“Regard Me”: Learner Engagement and the Satisfaction of Basic Needs in Professional Development

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One Theme, One Story

- 25 teachers, pre-K-12, 4-30 years of experience
- One theme: learner engagement
- One story: Wayne
  - 25+ years, all at the same school
  - Therapeutic public high school
  - Taught range of subjects before settling in English
“One of the first things I came across when I came here was these kids that we work with are smart, but yet they’re not school smart. If you know what I mean … They’re reading at a first or second grade level and they’re 18, [but] they can play me like a violin. And they’re really good socially… [Y]ou start saying what does intelligence mean… [But] then how do I figure out – because I was dumbfounded.

“I had **no idea how to teach a guy at 18 who can’t read.** I hadn’t been trained. I went to Divinity School.”
The Unfulfilled Promise of Professional Development

- Among three large urban school districts (TNTP, 2015):
  - $18,000 per teacher per year
  - 150 hours per year
  - “No type, amount or combination of development activities appears more likely than any other to help teachers improve substantially…” (p. 2)

- Mirroring decades of teachers’ intuition about PD (e.g., Calvert, 2016; Gates Foundation, 2015; Johnson, 1990; Smylie, 1989)
“If it was a pie chart, [professional development] would be like 85 percent bad. But there’s 15 percent good.”

— Chelsea, K-8 inclusion specialist
Learner engagement is important for learning.

Teachers are learners.

If teachers are not engaged, they are less likely to learn.
Self-Determination Theory

- Basic needs “innate, universal, and essential for well-being” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 232)
- *Intrinsic or extrinsic motivation*
Learner Engagement

- Learner engagement and motivation long seen as essential for effective teaching and sustained student learning (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Turner et al., 2014)

- Teacher motivation positively associated with participation in learning activities and the application of new instructional strategies (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Janke, Nitsche, & Dickhäuser, 2015; Shulman & Shulman, 2004)

- Given the central role of motivation and engagement in learning, its absence from several prominent frameworks for effective PD is notable (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; van Veen, Zwart, & Meirink, 2012)
Methodology

- Single critical case study, designed to extend and further elaborate SDT within the context of teacher professional development

- Drawn from larger sample of 25 public school teachers across five districts
  - Pre-K through 12th grade
  - Between 4 and 30 years of experience

- Interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes

- Focused on two professional learning experiences: (1) their “most powerful,” and (2) one they would like “never to have again”

- Multiple rounds of descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013)

- Thematic memos and participant profiles used to identify patterns for more focused analysis (Maxwell, 2005)
Wayne’s Story
Beliefs About Improvement

“You can’t really do great professional development if you’re not seeing the students in that school in action. You can only go so far with teachers with conceptual ideas. You have to see where the rubber meets the road …I mean, of course …I could go to a great conferring thing and I could be inspired for three or four hours, but for real great change **I need someone to see how I confer.** Really, to me.”
Wayne’s powerful learning experience:

One three-hour after school workshop (3:00-6:00) with David Johnson, a consultant from the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College

“It was set in a large room. We sat in kind of a circular type thing. He was in the front. He had an overhead projector and tons of—this was pre-whatever, um, whatever those clear things were. Transparencies, it’s been awhile. So he came and he asked us what do we want from [the training]… and then he started to introduce his whole thing, which was gonna be a focus on conferencing with kids about their writing. And he talked about it for while and gave examples.”
Nurture inner motivational resources

Use non controlling language

Be responsive to students’ questions and comments

Deci et al., 1982; Reeve, 2006

Autonomy

a “desire to self-organize experience and behavior” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231)

“I’d be like, ‘Well, hey, wait a sec, but what about…?’, and he’d pull out another transparency to talk about that…. The work reflected some of the challenges of my students …[and] the fact that he was able to [pull] out texts of such struggling writers made me feel like he was talking to my students, what I face on a daily basis. And I think that’s what made it, you know, feel more transformative.”

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Feelings of competence often aroused by positive feedback from a trusted source (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

“He gave me new tools of conversation. He taught me to better use text to show kids what you’re looking for… Not that I was new to that, but it just sort of banged it home. So, I’m like, ‘Wow, if he’s doing that with me, I’ve gotta do more of this stuff.’”
Relatedness

Essential for the process of internalizing — or fully integrating — extrinsically motivated activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Characterized by reciprocity

a feeling of being “personally accepted by and significant to others, and to feel cared for by others and caring of them
“[In professional development,] you want to ... feel like there’s a back-and-forth. So I’d say the relational part comes back to me there. He was able to make us like him... by honoring us and being funny and interesting and not dogmatic, you know? ‘Oh, that doesn’t work? Let’s try this,’ rather than, ‘No, you do it this way,’ you see what I mean? ... That little thing there means everything to me, right? Don’t we all wanna be special? Isn’t that the way it works? I mean, I know when he goes home he forgets I exist. I don’t care about that. I’m not trying to be special on that level, but at that moment I want him to be like, I want him to regard me... You know, I always say to teachers when they first work here, the kids here wanna feel like you love them to the point that you will jump out of a building for them. You won’t, but ... people want to feel cared for at a certain level.”
regard

verb

1: to consider and appraise usually from a particular point of view • is highly regarded as a mechanic

2: to pay attention to • take into consideration or account

3 a: to show respect or consideration for
   b: to hold in high esteem

4: to look at
Implications

- Autonomy-supportive behaviors and demeanors may allow teachers to find meaning and relevance in content, leading to greater ownership of the material and applications to practice.

- Relatedness is especially critical in compliance-driven, externally regulated learning experiences.

- Research and design frameworks should attend to motivation and engagement (e.g., Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Korthagen, 2010, 2017).
Thank you

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