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**‘Regard me’: A case study of learner engagement and the satisfaction of basic needs  
in continuing professional development**

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*Abstract*

Learner engagement is essential for deep and sustained learning, yet it is seldom included in empirical frameworks for effective continuing professional development (CPD), which tend to privilege broad design features over learner-centred strategies. In this critical case study, I consider this gap by applying the lens of self-determination theory (SDT) to analyse in depth what one U.S.-based teacher described as a transformational professional learning experience. Observing the ways in which learner engagement and facilitators’ pedagogical practices combine to satisfy SDT’s basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and to shape this teacher’s practice, I suggest that relational responsiveness – what the focus teacher in this study calls ‘regard’ – is an important and under-theorised quality in powerful professional learning. I conclude with theoretical and practical implications for the design and study of continuing professional development.

Many teachers would have no trouble imagining this scenario: at the end of a long school day, they are sitting in a room with their colleagues and find themselves sneaking a look at their smartphone – something they have often upbraided their own students for doing – maybe to check their email or social media, maybe to make a grocery list, maybe to look at their considerable to-do list for the rest of the week. Self-consciously looking up, they notice other colleagues doing the same. When a voice suddenly directs them to get into small groups and respond to a question, they snap out of their reverie and wonder what they may have missed.

This is what it looks like to be a disengaged learner, and it is in many ways a caricatured view of continuing professional development (CPD) and a perspective shared by many education stakeholders. Consider a 2014 Government consultation from the Department for Education (DfE) in the United Kingdom, which noted ‘feedback from the profession has consistently indicated that too many of the development opportunities on offer are of variable quality’ (p. 4). Similarly, a survey of more than 1,300 U.S. teachers found that ‘professional development is viewed more as a compliance exercise than a learning activity’ (Gates Foundation 2014; see also Hustler *et al.* 2003). This uneven perspective towards CPD is replicated across professions. In a study of professional learning among therapists corroborated with professionals across domains, including teachers, Webster-Wright (2010) found many individual practitioners were dismissive or ambivalent towards continuing professional learning. Although research on student engagement is quite vast (Shirley and Hargreaves 2021), the body of empirical evidence on what contributes to *teachers’* engagement or disengagement in professional learning is relatively thin. The positive role of community as a contributor to mutually engaging relationships in

professional learning is well-established (see Lave and Wenger 1991, Kennedy 2005); however, collaborative learning structures such as professional learning communities (PLCs) are insufficient by themselves to ensure individual learner engagement. Indeed, Hargreaves (2008) observed that some PLCs – vaunted for their collegial structure – may be experienced by participants as compliance-driven. To understand what differentiates a compliance-driven PLC from what Hargreaves called a ‘living and learning’ PLC, it is necessary to probe participants’ lived experiences and to ask explicitly about learning experiences that diverge from the norm. For example, when asked about CPD experiences in which they *had* learned, Webster-Wright’s (2010) participants enthusiastically recalled detailed accounts of powerful learning and such accounts may be generative for better understanding engagement (see also Noonan 2019).

Given this, when asked about powerful learning experiences, what do teachers say? How do they describe their motivations for learning? How, if at all, do these experiences change the way they approach teaching or the way they see themselves as teachers? Attending to the stories that emerge from these questions – stories of powerful professional learning – has important implications for how we conceptualise, study, and design CPD. Put simply: teacher engagement matters in professional learning, because if teachers are disengaged they are unlikely to learn.

### *Situating Engagement and Motivation in CPD*

Engagement and motivation, sometimes used interchangeably, are distinct but overlapping concepts. Fredricks *et al.* (2004) identified multiple dimensions of engagement: behavioural (active participation in a task), cognitive (the mental investment in learning), and emotional (positive feelings while engaged in a task). The positive feelings associated with learning – what Fredricks *et al.* refer to as emotional engagement – are central to motivation

insofar as they spark a learner's interest and motivate learning behaviour (e.g. D'Mello and Graesser 2012). Moreover, positive feelings about the learning experience may also emerge from or extend to feelings of attachment to or affection for the instructor (Perry and Booth 2021), a phenomenon referred to later in this paper as 'regard.' Finally, of particular relevance to the questions framing this research, the presence of motivation has been positively associated with teachers' active participation in learning activities and the application of new instructional strategies (Shulman and Shulman 2004, Gorozidis and Papaioannou 2014, Janke *et al.* 2015).

