

Becoming a Community of Novices: *How Teacher Agency Bolstered Professional Learning in a Pandemic Context*

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Spring 2020

EDUCATION

Schools close for millions of kids as teachers get sick and COVID-19 cases surge: Some districts are holding out

[Erin Richards](#) and [Elinor Aspegren](#) USA TODAY
Published 5:01 a.m. ET Nov. 20, 2020 | Updated 4:32 p.m. ET Nov. 23, 2020

All Michigan K-12 schools to close for 3 weeks due to coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Governor says 'this is necessary step to protect'

EDUCATION

Indiana schools closed through the end of the academic year



[Arika Herron](#)
Indianapolis Star

Published 2:38 p.m. ET April 2, 2020 | Updated 5:19 p.m. ET April 2, 2020

EDUCATION

Gov. Pritzker Orders Closure of All Illinois Schools, Including CPS, Over Coronavirus Concerns

[Kristen Thometz](#) | March 13, 2020 7:57 pm

ALBANY

Coronavirus: New York state orders all schools to close for at least two weeks

[Jon Campbell](#) and [Joseph Spector](#) New York State Team
Published 12:04 p.m. ET March 16, 2020 | Updated 6:57 p.m. ET March 16, 2020

EDUCATION

Gov. Greg Abbott orders Texas schools closed to students for rest of 2019-2020 school year



[Molly Smith](#)
El Paso Times

Published 11:30 a.m. MT April 17, 2020 | Updated 5:00 p.m. MT April 17, 2020

Gov. Closes K-12 Vermont Schools Starting Wednesday To Slow Coronavirus

Vermont Public Radio | By [Peter Hirschfeld](#), [Mark Davis](#)
Published March 15, 2020 at 3:51 PM EDT



Seattle Public Schools Close Due to Coronavirus

Seattle's schools serve 55,000 students and it is the first major school system to announce a prolonged closure because of coronavirus.

By [Lauren Camera](#) | March 11, 2020, at 5:39 p.m.

Summer 2020



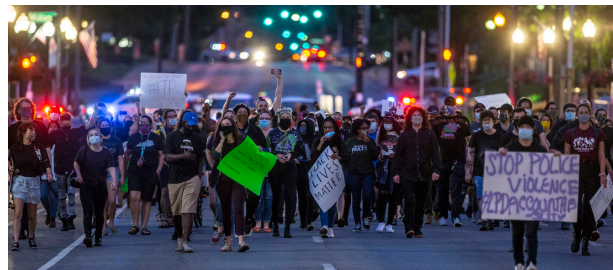
Fabrice Coffrini, AFP



Chloe Collyer, New York Times



Joseph Prezioso, AFP



Ryan C. Hermens, Lexington Herald-Leader

The New York Times

'I Can't Breathe': 4 Minneapolis Officers Fired After Black Man Dies in Custody

"Being black in America should not be a death sentence," the city's mayor said as video of the arrest was widely shared.

The Washington Post

Four Minneapolis officers are fired after video shows one kneeling on neck of black man who later died

By Brittany Shammas, Timothy Bella, Kalle Mettler and Dalton Bennett
May 26, 2020



Craig Lassig, EPA



Gabriel Bouys, AFP



Josh Galemore, Arizona Daily Star

Disequilibrium and Opportunity



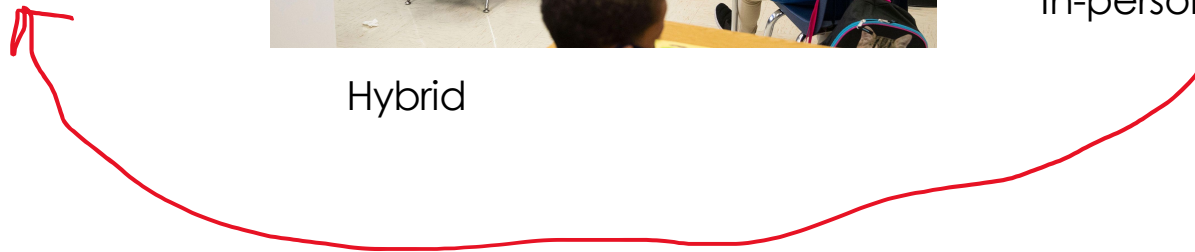
Remote



Hybrid



In-person



Guiding Questions

- ▶ What exactly *did* teachers most need to learn during the pandemic?
- ▶ What kinds of learning opportunities were most meaningful?
- ▶ To what extent were schools and districts a resource or an impediment to teachers' learning?
- ▶ How can teachers' learning experiences between March 2020 and June 2021 inform the "hard reset" we need (Ladson-Billings, 2021)?



