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Strategies for Supporting Professional Growth in Early Childhood Team Members

Kristin Goetz
goetzk@csp.edu

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Strategies for Supporting Professional Growth in Early Childhood Team Members

Kristin Goetz

Concordia University-St. Paul

MA in Education: Early Childhood Education

ED590 M952 Course Instructor: Dr. Kelly Sadlovsky

Second Reader: Elisabeth Amirahmadi

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) teachers, including pre-service and in-service workers, have reported the need for ongoing professional development support (Boyer, 2004; Buettner, Hye Hur, Jeon & Andrews, 2016; Brown, Cheddie, Horry, & Monk, 2017). Specific targeted support for professionalism was addressed as a retention strategy for the future of ECE (Boyer, 2004). The lack of consistent minimum qualifications for ECE teachers has contributed to a number of teachers in the field having little understanding regarding professionalism as a whole when teacher careers commence. The quality of learning and teaching in the classroom has been said to be largely determined by the level of professionalism of the teachers (Kilinc, 2014). For this reason, the lack of ongoing support for teacher growth is assumed to be possibly detrimental. This paper examined research in the area of professionalism and learning transfer to gain insight to specific supports that ECE teachers require to show progression in professionalism and to uncover strategies that could be implemented by program administration to support continued growth over time. Buettner et al. (2016) showed that giving ECE professionals the support requested helped increase commitment to the field and supported the maintenance and improvement of quality care and education. Through this study, multiple strategies have been identified that can be used to better support current ECE teachers in the field today. The study also showed that additional research is needed for the field to best understand how to support growth in professionalism among ECE teachers.

Keywords: professionalism, transfer of learning (TOL), scaffolding

Chapter One: Introduction

Supporting the growth of professionalism for all early childhood education (ECE) teachers in the field is important, regardless of the level teachers demonstrate upon entry to the field. Administrators can start from individual levels of understanding, lend specific supports, and implement practices that assist with teacher growth. Supporting professionalism in this way can benefit everyone involved, including teachers, administrators, families and children. Program administrators must ensure that professionalism remains an ongoing area of professional development (PD) for staff. Administrators must also have knowledge and skills of strategies for supporting this growth area for all teachers. This literature review explored information that lends insight into what supports teachers in the field of ECE may need in terms of growing in professionalism.

The target population in this research was ECE teachers working with children from birth to five years of age. This subset of teachers in society have historically struggled with being seen as professionals, and some teachers have had a hard time feeling deserving of a professional status as well. ECE team members need ongoing support for development from administrators, and administrators need concrete strategies to utilize in order to assist in development. Research was reviewed that gave insight to supports that ECE team members desired, best practice information regarding the transfer of learning (TOL), and specific strategies regarding how administrators and organizations can take an active role in developing team members.

Three key definitions surfaced during the literature review on this topic. One of the most important, *professionalism*, had multiple definitions presented by various researchers. Buettner

et al. (2016) utilized Kelchtermans' definition from 1993 explaining that professionalism is a teacher's sense of self as an educator, motivation and commitment to the job, and future professional development aspirations. Brown et al. (2017) used Castle's 2009 description that professionalism is acting in accordance with agreed-upon professional standards or ethical codes. Another study cited the 1999 Calgren definition which explained professionalism as related to the behaviors and attitudes of a person towards a specific job and the position's quality (Kilinc, 2014). Kilinc also used Cerit's 2013 definition which explained professionalism as a multidimensional structure that covers the behaviors and attitudes displayed by a person for being more successful in a job and improving the quality of the service provided. All studies reviewed utilized similar definitions that included aspects of behaviors and attitudes of the professional as related to high performance on the job. One study labeled this encompassing idea the professionalism of early childhood teachers (PECT) (Tzuo, Tan, Liang, & Yong, 2015). Another important term that arose regarding strategies for supporting team members was *transfer of learning* (TOL). Recent studies have focused on TOL, also referred to as learned transfer or learning transfer, to determine barriers, factors of success, and specific strategies to encourage the successful transfer of knowledge. Learned Transfer was described by Foley and Kaiser (2013) as effective and continuing application by learners; to the performance of jobs or other individual, organizational, or community responsibilities; of knowledge and skills gained in the learning activities. Roumell (2019) provided a similar description of learning transfer, specifically with the common thread of practicing the application of knowledge and skills across contexts. The third definition helpful to note was *scaffolding*. Scaffolding was defined by Foley

and Kaiser (2013) as a combination of ensuring that the learning environment, instructional plan, supporting resources, and instructional delivery are structured in a manner that best supports learning for all individuals. Research showed commonalities in the importance of all of the terms, which helped synthesize patterns and promising strategies of support for professionalism.