Among the best known theories related to motivation is self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are driven to satisfy three psychological needs that are 'universal, innate, and essential for well-being' (Deci and Ryan 2000, p. 232): autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Moreover, the drive to satisfy these needs relates to the full range of human behaviour across the lifespan, including the imperative to learn among children and adults (Piaget 1952, Knowles 1980, Ryan and Deci 2020). Synthesising the overlap between engagement and motivation, Turner *et al.* (2014) hypothesised that 'students are more engaged when they feel related to others, competent, and autonomous' (p. 1201). Ryan and Deci (2020) add that 'teachers, like their students, have basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness' and that teachers whose needs are well-supported are in turn better positioned to support students (p. 7).

Given this, the absence of learner engagement from many contemporary frameworks for effective CPD is notable (e.g. Garet *et al.* 2001, Ingvarson *et al.* 2005, van Veen *et al.* 2012, Cordingley *et al.* 2015, Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2017). The present study attempts to respond to this gap by attending closely to moments of engagement in one teacher's account of powerful professional learning. Focusing on one teacher's experience – rather than an

accumulation of diverse experiences – allows me to devote sufficient attention to the uniquely individual dimension of learner engagement and the processes that supported it while also accounting for the context in which the learning took place. Moreover, in interrogating engagement as an essential dimension of continuing professional development, I hope to extend the theoretical work of Deci and Ryan into the domain of teacher learning. Previous empirical work linking SDT and teacher learning has focused on teachers' motivation to participate or not participate in training (Goroizidis and Papaioannou 2014) and on the holistic development of pre-service teachers (Meijer *et al.* 2009, Zwart *et al.* 2015), but to date there have been no studies that consider the relationship between self-identified powerful learning experiences and the satisfaction of basic needs. Specifically, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How does one U.S.-based teacher describe engagement in powerful professional learning?
2. How closely does one teacher's account of powerful learning align with the satisfaction of basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness?
3. What are the implications of teachers' perceptions of engagement in powerful professional learning for CPD design and research?

In the pages that follow, I first briefly review the landscape of continuing professional development as well as the theoretical foundations of motivation and learner engagement that guide my analysis. After discussing my methods, I present an exploratory case study of a single learning experience to consider how these needs converge and interact. I conclude with provisional implications for CPD design and research.

## Literature Review

### *Continuing Professional Development*

Defined broadly and inclusively, continuing professional development may be understood as activities or relationships intended to support and develop teachers' instructional practice. Activities denoted as 'professional development' vary widely in design and may include in-district or out-of-district workshops, college-level courses, formal or informal mentoring relationships, teacher inquiry groups, or peer observations (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2009).

CPD is seen by a broad cross-section of stakeholders – teachers, principals, policymakers – as essential for instructional improvement and student learning. Indeed, many local departments of education in the U.S. have made professional development systems a linchpin of their instructional improvement efforts, including leveraging CPD to help teachers implement new content standards (see Borko *et al.* 2002, Berry *et al.* 2012). One indicator of the enormous faith placed in the potential of CPD to drive instructional improvement is the high levels spending on teacher development. In 2021, the U.S. federal budget allocated an estimated US\$2.2 billion to fund educator professional learning programmes (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021). A detailed breakdown of CPD costs in five urban U.S. school districts included materials, equipment, facilities, fees, and staff time (Miles *et al.* 2004), all of which amounted to an estimated 2 to 7% of district budgets. Using a more generous formula that included indirect staff support, coaching and peer observations, and investments in teachers' degree attainment, the U.S.-based organisation TNTP (2015) studied three large urban districts and estimated they spent on average US\$18,000 per teacher per year to improve instructional practice, 6 to 9% of district budgets and between 4 and 15 times the cost per employee in comparable industries.

