m not sure if administration is the path that I want to take. I feel like being in the classroom is where I’m having the most impact.” The long-term goal for participant D is “that I’m working on getting enough graduate credit to move over on the pay scale. While I would have loved to gone back and received my specialist degree, I just could not afford it and now it would not be cost effective with retirement seven years away. My other long-term goal is to go and present at other districts and focus on that, with the end goal possibly have my own business.” Finally, participant H “would like to learn education over curriculum and possibly when I retire or before, become a curriculum coach or after I retire be a consultant.”

To summarize the above results, due to technology changing all the time, some participants would like to stay up-to-date and current with the new ideas that are suitable for their classroom, focus on social-emotional learning, STEM/STEAM programs, brain development of adolescents and the behavioral development of children and adolescents. It is important to understand that presenters create a unique learning experience when they combine generational and adult learning theories (Holyoke, & Larson, 2009).

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?

The researcher investigated the first research question by analyzing responses to the interviews. The compilation of data represented in the interviews expanded the ideas

and concepts. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, two were applicable to the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning which included: Reflection/Observation and Implementation/training. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results.

### **Research Question 3 Theme 1: Implementation / Training**

Respondents of the research shared their opinion on if there was enough time allotted for collaboration and participation in Professional and Continuing Education courses and how the district can engage staff through the three phases of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation. To answer Research Question 3, How does financial support influence a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses? Interview questions 2 and 12 were utilized in combination with the secondary data from questions 4, 5, and 6 (see Appendix D and E). When analyzing question 2, the responses were six out of eight (75%) felt as though their district allotted enough time for collaboration and participation. For example, participant D stated "as a Digital Learning Teacher (DLT) and felt that especially in technology, their district was always providing training for teachers and staff to participate." However, two participants did not feel as though they received enough in their specific area. Participant C "felt that if teachers were in the core subject areas, they were fine, otherwise, specials such as fine arts and counseling do not receive as much time for professional development." Participant H indicated "that there was not receive enough time during a regular school day, but they do receive a number of PD days, therefore, if the PD was approved, then you are able to attend." Providing adult learners with support during and after programs is crucial for effective learning (Cornelius, Gordon, C., & Ackland, 2011).

Interview question 12 asked how the district can engage staff through the three phases of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Several of the interviewees indicated that once professional development was over, they were not provided time to collaborate or reflect on what they learned. Some of the participants indicated that the reflection and collaboration was something they completed on their own. One example was provided by participant A, who indicated “that the district did a justifiable job of offering professional development, however, when you present to a wide range of people the topic is very generic. Specifically, social emotional development, classroom behavior management, or some of the technology that is being incorporated in the district is understandable to provide for everyone. However, as an eight-year teaching that specifically teaches Spanish, there is a lot of things that are important for traditional classroom that are not as important to me in my language classroom. Language is not a subject the instructor said, it should not be taught as a subject. It is a skills-based class not a content class. The instructor indicated that social emotional learning is something that applies to everyone and they can learn from that, but in their opinion 70% of the materials covered by my district doesn’t apply to my classroom and wouldn’t affect my teaching, so they would be limited to 30%.” The participant is very passionate about language learners and said that at the university level the statistics coming forth, especially from Bill Van Patton, formerly of Michigan University as one of the premier language acquisition theorists. His studies showed that only 5% of university professors are teaching this language acquisition-based method which is prosperous considering we’ve had the research since 1970. So, at a high school level we have a thankfully higher percentage of individual teachers that agree that it is the

best way to acquire a new language. In general, if this district or at a state level would gear professional development towards second language acquisitions and the understanding of that vs. language learning at the state level that is where we could make huge strides in just this subject.”

Several participants indicated that providing opportunities for teachers to voice their opinion on topics of professional development would increase participation and active engagement. Allowing time for professional development during the school day and not requiring employees to use their personal time, as well as making sure that the PD is hands on instead of a lecture presentation would increase engagement and participation.

As mentioned earlier, secondary data utilized a Likert scale where a composite score was created for questions 5, 6, and 7 to indicate their level of time allowed for professional development growth, financial assistance provided through the district for professional growth, and how accessible it was to receive resources needed to teach in the district.

For, secondary data question 2 - The researcher ran a chi-square test of independence to determine if the time allotted for professional development was dependent on implementation into the workday. The analysis revealed that the amount of time allocated for professional development was independent of implementation and the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is not a difference.

Secondary data Question 6 asked how much financial assistance does your school offer for professional growth opportunities? There was a total of 216 responses that represented (43%) of the participants surveyed indicated that their district provided at

least \$160 or more in professional development for them each year. Question 7 from the secondary survey asked how accessible is it to get the resources you need to teach in your school district? The total responses received were 221 and those indicated that 83 (37.5%) = Accessible, 4 (1.8%) = Not accessible, 4 (1.8%) = Not very accessible, 67 (30.3%) = Somewhat accessible, and 63 (29%) = Very accessible. The researcher reported that the majority of the participants (37.5%) felt that they had access to resources accessible provided by their districts.

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

The researcher investigated the fourth research question by analyzing responses to the interviews and secondary data. The compilation of data represented in the interviews and secondary data expanded the ideas and concepts. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, one was applicable to determine the difference between participants that a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment which included: Student Success. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results.

#### **Research Question 4 Theme 1: Student Success**

Respondents of the research answered questions regarding if they had a master's degree and if the information was easily implemented into their workday. To answer Research Question 4, What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment? Interview question 5 was utilized in combination with the secondary data from questions 2, and 10 (see Appendix D). When analyzing question 5, What are your educational goals, the



responses were that seven out of eight (87.5%) currently hold a master's degree and the other participant was two courses away from completing their masters. In addition to those that hold a master's degree, three are working on their master's plus 30 and 45 for the salary advancement within their district, two participants indicated having an Ed Specialist degree, and one plans to complete their doctorate in May 2020. Participant A "is waiting on results after taking the Nation Board Certification, however, was not interested in continuing education due to no monetary incentive for doing so within the district."

When reviewing the secondary data for question 2, which asked do you hold a master's degree? If no, please explain, 31 out of 247 (12.6%) responded no, they did not hold a master's degree. However, 216 out of 247 (87.4%) responded yes. The researcher was pleased with the results of the majority having a master's degree. More than 16 million Americans (approximately 8%) of the population have a master's degree, which represents a 43% increase since 2002 (Schulsinger, 2017). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18 % of all jobs will require a master's degree by the year 2020. Having a master's degree can help you differentiate yourself and remain a valuable employee. However, a master's degree can also allow one to gain specialized knowledge to advance in their field, assist with transition into a management or leadership roles, increase earning potential, enhance professional networking, and improves with researching, writing and analyzing skill sets which prepares you for a life of constant learning (Schulsinger, 2017).

