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The Professional Learning Motivation Profile (PLMP): A Tool for Assessing Instructional Motivation

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Abstract

This article chronicles the collaboration of administrators from six districts and three college professors as they assessed professional learning during the first year of teaching. The examination led to the development of a Professional Learning Motivation Profile. Results from the profile indicated a traditional model of professional development was not effective in growing the professional learning motivation of beginning teachers. Anecdotal data shared includes how administrators used the data to inform conversations designed to support teachers in their journey toward courageous, effective instruction.

Keywords

professional development, professional learning, teacher education, student teaching

Disciplines

Education | Educational Leadership | Higher Education and Teaching | Secondary Education and Teaching | Teacher Education and Professional Development

In Practice...

The Professional Learning Motivation Profile (PLMP): A Tool for Assessing Instructional Motivation

Barbara A. Marinak, Divonna Stebick & Mary L. Paxton

This article chronicles the collaboration of administrators from six districts and three college professors as they assessed professional learning during the first year of teaching. The examination led to the development of a Professional Learning Motivation Profile. Results from the profile indicated a traditional model of professional development was not effective in growing the professional learning motivation of beginning teachers. Anecdotal data shared includes how administrators used the data to inform conversations designed to support teachers in their journey toward courageous, effective instruction.

As schools transform from a model of less effective professional development to one of school-based professional learning, (Fullen, Hill, & Crévola, 2009), several researchers have described the attributes necessary for such actions to be effective (Fullen, Hill, & Crévola, 2009, Lambert, 2003; Schmoker, 2006). In addition to theoretical and pedagogical expertise, these leaders have suggested that motivation is a critical attribute of professional learning. In his book, ***Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning***, Schmoker (2006) offers questions that should be considered when planning and sustaining professional learning. These include: Do teachers find their work useful?; Are they motivated to continue it?; Why or why not?; Do teachers feel commitment and connection to group members?; Do they feel responsibility to

help others improve? These are the very questions that surfaced when a group of school administrators committed themselves to finding a more effective process for supporting the professional learning of novice teachers (Learning Forward, 2012).

As a building principal, Kathleen viewed the supervision of her faculty as one method to gather data about teacher efficacy. She believed collecting and sharing data from classroom visits was one way to assist her teachers in making effective instructional choices in their own classrooms. However, as she reviewed the data sets from numerous visits to the first year teachers' classrooms, she saw very little difference between their instructional practice at the start of the year and at the end of the year. Despite a teacher

induction program provided by the school district, her post-observation conversations reflected little evidence of reflection and growth (Schon, 1987).

She was concerned her new teachers were struggling and their classroom practices were suffering. She wondered if this was due to a lack of adequate pre-service preparation or if, perhaps, the district didn't choose the best candidates during the hiring process. She tucked the paperwork away, wondering what she should do next year to scaffold growth in the next group of beginning teachers.

Kathleen's dilemma is familiar to most building principals. However, identifying a lack of growth in first year teachers is just the first step dealing with an issue rooted in multiple causes. Contributing to the concerns are variables such as a mismatch between preparation, pedagogy and district expectations; professional development designed to meet predetermined requirements rather than building new teacher capacity; and a lack of motivation in teachers to reflect upon and improve their instruction.

Recognizing that effective professional learning was a key strategy for supporting significant school improvements and knowing they need assistance to develop learning capacity in each of their buildings (Leaning Forward, 2012), Kathleen and her colleagues took bold action. This group of administrators from six school districts in one county reached out to three professors from very different teacher

preparation programs. Their focus was to begin examining the professional learning dispositions and motivation of beginning teachers. The result of this journey was the creation of an instrument designed to assess the motivation of teachers because the group knew Yong Zhao to be right (2009). When various stakeholders (leaders, teachers, learners) are intrinsically motivated, they will become courageous. And with the challenges faced by teachers in today's diverse classrooms, courage is a necessity.

Variables to Consider

The research related to beginning teachers identifies a number of important variables related to preparedness and effectiveness. For example, findings from An emerging picture of the teacher preparation pipeline, a national report issued by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), Ludwig, Krishstein, Sidana, Ardila-Rey and Bae (2010) revealed differing views among higher educators and school administrators on several critical attributes for beginning teachers. One survey queried deans/ chairs at colleges and universities and K-12 administrators regarding their perception of teacher preparedness. Responses to three of the attributes included in the survey, engaging families in supporting their children's education, maintaining order and discipline and working with children of varying abilities, revealed disparate views between deans/chairs and public school administrators. In their ability to work with

families, deans/chairs indicated 9% of their candidates are not well prepared. Public school administrators indicated 31% of their new hires are not well prepared to effectively engage families. Higher education and public education also disagreed on the ability of beginning teachers to maintain order and discipline. Deans/chairs reported 4% of their graduates are not well prepared to maintain order versus 25% of school administrators. On the critical issue of being able to work with children of varying abilities, deans/chairs reported 2% of their candidates are not well prepared while administrators reported 25% of their new teachers lacked the skills necessary to effectively teach children of varying abilities.

