



Exploring the Impact of Online Professional Development on the Professional Learning Community:

A Case Study in an International School during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new reality to teachers within primary and secondary education. Teachers who normally taught in person were required to make a digital shift in order to continue teaching. Primary and secondary school teachers who normally received their professional development in person took up online opportunities in order to continue their continuous education. The shift to online professional development has the potential to impact the professional learning community within an institution.

This purpose of this study was to explore the impact of online professional development on the professional learning community within an international school in Germany. This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of 6 teachers who took part in online professional development between March 2020 and February 2021.

The researcher conducted a thematic analysis based on the virtual interviews with 6 teachers from School X. The research findings are inconclusive, highlighting both the limitations and opportunities that online professional development could potentially have on the professional learning community.

The researcher recommended that School X should be aware of the opportunities and limitations that online professional development can create for the professional learning community. It is recommended that School X have structures in place to foster connectiveness and allow for open communication and collaboration after online professional development sessions.

Confidential information regarding the specific school and the research participants has been removed from this report.

Key words: professional development, online learning, education

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GLOSSARY

| | |
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| HGSE | Harvard Graduate School of Education |
| IB | International Baccalaureate |
| IBDP | International Baccalaureate Diploma Program |
| PD | Professional Development |

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research topic

Until recently, it was standard practice for students and teachers to meet in a classroom for instruction and teachers to attend professional development in person. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new reality to the field of education, causing a digital transformation overnight in order to be able to pursue teaching and learning from a distance (Mladenova et al., 2020). Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic make learning online a reality for students, OECD recognized that it has also become a reality for teachers as a means for professional development (Reimers et al., 2020).

Online learning refers to any form of educational experience that takes place from a distance with the pre-determined intention to be delivered online. Whomever is hosting the online learning incorporates appropriate strategies for instruction, engagement, and, when necessary, assessment (Bates, 2016). Examples of this could be online conferences, workshops, or digital trainings hosted by internal or external institutions.

There has been an increase in teachers participating in and receiving professional development through a digital medium (Reimers et al., 2020). However, research is lacking when seeking to understand the impact that digital learning as a means for professional development has impacted the professional learning community within a learning organization.

Digital learning is not new; in fact, it has been around for decades (Moore et al., 2011). When discussing learning taking place online, it is easy to get caught up in the jargon between digital learning, distance learning, e-learning, and online learning. For this research, the researcher uses the term digital learning. More can be found on the distinction for digital learning in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The aspects of learning organizations and a professional learning community are well known and established. Peter Senge (1994) identified five main features of a learning organization. These include Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared

Vision, Team Learning, and Systems Thinking (Senge, 1994). A school that operates as a learning organization is referred to as a learning school (Senge, 2012).

After the establishment of learning organization theory from Peter Senge came the theory of professional learning communities by Robert DuFour and Robert Eaker. Dufour and Eaker identified three main features of a Professional Learning Community (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). A professional learning community includes a shared mission, a collaborative culture, and a collective inquiry into best practices (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The focal point on all three is centered upon student learning.

Although professional learning communities stem from learning organization theory, there is limited research on the impact that online professional development could have on the professional learning communities. Professional learning communities operate under traditional ways of teaching and learning, where all members are able to meet in person (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the field of education for students and teachers dramatically.

It is from this gap in research, where the researcher began to question if and how receiving professional development online could impact the professional learning community within the learning organization. It is desirable to carry out research on this topic as digital learning as a means for professional development has become more available to educators since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and could be an option once the pandemic has passed. At the time of this research, there were still limitations within the context of in-person gatherings and school closures. Online professional development provides a way for educators to continue developing their practice.

1.2 Study area

The focus of this research is limited to the perspective of educators from one half-public half-private International School in Germany, which was forced to adapt to

digital learning opportunities in order to receive professional development. For confidentiality purposes, the school will be referred to as School X.

International Schools tend to be private and fee-paying (Hayden, 2006). The population amongst international schools includes diversity amongst teachers and students. Examples of where the diverse community comes from but is not limited to, international organizations, diplomat families, or local families that wish to provide their children with international education or a strong emphasis on the English language (Murphy, 1990).

