

RUNNING HEAD: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF PROTOCOL-BASED  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

**An Examination of the Effects of Protocol-based Professional Development on First  
Year Teachers**

**BY**

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF PROTOCOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT ON FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

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# AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF PROTOCOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

## **Abstract**

Teacher retention has a major effect on students, schools, and the education system. First-year teachers leave the field at a higher rate because they struggle with finding appropriate resources, teacher isolation, and a burdening workload (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). First-year teachers feel inadequate because they are thrown into role with a low success rate and a lack of resources and supports. This is important because teacher turnover becomes perpetual, consistently having to train new teachers and first-year teachers have a much higher likelihood of being ineffective at reaching appropriate student gains (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In order to help reverse this trend, I introduced a protocol-based professional development program specifically designed to meet the needs of first-year teachers. The results of this study show that teachers were able to reduce isolation by connecting with one another through the shared experience of failure. Additionally, the findings show how breaking down isolation among first-year teachers increases collaboration, thus increasing their exposure to different resources and supports, providing them opportunities to improve as teachers. This study highlights ways that facilitators can effectively create a professional development environment where connections and collaboration can take place to ensure teachers are reducing isolation while also improving their own teaching practice through various means.

For teachers and administrators who have never done this before, the initial implementation can be challenging, therefore I have included a professional development plan that will provide a curriculum and resources to help first time facilitators. Furthermore, I have included an article outlining the benefits to first-year teachers so administrators can identify ways this professional development could benefit their schools. This professional development, when facilitated and

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supported effectively helps first-year teachers with the common struggles that they face, most notably the isolation they experience as first-year teachers.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to start by dedicating this to my family. Without the constant support of my wife, Nikki, I would not have even started this program, let alone finished it. I would also like to dedicate this to my daughter, Fiona, who while probably delaying the completion of this, provided constant happiness and motivation to keep going. I would also like to thank my parents and my brothers, who have always supported me and taught me that hard work pays off.

I also need to thank everyone in my dissertation group. Each of you have been so supportive in so many ways and made this process a truly memorable experience. I will always appreciate you guys helping with advice to my study, but more importantly, letting me know that I would finish and that things were progressing along even when they did not feel that way. Dr. Battey, my dissertation chair, has been the single most important person in the process of this study, always available with thoughts and ideas, always willing to help, and always bringing a positive energy to our classes. I would also like to thank Dr. Hyland, because of your expertise, it opened up my eyes to many different directions for the study I had not considered. And finally, Dr. Flanagan, I thank you for everything you have done over the year, not only as a principal and member of this committee, but as a mentor to me from the beginning of my career as a teacher. I appreciate everything that all of you have put into this process.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

Of all of the educational issues that face this country, one that is often overlooked is the impact of teacher retention on students, schools, and the education system. Teachers go through extensive training, gain valuable experience, obtain skills to become excellent teachers and then leave the field and force a new inexperienced candidate to go through that process again. This is a problem in schools across the country, but this issue seems to be even more prevalent in low-income schools. Poor teacher retention in low-income areas is one of the main reasons that the “achievement gap” exists and has been so difficult to close (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Hays, 2013). Therefore, many students who live in low-income areas are falling dangerously behind, which disproportionately effects Hispanic and black students (Ramalho, Garza & Merchant, 2010; Hays, 2013; Murnane, 2007). Teachers remaining in their schools, specifically in low-income schools, would have a positive effect on the achievement gap because there would not be a constant need to train new teachers. Teachers in their first year have been shown to have a much higher likelihood of being ineffective at reaching appropriate student gains (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Programs that promote teacher retention, particularly within schools that serve Hispanic and black children, could potentially benefit students by keeping high quality teachers in the classroom.

Teacher retention has become a major issue that schools face on a yearly basis. Schools, particularly low-income schools, struggle to keep their teachers in their school or district and the effect on the students is drastic. There are a number of studies that have identified school or district related factors that cause a higher rate of attrition (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). First year teachers leave the field at a higher rate because they struggle with finding appropriate resources, are isolated from colleagues, and face a

burdening workload (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). However, there are ways to combat these issues, many that do not require additional funds, which can be put in place to help increase teacher retention within a school or district. In order to overcome the issues many of these schools face, the intersection of professional development and teacher retention must be a priority.

Drawing on this work of creating a professional community in low-income schools, I explored how professional development can be an effective way to combat teacher attrition for first year teachers. Being a first year teacher in a low-income school is notoriously difficult and results in low teacher retention after the first year. One of the major factors in supporting teacher retention, as discussed prior, was effective professional development. Professional development creates a sense of buy in, improves teacher community, and helps improve teacher's abilities in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Huggins, Scheurich & Morgan, 2011; Vale, Davies, Weaven, Hooley, Davidson, and Loton, 2010). There is a need to implement effective professional development programs in schools that address factors such as teacher isolation and access to resources to try and fix this growing problem.

To conduct my study, I implemented a protocol-based professional development program targeting the issues that are faced by the first year teachers in the school. This was a full year, continuous program that met once a month and used protocols to uncover, diagnose, and address the issues that first year teachers faced in my school. As a group, we discussed the issues, found the root causes of them, and brainstormed ways to help the teachers in the classroom. My role was to facilitate the discussion, ensure that everyone stayed on track in the meetings, and support the conversation in any way that I could. I used existing research of first year teacher issues, coupled with real-time feedback from the participants, to guide the topics we would cover

throughout our sessions. Through this PD, teachers were able to build trusting professional relationships with one another to combat isolationism, all while creating a solution driven environment to tackle the day-to-day issues that teachers were facing in their classroom.

### **Description of Artifacts**

My dissertation, “An Examination of the Effects of Protocol-based Professional Development on First year teachers” consists of three unique components. These components include a practitioner article, a scholarly research article, and a Professional Development plan for teacher leaders in their schools. These different components allow me to present my findings to different communities. The purpose of the practitioner article is to reach administrators who are looking to make changes in their status quo and improve the environment in their schools for first year teachers. The research article is designed to present my findings to the existing literature on protocol based professional development as well as the literature on first year teacher attrition in urban schools. Finally, the PD plan is for teacher leaders, providing a blueprint on how to execute a professional development program for first year teachers within their education setting. It is my hope that each of these documents reaches a unique audience to get this information to as many educators as possible to create change within the way we support first year teachers. The following paragraphs will describe each artifact in more detail.

The first part of my portfolio is an article written for the journal Educational Leadership, which is directed at educators, specifically educational leaders. The goal for this article is to communicate critical features of the first year teacher professional development as well as some of the benefits it could offer schools. I hope to engage administrators in implementing this in their school, based on the benefits that the first year teachers experienced and the limited cost to implement the program. This article highlights some of the essential components that must be

present in order to have a successful program, such as how to build trust among colleagues and how protocols are used and modified in order to adapt to the personnel and their needs. This article examines a few of the major findings in my group, which were the normalizing of failure, the power of shared experience, and how it united the group. This is intended to demonstrate to administrators that with the proper facilitation, negative experience can unite teacher, reducing isolation, and ideally, driving a solution driven professional development that is helpful to first year teachers and the school as a whole.

The second part of my portfolio is a scholarly research article written for *Urban Education*, geared towards researchers focused on urban schools. My research is designed to see how implementing a first year teacher professional development has an effect on teacher retention within urban schools. Keeping good teachers has long been an issue in urban schools. My research used a qualitative approach to determine the effects that professional development has in the areas of workload burden, lack of resources, and teacher isolationism. I have chosen those issues because they are three of the major reasons that first year teachers leave. In the article, I track how this program helped reduce isolationism over the course of their first year. In the initial interviews, isolationism was high and teachers were only building relationships with their Co-teachers, and even those were superficial. In the middle of the year, a shift occurred and teachers talked about the relationships they formed within the group, and the positive effects of those relationships. I detail how teachers discussed feeling less isolated and how the group reflected those feelings. I also examine how the sharing of resources occurred in the professional development program. We looked at how resources were brought to the group, discussed and analyzed in our sessions, and then tried out in classrooms between sessions. Teachers shared their experience with the strategies and resources and how they impacted their classrooms.

Teachers also shared an increased likelihood to try something when it came from our group because they knew that it was coming from a trusted colleague who was also a first year teacher, so they knew the strategy was accessible. Finally, I examine the thoughts of the teachers when it comes to scheduling and how they were affected by their workload. The study uncovered some ways to help deal with the stress of a busy workload and how teachers were able to be more efficient to alleviate some of the work. I also share some of the feelings of the participants on what effect their workload had on their year, which yields some interesting insights into scheduling and how it can improved, particularly for special education teachers. I feel that Urban Education is the best place for this article because these schools are the ones most affected by the problem I am examining and will have the most to gain if benefits of this program are shared.

The third part of this portfolio is a professional development plan to help teacher leaders or administrators who are attempting to implement this in their school. This plan explains how to create an environment that facilitates discussion among a group of first year teachers. I lay out the specific practices that I used to develop trust and build buy-in from the group. In this plan, I lay out the specific design of the professional development, including the sequence of the professional development sessions and the adapted protocols that guided my sessions. I describe the first session in detail, including how I developed trust in the group and what I did in that session to get information from the participants about how they wanted the sessions to run and what topics they wanted to cover. I also break down session three in detail so teacher leaders can get an idea of what a protocol-based session looks like. This gives teacher leaders the materials and knowledge they need to implement PD with first year teachers in their school. I include schedules so they can see the agenda, which follow a similar pattern in sessions two through seven. This agenda shows the amount of time that I allowed for teacher check in, the protocols,

and for a closing, and includes specific details of what is happening in each part. By having this information, teacher leaders get an idea of how effective this can be at helping first year teachers. This information can be used to start a professional development program for first year teachers in other schools.

Chapter 2: An Examination of the Effects of Protocol-based Professional Development on First Year

Teachers

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## **Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Of all of the educational issues that face this country, one that is often overlooked is the impact of teacher attrition on students, schools, and the education system. Teachers go through extensive training, gain valuable experience, obtain skills to become excellent teachers, and then leave the field and force a new inexperienced candidate to go through that process again. This is a problem in schools across the country, but this issue is even more prevalent in low-income schools. Poor teacher retention in low-income areas is one of the main reasons that the “achievement gap” exists and has been so difficult to close (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Hays, 2013). Specifically, schools that disproportionately serve Hispanic and black students who live in low-income areas are falling dangerously behind (Ramalho, Garza & Merchant, 2010; Hays, 2013; Murnane, 2007). Teachers remaining in their schools, specifically in low-income schools, would have a positive effect on the achievement gap because there would not be a constant need to train new teachers. Additionally, the constant teacher turnover leads to more students taught by first year teachers when research has established that teachers in their first year have a much higher likelihood of being ineffective at reaching appropriate student gains than their more experienced colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Programs that combat teacher attrition would benefit students by keeping high quality teachers in the classroom.

Drawing on this work of creating a professional community, this study explored how professional development can be an effective way to combat teacher attrition for first year teachers. First year teachers struggle with finding appropriate resources, teacher isolation, and classroom management, just to name a few issues (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond,

2003; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). One potential way to address teacher attrition, as discussed prior, is effective professional development. High quality professional development creates a sense of buy-in, improves teacher community, and helps improve teacher's abilities in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Huggins, Scheurich & Morgan, 2011; Vale, Davies, Weaven, Hooley, Davidson, and Loton, 2010). There is a need to use the programs and initiatives that are working in schools that are thriving academically as a model to implement them in other schools to effectively improve teacher retention and instruction.

To better support first year teachers, a protocol-based professional development program was implemented that targeted the issues that first-year teachers face in schools, with teacher isolation as the focal point. This was a full-year continuous program that met once a month and used protocols to address the teacher isolation that often occurs as teachers begin their careers. The school is located in a low-income community in a large metropolitan area with a student population that is majority Hispanic and black and over 90 percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch. The six teachers that participated in the study ranged in terms of grade level and subject area, including special education teachers. This professional development intervention was developed to respond to the following research questions:

- 1) How can trust be built in a protocol based professional development to alleviate feelings of isolation and ultimately impact teacher's commitment to stay in low-income urban schools?
- 2) How can professional development be used to build a collaborative environment where teachers share resources and strategies to drive improvement in teaching practice?

### **Literature Review**

Teacher retention has become a major issue that schools face on a yearly basis. Schools, particularly low-income schools, struggle to keep their teachers in their school or district and the effect on the students is drastic (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Through an examination of the literature, this review highlights alarming statistics about teacher retention, both in general and in low-income areas, which affect schools and students. It also highlights some of the institutional factors that negatively impact new teachers, the effect these factors have on teachers, and ways that we can try and improve these conditions in our schools. There are a number of studies that have identified school or district related factors that cause a higher rate of attrition. These issues can be traced from the school to the individual teacher to show how these school conditions cause teachers to leave the field. Finally, there are ways to combat these issues, many which do not require additional funds, that can be put in place to help increase teacher retention within a school or district. The literature on ways to support retention guide this study, as it implemented strategies that are used in successful schools to examine how to effectively support first-year teachers.

### **Poor Teacher Retention and Why It Is Important**

A major problem facing our education system at this time is the amount of teachers that are leaving their schools and the field. Teacher turnover hurts schools in many ways because it often leads to new and inexperienced teachers taking over classes, which negatively impacts students' success (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Teacher retention rates vary depending on the state, but on the national level, one out of every four new public school teachers left the teaching field within three years (Griener & Smith, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics states that 9.3% of public school teachers

leave before their first-year and as much as 50% of beginning teachers leave before the end of their fifth year of teaching (Griener & Smith, 2006). When you look at low-income schools, those rates are even worse (Perry & McConney, 2010; Templeton, 2011). A number of alternative route certification programs have been started in an attempt to combat teacher retention, but this has not made any impact on the problem (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). These programs often attempt to solve the problem in major cities, where low-income schools are more prevalent and have a tougher time filling vacant teacher slots. The problem with these programs is they often bring in teachers that do not have as much training and give them assignments that are more difficult than traditional route teachers (Andrews & Martin, 2003). When looking at data from one program, Teach For America (TFA), we see even higher turnover rates than we do with the national average. In New York City and Houston, 85% of TFA left the district within the first four years and in Baltimore, 80% of TFA teachers left after five years (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). This study will include five alternate route teacher and only one traditional route teacher. As much as programs like TFA provide teachers to areas that need them, they have not been able to keep teachers in the field, which is a trend that the education system must reverse.

Poor teacher retention has many negative effects on the education system. The first and most glaring, is the effect on student outcomes. According to Darling-Hammond (2003), the largest gains in student achievement are accomplished by well-prepared, experienced teachers. Beginner teachers and teachers without proper training have the lowest effect on student achievement gains, with many instances of these teachers being so drastic that they undo gains from prior years (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The education system is bringing in more and more new teachers that are not formally trained, and while this is not to say that all of these teachers

are doing a poor job, they are not as effective as experienced teachers. There is also a huge economic effect of teacher turnover. It costs taxpayers almost \$2.2 billion dollars per year because of teachers changing schools and nearly \$2.7 billion dollars per year because of teachers leaving the profession altogether (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). These effects cost the district and the school, but most important, the students. It is essential that we find ways to lower these numbers and keep qualified, experienced teachers in the classroom. Education as a whole, needs to find ways to keep the experienced effective teachers to continue to educate our students, serve as mentors for new teachers, and increase the effectiveness of our schools.

Teacher attrition among special education teachers is also an issue. This group represents our most underserved students and the group that needs high quality teachers the most, yet they often have the most inexperienced teachers (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Lankford, Loeb and Wyckoff (2002) examined teacher data in the state of New York from 1986 to 2002 and found that special education teachers had higher attrition rates than general education teachers. The study also concluded that special education students had teachers with one half of a year less experience than their general education counterparts (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). To add a more qualitative perspective, Freeman and Appleman (2009) conducted their study on 26 teachers who joined the MUSE program in California, which has been much more successful than most with retaining teachers. In their study, they interviewed the teachers who left the program and found that the teachers who left the special education program cited an inability to manage their schedule and a lack of support as two major reasons why they left the profession (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Special education teachers have been particularly difficult to staff and retain in the school site for this

study. Therefore, the impact of the PD implemented is important to understand with respect to the retention of special education teachers in particular.