Furthermore, the mindset of a typical beginning teacher may be a factor in minimal professional growth. Most pre-service teachers exit their college classrooms with the feeling they are ready to move into a classroom and begin teaching. Once there, they begin to apply instructional practices they learned in coursework. If those practices are effective, their belief about their own capability is reinforced. If they are not effective, they aren't certain as to why. They may lack the

The Professional Learning Motivation Profile

After discussing the concerns of our school district partners and recognizing the importance of a learning disposition, we decided to examine the intrinsic motivation

motivation to seek alternative instructional strategies. Foley (2011) pointed out motivation is a critical element in the implementation of pedagogy. In other words, a teacher must have the ability to carefully reflect on his/her own teaching and, based on such contemplation, make changes to improve instruction.

Some districts deliver induction or mentoring programs to beginning teachers based on state-mandated and/or approved requirements. This may meet the basic level of professional development identified through a strategic planning process, yet it rarely meets the broad spectrum of support needed by beginning teachers. Not only are beginning teachers struggling to learn the expectations and procedures of a district, they are also attempting to create an effective instructional community in their classroom. Too often the mandated induction programs focus on broad, general topics, such as diversity, while specific information regarding best practices are not included. While these general topics may be efficiently addressed in large group meetings, providing such information does not support growth in the specific contexts of practice facing beginning teachers (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

of beginning teachers related to the elements of effective instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2005; Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2008). To do so, a self-report survey grounded in the expectancy-value theory of intrinsic motivation was designed

(Eccles, 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This model of motivation was selected because it has been shown to explain how persistence and vigor relate to task completion. Specifically, expectancy-value theory argues individuals' performance can be explained by their self-efficacy related to a task and the extent to which they value the activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Expectancy-value theory has been used as the theoretical model for numerous academic achievement investigations. More recently, it has been used to explore teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs. In a recent study, Foley (2011) used expectancy-value theory to investigate teachers' implementation of comprehension strategy instruction. Both constructs of expectancy-value proved significant for predicting the implementation of comprehension strategy instruction.

Drawing on this work in expectancy-value theory, we created and validated the Professional Learning Motivation Profile (PLMP) and the Professional Learning Motivation Profile Conversational Interview. The PLMP, shown in Table 1, is a 30-item, Likert scale tool designed to assess instructional self-concept and value. The items are organized using five elements of effective instruction: meeting the students with varying abilities; engaging students in higher order thinking skills; providing students with the opportunity to engage in collaborative learning; teaching students to read critically; and modeling. Table 2 shows the two expectancy value subscales, self-concept and value, and the items included for each element of effective instruction. The PLMP Conversational Interview contains six open-ended questions related to the elements of effective instruction (Figure 1).

Table 1. Professional Learning Motivation Profile

1. I talk to colleagues about ways to model thinking when introducing new concepts.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. I identify the varying abilities of my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. I feel prepared to provide opportunities for student collaboration in my lessons.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. I talk to colleagues about ways to plan student collaboration.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I engage in professional reading about ways to plan collaborative lessons for my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. It's important to plan instruction that includes student collaboration.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. My lessons include opportunities for students to read critically in my areas of instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. My instruction includes opportunities for higher order thinking.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. My students verbalize their own thinking.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. I engage in professional reading to help me plan lessons that include reading critically in my areas of instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. It's important to plan lessons that include reading critically in my areas of instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. It's important to plan instruction that includes higher order thinking.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
13. I feel prepared to include higher order thinking in my lessons.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. I feel prepared to plan lessons that include reading critically in my areas of instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
15. It's important to plan instruction for the varying abilities of my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
16. I engage in professional reading about ways to plan	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

instruction for the varying abilities of my students.			Nor Disagree		
17. My students engage in collaborative learning.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18. I talk to colleagues about ways to plan instruction for the varying abilities of my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
19. My instruction includes modeling thinking when introducing new concepts.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
20. I engage in professional reading about ways to include higher order thinking within my lessons.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

21. I talk to colleagues about ways to plan lessons that include reading critically in my areas of instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. My instruction meets the varying needs of my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
23. It's important to model ways of thinking when introducing new concepts.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
24. My instruction includes opportunities for student collaboration.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
25. I feel prepared to plan instruction that meets the varying needs of my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
26. My students engage in higher order thinking.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
27. My students read critically in my areas of instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
28. I engage in professional reading about ways to model thinking when introducing new concepts.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
29. I talk to colleagues about ways to plan higher order thinking within my lessons.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
30. I feel prepared to model thinking for my students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Table 2. Elements of Effective Instruction for the Subscales of the PLMP

Subscale	Meeting the	Engaging	Providing	Teaching	Modeling
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	Needs of Students with Varying Abilities	Students in Higher Order Thinking Skills	Students with the Opportunity to Engage in Collaborative Learning	Students to Read Critically	for Students
Self-Concept	3	3	3	3	3
Value	3	3	3	3	3

1. When you were responding to the items on critical reading, what came to mind?
2. When you were responding to the items on student collaboration, what came to mind?
3. When you were responding to the items on modeling, what came to mind?
4. When you were responding to the items on planning instruction for varying abilities, what came to mind?
5. When you were responding to the items on higher order thinking, what came to mind?
6. What would you identify as your own area of greatest need? And how could you be supported to address that need?