Similar to the community of an international school, the teaching population is also diverse. It is common for international schools to contain a combination of local and international teachers (Hayden, 2006). It is common for the international teachers to have British or American backgrounds, as they are not recognized as civil servants in their home country. (Hayden, 2006). The diversity amongst student and staff population reign true for School X.

Many factors make International Schools attractive for teachers. Examples are but not limited to: a generous salary, stable health insurance, professional development, and reduced school fees for the children of staff members (Hayden, 2006). An additional benefit of working in an international school is the commitment to professional development. Standard forms of professional development in International Schools are typically provided through private conferences, workshops and training. This is attractive to teachers as it provides travel opportunities and the flexibility to seek training in areas that both the individual and leadership deem appropriate.

The necessary qualifications needed to teach in an International School vary according to the country and state the international school is located (Hayden and Thompson, 2008). Therefore, not every International School abides by the same requirements for necessary teaching qualifications, training and development.

The case school for this study, School X, is a half-private half-public school in Germany. With the status of being half-private half-public, the school receives

state funding per student, and collects fees from the families that attend. Because School X receives state funding, there are guidelines to abide by when it comes to certain aspects of the curriculum, teacher qualifications and professional development. The guidelines are not the same as fully public schools, so there is flexibility within.

In order for a teacher to work for School X as a full-time teacher, the trend has been for the individual to hold both a bachelor and master degree. Usually one of those degrees is in a specific subject and the other in a division of the education sector. The word trend is used because it is a case by case approval method between School X and the local Ministry of Education. However, there have been a few teachers hired that received approval without a master's degree, and also cases where teachers were denied approval despite having a bachelor and master's degree.

Once teachers receive temporary approval from the Ministry of Education, they usually have two years to complete a pre-determine amount of professional development. The amount of professional development required is specific to each individual and is determined by the Ministry of Education. Completion of this training will result in a long-term approval from the state to continue teaching at School X.

As previously mentioned, a common option for professional development for International School teachers is the use of conferences and workshops. There are various conferences that can be attended in person, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic travel on short notice to such conferences was possible. These conferences were often held through private companies or accreditation organizations. Because these conferences are targeted towards international schools, teachers from across the world are in attendance. Depending on the institution, there are a variety of ways in which the knowledge obtained from the conferences is shared with colleagues. Within School X, this knowledge was shared during weekly dedicated collaboration time.

Regarding School X, various forms of professional development were provided prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. An example of this includes School X hosting

department-wide professional development on or off site during pre-determined staff development days. In addition to pre-determined staff development days that took place every few months, each school year starts with a week-long summer institute that serves to help staff come together as a team and receive professional development, as well as to set goals for the institution with the leadership team.

However, professional development did not only happen on pre-determined staff development days. Staff members attended conferences within Germany and Europe, and took semi-intensive courses through Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). The most common option was for staff members to attend workshops that were offered within the state Ministry of Education.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting Germany as of March 2020, all professional development has taken place online for teachers within School X. Teachers within School X have continued to take courses through HGSE, but are also taking courses through the state Ministry of Education as well as through the International Baccalaureate (IB). For this research, the focus is on members of School X that took part in on online professional development and attended between March 2020 and January 2021. This includes teachers and administrative staff.

1.3 Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to understand the impact that a switch to digital professional development has had on the professional learning community within the learning organization during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research participants interacted with various providers of professional development. The focus of this study is not to evaluate the effectiveness or quality of the courses and providers that each participant is taking part in.

From this research, the researcher will produce data using qualitative methods on experiences and perceptions acquired through digital learning as a means for professional development within School X, and the impact it has on the

Professional Learning Community within the Learning Organization. The researcher will then analyze the data and provide suggestions to School X. This will further support the institutions desire and motivation to continue to use digital platforms as a means for professional development in the future.

The context in which this study takes place is specific to the researcher. It is of great interest to the researcher and the organization to conduct such research, as the duration of the COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions are unknown and the use of online professional development could continue far into the future. If members of School X continue to use digital learning as a means for professional development, it is important to understand the impacts it has on the professional learning community.

