

Effective Professional Development and Lesson Study

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## **Abstract**

School districts often utilize professional development to enhance teacher skills, with a particular emphasis on equity and social justice. This research delves into the perspectives of elementary school educators who participated in small-group residency professional development centered on equity. Through the voices of ten elementary school teachers, we gain insight into their overall experiences with professional growth, experience with the residency model, utilization of lesson study techniques, as well as challenges and successes they faced during the professional development process.

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## **1. Introduction**

Educator professional development, provided by school districts or professional development agencies, intends to strengthen teacher abilities to engage all students in achieving academically. One significant focus area for teacher professional development is equity and social justice. Equity and social justice work can take many forms in education, including but not limited to differentiating instruction, resources, or classroom settings based on student needs, ensuring students can be their authentic selves at school, and providing rigorous learning environments where students can employ critical thinking (Tuters, 2017). The need for professional development focused on equity is rooted in the overarching prevalence of racial disparities in educational systems. Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2010) point out that racism is an everyday practice within schools; schools are structured to reproduce the inequities found in larger society (p. 95). Racism is deeply rooted in education systems that, under the guise of racial neutrality, unequally impact students of color. Equity professional development is one strategy to chip away at the monumental impact racism has in education.

Equity professional development is not just a set of replicable teaching strategies but rather a shift of focus in educator belief systems. Nieto (2000) describes equity in teaching as the ability to comprehend and apply changes to materials and instruction to better serve the needs of the students in one's classroom. It means demonstrating patience, acceptance, ingenuity, care, and authentic and honest connection with students (p. 180). Stemberge (2020) describes teaching equitably as providing opportunities for all students to learn in ways they perceive as meaningful and allowing them to pull in their cultural and social strengths to thrive academically.

The Pierce County School District (PCSD), located in Lakewood and Joint Base Lewis McChord, Washington, is in a multi-year process, focusing on equity and social justice during district-led professional development sessions. The focus of the professional development has progressed each year of the process. Year one focused on building tone and trust among the adults in each school, including activities to build trust and honesty, engaging in conversations traditionally left out of the workplace, and a more explicit focus on equity from district leadership. Year two focused on improvement in the climate of inclusion for students. This focus looked like creating opportunities for increased belonging and connectedness, increasing positive student-adult relationships, and empowering students to speak their truth through listening session opportunities. Years three and four focused on the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. During the 2022-23 school year, the professional development attempted to shift the focus away from discussing how to improve learning opportunities for students to attempt to put the previous three years' worth of learning into action. This equity PD journey also began in the 2019-2020 school year, resulting in half of this work occurring in a virtual setting due to COVID-19.

### **Purpose and Guiding Question**

This qualitative study describes the experiences of elementary school teachers engaged in small-group, equity-centered professional development in the Pierce County School District during the 2022-2023 school year. This professional development is a lesson study model of equity PD, taking place in small group settings through residency professional development sessions with Dr. Adeyemi Stenbridge. Dr. Adeyemi Stenbridge is an educational consultant and the author of *Culturally Responsive Education in the Classroom: An Equity Framework for Pedagogy* (2020). Dr. Stenbridge works with school districts around the United States to

pinpoint the sources of educational discrepancies and develop targeted, teacher-driven instruction to address those discrepancies to rectify the underperformance of vulnerable student populations. Dr. Stenbridge defines *equity* as the embodiment of the belief that student groups will achieve when they receive learning opportunities "that they are able to perceive as meaningful and that allow them to draw on their social and cultural literacies in order to be academically successful" (2020, p. 5). Stenbridge describes equity as a performative construct. The intention is to shift teacher practice to allow students' interests, skills, gifts, and cultural wealth to shine.

This professional development is considered a small group because the sessions consist of teachers and an administrator or academic coach, typically in groups no larger than ten individuals. The residency model consists of Dr. Stenbridge coming to the school building for three consecutive days to work with the same group of teachers. The lesson study model consists of five parts: collaborative learning around a shared topic, collaborative lesson planning, teaching, peer observation, and reflection (Hixon, 2021). This contrasts with the large group (30 or more) presentation style professional development common in educational spaces. These professional development experiences consist of a presenter, typically leading through a set of slides or material, with opportunities for partner or small group discussions intermixed. Schools and districts use these formats to disseminate information to a large group of educators simultaneously.

Within this study, I examine teacher perceptions, experiences, and lessons learned in the small group residency professional development context compared to presentation-type equity professional development in a large group. Geneva Gay, a prominent scholar in culturally responsive teaching, states that teachers' beliefs significantly affect their instructional decisions

and actions (2010, p. 143). This sentiment is echoed by Smylie (1995), who states that "in order to change practice in significant and worthwhile ways, teachers must not only learn new subject matter and instructional techniques, they must alter their beliefs and conceptions of practice, their theories of practice, and their' theories of action" (p. 95). This study aims to learn more about teacher experiences with equity professional development in small group residency learning sessions because they are foundational to changes in practice. Therefore, this study is guided by the following question: What are the experiences of elementary school teachers engaging in small group, equity-focused residency professional development?

### **Context**

At the center of this study are certificated educators, including teachers, counselors, and school psychologists, engaging in professional development focused on equity. Looking specifically at the Pierce County School District, teachers are 76% female and 82% white. While this study focuses on certificated educators, an essential component of the context is the student populations these educators serve. The Pierce County School District's student population is primarily students of color, with the 2022-2023 demographics reported as 36% Hispanic/Latino, 13% Two or More Races, 13% Black/African American, 6% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4% Asian, and less than 1% identifying as American Indian/Alaskan Native. White students make up 28% of the student population in Pierce County, and 67.3% of PCSD students are identified as low-income (OSPI, 2023).

The racial demographics of the majority of the teacher workforce (White) and the majority of the student population contrast one another, not only in the Pierce County School District but in public schools across the state of Washington. This is important because without addressing the role of race in our educational system, we ignore the perpetuation of whiteness in our schools.

Whiteness, white space, and white ideals have and continue to be protected over the rights of people of color. "Whiteness has more value in relation to other races as long as it maintains its exclusive privileges" (Zamudio et al., 2010, p. 33). As social justice professional development attempts to reduce inequities, it simultaneously pushes against white spaces, as educators are predominately white, making up 79.3% of the US teacher workforce (NCES, 2018). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) examine critical race theory in education, specifically the relationship between race and property. The authors address race's role in the inequities of US society, while race is a social construct that varies from place to place. Race is pervasively ingrained into American life and institutions, not just the beliefs of racist people. This perpetuation of whiteness can also be seen in teacher education programs and some equity professional development. Castagno (2013) described this protection of whiteness as the normalization of "majoritarian perspectives and knowledge; obscuring or ignoring race, structural arrangements, and inequity; and failing to pursue social change" (p. 102).

While larger social structures would like to believe that race no longer significantly impacts society, racism permeates the structures and beliefs within US schools (Zamudio et al., 2010). Gershenson et al. (2018) found that Black students with at least one Black teacher in elementary school are 13% more likely to graduate high school and 19% more likely to enroll in college than their peers who did not have a Black teacher.

While this research does not focus on teacher demographics and their effect on student achievement, the discrepancy between the two demographics highlights one of many missing factors supporting students in the Pierce County School District. Nieto (2000) espoused that as the nation's teachers have become more "monolithic, monocultural, and monolingual," it is even more important to prepare teachers to "promote the learning of all students, and to develop

educational environments that are fair and affirming" (p. 183). According to the Pew Research Center, the racial and ethnic demographics of teachers differ by state, but "there is no state where teachers are less likely to be White than their students" (Schaeffer, 2021, p. 6). Therefore, improving the quality of equity professional development and teachers' reception of this new learning is necessary for strengthening the instructional approaches of a primarily white teacher workforce that predominantly serves students of color.

### **Positionality Statement**

I am a white female educator who has worked as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal at multiple Pierce County School District schools. I am also a product of the same school district for my K-12 education, having lived in Lakewood, Washington, all my life, with the exception of college. I am in a heterosexual marriage, middle class, and able-bodied. These characteristics are similar to the majority of the teachers in this study and are examples of my unearned privileges in schools and classrooms. McIntosh (1990) describes this privilege as being made to feel self-assured, secure, and oblivious, while other groups were likely being made to feel the opposite (p. 33).

As a white female in educational settings, I know that my identities represent the majority of the educator population within most educational spaces. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2018), during the 2017-2018 school year, 79.3% of the roughly 3.8 million K-12 teachers in the US were white. I navigated public education, attended college, and received advanced degrees as a white person, succeeding in educational spaces that maintain and perpetuate whiteness. As a teacher and early in my administrative roles, I reverted to shying away from conflict and removing myself from uncomfortable conversations that I perceived were not directly part of my job.

Early on in my career, I related to what Kumashiro (2000) described as teachers who "acknowledged and condemned the ways schools perpetuate, say, racism, but asserted that, as a teacher, their job is to teach academics, not disrupt racism" (p. 8). As I have grown as an educational leader, I have learned to push past my default setting of remaining quiet. This regularly manifests in challenging conversations with other white educators, often with many more years of experience than I have. This shift means confronting my tendencies to perpetuate white supremacy culture (Jones & Okun, 2001) through fears of open conflict by conversing with white teachers around race and privilege.

As a white educator, I have the privilege of choosing when or when not to engage. Juárez (2013) described this as the epitome of white privilege:

People of Color cannot get up in the morning and say to themselves, "Today is not a good day to be Black." or "I think I'll choose my white body because I'm too tired to deal with all the race-based discrimination that continuously and daily comes my way in my Black body. (p.42)

As I continue to grow as an educational leader, I am developing my skills to actively show up for staff members, students, and families. This growth is connected to the equity professional development described above, as this learning develops educators' beliefs and skills to better support student learning. Before the equity professional development that PCSD engaged in, topics of race, equity, or even identifying students' cultural assets were not regular points of discussion. Without the willingness to engage in open communication and reflection, the opportunities for growth stalled. Introducing equity professional development into the workspace allowed for the reflection, introspection, and change necessary for growth. Nieto (2000) described the need for teachers "to learn how to promote the learning of all students, and to

develop educational environments that are fair and affirming" (p. 183). These equity professional development opportunities serve as a bridge between the learning of teachers and creating more equitable, affirming, and beneficial learning environments for students.

Educational spaces have a history of oppressing people of color, and that oppression is still prevalent today. By existing in and benefitting from these educational systems as a white student, teacher, and now administrator, I have been complicit in the ongoing oppression within schools. As a principal, I continue to operate and often lead oppressive structures such as standardized testing or exclusionary discipline. I continue to spread white supremacy culture (Jones & Okun, 2001) by perpetuating a sense of urgency and quantity over quality because these characteristics have become synonymous with how schools operate. These practices are not what is best for students, nor are they what I would want for students, yet they are so entwined into the school system that they are routinely considered necessary. Through the work of Dr. Stenbridge, I support teachers in creating learning experiences centered around responding to student needs, interests, and identities rather than the normative white supremacy culture. This study offers differing perspectives on what teacher growth and practice could look like and how teachers experience this alternative professional development process.

## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review aims to examine and highlight existing peer-reviewed research related to teacher professional growth in the areas of equity and social justice (ESJ). Teachers engage or withdraw from equity-centered professional development for a variety of reasons. Four areas are analyzed in this literature review: 1. Research into why or under what circumstances teachers engage in ESJ work; 2. How the perpetuation of whiteness factors into

moving social justice forward in educational spaces; 3. a brief overview of culturally responsive education; and 4. the use of lesson study to drive teacher practice forward.