### **Institutional Factors**

This section is organized by institutional factors that impact teacher retention. Challenging schedules, a lack of resources, and a lack of collaboration are factors that lead to the negative effects for teachers. These are a result of ineffectiveness or oversight that puts the teachers in a position where their experiences are not ideal. The effects of these factors are reasons that teachers say they leave the profession. Finally, I address methods that the literature has shown have a positive effect on alleviating some of those institutional burdens and increasing the likelihood of teacher retention within a school.

When examining the literature, there are many reasons that teachers leave the profession within their first few years. One of the main factors has to do with new teachers being given the most challenging classrooms that are least desirable to experienced teachers. This is because experienced teachers get to choose the classroom they want and often choose the easier assignments (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). This study also highlights how special education teachers are given assignments that can lead to teacher attrition because they are being forced into teaching more difficult assignments when they are still learning how to be an effective teacher (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). New teachers are more often expected to take on multiple classes or multiple subjects, increasing the demand on their content knowledge and need to prepare multiple lesson plans. Teachers often need to work a few years before they obtain more desirable schedules, but for some that is too late. They leave the profession before they are able to settle into their role and start to become experts at their craft. Throughout my study, though this was an area of concern, this was beyond what the PD could

address. However, some qualitative data does emerge on how teaching schedules can play a role in expediting or delaying reduction in teacher isolation.

Another major issue with teacher attrition, specifically in low-income schools, is a lack of resources for new teachers. As mentioned in the introduction, teachers are trained in a variety of preparation programs and some of them have never prepared a lesson or actually taught a class full of students. For many new teachers, the process of finding materials to use is a major issue and many low-income schools do not have materials readily available for use (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Teachers do not have worksheets, project materials, or interactive hands-on materials to teach a lesson. This means every lesson plan they must create is going to take longer, which impacts the workload issue that will be discussed next, and is impacted by the scheduling issues discussed previously. This lack of time and resources has a negative effect on teacher retention (Freedman & Appleman, 2009).

A study by Swars, Meyers, Mays, and Lack (2009) looked at 134 teachers at a high needs elementary school and identified a positive daily life of teachers as one of the main reasons they stayed in the school. This study used survey data from the teachers who stayed in the school and examined the reasons for them staying. The findings indicated that having materials, curriculum guides and aids, and an administration willing to get new resources as being positive influences in their decision to stay (Swars, Meyers, Mays & Lack, 2009). Olsen and Anderson's (2007) took a different approach, examining why teachers left instead of stayed, but came to similar conclusions. In their study of 15 new teachers in a low-income school, twelve either decided to leave the school after one year or were unsure if they would return. When asked why those teachers chose not to return, all mentioned that they were given no starting point and few materials to guide them in creating an effective curriculum (Olsen & Anderson, 2007). One of

the central features of the PD designed for this study was for first year teachers to share resources as a way to address the resource poor nature often found in low income urban schools.

The literature documents that lack of support from colleagues and administration is another major reason for new teachers to leave their schools. New teachers struggle to adjust to the working environment for many reasons. Freedman and Appleman (2009) document that many new teachers struggle to form relationships with their colleagues both professionally and socially. Teachers in their study named isolation as a main reason leaving the profession and talked about school collegiality as a factor for remaining at their school. The teachers who left the program cited reasons such as “no one helped or supported me”, “I was too busy to really talk to my co-workers”, and “most of the teachers just stayed in their classrooms and only worried about their classes” (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). This is similar to the findings in Rothstein, Carnoy, Benveniste, and the Economic Policy Institution (1999), who found that schools that encouraged and made time for teachers to meet professionally had better success retaining teachers. The study found that principals played a key role in facilitating collegiality by creating a culture of collaboration, exchange of ideas, and continuous improvement. Teachers highlighted how important it was to their job satisfaction that they were able to collaborate with their co-workers and felt supported by fellow teachers (Rothstein, Carnoy, Benveniste, & Economic Policy, 1999).

In cases where new teacher face a lack of training and collegiality, this can lead to feelings of isolation in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Therefore, a major issue to address in supporting first-year teachers is isolation. A successful teacher leadership program involves teamwork, openness, and collaboration between administration, teacher leaders, and teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher individualism, isolationism, and privatism are



detrimental to the development of shared educational goals (Hargreaves, 1993). Evidence suggests that the ideal way for teacher leaders to influence other teachers is through trusting and collaborative relationships (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Schools where this lack of support is felt, create a difficult environment for all teachers, particularly inexperienced teachers who are struggling to find their way. Collaboration is the enemy of isolation, and professional development can create trust, vulnerability, and a willingness to learn from one another to create an environment of collaboration within a group.

### **Methods of Improvement to Promote Teacher Retention**

One of the ways that low-income schools work to improve their overall success with students is by improving the skills of the existing people in the building, which can occur through professional development and making sure that teachers feel supported by administrators. A number of studies have focused on how professional development can impact first-year teachers. PD improves their feelings towards teaching, their feelings towards their coworkers, and gets them more invested in their schools. Teachers will improve, the school will improve, and the students will improve and all of this without the high costs of additional hiring (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Maxwell, Huggins & Scheurich, 2010; Urick & Bowers, 2014). These findings serves as a basis for the present study as it attempted to take the benefits of professional development and gear them towards first-year teachers to alleviate the prior noted effects that lead to attrition.

Implementation of professional development, when done correctly, can positively impact attrition rates of first-year teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Professional development programs use collaboration to promote relationship building among teachers, which in turn leads to an improved working environment for first-year teachers. Improved working conditions and

professional development are more cost effective and more influential components of teacher attrition than even salary. It was found that teachers would need a 20% raise to even see a significant effect on attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2017). While professional development has demonstrated many benefits to first-year teachers, it is unclear how professional development is reducing isolation. The connection between professional development being used, isolation being reduced, and teachers improving their practice is lacking.

Transitional programs into teaching, or induction programs, have shown to have positive effects on first-year teacher retention rates. These programs, which include mentoring programs and professional development programs are designed to address the major areas of retention; isolationism, resources and workload. A study by Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) examined 92 special education teachers who were part of stress management workshops and collaboration programs. These programs showed positive outcomes in the categories of job satisfaction because the teachers felt more job support and that the supports were practical. These teachers reported that they were more likely to stay in their job in the short and long term because of the supports provided by the programs (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). Similar findings occurred in studies done by Ingersoll and Smith (2004) and Smith & Ingersoll (2004), which examined induction programs and their effects on first-year teachers. These studies looked at the effects of collaboration programs, reduced workload, increased resources, and mentoring opportunities from teachers in the same subject and school. Both of these studies also indicated that these programs have positive effects on teacher isolation. Teachers discussed increased collaboration with other teachers, leading to improved job satisfaction and increase likelihood to return (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) noted that the changes were only significant when the first-year teachers had multiple supports. The different

supports focused on different reasons for leaving and it was only when more than one of these reasons was being address that teachers felt the need to stay in their current role (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). While these studies all demonstrate how professional development programs can have positive outcomes when dealing with teacher retention, they are lacking in the qualitative detail as to how the programs affect the first-year teachers. These studies do not go into what part of the professional development is helping them to reduce their feelings of isolation or their lack of resources. It is essential to find out what elements of professional development reduce isolation, how do they translate to teacher retention, and how do teachers experience and quantify this reduced isolation. Through the present study, high quality professional development was implemented to document the effects of that PD on first-year teachers, with particular attention to isolation, but also attending to workload and resources. Determining how and why these programs are effective increases the fields chances of designing successful support programs to improve teacher retention in urban schools.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

In this study, the author facilitated professional development for a group of first-year teachers at the school. The study examined the professional development program to determine how professional development created trust and buy-in from the participants to improve teacher collaboration. In addition, the study looked into how that collaboration led to benefits in the classroom, and how the professional development improved the experience of being a teacher. This design was a good fit for the study because it followed teachers throughout their first year to document how the sessions addressed issues of isolation for teachers and how reducing isolation led to increased collaboration and ultimately, improvements in teaching practice. Additionally,

the study followed them into year two to reflectively examine their perspectives on issues of workload, resources, and isolation. Using this design, the analysis mapped the strategies that were discussed in the PLC, how the teacher used them, if they were effective, and how that helped or hurt the teaching experience for each of the participants. This study provides a unique opportunity to dig deeper in understanding the degree to which PD can have an effect on first-year teachers in addressing the major causes of teacher attrition, namely isolation.

### **Site Selection**

The school is an urban public school that services low-income students from sixth through twelfth grade. The school had approximately 700 students and 50 teachers, which includes 11 Special Education teachers. The class sizes were generally between 22-25 students per class, with the exception of self-contained classrooms which were around 8-10 students. The demographic breakdown of the school was 71% Hispanic, 25% African American, 2% Asian, and 2% White. The school had classified 25% of the students as needing special education services and 7.5% as English Learners, with 90.4% receiving free or reduced lunch. This school over the last few year has lost some teachers, although comparative to other schools, these numbers are not drastically high. Following the 2015-2016 school year, seven teachers left out of 44, or 15.9%, including three special education teachers. Following the 2016-2017 school year, five teachers left out of the 47 teachers, or 10.6%, including one special education teacher. In each of those years, two of those teachers that left were in their first three years of teaching.

This structure of the school, in serving grades six through twelve was framed as a major benefit to the students because the school prides itself on its “seven year” journey. A major value of the school was focused on the whole child: mentally, physically, and emotionally. The school had many counselors and support staff to help focus on these areas along with the

teachers. The middle school also had a “shepherd” for each grade who tried to help those students who were struggling with the emotional aspect of their lives.

The demographics of the staff were a majority white at 55.3%, but the staff was more diverse than the general teaching population. There were a number of African American (19.1%) and Hispanic (14.8%) teachers, and a few teachers with other backgrounds (10.6%), including Eastern Indian and Asian. The students and teachers on the whole came from very different backgrounds and cultures. Race did not appear to play a role in attrition as teachers of various races have left the school in recent years.

### **Participants**

The study included all six first-year teachers at the school. Five of the teachers were in their first year teaching and their first year in the school. One of the teachers had substitute experience in the school, but it was his first year as a full-time teacher. The teachers are spread out across different grade levels and teach different subjects. Below I briefly provide background on each teacher in the study.

Ms. I worked with both eleventh and twelfth graders and is an Integrated Co-Teacher (ICT) for all four of her classes. She worked with the eleventh grade ICT class in both History and Chemistry. She worked with the twelfth grade ICT class in both government and coding, meaning she needed to make modifications for four unique classes each day. Ms. I started teaching through Teach for America (TfA).

Mr. O is also in TfA and joined the profession right out of college. Mr. O taught eighth grade only, working as an ICT teacher for both Social Studies and ELA and teaching Social Studies and ELA to the self-contained eighth grade class. He did teach the self-contained class

multiple times each day and did sometimes have them for a double block of ELA. Because of this, he had to prepare for two or three unique classes each day, depending on the day.

Ms. S was a traditional route teacher, joining the profession right out of college. Ms. S taught general education art to ninth and twelfth grade students. She did not have an ICT teacher for any of her classes. She taught the ninth graders four times a week, seeing each of the four sections once a week. She taught the twelfth-grade section only once a week and that class mainly consisted of students who are missing an art credit. She also was a travelling teacher, meaning she did not have a room and traveled to each class. Ms. S had to prepare for one unique class each day.

Mr. B joined the school through an alternative route teaching program that brought teachers into education from other professions. Mr. B taught Spanish to four sections each day. Each day he taught all four sections of the grade including one class that was an ICT class. Mr. B had to prepare for one unique class per day.

Ms. J was also in TFA and joined directly out of college. She worked with the ninth and tenth grade and was strictly an ICT teacher. She taught both ELA and History and saw her ninth grade class twice a day and her tenth grade class twice a day. Ms. J made modifications to four unique classes each day.

Mr. E also joined the school through the same alternative route program bringing teachers into education from other professions. Mr. E worked with both the eighth and ninth grade and worked as an ICT teacher and self-contained science teacher. He worked as an ICT teacher for the eighth grade math and science classes and worked as an ICT teacher for the ninth grade science class. He had to prepare for two to three different classes each day and multiple subjects.

He did have experience at the school serving as a substitute teacher two years before becoming a full-time teacher.

Teacher	Grade Level(s) Taught	Teaching Route	Subject(s) Taught	ICT Teacher?	Self-Contained Teacher?
Ms. I	11,12	Teach for America	History, Chemistry, Government, Coding	Yes	No
Mr. O	8	Teach for America	Social Studies, English	Yes	Yes
Ms. S	9,12	Traditional Route	Art	No	No
Mr. B	10,11	Alternate Route	Spanish	No	No
Ms. J	9,10	Teach for America	Social Studies, English	Yes	No
Mr. E	8,9	Alternate Route	Math, Science	Yes	Yes

*Figure 1.* Teacher Information Table. This chart provides information describing each teacher in the study.

**Professional Development Sessions**

The professional development sessions met one Monday each month after school for about forty-five minutes. This was a specified professional development time at the school and all teachers were contractually obligated to attend the session, which helped with accountability of the teachers. The study started in October of 2017 and continued through the end of the school year. The study concluded, with the same group, in October of 2018 for the final interviews. This helped determine which teachers decided to stay for at least a second year and allowed the study to collect valuable data around the differences between first and second year perceptions on workload, resources, and isolation. The professional development sessions were

protocol-based, meaning they used adapted protocols that fit the topic covered that day. The facilitator, who also led the sessions, made adaptations to help ensure that the group made the best use of the time, staying on topic, and efficiently coming up with solutions to the teachers' issues. All sessions were documented to identify the different protocols used, the topics covered, and the sessions will be audio-recorded. The protocols were adapted from the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF, 2006). While the topics were based on the gathering issues the teachers struggled with after each session, it was designed to cover common issues for first-year teachers, such as behavioral challenges in the classroom, improving lesson plans, creating effective tasks, and creating engaging lessons.

Each meeting, with the exception of the first, followed a similar schedule starting with some form of an opening, then the protocol for the day, and ending with a wrap-up and discussion about the next session. The protocols were determined based on the topic for the week as determined by the surveys after each session. On the survey, the first question had the teachers ranking the topics they would like to discuss in the next session (Appendix A). The survey did not include content specific material because of the variety of content areas taught, instead opting for general teaching areas such as classroom management, lesson planning, and time management to ensure that everyone could relate to the discussion. The closing for each session was a quick wrap up of the day's discussion, a discussion about possible topics for next session, and reminders regarding post-session surveys.

### **Data Collection**

This study was completed using three main sources of data: interviews, recordings and observations from the PD sessions, and survey data taken after each session. Three interviews were conducted with each teacher throughout the course of the year, each of the three PD



sessions were recorded, and a survey was given after each session to find out the successes and failures of each session and determine if the first-year teachers used any of the ideas that came from the session in the classroom. Each of the data sources allowed the study to track the sessions, their impact on teachers, and the teachers' perspective on remaining in the field in order to respond to each of the research questions.

### *Interviews*

In order to get a deeper look into the first-year teachers' perspectives, the study conducted interviews before the professional development sessions began. These interviews took place in October of 2017 and the interviews lasted about 45 minutes. These were vital to determine what experience the teacher had, some of their perspectives about the issues related to teacher attrition, what the teacher was nervous or excited about, and their thoughts on being at the school moving forward. All of the interviews were audio recorded and done onsite at the high school. In the first interview, I examined teacher perspectives entering the year, what reservations they had, what trainings they participated in, and their thoughts on the field and how long they plan on teaching.