And yet, despite proclamations of CPD's importance, apparent consensus on effective design elements, and deep investments of time and money, many studies on CPD's impact on teacher practice and student learning have yielded null results (Hill *et al.* 2013; see also Garet *et al.* 2008, Harris and Sass 2011, Jacob and Lefgren 2002). Even TNTP (2015) observed that districts' investment of money and time in CPD had little apparent effect on teaching quality, as measured by multiple modes of teacher evaluation. Moreover, as noted above, many teachers have also long been dismayed by CPD's failure to realise its potential (e.g. Smylie 1989, Johnson 1990, Calvert 2016, Linder *et al.* 2016).

Encouragingly, there is some indication that teachers' voices and perspectives are being considered in the study and design of CPD. Recent research has urged providers and policymakers to be more sensitive to context and to design professional learning that is school-based and participant-driven (e.g. Borko 2004, Ingvarson *et al.* 2005, Webster-Wright 2009). Hochberg and Desimone (2010) advised that CPD designers and policymakers consider several contextual factors, adding that 'it is incumbent on professional development experiences to be considerate of teachers' backgrounds and existing knowledge and beliefs' (p. 100). In addition, practitioners have been outspoken in urging policymakers to integrate teachers' varied perspectives and experience when it comes to professional development (Gates Foundation 2014, Calvert 2016). Integrating teachers' perspectives into the design and implementation of professional development is surely important for its overall effectiveness, but it is also important to bear in mind that professional learning – like all learning – is experienced and interpreted at the level of the individual (Noonan 2019).

#### *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)*

Individuals are born with a powerful evolutionary motivation to learn. Further illuminating the individual imperative to learn, Deci and Ryan (1985, Deci and Ryan 2000)

identified three innate psychological needs that motivated human behaviour across the lifespan: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They further observed that satisfaction of these basic needs was interdependent and mutually reinforcing, noting that ‘correlations among satisfaction of the three needs, at the global or general level, across situations is relatively and expectably high’ (Deci and Ryan 2014, p. 55). Moreover, one’s motivation to satisfy these needs could be distinguished by the reasons underlying one’s actions. *Intrinsic motivation* referred to behaviours done out of interest or enjoyment, and *extrinsic motivation* referred to behaviours undertaken for reasons other than the activity itself (Ryan and Deci 2000).

Although distinct, the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are, in fact, closely integrated in the ways that they promote or thwart motivation. Autonomy appears to be especially central in this regard in that behaviours aimed at fulfilling one’s need for autonomy – such as providing choice or encouraging self-initiation – often contribute to fulfilling the other needs, as well. Deci and Ryan *et al.* (2013) explained, ‘when people support someone’s autonomy they typically also support that person’s relatedness and competence, for example by providing warmth and acknowledging effective performance’ (pp. 33–34; see also Ryan and Deci *et al.* 2013). Related to education, there has been ample evidence that autonomy-supportive behaviours are associated with student motivation and perceived competence (e.g. Ryan and Grolnick 1986, Deci *et al.* 1991, Vansteenkiste *et al.* 2004, Reeve 2006). Núñez and León (2019) further found that autonomy-supportive behaviours were positively related to students’ feelings of engagement. In contrast, the presence of external rewards or pressures or punishments, each of which people may experience as attempts to control behaviours and thus inhibit autonomy, have been found to thwart intrinsic motivation (see Deci *et al.* 1999).

Relatedness has, at times, been seen as less central to intrinsic motivation than autonomy and competence, but it remains essential for conceptualising engagement. This is because, as Deci and Ryan (1991) observed, '[e]nhancing one's self involves assimilating one's world (especially the social world)' (p. 239). Ryan and Powelson (1991) defined relatedness as 'the experience of connecting with others in ways that conduce toward well-being and self-cohesion in all individuals involved' (p. 53). Noting that many intrinsically motivated activities happen in solitude, Deci and Ryan (2000) nevertheless noted that 'a secure relational base appears to provide a needed backdrop – a distal support – for intrinsic motivation' (p. 235).