When working to understand why certain teachers engage in equity professional growth and what factors led to that engagement, Stephanie Tuters (2017) illuminated three key findings: all participants involved had some critical incident in their life that led them to engage, they all experienced struggles while engaging in equity work and they pushed forward based on their hope for positive changes in their schools, and the direction of their individual equity growth was tied to their own experiences with equity or inequity. Milner (2007) found that using personal experiences and narratives effectively broke down barriers between himself and his teacher education students regarding race and racism in relation to education. To that end, he focused on his own stories and how they affected his role as a teacher educator. Milner noted the need for discussions about race and its place in curriculum, teaching, and learning as an essential step, as most teacher education programs are tailored to their primary demographic, white female teachers. In the following quote, Milner described the power that his white teacher candidates held by virtue of their whiteness, even though he was their professor. Milner explains how that power could be wielded against the professor by seeking out additional authorities, like the dean of the education department. This power within whiteness applies not only to the teachers in Milner's class but also aligns with that of the teaching majority.

Clearly, although I had some power as a professor in the course, my students in the class had power (by virtue of their skin tone) that could easily override my power. A simple visit to the dean's office could make the dean skeptical about me or possibly even lead him or her to think I was a racist because I made some of the students feel "intellectually or socially uncomfortable." Moreover, they had the power to drop the course and to give

me low teaching evaluations. Also, the students had the power to leave that classroom context and go into society—even the hallway—and regain their power and privilege.

They had power because they were White. The students had the power and the privilege to "tune me out" or to counter my every position." (p. 601)

While teacher resistance is often a starting place when shifting the focus of professional development or teacher education programs (Milner, 2007), white privilege is another leading contributor to educator hesitancy in revising pedagogy to become more equitable. The primary demographic of educators is white and female. Due to their dominant status in American society, white people can go through life without fostering the ability to look at the world from differing perspectives (Merryfield, 2000). McIntosh (1990) defines *white privilege* as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day" (p. 31). McIntosh (1990) further describes how school as a system set her up with those beliefs:

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. (p. 31)

As teachers operate from this place of white privilege, it becomes easier to resist the need for equity and social justice-based professional development. Nevertheless, having white skin in the United States opens doors whether or not those who benefit from this advantage have requested such favor (McIntosh, 1990). To move equity professional development forward, white educators must acknowledge both the structural inequities in the education systems and the benefits that whiteness provides them.

While acknowledgment of oppression and the benefits of whiteness will not change these systems that are highly pervasive in educational structures, it is a necessary step. Kumishiro

(2002) addresses when educators and researchers have what appear to be positive intentions while furthering oppressive structures and systems. Kumishiro focuses on the idea that teachers and researchers become repetitive and seek out those beliefs or evidence that further what they are comfortable with. The teachers in this research project were selected by their administrators to engage in the professional development but had the choice to opt out. This form of self-selecting is similar to what Kumishiro describes above. Harris et al. (2019) found similar conclusions, focusing on teacher education programs rather than practicing teachers or researchers. Harris et al. (2019) found that many programs tout multicultural education while perpetuating and protecting whiteness. For example:

Despite the typically equity-oriented intentions of educators and others, the realities of substandard education are perpetuated, and teacher preparation for multicultural, inclusive education is subverted even as good people with multicultural intentions act and interact and make decisions that promote the existing racial hierarchy and the historical, systemic privileging of White interests. (p. 211)

In order to build an educational system that acknowledges, supports, and affirms students of color, practicing educators need intentional, supportive, and effective professional development to combat the system set up to perpetuate whiteness. In the context of this research project, the teacher's experiences through professional development will likely be impacted by their beliefs and orientation toward equity in their learning and their classrooms.

While more radical transformations other than professional development are genuinely needed to make an impact against the systemic racism pervasive in schools, these transformations take time, people, dedication, and collective focus at a much larger scale. The focus on professional development rather than radical transformations is primarily based on two

factors. The first factor is the ability to make change, even if that change is small, within the current parameters of schools in the US. The second factor is the need to act immediately in ways that support diverse student populations that are learning in schools right now. Stenbridge (2020) describes what this shift in teaching for equity could look like in the context of instruction in K-12 classrooms.

In his book, Stenbridge (2000) lends much of his foundational understanding of culturally responsive education (CRE) to the women he describes as the four CRE matriarchs: Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Geneva Gay, and Sonia Nieto. While Stenbridge draws the education praxis of these women together, their work has defining features that have various points of tension.

Gloria Ladson-Billings is an education researcher studying the practices of successful teachers who work with diverse student populations. Ladson-Billings challenges the idea that teaching is culturally neutral in how it benefits or disadvantages students (Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b). Ladson-Billings (1995) developed culturally relevant pedagogy, rooted in critical race theory and Black feminist thought, with three major tenets: "(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). Ladson-Billings also provides criteria for teacher behaviors to foster the tenets above through reflexivity, social relations, ethics of care, and knowledge construction.

Ladson-Billings teaches us about the role of the culturally relevant educator and how to support and prepare students for participation in a culturally diverse society. Lisa Delpit highlights that traditional education systems reproduce and reinforce the structures that yield

inequitable outcomes. Delpit suggests the need to empower students to push back against societal inequities. In her 1995 work, Delpit calls on teachers to understand the scope and influence of their social power. She studies how cultural conflicts and large societal power imbalances are replicated within classrooms. In turn, this impacts the access students have to educational opportunities. Delpit argues that classroom power imbalances and cultural conflicts reflect broader cultural inequities contributing to education inequalities. Geneva Gay brings in an asset-based view of students, arguing that this strength-centered view is necessary to ensure greater success for students from various cultural groups. Like Ladson-Billings, Gay strongly emphasizes giving students opportunities to think critically about inequities they have personally experienced or witnessed around them.

As defined by Geneva Gay, Culturally Responsive Teaching uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to deliver more effective instruction (Gay, 1995, 2002). According to Gay, Culturally Responsive Teaching encompasses five essential elements:

1. Establishing a knowledge base about cultural diversity
2. Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum
3. Building learning communities and demonstrating caring
4. Communicating with ethnically diverse students
5. Responding to ethnic diversity in instruction

Gay (2000) argues that students' knowledge and skills are more meaningful when situated within their own frames of reference. Her work encourages educators to critically examine their social and cultural identities to better understand how they impact the success of racial and ethnically diverse students.

Building on the work of Ladson-Billings, Delpit, and Gay on understanding the environment of education, including disparities built into the system, identifying student assets, and creating an instructional environment that demonstrates care, Sonia Nieto's work seeks to honor and value the students' experiences, histories, and cultures through pedagogy. In Nieto's work, she illustrates the importance of a culturally responsive pedagogy that is flexible, rigorous, and inclusive. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy provides students with learning experiences that challenge them and allow them to draw on their own cultural competencies (Nieto, 1999, 2002).

Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages us to regularly consider our values, biases, strengths, and limitations and how they shape our pedagogy when teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Stenbridge identified that Ladson-Billings, Delpit, Gay, and Nieto's research and scholarly works unfold overarching and interconnected themes, contextualizing his understanding of CRE and providing the grounding necessary for action beyond a catalog of specific practices (Stenbridge, 2020). According to Stenbridge, CRE can serve as an actionable philosophy for teaching and a means for planning and implementing responsive learning experiences for all students based on these ideas. In connection with this research project, the work of Ladson-Billings, Delpit, Gay, and Nieto outlines the path as well as the understanding needed to support educators in their practice. The concepts of CRE provide the teacher-learner with a foundation on which to base their practice rather than a checklist of actions or steps. This is important, as it provides the why behind the change in practice, building the educators' skills while creating a deeper understanding.

Stenbridge organizes what he refers to as *brilliant teaching* using six themes of culturally responsive education: engagement, relationships, cultural identity, vulnerability, assets, and rigor. These themes are identified as having the most significant potential for closing

equity gaps because teachers apply these ideas and tailor educational experiences to support their students individually. Equity gaps are the discrepancies in educational outcomes for students across socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity/race, abilities, and other demographic attributes. Unfortunately, these equity gaps are ingrained in US schools.

The equity framework described by Stenbridge (2020) is the foundation of residency professional development experiences. In these residencies, Dr. Stenbridge guides teachers through an intensive learning process. One component of this learning cycle is a process through which teachers plan, teach, and reflect on a lesson together. The process teachers are guided through is similar to the Japanese professional development tool of Jugyou kenkyuu, most closely aligned to lesson study in the United States (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). Hixon (2021) also looks at lesson study as a professional development tool, specifically in multicultural instruction in the United States. Hixon (2021) focuses on higher-order thinking skills, multicultural content in core academic subjects, and lesson study as a professional development tool. Hixon (2021) found that pairing those three areas together positively impacts multicultural education in US classrooms. Hixon (2021) and Stenbridge (2020) address how educators could integrate higher-order thinking skills and multicultural educational models into daily instruction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Concentrating on equity professional development with teachers as the center of my research, the application of andragogy and adult learning theory is used to frame this work. Andragogy is a European concept, reflecting the art and science of helping adults learn, moving forward from the concept of pedagogy, which is the art and science of helping children learn

(Knowles, 1980). Malcolm Knowles identified a set of four assumptions about the adult learner (1980). These assumptions are:

1. As a person matures, his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experiences, which is a rich resource for learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role.
4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature - from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning. (Knowles, 1980, pp. 44-45)

The small-group, equity-based professional development model described above intends to transform pedagogy through the education of practicing educators, otherwise known as adult learners. Using the andragogy framework as the guide, below are the four assumptions of andragogy within the context of the small group, equity professional development residency model.

**Self-Directed Learning:** Adults become increasingly independent and self-reliant as they age, demonstrating the ability to diagnose, plan, and evaluate their learning needs (Merriam, 1996). Teachers who engage in small group residencies are invited to participate by an administrator, but acceptance and involvement are entirely at the discretion of the teacher-learner. Within the residency PD, teacher-learners also have the freedom to plan many aspects of the learning experience based on their own needs, as well as the needs of their students. Self-directed learning also includes the desire for a climate where "adults feel accepted, respected, and supported" and

includes "a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers" (Knowles, 1980, p. 47). The small group, face-to-face model of the residency PD sessions helped to create such an environment.

**Wealth of Experiences:** Adults have accumulated a reservoir of experience that they can then use as a source and connection to their learning (Merriam, 1996). This can also look like the emphasis on experiential techniques, such as internships or field experience, as part of the learning process (Knowles, 1980). Within the residency PD sessions, teacher-learners can merge their knowledge of content standards and teaching practices with their in-depth wisdom about who their students are and the assets they bring to the learning environment. The lesson study element of this professional development also allows teachers to put their new learning into practice immediately and receive feedback from their peers and instructors.

**Learning within Social Role or Readiness to Learn:** This assumption looks at either the life stage of the learning, the context within which the learning occurs, or both (Merriam, 1996). An adult's readiness to learn could be based on a life stage, for example, needing to learn about a particular health concern that comes with age or within a social role, as in a parent or caregiver. Readiness to learn can also be expressed through learning based on how adult learners are grouped during the learning process (Knowles, 1980). In the residency learning environment, the teacher-learners are paired with colleagues who work in the same school and, often, at the same grade level, allowing them to learn from one another, practice their new learning, and reflect in a social context.