Teachers must focus on being a life-long learner in order to be effective in the classroom due to the educational setting continually changing (CETT, 2012; Morewood,

Ankrum, & Bean, 2010). Teachers must learn and understand the initiatives and reforms to provide students with the best possible education (Morewood et al., 2010). When participants were asked “What are you most passionate about” the answers were unanimously, helping students succeed! Specifically, “helping students develop and discover the fun in reading and writing to use their voice and morals” according to Participant B. However, Participant C “was interested in learning how to make sure that all students get access to the same curriculum and opportunities and connecting students to resources and assuring that everyone has a fair chance at getting honors classes or clubs and activities to help them become prepared for college. Participant D discussed “engaging and connecting students to STEAM, technology integration, makerspace, assisting students to attain a deeper level of learning.” Participant H indicated that “making creative lessons for the students and working with them every day is the passion that keeps going in the classroom.” Producing life-long learners starts with quality PD opportunities for teachers as well as providing quality PD, which usually falls on the shoulders of administrators (Morewood et al., 2010).

After collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher found that the participants had little to no voice in their professional development topics. Most of the participants felt very strongly about having a decision in the content topics to not only create buy-in for all teachers and staff, as well as being part of the process of developing it to ensure that it is interactive, keeps their attention, and creates more hands-on training. Participant D stated “If the district is intentional, they are not just throwing devices at teachers, there must be a systematic way of how you are going to teach and train effectively for the implementation in the classroom.”

**Summary**

The purpose of this mixed-method was to examine the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. Both primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed in this study. Primary data were collected via interviews and secondary data was collected from end of the semester surveys over the period of Spring 2018 through Spring 2019. During the interviews, all eight participants included a response to each of the 12 questions indicating that professional development should be active, engaging, collaborative, practical, reflective, and reinforced. A summary of the research and the findings, the conclusion, implications, and recommendations for future research presented in chapter five.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. Four research questions and four hypotheses addressed the student engagement regarding implementation of course content learned through the courses, importance of financial support and time to participate in continuing education courses, benefits of continuing education courses, and if having a higher education encourages participants to partake in the continuing education course.

**Research Question 1:** What are the benefits of Continuing Education?

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support impact a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree, and those who do not, and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a relationship between the amount of time allowed for professional development and implementation into the workday.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a relationship between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of the course content into the learning environment

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a relationship between financial support from the employer and the amount of time employees are willing to participate in professional

improvement.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is a relationship between professional support, financial support, and the implementation of course material in the classroom.

### **Introduction**

The idea for this study began about three years ago, when the researcher took the position of Coordinator for Professional and Continuing Education. The researcher saw the needs and benefits of offering these courses had for educators, school counselors, and anyone that participated. Realizing that it didn't matter if one was an educator or a business executive, everyone needed to continue to learn. Continuing to learn allowed educators and business professionals the opportunity to grasp new concepts and possibly more efficient ways of doing the same task. When the researcher started the study regarding the benefits of continuing education, the results were that it is not just beneficial to the participant, it is also a benefit for the organization and those within. It is critical that educators have structured professional development, allowing for learning time and collaboration time. The researcher wanted to start the evaluation process of the courses being offered through the department to learn where the department could improve and what the students were looking for regarding professional development opportunities. Upon completion of each semester, the coordinator would send an electronic survey, although it is not required, several students chose to participate. After a few years, the researcher completed the IRB approval process to begin the research study and run the data. Secondary data was used for a specific time period and then eliminated any surveys that were not complete. The researcher read through the hypotheses and chose which method best fit what the study was looking for and then

changed words to numbers to be able to complete the analysis.

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. By completing the mixed methods analysis, the study aimed to highlight the differences, if any, as well as the focus on the amount of time allowed to attend professional development; if the level of degree attained had an impact on participation in professional development courses; if the employer offered financial support, and if support structures were beneficial for their students. Through this comparison, this study aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses in the districts. The study included both qualitative and quantitative elements which were collected and analyzed. The literature review explained the importance of participating in professional and continuing education course. Education professionals are becoming stagnant in the current way of teaching in the classroom and some claim to be unaware of how to find new, innovative ways to continue to keep the students engaged. The research indicated that having students utilize hands on activities is beneficial as well as encouraging teachers to participate in continuing education course. Offering continuing education will assist with gaining the knowledge that the organization values and adds to its success. Continuing one's education in any profession is an advantage for both the organization and personal skill development.

The economic and social changes in the world had a significant impact on how districts must attain a better school system. If they continue to add more responsibilities to the teacher, it only becomes more challenging for the profession as a whole. Teachers have become more accustomed to these challenges, which may consist of multicultural

classrooms, integration of special needs, use of technologies, demands for more evaluations and holding them accountable, as well as, interactions with the community and parents. The demands of the teachers have become more complex over time and represent a challenge for the profession itself. Teachers need the resources to develop, master and reflect on the new ways to work with and educate our students. In the past, state policymakers have not given enough attention to the form, content, or quality of professional development. The issue is that if teachers today are prepared for the new challenges, this laissez-faire approach needs to be addressed (Corcoran, 1995).

In order to effectively prepare for challenges such as global warming, poverty, and health care... we must have educated engineers, scientists, economists, legislators, managers, and an educated citizenry to oversee and guide them... We need to rethink how we recruit, train, evaluate, and reward great teachers so that the highest possible standards are created and maintained (Chilcott, 2010, pp. 52-53).

Continuing education offers students the opportunity to network with colleagues, other students, and instructors. Professional Development and Continuing Education have several advantages: prepares you for a new position, enhances your skills, furthers your education, and can potentially offer information that you have never seen before. Hirsh (2010) declares that, "professional development provides teachers with the support they need in order to enhance student learning... Student academic success is enhanced when teachers experience powerful professional support" (p. 11).

### **Review of Methodology**

The researcher's hypothesis indicated that using continuing education is beneficial to all (the professional, the organization, and the co-workers around them).

Once the quantitative portion was completed, the researcher moved to the qualitative portion of the study where interviews would be conducted. Candidates that had participated in continuing education courses would be emailed an opportunity to participate in the interview and share their opinion on what encourages them to participate in these courses and if they would like to see new processes implemented. The researcher thought this would be the easy piece to the study. However, it became the most frustrating. Students were not as responsive or willing to participate. The purpose of having interviews was to find similarities and differences to create common themes that focused on the questions asked to all eight of the participants: increase in the utilization of continuing education, degree attainment, financial support, and implementation into the classroom. The interviews were very informative and much was learned from each student.

