

Running Head: Enabling and Disabling Social Structures of Professional Development

Investigation of Enabling and Disabling
Social Structures of Teacher Professional Development

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Abstract

This study examined the enabling and disabling social structures of teacher professional development within the context of university and school partnerships in a Western state. Semi-structured interview with participants was the primary data source for developing a qualitative theoretical model of what teachers perceived as barriers and enabling factors of their professional growth activities. The findings of the study indicate that local professional development efforts organized and supported by enthusiastic school principals were valued very highly by teachers and were associated with many enabling social structures of professional development. In contrast, university courses were identified by teachers as not meeting their daily classroom needs and were associated with several disabling social structures.

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For educators faced with the challenges of rapidly changing schools and increasingly diverse communities, school-university partnerships are often viewed as a critical method for supporting ongoing teacher development and improving schools (Teitel, 1998). Such partnerships may be based on an informal agreement or a formal Professional Development School (PDS) arrangement. Regardless of the formality, partnership members must create and sustain these relationships through a common vision: creating opportunities for theory and practice to intersect and inform one another (Teitel, 1998).

No matter what the term or format of the partnership, both K-12 schools and universities work toward a renewal that is mutually beneficial (Goodlad, 1994). School-university partnerships are therefore designed to allow universities and K-12 schools to simultaneously share the responsibility for preparing qualified future teachers, while providing practicing teachers with tools for continuous professional growth (Levine, 2002).

Our understanding of the dynamics of the school-university relationship is constantly growing. Disappointingly, emerging literature reveals that, while there are many potential benefits for university faculty and K-12 teachers, these partnerships are often far from perfect. There is frequently some degree of distrust, conflict, or misunderstanding between teachers and university personnel (Kohn, 1999; Teitel, 1998), providing poignant evidence that expanded research on teacher perceptions of these relationships is essential. To that end, this paper will present current research on K-12 teachers in school-university partnerships, and present an analysis of perceived barriers and enabling factors in one K-12 school district entering into a new school-university partnership.

Outcomes for Teachers in Partnerships

Studies reveal that well-structured, reciprocal relationships between schools and universities can indeed yield positive results for involved teachers (Teitel, 1998). While identifying how teacher knowledge and professional development can inform the design of teacher support technologies, Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, and Soloway (1998) report on benefits that teachers identified from collaborating with colleagues in professional development programs. These included: (a) access to new information; (b) clarification of beliefs and ideas; (c) examining new ways of thinking and teaching; and (d) reflection on their own teaching.

While examining the outcomes of regional partnerships of schools and universities in the state of New York, Donlevy (1999) reported on another set of possible benefits from university and school partnerships for teachers: (a) networking resources for both teachers and university professionals; (b) formal and informal relationships built between teachers in neighboring districts, which diminish the sense of professional isolation; and (c) exposure to a broader sense of educational purpose.

Day (1998) explored the variables influencing teacher perception of the short-term success of university-school partnerships. Based on the evaluations of seven partnership projects the following were identified as characteristics of programs that correlated positively with teachers' perception that the programs were a success: (a) amount of time teachers obtain from the program to spend on learning new skills; (b) amount of dialogue teachers have with other participants; (c) amount of reflection on practice the program supports; and (d) amount of support teachers obtain from their school and program coordinators.

Unfortunately, in many school-university partnerships, the intended renewal of teacher preparation and staff development has deteriorated into the laborious exercise of placing

preservice teachers into early field experiences and student teaching positions (Teitel, 2003). In some situations teachers are not given the much-needed opportunity for professional growth even after providing services to universities by welcoming and supervising preservice teachers in their classrooms (Cooner & Tochtermann, 2004). This is especially problematic given that many of the benefits from partnerships that teachers report are based on their interactions with colleagues and university faculty and not on interactions with preservice teachers. Therefore, many teachers are not provided the opportunity to experience the professional growth that they expect from partnerships.

Consequently, current reports on school-university partnerships indicate that there is a lack of reciprocity in what schools and universities gain from their relationships, and ultimately teachers do not believe they benefit equally from the interactions (Teitel, 2003). Sadly, under these circumstances, many partnerships have not been able to meet their educational reform goals, and end in termination of the agreement or require the schools to form relationships with multiple partners (Day, 1998; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Simpson, Robert, & Hughes, 1999). These partnerships often fail before they never have the chance to develop fully, are drastically reconfigured from the original vision, or one collaborator is forced to seek out additional partnerships with other organizations to fulfill their needs Teitel (1998).