Organization

The information presented in this literature review is organized according to specific subtopics. Beginning with an introduction to the problem and research question, the review moves into information presenting insights from stakeholders in the field. Administrator, teacher, and even parent insight was found to be necessary in planning beneficial supports for professional growth. TOL information is presented next, as critical information in planning professional development opportunities with the best possible outcomes for practice. Practices found throughout the research that support growth in the area of professionalism are relayed, followed by implications of these practices for all persons involved. Limitations of the current research, along with specific calls for future research are then presented, as a reminder that strategies can be refined as more studies are completed in the area of professionalism and conducted with specific ECE teachers. Finally, various research topics are synthesized, relevant to the need to improve the support and development of ECE professionals, which validate the conclusions presented in this review.

Conclusion

Studies reviewed show staff concern regarding professionalism and relayed that further support is needed as teachers progress in the ECE field (Kilinc, 2014; Boyer, 2004; Brown et al.,

2017; Tzuo et al., 2015). As early childhood educators participated in PD opportunities, Roumell (2019) found even perceptions of support can influence the transfer of new knowledge. The relationship found in the research between teacher professionalism and the learning that happens in the classroom suggested the future of ECE programming needs to include plans for supporting the continued development of professionalism in all teachers. In what ways can early childhood administrators implement strategies that support professionalism for team members? The following chapter presents an in-depth review of literature surrounding this inquiry. From understanding the insight of team members and the ECE field, to gaining knowledge regarding the transfer of learning, to implementing beneficial strategies which improve training or support, this literature review provides information that can guide administrators in taking concrete steps to support the professionalism of all program staff, regardless of current achievement levels.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Many stakeholders have a concern in the professional levels of early childhood education (ECE) teachers, including administrators, families, and communities. Reviewing literature on studies concerning aspects of professionalism lend insight regarding needed areas of focus and factors to consider when planning professional supports. Content of ECE professional standards, views of teachers, and information about what hinders or assists the transfer of learning (TOL) have been reviewed and incorporated to help formulate future plans of support. Research shows a practitioner's sense of professionalism is comprised of factors inextricably related to training and professional development (PD) (Osgood, 2010). Strategies related to training and professional development have been identified and synthesized in this literature review which can be utilized by administrators to ensure teachers on staff are supported in continual growth.

NAEYC Connections

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators provided information on six competency areas outlined as containing aspects each early childhood educator must exhibit to support the care and education of young children effectively. The sixth competency area was professionalism. This competency area upheld that continuous, collaborative learning is part of the early childhood profession, and prioritized the need for professionals to form habits of intentional and reflective practice throughout daily work. This priority was reflected in the findings of Urban, Vandenberg, Van Laere, Lazzari, and Peeters (2012) who supported the professional competence of critical reflection. NAEYC (2020) made formal recommendations

that professional growth plans be created by early learning programs that align with the standards and competencies in order to support staff mastery. In a study that prompted pre-service teachers to think about their preparation levels (Brown et al., 2017), results showed that teachers felt less prepared in the professional development standard of the NAEYC standards than in any other standard their coursework covered. In this qualitative study 27 teacher candidates in an Early Childhood Education master's program completed four journal assignments throughout the year and data was pulled from the journals which showed candidates perceptions of professional preparation for the field. Results showed that students felt less prepared, and NAEYC standards were only partially met in the realm of leadership skills (including strategic thinking, collaborating with others, and positively influencing outcomes for children, families, and the profession). Standards were also only partially met in the area of possessing the specific communication skills needed for this field (oral, written, and technological). Further, results of the study showed that standards' goals were not met in the element of understanding and applying the NAEYC code of Ethical Conduct (updated May, 2011) and other relevant professional guidelines.

These results supported findings from a quantitative study by Buettner et al. (2016) which utilized descriptive analysis to examine the curriculum coverage of recommended quality standards in ECE programs at two-year and four-year institutions and looked at the differences within these two types of programs. This study examined the online survey results of 175 university ECE program directors from 173 programs in the United States to understand curriculum coverage of standards set by NAEYC and the Council for Professional Recognition

(CPR). The results showed that the content concerning professionalism was less frequently covered in both two-year and four-year programs, and only about 34% of the programs in the study covered this standard's content in more than one entire course (Buettner et al.). On average, results found that professionalism was discussed only in multiple class sessions of one required course. One limitation noted regarding teacher preparation programs and the Buettner et al. study (2016) was that only program directors were surveyed, and the study used a self-reporting method, in which the response rate was not efficient enough to conclude overall effectiveness of teacher education programs.