**Problem-Centered Application:** Adult learning is characterized by being problem-centered rather than subject-centered. For example, focusing on the problem of educating teachers in a meaningful way to support the ever-changing educational needs of the student population. Adult

learning is also characterized by the need for immediate, rather than postponed, application of knowledge (Merriam, 1996). The problem facing teacher-learners is the need to improve teaching practices to provide equitable access to learning that responds to student needs. The lesson study model allows teachers to immediately apply this new learning in the classroom and adjust their learning with instructor support.

Professional development is a form of adult education intending to support adult learners' professional growth in the context of their work environment. This theoretical framework guides this research as a lens to not only view the learning process of practicing educators but also as a way to analyze what makes specific professional development experiences more successful, as measured by adult learners.

While aspects of adult learning theories are being used as a framework for this study, andragogy is not without critique. Sandlin (2005) conducted a qualitative content analysis focusing on articles critiquing andragogy and identified five main criticisms of the theory. The first criticism is that andragogy assumes erroneously that education is value neutral and apolitical. The second is that andragogy encourages a broad adult learner as synonymous with White middle-class values. The third is that andragogy overlooks other ways of understanding and silences other voices. The fourth is that andragogy ignores the relationship between self and society and the fifth is that andragogy repeats inequalities, as it perpetuates the status quo (Sandlin, 2005). These critiques are centered around Afrocentric, feminist, and critical perspectives and Sandlin's analysis (2005) demonstrates the ways that andragogy does not consider how structural systems of privilege and oppression, based on race, gender, and class, influence learning. Andragogy also fails to consider how cultural, sociopolitical, and institutional constraints work to perpetuate inequalities. Therefore, while recognizing andragogy's value as a

potential analytical tool for understanding adult education processes, it is important to consider these criticisms when applying this framework within the domain of adult learning. While andragogy is not without issues, this theory was chosen as it offers a lens to not only view the learning process of practicing educators but also as a way to analyze what makes specific professional development experiences more successful for adult learners.

### **3. Method**

This study examines teacher experiences in small group residency learning sessions focused on equity professional development. This process consisted of detailed observations of the residency professional development sessions that the teachers participated in, followed by in-person and virtual interviews of the teachers who participated in a residency professional development experience over the last three school years. I am a participant researcher who participated in the professional development sessions. While I was in the room throughout the process, administrators were asked to take a secondary role during these residencies, allowing more space for teacher engagement and conversation. As a participant researcher, I observed the professional development sessions to describe the process in detail.

Coming into this study, the focus was around equity-centered professional development. While this concept undeniably remained a central theme in the Stembridge residencies, an unexpected shift took place throughout the course of investigation, leading participating educators to direct a significant portion of their attention towards the professional development model itself and its associated processes. Consequently, while equity remained an integral component in the learning journey, it did not emerge as prominently in the findings when compared to other components of the learning process.

## **Procedure**

The teachers selected were elementary educators who work in the Pierce County School District. Teachers participating in these PD sessions were selected by their administrators, so the pool of teachers to recruit from was pre-selected. Administrators generally handpick teachers based on their willingness to engage in additional professional development or a perceived need for additional PD. Participants engaging in these residencies were recruited through direct conversations and emails. Changing identifying descriptors, such as participant names and specific details, ensured confidentiality.

Residencies were scheduled in coordination with Dr. Stembridge and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP). Teachers were guided through an intensive learning process in these three-day residency cycles. This process can look different from school to school, as Dr. Stembridge aligns the experiences to each school and teacher's needs, but most follow a similar structure. The first day consisted of an overview of the learning that would take place, directly tied to Culturally Responsive Education in the Classroom. Day two was guided support of teachers as they engaged in planning, teaching, and reflecting on a lesson together using the learning from day one. On day three, teachers either repeat that cycle or plan a future unit using their new learning with the support of Dr. Stembridge.

Ten educator participants were interviewed, all having had a residency experience in the last three years. Interviews were recorded with participant permission and transcribed for analysis. The interviews aimed to understand some basic background information about the educators, followed by questions about the residency learning experience, their experiences with professional development, both through the residencies and before, and their growth as a learner through the andragogy theoretical lens.

Interviews were conducted in person and virtually, depending on participant availability and preference. Interviews were recorded electronically with participant permission and note-taking throughout the process. Semi-structured questions were chosen to allow the participants to share their experiences and take the questions in the directions they saw fit. This proved challenging for many, as participants frequently wanted to know whether they answered the questions correctly and had to be reassured that the questions were intended to solicit different types of responses. Other questions were more specific, guided by the theoretical framework and the focus on adults as learners. Interviews were recorded, and transcripts were created from the audio recordings. These transcripts were also reviewed for clarity. Transcripts were also organized by overarching themes to compare the participants' answers to specific questions.

Table 1 – Participant Demographics

<b>Pseudonym Surname</b>	<b>K-12 Years of Experience</b>	<b>Years at Current School</b>	<b>Current Role</b>
Taylor	15	5	Intermediate Teacher
Malone	29	8	Intermediate Teacher
Higgins	5	1	Intermediate Teacher
Wisner	14	9	Intermediate Teacher

Vallely	15	7	Intermediate Teacher
Breslin	8	2	Consultant Teacher
Baldwin	11	1	Consultant Teacher
Archer	4	2	Primary Teacher
Gauthier	5	5	Intermediate Teacher
McPherson	18	4	Primary Teacher

**Participating Educators**

The educators who participated in this study were Pierce County School District teachers who had previously completed a professional development residency with Dr. Stembridge. The educators (as clarified in Table 1) included nine participants who identified as female and one who identified as male. All but one of the teachers who participated identified as white. Years of combined experience as teachers ranged from 5 to 29, although two teachers clarified that some of those years were as substitutes before being hired into their current positions. All participants have been classroom teachers, and eight are currently still in a classroom teaching position. Two participants are consultant teachers, a role that supports and monitors the implementation of instructional curriculum and intervention programs. Teachers in this role primarily work as a coach to support teaching and learning at the building level. Six participants were intermediate teachers, two were primary teachers, and two were consultant teachers. These teachers work

within the same school district but at two different elementary schools. All names, including the name of the school district, identifying details, and other revealing information have been omitted or altered through pseudonyms and other confidentiality measures in order to create a safe environment for participant experience and voice. All participants are referred to by a pseudonym surname, and the pronouns of they/them are intermixed with she/her so as not to reveal the identity of the one male participant.

### ***Taylor***

Born in Lakewood, Taylor is a product of the Pierce County School District. They have taught at three elementary schools in the district over the last 15 years and have taught most elementary school grade levels. Taylor got into education because an elementary school teacher made learning an experience, incorporating learning, positivity, and project-based exploration into the classroom. Taylor takes that experience from their childhood but also works to incorporate more academic rigor into those learning opportunities.

### ***Malone***

Malone got into education because she knew she wanted to find a career that impacted the future. She enjoys the liveliness of her job as a teacher and acknowledges the importance that teachers have on children, especially over her 29 years as an educator. Malone primarily teaches intermediate grade levels. One of her favorite memories is when previous students come back to share where they are now as adults in the world. Malone grew up in a neighboring city with very similar demographics to Lakewood and has been a teacher in four different schools within the Pierce County School District.

### ***Higgins***

Born in the Midwest, Higgins moved to the Pacific Northwest as a military spouse when their partner was stationed at Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM). Higgins is in their 5th year as a certificated educator but their first year as a contracted classroom teacher. As a substitute, Higgins primarily worked on day-to-day sub assignments, with a few longer-term jobs in their last year as a substitute. They prefer teaching intermediate grade levels. Higgins originally went to school to become a nurse, but through a job that allowed them to work with early elementary-age children, Higgins realized that education was where they wanted to be.

### ***Wisner***

Wisner comes from a family of educators, and she started her teaching career as a substitute teacher in her hometown. Her favorite learning experiences and memories revolve around music, singing, and theater. After five years as a substitute, Wisner decided to move to Lakewood and apply for contracted teaching positions, where she has worked for the last nine years as an intermediate classroom teacher. Wisner has appreciated how colleagues, her parents, mentors, and teaching partners have helped her grow over the years.

### ***Vallely***

Born in the Southeast part of the United States, Vallely moved to the Pacific Northwest (PNW) as a military spouse when their partner was stationed at JBLM. Vallely got their bachelor's degree in another field but then enrolled in a master's program for teaching. Although teaching was Vallely's goal, being a military spouse required their family to move, and that degree was placed on hold. It was Vallely's role as a parent to a child on the autism spectrum that led them back into the world of education. Vallely found themselves in an advocate role for their child, which led them back to finishing their degree. Vallely has taught intermediate elementary grade levels as well as reading intervention.

### ***Breslin***

Breslin has lived in many cities within the Pacific Northwest and comes from a family of educators. Before stepping into the consultant teacher position, Breslin was an intermediate classroom teacher for six years. Breslin had always wanted to be a teacher and remembers times when she struggled with speech as a child and wanted to support students who struggled in various ways. Breslin enjoys her job as a consultant teacher because she is constantly learning from her colleagues and can support others in their learning.

### ***Baldwin***

Hands-on learning experiences, especially in science, were memorable and impactful for Baldwin as a student. As an educator, Baldwin has taught many grades within elementary and middle schools over the last eleven years, as well as some work at the community college level. They spent two years in another school district, and the last nine have been in Pierce County. Baldwin prefers the intermediate grade levels as a classroom teacher but now supports all elementary age groups as a consultant teacher.

### ***Archer***

Archer has lived in a few Pacific Northwest cities and has spent the last four years teaching at two different schools in PCSD. Archer teaches in a primary classroom and has taught the same grade level for the last four years. As a child, Archer struggled with dyslexia, but there were very few supports for students with dyslexia at that time. She now sees herself as an advocate for students who need additional support, whether through a formal Individualized Education Program (IEP) or informal methods within the classroom. Archer remembers a specific teacher who would pre-teach passages to Archer so she felt confident participating in

class. Archer strives to build a community within her classroom where all students feel a connection and belonging.

### ***Gauthier***

Born in the PNW, Gauthier had volunteered in education as a teen and had really enjoyed that experience, but as an adult, had chosen a career in finance. After 17 years, Gauthier decided it was time to pursue a career in teaching. Gauthier has taught both primary and intermediate elementary grades but prefers working with intermediate students. Gauthier has fond memories of a teacher who pushed them to work harder and achieve at higher levels. They also appreciate opportunities to step into leadership roles in their career.

### ***McPherson***

McPherson grew up in the PNW and has been a classroom teacher at three schools in the Pierce County School District and in other roles such as consultant teacher, interventionist, specialist, and virtual teacher. McPherson prefers primary positions where she can put her literacy skills to good use. A memorable learning experience from her childhood revolved around a student-led school marketplace where students learned all the aspects of a functioning economy. McPherson loves the springtime each school year when she can start to see the connections and learning that students make as a result of the year's instruction.

### **Data Analysis**

The first step in the data analysis process was reviewing the interview transcripts. This process included highlighting common themes, trends, and responses, noting overlaps between teacher experiences, and recording questions that arose while reviewing their responses. The next step was compiling teacher responses to the interview questions into shared documents, gathering answers to the questions around common themes. The data was then coded using

theoretical thematic analysis steps using qualitative coding software. This process included revisiting the transcripts, identifying patterns, assigning codes to those patterns, and grouping codes by shared themes.