The researcher indicated that implementation of continuing education would benefit the university, as well as the professional, and their organization. If the researcher indicated an increase in the utilization of continuing education, then the researcher confirmed that, through the implementation of more professional development, the opportunity for continuous learning throughout the organization would increase. The purpose of having interviews was to find similarities and differences to create common themes that focused on the questions asked to the eight participants: increase in the utilization of continuing education, degree attainment, financial support, and implementation into the classroom.



### Summary of Findings

For this study, the researcher examined four research questions and four hypotheses statements. This study examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. Additional statistical analyses, both descriptive and inferential, determined if there was significant support for each hypothesis. Quantitative results will be discussed first, followed by discussion of the qualitative findings.

**Hypothesis 1:** The first hypothesis statement in this study, “There is no relationship between the amount of time allowed for professional development and implementation into the workday.” To address the first hypothesis, the researcher completed a statistical analysis of survey results. These surveys collected information from participating students regarding their educational background, course content, district involvement, time allotted, and overall evaluation of the program. The course evaluations were optional for a student to complete.

The researcher ran a chi-square test of independence to determine if the time allotted for professional development was dependent on implementation into the workday. The analysis revealed that the amount of time allocated for professional development was independent of implementation into the workday;  $\chi^2(6.93, n = 217) df = 9, p = .645$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is no relationship between the amount of time allotted for professional development and implementation into the workday. A confidence level of 95% determined that the researcher should fail to reject the null hypothesis. This analysis indicated no statistical difference. With the level of significance  $\alpha = .05$ , and the  $p$ -value of .645, the researcher

failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is not a difference in the amount of time allocated for professional development and was independent of implementation into the workday. The results of Hypothesis 1 indicated that no matter how much time was allowed for professional development the teachers still implemented what they learned at the session into their classroom. Teachers indicated that they were consistently looking for new innovative ways to engage their students and teach them valuable lessons.

Professional development (PD) is a necessary factor in teaching and is an integral part of creating an effective classroom where students are successful (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Teachers' professional learning must align with state standards as well as local and school goals, conducted with a team of educators, facilitated by effective leaders, occur several times a week, and engage groups in the continuous improvement cycle (National Staff Development Council, 2010).

**Hypothesis 2:** The second hypothesis statement, "There is no relationship between participants that have a master's degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment," was investigated using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The analysis revealed that the students without a master's degree ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) were not significantly higher than those students with a master's degree ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ );  $t(-0.653) = 0.514$ ,  $p = .614$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that students without a master's degree did not implement more course content than students with a master's degree; they were not significantly different. The results indicated that teachers that hold a master's degree and those that do not both implemented the PD information into their classrooms equally.

The researcher was not surprised with the results as they believed that it would not and should not matter if an instructor has a master's or a bachelor's continuous learning is critical.

Teachers are more likely to implement new instructional strategies when they can see the direct benefits to student success (Morewood & Bean, 2009). New PD may redefine what it means to be a teacher within a particular learning environment because PD is learning about new ways to relate to teaching and students (Battey & Franke, 2008). Effective PD must emphasize the relationship between teaching and learning and provide ongoing support consistent with the integration (Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009).

**Hypothesis 3:** The third hypothesis statement was, "There is no relationship between financial support from the employer and professional improvement." As with the previous hypotheses, the researcher investigated the claim investigated using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The researcher chose to utilize the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC) to measure the linear correlation between the two variables. The value is between +1 and -1. A positive linear correlation is 1, 0 is no linear correlation, and -1 is total negative linear correlation. The researcher focused on Questions 6 and 8 to determine whether there is a relationship between financial support from the employer and professional improvement, the researcher calculated the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient and ran a *t*-test. The analysis showed that the coefficient of correlation ( $r = -0.002$ ) was not significant;  $t = -0.03$ ,  $p = .0974$ , and the d.f. = 21. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is no relationship between financial support and professional improvement. The results indicated that the amount of money provided by

the district did not reflect professional improvement for the instructor. However, when teachers participate in PD, student achievement is affected in three ways: increases and enhances teachers' knowledge and skills, increases teachers' skills in using effective instructional strategies, and improve teaching cause student achievement to increase (Yoon et al., 2007). However, if one component is missing, increased student learning cannot be expected (Yoon et al., 2007).

**Hypothesis 4:** The fourth hypothesis statement, "There is no relationship between professional support, financial support, and the implementation of course material in the classroom," was examined by applying both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The researcher chose to complete three different tests to determine if there was a relationship between professional support, financial support, and implementation of coursework and labeled each test: Hypothesis 4(a), 4(b), and 4(c). The data was tested to see if there was a relationship between professional support and financial support.

*Hypothesis 4(a).* The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between professional support and financial support. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were not equal. The analysis revealed that professional support ( $M = 1.023$ ,  $SD = 0.15$ ) was significantly lower than financial support ( $M = 2.511$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ );  $t = -15.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $n = 217$ , and  $d.f. = 432$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no relationship between professional support and the financial support. Even though the teachers believed that their administration supported continuing education/professional development, the amount of financial support, according to the data, suggests that is the reason for a portion of the participation.

*Hypothesis 4(b).* The second *t*-test the researcher conducted was to compare Q4 - Does your administration support continuing education / professional development?), and Q10 - Do you feel the assignments to earn the credit were easily implemented into your everyday workload? The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between professional support and implementation of course work. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were not equal. The analysis revealed that professional support ( $M = 1.023$ ,  $SD = 0.15$ ) was not significantly lower than implementation of coursework in the classroom ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ );  $t = -10.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $n = 217$ , and  $d.f. = 432$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no relationship between financial support and the implementation of coursework, that is not the deciding factor on if they implement it into their classroom. The purpose of the PD session is to provide new ways to engage their students and assist them with being successful in the classroom.

*Hypothesis 4(c).* The third *t*-test the researcher did was to compare Q6 - How much financial assistance makes your school offer for your professional growth opportunities, and Q10 - Do you feel the assignments to earn the credit were easily implemented into your everyday workload? The researcher conducted a *t*-test of two means to see if there was a relationship between financial support and implementation of course work. A preliminary test of variances revealed that the variances were equal. The analysis revealed that financial support ( $M = 2.511$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) was not significantly higher than implementation of coursework in the classroom ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ );  $t = 9.87$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $n = 217$ , and  $d.f. = 432$ . The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there was no relationship between financial support and the

implementation of coursework. The teachers believe that implementation of innovative creative, and hands-on teaching methods is required to reach the students today. They are grateful and appreciative of the support that their districts provide financially, however that does not play a factor of whether they will take the information acquired from the sessions and implement it into the classroom.