Call for Effective Professional Development

Review of the literature on professionalism revealed many connecting threads among pre-service teachers and programs. Pre-service teachers were described as individuals who are still in the education phase of the profession, but who are not yet employed in the field. Studies reviewed showed that pre-service teachers had concerns in the areas of personal preparation for their career choice and in growing as a professional, an identified area shown to be covered less in ECE programs (Boyer, 2004; Buettner et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017). In the oldest study in this review (Boyer, 2004), concerns of undergraduate pre-service teachers surfaced authentically during a series of assigned reflective papers. This quantitative study utilized descriptive statistics to identify and assess concerns of meeting high expectations of the field, with the purpose of creating approaches to meet the needs of the pre-service teachers and assist in building confidence and competence in the concern areas. Three assigned reflective papers were completed during an undergraduate child development class, and 151 teachers completed the

papers for a total of 453 submissions. Within the papers, 86 different areas of concern were expressed, revealing 109 concerns relating to personal preparation and career choice. The reflections were intended to prompt thoughts regarding new ways of thinking, therefore this unsolicited type of response received from participants demonstrated a genuine set of perceptions regarding what support professionals may need entering and continuing in the field. This need for continued support was reiterated by the Buettner et al. study (2016), concluding that professionalism was an under-taught area in teacher pre-service training and education programs. Findings from other related studies (Boyer, 2004; Buettner et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017) uncovered a call for effective PD to be implemented as pre-service teachers moved into the field. This need was supported by the NAEYC position (2020) that PD opportunities needed to be provided by programs to assist professionals in further understanding the NAEYC standards and competencies and applying the standards to practice.

Boyer (2004) recognized that pre-service professional concerns are high and recommended specific concerns to be addressed to ensure teachers enter the field, and also stay in the field. This research mandated in-service training to address concerns and develop solutions, and suggested administration carry out leadership or mentorship programs on-site as part of in-service training. Studies from Tzuo et al. (2015) and Kilinc (2014) also showed that professionalism of early childhood teachers (PECT) was an ongoing process which requires continued support from employers that include planned, positive PD opportunities. In a study which looked at the differences in parents' and teachers' views on professionalism, Tzuo et al. (2015) reported that PD and valuing ethics were seen as an important piece of professionalism.

In this mixed-methods study 106 teachers completed a quantitative questionnaire and five teachers completed semi-structured qualitative interviews to inform the study. Preschool teachers from Singapore involved in this study indicated that support was needed for early childhood teachers to continue advancing in professionalism levels, and that this continuous process should involve classroom observation and PD opportunities.

Osgood (2010) findings supported other studies (Boyer, 2004 & Tzuo et al., 2015) and acknowledged that the discussion of ongoing appropriate PD for the ECE workforce was now backed by many in the field. Osgood's qualitative study analyzed interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of 24 nursery workers in central London (2010). The purpose of the study was to evaluate how the professional identities of the workers were formed. The understanding of reasons why this ongoing PD in the supportive workplace is important was realized throughout much of the literature review. Foley and Kaiser (2013) recognized that TOL barriers can occur even after a learning experience, including when there was a lack of support. This study also pointed out that it is imperative to understand that just because learner participation occurs in a learning activity, no guarantee exists that the learner will be successful in transferring that learning automatically. Scharff et al. (2017) attributed an explanation for this barrier in learning transfer, saying students often prefer to take a more passive approach to learning, not perceiving the benefit of metacognition. Due to the fact that students do not perceive the benefit, learners do not engage in metacognition, employing surface approaches to learning instead.

While not focused on the field of ECE, a 2017 study from Palesy sought to find out how to support classroom learning and adapt training to promote application in the field, the results of which were applicable to any field. In the qualitative Palesy research, which took a case study approach, two studies were included. The first was exploratory, observing classroom training and evaluating interviews from participants afterwards. The researchers then implemented interventions based on the interviews and repeated the study with a new set of participants. Each study had 7 participants, who were trainees for a home health care organization, with varying demographics of gender, age, and cultural background. Findings supported TOL difficulties, and further explained learner struggles. Palesy identified a major barrier that learners encounter as having to try to apply what is learned without direct supervision and support, when only formal instruction in a brief training session was received. Palesy also found themes regarding what promoted effective PD sessions, including utilizing practical small-group activities as the most useful form of training, providing written materials to participants as resources, and holding consistent follow-up sessions for participants. While small sample size was identified as a limitation of this study, the participants represented a varied demographic sample, which is notable for future research.

Overall, this literature review provided insight to the importance of ensuring effective ongoing supports to further the PD of ECE staff in the field. Facilitators created barriers when specific motivational supports were not planned for the learners (Goldstone & Day, 2012). Foley and Kaiser (2013) reiterate the need for ongoing supports, and found that instilling the idea that the learner needs to take on the responsibility of the transfer actually lessens the chance of the

intended transfer. The review found that organizations are investing in training programs for their employees more, but only an estimated ten percent of information from training programs is being transferred into the workplace (Turab & Casimir, 2015). This low percentage calls for the need to intentionally restructure and adapt PD for ECE teachers with transformational, continuous PD elements imbedded (Urban et al., 2012). Bloom, Hentschel, and Bella (2010) concurred with this need, and acknowledged that too much is at stake for PD to be provided haphazardly. Daily practices are influenced by the PD that each individual worker participates in and the support that staff receive before, during, and after such PD. NAEYC (2020) recognized the importance of PD influence, and acknowledged that professional learning is one of the sources early childhood educators consider in decision-making. The continual, ongoing professional learning strategies implemented by program administration can then be viewed as important to supporting higher levels of professionalism for program staff.