In addition, relatedness is integral for the process of *internalising* extrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), extrinsic motivation, long thought to be a relatively invariant contrast to intrinsic motivation, could better be understood along a spectrum defined by the degree to which behaviours were regulated internally or externally. At one end of this spectrum were fully *externally regulated* behaviours, undertaken to be in compliance with external demands, generally experienced as controlling, and classically understood as the contrast to intrinsic motivation. At the other end of this spectrum were *integrated* behaviours, actions prompted by external forces but which had become fully assimilated and made coherent with one's values. Thus, even though attempts to induce or coerce behaviour could negatively affect intrinsic motivation, the presence of supportive peers and a high degree of relatedness could, over time, help one assimilate these behaviours into one's value system and identity. Indeed, among teachers, strong professional communities have been understood as essential for facilitating effective implementation of school improvement reforms, many of which begin as externally regulated but can become more integrated over time (e.g. Rosenholtz 1989, Elmore 2004).

Within discrete learning experiences, there are many effective strategies for promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (See Table 1 for a summary.) Feelings of competence could be facilitated by strategies such as appropriately demanding tasks, scaffolding, or formative feedback (Bransford *et al.* 2000, Hattie and Yates 2014). As noted above, providing choices and using non-controlling language could encourage autonomy (Núñez and León 2015). Similarly, open classroom climates and room for debate promote autonomous thinking and action (Hess 2009). Opportunities for group work and cooperative learning have been associated with more positive peer relationships as well as numerous other beneficial outcomes (Roseth *et al.* 2008, Martin and Dowson 2009).

(INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

## **Methods**

For this analysis, I employ a single case design, drawn from a larger study in which I asked 25 teachers to select and describe in detail one of their ‘most powerful professional learning experiences’. Many previous studies have studied teachers’ sense-making about CPD experiences aligned with desirable design elements (e.g. Grossman *et al.* 2001, Harnett 2012, Vaandering 2014, Wells 2014). These studies remain valuable for their thick descriptions of learning in action, but insofar as the focal learning experiences under study were determined by the researchers and not the teachers themselves they remain tethered to a dominant discourse in which CPD is *done to* teachers rather than something teachers engage in as competent self-authorising professionals (Webster-Wright 2009). By asking teachers to define and identify professional learning experiences for analysis, I believed I would be more likely to hear experiences that were intrinsically motivating (or extrinsically motivated experiences that over time became *integrated* into their sense of who they were as teachers). Moreover, by letting teachers choose CPD experiences they viewed as meaningful I sought

to demonstrate respect for their perspectives and judgement. In order to present a textured portrait of teacher learning and engagement in this paper, I selected a single case from the full dataset for in-depth analysis. The narrative in the selected case was rich in detail about the emotional and behavioural engagement associated with the learning experience, but it also presented a compelling challenge to conventional wisdom on effective CPD.

Specifically, the powerful learning experience identified by the focus participant was of short duration and relatively didactic in structure.

As Yin (2014) notes, single-case designs are appropriate in several instances. Among the appropriate rationales for single-case studies is the *critical* case study, which is closely tied to well-articulated theories and seeks to confirm, challenge, or extend them in some way. In presenting this case, I hold that the propositions associated with self-determination theory are widely accepted and attempt to further elaborate these propositions and the processes that support the fulfilment of basic needs within the unique context of teacher professional learning. Notably, Ryan and Deci (2020) have recently called for more qualitative studies that use SDT as an analytic lens in order ‘to fill in a more detailed picture of experiences, practices, and motives involved in need supportive schools’ (p. 9).

#### *Data Collection*

As part of the larger study from which this case is drawn, I conducted 90-minute semi-structured interviews as a way for my participants to ‘reconstruct and reflect’ on one self-defined powerful learning experience and a corresponding negative learning experience (Seidman 2013). Given that the impact of learning experiences become more evident with time, post-hoc interviews enabled my participant to consider the long-term impact of CPD on their practice. I also drafted ‘impressionistic memos’ immediately following each interview, in which I reconstructed the context of the interview and documented preliminary

questions and potential patterns that seemed to recur across interviews (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997). These memos served as additional data sources.