Professional development (PD) providers need to move away from traditional methods and utilize tools and resources of the present time (Brooks & Gibson, 2012). For meaningful PD to occur, it must be ongoing, diverse, and centered in ways teachers can create a positive social change within the learning environment (Drage, 2010). Teachers must feel that PD sessions are relevant and worthwhile for teachers to get truly involved (Drage, 2010). One example of getting teachers involved is for them to look at professional development as lifelong learning. Lifelong learning assists with helping individuals feel more secure and confident instead of overwhelming them. It also provides new resources and tools to implement into the classroom. Edwards, Ranson, and Strain (2010), suggested that the argument for lifelong learning, is that, “to be able to negotiate uncertainty successfully, people need to engage in learning throughout their lives, with an implicit threat that not to do so is to risk economic and social exclusion,” (p. 581).

The researcher collected qualitative data from interview questions. The researcher combed the data to reveal themes that were found throughout the interview responses which are indicated in Table 5 and further described in the subsequent paragraphs.

**Research Question 1:** What are the benefits of Continuing Education?

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning?

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support impact a teacher's decision to participate in continuing education courses?

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master's degree, and those who do not, and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

All participants included a response to each of the 12 interview questions indicating that professional development should be active, engaging, collaborative, practical, reflective, and reinforced, which suggests that adult learning in a professional environment, which occurs through the same process as developmental learning theories (Baumgartner & Merriam, 2000; Clark & Cafferella, 1999).

This mixed-methods research generated data from interviews and secondary data through an end of course survey. Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of six significant themes: having a voice in decision making for professional development, knowing the why - focus on the students and their future, , observation/reflection - providing assistance and support with implementation and evaluation after professional development has been completed., focusing on long-term visions and educational goals, student success, and Implementation/training. Responses from the interviews included the importance of choosing their own professional development topics or at least having a say in what to offer. All participants believe that their school districts provide sufficient time for professional development which created an increase in test scores or metrics for

measuring success. Patton (1990) described this procedure as the creative process of discovering “patterns, themes, and categories that capture primary meaning of the data” (p. 406).

### **Research Question 1 - Theme 1: Having a Voice**

To answer Research Question 1, What are the benefits of Continuing Education? Interview questions 3, 4, 7, and 9 were utilized (see Appendix D). For interview question number 3 – What areas of your career would you like to develop? The eight participants indicated their specific topic of interest and the reason they chose that topic. By allowing them to have a voice and being able to choose the topic for professional development would benefit them more as well as encourage them to attend continuing education opportunities. When the participants were asked question 4 – What is your long-term vision for your career? Four out of the eight participants (50%) indicated they plan to retire within the next 7-14 years. Participants A, D, F, and H were not interested in any other degree programs, although they were interested in continuing their education through professional development and one was possibly interested in a certification program. Two of the participants were interested in becoming curriculum coaches or consultants.

The next interview questions that was reviewed for Research Question 1 was interview Question 7 which asked – What steps would you like to take to improve in your developmental areas? When reflecting on areas that these participants would like to improve, seven out of eight interviewees answered the question (87.5%). Some of the answers were: requiring every teacher to be proficient in one area and then having something else to offer or be part of their tool bag as a teacher, learning the right way to



teach that gets students to think critically and creating assessments on how to access, developing more in K-12 teaching strategies, course work on training in social/emotional learning, finding something of interest before attending the conference, asking questions, putting yourself out there and doing things is how you grow and develop, and finally attending conferences that are hands on and include writing. Question 9 – Tell me about a time when you utilized what you learned and how the students reacted in your classroom. Were the students accepting of the new tools? The responses were very informative and indicated that seven out of eight (87.5%) expressed that the students were very responsive and more engaged to the task at hand. For example, Participant A indicated my district did a round of comprehensible input and I implemented it into my classroom. The results were 95% of the students love that there was no desks – they were allowed to sit on the floor or in chairs and 5% of the students provided negative feedback indicating that they were frustrated with the fact that when responding to a question on the test, there was no right or wrong answer. They did not adjust to the holistic way of thinking, with not a lot of guidelines for length or what to include in the summary. The information was interesting to the instructor. The students indicated that this was too easy, one would only need to speak slowly, use a bunch of hand gestures, draw pictures on the board, and make sure it is comprehensible. The need is to make sure all students understand. Therefore, there are no worksheets, no need for vocabulary sheets, no grammar worksheets, no need for homework, which is something the students are accustomed to. Another example is Participant H, who spoke about a conference where they learned about Plicker Cards, which are a quick way to do a formative assessment; which looks like a QR code. The instructor puts a question on the board and then scans

the codes as they answer so it's very instantaneous. The instructor can view individual student's responses or the whole class responses. This allows the students to review and go over the choices and answers that were selected. The interviewees shared great ideas that benefits the student learning as well as keeping them engaged and participating in these activities.

Educational leaders such as district personnel, administrators, policymakers often decide teacher PD without consulting the teachers (West, 2011). Allowing teachers to have input was one of the biggest concerns of all participants that were interviewed. The results were unanimous, eight out of eight (100%) of the participants indicated that they would like to see teachers involved with the decision on what types of professional development to offer. They all suggested that if they have a voice in the decision-making process, and the topics of choice, that would encourage them to attend more willingly.

Just as educators stress the importance of differentiation for students, adults require differentiated learning too. School and district leaders must work with teachers to discover a balance between this differentiation and supporting professional learning for the entire staff that meets the goals for school improvement. Because adults learn differently from children, different instructional strategies are encouraged with each group, especially when the adults are well-educated independent teachers (Beavers, 2009). Valuable information is often unheard or overlooked when PD presenters are utilizing ineffective teaching strategies (Beavers, 2009).

### **Research Question 1 - Theme 2: Knowing the Why**

Adult learners need to understand why they are learning new knowledge and how the new knowledge is relevant before they will actively participate and prepare to learn

(McGrath, 2009; O'Toole & Essex, 2012). For example, Participant D indicated that opening one's eyes to different situations. Asking questions like why should employees participate or how will this improve their classroom allows employers to be intentional and think outside the box. Remembering that professional development coordinators cannot throw devices at teachers; they need a systematic way of how they are going to teach and train the employees to effectively use that device or software in the classroom. It is important to understand that if employees do not have the professional development part and how to use it for engagement, the process will not succeed. The course that this participant took directly related back to the classroom through developing lessons, appropriate research and implementation into the classroom, the instructor became creative and has seen first-hand how this process has positively impacted their students. Another suggestion was to consider instructing the professional development in a hands-on approach, instead of a lecture to increase engagement.