Transfer of Learning

Transfer of Learning Factors

ECE has been an ever-changing field where practitioners will consistently need to integrate new findings and research into daily practices for the betterment of the children and families served. Yet research demonstrated that supports were lacking for integration to occur in many cases. Roumell (2019) found that a critical missing element in adult education was often the use of TOL strategies. Renta-Davids, Jimenez-Gonzalez, Fandos-Garrido, and Gonzalez-Soto (2014) agreed that continuous training should be used as a method of improving workforce competencies, but argued that continuous training needed scrutiny due to the lack of learning

transfer and therefore effectiveness. The conclusion by Renta-Davids et al. (2014) stemmed from a quantitative study designed to evaluate job-related training courses and their resulting learning transfer to the workplace. Two self-reporting surveys were utilized in this research study, completed first during a workplace training and again two months after the training. The first survey included 447 subjects attending work-related training courses in Spain as part of the Professional Training for Employment Subsystem. The second survey drew 158 responses from within the 447 training participants, and once reviewed, led to findings related to TOL.

Scharff et al. (2017) further indicated that the ability for successful TOL is integral to lifelong learning and continued employability. Overall findings from Roumell (2019) showed three areas of influence attributing to achieving TOL. The first area included individual learner factors like motivation, relevance, and goal orientation. Instructional process factors such as facilitator methods and opportunity for application were the second area of influence. The third area of influence on TOL was identified as perceptions of organizational support and accountability. Findings from Brad Harris, Chung, Hutchins, and Chiaburu (2014), Scharff et al. (2017), and Turab and Casimir (2015) mirrored the Renta-Davids et al. (2014) conclusion which found three major factors influenced TOL, including work environment, training designs, and trainee characteristics. Additional support for trainee characteristics and training design follow.

Scharff et al. (2017) completed a quantitative research study to determine whether enhancing metacognition would increase learning transfer. The 2017 study included 74 staff and 118 students from not only the United States, but also Australia, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. The learner factor within TOL was taken into account when Scharff et al. reported

there were positive correlations between thinking about transfer and learning processes, and using those thoughts to guide the journey from learning to practice. Turab and Casimir's 2015 qualitative study utilized questionnaires to look at trainee's attitudes and that relationship to TOL. The 2015 findings include the responses of 123 oil sector employees in Kuwait who completed a questionnaire regarding training attitudes towards learning transfer. Turab and Casimir found that trainees who think learning transfer will lead to better job performance and improve relationships with coworkers held more positive attitudes towards TOL. Scharff et al. (2017) and Turab and Casimir (2015) both agreed that the learner is front and center as a factor in the successful transfer of learning. Goldstone and Day (2012) agreed that the learner is a factor and added that the learner has to ultimately make the connection between the knowledge and the situation to which the knowledge is intended to be transferred.

Commonalities among findings were also uncovered in regards to training design and methods utilized by facilitators, including one example from Brad Harris et al. (2014). This quantitative research study examined survey responses within three questionnaires from 243 undergraduate business students to study trainer and trainee characteristics and the correlation of these characteristics to trainer satisfaction and training transfer. Despite noted limitations such as relying on student samples and self-reports, and a study design that limits definitive cause and effect claims, Brad Harris et al. (2014) linked the directiveness of the trainer to training satisfaction, trainee learning goal orientation, and training transfer. Similarly, Roumell (2019) discerned that facilitators who wanted to remove many transfer barriers should instead plan experiences that bridge the gap between the facilitated learning event and the end goal of

integrating what was learned. There were some promising studies and strategies facilitators can utilize that have been shown to diminish barriers and be beneficial to the TOL process. In one quantitative design experiment using teacher study groups as a model of PD, (Cunningham, Etter, Platas, Wheeler & Campbell, 2015) research was conducted in a San Francisco school district serving children between the ages of two and five from high-needs families. Over a span of three years, 19 female teachers participated in the study, from various races and educational levels. The teacher study groups were held for two hours, twice a month, for seven to eight months, following a process based on effective adult learning. The purpose of the study was to show impacts and feasibility of training utilizing teacher study groups. Cunningham study results showed positive correlations when facilitators emphasized both content and pedagogical knowledge. This was found, despite the limitations noted of each cohort group receiving different versions of the intervention, due to fine-tuning the evaluative components after each study group process. Foley and Kaiser (2013) found that using diverse instructional methods in this area, such as schema theory, purposeful reflection, repetition, concept mapping, and scaffolding, can all increase learning transfer by finding ways to help learners activate existing schema that is related to the learning at hand. This practice was found to increase the chance of retaining new information for later application. In the Cunningham et al. study (2015), the use of scaffolding and small groups of peers learning together actively over time led to proven, positive changes in practice and actual improved outcomes for children in the area of emergent literacy. Roumell (2019) also found that socially sharing experiences was a helpful element in successful TOL. The 2015 study by Cunningham et al. identified a third common strategy that works in

child-learning also; experiencing success with the transfer of knowledge through a series of active learning experiences.