During initial coding, 48 codes were identified across the ten interview transcripts. Codes were then clustered together into groups based on common themes. The initial grouping identified 14 groups within the response data, which were then synthesized into six main themes. These themes are barriers, conditions for learning, teacher experiences, peer-to-peer learning, vulnerability and trust, and the lesson study residency.

### **Findings**

Through the interview process, participants shared many aspects of their experiences as students, educators, and learners, as well as the life experiences that led them into the field of education. These experiences were unique to the individuals while also having multiple similarities to one another in many ways. The themes that arose fell into six categories, mainly describing the educators' experiences and beliefs related to their professional learning or teaching practices.

### **Barriers**

Launching into the topic of professional development (PD), all but one of the teachers interviewed had overwhelming negative experiences with PD throughout their careers. The teacher who did not express such negative emotions was Higgins, who was in their first year as a contracted teacher. One common concern with PD is that it is delivered in the shortest method possible, often resulting in an overwhelming amount of information being disseminated to a broad audience, leaving little time for differentiation or choice. Participants noted that this lack of personalization can leave PD participants feeling disengaged and uninspired, as they are

merely passive recipients rather than active learners. Taylor made the connection between the engagement we want to see from students juxtaposed with the compliance we often see from teachers during professional development.

The PD experience is verbal diarrhea. They are delivering information in the shortest way possible, and you know, we talk all the time about student engagement. Right? Are they compliant? Are they compliant, you know, or are they engaged? And it was such a weird moment for me to realize. Oh, crap! There are so many of them that are just compliant.

They are not actually engaged. They are good at faking it, you know. I think, for the most part, I feel like the adults in PD are compliant. We are really good at playing the part. Just like students, educators have become skilled at looking engaged in order to get through a part of their work life that they are not invested in.

A common theme based on the responses from respondents were that negative experiences with professional development arose due to the failure to account for individual differences in learning needs and preferences. Taylor observed that the differentiation teachers are expected to implement in their classrooms is not extended to traditional PD experiences that teachers are required to participate in.

They are trying to deliver to such a wide audience and are literally disseminating information in a way they tell us not to, right as teachers. They are like give students voice and choice. You know, it is not just about a canned lesson, right? It's the differentiation. And you know we gotta hit kids where they are and meet their needs. And there is none of that for teachers. At this point, I am like I'm done hearing the same thing and want to do more. I want to get better. I'm passionate about my craft. I would say, probably 90% of what I sit through, I am like, they could have given me a paper, you know, or an email.

Vallely, Breslin, Baldwin, and McPherson shared similar struggles with the professional development they have traditionally experienced. McPherson described the need for differentiation between professional development school to school within the same district. "Well, what's happening down the street or across the district is not applicable. We have very different students. So, what you are saying about one school's kids is not going to apply to our kids. So, I think it's not helpful when it's just like this blanket PD."

Additionally, sessions focusing solely on content knowledge fail to address essential skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, that are crucial components of effective teaching practices. Malone, a teacher who prides herself on kindness and professionalism, described the typical district-led professional development sessions as an opportunity to tune out. Even Breslin and Baldwin, the two consultant teachers often tasked with delivering the district professional development, did not have positive experiences with the process. They described being given a set of slides, a small window of time for delivery, and little to no room for adjustment or engagement. Hearing these experiences with professional development in the past, it is unsurprising that a third of the teachers invited to participate in the residency professional development experience declined the opportunity.

### **Conditions for Learning**

While teachers described many barriers to learning in traditional professional development settings, they were able to share even more examples of the conditions that support their learning. These conditions were characterized by administrative trust and support, accountability, time, reflection, and positive student achievement data.

### *Administrative Trust and Support*

Administrative trust and support were paramount in establishing a positive learning environment that fosters creativity, risk-taking, and growth for many of the teachers interviewed. Many veteran teachers who have worked for ten or more years explained the need for administrative trust and support as a crucial element in order to feel safe in their learning, having experienced many administrators in their teaching career. Malone, the most veteran teacher interviewed at 29 years, has had 14 different principals during her career. She spoke frequently about her comfortability as a learner, based on the varying support administrators have or have not provided over the years. For Malone, principals who express support in a kind and caring manner further bolsters her confidence and morale. She described when she moved schools because her administration did not demonstrate the kindness and support she needed to thrive.

An administrator's belief in teachers' professionalism empowers them to take calculated risks, experiment with new teaching strategies, and explore their strengths. Taylor described what this environment looks like for them:

I find that I flourish and feel independent when working underneath someone who allows me to take risks, who is open to letting me try things. You know what I mean, to be creative, to take the curriculum and teach to standards and use it, but then also to kind of improve upon it with project-based learning or other pieces. I guess the way, the best way to put it, someone is not going to stifle my creativity. You know, to where I can do what I think would be best and come up with learning experiences that are exciting, memorable, and engaging. But aren't, just from the curriculum. Right? Someone who is not necessarily micromanaging me or saying, well, I need you to teach just from the book, you know.

This type of administrative support for teacher creativity, risk-taking, and learning is in direct contrast to the traditional professional development described in the barriers section, which does not allow for differentiation or variation. Malone described this part of learning as the freedom to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes:

You have to make mistakes to get better and not feel bad about it. You have to take risks.

You have to have leadership that will let you try those things and not, yeah, not hound you over and over for things, and let you find, like, an authentic way to get there.

Gauthier had similar sentiments, particularly as they learned their own strengths in the classroom in the first few years as a teacher. Gauthier described a moment when the second principal in their career encouraged them to take risks and find what worked best for them. This principal told Gauthier, "I see what you are doing. I see what you're trying to do. You gotta do what you've got to do. You have to stop trying to fit into the mold. You need to just be you." Gauthier saw this trust from their principal as a turning point in their teaching career, allowing them to take chances they had previously been reluctant to try.

By granting teachers autonomy in decision-making and not micromanaging every aspect of classroom instruction or teaching and learning, principals can cultivate an environment where innovation flourishes. In turn, this allows educators to feel valued as professionals who have the potential to make meaningful contributions to student learning outcomes. McPherson and Valley described being treated like a professional by administration as a critical feature of their learning. McPherson stated that she thrives when "I am not being babysat. I know what my students need, and I know how to put it into practice. So, I think that is the biggest thing is like that trust." Ultimately, when administrators provide teachers with the necessary trust, guidance, support, and autonomy they need, teachers can feel successful.

## *Accountability*

A surprising, reoccurring theme as teachers reflected on their experiences with professional development was the desire for accountability. Given that adults have multiple responsibilities competing for their time, accountability measures routinely came up as a condition that made the learning process more effective.

In the Stenbridge PD Residency Experiences, this accountability presented itself in the small group nature of the learning environment. The learning experiences had between six and nine participants, creating an intimate, personal experience. This small group setting also heightened the accountability of the presenter as well as the other participants in the room. Taylor compared the need for structure and routine in the classroom to the need for accountability as an adult learner.

In a whole group setting, you can hide. You can look engaged and look like you're being compliant. But you are not. You can fly under the radar. No one is going to call on me because of simple statistics. There are too many people. But in that small group setting, I think that is what so much of the pressure was: there is nowhere to go. I have to share. You are going to fully engage in every part of this. I remember thinking like, we need to do this with the whole staff. And then I thought it would not be as impactful because of the intimate nature of it. You have to fully engage. It kind of forced you to participate. That sounds so bad. I feel like that's not a good way to put it. I think we think it is so different with adults and children, and just how I felt like moving from teaching first to fourth grade. I thought, oh, they are so grown up, and I kind of abandoned structure in a lot of the ways. I did things and then realized. Oh, my gosh, no! Management wise, right? These are babies. The same rules apply. Human nature is human nature and being held

accountable, and I do not mean through like creating, like some arbitrary product. But being held accountable and to participate is huge. If you are going to provide us with an option for opting out, you know, we are going to take it. Even administrators are going to take it. If there is an option to opt out of something, you are going to do it because you are going to focus your time on things that you have to do and are required to do, and it is the same concept.

The call for accountability, as Taylor described above, was echoed by eight of the ten participants in one form or another. McPherson noted that the small group learning environment created a setting where she was forced to engage, leading to better attention to detail, retention, and targeted learning.

Wisner found that deadlines are a crucial piece of accountability, concluding that if a task in her professional life does not have a deadline, it will get displaced for another time-bound priority. Another component of accountability was learning with a teaching partner. McPherson and Archer taught together on the same team, and both described the accountability they felt to one another as they engaged in the small group residency process. McPherson described the learning as being tailored to them as individual teachers and parts of a team, allowing them to hold each other accountable.

Another prominent feature of the small group learning experience that led to accountability was the opportunities to implement new learning through the lesson study model. Where traditional PD does not ask teachers to demonstrate their new learning as part of the experience, the residencies created built-in time, space, and accountability to model this learning. Baldwin described what happens in traditional PD:

Even when you sit in PD with the idea that you are going to implement it later, most of the time, it is out of sight, out of mind, and it can be really good information when you are sitting there. Then, when you go to put it into practice, you don't remember, or the materials are not there, or it just takes too much time. When you haven't seen the positive effects yourself, it is just far less likely to happen.

As part of the PD process, the lesson study model and implementation allowed teachers to be immediately accountable for their learning and work through learning struggles with colleagues. In addition to the accountability with peers, Malone described a desire for accountability from administration.

It holds you accountable, but to continue that, though, I think it would be great if then the leadership would want to see that learning, for instance, when they are coming in for an observation.

While teachers described the desire for administrative trust as a condition for learning, it is also evident that accountability plays a fundamental role in promoting effective teaching practices over time. The teachers interviewed expressed a desire to learn and grow as professionals while acknowledging that their time and attention demands are intense. Built-in accountability measures were a tool that teachers identified to support their continued growth.

### ***Time***

It is often challenging for teachers to complete all their daily tasks, given their numerous responsibilities, let alone have opportunities to learn and grow in their practice. In the Pierce County School District, teachers are guaranteed 280 minutes of planning time a week. This is the time during a teacher's workday when they are not responsible for student supervision and could focus on collaboration, planning, learning, or preparing materials. This equates to less than an

hour a day to get everything ready for students, as the remainder of the day is spent in front of children.

A reoccurring benefit of the residency experience mentioned by teachers was the provision of ample time for learning, collaboration, planning, implementation, and reflection. The three full days dedicated to this PD allowed teachers to focus solely on learning instead of the traditional PD experience of one-hour sessions that barely scratch the surface. McPherson described what the time meant to her as an educator:

I think it was super helpful to just have time. That is the biggest constraint on us as teachers is having that time and being able to know that my class was taken care of with a sub, and it was during my workday. It is not after school like it was just like this is my job for the day or for these three days is to learn, plan, and implement. Like literally, my brain hurt every day. I went home with a throbbing headache, but I was so excited because it was like, this is going to transform teaching and learning in my classroom. So, it is really powerful to have that time. I don't think it would have been as powerful had it not been during the workday.

Malone echoed that sentiment, pointing out that typical teacher professional development occurs at two very poor times of the day. These times are either before school, when teachers need to prepare for the day, or after school when teachers are exhausted from the previous six hours of teaching.

Three consecutive days of learning has additional benefits as well. Due to the many constraints on teachers' time, collaboration is not always possible during the workday. Wisner and Higgins pointed out the benefits of having the time to bounce ideas off of a teacher partner, process at a slower pace, reflect with a peer, or ask questions, all aspects of professional growth

typically hindered by time. During McPherson's residency experience, she taught her students a lesson and then reflected on that experience with her teammates. She recalled:

What I loved about that is that going through the process, being the teacher who was teaching it, and having to implement it right away was really powerful. I think what we learned the most was what kids responded with, the things that we were surprised they were saying, and where they took the learning. If I had just sat and planned the lesson plan, I would never have thought of some of the things that kids had said. So, it was really powerful. And then to all have that same experience with real-life children, because a lot of times in our professional development we are thinking of like the cookie cutter student.