Adults are able to determine the value and relevance of learning easily (O'Toole & Essex, 2012). Adult learners are also receptive to new material when presented as real-life situations (McGrath, 2009). However, adult learners tend to be resistant to learning when it does not align with their learning philosophy (Beavers, 2009). Educational leaders such as district personnel, administrators, policymakers often decide teacher PD without consulting the teachers first (West, 2011). Allowing teachers to have input was one of the biggest concerns of all students interviewed. It was unanimous that they all indicated that they would like to see teachers involved with the decision on what types of professional development to offer. One of the interviewees indicated that knowing the why serves as a life skill and efficiently resolves difficult situations It was unanimous, all

eight (100%) of the participants indicated that they would like to see teachers involved with the decision on what types of professional development to offer. They all suggested that if they have a voice in the decision-making process, and the topics of choice, that would encourage them to attend more willingly. Also, the district is showing that they are listening to what the teacher's needs are as well as offering professional development.

### **Research Question 1 - Theme 3: Long-Term Vision/Educational Goals**

Adults possess 80% of the knowledge presenters want them to learn (ASSE Training & Communication, 2013). However, the challenge is getting learners to understand that PD programs and sessions are truly effective, and presenters need to understand the learning styles, values, and preferences of each generation (Holyoke, & Larson, 2009). When asked the question, "What is your long-term vision for your career, and What are your educational goals", seven out of eight (87.5%) indicated that they want to continue to learn due to technology changing all the time, and the stressed the importance of staying current with the new ideas that are suitable for their classroom. Some other areas of focus were social-emotional learning, STEM/STEAM programs, brain development of adolescents and the behavioral development of children and adolescents. It is important to understand that presenters create a unique learning experience when they combine generational and adult learning theories (Holyoke, & Larson, 2009).

Providing adult learners with support during and after programs is crucial for effective learning (Cornelius et al., 2011). Several of the interviewees indicated that once professional development was over, they were not provided time to collaborate or reflect on what they learned. These participants indicated that this was required to do on their

own. Participant D shared that their district allowed them one to two hours after the PD to meet with their team and decide how they plan to implement the new information. They have learning time as well as collaboration time. They also have meetings where they discuss what is working and what is not, as well as how they can improve. Their curriculum instructors and administration support them through their challenging times so they are not frustrated and create a positive learning environment.

**Research Question 2:** What is the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning? The researcher investigated the first research question by analyzing responses to the interviews. The compilation of data represented in the interviews expanded the ideas and concepts. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, two were applicable to the perceived relationship between continuing education and student learning which included: Reflection/Observation and Implementation/training. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results below.

### **Research Question 2 - Theme 1: Reflection / Observation**

Respondents of the research shared their personal career development goals, long-term vision for their career, and current strengths. To answer Research Question 2, Interview questions 9, 10, and 11 were utilized (see Appendix D & E). When analyzing question 9, the responses were unanimous; 100% of the participants indicated that implementation of new ideas or tools was a success with the students when brought into the classroom. The interviewees responded to Question 9 and offered several examples of implementation that was brought back to the classroom. Each participant had a story about how the students were engaged and participating. The results provided from one

participant was they indicated a decrease in behavior issues and an increase in engagement. Having the students more hand-on kept them engaged and collaborating with their peers and focused on the task at hand.

When asked question 10, another unanimous results of all eight (100%) of the responses indicated an increase was noticed in the classroom. However, five out of eight (62.5%) participants felt that an increase was determined by test scores. Participants C, D, E, and G indicated that tests were not taken, although they have seen improvement in their classroom. Participant E indicated that students enjoyed learning new ways to effectively do a task, however, they were not provided data that supported the opinion based on their responses. Those that indicated that test results had increase were Participants A, B, F, and H. Reviewing those results: Participant A indicated that while the tests had changed the students were still scoring higher on standardized tests. More students scored A's with this method and is more egalitarian. Participant B indicated that yes, scores are continuing to go up year after year. Student's comprehension of the books they are reading are going up. The districts benchmark scores as well as their MAPP scores are always very high and in fact are ranked #1 in the country again this year for eighth grade ELA.

When asked question 11, the results again were unanimous, all eight (100%) of the responses indicated what their specific tools was and how it was successful in their classrooms. While there are several tools to be implemented and more innovated ones being created every day, when teachers utilize comprehensible input, students are happier and they are acquiring more of the language and allows students to freely work on their own. Another tool is by building metrics to measure success in order to continually

evaluate the progress of the program as well as to prepare or adjust / refine current procedures based on the results. For example, Participant H indicated that USA Test Prep was the preferred assessment tool in their building. This participant said “it is awesome because it aligns to the Missouri Standards and gives students immediate feedback on their score, but it also has the type of questions that are asked on the end of the course exam.” The questions are higher level and are more interactive on the computer, which is beneficial because the teacher can see all their scores and how it aligns to specific standards as well as the color coordinates the results indicating which students are meeting standards and which are not.

**Research Question 3:** How does financial support influence a teacher’s decision to participate in continuing education courses? The researcher investigated the third research question by analyzing responses to the interviews and secondary data, which expanded the ideas and concepts. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, one was applicable to determine how financial support influenced a teacher’s decision to participate in continuing education courses: implementation / training. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results.

### **Research Question 3 - Theme 1: Implementation / Training**

Respondents shared their opinion on if there was enough time allotted for collaboration and participation in Professional and Continuing Education courses and how the district can engage staff through the three phases of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation. To answer Research Question 3, How does financial support influence a teacher’s decision to participate in continuing education courses? Interview questions 2 and 12 were utilized in combination with the secondary

data from questions 4, 5, and 6 (see Appendix D and E). When analyzing question 2, the responses were six out of eight (75%) felt as though their district allotted enough time for collaboration and participation. However, two participants did not feel as though they received enough in their specific area. Providing adult learners with support during and after programs is crucial for effective learning (Cornelius et al., 2011).

Interview question 12 asked how the district can engage staff through the three phases of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Several of the interviewees indicated that once professional development was over, they were not provided time to collaborate or reflect on what they learned. Some of the participants indicated that the reflection and collaboration was something they completed on their own. Several participants, indicated that providing opportunities for teachers to voice their opinion on specific topics of interest would increase participation. In addition, active engagement, providing time for professional development throughout the school day, and keeping the participants engaged with hands on PD would also increase participation.