### *Data Analysis*

After transcribing audio files of the interviews, I created ‘profiles’ for selected participants whose transcript data lent itself well to a narrative arc, including the focus participant of this study. As Seidman (2013) notes, the process of developing a participant profile can serve to ‘find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant’s experience ... and to link the individual’s experience to the social and organisational context’ (p. 123). Using profiles as a basis for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2012), I conducted multiple rounds of descriptive coding (Saldaña 2013) on the full sample of interviews, listening within and across cases for patterns in teachers’ motivations for learning and the need-satisfying pedagogical strategies within their learning experiences. Parallel to coding, I drafted a series of thematic memos to explore these patterns in more depth, making connections to empirical literature. From these accounts, I developed integrative case studies to explore the dynamic interplay of teachers’ values and the pedagogical strategies related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As noted above, I then selected one of these integrative case studies that demonstrated well the interaction between instructional strategies and learner engagement, as embodied by satisfaction of Deci and Ryan’s three basic needs, and for which there was a sufficiently coherent narrative enabling me to account more fully for the personal and organisational context in which the learning took place.

### *Limitations*

The single case design, while constructive, does have limitations, which I readily acknowledge. For example, while my data illustrate the ways in which SDT may intersect with one U.S. teacher’s CPD experience, it is in fact only a singular experience and cannot be

generalised. For that matter, retrospective self-reports may be coloured by the selective haze of episodic autobiographical memory, which is necessarily comprised of individuals' *reinterpretation* of their experience (Thomsen and Brinkmann 2009). Moreover, my data are cross-sectional and thus unable to fully account for how my participant's perceptions of professional learning and his motivations may have evolved or may yet evolve beyond what is reported here. Regarding researcher positionality, my interest in studying professional learning was shaped in part by my own experiences as a participant in and a facilitator of CPD for educators, and so I acknowledge that I came to my analysis with a constellation of assumptions about what 'good' or 'bad' CPD looked like (Peshkin 1988). To help mitigate researcher bias, I took steps to 'bracket' my personal experiences when collecting data, and I offered member checks to all my participants – including the focus participant profiled below – allowing them to view transcripts and clarify their stories (Creswell, 2013).

## **Findings**

Wayne<sup>1</sup> was a 25-year veteran high school English teacher who had spent his entire career at public school programme for students with high emotional needs. A former divinity school student who came to teaching by 'happenstance,' Wayne was unequivocal about the way he struggled early in his career to teach writing. He explained, 'I basically tried to say, "This is how you do it," and then we'll put it up on the board and I'll come and correct. But I think that was my deficiency ... It was so overwhelming.' After Wayne had been teaching for 12 years, David Johnson, an external specialist with expertise in reading and writing instruction, came to give a three-hour workshop on how to confer with struggling writers. At a glance, the session – as recollected by Wayne – seemed unremarkable and not unlike numerous teachers' reports of typical afterschool CPD sessions:

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... 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.

And yet, despite the boilerplate nature of this description, Wayne's enthusiasm – even more than a decade after the fact – was effusive and suggested that the outward appearance and design of a workshop was not necessarily (or even primarily) what made the learning experience powerful. Clearly, for Wayne, this workshop with its 'sage on the stage' set-up resonated deeply. What could explain Wayne's positive assessment, even after so many years?

Looking back, Wayne recognised Johnson's expertise as something to help him address his own shortcomings. The bulk of the presentation was Johnson giving examples of how he conferred with students and showing transparencies of student work on an overhead projector. But Wayne reported that the learning experience was 'transformative,' leading to a decade of involvement with Writers Workshop and a sustained leadership role in his district. Critical to the durable impact of this experience, I argue, were the ways in which it helped to satisfy Wayne's innate need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

### *Autonomy*

Defined as a 'desire to self-organize experience and behavior' (Deci and Ryan 2000, p. 231), autonomy may take various forms in CPD, most commonly in the way teachers opt into or out of experiences. Because this workshop was required for Wayne, he needed to

exercise his autonomy differently, asserting his learning needs *within* the workshop and trying to bend Johnson's presentation to respond to those needs. Given the lives of his students – many of whom experienced trauma and few of whom would attend college – Wayne was outspoken about his need for examples of student work he could relate to: 'I'd be like, "Well, hey, wait a sec, but what about... ?"', and he'd pull out another transparency to talk about that.' More importantly, Wayne added, '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.'