Understanding Teachers' Culture

In order to maximize the potential benefits from partnerships, cultural differences between university faculty and K-12 teachers need to be addressed. For school-university partnerships to be successful, a completely new culture needs to evolve out of existing school and university cultures (Prater & Sileo, 2002). Teitel (1998) identifies one particularly distressing cultural conflict between teachers and university personnel: Teachers and school

administrators are particularly sensitive to issues of status, especially any perceived arrogance from university faculty, and expectations about who controls partnership activities. University faculty are not necessarily aware of this issue and often overstep their boundaries, leading to fatal breakdowns in communication.

While schools in partnerships hope to impact teacher education programs, they often report that they feel a limited parity of influence. K-12 personnel dislike the idea that universities are trying to fix the school, rather than working in partnership with the school on professional and programmatic renewal (LePage, Bordreau, Maier, Robinson, & Cox, 2001). According to (LePage et al., 2001) schools are willing to participate in partnership programs under these circumstances if: (a) they saw it as useful; (b) it brought some recognition to the institution; and (c) it did not take too much time away from the teachers “real work.” To make matters worse, many school-university agreements are hastily arranged, often in response to institutional accreditation requirements. The necessary planning for the long-term sustainability of the relationship is not adequately addressed (Teitel, 1998).

Many of the above conflicts in partnerships result from differences in the work lives of university faculty and K-12 teachers. University faculty and teachers do not share a common work culture, generating enormous strain in the relationship. This cultural difference triggers tensions between faculty and teachers, and sustaining communication alone becomes an inordinate task (Edens, Shirley, & Toner, 2001; Snow-Gerono, Yendo-Silva, & Nolan, 2002). The primary communication roadblock stems from the difference in beliefs between university faculty and teachers regarding what is legitimate theory and practice (Perry & Power, 2004). University faculty rely on theory derived from research to identify good teaching practices while teachers rely on their own and their colleagues’ experiences in the classroom to identify good

teaching practices. Cochran-Smith (2000) refers to the above conflict as the “knowledge question” and point out that in the teacher education community, what constitutes teacher knowledge is still in debate. When the legitimacy of teaching-related knowledge and best practices are questioned, many uncertainties arise regarding how to best facilitate partnerships (Perry, Komesaroff, & Kavanagh, 2002). Consequently, universities and schools do not necessarily have shared goals (Bacharach & Hasslen, 2001).

Teachers operate in complex work environments while carrying out their everyday teaching. They are constantly negotiating and renegotiating classroom decisions, trying to meet and balance the multiple obligations that are imposed upon them by their community, peers, students, administrators, and themselves. In this multifaceted work environment teachers monitor, organize, evaluate, modify, direct themselves and classroom events, make quick important decisions, and manage student learning and behaviors (Manning, 1993). Teachers value practical knowledge gained through daily interactions at their school (Cochran-Smith, 2000).

According to Little (1990), teachers share ideas with their colleagues in the form of story telling. Additionally, teachers acknowledge the value of informal and formal idea sharing (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003a). During departmental meetings, between class periods in the hallway, and during lunch breaks teachers engage in quick maintenance of their professional relations with colleagues by exchanging stories with one another about teaching and student information. However, because individual time is precious (Hargreaves, 1993), and demands placed upon teachers are heavy (Lieberman & Miller, 1991), a tension exists between teacher individualism and collaboration (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000). Undoubtedly, when professional development programs are introduced into schools as innovations to promote change, these

programs become another variable for teachers to juggle in their work. Furthermore, these innovations can add new dimensions to tensions already prevalent in schools, which include: (a) teacher motivation for change versus multiple layers of responsibilities in everyday practices of teaching; (b) meeting individual student needs versus responding to demands regarding accountability; and (c) teacher individualism versus teacher collaboration with other teachers and the professional development providers (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003b).