Secondary data utilized a Likert scale for questions 5, 6, and 7 to indicate their level of time allowed for professional development growth, financial assistance provided through the district for professional growth, and how accessible it was to receive resources needed to teach in the district. Secondary data question 2 - The researcher ran a chi-square test of independence to determine if the time allotted for professional development was dependent on implementation into the workday. The analysis revealed that the amount of time allocated for professional development was independent of implementation into the workday;  $\chi^2(6.93, n = 217) df = 9, p = .645$ . A confidence level



of 95% determined that the researcher should fail to reject the null hypothesis. This analysis indicated no statistical difference. With the level of significance  $\alpha = .05$ , and the  $p$ -value of .645, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is not a difference in the amount of time allocated for professional development and that it was independent of implementation into the workday.

Question 6 from the secondary survey asked how much financial assistance does your school offer for professional growth opportunities. There was a total of 216 responses that indicated - 91 (42%) = \$0-\$50, 18 (8%) = \$60-\$100, 14 (6%) = \$110-\$150, and 93 (43%) = \$160+ hours of professional development allotted each year. It was exciting to see that (43%) of the people surveyed indicated that their district provided at least \$160 or more in professional development for them each year. Question 7 from the secondary survey asked how accessible is it to get the resources you need to teach in your school district. The total responses received were 221 and those indicated that 83 (37.5%) = Accessible, 4 (1.8%) = Not accessible, 4 (1.8%) = Not very accessible, 67 (30.3%) = Somewhat accessible, and 63 (29%) = Very accessible. The researcher was surprised to see that many of the participants felt that they had access to resources provided by their districts with a 37.5% overall those surveyed.

The researcher was shocked at the information provided about the lack of input that participants had in their professional development. They all felt very strongly about having a decision in the topics to not only create buy-in for all teachers and staff, as well as being part of the process of developing it to ensure that it is interactive and it keeps their attention, creating more hands-on training. Participant D stated "If the district is intentional, they are not just throwing devices at teachers, there must be a systematic way

of how you are going to teach and train effectively for the implementation in the classroom.”

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference between participants that have a master’s degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment?

The researcher investigated the fourth research question by analyzing responses to the interviews and secondary data. Of the six themes emerged throughout the analyses, one was applicable to determine the difference between participants that a master’s degree and implementation of course content into the learning environment which was Student Success. This thematic analysis served as the outline in the presentation of the results.

#### **Research Question 4 Theme 1: Student Success**

Respondents of the research answered questions regarding if they had a master’s degree and if the information was easily implemented into their workday. To answer Research Question 4, interview question 5 was utilized in combination with the secondary data from questions 2, and 10 (see Appendix D). When analyzing question 5, seven out of eight (87.5%) currently hold a master’s degree and the other participant was two courses away from completing their masters. In addition to those that hold a master’s degree, three are working on their master’s plus 30 and 45 for the salary advancement within their district, two participants indicated having an Ed Specialist degree, and one plans to complete their doctorate in May 2020. Participant A is waiting on results after taking the Nation Board Certification, however, was not interested in continuing education due to no monetary incentive for doing so within the district.

When reviewing the secondary data for question 2, 31 out of 247 (12.6%) responded no, they did not hold a master’s degree. However, 216 out of 247 (87.4%)

responded yes. The researcher was thrilled with the results because earning a bachelor's degree used to be enough to establish your career, however, it is not the case today. More than 16 million Americans (approximately 8%) of the population have a master's degree, which represents a 43% increase since 2002 (Schulsinger, 2017). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18 % of all jobs will require a master's degree by the year 2020. Having a master's degree can help you differentiate yourself and remain a valuable employee. However, participating in continuing education courses can allow one to gain specialized knowledge to advance in their field, assist with transition into a management or leadership roles, increase earning potential, enhance professional networking, and improve with researching, writing and analyzing skill sets.

Becoming a life-long learner for teachers consists of them striving to be effective in the classroom even when the educational setting is continually changing (CETT, 2012; Morewood et al., 2010). Teachers must learn and understand the initiatives and reforms to provide students with the best possible education (Morewood et al., 2010). When participants were asked "What are you most passionate about" the answers were unanimous: helping students succeed. Specifically, helping students develop and discover the fun in reading and writing to use their voice and morals according to Participant B. However, Participant C is interested in learning how to make sure that all students get access to the same curriculum and opportunities and connecting students to resources and assuring that everyone has a fair chance at getting honors classes or clubs and activities to help them become prepared for college. Producing life-long learners starts with quality PD opportunities for teachers as well as providing quality PD, which usually falls on the shoulders of administrators (Morewood et al., 2010).

There are three primary stakeholders for PD that exist: funders, institutions of higher learning, and teachers (Smolin & Lawless, 2011). Each group has different definitions of what constitutes an effective PD program. Funders are most interested in knowing how the program affects teachers and students and considers the program a success if the students are positively affected (Smolin & Lawless, 2011). Institutions of higher education have two important roles in PD: creating new frontiers and providing a pipeline of teachers proficient in technology (Smolin & Lawless, 2011). Finally, of course teachers are at the forefront of the PD sessions because they have the opportunity to adjust the content and technology to meet the needs of unique students (Smolin & Lawless, 2011). These three stakeholders must align their goals and coordinate their efforts to ensure positive outcomes. Financial restrictions and time constraints are two major barriers to their roles as instructional leaders. It is important for all those involved in the professional learning of teachers to recognize the importance of controlling and removing the barriers to providing quality professional development.

In order for professional development to be effective, all the stakeholders must understand that the direct improvement of teaching and learning in every classroom comes from a constellation of individuals and groups who undertake a myriad of activities and initiatives which provide continual reflection and changing of classroom practices guided by the educational aspirations of the school (Glickman, 2002, p.2).

All eight participants included a response to each of the 12 questions indicating that professional development should be active, engaging, collaborative, practical, reflective, and reinforced. This point demonstrates that adult learning in a professional

environment, which occurs through the same process as developmental learning theories (Baumgartner & Merriam, 2000; Clark & Cafferella, 1999).