Gauthier had similar feelings about the learning that time allowed them to gain. The three days of focused time allowed teachers to walk away feeling like they had gained new skills. The extended timeline of the residency experience allowed for ample opportunities for educators to collaborate with colleagues and plan out strategies together. It also gave them enough time to implement those plans and reflect upon the process.

### ***Reflection***

Teacher reflection is a critical component teachers reference when considering on their professional growth and development. Many of the teachers interviewed identified reflection as being one of the most effective tools in their repertoire to change their practice and improve their instruction. Taylor identified formal reflection processes, such as online records organized by date and lesson. At the same time, others mentioned informal processes or conversations they have with colleagues in passing to help process a lesson or specific situation. Valley recounted a process that includes student feedback and questioning as part of the reflection process.

By reflecting on their practice, teachers can identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching methods and make necessary adjustments to improve student learning outcomes. Even lessons that previously went well can benefit from the reflective process as it allows teachers to evaluate what worked and why, which they can apply to future lessons. Archer described a situation where she and McPherson reflected on a previous lesson they had planned the year before, using the learning from the residency experience.

I think that reflection keeps us honest with ourselves and keeps us in the same like mindset that every year is going to be different with the kids that you have. What can you do to make sure the way you are approaching each lesson is for that group of kids, and how is it going to be most successful for the group you have now? Like we did some things this year that we planned last year after the Stembridge residency, and it was like a total flip-flop from what it was last year. It is like because we need to make sure we are not just doing it, because, oh, this worked so great last year, and this was so wonderful, but actually planning it again for the kids we have now. We found ourselves looking back at the plans that we created last year and just using them because we are like, oh, we already did this. We planned it the Stembridge way, but it did not work out the same way because there are totally different feelings that we need from this group of kids than we did from last year's group of kids. So, that kind of reflection has just been big, I think, especially this year, like realizing. Like, yeah, I grew a lot last year as a teacher and learning all of this, but it does not mean it's just like great. Now you have the tool like you have to constantly reflect. Otherwise, it won't have the same effect on kids.

Malone had a similar experience moving from one school to another. The strategies that worked well for one demographic of students sometimes worked differently for another group. Her

ability to reflect on those practices continuously allowed her to adapt to every changing demand. Malone stated that reflection is the tool that has permitted her to learn and grow over four different schools, 14 different administrators, and 29 years in the classroom.

In their consultant teacher roles, Baldwin and Breslin use reflection in their practice, as well as coaching teachers through new learning. They also identified the added bonus of having a thought partner to reflect alongside. This is a benefit that teachers also experienced as part of the residency learning experience. Breslin described the process as:

As soon as we have done something together, we're like, okay, how did that go? How does this go? What is our product? What do we see? I think, when you are by yourself, you are trying to reflect, but I do think having a thought partner helps a lot for sure. When you have other thought partners at the table, it's like, where should I go from there?

While it is essential to reflect on all lessons, it is crucial for educators to reflect on lessons that did not go according to plan, as those experiences often teach more than successful ones. The willingness to learn from mistakes is essential for teacher growth as it helps them develop a mindset of continuous improvement. Archer described lessons having a more substantial impact when she learned from mistakes.

I think I learned the most skills from when I didn't do them that way. I learned from my experience. If you are going to handle a behavior in front of the whole class, it is usually not going to get handled. If you are going to just push through a lesson because you just want to push through it, and you just do not want to deal with it. Well, then, you are losing a day of learning the next day because you have to go back and re-teach it. So that is basically making those mistakes before and learning from them.

Reflection was identified more frequently as a tool for professional growth by the educators interviewed than formal professional development opportunities because it is an ongoing process that can be done independently or with colleagues. It does not require as many additional resources yet still yields significant benefits for students and teachers. By taking time regularly for self-reflection, teachers identified the growth they have made throughout their teaching careers.

### ***Student Achievement Data***

A repeated condition for learning that came out through the interviews was the connection between teacher willingness to change and student achievement data. In the wake of No Child Left Behind, teacher success has become increasingly tied to student achievement data. With the abundance and easy availability of technology that can track and analyze student performance, teachers are acutely aware of their ability to assess student progress as measured by standardized assessments. This data is often the only outward-facing information for district administrators, school boards, or community members to assess school, teacher, and student success. This reliance on standardized testing data has had some unintended consequences for educators. In many cases, teachers have felt constrained by their need to produce positive results in order to justify their methods and approaches.

Three of the educators interviewed, Malone, Gauthier, and Baldwin, identified that they feel a need for high test scores as a way to prove to administration that they are trustworthy and should be allowed to try new things. Malone described it as:

I think one of the ways principals do trust teachers is high scores, you know, because they have to look at the data. You know, I try to get the data to help support what I am doing,

so like proving that. Okay, I am trying these things and taking risks, but my data is showing, you know, positive growth.

Gauthier and Taylor also identified a personal need for high test scores in order to prove to themselves that their methods are working. Taylor stated that they often wait to try new things until after spring testing has been completed. Baldwin identified themselves as a data-driven educator and stated that depending on how their data was trending, they "felt like I had the autonomy to spend more time in this area, or less time in that area."

The reliance on standardized testing data creates a situation where innovation and willingness to learn or try new things are stifled. Teachers only feel free to attempt new learning if they have hard evidence that it will lead to student growth or proficiency. Malone did state that she takes some of the pressure off herself when she has an administrator who "doesn't hound test scores." The pressure that teachers feel in regard to standardized test scores has a noticeable impact on their perceived freedom to attempt new learning and grow in their practice.

### **Teacher Experiences**

As educators, teachers bring a wealth of life experiences to their classrooms that inform and shape their teaching practices. These life experiences also shape them as adult learners. These experiences enrich their instruction and inform how they connect with and inspire their students, manage classroom routines and expectations, and inform the multitude of educational choices they make as part of their job.

While being a parent is not necessary to be a skilled teacher, many educators described parenthood as a setting through which they learn skills that help them be effective in the classroom. Valley described their beliefs on parenthood and teaching, "Being a parent is huge. I know I have a lot of really good teacher friends who are not parents. But I do think that being a

parent makes you a better teacher, no offense to them. I think it makes you relate to children a lot better and understand where they are coming from." Of the ten educators interviewed, seven were parents, and two of those had experience parenting and advocating for a child on the autism spectrum. These personal life experiences impacted not only these educators' decisions to go into teaching but also their patience and understanding of children with similar needs.

Being a military spouse was another significant experience that impacted two of the educators interviewed. That role can provide unique insights into the challenges faced by military families and help teachers better support students from similar backgrounds. This was especially significant for teachers within the Pierce County School District, as the student population is comprised of 35% military-dependent students. Not only does the military similarity allow for more robust connections to military-dependent students, but it also provides frequent opportunities to demonstrate flexibility. This skill is also essential in education. Higgins described their ability to pivot quickly as a result of being a military spouse.

Being married to a soldier. Everything in my life, I had to be able to pivot at the drop of the hat because I never knew what was going to be happening. I never knew when my partner was leaving or when they were coming home. When I had the kids by myself like I never knew, I just developed that skill, and it has helped me a lot in work, too.

Vallely described similar experiences, equating their flexibility as a teacher as a derivative of skills they learned as a military spouse. While flexibility and the willingness to pivot in a moment were skills that Vallely and Higgins learned as military spouses, Wisner attributed these skills to her background in music and theater. Although their backgrounds varied, all three educators viewed their life experiences as central to learning and practicing the flexibility necessary for teaching.

Teachers who experienced struggles as students could bring positive and negative learning experiences into how they structured learning in their classrooms. Wisner described how she used her struggles with dyslexia to teach herself to slow down and how that skill is valuable as a teacher. Archer also experienced struggles as a student with dyslexia and how the lack of understanding from many educators widened the gaps in their learning for many years. Archer also had a positive experience that solidified her desire to be a teacher due to the thoughtfulness of her teacher in supporting her as a reader.

In third grade or fourth grade, I had a teacher where we were reading a book as a class, and the way that they did that was they had a ball, and one person would read a paragraph, and then they would just throw the ball to another kid, and you would read that paragraph out loud. It caused me like so much stress because I was like, I can't do that on the spot. So, my teacher would look ahead and assign me a paragraph, and basically, we would make sure I got the ball for that paragraph, and so I would practice it and practice it just so that I felt like I could have some success in the classroom, which is just something that has always stood out to me. I do not know if it is necessarily the most effective teaching strategy, but it made me feel good.

Having experienced life as a child with dyslexia, both Wisner and Archer bring an understanding of the difficulties some students face, allowing them to offer targeted interventions for struggling learners that other educators might not know to offer.

Through years of teaching, educators gain invaluable experiences that shape their pedagogical approach and enhance their ability to engage with students effectively. The educators interviewed had a range of experience in the field, extending from four to 29 years. While many agreed that there would not be a wrong time to have gone through the residency

professional development training, the ability to connect to previous teaching, PD, and life experiences was seen as an asset by most of the adult learners. Taylor stated, "I cannot imagine that residency process not being beneficial for anybody. However, I do think, as someone who has experience under their belt, teaching is so hard, and it's such an art, and there are so many moving pieces and multitasking that occurs." That multitasking is necessary was a rationale for a few years of experience before engaging in a PD residency. Taylor went on to describe the similarities between a beginning reader and a new teacher.

It's like reading. As young kids, they are not able to decode, and they are learning and they are sounding out words. They are working so hard and get to the end of the sentence. They have no idea what the sentence said. And they have to go back and reread and reread and reread, and they're like, okay. Now, I know what the passage meant, right? I think when you are a brand-new teacher, you have so many pieces that are up in the air and that you are working on. I don't know if you would get as much out of it simply because you are not in a space where you are receptive. No, receptive is not the right word. You don't yet have the capacity.

Along with Taylor, Wisner, Archer, Gauthier, and Vallely expressed similar responses concerning the expansion of learning that comes from experience.

Another significant source of knowledge mentioned by the teachers interviewed was learning from mistakes. Experienced teachers know that failures can be turned into opportunities for growth and improvement by analyzing what went wrong and applying corrective measures in future lessons. Malone, the teacher with the most experience in this interview set, attributed her most significant growth to trial and error. While a great deal of learning comes from making mistakes and learning from them, many of the educators noted that this is an acquired skill.

Breslin, who works as a coach and mentor, described how new teachers often power through a lesson that is not working because they think they have to. Breslin incorporates this feedback into her coaching, "I try to say that to other teachers like it is okay. If it did not work, it did not work like whether you are being observed or not. You do not have to keep pushing through."

Trial and error was also an integral component of participating teachers' practices, as it allowed them to experiment with different methods until they found what worked best for each student, group, or them as the educator. Moreover, being willing to make mistakes demonstrated their growth, continuous learning, and adaptation. Over time, these experiences build up a teacher toolbox - a collection of strategies, techniques, resources, and insights that become increasingly refined over years spent in the profession. Gauthier, who changed careers from finance to education, described the process of gaining experience and refining your skills over time. "The more you do it, the easier it is to continue to evolve and develop. So, like, the more you do it, like the more experience you have, you just almost don't even think about it. You just kind of do it. Even in my previous career, you get to that point where, like, you know something is going to happen before it happens." The accumulation of such skills enabled educators to establish positive classroom learning environments while becoming increasingly more confident in themselves as professionals. Teachers' life experiences serve as assets and a building block to future professional growth.