Teachers' work lives are not only complex but are constrained by multiple obligations (Buchmann, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1999) that create conflict. These tensions create enabling and disabling social structures for them to carry out their everyday work and to be involved in professional development activities. The frequently identified barriers that prohibit teachers from fully benefiting from professional development activities include: (a) lack of time; (b) lack of resources; (c) lack of substitutes; and (d) lack of good presenters for the professional development occasion (Zimmerman & May, 2003). If universities are interested in becoming a central force in school change, while engaging in mutually beneficial renewals with schools, university faculty need to address barriers to teachers' professional growth (Abadiano & Turner, 2004).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate what teachers perceive as barriers and aids in schools for them to infuse professional development experiences into their teaching. Our ultimate goal was to use the results from this study as the foundation for eliminating the barriers and taking advantage of the existing enabling social structures. The school district in which this study took place was beginning partner relations with a large public Western university. Therefore, it was our goal to identify the barriers and aids of teacher professional development in

the early stages of this partnership so that we could maximize the opportunities that are provided to teacher participants.

This study was guided by the following three research questions: (a) what role does professional development take in the everyday work environment of teachers; (b) what social structures exist in classrooms, school districts, and universities that are enabling or disabling teachers from maximizing the potential benefits of professional development; and (c) what characteristics of a professional development program convince teachers that it is worth their time to participate?

Research Participants

The school district that the study participants came from was on the urban fringe of a mid-size city in a Western state. The district is made up of 81 schools: 56 elementary, 15 middle, and 10 high schools. About 20% of the students in the district are economically disadvantaged (below the statewide average of about 31%), with about 16% of students on free or reduced price lunch programs. Six percent of the students were classified as Limited English Proficient, close to the state average. The district's students were made up of largely white children (about 91%; statewide is about 84%). Approximately 6% of the students were Hispanic, just below the state average.

The participants in this study included male and female elementary and junior high school teachers and administrators. There were a total of seven participants in the initial interviews. These participants consisted of two principals, one district professional development coordinator, and four teachers. Four of the above participants volunteered for the follow-up interviews. These participants consisted of one principal and three teachers. All participants were selected on voluntary basis. This may be a limitation of this study, as there were no rewards

offered to participants. This may have encouraged teachers who were specifically interested in their professional growth to be involved in the study.

Research Methodology

This study entailed a naturalistic inquiry investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that included series of interviews for grounded theory development in addition to document analysis of professional development materials available at the school district. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. During the first set of interviews it became apparent that work-related time constraints took a critical role in teacher perception and evaluation of professional development programs; therefore, during the second set of interviews we asked teachers to complete a time sheet charting their daily activities during the seven days of the week. Additionally, the second set of interviews served as a member checking opportunity of findings that were made in the first set of interviews.

Through the continuous interplay between data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)—wherein the investigators are involved in data analysis as the data collection process unfolds—our goal was to develop a qualitative theoretical model. This model was based on the participant teachers' experiences and perception about professional development, which allowed us to describe and understand enabling and disabling social structures of professional development. We went about this by using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach to grounded theory development.

The analytical process of this study emphasized the discovery of hypothesis and theory rather than their confirmation. We began this process by becoming involved in an iterative cycle of reading and rereading the initial set of transcribed data. We then followed the constant

comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and used qualitative data coding software to begin the open coding process. In this open coding process our goal was to identify the codes and definitions associated with each other that represent prevalent themes across the multiple sources of data.

Once we generated a set of codes and definitions regarding the enabling and disabling social structures, we began the axial coding process, which entailed identifying overarching themes and categories that exist among the codes. During this process we eliminated any redundancies in the coding scheme. With the initial set of codes and their relationships to one another in hand, we tested if the represented themes were an accurate portrayal of the participants' experiences. We tested this with a second round of interviews with participants. The interview questions were derived from the thematic relationships revealed in the codes.

We then analyzed and coded transcripts from the new interviews as well as reexamined the first set of interviews, making any necessary changes to the codes and thematic relationships. We began the selective coding process, and integrated and refined the previous codes to develop a qualitative theoretical model. The codes were reorganized around an explanatory concept that helped clarify the enabling and disabling social structures. Once this reorganization was complete, we went back to the entire raw data set and tested the new coding scheme that was organized around the explanatory concept as the theoretical framework. Throughout these processes, we developed and modified a graphical model of the theoretical framework.