### **Limitations**

As with other research, there were limitations that existed in this study. This study was limited to graduate students that participated in continuing education courses in a Midwest university. In addition, the data that was tested only came from courses that were offered in the professional and continuing education program. Since the researcher utilized secondary data, the researcher had no control of the data. The development of the interview questions was formulated to evaluate the program, identifying what participants are looking for when considering investing or registering for professional development sessions, and to determine if implementation of what they learned is engaging for the students. The second limitation was the possibility of a gap in time between the secondary data and the primary interview data. The qualitative data came from interview responses collected during the fall semester of 2019. Students may have taken their courses at the beginning of the study (Spring semester 2018) and not remember the pertinent information the researcher is looking for. The next limitation that the researcher had was the number of participants willing to be part of the study. The researcher was hoping to have a minimum of eight participants to validate the study. The researcher planned to conduct a random sample, however, due to the limited amount of responses, the researcher made an adjustment and sent a mass email to have eight participants. Five out of the eight participants identified as females. It is possible, but not a guarantee that the outcome of the data could have been different. Participants took part in a variety of course offerings throughout several school district within the United

States. For example, while the majority of the courses were provided through their districts, some were through national organizations or other cooperative agencies. While this may not have had an impact on the study the fact that they all did not participate in the same course, within the same district, and the same instructor, could have had an impact on the results of the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Additional information obtained from future research would support the data provided from this study. The first recommendation is to receive input from the teachers as to what they would like to see offered. Teachers are reluctant to participate in professional development if they do not have input on the topics of interest. Teachers and staff would like the opportunity to have a voice when topics are being discussed in order to meet their classroom needs and they feel the trainings would be more effective. The educators in this study also indicated they would like to have more hands-on professional development. Incorporating these suggestions would allow them time to ask questions about implementation into their classroom.

Effective PD will increase the professional development participation throughout the district. For example, the arts, music, librarian, paraprofessionals, and counselors would like to voice their opinions when planning professional development as well. Receiving staff input is most valuable for all participants. Producing high-quality teachers starts with high-quality PD (Morewood et al., 2010). Teachers influence student achievement; therefore, schools and districts cannot be any more effective than the teachers working within the learning environment (Croft et al., 2010; Guskey, 2009; Morewood & Bean, 2009). Teachers begin with a certain degree of knowledge and skills,

which must continually grow over the years (Slepkov, 2008). Effective PD is essential to provide educators with the knowledge and experiences needed to foster professional growth (Guskey, 2009; ODE, 2007). Existing literature has not provided a single case of school improvement without PD occurring (Guskey, 2009).

The next recommendation is to offer financial assistance and additional time for professional development to occur during the week and throughout the school day. Financial restrictions and time constraints are two major barriers to their roles as instructional leaders. It is important for all those involved in the professional learning of teachers to recognize the importance of controlling and removing the barriers to providing quality professional development. In order for professional development to be effective, all the stakeholders must understand the direct improvement of teaching and learning in every classroom comes from a constellation of individuals and groups who undertake a myriad of activities and initiatives which provide continual reflection and changing of classroom practices guided by the educational aspirations of the school (Glickman, 2002, p. 2).

A gap exists in beliefs of what constitutes effective PD and the evidence used to confirm this belief (Guskey, 2009). Budget cuts have almost become the norm for schools, which hinders long-term, content-specific PD (Croft et al., 2010). Schools, districts, and states cut PD funding because it does not directly establish the basic teaching and learning of the school (Croft et al., 2010). Because of budget cutbacks, teachers often instruct multiple content areas (Petrie & McGee, 2012). These budget cuts present a challenge for teachers because they have to engage in multiple PD programs to stay current on content and pedagogical approaches (Petrie & McGee, 2012)

Another recommendation is having school districts create partnerships with universities, forming a PD partnership that provides teachers the benefit of closely working with content area experts, which also allows customized PD to meet individual needs (Smolin & Lawless, 2011). These established relationships help districts function better as a learning community (Doolittle et al., 2008). Offering continuing education courses for graduate credit is a benefit that teachers and counselors can participate in to advance on the salary scale or to learn more innovative ways to engage their students.

The above recommendations would create less frustration as well as encourage teachers to implement the most up-to-date technology in their classrooms. Lastly, teachers want to know how to incorporate follow up from the administrators or curriculum departments. The teachers indicated that in several instances, the administration provides the training, however, there is no evaluation to know if they are implementing correctly or at all. The teachers would like to have more information on how they can better incorporate the newest technologies and resources properly.

### **Conclusion**

Educators go through several stages throughout their teaching careers, which Eros referred to as the learning cycle. Teachers in different stages require different PD activities. The learning cycle discovered that if teachers are to continue to grow, they must engage in sustained and authentic PD throughout their careers (Eros, 2011; Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Teachers may have years of teaching experience; however, this does not mean that they do not need PD. It is critical that teachers understand educational theory and practice by making observations, connecting to current instructional strategies, and receiving support both during and after the professional



development session. Administrators must also acknowledge the career cycle of teachers so that PD is implemented in the classroom (Richards & Skolits, 2009).

Innovative technologies have increased rapidly, and teachers are having a difficult time keeping up with changes, which causes them to be frustrated and overwhelmed (Schols, 2012). As technology resources transform the educational environment, leaders must provide the appropriate and updated educational technology PD sessions (Martin et al., 2010; Schols, 2012). Effective educational technology PD should include operation and tools because teachers need to know how to use the software before they can implement the resource. It is important to not only learn about a specific technology but also how to use the technology to increase student achievement (Harris, Mishra, & Koehler, 2009). Teachers are more likely to utilize the new technology resource when provided with quality opportunities and hands-on activities (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

The more educators can practice an activity; the more likely the activity becomes a habit; the same is true for technology integration. Utilizing new technology can lead to increased student achievement. Teachers must have ample time for self-reflection (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) because self-reflection is a way for meaningful change to occur (Slepko, 2008).

TPCK emphasizes the connections and interactions between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (Harris et al., 2009). Some of the key features that teachers must keep in mind when using TPCK: open to new possibilities, ongoing reflection and commitment, willingness for new instructional strategies, and awareness

that technology has strengths and weaknesses, and collaboration with peers (Morsink, 2011)

Continued research indicates that there is a need for continued PD. As research continues to reveal new information about teachers, technology, and best practices, teachers must grow their teaching practices and philosophies. Teacher collaboration is an effective way to learn and grow to improve their teaching (CETT, 2012; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Stanley, 2011). Collaboration must provide a means of extended and effective PD because each member is equipped with different perspectives and connections, making it easier to accomplish the goal (Frost, Akmal, & Kingrey, 2010).

For PD to be truly effective, teachers need to attend 50 or more hours of development. These 50 hours do not have to be in training sessions. Teachers need to devote part of their time in collaboration, observation, reflection, and participating in professional learning communities. Teachers and administrators need to work together. The traditional top-down structure is ineffective because teachers feel they do not have ownership over their learning. Teachers must have ample time for self-reflection (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The reason for the time for self-reflection is because self-reflection is a meaningful way to promote change (Slepkov, 2008).