Specific TOL success was tied to training design in the Renta-Davids et al. (2014), Scharff et al. (2017), and Turab and Casimir (2015) studies. Job relevance, connections among employees, and being explicit about TOL expectations and goals were all factors these studies supported in their research. Conclusions reached suggest TOL opportunities for ECE staff should include proven factors whenever possible, and administrators should ensure that PD the staff participate in include proven, positive elements. Foley and Kaiser's (2013) summary found increasing learning transfer essentially entailed integrating effective processes and methods of instruction into daily practice. Evaluating this information, program administrators were thought to be in prime positions to ensure this occurs as overseers of teachers' daily practice.

Support for PD Transfer

The literature review revealed the importance of ensuring ECE professionals were equipped with strategies that will help successfully transfer the knowledge and information gained from PD opportunities directly back into the programs and classrooms on a daily basis. Research findings identified a need to intentionally build in objectives and goals to support the learning transfer process (Roumell, 2019). Osgood noted it was critical that participants of training see these course objectives and goals as relevant to daily jobs (2010). Turab and Casimir (2015) suggested emphasizing the task-related and social benefits of TOL to participants engaged in PD opportunities as a way to help highlight TOL relevance.

Teacher efficacy was another common element found to support TOL. Turab and Casimir (2015) showed that self-efficacy in professionals who wanted to contribute to organizations worked for by way of TOL were likely to hold more positive attitudes to TOL and therefore likely to increase that transfer. Seo and Moon (2013) agreed that efficacy was related to professionalism and that professionalism was related to efficacy. Conclusions from this 2013 qualitative study were based on 593 pre-service and in-service teachers in Korea who completed questionnaires designed to rate the confidence levels of the teachers in regards to teaching young children. Seo and Moon found that teacher efficacy was related to levels of professional commitment for both new and senior teachers, and that the amount of new ideas/innovations involved in decision-making were influenced by efficacy, making efficacy an important goal of PD programs striving for TOL. One specific strategy note regarding efficacy was that flipped classroom methods were found to support higher self-efficacy beliefs (Kurt, 2017). Teacher perceptions of this method were also positive, therefore increasing the chance that learning introduced using a flipped classroom method would successfully transfer.

General Positive Training Practices

Urban et al. (2012) defined practitioner education, usually referred to as training, as any form of professional preparation and continuous learning that enhances competence. This definition highlighted that training had the potential to transform professional practices, which the literature supported as the overall goal for ECE staff engaged in PD. Multiple positive training practices were identified through the literature review that promoted the successful improvement of competence. Two general findings were revealed, including that areas found to

be less-covered in pre-service programs and training should be addressed through in-service licensing requirements and PD programs, (Buettner et al., 2016) and that training forms that cultivate self-awareness and reflection have a higher intrinsic value than training forms that are prescribed and measure practical or technical competence (Osgood, 2010). Specific positive training practices were identified by multiple researchers as well. Taggart (2015) found that introducing mindfulness exercises into training helped teachers stay tuned in to the needs of children as learning occurs. Taggart's mixed methods study involved 19 volunteer students answering three survey sections regarding a mindfulness module facilitated by the researcher, in order to determine whether mindfulness activities were perceived as useful and influenced the students' professional identity. The results clearly showed the mindfulness exercises to be relevant and influenced students' work in a positive way, allowing for more focus on the children (Taggart, 2015). Foley and Kaiser (2013) found that the likelihood of information retention is supported by facilitator assistance for learners to find existing schemas related to training. Osgood (2010) determined that effective training provided opportunity for building professional confidence through discussions of cause and effect in relation to learning and application, and Boyer (2004) suggested that facilitators and PD programs help professionals identify concerns and develop practical solutions in order to build confidence. In short, the literature review supported the argument of Bloom et al. (2010) that the PD in which teachers participated in needed to be high impact, applicable immediately in classrooms, engaging, and relevant.

Specific Characteristics of Successful Strategies

Throughout the review of the literature, three themes arose regarding successful strategies to support the PD of early childhood educators, including taking a collaborative approach, incorporating both theory and practice into training opportunities, and integrating learning into everyday practices. Harwood, Klopper, Osanyln, and Vanderlee (2013) was one of the proponents of taking collaborative, team-based approaches to training, as well as training strategies that valued listening to educators who were participating. Harwood et al. utilized qualitative, audio-recorded interviews with 25 Canadian, Nigerian, and South African early childhood educators to evaluate educator's perceptions of ideas related to professionalism. Results uncovered themes by participants noting the opportunity to engage critical discourse and the positive benefits discourse has on influences on professionalism (Harwood et al., 2013). NAEYC (2020) valued this collaborative approach also, acknowledging that early childhood educators had a constantly evolving knowledge base and that to develop new shared knowledge, opportunities were needed for dialogue and attention to differences. Cunningham et al. (2015) assigned collaborative relationships as one of the important tools of growth and improvement, and Urban et al. (2012) argued for supporting peer learning as well as intergenerational learning embedded within competent, collaborative systems. The theme of incorporating both theory and practice elements into learning opportunities was supported by Urban et al. (2012) and Cunningham et al. (2015), the latter encouraging the practice of having both content and pedagogical knowledge emphasized within an active learning experience. Finally, incorporating every day practice into learning designs was found as the third promising characteristic of