### **Peer to Peer Learning**

The benefits of learning in a social context are numerous, according to the insights shared by educators. When teachers engage in peer-to-peer learning, they become thought partners, offering constructive feedback and insights on various teaching methodologies, resources, and techniques to one another. The learning process became more collaborative and engaging when

colleague relationships were strong, as it fostered an environment of mutual trust and respect that enabled authentic dialogues about teaching practices. Learning from and with colleagues was also beneficial because it enabled the sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences. It was evident that teachers recognized the importance of social interaction in enhancing their professional development and fostering a supportive community where they learned from each other's successes and challenges.

Having a thought partner was identified as an essential aspect of not only the professional development experience but also growing as an educator on a regular basis. A thought partner allows individuals to engage in meaningful discourse, share ideas and perspectives, and explore different angles on complex issues. A thought partner provided the necessary support and guidance to navigate challenges effectively while offering constructive feedback that helped refine one's thinking. In their roles as coaches, Breslin and Baldwin often work in isolation because only a few people share similar experiences as they do. Breslin described the experience of going from isolation to having a thought partner in Baldwin.

We collaborate on a lot of things, and we bounce ideas off of each other, and especially with our mentees. Before going into a mentee meeting, we have the conversation like, "How am I going to get them there?" instead of like just being blunt, because that's not going to work on all teachers. So, I think it's just the ability to plan and process together. Baldwin described the power that comes from working side by side with someone rather than a top-down model. Working with a partner allowed Baldwin to reflect together on what individual teachers needed rather than following a directive that did not match the needs of the mentees or building staff.

McPherson and Malone highlighted the benefit of having a thought partner that could speak the same pedagogical language, as a result of going through the residency experience together. McPherson described that the conversations in professional development are now richer because the conversations can use vocabulary, examples, and activities that were shared through the Stenbridge Residency. Malone echoed McPherson's sentiments, but with the addition of wanting to create an open, inclusive learning environment for her colleagues.

If we are speaking this same language and another colleague is not, then we might be considered being cliquy so that can be something I don't want to see. Then they'll feel like, you know, like we put up walls, or then they don't try, or they give up. You never want to see that competition. So, it'd be nice if whoever is on our grade level team has that same background of that PD.

While teaching can be an isolated activity for large portions of the workday, the benefit of thought partner to process with was mentioned often by teachers.

Another common response was the importance of the relationship between colleagues, both on a day-to-day basis and when working together in a professional development context. Not surprisingly, teachers are more willing to collaborate with a peer when they have a strong relationship with that person. Baldwin recounted that she is able to have conversations that push teachers' practices when she has built a strong, collaborative, trusting relationship with them already. Wisner, Vallely, Malone, Gauthier, and Higgins all reported having certain colleagues that they know to be helpful for different components of the job. Vallely stated, "There is a saying to find your marigolds. Find those people that support you and bring you up." Gauthier and Malone frequently named the colleagues that they would turn to, depending on where they needed support, knowing where to turn and where to find certain strengths.

An additional benefit of having strong relationships with peers was the ability to collaborate and reflect on the fly. As mentioned previously, finding the time to collaborate and reflect can be challenging for most teachers. Both McPherson and Wisner identified a colleague that they are able to collaborate with in short bursts, finding small moments throughout the week to share, reflect, or partner. For McPherson, that person is Archer.

That was what was great about our teaching partnership. We could talk about a strategy, and both try it, and then, like, reflect together. Like how did it go, especially with the Stembridge stuff, or even the new reading stuff. It was like, okay. How did it go? How do the kids respond? What do we want to do more of? But finding people who are ready to try new things, that is a challenge. You need that person that you can bounce ideas off of.

Similarly, for Wisner, that person is Malone.

We don't know everything, and that is why we need that support. I'll go over, you know, because she is stronger in reading, and I'm stronger in math. So, she'll come over to my room and ask me about something, and we will like physically solve problems in front of each other. Or I'll be like, "Hey, you know, on this reading thing, how did you teach that?" It is not treated like you don't know something in your craft, it is that we're all learning.

Breslin and Balwin shared similar benefits to their strong colleague relationships in their coaching, noting that having a solid mentee-to-coach partnership sets up the foundation for professional growth.

While strong colleague relationships set up the foundation for success, struggling partnerships have the opposite effect. Baldwin and Gauthier both described a peer relationship

with a shared colleague who is reluctant to partner, try new things, or be vulnerable in their learning. Baldwin described how that struggling partnership, where you cannot be honest with one another, stifles growth.

If you have a strong team, then that is a really good spot to be like, "No, I don't agree with that idea, and this is why." But if you're not in that spot, you are left just letting people continue to think they're own things and not working together to get things fixed. Gauthier echoed that experience, stating that there are colleagues that they partner extremely well with, and can learn on the fly with, because they have that type of relationship but when it comes to other colleagues, the partnership is stuck.

But when you have certain people that can't, like, get off of certain topics, or you're trying to discuss with them like, okay, we need to take a negative and turn it into a positive, and that's difficult to turn them around and bring them back in.

It is evident that the relationships between colleagues have significant impacts on teacher learning, but that impact can be positive or negative, depending on the strength of the peer partnership and relationship.

Learning from and with colleagues was another pivotal aspect of professional growth in an academic setting, as named by the educators interviewed. The benefits of learning from the experts in your school are numerous. Valley and Gauthier stated that they trusted professional learning from their respected peers because they had seen them in action, which allowed for validation that could not be replicated by outside presenters. Valley recounted two experiences where colleagues that they did not work closely with, led professional development in a subject area that they were very skilled in. Having trust and respect for those educators prior to the PD allowed Valley to place more stock in the information, knowing it came from trusted educators.

This level of trust also creates an environment where support is readily available when needed, as colleagues are there to offer their expertise and guidance. As a consultant teacher, Baldwin noted that one way they develop relationships with teachers is just being available when they need them. This could look like helping with a task that would not typically be in the consultant teacher job description, but if unpacking boxes helps to build relationships, it will lead to professional learning in the future.

Furthermore, learning in a social setting allows for a more immersive experience, enabling participants to gain deeper insights into the subject matter at hand. Wisner, Baldwin, Taylor, Archer, and McPherson all shared the benefits of going through the residency experience with their teammates. Archer described this experience of learning with colleagues

It made it so that we were all really on the same page. And we all went through that together, so therefore we all wanted to apply it, and there wasn't really an excuse not to, I guess. That was really important, I think, for my team. When you're in a small group like that, you actually can ask the questions you want to ask and have the conversation follow the path that it follows that works for your team rather than like, "What does Dr. Stembridge want it to look like?" When you are with such a small group, there's more flexibility for us to have kind of control over where it goes. And for him to like pivot with us on that.

Malone and Archer both spoke on the benefit of speaking the same language with their teammates due to the shared learning experience. Malone noted that she wished her entire team had engaged in the PD together. Her team of three included Wisner and one other colleague who opted out of the professional development opportunity. Malone noted that the absence of one colleague makes it challenging to continue learning after the PD because she does not want to

leave the other colleague out. However, speaking about the experience unintentionally leaves that person out because they did not share in the learning or cannot draw on the same information. Ultimately, actively engaging with peers and drawing upon each other's knowledge base facilitates personal and collective growth over time.

### **Vulnerability and Trust**

In many ways, teaching is an isolating experience, as educators spend most of their day with students, with limited opportunities to share practices with other adults. Many of the educators interviewed noted that this seclusion can create a sense of insularity between educators, even those who have worked together for years. Not unexpectedly, the educators interviewed found great value in opportunities to open up, be vulnerable, and share their failures with other teachers during the residency learning experience.

Educators stand to gain the most from learning experiences when they can let their guard down. Taylor, Vallely, and Wisner each noted that by sharing their struggles, they were able to find connections and build trust with their colleagues. Taylor stated that teaching is "more of a team sport, like hey, you are really great at this, and this is not my area of strength, and that has allowed me to be vulnerable and share my practice." By opening up about personal struggles and past failures, teachers create space for growth within themselves and colleagues. Taylor described this failure as part of their ongoing process of improvement.

It is important to feel like it is okay to fail, and maybe it sounds weird that the goal of the learning is not to achieve, you know, 100% or to be right, and then I am going to be perfect. But the goal of my learning is to be okay with failure in order to improve. When embodying vulnerability in this way, educators build trust through shared experiences that allow them to learn more effectively together. Vallely noted that a benefit of the residency

experience was the trust built through the process, allowing teachers to feel comfortable putting themselves out there without risk of judgment.

Furthermore, by putting oneself out there and sharing with colleagues in vulnerable ways, one demonstrates a willingness to embrace imperfection - an essential step towards becoming a lifelong learner who is open to new ideas and constructive feedback. Trust is an essential step in the willingness to be vulnerable. Both Archer and McPherson noted their willingness to be vulnerable and put themselves out there when trust was built amongst the educators in the room. Archer noted that for her, trust is built through positive experiences over time or through others' willingness to be vulnerable with her. McPherson noted that vulnerability comes from smaller settings, where everyone has an opportunity to share, as trust for her is built through connections.

Vulnerability was noted as by the participants as helping them get the most out of the learning process. Taylor again connected the work of educators to that of students.

It is so simple and so silly, but we are so much like children. You know it is the same. It is that vulnerability piece. If anything, we want to be more right than we did as a kid. You know what I mean. It is like, I cannot tell you what my flaws are. I have to fully cover them. Because, well, I am getting paid to do this, so I should know everything. And so, we have a lot of people who are faking it till they make it, or quite frankly inflating the things they are doing, you know. Vulnerability comes from not making them feel bad about or insecure about the ways that they are not currently performing. I think sometimes we are more insecure than kids are with this kind of stuff because we are supposed to know everything because we are getting paid to do this.

Ultimately, vulnerability within the academic setting yields immeasurable benefits for individual professional development and group collaboration efforts.

### **Lesson Study Residency**

The last set of themes are derived from experiences specific to the Stembridge residency experience and the professional development lesson study model. The lesson study and residency professional development experience offered by Dr. Stembridge was a transformative journey for educators seeking to elevate their teaching practices, and many topics of reflection centered around how this professional development experience enhanced their learning compared to other models. The residency's emphasis on peer observations, small group settings, and problem-centered application with a focus on specific students made for an enriching learning environment. In addition, Dr. Stembridge, as the PD planner and facilitator, brought to the table his plethora of skills, passion, and knowledge in the field of education that he seamlessly integrated into each residency experience.

### ***Small Group Setting***

A vital component of the residency experience was the small group learning, with groups of ten or fewer educators each time. The small group setting is integral to the residency experience as it offers a more intimate learning environment, allowing for greater student engagement and participation. Wisner pointed out a feature of the small group setting as an opportunity to hear more people, allowing everyone the opportunity to speak and share their individuality.

Another benefit Wisner, Gauthier, and Baldwin mentioned was the feeling of safety fostered amongst learners within the small group environment. This setting gave them a sense of comfort to freely share their thoughts and ideas without fear of judgment or criticism. Gauthier

described their experience in the small group, "I definitely feel safer with a smaller group, especially if it is a smaller group of the people who are open and who are willing to have discussions because then you can feel safe to share enough without feeling like you are going to be judged." By doing so, they can create opportunities for everyone in the room to engage actively in the learning process and participate in discussions.