Throughout this document, the researcher provided evidence supporting the importance of continuing education as well as the benefits to the school districts, employees, universities, and students. The researcher examined four research questions and four hypotheses statements. This study examined the efficiency and implementation of the continuing education program through financial support, degree attainment, and improvement in the classroom. The researcher recommends further exploration in

multiple school districts, encouraging them to allow more time for collaboration, reflection, observation, and implementation into their workday.

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## Appendix A

### Secondary Data Survey



I'm interested in learning more about your experience through the Cooperative Credit program at Lindenwood University.

1. Have you previously taken a Cooperative Credit Course through Lindenwood University?

Yes or No

2. Do you hold a master's degree?

Yes or No

3. If no, do you plan on pursuing a masters degree?

Yes or no

4. Does your administration support continuing education / professional development?

Yes or No

5. How much time does your school allow for your professional development growth?

0-5 hours a month

6-10 hours a month

11-15 hours a month

16+ hours per month

6. How much financial assistance does your school offer you with for professional growth opportunities?

\$0-\$50 hours a year    \$60-\$100 hours a year    \$110-\$150 hours a year    \$160+ hours a year

7. How accessible is it to get the resources you need to teach in your school district?

Very accessible                  Accessible                  Somewhat Accessible                  Not accessible  
 Not very accessible

8. How would you rate the cooperative credit program on achieving your learning goals?

Exceeds expectations                  Meets expectations                  Does not meet expectations

Slightly below expectations    Far below expectations

9. Is the application process user friendly?

Yes    or    No

10. Do you feel the assignments to earn the credit were useful and easily implemented into your everyday workday?

Very useful    Useful    Somewhat useful    Not useful    Not at all useful

11. How likely are you to recommend Lindenwood University to your fellow teachers for cooperative credit?

Extremely likely                  Somewhat Likely                  Neither likely or unlikely

Somewhat likely                  Extremely unlikely

12. What area(s) would you like to see improved?

13. How was the cooperative credit process overall? Would you do it again?

Thank you for your time and assistance in completing this survey. I look forward to continually growing the program and working with you in the future.

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

#### Professional and Continuing Education Participant Interview Email

##### Introductory Protocol

*I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University and am working on my dissertation: A mixed-method study analyzing the impact of continuing education on K-12 educators. I am hopeful that you would be willing to participate in my study by answering a series of questions. The information will be analyzed and implemented into my research study. If you are willingly to participate, please sign the research study consent form or confirm by responding to this message. Thank you for agreeing to participate.*

*I have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.*

*Thank you for your participation in this survey. I will share the results once the data has been collected and analyzed. Teacher education must be considered and thought of as a life-long experience and will continue from the beginning of the teacher's career until they retire. Having the schools at the center of continuing training is the best way to restructure schools and the educational system as a whole (Musset, 2010).*

**Appendix C**  
**Consent Form**

# LINDENWOOD

## Survey Research Consent Form

A mixed-method study analyzing the impact of continuing education on K-12 educators

You are asked to participate in a survey being conducted by Jennifer Edler under the guidance of Dr. Roger “Mitch” Nasser at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of participating in the professional and continuing education courses; determine if instructional changes or implementations are needed in order to create a better learning environment for the students, and if financial assistance encourages educators to continue their education. For the qualitative piece of the study, the interview portion, the researcher will be provided the email addresses for participants and will send them a copy of the informed consent form as well as the description of the research project. The interview will be recorded on a cell phone and transcribed after the completion of the interviews. No "official" names will be used. The researcher will utilize fake names to refer to selected participants to keep their identity secure and private. The data will be destroyed once the interview is recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. It will take about 30 minutes to complete this survey.

Answering this survey is voluntary. We will be asking about 20-30 other people to answer these questions.



**What are the risks of this study?**

We do not anticipate any risks related to your participation other than those encountered in daily life. You do not need to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or you can stop taking the survey at any time.

We will be collecting data that could identify you, but each survey response will receive a code so that we will not know who answered each survey. The code connecting you and your data will be destroyed as soon as possible. We do not intend to include any information that could identify you in any publication or presentation.

**Will anyone know my identity?**

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

**What are the benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefits for completing this survey. We hope what we learn may benefit other people in the future.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Jennifer Edler directly at 636-949-4612 or jedler@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact Dr. Roger “Mitch” Nasser at RNasser@lindenwood.edu.

If you are willing to participate in the survey, please sign and return the consent form or confirm by responding to this message. I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by simply not completing the survey. I also confirm that I am at least 18 years of age.

_____	_____
<b>Participant's Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____
<b>Participant's Printed Name</b> _____	_____
_____	_____
<b>Signature of Principle Investigator or Designee</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____
<b>Investigator or Designee Printed Name</b>	

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

1. **Please indicate what grade you teach and if you have participated in Professional and Continuing Education courses.**
2. **Is there enough time allotted for collaboration and participation in Professional and Continuing Education courses?**
3. **What areas of your career would you like to develop?**
4. **What is your long-term vision for your career?**
5. **What are your educational goals?**
6. **What are your current strengths and developmental areas?**
7. **What steps would you like to take to improve in these areas?**
8. **What are you passionate about?**
9. **Tell me about a time when you utilized what you learned and how the students reacted in your classroom. Were the students accepting of the new tools?**
10. **Have you noticed an increase in test scores when focusing on a specific subject?**
11. **Explain what metrics you will use to measure success?**
12. **How can the district engage staff through the three phases of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation?**

Thank you for your participation in this survey. I will share the results once the data is collected and analyzed. Teacher education must be considered and thought of as a life-long experience and will continue from the beginning of the teacher's career until they retire. Having the schools at the center of continuing training is the best way to restructure schools and the educational system as a whole (Musset, 2010).

### **Vitae**

Jennifer S. Edler was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and grew up in St. Charles, Missouri. She graduated from St. Charles West High School in 1993. Mrs. Edler attended St. Charles Community College and earned an Associate's Degree in 1996. Jennifer transferred to Lindenwood College where she enrolled in the LCIE program while working full-time, and completed her Bachelor's degree in Human Resources in 1998. Mrs. Edler became a stay-at-home mother when she had a premature baby in December of 2000. She and her husband raised three children together and once they were all in school, she decided to go back to college where she earned a Master's of Business Administration degree in 2018 from Lindenwood University. She currently resides in O'Fallon, Missouri, with her husband, Benjamin, her children, Haley, Zachary, and Jacob, and their dog Sandi. Jennifer plans to graduate from Lindenwood University with a Doctorate in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education in Summer 2020.