As described above, we triangulated our findings through data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1989). We attempted to maintain trustworthiness of this study through the systematic data analysis

procedures involved in the constant comparative methodology, triangulation, prolonged engagement with the research site, and member checking.

Results and Thematic Findings

Common Professional Development Delivery Format

According to participant responses, teachers in the Western state in which this study took place were given opportunities to attend professional development activities hosted by the state, the school district, universities, and their own schools. These teachers felt a sense of need to participate in professional development courses partly because of their desire to be lifelong learners and to be better teachers for their students, but also because of the enormous pressure from the state teacher licensing system. This system requires teachers to attend professional development courses to maintain or improve their licensing status, which ultimately affected retention, promotion, and annual salaries.

The state office of education identified several professional development events that teachers could attend to earn points for their license renewal process. University courses were only one of the eight choices. These events included: (a) college/university courses and/or state approved inservice (18 points per 1 semester credit); (b) workshops, symposia, conferences, district courses, or staff development (1 point per clock hour); (c) service in professional activities in an educational institution (1 point per clock hour); (d) service in a leadership role in a professional organization (maximum of 10 points per year); (e) education research and innovation; (f) other professional development activities; and (g) substituting (State Educator License Renewal Brochure, issued May 10, 2000).

Additionally, in some years there were state or district specific high priority areas for which teachers were mandated to attend training and complete professional development

courses. In these situations the courses were clearly aligned with the teaching license recertification process and increases in teacher salary. These areas were often identified by the state or school district to comply with federal regulations. For example, Zach, a middle school teacher, described his experience obtaining an ESL endorsement through university courses when his school district was informed that they were not in compliance with meeting minority student needs:

....when the federal government came out and said “you’re not in compliance with minorities”...[the district] had to get their act together and put a program together. And they paid for that because they had to. (Zach, teacher interview, April 16, 2003)

Mark and Susan, both elementary school teachers, also reported situations in which they were mandated by the school district to participate in professional development courses on balanced literacy and other subject-specific courses when the state curriculum was revised. In many cases, these mandatory professional development activities were paid for by the school district and teachers did not have to incur any out-of-pocket expenses. However, these courses did not necessarily meet what individual teachers perceived as an immediate need for their professional growth. As indicated in Susan comment’s below, she had to attend the balanced literacy courses even though she was in a teaming situation with a colleague and she taught social studies and her colleague taught reading.

...in the balanced literacy, what I found was it was very geared to the reading teacher, but not to any other subject. And so for me to take, what was it?...I guess it was 14 hours of inservice that was not geared to anything I teach, was very hard. (Susan, teacher interview, March 28, 2002)

In addition to the mandatory professional development events, the district hosted activities in needed areas, as identified by the professional development coordinator and her staff. In this district, teachers were provided with a printed catalogue of professional development course schedules from the professional development office every four months. The Spring, 2002 catalog included the following topics: (a) computer/technology; (b) general topics; (c) language arts; (d) balanced literacy; (e) math; (f) science; (g) special programs ; and (h) paraprofessional classes. In the table of contents the number of professional development credit hours that teachers would earn was clearly indicated. Many of these courses took place after school hours and on weekends. Additionally, teachers had to pay a minimum of \$20 in registration fees for most courses.

University courses were offered to teachers as another method of professional development. However, there was a sentiment among teachers in this study that university courses did not necessarily meet individual teachers' specific classroom needs. When commenting about the ESL endorsement program offered through a nearby university, Zach stated:

I thought that course could be shorter than it was.... I thought there was information that was valuable, but there was other things that we did that I thought was very invaluable...it was like filler time, because you need so many hours to graduate. (Zach, teacher interview, June 11, 2002)

Despite the fact that university courses did not necessarily meet immediate classroom needs, teachers chose to take these courses when mandated to do so and because they earned a lot of professional development credits. One university course semester credit hour equaled 18 professional development credits. Depending on the level of license that a teacher held, renewing

a license required them to obtain up to 100 professional development points during a five or a seven year span (State Educator License Renewal Brochure, issued May 10, 2000).