successful strategies supported by Foley and Kaiser (2013) and Urban et al. (2012). Intentionally recognizing past and present daily experiences, incorporating experiences into the learning experience, and building upon experiences was found to be part of successful PD experiences that resulted in increased chance of improved performance and competence (Urban et al., 2012). Conclusions from Urban et al. (2012) stemmed from a research study that set out to identify how to develop, support, and maintain competence for ECE professionals in a systematic way. The mixed-methods study included a literature review, analyzed survey results from fifteen participating countries, and seven case studies.

Strategies

Reflection

A promising strategy found to have positive effects when utilized to support professionalism of teachers was reflection. Brown et al. (2017) noted the importance of reflecting on practice, citing the complexity of teaching preschool children, and along with Roumell (2019), stressed the importance of incorporating intentional, reflective practices into the learning. Results from Buettner et al. (2016), Brown et al., (2017) and Roumell (2019), all connected the ability of reflection to promote positive improvement in practice. Bloom et al. (2010) reiterated this connection to improvement, and added that helping teachers reflect and analyze actions should be a goal of PD, along with the goal of formulating strategies to help improve competence. Reasons for the success of using reflection included the roots of TOL reflection created, and also relevance (Brown et al., 2017). NAEYC (2020) affirmed that PD for early childhood educators should strengthen teachers' reflective practice ability, including PD

using supervisor and peer feedback. Buettner et al. (2016) noted that the specific professional development method of monthly self-reflective writing was beneficial to improved practices in the areas of behavior management, productivity, and modeling of language in classrooms.

Organizational Support

Another promising strategy useful for program administrators that was identified throughout the research is the notion of providing organizational support to developing professionals. Renta-Davids et al. (2014) linked work environment elements to the transfer of learning and Taggart (2015) concluded organizations exhibiting compassionate cultures were integral in the success of proven training strategies. Multiple sources listed administration as important personnel in organizational support. NAEYC (2020) promoted the use of coaching and mentoring PD from early childhood programs for staff, and Boyer (2004) specified that leadership and mentorship support networks must be carried out on the educational site.

In reviewing specifics regarding organizational support as a promising strategy to support teachers' PD, research by Kilinc (2014) found that organizations with a support culture or task culture were associated with higher levels of teacher professionalism. Kilinc's quantitative study included 386 teachers from 18 Ankara primary schools, chosen by random sampling. The majority of these teachers were male and had been working in their current schools for less than 6 years. The study utilized two scales, the Teacher Professional Scale and the Organizational Culture scale, to gain teachers perception of school culture and teacher professionalism. Results, while some were contradictory to results of similar studies, showed support cultures' main characteristic was the relationships that existed between individuals that were based on trust

(Kilinc, 2014). Support cultures based staff interactions on collaboration and PD, and focused on the accomplishment of goals. In the task culture the work was the main focal point and all development was based on goals. Organizational culture of schools was shown to possibly dictate managerial priorities. Bloom et al. (2010) research tied this to administrator action, and showed that managerial priorities tend to dictate the importance conveyed regarding professional development activities at centers, rather than actual financial constraints. Research concluded staff gain knowledge about how important professional development in organizations by the concrete ways administrators promoted these activities.

Activities that can show this organizational support and priority for learning included teacher study groups. These groups described by Cunningham et al. (2015) held a collaborative context including opportunities for teacher feedback, problem-solving, and sharing experiences and knowledge in a supportive manner. In addition, Urban et al. included providing sufficient paid time for learning opportunities and focusing on changing both individual and collective practices through continuous PD opportunities over time (2012). Urban's study concluded that team-level competence was raised along with professionalism, when coherent support was provided from organizations offering possibilities for change and allowing for critical reflection. Organizational support was also tied to successful TOL in the literature review, which solidified the strategy as a promising and beneficial practice. Organizational climate perception of supervisor and peer support was found to be one of the static variables in ensuring TOL in the study by Renta-Davids et al. (2014). In agreement, Turab and Casimir (2015) found that

employees that worked in organizations where strong ties to other employees are felt had better attitudes about TOL, and therefore TOL was increased.

Scaffolding

Another specific strategy that was found to be successful in increasing the learning transfer of PD was scaffolding. Scaffolding was defined by Foley and Kaiser (2013) as a combination of ensuring that the learning environment, instructional plan, supporting resources, and instructional delivery are structured in a manner that best supports learning for all individuals. Cunningham et al. (2015) also supported the use of scaffolding as a valuable strategy and related this positive strategy to how teachers support children's classroom learning. Foley and Kaiser (2013) found relevance as the key to effective resource and scaffolding implementation. The researchers further concluded without scaffolding, much time could be spent only developing a foundational understanding of the learning, rather than getting support for that understanding and moving on to mastery and application (Foley & Kaiser, 2013).