In the second interview, which occurred in February, about halfway through the professional development program, I examined the progress of the sessions and the teachers. Part of the interview looked at how the teacher is coping with their first year teaching and the other part examined their perspective on the professional development sessions. This was an opportunity to check in regarding their responses to the initial interview, including their perceived strengths and weaknesses as well as revisiting their thoughts on some of the indicators of teacher retention from the literature, such as isolation and a burdening workload. I inquired about what they think is beneficial about the professional development sessions, what could be

improved, and if the sessions had any impact on them as a teacher or on their willingness to continue as a teacher in future years. Finally, I used this opportunity to discuss some of the information I found in the survey and the PD sessions. I used this time to confirm or disconfirm preliminary analysis from the sessions and information they provide in the post session surveys. These interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

The final interview was a wrap up of what we have talked about throughout the year, as well as a check in after the summer to see what teachers were experiencing starting year two of teaching. I asked the teachers to share their opinions of the professional development program as a whole. I wanted to find out how the sessions were helpful to the teachers and what suggestions they have for improvement of the sessions in future years. Much like the midline interviews, I used this time to confirm or disconfirm analysis from prior interviews, sessions, and surveys. I purposefully inquired for specific examples of how the sessions were useful and when they used strategies from the sessions in their classrooms. This also served as a preliminary check on some of the themes that were emerging from the prior data sources. Finally, I wanted to know the impact that the program had on them in terms of returning to the school or returning to teaching. These interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and all took place in the teacher's classroom, except for Ms. S, who left the school, which took place over the phone. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### *Session Recordings*

Each session was audio-recorded and transcribed. Additionally, field notes were taken to document each meeting. The purpose for doing this was to have multiple data points to examine observations. These data sources provided insight into the nature and effectiveness of collaboration in the sessions. Examination of how relationships were forming is also important

data from the session recordings. These recordings are evidence to how isolation effected the teachers and how connections between teachers were being made through the PD. The recordings were also important because since the author was also the facilitating, it was important to check the researchers perspective with evidence that may have been missed by also facilitating the sessions.

Field notes were a second method for documenting observations. Field notes captured aspects of the meetings that an audio recording cannot. Whenever we used something like a visual aid or student work, I made a note of that so that the recording made sense in the context of the session. Materials shared during sessions were also photocopied and field notes helped match up sessions with the materials. Field notes also noted critical events. These include breakthroughs that occur, moments that were important, or things that were happening that could not be documented by audio-recordings such as facial reactions, nonverbal cues, or items like visual aids or projections that are central to the sessions. I made observations of strategies that are being discussed or when I thought there is evidence of the sessions helping teachers in some other way, such as collaboration on a lesson plan or sharing resources. This information was used to further support findings from the other data sources such as the post session surveys or the interviews.

### *Surveys*

The final piece of data in the study was surveys that were sent out one week after each session. Surveys asked teachers about their implementation of strategies discussed within the prior session. First, the survey asked if the teachers were able to apply those practices within their classroom and elaborate on the experience. Second, each survey asked the teachers to come up with some ideas for what would be helpful to talk about in the next session. The idea is that

these sessions are helping teachers with their problems in real-time and each session was relatable to what was going on in the classroom. The goal was to make the sessions more engaging and, in the long run, helped the teachers to feel like they had an outlet and a support system when they were struggling. Additionally, the surveys were meant to create a sense of community among the new teachers so that they felt like they had someone to turn to in between sessions if they needed assistance or ideas. The first two questions gave valuable data from the teachers as to how the sessions affected them as teachers and how it affected their practice. The final question was helpful as the facilitator to plan future sessions. The surveys took about ten minutes to complete. This information also informed interviews to confirm or disconfirm how the professional development sessions were used in the classroom.

**Data Analysis**

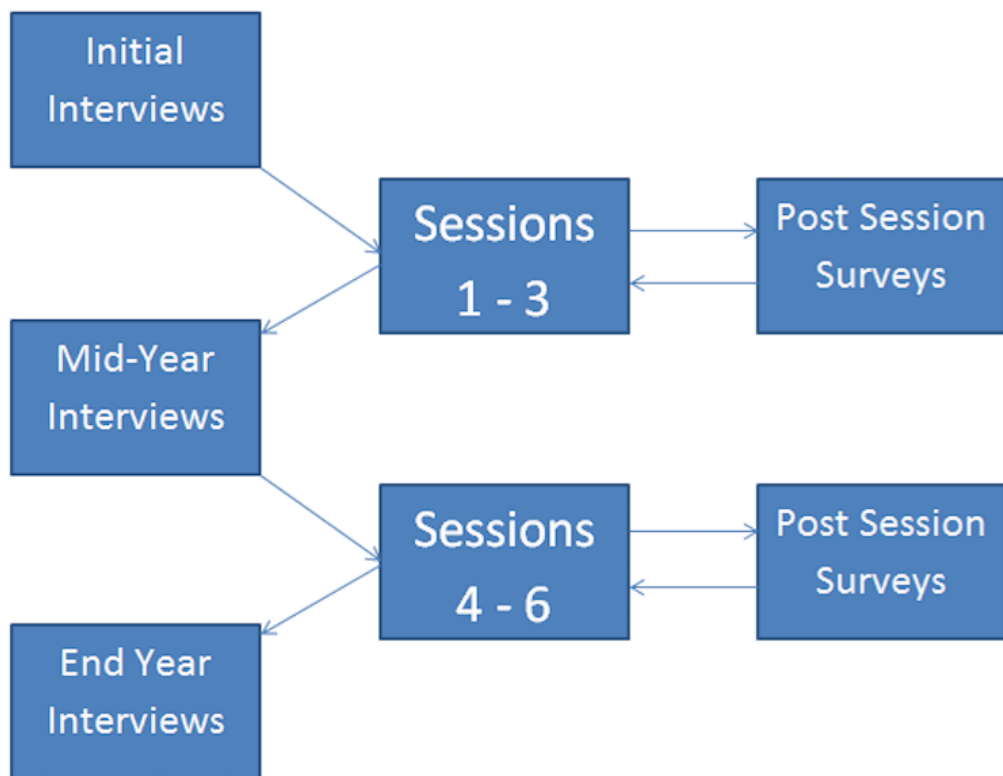


Figure 2. Validity Model: Sequential design of data collection to validate prior data sources.

Each of the three types of data was used to validate one another (see Figure 1). The initial interviews were used to drive the initial professional development session. Once initial interviews were finished, I analyzed the recordings and used their responses to determine topics for the initial professional development session. In addition, the analysis helped raise the major challenges the teachers were facing in their new position, whether it be resources, classroom management, or isolation. The analysis allowed me to examine how this challenge played out in subsequent sessions and to check in about it in follow up interviews. After the PD session was completed, each survey generated ideas for topics to be discussed in the next session. The surveys also provided important information for what strategies were being used in the classroom and what struggles teachers were facing in implementing the strategies, which I inquired about during the mid-year interviews. During the mid-year interviews, I asked the teachers to expand on some of the examples they mentioned in the surveys and the PD sessions to dive deeper into the effects of the program. This gave me valuable data on what information the teachers took from the sessions and applied to their classrooms. This information helped me to understand how these professional development sessions affected the teachers with their pedagogy, content, and students. The second half of the sessions were similarly driven by the surveys, prior sessions, and interviews, so I continued to deliver information that the teachers deemed valuable. I used the end of year interview to confirm my findings from throughout the year, and had the teachers explain how the session affected them as teachers using specific examples from their classroom. Thus, the final interview served as a member check of the preliminary themes that emerged from the ongoing analysis, allowing me to revise and refine those themes, as well as look for confirming and disconfirming evidence. Utilizing the three interviews with each teachers, the recorded sessions and protocol procedures, and the survey data

will gave me a nice way to triangulate data and created accurate and supported observations for my study.

To complete my analysis, I created codes that helped me to organized all of my data. The codes that I created were based on the major categories of teacher attrition: isolation, resources, and workload. From that point, I also had a positive and negative code identifying positive and negative examples of each of these categories. These were all pre-made codes that I expected to see and made them before I started analysis. As I went through analysis, I also created a code for collaboration, a code for a connection between teachers, a code conversations that were driving improvements, and finally a code for failure. These were the codes that really cut across the three categories for teacher attrition. Connections made between teachers was found in all three categories and helped to create my theme on isolation being a driving force behind lack of resources and workload delaying the reduction in isolation. The failure code also comes up many times as teachers sharing their failures leads to discussions in all three categories; isolation, resources, and workload. Due to the triangulation of the data, and using the interviews to drive sessions, and sessions to drive future sessions, some of the analysis was happening as the PD was occurring, but only after looking at the whole picture and using the codes to organize my data did the major themes start to take shape.

### **Results**

The results are broken down into the three major themes: connecting through failure, resource sharing through peer to peer accessibility, and isolating special education teachers through workload differentials. The themes are tracked through the ebbs and flows of the various sessions and interviews to see how progress was made from their first September as a teacher through their second September as a teacher. The study reveals some of the ways that

professional development for first-year teachers, when structured to address issues causing teacher attrition, can alleviate the burdens that first-year teachers face.

### **“At least we all suck!”: Connecting through Failure**

Throughout this study, helping teachers with their issues of isolation was a major focus. This professional development was designed to help teachers build relationships with one another so teachers were less likely to experience burnout and leave their job. The teachers in this study connected through failure and as a result, reduced their feelings of isolation. Throughout the study, teachers demonstrated this connection through failure, during both the professional development, as well as expressing themselves during interviews. They found failure to be a common bond that helped build relationships and trust within the group. These relationships caused teachers to meet during the day and visit each other’s classrooms, which caused a reduction in isolation.

Early in the year, participants’ experience with their colleagues was largely negative. In the initial interviews, when singling out comments regarding relationships with colleagues, the ratio of positive to negative experiences was 2:7. Teachers were asked about relationship building within the school and the one area they all seemed unanimous on was that they were building relationships with their Co-Teachers, but very few outside of that. In the initial interview, when asked about who they interact with within the school, Ms. S, an art teacher who works with 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade stated, “I really have only gotten a chance to work with the other art teacher, she has been helpful, but I have not built a relationship with the 9<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade team yet, and I travel, which I hate because I really don't feel comfortable in their rooms.” Ms. S discussed how after one month into the school year she had yet to build any kind of relationship with her grade team. Ms. S did not feel comfortable teaching in their rooms, something she does

each day, because she travels between rooms when she teaches. This speaks to the isolation she experienced early in the school year, not even wanting to be in their rooms, when she was scheduled to be there. Even though these teachers shared the same students, almost no relationship had been formed. It was also unclear about how healthy the relationships with the ICT teachers was at the time. Mr. O made a comment that demonstrated this when he said, “I have a great relationship with my ICT teacher so far.” But when he was pressed about it, he said, “No, we do not really share resources yet”, and added “They haven’t really explained management strategies, I am trying to match what they do.” These seem to be conflicting statements, saying that you have a great relationship, but do not share resources and do not talk about how to implement behavior management strategies. This suggests that in the moment, the first-year teachers did not know how a professional teaching relationship functions. These were early warning signs of teachers heading down a path to isolation. Additionally, in our first session, Mr. O stated, “I have a great relationships with my Co-Teachers, but other than that, I do not have anyone I really have a relationship with.” While teachers consistently noted they had built some relationships, they were all limited to direct colleagues and many of these relationships did not focus on understanding and sharing practices.

This resulted in comments from teachers about lacking confidence or being unsure about their future in teaching. Ms. J said that she, “Was worried about how this would work out” when asked about her future career in teaching. From this comment, it is clear that isolation already had an effect on her potential chances of staying in their field. Mr. B also stated that he was “unsure of himself and did not really know where to go for help.” Again, Mr. B did not know who to turn to and felt isolated within the building. While teachers said they had relationships with direct colleagues, they expressed a lack of confidence, and possibly even more problematic,



they were not sure where to go to get support. Ms. I sums this up when she said she “was lost but not sure even how to get out of it”. This again shows a general lack of connection throughout the school. While the teachers seem aware that they need help, they do not seem aware of where to get that help, or do not feel comfortable enough to seek help, either of which is concerning. All of these comments took place in October, only one month into their teaching careers. These feelings are common, but without support from colleagues, are the beginnings of teacher isolationism and can have an effect on the whole year without proper support.

Where it gets interesting is once the sessions started to take place, how some of those relationships started to form within the group. Within the first ten minutes of the session, while introducing our motivations to becoming a good teacher, during the initial check-in, the following discussion occurred:

Ms. I : I know I am letting down these kids already, but do not know how to fix it. I am failing my students and that is really tough.

Mr. O: I feel the same way, it has been two months, and I am not really sure if I am getting better or how to get better. And knowing that my mistakes are hurting my students makes it even worse.

Mr. B: At least we all suck!

Here, Ms. I stated that she believed she was failing her students, but did not know how to address the issues she was having. Mr. O had a similar assessment of his teaching practice. Teachers are thrown right into the fire, and you can already see, in November, that they not only are unsure of themselves, but they are unsure of where to turn for help. Finally, Mr. B captured the feeling in the group, saying “At least we all suck!” and everyone laughed. It may not have seemed like

much, and whether he was right or not, this was a moment where the teachers connected with one another around a common experience of failure.

Throughout the PD, this check-in time in the beginning of our sessions, while typically limited to only five minutes, had an effect on the teachers. In January, the one of the general education teachers that Ms. I worked with had quit, and the process of finding a permanent replacement was stressful for her. During a session in March, Ms. I spoke during the check-in about how rough her year had been when she said she “Seems to be the only one who cares that the kids aren’t getting chemistry, but don’t have the ability to do anything about it.” She also said that she did not know if the lessons she was trying to help plan “were any good.” It is clear that she felt isolated and was letting her students down. Without any prompting from the facilitator, another teacher responded, “Oh my god, are you kidding. Let us help you. Tell us about your plans and what you need to cover.” The next fifteen minutes were spent looking at lessons for that teacher and helping her to plan. This was not part of the schedule or the protocol, but all five teachers were working together to help one teacher plan for their week.

Ms. I: One of my concerns with the lessons is that I am not giving the students enough work time, I am always the one talking.

Facilitator: What are your goals? Maybe you are trying to do too much in one period.

Ms. J: Yes, that could be it, can we see your lesson.

Mr. B: That is a common mistake I made, try and teach too much and they end up missing a lot.

While this moment could have devolved into venting or crippling failure, the other teachers rallied around Ms. I in a difficult circumstance and used their time to help her get ready for the week. In the post-session survey, when asked about the major takeaway from that session, Ms. I

said that “she was so grateful to the group for the help” and that “No one else really helped her with planning for that class.” In an interview, when asked about the moment, she noted, “That was so amazing, it made me feel like everyone really cared.” This shows the connection that developed in the group through the failure of another teacher. The teachers saw one of the fellow first-year teachers struggling and supported her in developing her teaching practice. This was not lost on Ms. I and she expressed those feelings of being cared for and supported. This is an instance where everyone felt closer to the group and less isolated after the session. Not only that, but when I asked Mr. B about that session, he said “None of us have been through that exact situation, but we all know what it is like to feel unprepared for a class and wanted to help.” There is clearly connection between Mr. B’s experiences and what Ms. I was going through in that moment. There was empathy towards Ms. I’s situation because each teacher felt a connection with Ms. I, and had experienced that feeling of being overwhelmed and lost in the classroom. Whether it was struggling to write lesson plans, manage student behavior, or just feeling like they were not good at their job, the teachers were forming a bond centered around collective failure, but also supporting each other in pushing through that failure to improve their practice.

Another interesting development occurred the check in phase of our January meeting, Ms. S, when talking about how things were going since the start of the New Year, said, “When I returned from the break, I decided to reset my class a bit. I introduced a new entry procedure and new expectations for the class, really tried to start over kind of.” Another teacher, Ms. J interjected, and said “I went and saw her class last week, I thought it went really well. All of the students knew what they were supposed to be doing and she had most of them on board. I wish I had tried it in my room.” By visiting each other’s room, the teachers demonstrated a level of

trust within the group. The teachers built that trust in the PD and it allowed them to be vulnerable with one another and welcome colleagues into their classrooms. At the time, I took a note of this and inquired with Ms. S about why she did that during the interview:

It was something that I talked about with [Ms. I] before break. I was really struggling with getting my class started quickly and asked her what she thought of trying to be tougher on them when we come back from break. I remember she had struggled with that earlier in the year so I asked her what she had done. It was really helpful.

She mentioned that the conversation took place during lunch, showing that relationships were expanding outside the PD, including improvised peer observations. These teachers built a professional relationship with one another where one teacher felt like they could reach out to the other over a similar experience of failure. This was an example of the teachers connecting over a shared experience of failure, but using the experience they had gained to improve their classroom practice.

At the time of the mid-year interviews, the teachers had completed the first four professional development sessions and built rapport with one another. In these interviews, they were asked about their feelings on the year up to this point. When asked about what is working in the professional development sessions, Ms. J responded:

Just talking about common problems, it is just nice to know that you are not the only one going through these issues. All of us are struggling to manage our classrooms and are unsure if our students are learning everything they need to. Knowing that makes you feel better about your own weaknesses.