Additionally, securing a master's degree from a university guaranteed some form of promotion and salary increase for teachers. In the district in this study, coursework toward advanced degrees need not necessarily come from a single university. Teachers were able to mix and match courses from various universities to complete their degree; therefore, teachers became savvy shoppers of university courses and chose what courses to take from what university based on their needs. When deciding what university courses to take teachers considered travel distance, when courses were offered, and how much they had to pay out of their own pocket for tuition. For example, Paul, a middle school teacher, was earning his master's degree via the Internet from a university in another state and the district was paying his tuition. Therefore, the university course shopping criteria consisted of cost and location, which are both associated to convenience and not instructional quality. These convenience criteria fit the analysis provided by LePage et al. (2001) that schools use when they are not engaged in mutually beneficial partnerships. In these situations, schools are enthusiastic about participating in professional development activities that bring most benefits and do not take too much time away from the teachers' existing instructional duties.

The final professional development delivery format that teachers and principals commented on was the local professional development activities that took place at their own schools. These activities included formal events organized by the principal such as book clubs and weekly topic-centered meetings. These activities were supported by enthusiastic principals who secured state grant money to sustain local professional development and enabled teachers to engage in professional growth activities. Teachers participated in these events on a voluntary

basis and reported that these book clubs and weekly meetings were the most valuable form of professional development because daily classroom needs were addressed. Principals saw value in these activities because teachers were able to exchange ideas with colleagues about pressing topics at their school rather than sit through a training event and not have time to reflect on individual teaching practices. Jack, a principal at a middle school, commented on how he valued the book club that he organized at his school:

[the book chat is] a way to get people to think and talk...We go to an inservice and we come back and usually it's just thrown at the back of the shelf unless you have a chance to use it or take the time...[at a book chat] with the dialoguing it gives people just a time to interact, adult interaction, revalidated for your opinions. (Jack, principal interview, May 13, 2002)

The above indicate that Jack believed that teacher professional growth could be significantly supported through teachers exchanging their ideas and experiences with each other. Therefore, he enthusiastically supported teachers to engage in activities to exchange ideas. The local professional development opportunities that Jack provided to teachers align well with the characteristics of successful teacher professional development because he treats his teachers as professionals who enjoy exchanging practical knowledge and working collaboratively to identify best practices (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Day, 1998; Little, 1990; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003a).

Teachers also considered the informal exchange with local colleagues during lunch hours and shared prep time to be a form of professional development. Susan, an elementary school teacher, shared that she regularly engaged in curriculum related collaboration with her colleagues who taught the same grade level. Additionally, Susan commented that these interactions with

colleagues “help [her] know what background [knowledge her] students have and what background [knowledge] they don’t have” (Susan, teacher interview, March 28, 2003).

Paul also identified informal collaboration with colleagues as a form of local professional development. He commented that teacher collaboration allowed him to share curricular ideas to gain advice from colleagues, but also to validate his ideas before experimenting with them in the classroom. These collaborations primarily took place in casual settings such as shared lunch hours and breaks between class periods in the hallway.

Enabling Social Structure

The thematic findings identified from this study as enabling social structures of teacher professional development included: (a) individual teachers’ initiative for wanting to change; (b) principals’ devotion to support teacher change; (d) collegial work environments that nurture teacher professional growth; and (e) structured reward systems that encourage teacher growth. Teachers reported that one of the reasons they seek professional development opportunities was because they want to be better teachers and were hungry to find new ways to provide enriching experiences to students. Zach noted:

I think professional development helps me to learn more about my profession. It lets me....change a few things. I’m one teacher that doesn’t like to stay in a rut, and if I am in a rut, I feel the kids aren’t learning what they should be. With professional development, I believe that’s one way I can show that I can change my curriculum and how to do that and what’s the best way to approach new ideas. (Zach, teacher interview, April 16, 2003)

Zach and the other teachers who were interviewed in this study wanted to continue their professional growth because of their commitment to lifelong learning, as well as meeting their students’ needs. As a result, these teachers were constantly looking for professional development

opportunities that would help them develop and improve teaching practices that enhance student learning. These teachers did not treat professional development as a part of a checklist toward promotion or an increase in salary, but looked for opportunities to reflect upon their practice and share their ideas with colleagues, which are key characteristics of partnerships that are perceived by teachers to be successful (Day ,1998).