Flipped Classroom

Another promising strategy found in the literature review discussed by Kurt (2017) and Foley and Kaiser (2013) utilized the premise of a flipped classroom in designing the learning event. In this teaching method, technology was used to move content introduction outside of the traditional classroom, and assigned as homework for learners. Collaborative inquiry-based learning was used during class time (Kurt, 2017). In looking positively at removing barriers and implementing strategies that worked, many findings centered on strategies that were based around the facilitator's understanding of the learner, and the planning and design of the learning

event. This qualitative and quantitative data from the Kurt study (2017) came from 62 pre-service teachers who participated in a classroom management course delivered in two different methods. One method was traditional and included group lectures, with little time for discussion and independent reading. The second method utilized the flipped classroom structure. Exam results and surveys were collected from participants of both methods. Kurt found a theme related to the benefits of individualized learning. Specific findings of the study showed that in the flipped classrooms, learners developed more self-efficacy beliefs and also achieved higher exam scores than in traditional classrooms. The findings of the participant interview from Kurt were summarized in themes, showing perception of better learning and enjoyment of flipped model learning led to high satisfaction with method of instruction, and that the classroom environment was student-centered, more positive, and less stressful (Kurt, 2017).

Kurt's 2017 study showed that use of a flipped classroom resulted in an increase in rapport between teachers and students, an increase in student collaboration, and an increase of time used for engaging activities rather than passive learning. Based on the constructivist learning theory, the flipped classroom afforded the opportunity for differentiated instruction as learners could rewind, skip, repeat as necessary to prepare for class at their own pace and levels. Teachers also had more time for individualized feedback during class since they were not filled with prescribed lectures. Foley and Kaiser (2013) agreed with the Kurt (2017) findings and argued that the flipped classroom allowed for time to be devoted to approaches that were experiential and interactive. Kurt (2017) also found positive perceptions of flipped classroom experience by the learner, as well as positive classroom environment and opportunity to work

with peers. Findings of both of these studies are connected to the previous discussion regarding increased TOL and the link between perception and higher learning transfer. This research related to the focus question at hand because classroom management components of the class used in this study are similar to those that would exist in a classroom management course for ECE professionals and suggest a link between effective techniques used in this class and successful strategies in ECE.

Conclusion

Bloom et al. reminded readers that “machines can be worked, but humans must be developed” (2010, p. 62). Many of the studies cited in the literature review demonstrated common threads of specific concerns of both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in the ECE field. Studies gave insight as to specific supports and strategies that program administration could implement to help support the development of professionalism among each group of teachers. Boyer (2004) affirmed professionalism concerns and teacher development areas must be addressed as a retention strategy for the future of ECE. This literature review can help program administrators support staff with professional growth. Examination of information learned from the research studies, along with identifying limitations, gaps, and possibilities for future research, can assist the field in adopting and implementing new strategies to keep moving forward to ensure necessary support occurs for teachers.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

This chapter summarizes key findings of the literature review, and discusses implications of the research related to future instructional practice. Many commonalities have been found regarding the professional development needs of teachers, and the discussion in this chapter summarizes potentially positive practices that program administrators can implement to assist in supporting this ongoing need. Limitations of the studies reviewed are presented, as well as gaps found throughout the literature review. Both limitations and gaps are used to suggest potential future studies related to strategies for supporting the professional development (PD) of early childhood education (ECE) staff, which would be helpful in formulating more consistent practice across the field.

Discussion and Application

This literature review presents many common implications regarding supporting the professionalism of ECE teachers. In general terms, many studies report that teachers continue to grow in professionalism when ongoing support is given (Boyer, 2004; Kilinc, 2014; Tzuo et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2017). Attention to teacher support is also needed for practitioners who have not yet started in the field formally. Perceptions of competency in professional behaviors is another area of importance that Boyer (2004) and Kilinc (2014) note. Research reports support is needed to help teachers raise confidence levels and the ability to grow in the ECE field. Strategies for support in this area can be implemented beginning with pre-service teachers. Support recommendations involve methods that increase the possibility of the transfer of learning (TOL) from PD opportunities into daily practice. Specific methods this review suggests

may be helpful to administrators of ECE programs including offering collaborative PD opportunities to help teachers grow in professionalism (Boyer, 2004; Kilinc, 2014; Buettner et al., 2016) and offering staff opportunities to take part in mentorship programs (Boyer, 2004; Brown et al., 2017). Ongoing, collaborative PD activities including opportunities for reflection and continued learning in the area of professionalism and ethics should also be afforded to program staff by program administration in order to continue the professional growth of all teachers (Tzuo et al., 2016; Buettner et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017). Positive results in studies using methods with increased rates of TOL lead to the conclusion that administrators can implement PD opportunities that employ such methods with team members to help support continued professional growth over the length of careers. Incorporating flipped classroom learning opportunities (Kurt, 2017), committing to the scaffolding of adult learning (Cunningham et al., 2015), and providing a consistent atmosphere of ongoing organizational support (Kilinc, 2014; Urban et al. 2012) are three strategic applications that stem from this literature review.