Each teacher had experienced different issues in their classes, but at the same time, were connected through the struggles. Failing is an unenjoyable experience, but failing alone is

particularly isolating. In our February interview, Mr. E commented, “I think there are a lot of times in teaching where it can feel like you’re on this island, and in here we know that we are not. We have come together to help each other make it through this year.” This shows that the professional development group has gotten off this “island” where they feel alone and isolated and have come together and bonded to help each other improve. Through the PD, the teachers recognized that they were not failing alone and that it was a normal occurrence within learning to teach. The stigma of failure was removed and teachers talked freely about their mistakes. This connection around failure allowed them to be vulnerable in front of one another. This helped the teachers feel connected with each other and alleviate the feelings of isolation that they were experiencing earlier in the school year.

In the penultimate session, which occurred in May, the teachers were examining a lesson plan that was modified for an ICT setting by Ms. J. This was a lesson for a 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA class and she had taught the lesson the week before we met. In that protocol, the lesson plan that Ms. J brought was met with some criticism regarding the difficulty of the task, specifically the questions that she was asking the students in the independent practice section of the lesson. Ms. I started by saying, “This is too easy for them, they probably got bored.” Mr. B added, “I teach these kids too, and they do not work well when you just throw problems at them. They need something a little more interesting or challenging.” It was positive seeing the teachers offer up honest critiques of the lesson plan. Often time teachers do not want to upset anyone and will be very neutral in their comments, but the participants showed the comfort level with each other and with the protocols by giving honest feedback. The teachers developed such a close bond that they started to push each other to improve their lesson plans and their teaching practice. The

support for one another was real, but was necessary to develop a norm of being critical in order to improve practice.

At the end of the protocol, the presenter debriefs with the feedback they are given and during the debrief, Ms. J said, “I thought the critiques of these modifications were fair, and I think I could have done better. I have been talking all year about how this class has frustrated me, and I think I let that frustration get to me. This was not challenging or engaging enough.” The feedback that Ms. J received came was critical of her work, but it was coming from a supportive place. The teachers built up a trust so they knew they were all supported by one another, but they were also ensuring that Ms. J got the feedback she needed to improve the questioning on her assignment. It was not just surface feedback, it was aimed towards improvement of practice. In our final interview, when asked to describe the effect that session had on her, she said, “After the session, I went back over the rest of my lessons and made sure to take the feedback and apply it. It was helpful for the rest of the year because I always remembered that feedback when planning my lessons. I needed to hear it.” Ms. J clearly understood that the critique was an attempt for her to get better. She did not take it personally or get defensive because of the trust established within the group. It was offered to her to help her improve her questioning of that class and make her a better educator. I also asked her how it felt to be critiqued, and she said, “It was fine, we are here to get better and that helped me get better. At this point we are comfortable enough with each other to be honest.” She stated very clearly the comfort level that the group felt and the relationships they had formed. She was not defensive in the moment and she did not hold it against anyone. The feedback was genuinely appreciated and taken in the way it was intended, to drive improvement. The teachers were comfortable enough with one another to honestly evaluate each other and accept these critiques

in order to drive improvement of practice shows the connection that they have made. At this point in the year, just connecting with one another was not enough. Honest critiques were driving teaching improvements, which shows that they are supporting each other on an even deeper level, not just emotionally, but also pushing everyone to be better teachers. There was a shared experience of failure that has brought these teachers together, allowed them to feel comfortable sharing their problems, taken away feelings of isolation, and led to genuine attempts at improving their craft.

### **Resource Accessibility: Sharing First Year Teaching Strategies**

Throughout the study, teachers also demonstrated a connection through sharing resources and ideas. First-year teachers often struggle to find effective strategies and resources that can help them in their classrooms. These teachers connected with each other during the PD because they would discuss and share resources that they encountered and found effective. The teachers also found a comfort and connection in the fact that their fellow first-year teachers had tried the resources and been successful in implementing them in the classroom. This was not the case when the teachers used resources and strategies from more experienced teachers. The first-year teachers were more reluctant to employ strategies shared by veteran teachers. The sharing of ideas and resources extended outside of just our professional development sessions as well. This was helpful in connecting the teachers, further improving on the feelings of isolation that first year teacher's experience.

The issue of resources and strategies started in the second session in November. During the check-in, Mr. B talked about how he was struggling with classroom management in his room and the group took up his struggles.

Ms. J: Have you tried using some of the strategies your Co-Teachers use?

Ms. I: One of the issues is the teachers I work with are so experienced, that even when I have a problem, usually their advice is so far above me I can't really even use it. I am not even sure what exactly they are doing, and even if I did, do not know if I could implement it anyways.

Mr B: Yeah, you know, sometimes when I am visiting other teachers, I see that the same kids that I teach are behaving perfectly, but I cannot figure out how the teachers do it, they just do. Even when I ask them, I get answers like, you just have to find your style or you just need to be more strict and have high standards. But again, how?

Ms. J: My Co-teacher literally just stands there, fold his arms, and waits, and the kids respond and get back on track in like two seconds. I try it and would be waiting for days.

After the question was raised about the possibility of learning from co-teachers, Ms. I said that she found their strategies are too complex for her to implement. Mr. B essentially agreed, saying that it was difficult for him to deconstruct their practice and their responses are not detailed enough for him to adapt them to his own classroom. Finally, Ms. J added that her co-teacher's strategies did not work for her. While this shows that the teachers were actively engaging with their Co-Teachers, they were unable to pinpoint exactly what strategies they are using to be successful. This is a different form of isolation, but isolation nonetheless. They were looking for guidance, but either had not been able to find it or were not getting enough detailed feedback in order to implement the suggestions. This was frustrating for them because they see successful resources being employed, but just could not access them.

However, something shifted when sharing strategies that have succeeded for them. Later in our second session, during the protocol Mr. E introduced something called Class Dojo, which is an online classroom management tool.



Mr. E: You should try something called Class Dojo. My Co-Teacher told me about it and it allows you to give positive and negative points to students silently without causing a disruption to the rest of the class. I used it and in three days I saw a difference.

Mr. B: How does it work?

Mr. E: So you can set up individual students and classes and then very easily give and take away points to the students for behavior reasons. The thing that I really like about it is it is really easy to start, really easy to explain to the kids, and it worked right away.

They all act like it is a video game or something.

Many of the teachers took note of this and said this might be something to try. Ms. I said, “I wonder if it will work in the high school, but it is worth a shot and seems like it is easy to use.” In contrast to drawing on resources from co-teachers, teachers saw resources from colleagues as accessible. Here was a major change in their acceptance of a strategy, very different from the response to the strategies shared by their co-teachers. This interaction showed that the experienced teachers in the building were offering their services and tried to help the first-year teachers, but the response from the first-year teachers was very different when it was coming from one of the other teachers in the group. In the interaction, teachers were all very receptive to the suggestion, saying they would try it out even if they were skeptical that it would work in their setting. This shows the level of trust they had with one another. That was very different from some of the interactions laid out earlier from Co-teachers, where the first-year teachers very quickly shot down the ideas as too high level or difficult to implement. However, when it comes to strategies from their fellow first-year teachers, they did not shy away from the strategy, asked questions to explore, and tried the strategy in their classroom. First-year teachers were more receptive and open to ideas suggested to them from members of the group because of the

relationships they had formed throughout the year. They knew that the strategies could be implemented because they heard it from one of their own and trusted that they would bring them effective strategies.

In our February interview session, this question was raised and the teachers pointed to a connection within the group as part of the reason, along with a lack of confidence in their abilities. Mr. B, in his February interview, said “I am always looking for resources to use that will help improve my classroom management, but it is not always something I can use when it comes from more experienced teachers. They just seem to have this knowledge of what they are doing with [a strategy], but I do not have that knowledge yet, so I cannot apply it in my room.” Here, Mr. B explicitly states what was raised in the PD session, that as a first year teacher he did not have enough background knowledge to enact experienced teachers’ strategies. Ms. I also made the point in her interview, “I talked about it in our session, but when it comes from someone in the group, I feel more comfortable with it because I know it can be done by a first year teacher. And the people in here talk about strategies that we all can use.” Both teachers talked about the accessibility of implementing strategies because they knew it could be done since someone in the group already did it, therefore making it accessible given their level of experience. Whether real or imagined, the teachers felt they were not ready to apply some of the strategies that they witnessed experienced teachers using. They often times did not even attempt the strategy in their rooms. This demonstrated a confidence (or lack of confidence) in their own abilities, but also to a trust and connection that developed within the group.

In the next session, three other teachers had all used class dojo and reported positively on its effect in their classroom. Each of them talked about it during our debrief in the beginning of the session. Mr. O shared, “I tried using class dojo like [Mr. S] had said and it has really helped.

I feel like every period I have about eight different things going on and this helps to check one of those off my list”. Mr. O took the resource that was offered to him and put it into action in his classroom, seemingly having a positive experience in managing behavior. Mr. B did not end up using class dojo in the long term, “I tried class dojo, it doesn't really fit my tenth graders, but has given me some ideas to help my management.” This was a prime example of how collaboration was effectively used in professional development to improve teacher practice. A strategy that one teacher had seen used was brought to each of the other five teachers in the group, none of whom had used it before. This resource was not known to the group, but because of the discussion and trust in one another, helped lead to new ideas being used by these teachers. It was also important to note that because this suggestion came from a first-year teacher, the rest of the group all had the confidence to try and implement it right away. When ideas came from Co-teachers, the teachers used phrases such as, “feeling like it was above them” and “they did not know how to implement that”, but when it came from another first-year teacher, they felt like it was an approachable idea.

Collaboration also took form in another area, cross-content collaboration. This was brought up in session five, which was designed around student engagement. Ms. S shared an engaging hands-on project that had been done in an art class and talked about how she related it to the curriculum and unit that was being taught in science class.

Ms. S: The project works with the science class. We are taking pictures of nature, then recreating them and examining the symmetry that exists in nature and art. It has been really cool because it relates to both science and art curriculum and they get to see the connections between the subjects.

Mr. E: I have been trying to include more projects and hands-on experiments in my room. They are great for my special education student because they allow for more freedom, something that I do not give them nearly enough.

Ms. S: Oh, you should come in and see it. We still have two more days.

Through the interviews, I learned that not only did Mr. E go and visit Ms. S's class to see her project, but he also introduced one of his own to his self-contained section, and Ms. S came and visited his class. Mr. E, in the next session talked about that project and how Ms. S inspired him to try a hands-on art project in science class.

I tried some of the art ideas that [Ms. S] brought up last time. I wanted to do more hands on stuff and relate it to the science curriculum. The best part of the entire process was allowing students more freedom in what they were doing, an idea that came from [Ms. S's] presentation.

Here was an example of the group connecting over resources. In this case, the resource was a project idea, but also the opportunity to observe the project and see it in action. The teachers provided accessible resources to one another and then observed each other to learn more. This is another example of the group making a connection over resources and strategies. Mr. E, in the exit interview said, "I never would have tried this project if I did not hear about it from [Ms. S]. Visiting her class was also great because I could see it in action and think about how this could relate to my kids and my content." The teachers in this PD connected over this idea, but that would not happen if not for a trust that was already established. By this point in the year, the teachers were volunteering to visit one another's classrooms in order to get ideas and see one another implementing those ideas. The sharing of resources started because they were not getting enough resources from other sources, but also because the resources they were getting

did not seem accessible in terms of being able to implement ideas as a new teacher. This evolved into trying to implement and improve ideas to become better teachers. Visitations and observations certainly showed reduction in isolation among the teachers but it also showed an active attempt to better themselves and their colleagues as teachers. This shows great growth of the group because in earlier sessions, the resources shared were mainly behavior strategies, but in the March session, the group had moved beyond that and sought after student engagement strategies. This growth highlights teachers leaving their rooms, shedding those feelings of isolation, and becoming an active member of a professional community.

### **Isolation in Special Education**

Throughout the study, differences in isolation presented itself between the general education teachers, the special education teachers, and the in-class teachers (ICT). Various studies highlight that the workload of an ICT teacher is different from a special education teacher and a general education teacher (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). ICT teachers and special education teachers had more unique classes to prepare for and IEPs that they must worry about, additional work that general education teachers did not have. In this section, I document how workload affected teacher isolation, particularly focusing on the differences between the three different types of teachers that were in this study.

Mr. B and Ms. S represented teachers in general education. These teachers taught general education with one ICT section and only prepared for one unique class each day. Mr. O and Mr. E are special education teachers. These teachers split their time between special education for two periods each day and ICT for two periods a day, preparing for three unique classes each day. The final group, Ms. J and Ms. I were ICT teachers, and taught four unique classes each day, all ICT classes. In the beginning of the PD sessions, as discussed earlier, all of

the teachers shared that they were lacking a connection with colleagues. Many of the teachers said they had a connection with their ICT teacher, but many of those relationships did not seem as strong as the teachers may have let on. All of the groups were struggling with isolationism; however, as the year went on, there were clear differences in which the various groups were able to address their isolation.

A change appeared as early as the December session; a divide developed between the issues that groups of teachers were discussing. In that session, Ms. S talked about how she had built a relationship with the other art teacher in the building and was enjoying incorporating some of her ideas into her classroom teaching. She was connecting with colleagues that she may not have been connecting with to start the year and felt comfortable and less isolated. Mr. B shared an experience that he had when he felt a breakthrough, “I tried to incorporate a visual aid that I saw in [10<sup>th</sup> grade English] class. It was a way to conjugate verbs in Spanish. I bring it to each class and the kids seem to get it since they see it in multiple places.” Mr. B was beginning to connect his content with content from other teachers within his tenth grade team. He felt comfortable with bringing in outside ideas from other teachers in the building. Both Ms. S and Mr. B, while still struggling in many areas, started building relationships within the school and trying out new ideas. The breakthroughs that they discussed involved planning creative lessons and creating entry points for their students.

However, comments from ICT teachers had a different tone. In this session, Ms. I said, “I am just so overwhelmed with managing the class, I am still struggling to understand my students.” Ms. I was trying to get to know four classes worth of students, in addition to IEPs, and had no opportunity to make those same breakthroughs. She was still in the process of trying to manage a class and learn about individual student needs. Ms. J echoed this saying, “I do not

really know how to help each student in their different classes, it is hard to make adjustments to their needs.” The ICT teachers were overburdened with the number of students that they needed to develop relationships with in order to serve their needs. Later, in the interview sessions, Ms. J further touched on this, “It is so difficult to make adaptations for all four classes. There are just too many kids that need their own personal changes, and I barely know the students’ needs yet.” Often times we think about workload in terms of teaching many classes, but it is also worth considering how many students an ICT teacher needs to foster relationships with in order to properly support the student in each class. This takes a lot of time and can create a very isolating experience when they bare the entire burden themselves.

In our February session on effective questioning and assessment, it was again apparent how workload had an effect on isolation among different groups of teachers. During the session, Mr. O, a special education teacher, brought a lesson plan and worksheet that he had prepared and wanted some help with the questioning to ensure that he was asking questions that covered content, but also mixed in surface level questions with deep, more analytical questions.

Ms. I: I need to think about this more with my students. I finally think I am making progress with my adaptations, but do not consider this enough. It is so hard because most of my kids can only answer surface level.

Mr. E: I thought that too at first, but the more practice my kids have the more they step up their game.

Ms. I: My problem is, I am just starting now, and I do not even really know the best way to include high level questions in my lesson plan, I am still working on modifications. I feel like I spend all my time sitting around doing modifications.