Transformation, of course, implies a high bar: those who experience transformative learning are changed in ways that cannot easily be reversed (see Mezirow 1991). The experience becomes an inflexion point by which individuals mark time – before and after. And indeed, Wayne seemed to mark his career by this one afternoon training. After the workshop, he said, he was 'on fire' for Writers Workshop: 'It made all the difference of getting me pumped, just pumped my tires and then you wanna ride,' he explained. He proceeded to attend numerous Writers Workshop trainings. He joined a district-wide coordinating committee for the implementation of the programme. He became a trainer and coach for other teachers in his district. And according to Wayne, these choices to undertake additional responsibilities emerged directly from his powerful professional learning experience. Johnson's ability to adapt to Wayne's needs was essential to making the learning experience so meaningful and shaping the trajectory of his career, but these adaptations might not have happened had Wayne not felt free to shape the experience to respond to his shortcomings.

According to SDT, two types of actions can be considered autonomous: intrinsically motivated behaviours and extrinsically motivated behaviours that become fully integrated (Deci and Ryan 1991). Systems of external regulation, such as those relying on rewards and punishment to induce desirable behaviour, are anathema to intrinsic motivation and autonomy. In the case of Wayne, however, his involvement with Writers Workshop began as a form of compliance – a required afterschool workshop – but over time it may be viewed as autonomous to the extent that the requirement aligned with his own values about what was essential and valuable knowledge. Moreover, Wayne’s subsequent endorsement of Writers Workshop – as evidenced by his participation as a trainer who led other required workshops – was evidence of a teacher engaging in externally regulated behaviour not for compliance but ‘as a source of spontaneous enjoyment or satisfaction’ (Deci and Ryan 2000, p. 236). What had been required of him (externally regulated) became what he wanted (fully integrated).

Of the three needs identified by Deci and Ryan, autonomy was perhaps the most basic insofar as its fulfilment facilitated the satisfaction of both competence and relatedness. Unsurprisingly, then, Wayne’s experience provides a window into how the presence of autonomy-supportive behaviours – such as Johnson’s flexibility and willingness to respond to Wayne’s requests – also helped to satisfy the basic needs for competence and relatedness.

#### *Competence and Relatedness*

To satisfy one’s need for competence, it is less important to *be* competent than to *feel* competent or efficacious (White 1959, Bandura 1997). What’s more, as Deci and Ryan (2000) pointed out, a feeling of competence was often aroused by positive feedback from a trusted source. In reflecting on professional development generally, Wayne was insistent that observation and feedback were critical for improvement. ‘[F]eedback in context is so huge,’

he explained, ‘because I might think I’m doing it better than I am or worse than I am.’ To illustrate this point, Wayne recalled a time when he was first learning how to use Writers Workshop and an expert coach came to visit his class:

And immediately, she made corrections on some of the things I was saying to the students... Like she just immediately [said], ‘I think you’re breaking it down wrong in how you’re presenting it.’ It was a small thing, but it meant a lot at the time. And I ...couldn’t step out of myself to see me. ...[L]ike I thought I was doing it right.

Ironically, perhaps, David Johnson – whose presentation was so transformative for Wayne – never saw him teach and never gave feedback on his teaching. And yet, the practical nature of the presentation and his affirming responses to Wayne’s questions had a similar effect: Wayne saw him as a trustworthy source of expertise and one who could then hold up a mirror to Wayne’s practice. As Harper-Hill *et al.* (2020) concluded, perceptions of facilitators’ credibility or trustworthiness are related to feelings of engagement. Speaking about Johnson, Wayne said, ‘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”.’

In these moments of responsiveness and encouragement, Wayne felt *seen* and *cared for* by David Johnson in a way that satisfied his need for relatedness – what Deci and Ryan (2014) called a feeling of being ‘personally accepted by and significant to others, and to feel cared for by others and caring of them’ (p. 53). In addition to its importance for wellbeing, relatedness is also critical for learning. In articulating his theory of transformative learning for adults, Mezirow (2000) noted ‘the crucial role of supportive relationships and a supportive environment in making possible a more confident, assured sense of personal

efficacy' (p. 25). Indeed, in his reflections on this learning experience more than a decade after the fact, Wayne elevated this perception of care into a privileged place in his assessment of Johnson's performance:

[Y]ou 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 as engagement*

Wayne's notion of *regard* – a sense of seeing and being seen that centres and deepens the relationship between learners and teachers and that evokes positive emotions about learning – reflects the dimension of emotional engagement, but it also calls to mind the Black feminist scholar bell hooks's (1994) notion of 'engaged pedagogy' and Seymour Sarason's (1999) conceptualisation of teaching-as-performance.