Limitations

The review of the research led to multiple implications for future support for professional growth despite many limitations identified within the studies. Common limitations across the studies in this literature review are important to point out that lead to recommendations for future research regarding professionalism and how to support the professional growth of early childhood teachers. Multiple studies cite limited sample size as a specific limitation to the research (Boyer, 2004; Brown et al., 2017; Buettner et al., 2016; Scharff et al., 2017). Harwood

et al. (2013), Seo and Moon (2013), and Turab and Casimir (2015) note the small sample size of the studies as limitations as well, with each noting that findings cannot be generalized and suggesting that more information on the demographics of participants would have been helpful in both studies. The Seo and Moon study (2013) presents additional limitations, including producing point-in-time findings, which only allow the study to view one career stage of the participating individuals, and a potential overlap of the professionalism features of the scale and the domains of the teaching efficacy scale. Seo and Moon also note general difficulties in measuring teacher's professionalism.

Gaps

The search and review of the literature reveals a few gaps that are important to mention. Despite the evidence for continued support for professional growth for teachers, and the potential strategies that can be utilized by administrators to lend support, gaps are present in terms of having studies that combine these two aspects together. Research is lacking that shows specific studies following ECE teachers through professional learning opportunities and then measuring growth based on the specific strategies utilized. Also lacking is research on current or past support strategies which administrators use and the specific effects of the strategies on staff growth. These two areas of missing research may relate to a third major gap, which is research on how to measure growth in the area of professionalism overall. The gap exists despite searching six databases and two search engines using keywords such as *early childhood education* (or *early childhood educators*) and *professionalism* or *growth* or *strategies* or *development* or *professional development* or *coaching* or *improvement* or *competency*. Despite

the limitations and gaps in the search, the literature review ties studies together to suggest promising future strategies that administrators can implement to help support the growth of the ECE professionals on staff, yet future studies are needed to strengthen the case for the outcome of utilizing strategies for both the employees and the children the ECE programs serve.

Future Research

Possibilities for future studies can be drawn from many of the common limitations present in the literature reviewed, along with the identified gaps in research. Replicating many of the research studies on a larger scale may help strengthen the conclusions and implications found by researchers. For example, further information in the Seo and Moon study (2013) could possibly help affirm or refute assumptions of gender and race or ethnicity. Future studies recording demographics such as gender, education, and age information may be useful if collected on a large scale, to determine if potentially positive strategies are successful with all demographics. Specific to individual research reviews, two studies suggest specific research that would be helpful in the future. Buettner et al. (2016) note that future research looking at the specific quality of courses or professionalism content therein would be helpful, along with studies showing that more pre-service training in the area of professionalism has a positive relationship with actual performance levels. Kilinc (2014) suggests that different research methods looking into the perception of teacher professionalism and the relationship between professionalism and bureaucratic school cultures is needed in order to reaffirm study results showing the positive correlation between support-based and task-based schools and levels of professionalism.

In addition to future study ideas based on limitations from current research, gaps in the literature review uncover potential areas of future research to identify strategies helpful for the PD of ECE teachers. Future research studies should follow ECE teachers through professional learning opportunities and then measure growth based on the specific strategies utilized. Research on current or past support strategies which administrators use, and results on staff growth would be beneficial as well. Finally, research on how to measure growth in the area of professionalism and among different aspects of PD specific to ECE would be helpful as a baseline guide as to how to measure other strategies and effects on staff. Future research possibilities are plentiful, and each endeavor will bring the field closer to creating a consistent process for ensuring the continued growth of early childhood teachers across career lengths, a process that is invaluable for ensuring quality programming for children.

Conclusion

Based on the research analyzed regarding the benefits of supportive organizations on the development of staff, this literature review proposes supporting the continued growth of teachers as a viable strategy for ECE programs and program administrators. Numerous studies have revealed insights to a combination of strategies that can be implemented together as solutions for supporting ECE professional growth from pre-service, through ongoing training, and in the classrooms on a daily basis for the lengths of each teacher's career. "This solution network is a function of leadership and mentorship that should and can be instituted and carried out by administrators and resource or master educators on the educational site" (Boyer, 2004). Though the studies analyzed in the review originated from differing fields, much of the future research

suggested had similar themes containing a focus on the learner as one key to successful TOL. Evidence such as this suggested employing proven TOL strategies within the ECE field as a positive move towards supporting professional growth. Analysis offered in this review uncovers promising research-based strategies that solidify and improve the professionalism level of ECE staff in child care programs. This is of great importance to the guidance of future ECE methods that can be adopted at program levels to ensure continued quality programming and learning experiences for all children in their earliest years of life.

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