A second important element that contributed as an enabling social structure of professional development was the principals' leadership style and efforts he/she put into providing professional growth for teachers. This is another characteristic identified by Day (1998) as an indicator of success in partnerships. The positive attitude and sincere efforts in providing support to teachers exhibited by principals on a daily basis persuaded teachers to engage in in-house professional development activities. As reported earlier, these activities included book clubs and theme-centered voluntary faculty meetings. In some cases both Michael and Jack, the two principals in this study, acted leader of these meetings, while in other cases they provided financial assistance for teachers to purchase books and materials, but chose not to be an active participant in the meetings; however, teachers were accountable for providing a report on their activities. Additionally, both Michael and Jack were active in securing state professional development money for their teachers. These monies were competitively distributed to teachers for use on individually identified professional development activities. Several teachers reported that they truly appreciated the professional growth opportunities that were provided to them at their school and enjoyed being treated as professionals.

Another enabling social structure for teacher professional development was teacher collaboration. Teachers who believed that their faculty maintained a collegial relationship and felt comfortable in exchanging ideas to coordinate cooperative units felt they had professional

development support from colleagues. This collegial atmosphere was created and nurtured by the principal's leadership style. For example, as reported earlier both Susan and Paul felt comfortable about openly asking a colleague for help. Additionally, Susan reported that she regularly determines whether to attend a professional development event based solely on the word-of-mouth evaluations of other teachers. This information was gathered during daily interactions with other teachers within her building and with other school district teachers during district-wide professional development meetings. These findings align with what Marx et al. (1998) reported as benefits that teachers find in collaborations with colleagues. Finally, the state and school district reward system associated to professional development activities were identified as another enabling social structure that promoted teachers to pursue professional growth.

Disabling Social Structures

The disabling social structures of teacher professional development that were identified in this study included: (a) lack of time; (b) lack of money; and (c) professional development opportunities not meeting teachers' needs. When participants in this study were asked to complete a time sheet charting their daily activities during the seven days of the week, many of them began their teaching-related activities early in the morning and did not finish until late in the evening, and many worked at least one day during the weekend as well. Many of the professional development activities required teachers to participate after school hours or during the weekends during the school year. Zach commented that, between his daily responsibilities as a classroom teacher, obligations to his family, and trying to meet professional development requirements, he did not see how he could meet the individual needs of the thirty students in each of his classes.

The second disabling social structure of professional development was the out-of-pocket cost for participating in courses. As reported earlier, teachers often have to pay registration fees or tuition to attend professional development courses hosted by the school district or by universities. Many of the in-house professional development workshops required teachers to pay a minimum of \$20. Susan, an elementary school teacher, Zach a middle school teacher, and Megan, the professional development coordinator, all commented that it was discouraging for teachers to participate in professional development activities if they had to incur expenses. University courses were even worse. Tuition and fees increase annually. In university settings, teachers who come back to take courses are not treated as professionals seeking training. Instead they are treated just as the same as any other pre-service student. Under these circumstances, Susan felt that the topic of the professional development event ought to be very appealing, and that teachers were not necessarily treated as professionals. She cited the example that many businesses send their employees to training during their work hours and pay them regular salary and pay for the costs associated with the training.

The final disabling social structure of teacher professional development identified by participants was the fact that there are professional development courses that do not meet teacher needs in the classroom. For example, Paul reported that in some cases these activities consisted of guest speakers in a large lecture format, and most teachers who attended these events listened to “ideologies” that were going to be “thrown out the window” the minute the lecture was done (Paul, teacher interview, March 27, 2003). In other cases teachers were required to attend a series of training sessions on a state or district level endorsed program even though they were already trained on something very similar in the past. In such situations, Susan felt that it would have been more beneficial to her if the money was spent on other professional growth activities.