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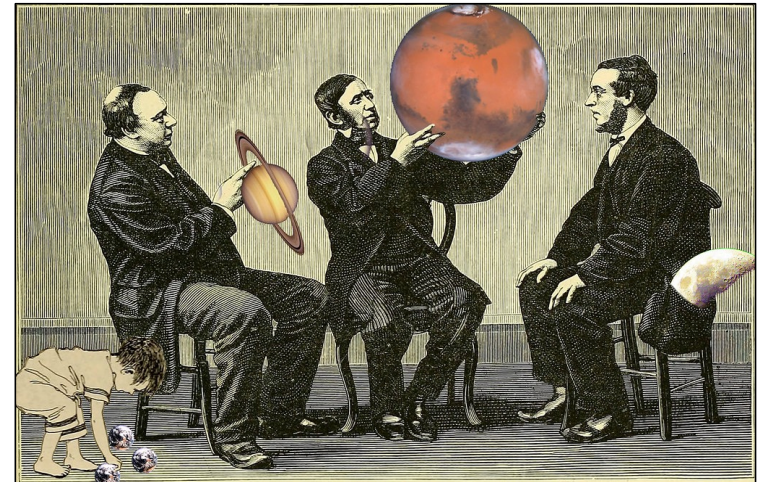
Conceptual Frameworks

▶ Professional Learning

- ▶ Consensus design elements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015)
- ▶ Variable effectiveness at individual level (Carpenter & Krutka, 2015; Noonan, 2019; Schultz & Ravitch, 2013)

▶ Teacher Agency

- ▶ Exercised individually (Brodie, 2019; Coburn, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lortie, 1975)
- ▶ Enabled or constrained by context (Biesta et al., 2015; Giroux, 1998; Holland et al., 1998; Ravitch, 2020)



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Methods

- ▶ **Convergent mixed methods design** (Creswell & Clark, 2017)

- ▶ **Online Survey (n=203)**

- ▶ **28 items:** 19 closed- and 9 open-response items.
- ▶ **Likert-scale items:** types & quality of prof. learning
- ▶ **Open-response items:** experiences of prof. learning
- ▶ *Today, presenting primarily from these data*

- ▶ **Follow-up Focus Groups & Interviews (n=8)**

- ▶ Virtual follow-up focused on deepening our understanding of potential differences by years of experience, geography, teacher role, etc.



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Findings

- ▶ **Early on, teachers recognized a wide variety of learning needs**
 - ▶ Technical needs (Zoom, Google Classroom, Jamboard, Flipgrid)
 - ▶ Pedagogical needs (new models of assessment, classroom management)
 - ▶ Relational / interdependent /community-oriented learning needs (family engagement, social emotional wellbeing)
 - ▶ Larger social justice learning needs (antiracism, anti-oppressive work, LGBTQ+ support)

- ▶ **School- and district-based PL opportunities, by and large, left those needs unmet**
 - ▶ “This past year has really revealed how ineffective PD is in my district and how much teachers have to seek out resources to improve.”
 - ▶ “Teachers were left to figure it out on our own. No support from district or even building level admin. This is what I’ve heard from several others in various districts across [my state].”
 - ▶ “I feel like work around teaching and learning (except for new digital interfaces) has really been put on hold. I am eager for focusing on the why and how instead of the what.”

A gap between learning needs and opportunities

- ▶ “In general, my PD was planned before the pandemic and was not changed to meet the needs of the pandemic.”
- ▶ “Honestly, the formal sessions provided by the district were too little, too late.”

Percentage of respondents identifying school- and district-based PD during the pandemic as “not at all useful” or “only somewhat useful”