Through this interaction it was evident that, even in this session in March, the struggles of the ICT teacher were clear. Mr. O and E, the special education teachers, had moved into questioning, a higher-level teaching skill, and putting serious thought into how they could improve. The ICT teachers, while recognizing that questioning is important, had not been able to include it in their lessons. Ms. I was spending so much time working on four classes of modifications, which is not only holding her back from improving other areas of her teaching practice, but also forced her to sit in her room and modify lessons. She was isolated because of the workload that she is taking on each day. She has not had the same opportunities to connect with colleagues within the school as the general education teachers and even the special education teachers. I asked Ms. J about this interaction in our final interview, “I didn’t even start to think about this until the end of the year. It is important, but I just was not ready, but this will be a focus of mine [in year 2]. I was so busy this year I didn’t even get to talk about this with any teachers. I need to.” The ICT teachers were very aware of the importance of this, but because of their high workload, they were behind in addressing this aspect of practice compared to the other teachers. Ms. J even said that she needed to talk about this with other teachers, but did not have a chance to. She was aware that other teachers in the building have the expertise to help her, but was isolated in order to get her work done. This shows why the first year can be so difficult for special education and ICT teachers. Their workload made their timeline for learning longer and this can be frustrating and isolating. This delay in reducing isolation could demonstrate a reason why special education turnover is so high. The teachers felt isolated their entire first year teaching, at times, and that created negative feelings about their positions. Also consider that for many alternative route teachers especially, this may not even be the area of teaching that they are passionate about, instead where they are placed. All of this can lead to a



higher turnover rate for special education teacher. However, in our group, five of the six teachers in the group returned to the school including all of the Special Education and ICT teachers.

### **Discussion**

Research has found mounting evidence of positive benefits of protocol based professional development on teachers. This study looks at one particular professional development experience, and focuses on what effects protocol based professional development had on first-year teachers. The study examined the major topics discussed in the literature such as isolation, resources, and workload, to find out to what extent these issues were addressed due to the PD. Results showed that teachers coming together and discussing their failure opened up space to both connect with each other, as well as to make that failure productive in order to improve their practice. Using the session's transcripts and interviews taken over the course of the year, connections existed between isolation and resource acquisition within the school, with reduced isolation leading to more access to resources. Finally, while not specifically addressing the workload of first-year teachers, it is evident how teacher isolation is experienced differently by teachers with different responsibilities. Each of the teachers in the group experienced a decline in their isolation throughout the year, however, teachers demonstrated a difference in the timeline of this decline.

First, the power of normalizing failure was a galvanizing experience for these teachers. Existing literature claims venting within professional development is negative and something that facilitators must squash immediately (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra & Volman, 2015; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Normalizing failure is not to be confused with venting (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008). Normalizing failure is providing the

teachers with a structured place to discuss issues they are having in class in a productive way.

Teachers within this study explained how listening to other first-year teachers tell their stories of failure helped build a trust, and even more crucial, helped normalize failure to make it more palatable. We often talk about the complexity of teaching, but do not mention how that complexity plays on the psyche of a first-year teacher. Teaching leads to a lot of failure and that can greatly affect the person who is experiencing that failure. Talking about these experiences with the group helped them feel better about their own failures and understand they are not alone. It helped this group of teachers realize that failure is part of the job and took away that stigma, allowed teachers to bond over it, discussed it openly, and eventually helped make them better teachers. Normalizing failure, for this group, was a crucial and effective way of getting teachers through the early struggles that all first-year teachers experience.

This study adds to the existing literature around best practices for professional development arguing that, while venting may be negative, connecting over failure can reduce isolation. Additionally, when facilitated effectively, this failure can lead to improvement. The first-year teachers began by building a bond through the experience of failure and then started to make improvements in their teaching. The connection around failure helped them to build trust and be vulnerable with one another. The improvements came because the teachers were willing to give each other honest feedback, as well as hear that feedback and not become defensive. This should be considered when designing and implementing professional development, specifically for first year teachers, because often times we try to squash negativity, when in actuality, that negativity could normalize failure in a way that reduces isolation by bringing new teachers together. This was essential to them building relationships, reducing isolationism, and improving their teaching practice.

Another noteworthy finding is that the source of the resources was not only someone the teachers trusted, but also a teacher that had a similar level of experience. Existing literature explains that new teachers struggle to find worksheets, project materials, and classroom resources (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Ingersoll and Smith's (2004) study found that professional development encouraged collaboration and sharing of resources among teachers. This study adds to this literature finding that while trusting relationships between teachers is important when sharing resources, there was an added layer that when the resource were coming from a teacher at the same level it further increased the likelihood that a teacher would try to incorporate a new resource into their practice. The first year teachers were reluctant to attempt many of the strategies and resources brought to them by their Co-teachers, deeming them too difficult. Many of these teachers even shared that they had built strong relationships with those same Co-teachers, but still did not feel confident using the Co-teacher's ideas. Strategies provided by trusted teachers, who were also in their first-year, and on their level, seemed more accessible, and therefore, were more often incorporated into their classroom. Teachers were less deterred by initial failure when the source was another first-year teacher, whereas, when a strategy or resource came from a more experienced teacher, the first-year teacher would stop using it at the first sign of failure.

Finally, findings about workload did not affect all first-year teachers equally. First, special education teachers are in charge of the most difficult population of students (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). Often times, special education teachers also face the most difficult workload, having to prepare for three or four different classes each day (Nagy & Wang, 2007). The teachers in this study, who taught special education, all shared that over the course of the year their course load made them re-think teaching special education, sometimes preferring a

job teaching content alone. In alignment with this, research has shown that ICT and Special Education teachers leave the field at a higher rate, and the issue of isolation plays a role in that (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). This study suggests workload, and specifically the scheduling that leads to increased planning is an important factor, even when isolation is addressed.

Throughout the sessions, the timeline for reduced isolation shifted depending on the type of teacher. Specifically, there was a delay in reducing isolation for Special Education and ICT teachers compared to general education counterparts. Teachers that taught general education seemed to get a handle on their workload earlier in the school year, which in turn, allowed them opportunities to get out of their classrooms and experience the school community. On the other hand, Special Education and ICT teachers struggled with planning and familiarizing themselves with their students' needs as areas that held them back. This delay in isolationism led to negative feelings about their position, which can link to higher turnover in the special education field. Understanding that delay amplifies the need for structures to ensure Special Education and ICT teachers have opportunities to become part of the school community, even if they feel they do not have time. While scheduling is outside the scope of PD, it is a central factor for Special Education and ICT teachers in this study, and extends as a concern into their second year of teaching as well as whether they will continue in the profession, even when isolation and access to resources has been addressed.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows that first-year professional development can be effective in helping teachers deal with the major issues that drive teacher attrition: isolation, lack of resources, and workload. Effective facilitation is key to success through building trust by modeling, planning

sessions that reflect what the teachers want to discuss, and maintaining a session where negatives can be talked about and discussed as long as they lead to methods of improvement. As teachers connect through failure, they can begin to trust one another, and build positive relationships that reduce the isolation in their school setting. Connecting through failure can also allow teachers to be vulnerable, which opens the door to honest and productive feedback to drive an environment focused on improvement. The results of this study increase the awareness of the benefits of professional development for first-year teachers and how it can address common issues that negatively impact first-year teachers' chances of staying in the field. Professional development initiatives need to consider this moving forward, allowing teachers a place to discuss their failures, but with an eye towards improvement. Facilitation cannot be so rigid that it does not allow for honest conversations to occur and facilitators must be flexible enough to allow for this. Failure is common when tasks are ill-formed and complex as teaching surely is. When first-year teachers experience this on their own, they may not realize others are going through the exact same thing. Once it is normalized, it can be used to focus growth. Growth occurs when teachers are taking risks and trying new things, which only happens when the walls of isolation are brought down through connections with fellow teachers.

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**Appendix A**

Survey Monkey – Sent out 1 week after each session

- 1) What have you applied that was discussed in our last session in the last week in your classroom? (RQ1, RQ2)
- 2) What are you struggling to apply from our last session? (RQ2)
- 3) What are some topics you would like to cover in our next session? (RQ2)
- 4) Rank the topics you would like to discuss next session: (RQ2)

⋮	<input type="text" value="Lesson Plan Ideas"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Reviewing Student Work"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Classroom Management"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Creating Discussion in Class"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Engaging Students"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Effective Questioning"/>

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol – Initial Interview

*Introduction:* Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I am conducting this interview study to learn about your experiences with teaching thus far in your career. Your answers will help me to build the professional development and help me to learn more about you as a teacher. If I go through the interview and you have any questions about why you are being asked something, or you would like to ask for clarification, just let me know. Before we begin, I need to mention that I would like to record your responses. Also, your identity will remain confidential. Is that OK?

1) What brought you to teaching? What brought you to Mott Haven? (RQ2)

How is it going so far?

Any challenges related to teaching in urban schools? (RQ2)

2) What are aspects of teaching that you feel prepared for? (RQ2)

3) What training have you received so far to help prepare you for teaching? (RQ3)

4) What are some aspects of teaching that you are nervous about? (RQ2)

5) What do you like best about SBP? What about worst? (RQ1)

What is difficult about teaching? (RQ2)

Tell me about your students. What are some successes and challenges? (RQ2)

How do you connect with students? How do you build relationships? (RQ1, RQ2)

6) What support system do you have in place to help you with the aspects that you are nervous about? (RQ1, RQ3)

How do you interact with the school's leadership? (RQ1, RQ3)

How do you connect with colleagues? (RQ1, RQ3)

6) What are your thoughts about a long term teaching career? (RQ3)

Do you plan on staying in the same school, staying in the same district, sticking with teaching? (RQ3)

What factors could influence your decision to stay? (RQ3)

*Closing:* Thank you very much for speaking to us. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol – Mid-Year Interview

*Introduction:* Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I am conducting this interview to learn about your experiences within this professional development and how it relates to your feelings about teaching. Your answers will help guide me so I am able to make this as effective as it can be in helping first-year teachers. Before we begin, I need to mention that I would like to record your responses. Also, your identity will remain confidential. Is that OK?

1) What ways has this program helped you with in terms of teaching practice? (RQ2)

When have you incorporated some of the practices from our sessions into your classroom? What practices? (RQ2)

Are there any teaching practices you would like covered in more depth? (RQ2)

2) Outside of teaching practices, how has this program been useful to you in any other ways? (RQ1)

What are some examples of session topics being useful to you? (RQ2)

Thinking back to some aspects of teaching you felt good about in our first interview (remind them), could you update me on how that is going? (RQ2)

And how about some of the areas you were nervous about (remind them)? (RQ2)

3) In what ways have you changed this year as a teacher? (RQ1)

How has your management changed? Planning? Leadership? Relationships with students, teachers and administration? (RQ1)

4) In what ways has this PD program aided/hindered those changes? (RQ1)

5) What are your current thoughts about teaching as a long term career? (RQ3)

Currently are you planning on staying in the same school or district? Where and why? (RQ3)

What factors could still influence this decision to stay or leave? (RQ3)

How has your prep/planning schedule affected you decision? (RQ1, RQ3)

6) What topics could this program cover that could help you in the future?

*Closing:* Thank you very much for speaking to us. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol – End-Year Interview

*Introduction:* Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I am conducting this interview to learn about your experiences within this professional development and how it relates to your feelings about teaching. Your answers will help me to understand how effective this program was in helping you through your first-year of teaching. If I go through the interview and you have any questions about why you are being asked something, or you would like to ask for clarification, just let me know. Before we begin, I need to mention that I would like to record your responses. Also, your identity will remain confidential. Is that OK?

1) Overall, how did our PD sessions together help you in terms of your teaching practice? (RQ2)

When have you incorporated some of the practices from our sessions into your classroom? What practices? (RQ2)

How did you feel about following the protocols? How did that make the sessions more or less effective? (RQ1, RQ2)

2) Outside of teaching practices, how has this program been useful to you in other ways? (think stresses or isolation) (RQ1)

What are some examples of session topics being useful to you? (RQ1)

Thinking back to some aspects of teaching you felt good about in our first two interviews (remind them), could you update me on how that is going? (RQ1, RQ2)

3) In what ways have you changed as a teacher? (RQ1)

Thinking back to areas that you struggled with last year (remind them), how have you been doing with that this year? Are there any ways that connects to some of the work we did in our sessions? (RQ1)

4) Looking back on last year, what supports did this PD provide to help you get through your first-year? Do you still collaborate with anyone from our group? (RQ1)

5) What are your current thoughts about teaching as a long term career? (RQ3)

How has your prep/planning schedule affected you decision? (RQ3)

6) What topics could this program cover that could help you in the future? Should this continue into a second year? (RQ3)



Chapter 3: Practitioner Article for Urban Education Submission

“Failing” Towards Progress

Jordan Dellostretto

Rutgers University Graduate School of Education Ed.D program

June 2019

Content Area: All, Aimed at first year teachers in all content areas and grade levels

Grade Level: All, Aimed at first year teachers in all content areas and grade levels

Big Idea: Creating Successful PD environments for first year teachers

Preexisting Knowledge: N/A

Time: One Hour a month for 1 year

Cost: Can be built into existing PD time at no extra cost

## **Introduction**

Teacher retention, specifically in low-income areas is a major dilemma for this country's schools, one in which every administrator, teacher, and student feels the effect. Poor teacher retention in low-income areas is one of the main reasons that the "achievement gap" exists and has been so difficult to close (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Hays, 2013). When looking at the major reasons why first year teachers leave the profession, isolation, workload, and lack of resources and support are the most prevalent (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Nagy & Wang, 2007). This article specifically addresses the isolationism. Teacher individualism, isolationism, and privatism are detrimental to the development of shared educational goals and teacher job satisfaction (Hargreaves, 1993). When you have isolation and individualism within your school, it is typically representative of disjointed teacher leadership. One initiative to combat this issue is implementation and execution of professional development programs as address these aspects of the school culture. Professional development has shown to be a cost-effective way to improve the existing culture in the building (Urick & Bowers, 2014). Teachers will improve, the school will improve, and the students will improve, and all of this without the high costs of additional hiring. Thus, it makes sense that implementation of a professional development program designed specifically for first-year teachers would have a positive influence and would improve the capacity and retention of new teachers.

In this article, I will highlight how professional development with a group of first year teachers created an environment that allowed teachers to have honest and open dialogue about

their experiences as teachers, which led to growth as practitioners. A successful teacher leadership program involves teamwork, openness, and collaboration between administration, teacher leaders, and teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). To achieve this, I developed trust with the teachers by creating space for the first-year teachers to share exactly what was going on in their classrooms, their feelings about being a classroom teacher, and what support they needed to be successful. This is one way to effectively address isolationism and create an environment where first year teachers feel supported. As you read, I discuss some of the facilitation strategies used to initiate the group to the point where we could effectively discuss problems without focus on the negative. I use the teachers' voices to show their perspectives as they engaged in PD.

In order to provide first-year teachers with effective professional development, strategies must be used in order to create a trusting environment that is focused on improvement and change. Protocols needs to be properly deployed and facilitated in order to maintain focused conversations within the group. Facilitators must model professional development by including themselves in the conversation while allowed participants to drive it. Finally, allowing participant feedback and ownership of the professional development to create buy-in from the group. Examples of each of these strategies will be demonstrated and their effectiveness explained. Combined they were effective in building trust, reducing isolationism, and creating a space for first-year teachers to form relationships and improve their practice.

### **Background**

To provide some context, the PD included six first year teachers of varying experience, teacher training, and disciplines. I conducted the PD in a low-income school in a large metropolitan area in the northeast that services students from sixth through twelfth grade. The demographic breakdown of the school is 71% Hispanic, 25% African American, 2% Asian, and

2% White. In this school, 25% of the students are classified as having special education services and 90.4% receive free or reduced lunch.

I facilitated the professional development that included a single one-hour session each month, specifically geared to the issues that first-year teachers commonly face. Throughout the year-long PD, I also conducted three one-hour interviews with the teachers to find out more about their experiences teaching, experiences in the sessions, and how the sessions effected their teaching experiences. As the facilitator, I was in charge of designing a curriculum that gave teachers a chance to share their experiences and find common ground with other first year teachers. Before starting the program, I decided that it was necessary to use protocols that would ensure that our discussions led to solutions (NSRF, 2006). I did not want to create a negative environment where teachers vented their frustration and did not have any strategies to improve their classrooms; protocols were an effective method in achieving that structure. At the end of the first year, five of the six teachers in the program remained in their current position at the school. The lone participant did remain in teaching, but relocated to an entirely different metropolitan area for a personal, rather than a professional reason.

### **The Build-Up: From Creating Trust to Incorporating Protocols**

In running these sessions, the most essential part of the entire process was building a trusting environment where participants felt that they could be open and share their experiences without any negative effects or feelings of judgement. Building trust is important because it allows teachers to open up to one another about issues that are happening in the classroom without being guarded so that improvement can take place (Curry, 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Little, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2001; Wood, 2007). This is the part where, in my experiences as a participant, most professional developments fall short. There were many

strategies that I built into the program to ensure that trust was established starting in the first session including building relationships between participants and allowing for participant input in the sessions and topics to be addressed.