Graphical Model of Enabling and Disabling Social Structures

Figure 1 shows the graphical model created as a result of this investigation. The figure shows the enabling and disabling social structures of teacher professional development that participants identified, and the common professional development delivery formats that participants reported. All professional development delivery formats were associated in some degree to both enabling and disabling structures. University courses were the most costly delivery format for teachers from both a monetary aspect and the time it consumed from their daily activities. Unless there were fee remissions or support from their school district it was very difficult for teachers to pay tuition to participate in university courses. To make matters worse, as reported earlier, university courses were not necessarily most relevant to the activities that teachers engaged at their work setting, and did not benefit from many of the enabling social structures embedded in professional growth activities that teachers find at their own schools. Teachers therefore found it difficult to infuse what they learned into their classrooms. Under these circumstances, the return on investment that teachers identified from university courses was not impressive. However, teachers were motivated to take university courses and complete an entire master's degree to obtain an increase in their salary, maintain their teaching license, and to be promoted.

The local professional development activities organized and supported by school principals were identified as the most beneficial form of professional development by teachers. However, teachers were not necessarily rewarded the most for their involvement in these types of activities through the district recertification and promotion program. Teachers identified that these activities had the most return on investment on their teaching because: (a) there were no cost associated to them; (b) teachers were able to participate in these activities during their work

hours at their school; (c) these activities did not interfere with the time they spend with students; (e) the topics for each meeting were chosen based on just in time teacher needs; (f) these activities encouraged dialogue with colleagues; and (g) they were able to obtain immediate feedback from their students and colleagues regarding the new teaching strategies they experimented in the classroom.

When deciding which professional development event to attend teachers from this study reported that they consider what the return on investment was going to be as an outcome of their participation. Teachers measured the value of return on investment both from a financial and time management perspective. As indicated earlier, teachers participated in professional development to learn something new that would help them as a professional in the classroom. They valued the opportunities that some professional development courses provided them to reflect on their practice. However, they were also willing to participate in professional development activities that did not necessarily help them with the daily activities in their classroom when these events provided them with opportunities for extra pay, salary increase, or renewing their teaching license.

Reflections and Implications

By being able to compare programs offered by several nearby universities, teachers became savvy consumers of professional growth opportunities. Often times during the interviews teachers commented “university *x* offers this, but university *y* does not” or “university *x* will bring the college level courses all to our school district, but we have to travel to university *y* for their program.” If universities truly wanted to be in university school partnerships and provide professional growth opportunities to schoolteachers, the traditional format of offering university courses may not be the best approach to meet teacher needs. As reflected in this study’s findings,

teachers revel in professional growth opportunities that are situated at their work place and meet their immediate classroom needs. Teachers are seeking professional growth opportunities that may not take as much time out of their work and personal time as a traditional semester-long university course would, but will provide the maximum benefit in a very short period of time. This means that universities need to collaborate with school principals in providing local professional development activities. If these activities are framed within the context of university course credits teachers indeed earn the professional development points that they deserve through their efforts put into educational renewal.

The overall findings of this study indicate that the delivery format of a professional development program does not matter in terms of teacher perception regarding the success or failure of the program. What mattered was how the identified enabling and disabling social structures interacted with the work related activities of individual teachers. Additionally, depending on what career stage participants were at, the enabling and disabling social structures of professional development had a varying degree of impact on teacher activities. It is therefore difficult to identify specific features of professional development programs that guarantee successful infusion of new skills in daily classroom activities. Instead it is important to identify what enabling and disabling social structures of professional development interact with individual teacher activities, and what types of interaction support teachers' professional growth. Perhaps the professional development activities in partnerships need more individualized or school-specific components that would meet individual teacher career growth needs and goals.

Finally, although the results of this study do not paint an optimal picture of the role that university courses take in teacher professional development; this does not mean that they never will. If colleges of education address how they can embed enabling social structures of

professional development into their courses it is likely that teachers would find a greater value. At the same time, both schools and universities need to reconcile their cultural differences and create a new, more functional culture when they are in partnerships. Formal partnerships often form between universities and K-12 schools when universities are in the process of obtaining funding or meeting accreditation requirements. Informal partnerships come to form through casual agreements between university faculty and schoolteachers working to improve classroom practices. In either of the above scenario, to identify a new partnership culture, universities and K-12 schools need to spend far more time defining their mission, relationship structure, and embed enabling social structures of teacher professional development into their programs. Undoubtedly, in this process school principals will take a critical role in identifying how universities can provide teachers with professional growth opportunities.

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List of Figures

Figure 1. Enabling and Disabling Social Structures of Teacher Professional Development