Another benefit of the smaller groups was that the learning was tailored to each educator's needs. McPherson discussed how the learner felt specific to her team and students.

When it is just my team like, we can really grapple with some deep issues and problems that may have come up in our classrooms. It was really nice because it was tailored to us as a group. And I feel like it was a really intimate experience for us as a team because it is not just like, oh, we are doing this as a whole school.

Archer echoed that sentiment, stating that her whole team became learners together, and as a result, they wanted to apply their learning together as well. The smaller group size also ensures that every learner's voice is heard equally, promoting more sharing of unique perspectives and experiences.

### ***Peer Observations***

A key component of the lesson study model is the opportunity to plan, teach, observe, and reflect with colleagues, all as part of the learning process. This was a new experience for all of the classroom teachers interviewed. However, it was familiar to the consultant teachers, as this was a tool often used in professional development around coaching other educators. *Peer observation* is a valuable tool that allows teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices while also gaining insight into the instructional strategies of their colleagues (O'Keeffe et al., 2021).

Through observing other teachers in action, educators could compare and contrast similarities and differences among their approaches to teaching. Vallely noted that when they went through the residency experience, they had never seen the three other educators in action other than walking their classes in the hallways. Vallely stated, "I loved that part of it. I loved the part when we went into their classrooms. It was interesting to see them in their own space because we do not get to see that enough." Vallely's teacher partner at the time was Taylor, who noted a very similar realization after their peer observation experience.

After Vallely left my room, and again, this was the second year I was at that school, they were like, "I literally had no idea how you run your classroom, like I literally did not know." I am like, I know, but it is one of those things. We do not really get to see each other.

From the participants responses, it was evident that not only do peer observations allow teachers to learn more about their colleagues than they previously knew, but they also provide opportunities for learning from both successes and challenges encountered by peers in different classroom settings. Gauthier described this process as getting to see the best of both worlds.

You learn the things that you would want to use and then things you would say, "I would never do it like that." That has always been kind of nice. I always enjoy that with working with colleagues or doing trainings with colleagues, you learn from the good and the bad. By observing their colleagues' teaching practices and strategies, educators could identify parallels to their approaches, gaining new perspectives on effective instruction.

Another benefit the interviewees noted about teaching and peer observations during the residency experience was the allowance for immediate implementation of new skills and techniques. Teachers were able to see firsthand how students respond to various activities or

methods and were able to apply these skills immediately in their own classes. Malone noted many benefits to teaching a lesson and observing one another as part of the residency experience.

You were able to implement it right away and with your team. That was very important. I am seeing it in action, noticing the positives, and focusing on the positives. I feel that helps people, you know, want to take that chance. It is scary, though, because no matter what, people are going to judge. You have to really put your mind into it. Okay, just look at the kids and see what they are doing. See what their conversations are. When you go in and observe classrooms, there has to be a focus.

McPherson and Vallely commented similarly to Malone, pointing out the power of immediately seeing their new learning in action. McPherson also highlighted the benefit of seeing how her new skills are applied to the students in her classroom.

If my students in this room can do it, yours can, too. And I think that is powerful, seeing it in action when you are doing it as a team and watching this in the classroom across the hall. They can do it. So. Yep. That mindset piece.

The immediate application with real students not only allowed educators to practice their new skills but also removed the excuse that a specific method would not work for particular populations of students. Higgins noted another benefit of the teacher and observation process as better retention of new skills. Higgins observed that as a hands-on learner, they sometimes need help to retain information from professional development, as it is only presented in one format. For Higgins, being able to actively work through the process, practice it for themselves, and walk through every step together, helped them retain much more from the experience. Overall,

incorporating peer observations into the residency professional development process empowered educators to apply new learning, collaborate, reflect, and see their new learning in action.

### ***Problem Centered Application***

During the residency experience, Dr. Stembridge shares with the learners in the room that teachers have two superpowers. The first superpower is the ability to identify the assets in any student, even when those assets present themselves in the form of poor behavior. The second superpower is the ability to notice things about students that other people do not notice.

Stembridge notes that these superpowers are most applicable and necessary in connection to the students who present the most significant challenges, whether that be in regards to behavior, academic deficits or strengths that make them outliers, engagement struggles, language barriers, or other needs.

In order to combat these challenges, Dr. Stembridge has educators focus on these tricky students from the start of the planning process. This process looks like identifying three students who could be identified as needing extra support for whatever reason. Once the teacher has identified these students, Stembridge has the educators answer the following questions: What assets do these students bring to the classroom? What do you want these students to be thinking? What would an 'engagement trap' look like for this student? How can I show them understanding, validation, and care during this lesson/unit?

Focusing on a few tricky students as part of the lesson planning process is a form of a problem-centered application that the teachers interviewed had never encountered before. This focus on students who present challenges was also one of the aspects of the residency process that the educators found to be most impactful on their learning. By focusing on a few students who would typically present challenges during a lesson, teachers were able to tailor their

instruction and plan engaging components based on student interests. Taylor recalled that it was almost frustrating how well the idea of focusing on your tricky students and highlighting their interests worked for their students.

This will work for them if I have this access point. I feel like it focused me on getting to know my kids more and not just academically based, but like interest-based.

This personalized approach not only benefits the identified students but also positively impacts the learning experience of most of the students in these classrooms. Valley, Breslin, Taylor, and Archer noted that intentionally planning for the assets and needs of their trickiest students positively affected all of the kids in their classrooms. Valley pointed out how this problem-centered planning process helped their multilingual learners (MLL).

What helps my MLL kids helps everyone. Planning for those kiddos that need that extra support helps everyone—so, planning for my kiddo, who will probably get up in the middle of a lesson. I just try to keep that in mind. They are not going to derail me. We are going to keep doing what we need to do. And hopefully, I can engage them in something before that happens.

Stembridge uses the idea of *engagement traps* as a way to engage students who teachers know might take a lesson sideways. These engagement traps could look like incorporating shark facts into a math lesson when the teacher knows one of their tricky students has a strong interest in sharks.

Higgins, who was in their first year as a classroom teacher, had many students who struggled to engage in the learning on a regular basis. When asked about the planning process with your trickiest students in mind, Higgins recalled a lesson they had recently taught that was a success due to this planning process.

We were doing an alternate assessment for graphing points on a coordinate plane, and I found things where they get to plot the points and draw the picture as they go because drawing is a way that I can engage Student A. He actually participated. He never participates without me sitting right next to him, but like he did some of it on his own! As a consultant teacher, Breslin model taught a lesson in Higgin's classroom after the residency to demonstrate some of these practices in action. Breslin recalled how the problem-centered application of focusing on the students who need the most support changed her practice.

I definitely think it changed my thinking, how I plan, and how I mentor teachers. When I am planning it with them, like I try to tell them, "Okay, these are the students you struggle with. Plan to them. The rest will be fine. Make sure you have everything intact for these two or whoever you are focusing on, and the rest will get it." And that is what I was trying to do when I went in and taught a math lesson for Higgins. I knew that Student B was going to be my struggle, and then Student C as well. And so, like, those are the ones I was trying to get engaged, so I changed how I did everything with the focus on my tricky ones.

Planning for the trickiest students allows teachers to narrow their focus and allocate ample time and resources toward addressing their unique needs effectively.

While it might sound like teachers are being encouraged to only teach to a few students and forget the rest, the results were quite different. Archer described what this process was like for her.

I think that it is just a constant reminder that every kid needs us, and every kid needs something different. But chances are your tricky kids have certain things about them that other kids might have, like one of those needs as well. So I mean, if my tricky kiddo has

five things that are challenges for them, or challenges in their life or differences in the way they learn, or whatever that could be, and that challenge is putting up a block to their education, there is another kid in my class who would probably have one of those. If I am focusing on the tricky student, I know I am also getting the other kids with similar needs.

And so, I think it just made it actually a lot more simplified.

Malone noticed a similar benefit: shifting her focus from trying to do everything for every student in her classroom to intentionally planning for a few, streamlined her thinking and reduced her stress.

Focusing, maybe like bringing it down to like one or two, because sometimes I think I was going too broad. Yeah, so I like narrowing it a bit, and it gave me a little less. Our brains want to do everything for everyone. So, I love just having a narrow focus, and I think the quality is better in that sense.

Moreover, educators cultivate a culture that promotes a growth mindset and resilience by shifting attention from negative behavior patterns to positive aspects of these students' personalities and abilities. McPherson noted the change in her thinking patterns due to focusing on student assets.

I think it has really transformed the way I think about the kids that are in my room. I like that we think about their assets right away, just naming the things that they are good at and then using that to engage them in learning. So, I remember earlier this year I sent you a picture of Student D, like fully engaged with his learning, where at the beginning of the year, he was just like, "me dumb" constantly. Where we are now, he is not calling himself dumb, but that came from finding things that he would find success at and planning for that specifically to hook him in. I think that was like a really key thing.

The problem-centered application process empowers teachers with valuable insights into individualized student needs and interests to enhance academic outcomes while fostering engagement within classrooms.

### ***Presenter Skills***

One of the recurring themes that stood out throughout the interview process was the stark contrast between a presenter who delivers professional development for a living compared to educators or district office staff who are required to deliver PD as one part of their more extensive job responsibilities. The educators interviewed acknowledged the desire to acquire knowledge from an individual who possesses exceptional expertise in their respective domain and has the presence, humor, and command of a skilled presenter.

Other than once-a-year keynote speakers, the Pierce County School District does not typically hire out for professional development, leaning on staff from the Teaching and Learning Department to deliver most PD. As a result, the skills of Dr. Stembridge were something that the educators frequently noted when reflecting on the residency experience. Baldwin, a consultant teacher who often delivers PD created by someone else, noted the difference between Dr. Stembridge and other professional development experiences.

Yeah, I think we are used to getting PDs from someone who is trained, by someone who was trained, by someone who was trained, and I am a part of that. I was trained the day before, and now I am giving you a PD on it versus having Dr. Stembridge here, who is highly intelligent and has a great wealth of experience, which really makes you think critically about your practice and students and education in general. I love to learn, and I found that experience really great. He is an important part of the success, but I also think the implementation is like being able to see it first-hand. Those results and being able to

talk about it afterward, I think, make a far greater difference than any of the PDs we have gone through previously.

Archer noted a similar comparison to PD delivered by district staff compared to professionals specifically skilled in delivering learning to educators.

It is hard because it is not like the CTs signed up for the PDs they present. It is not like they chose the content that we were learning. It is just something special when it is a PD where the speakers have a passion or they are really into it. It makes such a difference when the presenter is passionate about what they are teaching.

Taylor, Gauthier, and Malone noted similar differences between the professional development teachers routinely receive and what was delivered by Dr. Stembridge. The differences are not only in his passion and knowledge around the content but also in the humor, relatability, and interest he fuses into his teaching.

Another quality teachers noted as commendable was Dr. Stembridge's ability to customize the learning experience according to the specific needs and preferences of educators in the room. By embodying qualities akin to an excellent coach, Dr. Stembridge empowered these learners with invaluable guidance and insights that enable growth from multiple entry points in their learning. Vallely noted that Stembridge was an excellent teacher coach, "I think that there are things that I could learn from him, and not just about equity, but around being a good teacher, a good speaker, a good presenter." Dr. Stembridge's ability to adjust his teaching to meet the needs of the educators in the room was also noted by Archer and McPherson. McPherson observed that Dr. Stembridge was skilled at reading the teachers in the room.