Grounding his notion of the teacher as a performing artist in Stanislavsky's (1969) theory of artistic performance, Sarason (1999) described the relationship between performers and their audience. Specifically, he highlighted the expectation of an audience that they will be respected no matter how many times a performance is given: 'Audiences do not want to

feel that they are being treated to a routinized performance,' he wrote, '[T]hey want to identify with the role, they want to "lose themselves," to be caught up in the welter of thought and feeling the role requires. Audiences want to be respected, not to feel they are being taken for granted' (Sarason 1999, p. 13). Stanislavsky (1969) popularised this orientation towards performance – what he called 'true art' – and contrasted it to the 'school of representation,' through which performers perfected mechanical repetition but lacked feeling and inner motivation. The school of representation, Stanislavsky (1969) cautioned, was 'effective, [but] not powerful' (p. 22). Similarly, hooks (1994) recalled with appreciation the mission-driven approach of Black teachers in her segregated elementary school and the feeling of being 'seen' and known. In her context, teaching was not merely about the transfer of information but about the ecstasy of learning and the reciprocal relationship between teachers and learners. Like Sarason, hooks viewed teaching as a 'performative act'; like Stanislavsky, she argued that the 'engaged voice' of a teacher must be responsive to the needs and perspectives of their learners (p. 11).

In Johnson, Wayne experienced a teacher who was deeply knowledgeable and skilled at improvisation. Johnson had a role to play but not a precise script and so he was able to be responsive – not routinised – in a way that Wayne perceived as profoundly respectful. In contrast, Wayne recalled another well-regarded authority on adolescent literacy who came to his school, Richard Baker ('people all worship this dude,' said Wayne). Like Johnson, Baker was a content expert. Like Johnson, Baker led a workshop at the school. Unlike Johnson, Baker *did* come to visit Wayne's classroom. But Wayne's assessment of Baker was far less adulatory than his assessment of Johnson, and the difference seemed to be largely in how they made him *feel* as an 'audience' member. In Wayne's mind, Baker calculated and routinised his performance in a way that undermined his message, paying insufficient

attention to the tacit relationship between him as a facilitator and the teachers who were his learners. Baker, said Wayne, ‘came with a kind of like, “I wanna tell you what I wanna tell you” ... and I want someone coming from the, “I want to know what you need.” ... I thought he wants me to *be* him, but I want him to teach *me*.’

Wayne’s beliefs about the value of observation and feedback helped explain what he found so valuable about Johnson’s seminal performance more than a decade earlier, even though Johnson never observed him: regard. To be regarded is to be seen. In talking about why classroom observation was necessary for change, Wayne said, ‘I need someone to see how *I* confer.’ When done well, such observations helped Wayne to step back and see himself in a way he could not have done alone. Reciprocally, Wayne needed to *feel seen* so that he could then *see himself*, something that David Johnson provided for him and something that became solidified over his many years of involvement with Writers Workshop. Ultimately, the identity formed by his learning experience may have been more durable than the story he told about it.

### **Implications**

From the preceding exploratory case, I draw several potential implications for the design and study of continuing professional development. Reflecting much of the SDT literature, of the three needs identified by self-determination theory, autonomy seemed most catalysing for Wayne insofar as it helped him shape an experience to meet his learning needs and further satisfy his needs for competence and relatedness. Indeed, Wayne’s experience may offer instructive implications for the design of district- or school-required CPD, so much of which can be seen by teachers as an imposition or an attempt to impede their autonomy.

First, facilitators who build in autonomy-supportive behaviours during CPD may support teachers to find meaning in the content, which may in turn lead them to assume greater ownership over the material and to make substantive changes in their practice. In Wayne's case, it was not clear that there were design elements in his workshop with David Johnson that enabled him to exercise the autonomy he did – rather, it may have been more a mark of Johnson's openness to participant feedback or his own relational orientation. In this way, the need satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness may be seen as mutually reinforcing.