The first session focused on establishing relationships with each other as people, not just as teachers. This was a group of first year teachers, many of whom did not have many relationships in the building, and it was important for them to see one another as allies in the school. We talked about our backgrounds, our paths to teaching, our strengths and weaknesses as teachers, and our purpose for becoming a teacher. I joined in on this conversation, gave them background on myself as a teacher and as a person, and discussed the program and its purpose.

In order to ensure teachers were excited about what we were doing, I wanted to give them an opportunity to have a voice on what we would do in the sessions. After each session, I sent out a survey and in the survey following our first session, I asked for their opinions on how this professional development could help them, and what they did and did not want out of our time together. I asked about how they wanted the facilitation to be conducted, what facilitation strategies would get them most invested, and what topics they wanted to cover throughout the year. The comments that I received back from this survey were mostly about efficiency, ensuring that time was being valued and allowing time for many people to share each session. When teachers feel a sense of ownership in professional development, they become more engaged and open to discussion, leading the discussion to focus on ideas to improve teacher practice (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008). I used this opportunity to share the results with the teaching, letting them know that efficiency and valuing everyone's time was a priority. I set an expectation that in an effort to value time and efficiency, during our protocols I would be redirecting any conversation that takes us away from the day's goal. I also set the expectation

that the check-in time would be their time to discuss whatever was pressing to them and I would not redirect conversation. This was important because it let the participants know that their time is valued and that I wanted to set up a professional development that values their input. The first session was more focused on establishing relationships and less on teacher practice. Starting in the second session we moved towards growing as a teacher. The schedule that we used throughout the year shows the topics and the protocol that was adapted for each session (see Table 1).

*Table 1: First Year Teacher Professional Development Schedule*

Session	Topic	Protocol
1	Introduction to New Teacher Experience Professional Development	N/A
2	Experiences That Have Stood Out so Far this School Year	<i>Adaptation to 30-Minute Meeting Protocol</i>
3	Behavior Management Issues in the Classroom – Part 1	<i>Adaptation to The Final Word Protocol</i>
4	Behavior Management Issues in the Classroom – Part 2	<i>Adaptation to The Final Word Protocol</i>
5	Effective Questioning in the Classroom	<i>Adaptation to Blooming Questions Protocol</i>
6	Student Engagement – Examining Lesson Plans	<i>Adaptation to The Tuning Protocol</i>
7	Examining Student Work	<i>Adaptation to ATLAS: Learning from Student Work</i>

The second session was a hybrid between the introductory session and the type of protocol-guided sessions we ran moving forward. The first thing we did in every session was to build in a five-minute check-in to start the session. This was very informal and allowed everyone to talk about their weeks and what was going on in their lives and classrooms. After the check-in, it was important that they continue to get to know one another and have a voice in the room. Therefore, each member of the group came to the session with a general problem they were facing in their classes. In this session, everyone had about three minutes to describe their

scenario followed by a 30 second comment period for each of the other participants. I allowed some freedom on what they could respond with including suggestions or ways that they can relate to that particular issue. The purpose of this was to encourage participation from everyone and let them share how they are feeling, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. This creates a space where teachers can open up to one another and know that those feelings are valued. Later on, during the protocol, we will ensure a more focused conversation, but during the check-in that is not a priority. In that session, each person, including myself, was able to share something that each teacher was experiencing in his or her classroom and receive feedback. For example, I described a scenario in my classroom where I was struggling to reach a student in my classroom and she was becoming disengaged and isolated in the room. The participants provided me with some excellent feedback from experiences they already had and things they had learned in their short time teaching. I was very purposeful in my sharing as well as my feedback to show vulnerability in my own teaching practice. Additionally, the session was crucial because I focused a lot of my feedback on ways that I could relate to their issues, not just suggestions on how to fix their problems. This illustrated that all teachers experience these issues in various ways regardless of experience, and that I was a learner alongside them as well as the facilitator. This modeling is crucial to show participants that this is a safe space where setbacks are shared with the mindset of improving, not as failure. The purpose of this was to get voices heard and show that this was an area to be vulnerable and open yourself up to suggestions. This session was essential to setting the tone for the rest of the year, and through modeling, built trust that is essential to success.

The third session was the first time we ran a formal protocol that I had adapted to our sessions. Protocols can be used within professional development to create structure where all

teachers adhere to the schedule and facilitators monitor time limits and redirect teachers when protocols are not being followed. In the third session, we ran an adaptation to The Final Word protocol (NSRF, 2006). This protocol is normally used to look at text, but was adapted so that each participant was asked to arrive with a specific behavior management situation that occurred in class. The participant had one minute to describe it to the group. Then, as a group, we had two minutes to ask clarifying questions. Finally, each participant had one minute to describe his or her reaction to the situation and something that could be effective in handling that situation. As the facilitator, I needed to ensure that the participants were staying on task and steered participants back to the situation if the conversation veered off track. An example of the protocols being followed to allow for collaboration occurred in session five. We used a protocol built around student engagement and sharing engaging ideas. One of our teachers, an art teacher was sharing an project idea that she had used in class. During the discussion phase of the protocol, another teacher talked about how he could relate this idea to his Spanish class.

Teacher 1: I have been trying to include more projects and hands-on experiments in my room. They are great for my special education student because they allow for more freedom, something that I do not give them nearly enough.

Teacher 2: Oh, you should come in and see it. We still have two more days.

Through the interviews, I learned that not only did Teacher 1 go and visit Teacher 2's class to see her project, but also he introduced one of his own to his self-contained section, and Teacher 2 came and visited his class. Allowing for the presentation of the material, the discussion section, and the debrief to run its course gave the teachers the structure to have discussions and collaborate on their own. The teachers were able to take the discussions that occurred in the protocol and then continue the discussion outside of our group to improve their practice. This



can be difficult for some facilitators because it can feel like they are telling people what they can and cannot say, but it is necessary for a professional development session, especially one where time is short. Again, in the feedback from the group through the surveys, they requested that I respect their time and be efficient, so I reminded them of this before we started the protocol and informed them that I would bring the conversation back if it veered off track. By reminding them of their own feedback, I let them know that the type of facilitation was being responsive to their ideas. Finally, the original participant had two minutes to summarize what they heard from the group. Ending this way creates a lasting impression of the solution for both the main participant and all of the other teachers in the group.

This is where protocols are really impactful, because in beginning with problem, a goal of trying to solve that problem, then engaging group questioning and discussion, conversation always circles back to how to reach the stated goal. However, it is also essential for facilitators to get to know their group and adjust accordingly, particular in terms of the rigidity of the protocols. A facilitator must be present in the session and sense when they can let the teacher stray away from the protocol a bit to allow for enriching discussion. During a session in March, one of the teachers spoke during the check-in about how rough her new year had been when she said she “Seems to be the only one who cares that the kids aren’t getting chemistry, but don’t have the ability to do anything about it.” She also said that she did not know if the lessons she was trying to help plan “were any good.” Without any prompting from the facilitator, another teacher responded “Oh my god, are you kidding. Let us help you. Tell us about your plans and what you need to cover.” The next fifteen minutes were spent looking at lessons for that teacher and helping her to plan. This was not part of the schedule or the protocol, but all five teachers were working together to help one teacher plan for their week. This was a moment where

teacher collaboration and relationship building was occurring because the teachers had genuine concern for their colleague and all started working to improve her lessons. This is a time when letting the teachers collaborate and form a bond took priority to the protocol. Deciding in these moments when to be strict with the protocol and when to be more relaxed and allow genuine conversations to take place is an essential skill for facilitation.

### **Normalizing Failure and Its Positive Impact on Isolationism**

One of the major themes that emerged was the positive benefit that teachers found in the shared experience of failure. Teachers found that it helped to bring them together and made them realize that they were not alone in their failure, and it brought them together. “It really helps to hear insights from a bunch of other first year teachers, and in many cases I felt like I was able to empathize with them, and I was able to pick up some new strategies, especially in terms of classroom management.” This is a quote from an Integrated Co-Teacher who taught two different grade levels and four different subjects. Each session, the group would have a topic that we were going to focus on; classroom management, engagement strategies, or examining student work to name a few. While we always wanted to have a growth mindset and be thinking about how we can improve our practice, most of the feedback I received from the participants about the benefits of the professional development program referenced the shared experience of failing in the classroom. When asked what was most beneficial about our PD sessions, one teacher commented, “I am not used to failing this much and it was really hard for me to deal with, but seeing that others were experiencing the same thing, helped me to realize that it isn’t a me thing, it’s a first year teacher thing.” The shared experience of failure was a major unifying force within the PD sessions. While the structure of the PD did not allow this to become venting, shared failure actually helped to alleviate isolation among the six teachers because they realized

that they were not alone and that they had colleagues who were going through the same experiences just down the hall from them.

Normalizing failure was a major reason that this program was successful with first-year teachers. The teachers in this program were very open and honest about the issues that they faced within the classroom, and because this failure became normal, the stigma of failure was removed. This is echoed by one of the teachers saying, “I have never failed so much in my life than I have this year, and it was really challenging. Knowing that others were failing and struggling made me feel better about myself and my teaching.” Having the opportunity to share out their failures helped them relate to one another and became therapeutic. Providing teachers five minutes to share before we started the formal protocol allowed teachers to find some common ground and realize how normal the issues they faced were. We did not have situations where teachers were self-conscious about sharing or embarrassed by what was happening in their teaching because everyone was experiencing similar issues. Rather, every session teachers’ would bring their issues with them and discuss what happened, why they were unsuccessful, and how they could improve. In the interviews, each teacher discussed the impact of hearing their colleagues talk about failure, realizing that they could relate to all of the scenarios raised, which was empowering to them. One teacher stated,

Just talking about common problems, it is just nice to know that you are not the only one going through these issues. All of us are struggling to manage our classrooms and are unsure if our students are learning everything they need to. Knowing that makes you feel better about your own weaknesses.

Throughout the entirety of the program, these teachers still felt that sense of unity with one another through their failures, struggles, and eventually, growth. That was a powerful thing to be a part of and experience with these teachers and for me, a major takeaway from this study.

Professional development facilitators do need to be careful with this however, because one common pitfall within professional development sessions within schools is that negative venting within sessions can lead to teachers disengaging from PD. When teachers have the opportunity to vent their frustrations it is only a short-term relief of the stresses that teaching can cause. Additionally, it limits the chances to get into solutions for the issues they face. That is where the protocols were effective, creating a structure around our discussion ensuring that we were focusing on solutions, not just problems. As the sessions progressed, the initial five minutes turned more into sharing of success stories and not just failures. It was inspiring to see these teachers so positive in our sessions after a long day of teaching.

### **Conclusion**

This program demonstrates the positive effects that professional development can have on first-year teachers when facilitated intentionally. This is a low-cost strategy that can easily be implemented into any school and can have a positive effect on first year teachers, who have shown to be very difficult to retain, particularly in low-income communities. While this article does not address institutional areas of concern for first year teachers (salary, workload), it does have an effect on major problem areas for first-year teachers, specifically teacher isolation. Effective facilitators of this type of PD need to focus on three areas to create an ideal environment. First, facilitators must create and enforce structures, such as protocols, that are adapted to the “personality of the collective” and fit the topic that is being covered. These protocols must be well thought out and purposefully planned to focus on the learning from

practice. Facilitators must also act as models for the participants, allowing themselves to participate in the group discussion while also leading it. Modelling not only helps to build rapport with the group because you are one of them, but also shows participants how discussion within a protocol should take place. Finally, facilitators need to include the participants in the process of planning the PD in order to build a sense of ownership. These three strategies help create an environment where first year teachers can help one another to become better teachers and help create relationships to combat the normal first year isolation teachers often feel.

Lastly, this professional development program was designed to reduce isolationism within first year teachers, but that is only one piece of the puzzle. One topic that came up over and over in our discussions was the burdening workload that teachers face. Administrators can couple this program with an effective schedule to help first year teachers so they are not overwhelmed in their first year. While scheduling is always a challenge, the aim should be for administrators to couple this program with a schedule that does not overburden new teachers, trying to limit the number of unique classes and subjects that they must prepare for. This is especially true with Special Education/Integrated Co-Teachers because they are the ones that most often have to teach four different subjects across two different grade levels. With everything else going on in their first year teaching, this can be a crippling schedule, leading to teacher attrition. This professional development had five out of six teachers return to the school and did not lose any Special Education teachers, but no professional development can fix scheduling a burdening workload for our new teachers. One of the Special Education teachers, when interviewed in their second year of teaching said, “This year I am still working with four different subjects, but at least I have the same group of students. It has been easier than last year”. Another teacher, who has made the switch from full time ICT (4 unique classes) to a self-

contained setting (2 unique classes) said, “This year is so much easier than last year with my planning. I have more time to plan better, more appropriate lessons that address my individual student needs.” While some of this can be attributed to being a more experienced second year teacher, it is clear that being more mindful of the burdening schedule placed on first year special education teachers would have a positive effect on the attrition rates, and coupled with professional development, improves their chances of staying.

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Chapter 4: First-Year Teacher Professional Development Plan

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June 2019

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

Low-income urban schools can be difficult to staff with high quality teachers, and just as hard to keep those teachers in the school and the profession. This was an issue that I saw every year at my school and I wanted to attempt to help first-year teachers with their transition into a new, unknown environment. Many first-year teachers in urban schools do not share a background with the students and community, which can be difficult. I wanted to create a space that could help those teachers to become entwined in the school community, and have a support system to help them succeed in their first year. The New Teacher Experience was a professional development group designed to help first year-teachers within my school. I was the facilitator of the group and the group was comprised of any first-year teacher regardless of subject or grade level.

### **Problem**

Of all of the educational issues that face this country, one that is often overlooked is the impact of teacher retention on students, schools, and the education system. Teachers go through extensive training, gain valuable experience, obtain skills to become excellent teachers and then leave the field and force a new inexperienced candidate to go through that process again. This is a problem in schools across the country, but this issue seems to be even more prevalent in low-income schools. Poor teacher retention in low-income areas is one of the main reasons that the “achievement gap” exists and has been so difficult to close (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005; Hays, 2013). Teachers in their first year have been shown to have a much higher likelihood of being ineffective at reaching appropriate student gains (Darling-Hammond,

2003). Programs that promote teacher retention, particularly within low-income urban schools, could benefit students by keeping high quality teachers in the classroom.

One of the most cost-effective ways that administrators can help first-year teachers is by providing quality professional development. Professional development specifically geared towards first-year teachers can be effective by giving teachers the chance to be a part of their own learning. Professional development needs to be conducted in a certain way in order for the best possible results to occur. First, professional development can be successful only with the buy in of the participants. Teachers must be able to build trusting relationships in order to take risks, and risk taking drives the improvement in teacher practice. Building trust is important because it allows teachers to open up to one another about issues that are happening in the classroom without being guarded so that improvement can take place (Curry, 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Little, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2001; Wood, 2007). Second, professional development sessions must have an end goal of improving teacher practice. It is possible for professional development to have parts of the session that are not geared towards teacher improvement, but those must be purposeful and short. In my sessions, I used protocols to create the structure necessary to keep sessions purposeful. Every session had a topic and the purpose of the session was to improve teacher practice in that area. Protocols were then chosen and adapted based on those topics, which helped me to facilitate an on-task, improvement-driven session. Finally, facilitating can be uncomfortable and difficult, but it is necessary to have a successful PD. The facilitator must redirect the conversation if it gets off task and maintain the structure of the protocol to maximize the efficiency of the session (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008). The facilitator must be willing to put in the work before the session to ensure it is purposeful and

meaningful. Selecting the right facilitator will allow the rest of the pieces of this professional development to fall into place.

In addition to improving teaching practice, mentoring programs help first-year teachers with their feelings of isolation (Greiner & Smith, 2006). When looking into particular mentoring programs that are effective, Hallam, Chou, Hite, and Hite (2012) found that the most effective mentoring programs came from within the schools. This study examined in-school mentors, professional learning communities, and out of school coaches, determining that the most effective method was the professional learning communities. This study concluded that teachers needed to have the support of their fellow teachers in order to maintain a positive working disposition. This led to a decrease in teacher attrition because the participants felt that they were supported and had someone to turn to in a time of need (Greiner & Smith, 2006; Hallam, Chou, Hite, & Hite, 2012). Teachers need the support of one another and having professional development that focuses on community is one effective way to combat the attrition of first-year teachers.

