

Module 3: Reflection
Personalized Professional Development

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EDAD 6915 - Learning, Teaching, and Instructional Leadership

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January 26, 2026

The traditional model of professional development (PD)—often characterized as "disjointed workshops" or "one-size-fits-all" sessions—has long been criticized for failing to impact classroom practice meaningfully (Schifter, 2016, p. 222). In contrast, Personalized Professional Development (PPD) acknowledges that just as students have unique learning needs, teachers possess distinct strengths and areas for growth. By shifting to a PPD model, educational leaders can significantly impact teacher growth by increasing "buy-in" and engagement. Schifter (2016) draws on Knowles' theory of andragogy to highlight that adults are self-directed and motivated by interest (p. 229). When teachers feel that PD is relevant to their specific context—rather than something being "done to" them—they are more likely to internalize the new skills and apply them to improve student outcomes.

Benefits: Agency and Relevance

The primary benefit of implementing PPD is the cultivation of teacher agency. As Schifter (2016) notes, adults move from dependency to self-direction as they mature (p. 229). I believe that establishing committees of teachers to steer PD agendas is a practical application of this theory. By allowing multiple committees to work toward different themes of interest set by the district—such as using technology, mindfulness in the classroom, or behavior management—teachers can self-select into the areas where they need the most support or have the most passion.

This approach directly addresses McClusky's Theory of Margin, which suggests that motivation is a ratio of "power" (resources/skills) to "load" (demands) (Schifter, 2016, p. 229). Topics like addressing teacher burnout or student mental health are not just instructional strategies; they are essential resources that increase a teacher's "power" to handle the daily "load" of the profession. Furthermore, organizing these

sessions to be age-specific or content-specific (e.g., separating elementary homeroom teachers from high school intervention specialists) ensures that the training is immediately applicable, satisfying the adult learner's need for immediate relevance.

Challenges in Adoption

While the benefits are clear, shifting to PPD presents challenges regarding logistics, resources, and alignment. Schifter (2016) points out that research-based practices are often expensive and take place over long periods (p. 224). Implementing a system where committees start planning six months in advance requires a significant investment of time and organizational energy. Additionally, there is the challenge of the "closed classroom door" effect, where teacher autonomy might lead to fragmentation (Schifter, 2016, pp. 224-225). If every teacher pursues a different path, it can be difficult for a leader to ensure that the district is moving cohesively toward shared goals, such as the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Leadership Strategies for Sustainability

As an educational leader, I would address these challenges by creating a structured framework that balances autonomy with alignment. While teachers should have the freedom to choose their focus, the district must set the overarching themes to ensure all professional learning supports Tier 1 instruction and MTSS goals. To overcome the resource challenge and ensure high-quality planning, I would advocate for incentives such as stipends or licensure credits for the committee members who conduct the literature reviews, book readings, and expert discussions during the planning phase.

Furthermore, I would utilize Schifter's (2016) action principle of promoting "communities of practice" (pp. 223-224). By structuring PD days so that teachers collaborate within their specific content or grade levels, we prevent isolation. This

structure ensures that while the learning is personalized to the teacher's interest (e.g., technology), the application is collaborative and aligned with the school's broader mission. By validating teachers as professionals and providing the time and resources for them to steer their own learning, we can transform PD from a compliance activity into a sustainable engine for school improvement.

References

Schifter, C. C. (2016). Personalizing professional development for teachers. In M. Murphy, S. Redding, & J. Twyman (Eds.), *Handbook on personalized learning for states, districts, and schools* (pp. 221–235). Center on Innovations in Learning.