64%

School-based

58%

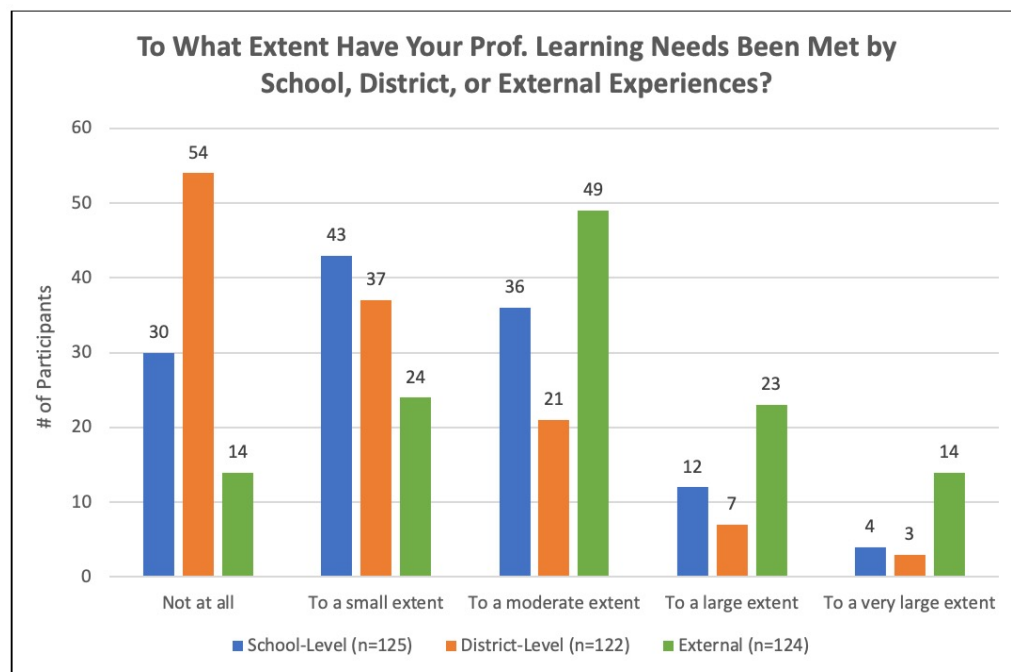
District-based

Professional learning beyond schools and districts

▶ **Percentage of respondents who found learning experiences at least moderately useful, by source:**

- ▶ District-level: 25.4%
- ▶ School-level: 41.6%
- ▶ External: 69.4%

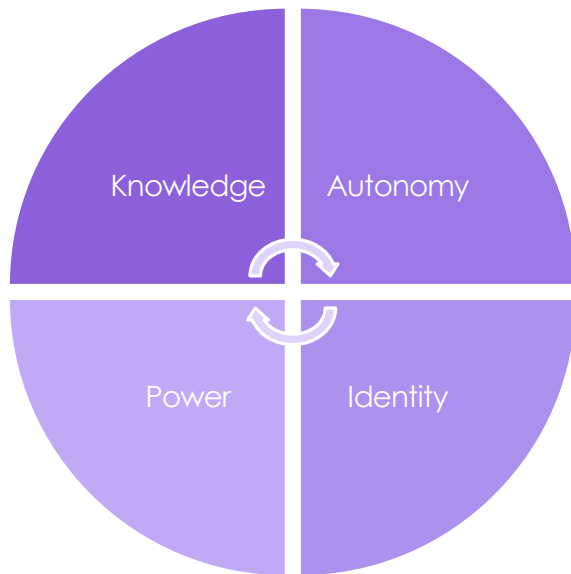
▶ Of 60 responses to an open-ended question about which PD has been most effective, 21 mentioned "collaborating with colleagues"



Collaborating with colleagues

- ▶ **Though often physically separate, teachers turned to each other for needed learning and support.**
 - ▶ “My network of twitter Math educators, experiences like Desmos live, etc, offered me more timely and relevant information.”
 - ▶ “Collaborating with colleagues to support students has been most effective because we are continuously working to reach students before they get lost in the virtual learning experience.”
 - ▶ “Collaborating with colleagues - as this gives a chance to share ideas and to deepen understanding of different concepts, technologies, and teaching strategies. It gives immediate and workable solutions/ideas for problems of practice.
 - ▶ “Collaborating with colleagues and coaches. Colleagues because they know what you are doing through. Coaches because they can pull from their hat of tricks and inspire and model new approaches to teaching.”

Dimensions of agency



For teachers, the multiple dimensions of agency were interacting in complex ways all the time.

(Giroux, 1998)

Looking ahead

▶ The (imperfect) democratization of professional learning

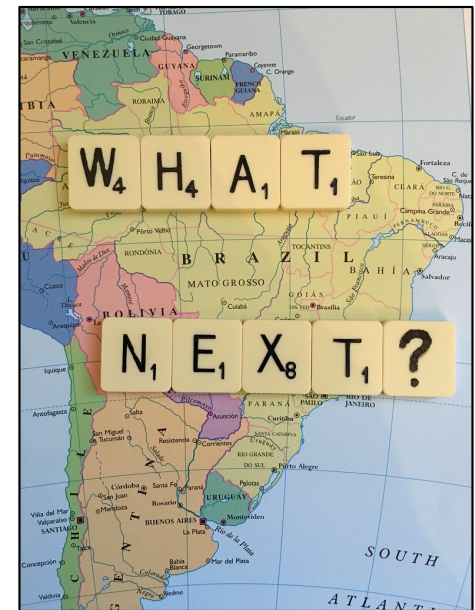
- ▶ To what extent will teachers' enactment of agency in professional learning during the pandemic extend into other domains of their work?
- ▶ How should schools and districts structure PL to preserve teachers' agency and curate common learning experiences?

▶ Balancing agency and justice

- ▶ What is required to ensure teachers' agency is not used to avoid or minimize racial and social justice learning?
- ▶ How might agency be applied as a resource in educators' antiracist learning?

▶ Professional learning and the "hard re-set"

- ▶ What might a "new normal" of professional learning look like?
- ▶ How can a close attention to teachers' experiences guide us? (see also Reich & Mehta, 2021)



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Thank you

- ▶ Please reach out with questions or to follow up:
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