I think he is really good at reading people and their experiences. He is not just repeating or resharing something you already know. What he is talking about is what is relevant and personal to you. He has the skill of being able to tailor his PD to who is in the room. Baldwin, the only educator in the room who had attended more than one of Dr. Stembridge's residencies, had similar observations. They remarked on how Dr. Stembridge's slide deck had far more content than he covered in one residency. He used this massive amount of information as a way to tailor the learning to the conversations, questions, and needs that arose during each residency. This specificity contrasts the professional development teachers in PCSD were used to, which typically looks like the same information for all staff, no matter your subject area or years of experience.

The skills Dr. Stembridge demonstrates as a presenter contribute positively to the overall success of his residencies. His captivating teaching style is characterized by being intriguing, interesting, and passionate, skillfully engaging his audience throughout the residency journey. Malone noted many of the skills that Dr. Stembridge deployed that led her to benefit from his professional development.

I felt safe because of how he presented himself, his personality, openness, and humor. He knew his stuff. He had that 'withitness'. He was not pretentious. He was not talking to us. He was talking with us and for us. He also made us feel like he was for the teacher. He used different modes. You know, whether it is a visual, whether we type, talk, or read, all those modes. He makes us think. Someone else could have presented that, and I might have thought, "I don't know that I want to engage in this. I don't know if I want to try this or trust you." You have to know that they are there for you. He was very teacher-focused. He wanted to help us and made sure to tell us that he knew we worked hard. I think for

any dynamic presenter to do a good job, they need the ability to connect to their audience, just like a good teacher connects to their students.

Dr. Stembridge's ability to impart knowledge with a generous dose of humor and personality helped to foster a connection between him as the presenter and the educators in the room.

Each participating educator noted many dynamic skills Dr. Stembridge brought to the residency PD experience that supported their overall learning. These presenter skills are essential because they directly impact the teacher's perceptions of the residencies as a whole. Dr. Stembridge's ability to recognize teaching as both an art form and scientific discipline, weaving together pedagogical theories seamlessly with practical application, led to optimal comprehension and teacher buy-in. McPherson, Malone, Gauthier, Archer, Baldwin, and Vallely all noted that even though the content was of a high caliber, the residencies would not have been as impactful without the skills that Dr. Stembridge brought as a presenter.

## **5. Discussion**

The outcomes of this study provide insight into teachers' professional development experiences, particularly those that positively and negatively impact their work as educators. The teachers interviewed had primarily negative experiences with professional development throughout their careers prior to the residency experience. Common concerns are that PD is typically delivered in the shortest method possible, often resulting in an overwhelming amount of information being disseminated to a broad audience, leaving little time for differentiation or choice. These negative experiences arise from failing to account for individual learning needs and preferences differences. Administrative trust and support, accountability, time, reflection, and positive student data are the conditions that support teachers' learning. Teacher reflection is a critical component teachers reference when reflecting on their professional growth and

development. Many of the teachers interviewed identified reflection as being one of the most effective tools in their repertoire to change their practice and improve their instruction.

The benefits of peer-to-peer learning are numerous, according to the educators interviewed. Some benefits include that it is more collaborative and engaging, fosters an environment of trust and respect, and enables the sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences. Vulnerability is an essential quality for educators to have in order to be successful in both their individual professional development and collaborative group efforts. The Stenbridge residency experience and the lesson study model of professional development offer a transformative journey for educators seeking to elevate their teaching practices.

In analyzing the perspectives of the interviewed teachers, it becomes evident that the conventional approach to professional development (PD) fails to align with their expectations and desired outcomes. Differentiation is a critical skill when teaching children; however, the absence of differentiation in PD is a pivotal element in understanding teacher's discontentment with traditional PD methods. Unsurprisingly, teachers preferred smaller group settings, emphasizing the need for personalized attention and tailored support that fosters effective peer collaboration and reflection. This signifies an essential shift towards acknowledging the diverse needs of educators rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Also unsurprising was the note that high-stakes tests can significantly hinder their professional growth. These assessments often overshadow learning experiences tailored to individual student needs, outweighing the state test results over individual student growth.

An unexpected finding arose from teachers' desire for accountability from administration. Built-in accountability measures were a tool that teachers identified to support their continued growth. Another surprising finding was the repeated need for vulnerability from their colleagues

during PD sessions, highlighting the complex nature of fostering trust and cultivating safe spaces where authentic professional growth can occur. This particular result was surprising because teachers often indicate a desire to check out during professional development. The need for vulnerability highlights a desire for authentic connection between educators that is missing, which might be a contributing factor to why teachers often check out during PD.

The guiding question behind this study was focused on the experiences of elementary school teachers engaging in small group, equity-focused residency professional development. One aspect of that question that did not come up in the findings was how the equity-focused nature of the professional development experience impacted their learning. The findings fell under the six themes of barriers, conditions for learning, teacher life experiences, peer-to-peer learning, vulnerability and trust, and the lesson study residency. These six themes demonstrate what teacher learners benefited from in a quality professional development experience as well as what hindered their learning, but these findings were not specific to equity focused PD. While the equity focus of the professional development did not show up in the findings based on one-on-one teacher interviews, a shift did present itself in the surveys that were taken by participants before and after the residencies.

Prior to the residency PD, teacher experience with PD that was equity centered was rated as 20% not valuable, and 80% somewhat valuable to their teaching practice. In contrast, after the equity PD delivered during the residencies, all of the teachers rated their experience as extremely valuable. When asked how prepared they felt to implement equity centered practices in their classrooms before the residencies, 30% of teachers said they left somewhat unprepared, and 70% said they felt somewhat prepared. Post-residencies, the teachers interviewed shifted, stating that 30% felt somewhat prepared to implement equity centered practices in their classrooms, and

70% stated they felt very prepared. While the findings did not highlight equity or social justice as common threads in teacher reflections, the pre and post survey results demonstrate a growth in teacher beliefs around their own skill sets in regard to equity. Another potential reason that equity did not rise to the top in the findings could be the way that Stenbridge frames his equity work. Stenbridge makes a point to communicate both in his writing and during the residencies that equity is not a set of checklist items for educators to follow. The residencies focus on equipping teachers with the skills to get to know their students' assets, backgrounds, and interests and then tailoring high quality learning experiences based on that knowledge.

In light of these findings, the implications underscore the significance of Stenbridge's six themes of culturally responsive education for students and how these themes also apply to the learning of adult educators. According to Stenbridge, the six themes are engagement, relationships, cultural identity, vulnerability, assets, and rigor. As the educators interviewed navigated their professional growth journeys, it became evident that four out of these six themes hold particular importance for them: engagement, relationships, vulnerability, and assets. In the same way that these themes benefit student learning, they also benefit adult learners engaging in professional development. Engagement signifies active involvement and participation in learning. Positive relationships between teachers and their colleagues encourage trust-building and open dialogue, which are essential for effective communication and collaborative learning. Vulnerability plays a pivotal role as educators acknowledge their limitations while embracing new perspectives, content, and skills to enhance cultural responsiveness in classrooms. Lastly, the notion of assets underscores recognizing and valuing the wealth of experiences, unique strengths, and talents that educators bring into the learning environment. While Stenbridge's

themes of culturally responsive education were written with student learning in mind, there are implications for their effectiveness with adult learners as well.

Another implication is the benefit of the lesson study model in teacher professional development. Compared to traditional professional development models, this approach necessitates a substantial investment of time and resources due to the planning, observation, and thoughtful reflection components. However, its advantages are numerous, as elucidated by the experienced educators interviewed for this study. Employing the lesson study model empowers teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry and peer observation while actively participating in their own growth and improvement as professionals. By immersing themselves deeply into designing, implementing, and evaluating lessons collectively with their peers, educators gain invaluable insights into their teaching practices that would have otherwise remained concealed. This collaborative experience fosters a supportive environment conducive to open dialogue and collective problem-solving among educators that can not be replicated through a sit-and-get PD model.

The interview results indicated three distinct connections to the theoretical framework of andragogy and the focus on adult learners. First, the concept of self-directed learning was a factor, as all the teachers willingly chose to participate in this professional development experience. Their active engagement with the PD stemmed from their inherent interest in increasing culturally responsive practices for their students, thus allowing them to reap numerous benefits throughout their learning journey. The educators who did not have a self-directed interest in this learning opportunity likely opted out of this professional development.

Another connection to andragogy was how these adult learners emphasized the advantages of engaging and interacting with their peers within a social setting. The collaborative

atmosphere created through the residency PD experience fostered meaningful discussions, idea exchanges, and enhanced understanding through shared experiences, which are all important to learning in a social setting. Lastly, problem-centered application emerged as a crucial aspect for these educators. They were able to effectively apply newly acquired knowledge and skills to address real-life challenges encountered in their respective classrooms and teaching careers. Teacher-learners constantly need to improve teaching practices to provide equitable access to learning that responds to student needs. The teachers interviewed noted that the problem-centered application, with a focus on their hard-to-engage or behaviorally challenging students, was a benefit of the learning experience for them.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged within the context of its scope. First and foremost, it is necessary to note that all participants were exclusively drawn from a single school district. While this provides valuable insights into teachers' experiences within that particular setting, it inherently restricts the generalizability of findings to a broader population. Moreover, it is crucial to consider that only those teachers who willingly chose to participate in the professional development were included in this study. This self-selection bias introduces potential limitations as these individuals may possess unique characteristics or motivations that could influence their experiences and perceptions differently than those who did not participate. An avenue for further exploration would involve examining whether mandating the participation of educators in these professional development residencies would yield different outcomes altogether; addressing such variables would contribute significantly towards understanding how teacher experiences are shaped by voluntary versus obligatory commitments. Additionally, it is important to note that the researcher was either a former administrator or current principal for all

the teacher participants in this study. The participants' comfort levels with the administrator-teacher relationship may have affected their willingness to share. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the sample size was only ten participants, so caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions from such a small sample of educators. While this study offers valuable insights into specific contexts and participant experiences, future research endeavors could expand the diversity, number of participants, selection criteria, and sampling locations for enhanced validity and reliability.

## **Conclusion**

Professional development can both positively and negatively impact the work of practicing educators. The educators interviewed noted many barriers to their learning in PD, including lack of differentiation, passive engagement, and limited time for participation or implementation. Although many barriers were noted with traditional PD, the educators noted many favorable conditions for their learning. The small group, lesson study professional development residencies demonstrated many benefits. The work of Dr. Stenbridge positively supported teacher learning through residency professional development experiences, engaging teachers in planning, implementing, and reflecting throughout the process. Additional conditions that support learning include administrative trust and support, accountability, ample time for understanding, implementation, and reflection, and positive student data to support the work that teachers are engaging in. The adult learning framework andragogy also had connections to the benefits noted by educators. The teachers interviewed noted that they brought significant life experiences to their learning. Teachers also noted the strengths of learning from and with colleagues in a social setting and the benefits of vulnerability in their peer learning relationships.

While there were many benefits, as noted by the educators themselves, the results could be linked to factors such as the individual skills of Dr. Stenbridge as a presenter, the eager participation of educators who self-selected to participate in the PD or the finite location of one school district where all ten educators were employed. As the roles of educators become increasingly more complex and demanding, it is important to understand the tools, professional development and otherwise, that benefit educators and support student learning. The application of professional development following a similar model is just one tool that might benefit educators and students.

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