One way to have teachers remain central in their own professional development is through Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, a strategy that has shown promise particularly in successful low-income schools (Maxwell, Huggins & Scheurich, 2010). PLCs are a way that organizations, in this case, schools, seek to re-examine how they conduct professional development for continuous improvement. The essential component to PLCs is that teachers work collaboratively to change their practice, based on their needs. This empowers teachers to enact changes in their classrooms based on their collaboration with their groups. Some of the practices of successful PLCs are using a shared language, engaging in activities that will improve student learning, a focus on improving knowledge and practice, and developing common

teaching practices, assessment procedures, and tools (Vale, Davies, Weaven, Hooley, Davidson, and Loton, 2010).

### **Solution**

To help ease the burden of first-year teachers, I have created a protocol-based professional development program that will target the issues faced by the first-year teachers in the school. This is a full year continuous program that meets once a month and uses protocols to uncover and diagnose the issues that first-year teachers are facing in the school. As a group, teachers discuss the issues, find the root causes of them, and brainstorm strategies to help each other in the classroom. A key role in this process is to find an experienced teacher who can facilitate the discussion, ensure that everyone stays on track in the meetings, and support the conversation. This professional development will leverage the structure of protocols in order to create an environment when meaningful discussion about the issues first-year teachers are facing is present. Discussions are meant to develop strategies for dealing with these issues along with creating an environment where teachers can build professional relationships and help resolve isolationism, which is a typical hardship of first-year teachers.

### **Setting**

I conducted a pilot of this program low-income school in a large metropolitan area in the northeast that services students from sixth through twelfth grade. The school population is 661 students, which breaks down to 94 students in each grade. There are 49 teachers in the school which includes 11 Special Education teachers. The demographic breakdown of the public school is 71% Hispanic, 25% African American, 2% Asian, and 2% White. In this school, 25% of the students are classified as having special education services and 90.4% have free or reduced

lunch. This public school is representative of a typical school in the South Bronx when it comes to demographic and socioeconomic breakdown. The school consists of about 7.5% ELL students and while many of the students are fluent in English, many of the parents only speak Spanish. This sample was helpful to my program because this demographic is representative of the type of school that can be greatly affected by teacher attrition. Due to many factors, schools similar to this are often the schools that feel the negative effects of teacher attrition the most. Using this school as a model, I have designed this professional development plan to affect teacher retention and attrition in low-income urban schools.

### **Participants**

The professional development was designed specifically for first-year teachers. For this to be successful, facilitation needs to take place that is not content-specific and is focused on general teaching practices and strategies. This allows for all teachers to be active participants in all sessions and not just the ones that relate to their content. It also is designed to include special education teachers. Being that the main focus is on the relationships building and the discussion and interaction of the participants, focus on general topics and strategies allows for everyone to be an active participant and benefit from the group.

## **Professional Development Plan**

### **Overview**

This professional development plan will describe an early session, a typical session throughout the process, and a cohesive plan on how to make the yearlong program flow from month to month. The opening session is different from the rest of the year because you are introducing the program and the participants. The session is more about building trust than it is

about improving teacher practice. I will then describe the typical session in detail to understand how trust is continuing to build, while protocols are facilitating teacher improvement. Finally, I will explain the different topics that I covered throughout the year. These topics are subject to change and should take into account the participants needs as the year progresses. In professional development, participant interaction is essential and participants need to have some investment in the topics so they will be engaged in discussion. Some topics that I would expect based on typical first year problems are lesson planning, behavior management, handling extreme behavior, and creating student engagement. The method I used to get feedback for topic ideas was a survey after each session to gauge how much they liked the session and then a ranking for possible topics for the next session (appendix F). This helped me to guide the sessions to a place where teachers were maximizing their engagement.

### **Goals**

The goals of this professional development are to combat the major issues that plague first-year teachers, first and foremost, teacher isolation. First-year teachers are thrown into a job where they are by themselves in a classroom all day and, on top of that, given a burdening workload, which only increases their isolation. While this PD cannot fully address the issue of workload, it can offer some strategies to help manage the mental effects of that burden. This PD can provide teachers a space to build trusting relationships and lessen the isolationism most first-year teachers feel. A lack of resources is another central concern for many new teachers in low income schools. Therefore, the PD should be a place for teachers to share strategies and other resources, so they have a support system that they can use in a time of need.

Therefore, the goals of this professional development are:

1. Teachers experience a professional development setting where trust is present allowing for teacher discourse to promote first-year teachers building relationships with colleagues
2. Teachers are able to share their experiences in their classrooms, share feedback on ways to improve, and grow as classroom practitioners.
3. Teachers are exposed to a wide array of strategies that can improve their teacher practice, allowing teachers to adapt strategies that what will work for them and for their student population

### **Initial Session Description**

It is crucial to focus the first day on setting norms for the year and allowing a space for teachers to build relationships. Norm setting will be collaborative and the participants will share what they feel is important so they get the most out of the session. Collaboration and building trust is a key element to effective professional development. By including everyone in the process of goal and norm setting, it should build buy-in and trust from all participants (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007). When teachers feel a sense of ownership in professional development, they are more engaged and open to discussion and leading the discussion opens the door to more ideas to improve teacher practice (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008). To begin our first session, participants were grouped into three and spent five minutes coming up with norms, and then for the next five minutes, there was a whole group share out while I wrote the ideas on poster paper to display for the entirety of the sessions. This established trust early on by showing collaboration would be a priority and that the teachers would have input in this PD. Trust is also established by sharing my experiences both in the initial session and throughout, demonstrating that the facilitator is a part of the group as well as the facilitator. By sharing failures as a teacher,



the facilitator shows vulnerability and sets the expectation that everyone can share and learn from participating in the group. The modelling I did was essential because it broke down the barrier between facilitator and participant, made everyone equals in the group, and promoted honest dialogue because everyone was on the same level. All members of the group could provide feedback and be vulnerable to feedback, even the facilitator. I was also upfront with the group telling them about the expectations of the protocol. I was very clear that during the check-in I would respect their time and allow them to share whatever they wanted during that time. However, I was also clear that once the protocol had begun, to stay on track with our stated goals, I was going to redirect any conversation that was distracting from the conversation or leading us away from our goals of improving as a teacher. This was important because it prioritized the protocols and our time, and it did not come as a surprise when I would redirect conversation. Being honest up front helped build trust because the teachers knew that the group was here for a purpose and we all needed to respect each other enough to stay focused on that purpose and not waste anyone's time. After the norm setting, I outlined the goals and objectives for the PD. Teachers need to know the purpose of the PD, the benefits, and their role in the PD in order for an honest dialogue to take place and learning to occur.

Finally, some relationship building needs to take place in the first session. These teachers are new to teaching, have limited relationships in the building, and thus limited resources when they need assistance. This needs to be a place where teachers can form those relationships and find resources for when they need help. There are many different ways to form relationships, such as icebreakers or team building activities. In my initial session, I used an icebreaker where we shared out a little about ourselves, our background, our paths to teaching, and our motivation for becoming a teacher. I participated in the conversation so they got to know me as a teacher

and person, not just as a facilitator. After the session ends it is helpful to send out a survey with some topic ideas for the next session and to have them rank those topics. Some of the topics I used were behavior management, student engagement, lesson planning, and looking at student work. In this case, the group unanimously selected student behavior, which became the focal topic for the next two sessions.

### **Protocol-based Session Description**

The majority of the PD sessions will follow a similar schedule (Appendix E). The first five minutes of the session is reserved for a teacher check-in. Each participant has 30 seconds to one minute to talk about how his or her week is going. The sessions typically last 45 minutes to one hour, however, if you have a longer time period, then this could be adjusted. In this part of the session there may be some negativity and some venting, which is ok, as long as it ends after the check in. Teachers need to see that they are not alone in their failures and that all teachers experience these issues. This shared experience of failure was something that bonded the teachers in my PD session and actually made them feel better about themselves as teachers. Through shared failure, they learned that everyone is experiencing similar struggles and it made them feel less isolated.

After the check-in period, you move into the protocol you have for that day. I have attached my adapted protocols in the appendix section. You base the protocol on the topic that you will be discussing that day. This is where the facilitator needs to be thoughtful and purposeful in their planning. The topic that is selected, with the help of the group, needs to dictate a protocol that matches. For example, a session on lesson planning should involve some sort of examination of a teacher's lesson plan, so finding a protocol where that occurs is essential. Then the facilitator needs to adapt the protocol to the norms of the session. In my

sessions, the group decided that they wanted equity of voice so that no one person dominated the session and everyone was involved in the discussion. In order to accommodate this, I had to alter the protocols to make sure that timing allowed multiple participants to share out. Finally, the facilitator needs to be ready and willing to interject when a conversation is getting off topic. This is sometimes difficult for facilitators to do, but is critical to the success of the session. I will describe one of the sessions in further detail to give a better understanding of the session.

The session I will detail is the third session, which was the second part of our discussion on managing student behavior. Each participant was asked to come with a specific example of student behavior that was occurring in their class that they were struggling to manage. The protocol that we used for this session was an adaptation to a protocol called the Final Word Protocol (NSRF, 2006). This is where facilitators need to be very purposeful in matching up a protocol with a topic and adapting it to their group. The Final Word Protocol is typically meant as a text rendering activity, meaning that you read a text, create meaning from the text, and then discuss it. I adapted this protocol (Appendix A) by using the round table format where every person gets an opportunity to make suggestions and share ways that they can relate to the presented situation, but I changed the topic from a discussion about text to a discussion about situations that arise in the classroom. Finding a protocol that matches the topic and then adapting that protocol to fit in with the group dynamics as well as the time constraints of the group is essential to this being effective. This is one of the key roles of the facilitator.

In this session, the first participant would discuss their behavior scenario for one minute. The participant was instructed to leave out any names and focus on the behavior that was being exhibited and some of the details that were happening in conjunction with the behavior such as the activity that was being administered, the time of the period, and the grouping of the students.

Next, the group would have two minutes to ask questions about the scenario. Again, these questions were to be about the situation, not the student. The questions were not allowed to be judgements or suggestions in any way. This is the group's opportunity to fill in any gaps that the lead participant may have left out in their description of the situation. The first two parts of this protocol are about trying to paint a picture of exactly what was happening in the class as the behavior was occurring. Finally, each participant had one minute to discuss his or her reaction to the scenario and something that could be effective in handling that situation. In this round of discussion, we were looking to either relate to the lead participant or offer a suggestion to what they are dealing with. This is done without judgement, and the facilitator needs to prioritize this. Teachers can talk about a time when they experienced something similar to this and how they approached dealing with the situation or they may offer a suggestion that they feel might help fix the problem. This is the part of the protocol when the group is forward thinking and focused on solutions. Any discussion that leads us anywhere else must be redirected by the facilitator. With only one minute per person, you need to maximize the time by being solution-driven. Finally, the lead participant gets one minute to debrief what they heard, highlighting solutions that they will implement in class to resolve the situation. We would continue this until every participant got a chance to share his or her scenario. Each participant's scenario should only take around 15 minutes to go thru each round, allowing multiple participants to share in one session.

### **Sustaining the Learning**

As the year progresses, the professional development should progress as well. Early sessions need to be much more structured to make sure that every participant has a chance to talk and express their opinions. Building these into the protocol develops structure within the session, but does not always create a true dialogue. As the participants get more comfortable

with the structure of the protocols and one another, you can start to remove these structured discussions and allow for more open debrief. This is at the discretion of the facilitator and can be adapted into the protocols.

As a facilitator you can also plan out an expected topic list and adjust it as you go. As first-year teachers, the first session will most likely be on student behavior or behavior management. After that, the next logical place to go is how to plan lessons that are engaging for students. You could talk about variety of lessons or project ideas here as well. Then once you have some ideas on how to control a class and conduct an interesting lesson, purposeful planning becomes a priority. A session on lesson or unit planning would be a great mid-year session. As you start to get towards the end of the year, you want to start to push the teachers to improve their practice. Topics such as student discourse, effective questioning, or examining teacher feedback are excellent ideas as you get towards the second half of the year. These are all subject to change and dependent on the group of teachers you are working with, but can serve as a general guideline for facilitators. As your groups gets better at having discussions with one another, much like a classroom, you as the facilitator can increase the rigor of the topics you are presenting to them. It may be effective to start having teacher bring in artifacts like lesson/unit plans, or examples of student work. Incorporating some sort of visitation schedule to address topics like effective questioning could also bring a whole new level of discussion to your group. Evolving the sessions as your participants evolve as teachers will increase the effectiveness and depth of the discussions. This is very important to facilitating a PD that will help improve teacher practice and reduce teacher isolation.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation of this professional development will take place at the end of the school year after all sessions are completed and will assess effectiveness in two areas. First, was the PD able to create a space for first-year teachers to create professional relationships where they can discuss challenges they are facing? Second, is the PD effective in creating a solution driven environment where teachers are feeling better regarding the areas of workload, resources, and teacher isolation? In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, teachers will be given a likert scale survey in the beginning and end of the professional development program. The teachers will rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10 based on their perceptions of teacher isolation, finding resources, and workload. The evaluation will provide a comparison to see how effective this professional development was in improving the teachers' feelings in these areas. While other factors could play a role in these perceptions throughout the year, it will give us a glimpse as to whether the program was effective in improving teachers' perceptions in those problem areas. Also, in the final evaluation, after the likert scale, the survey will include a question where teachers provide three specific examples of this professional development improving their instructional practice. This allows the likert scale items to be validated with more concrete, specific examples of the PD being helpful to the teachers. This also provides an opportunity to assess the teachers of the practices and allow the teachers to speak to their understanding of these different skills. Finally, in the final evaluation there will be a formative section asking teachers to talk about areas of practice that the PD could have addresses further and ways to improve next year's iteration of this professional development. This professional development is all about helping first-year teachers feel more comfortable and improve their practice. This evaluation reflects those goals by getting feedback on how the professional development was helpful to

them, both in a general sense and with specific examples of when the PD helped them in the traditional first-year teacher problem areas.

### **Conclusion**

First-year teachers face challenges that do not exist in most professions. They have the same responsibilities and job description to a teacher who is in their tenth year. Hence, first-year teachers do not often survive the first year. As a community, more needs to be done to provide support for these teachers in terms of resources, teaching practice, and mental health. This professional development is a cost-effective way of providing all three. With the help of this guide and the implementation of an effective, organized facilitator, any school can create a professional development group that improves the teaching practices of first-year teachers and offers them a place where they can build relationships and discuss issues they are facing in the classroom. This improves the mental well-being of a teacher and gives them strategies to make their first year of teacher go as smoothly as possible. As someone who spent the whole year working with six first-year teachers and saw them grow into effective second year teachers I hope that all schools make an effort to improve the support they provide their new teachers.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### New Teacher Experience Protocol

##### Adaptation to Final Word Protocol

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of this protocol is to give each person in the group an opportunity to have their ideas, understandings, and perspective enhanced by hearing from others. With this protocol, the group can explore a behavioral management issue, clarify their thinking, and have their assumptions and beliefs questioned in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

##### **Time**

For each round, allow about 8 minutes (circles of 5 participants: presenter 3 minutes, response 1 minute each for 4 people, final word for presenter 1 minute). Total time is about 40 minutes for a group of 5 (32 minutes for a group of 4, 48 minutes for a group of 6).

##### **Process**

1. Sit in a circle and identify an order for presenting.
2. Each person needs to have a significant behavioral management issue that the teacher has experienced in the classroom. It is often helpful to have a back-up as well.
3. The first person begins by sharing their experience in the classroom, without using names. Then, in less than 3 minutes, this person describes the situation in which this issue presented itself, giving context to the situation. For example, where in the class (time/place) did this happen? Is this a reoccurring issue with just one student or with many students? What interventions have been attempted so far?
4. Then the group has 1 minute to ask any clarifying questions.
5. Continuing around the circle, each person briefly responds to that situation and what the presenter said, in less than a minute. The purpose of the response is:
  - To relate to the presenter's experience with an experience of their own.
  - To provide a possible solution to the situation
  - To question the presenter's assumptions about the situation and the issues raised (although at this time there is no response from the presenter)

6. After going around the circle with each person having responded for less than one minute, the person that began has the “final word.” In no more than one minute the presenter responds to what has been said. Now what is she/he thinking? What is her/his reaction to what she/he has heard?