Second, the years-long leadership role that resulted from Wayne's assertiveness (and Johnson's responsiveness) in the CPD session is instructive. As suggested by SDT, the need-satisfaction of relatedness may help to *internalise* extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 2000). That is, externally regulated experiences in which people see their behaviour controlled by sanctions and rewards may over time become more consonant with personal values and identities. In Wayne's case, this one three-hour workshop led to a durable connection with the content of Writers Workshop and an intrinsically motivated imperative to teach other teachers what he learned.

Third, Wayne's centring of *regard* – and the ability of a facilitator to evoke it or not – is a reminder that learning environments in CPD are profoundly shaped, for better and worse, by the social and emotional dynamics between facilitators and learners. Perry and Booth (2021) affirmed the need for CPD participants to feel an emotional connection and rapport with their facilitators and suggested that facilitators' capacity to elicit these connections was a combination of inherent dispositions and pedagogical judgement. On the surface, the presentations of Johnson and Baker – two content experts who visited Wayne's school and delivered afterschool workshops – were quite similar in design, but the rapport

between Wayne and the two facilitators represented a dramatic contrast: where Baker seemed to demand compliance, Johnson forged a feeling of partnership.

Finally, CPD research would be greatly enhanced by closer attention to both teachers' motivations and the relationship between CPD facilitators and teachers. Regarding attention to teacher motivations, research frameworks for the study of CPD ought to privilege teachers' values and experiences in order to better understand how CPD design does or does not meet their learning goals and basic needs (e.g. Korthagen 2004, 2017, Hochberg and Desimone 2010), an inclusion which could in turn encourage research that explicitly accounts for the satisfaction of teachers' basic needs (e.g. Zwart *et al.* 2015). Janke *et al.* (2015) noted that attention to teachers' 'need satisfaction' had important implications for their orientation towards continued learning, adding that 'efforts to motivate teachers to engage in professional development will fail when teachers' basic psychological needs are not considered or are even thwarted' (p. 193). In addition, as suggested by this study, the dispositions and actions of facilitators have a meaningful – perhaps central – role when it comes to teacher engagement in CPD. As such, research focused on the dynamic nature of the relationship between facilitators and learners – and how facilitators can further develop their relational capacity (Lange and Meaney 2013) – could illuminate how facilitation and learner engagement interact in the learning process.

## **Conclusion**

Teacher engagement is essential for learning. And as self-determination theory has demonstrated for decades, intrinsic motivation – defined in part by individuals' satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness – is essential for engagement. The fact that so many teachers report feeling disengaged by professional development suggests that these needs have gone largely unfulfilled. One possibility is that the imperative for CPD

improvement at scale has obscured the individual nature of teachers' need satisfaction and thus also their learning. In this paper, I have sought an area where these seemingly duelling imperatives – for individualised attention and for scale – may find some common ground. Self-determination theory places individuals at the centre, but it also makes generalisable claims about what individuals like Wayne need for their wellbeing and how greater learner engagement can contribute to that wellbeing. In education policy debates, teachers themselves are essential resources for showing the way towards greater engagement and thus towards more effective professional learning.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> All names – of teachers and teacher facilitators – are pseudonyms.

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**Table 1.** Instructional strategies and empirical evidence associated with self-development theory

Construct	Related Instructional Strategies	Empirical Support
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing choices</li> <li>• Encouraging self-initiation</li> <li>• Using “non-controlling language”</li> <li>• Using tools for self-evaluation</li> <li>• Offering explanatory rationales</li> </ul>	Hess 2009; Reeve 2006; Ryan & Deci 2013; Ryan & Grolnick 1986; Vansteenkiste <i>et al.</i> 2004
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting appropriately challenging tasks</li> <li>• Scaffolding complex tasks</li> <li>• Asking open-ended questions</li> <li>• Using formative assessment</li> </ul>	Bransford <i>et al.</i> 2000; Hattie & Yates 2014; Ryan & Deci 2013; Turner <i>et al.</i> 2014
Relatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling mutual respect</li> <li>• Creating opportunities for group work</li> <li>• Leveraging shared interests between teachers and students</li> <li>• Mentoring relationships</li> </ul>	Martin & Downson 2009; Roseth <i>et al.</i> 2008; Ryan & Deci 2000; Turner <i>et al.</i> 2014