Figure 1. Professional Learning Motivation Profile: Conversational Interview

Using the Professional Learning Motivation Profile

A group of 30 educators across all disciplines and grade levels took the PLMP at the beginning and end of their first year of teaching. In addition, administrators also completed the PLMP based on their observations of the beginning teachers. Following a year-long validation, the PLMP proved to be a reliable instrument (Cronbach's alpha= .87) for quantifying the

self-concept and value beginning teachers feel toward the five elements of effective instruction. In addition to the PLMP, the PLMP Conversational Interview was used to interview each teacher. The interviews were conducted midway through the school year.

Data from the PLMP was analyzed in two ways. Within group differences were examined using pre and post survey results from the novice teachers. Between group

differences were also analyzed using the post survey results of the beginning teachers and survey data from their administrators. Interestingly, the results found no significant statistical differences between the pre and post administration of the PLMP. Confirming the administrator's suspicions, the traditional induction/mentoring did not grow the intrinsic learning motivation of beginning teachers.

In addition, statistically significant differences were found between inductees and their administrators for total motivation on the PLMP. Descriptive statistics indicated the inductees reported higher self-concept and value on critical elements when compared to the scores of their administrators. Several of these included valuing the professional reading necessary to plan differentiated instruction and model thinking; being confident when engaging students in collaborative learning; and being confident in the ability to engage students in higher order thinking. In other words, the PLMP revealed incongruence between the beginning teachers and their administrators in numerous elements of effective instruction with the teachers reporting higher motivation than that seen by administrators during observations and interactions. Given the findings from this study, the challenge was to support the professional learning of these novice teachers in ways that nurtured the intrinsic motivation to be as effective as possible in their classrooms.

The building leaders in these districts are now dialoguing about their needs and how to best provide professional learning opportunities during the early months of teaching, and indeed, throughout all years of a professional career. Though all the administrators we worked with welcomed data from the PLMP and continue to use it now with both novice and veteran teachers, one building principal saw the results of the PLMP as an affirmation of an initiative he had undertaken.

Supplementing Induction

The PLMP Conversational Interview revealed Mark, an administrator in the study, recognized the need to supplement induction for his beginning teachers and does so in ways that motivate his beginning teachers. Mark, in his fifth year as a high school principal in the county where the PLMP was validated, is an avid reader and engages in data-driven decision making. Knowing many new teachers leave the profession after one year due to a lack of administrator support (Ingersoll, 2003), Mark took action to help prevent such attrition with the 15 beginning teachers he had hired during his first year as an administrator. He knew he needed to reach out to his new teachers individually, beyond the district-wide mandated teacher induction program. He asked his district to support monthly lunches for the new teachers and himself. He was given funding to pilot the initiative. Mark designed these lunches to meet individual needs using questions and concerns from the novice

teachers as well as his own observations. Mark worked hard to ensure he met with each teacher at least once each month during his or her lunch period. The process honored their planning time and offered impactful professional learning in a risk free setting.

Mark is convinced this simple, low-cost, differentiated approach to professional learning is the reason he hasn't lost any new teachers in the past five years. He believes this individualized, school-based approach is the only way to support not only novice teachers, but all educators. He is comfortable with a personalized, responsive approach and hopes other administrators will see its value and consider adopting such practices. As Mark noted to his colleagues, teachers who are motivated to be as effective as possible in their classrooms are also valuable members of a professional learning community.

Though Mark has been engaged in supportive dialogue with his inductees for several years, he has added the PLMP and the PLMP Conversational Interview to his data collection system. He will use it to inform not only his lunch conversations with his inductees but professional learning for all of his teachers.

Using the PLMP to Inform the Conversation

The PLMP study provided an opportunity for Mark to share his success with the group. And, after listening to descriptions of the rich conversations he was engaged in, Kathleen and her colleagues felt they had found a way to support their novice teachers. The group became committed to using the PLMP as a path to designing and delivering responsive professional learning.

The PLMP proved to be a reliable measure of the effectiveness of professional learning motivation. More important, however, its use began important dialogue within school buildings and across a community of leaders focused on nurturing the motivation of novice teachers through personalized professional learning. Though the PLMP and the PLMP Conversational Interview were used with beginning teachers in this study, we suggest the tools can be used to evaluate professional learning with all teachers. Self-reflection and on-going conversations are critical to what is sure to be a nomadic journey toward effective instruction.

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