7. The next person begins by discussing their situation and the process continues to each presenter.

8. End by debriefing the process in your small group.

## **Appendix B**

### **New Teacher Experience Protocol**

#### ***Adaptation to Blooming Questions***

Adapted from Bloom et. al., 1956, by Deborah Bambino, 2005.

#### **Purpose**

Since we all profess a commitment to critical thinking examining the questions we ask seems like a natural winner. This is an easy way to get everyone to bring an example of his or her work. This can be anything that they have created that has questions for the students to answer. We are examining the questions themselves to see what types of questions we are asking as teachers and ways we can improve our questioning skills.

#### **Time**

In part 1, each person will bring their own blank copy of an assignment where questioning will occur. Each participant will have 3 minutes to comment on a post it note and respond to his or her colleague's example. This will take about 20 minutes for a group of 6-8.

In part 2, each partner will pair up with a colleague and they will have 5 minutes each to talk about their work, the feedback they received, and how the questioning could be improved/reworked. Total time for a group of 6 should be 35 minutes.

#### **Process**

##### **Part I**

1. All members of the group bring a written copy of a current question(s) they are going to pose to their students in the future.
2. On a Post-it, examine the artifact with the following prompts in mind:
  - What do you see? (Describe w/o evaluation.)
  - What questions does your review of this sampling raise for you?
  - What are the implications for your focus on higher order questioning?

##### **Part II**

Read the comments given to your artifact. Pair up with another teacher and spend 5 minutes of each person's artifact. Discuss the comments given to your questioning and spend time trying to "fine-tune" your questions and improve the higher order thinking of your questions.

## Appendix C

### New Teacher Experience Protocol

#### *Adaptation to the Tuning Protocol*

##### **Purpose**

When you tune a lesson plan, you have two basic components: the goals of the plan and a set of learning activities sequenced in a way that you believe will help the students meet those goals. The general objective is to get feedback from your colleagues about the degree to which the activity you structure seem likely to get your students to these goals. The plan is “in tune” when the goals and activities are most in alignment.

##### **Time**

Each presenter should take about 15 minutes. Then at the end the whole group debrief should be somewhere between 5 and 10 minutes.

##### **Process**

1. Presentation (3 minutes): Presenter presents the lesson focusing on the following:

What are the learning goals of the lesson? What do you want students to learn? How will you facilitate this learning?

Provide context for lesson plan (i.e. what led up to the lesson, what will be your next steps, etc.).

Focus question for feedback: What evidence exists in the lesson that students will read, write, think, and talk and how might I increase those opportunities during the lesson or unit of study?

2. Clarifying Question from Group (2 minutes)

Clarifying questions are matters of fact and allow participants to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation and will help them to understand the context for the lesson. The facilitator is responsible for making sure that clarifying questions are really clarifying and that the person asking the question is **not making suggestions at this point**.

3. Pause to Reflect on Feedback (2 minutes)

Participants prepare their feedback by taking notes on where the plan seems “in tune” with the stated goals and where they may be opportunities for improvement. When providing warm feedback, avoid judgment statements such as “I like, Great job...etc.” Instead, consider starting comments as “I saw,” “I noticed,” “I heard,” or “I see evidence of...”. Cool feedback may include possible disconnects, gaps, or suggestions for change. Remember that cool feedback should offer ideas or suggestions that strengthen the lesson plan presented. Cool feedback should address the focus question outlined in step 1. When providing cool feedback, consider starting comments as “I wonder if you have considered.....,” “I’m curious to know what might happen

if.....” Results are more positive if you can frame cool feedback as a probing question that allows the presenter to reflect on their plan. Presenter is silent during this reflection; participants do this work silently until step 4.

4. Warm and Cool Feedback (5 minutes)

Participants share feedback with the presenter, starting with warm feedback then transitioning into cool feedback. Remember the suggestions should help answer the focus question in step 1. Presenter is silent and takes notes while the participants provide feedback.

5. Reflection (3 minutes)

Presenter speaks to those comments/questions he or she chooses while participants are silent. **This is not a time to defend oneself**, but is instead a time for the presenter to reflect aloud on those ideas or questions that seemed particularly interesting. Facilitator may intervene to focus, clarify, etc.

6. Repeat steps 1-5 until every teacher has presented and received feedback on their lesson plan.

7. Debrief (5 minutes)

Large group facilitator leads discussion on the tuning experience.

## Appendix D

### New Teacher Experience Protocol

#### *Adaptation to ATLAS: Learning From Student Work Protocol*

##### **1. Getting Started**

- The facilitator explains the protocol.

Note: The presenter is silent until Step 5. The group should avoid talking to the presenter during steps 2-4. It is sometimes helpful for the presenter to pull away from the table and take notes.

##### **2. Presenter describes the assignment (5 minutes)**

- The educator providing the student work gives a very brief statement of the assignment. The educator should describe only what the student was asked to do and avoid explaining what she/he hoped or expected to see.
- The educator providing the work should not give any background information about the student or the student's work. In particular, the educator should avoid any statements about whether this is a strong or weak student or whether this is a particularly good or poor piece of work from this student.

Note: After the group becomes more familiar with this process for looking at student work, you may find it useful to hear the educator's expectations. However, this information will focus more of the group's attention on the design of the assignment, the instruction, and the assessment, rather than on seeing what is actually present in the student's work.

- The participants observe or read the work in silence, perhaps making brief notes about aspects of it that they particularly notice.

##### **3. Describing the Student Work (5 minutes)**

- The facilitator asks: "What do you see?"
- During this period the group gathers as much information as possible from the student work.
- Group members describe what they see in the student's work, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations about what the student was doing.
- If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to describe the evidence on which they are based.
- It may be useful to list the group's observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.

##### **4. Interpreting the Student Work (5 minutes)**

- The facilitator asks: "From the student's perspective, what is the student working on?"

- During this period, the group tries to make sense of what the student was doing and why. The group should try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence.
- From the evidence gathered in the preceding section, try to infer: what the student was thinking and why; what the student does and does not understand; what the student was most interested in; and how the student interpreted the assignment.
- Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the work, no matter how confusing, makes sense to the student; your job is to see what the student sees.
- As you listen to each other's interpretations, ask questions that help you better understand each other's perspectives.

### **5. Implications for Classroom Practice (5 minutes)**

- The facilitator asks: "What are the implications of this work for teaching and assessment?"
- Based on the group's observations and interpretations, discuss any implications this work might have for teaching and assessment in the classroom. In particular, consider the following questions:
  - What steps could the teacher take next with this student?
  - What teaching strategies might be most effective?
  - What else would you like to see in the student work? What kinds of assignments or assessments could provide this information?
  - What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice? About teaching and learning in general?

### **5. Reflecting on the ATLAS (2 minutes)**

The presenter shares back what she/he learned about the student, the work, and what she/he is now thinking. The discussion then opens to the larger group to discuss what was learned about the student, about colleagues, and self.

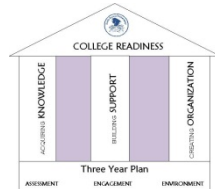
### **6. Debriefing the Process (3 minutes)**

How well did the process work? What went well, and what could be improved?



**Appendix E**

Sample Schedule from New Teacher Experience PD 2/26/18



**Monday, February 26, 2018**

**Room 110**

**New teacher Experience PD**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Meeting Notes</b>
2:45- 2:50pm	<p><b><i>Introduction</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recap from last time</li> <li>• How was your break?</li> </ul>	
2:50 – 3:25pm	<p><b><i>Protocol – Blooming Questions – Full Protocol Descriptions are Provided</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptation of the blooming questions protocol. Each participant will write down 2-3 questions they have posed in class. One will share out a question and each participant will try and come up with an adaptation to improve the rigor of the question. We will go around so we each share a question.</li> </ul>	
3:25 – 3:38pm	<p><b><i>Support/Knowledge</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topics for next session.</li> <li>• Surveys(emailed out next week)</li> </ul>	

**Appendix F**

Survey Monkey – Sent out 1 week after each session

- 5) What have you applied that was discussed in our last session in the last week in your classroom? (RQ1, RQ2)
- 6) What are you struggling to apply from our last session? (RQ2)
- 7) What are some topics you would like to cover in our next session? (RQ2)
- 8) Rank the topics you would like to discuss next session: (RQ2)

⋮	<input type="text" value="Lesson Plan Ideas"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Reviewing Student Work"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Classroom Management"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Creating Discussion in Class"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Engaging Students"/>
⋮	<input type="text" value="Effective Questioning"/>

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

To address these issues of teacher retention in urban schools, this study used protocols that were adapted to specifically target issues that first-year teachers typically face. The essential piece that drove all other improvement was addressing isolationism within the group of first-year teachers. Isolation was addressed first as teachers in the group found that sharing experiences of failure actually connected them. This is important because too often, facilitators try to steer their professional development away from negative comments due to worries about venting. But in this case, it was the first sign of a connection in the group and brought the teachers together in a profound way that led us to other positive outcomes and connections throughout the year. Teachers allowed themselves to be vulnerable and honest because they shared a connection that they were all struggling with something and that struggle made them all feel that they were not alone.

### **Research Findings**

First, a major takeaway to this study is the difference between venting and normalizing failure and the positive effect that normalizing failure can have on a group of first year teachers. Venting is continuous complaining about an individuals' current situation without any offering of solution or means of improvement. Venting is generally complaining about what someone else has done. Venting has been shown to have a negative effect on teachers within a professional development group (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008). Normalizing failure gives a teacher space to share an experience in which they were not effective and an opportunity for the other teachers in the group to relate to that experience. In essence then, failure is about attributing the lack of effectiveness to one's self, which places the responsibility to make it better on the one sharing the failure. Building in a place for teachers to talk about their failures, but

having the structures in place to ensure that normalizing failure has a purpose is key to effective facilitation with first-year teachers. This professional development program leveraged the normalization of failure to reduce isolation among the participants, and teachers drew on that connection to form relationships with one another.

Normalizing failure through structures built into the professional development was a bridge to reducing isolationism with this group of teachers. Through this, bonds and relationships formed between the teachers, which opened the door to sharing resources and strategies. Isolation leads teachers to repeat the same failing strategies without trying new things (Gagen & Bowie, 2005; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). As their isolation reduced, the teachers started to adapt new ideas from one another through our professional development discussions and their own visitations. The protocols that were adapted and used in our groups promoted discussion of ideas that they had successfully incorporated into their classroom. The relationships and protocols that were used also encouraged teachers to critique each other, pushing further improvement for the teachers.

Supporting Special Education and ICT is very difficult because of the workload that they must deal with in their first year. First-year Special Education teachers are the most likely to leave their job because they often work with the most difficult group of students and have the most difficult workload, often preparing for three to four unique classes each day (Andrews & Martin, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Nagy & Wang, 2007; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Addressing this issue was not within the scope of the study, but throughout the program, I obtained some noteworthy insights into the Special Education and ICT group. There was a delay in the reduction in isolation when comparing them to the general education teachers, meaning some of the breakthroughs in reduction of isolation

that the general education teachers were having in January, were not occurring until March or April for the Special Education teachers. When considering the timeline of the school year, if teachers are not experiencing any reduction in isolation until that time, these teachers may not get to experience positive teaching moments until late in the year, and it stands to reason, may not want to return for another year. Building in structures, such as our professional development group, that force Special Education and ICT into community building and collaboration needs to occur, even if they feel they do not have time because of their workload.

While the results of this survey show that normalization of failure helped to build relationships, this was a small sample and needs further exploration. On a micro level, this group of first-year teachers consisted of only six teachers. Future studies could examine how normalizing failure affects a larger group of teachers within a professional development session. It may be more difficult to allow this normalization of failure to develop in a larger group. On a macro level, when looking at a larger scale study, do the findings around normalizing failure remain consistent or was this unique to this small group of teachers? Another future study could further examine the relationship between resources and teaching level. Perhaps looking at the relationship between resource accessibility and teacher level for teachers at all levels to see if the findings are consistent with the findings in this study. Additionally, along the lines of resources and teacher accessibility, it would be worth looking into whether or not we need to start scaffolding teacher resources and strategies for teacher, much as we do for students. When considering suggesting resources and strategies to teachers, be sure to think about level appropriate resources and what supports could be built in to help teachers with strategies that may be above their level.

### **Findings in Practice**

Throughout the study, building trust, modeling, and adapted protocols were essential in creating an environment where teacher improvements could take place. Literature shows that isolationism is the enemy of collaboration and that building trusting relationships is key to reducing isolationism in professional development (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Building trust within our group was accomplished by including the teachers in the professional development decisions to make sure they felt invested. Facilitation of professional development must take into account participant feedback when determining topics for discussion and norms for which the PD will run. The entire first session of this professional development series was purposefully dedicated to bringing the participants into the decision making process of what was discussed and how we conducted the professional development. This was designed to make sure that the participants were invested in the PD.

One recommendation is to use modeling, to build trust by bringing the facilitator into the discussion. Modelling, through the facilitator's stories of failure, helped the facilitator show vulnerability to the participants. This built trust between the facilitator and the participants so they could form relationships and increase collaboration. Another recommendation for facilitating this type of PD is to adapt protocols to the topics that will be discussed. Before each session, a survey was used to determine the topic that was discussed in that session. It was crucial to match the topic, the protocol, and the personality of the group to have a successful session. The best way to do that is to adapt protocols to fit the needs of the group. This gives the facilitator an opportunity to fit the protocol with the group and not the other way around. By trying to run a protocol that does not fit the personality of the group, there is a chance that the group will not buy-in to the protocol and hinder the full investment of the participants. Adapting

protocols is another way to build trust because it allows for purposeful planning to fit the group's needs.

While there are many benefits to protocol based professional development, there are some drawbacks. First of all, it requires the commitment of all parties involved. The administration needs to be supportive of the program, providing scheduled time for teachers and facilitators to meet. The facilitator needs to be properly trained and also must be willing to put in extra time planning the sessions based on the needs of the group. The participants also give up time in their busy schedules to meet, and while beneficial to them, it does take them away from other responsibilities they could be working on. In order for the process to work, everyone must be invested and on the same page.

Another drawback to the program is that it is not designed to address the burdening workload that first-year teachers experience, which is one of the major reasons that attrition is so high with first-year teachers. When first thinking through this professional development, the design was to help fix the three major issues, but due to the nature of professional development and the major role that administrators play in setting workload, it is just not something that can be addressed. As a group, we were able to collaborate to find ways to deal with the stresses of a heavy workload and teachers did say that, as the year went on, their efficiency and time management improved and helped with the workload, but the fact is professional development is not capable to reschedule teachers to substantially lessen a teacher's workload.

In terms of scheduling, the difficulty in workload of first-year Special Education and ICT teachers needs to be considered. First-year teachers, particularly Special Education and ICT teachers often face the most demanding schedules and workload (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Nagy & Wang, 2007). This workload delays their reduction in isolation and

hence, their growth as a teacher. This group of Special Education and ICT all had moments where they questioned their decision to go into that field during the year. Next steps would be finding and studying creative ways to give them additional prep time or reduce the number of unique classes they must prepare, to see if that has some effect on job satisfaction throughout their first year. More schools making sure that support groups, such as this one, for first-year teachers, should also be a priority. This will give first-year teachers a place to build relationships, collaborate, and feel part of group and hopefully, lead to increased retention of teachers.

A final consideration is that because of all of the different forms of training and learning that first-year teachers go through, it can be hard to pinpoint exactly how this professional development affected teachers. Throughout the study, I tried to find multiple sources to validate experiences or quotes from teachers, attempting to show through sessions and interviews from multiple teachers where positive effects of the professional development result. With that said, it is difficult to say that outside sources did not play a role in the learning and improvement of the first-year teachers. Factors such as graduate school classes, other professional development, TFA meeting, or day-to-day interactions all could have also helped teachers, and cannot solely be attributed to this professional development group.



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