1.4 Research questions

This study was led by one main research question and four secondary questions. These questions guided the researcher in forming the literature review for this study.

The main research question for this study:

- How did the use of online professional development impact the professional learning community within a learning organization?

The four secondary questions for this study:

- What is a professional learning community?
- What is a learning organization?
- How is a professional learning community and a learning organization related?
- What is the context of digital learning in this research?

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of 5 chapters in total. In chapter 2, the researcher provides a comprehensive literature review related to professional learning communities, learning organizations and the relationship they have to each other. The researcher also included digital learning as a means for professional development and the context in which the term digital learning is used. This serves as the theoretical framework for the research design.

In chapter 3, the researcher introduces the methodology and clarifies data collection and qualitative analysis methods employed. Chapter 4 is regarding the data analysis. This is where the researcher will present the raw data from the interviews she conducted for this study. In the final chapter, conclusions and discussion, the researcher provides recommendations for School X, limitations to this study, and suggestions for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Learning organization theory

In order to understand Learning Organization theory, the researcher referred to American systems scientist, Peter Senge. Peter Senge defines Learning Organizations as an organization where members “expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1994). The theory of a Learning Organization focuses on learning as both a tool and a philosophy for sustainable change and renovation in the lifetime of an organization’s rapidly changing world (Bui and Baruch, 2010).

In the pursuit of ubiquitous learning in organizations, within which the learning is sustained, Senge promotes five disciplines which offer effective ways to deal with the challenges and pressures of educational institutions (Senge, 1994). The five disciplines are represented in FIGURE 1.

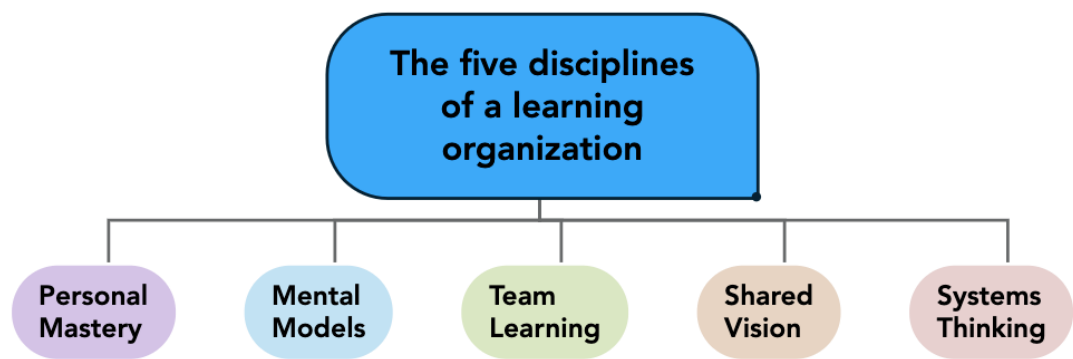


FIGURE 1: The five disciplines of a learning organization (Senge, 1994)

Personal mastery is the process in which a personal vision is developed and viewed as an important step in the management of change. Personal mastery enables every member of the team to have personal input into the strategic aims of an organization. This discipline caters for the development of commitment and individual learning that will enable system learning to reach its full potential.

Senge's theory reminds us that the learning of the system happens through people. An absence of individual learning results in an absence of organizational learning (Senge, 1994). The learning related to personal mastery does not involve acquiring skills and knowledge related to the goals of change, but rather the deep connection to learning involved in knowing and understanding one's role in the change (Senge, 1994). This requires an individual to meet personally significant and rewarding goals.

Mental Models is in reference to the images, hypothesis and stories that we maintain and unknowingly hold onto. These stories are regarding ourselves, our peers, the institution, and all aspects of our surroundings (Fillion et al., 2015). This could also pertain to ideas and stereotypes we hold true to the profession in which someone is in.

Built upon the other disciplines is team learning. Team learning is team knowledge that has been developed and viewed as greater than that of the individual team members. In order to achieve this, each individual member of the team needs to overcome their personal bias to be able to join in with the collective understanding. A key to becoming a learning organization is that the organization learns together, and builds upon their "common thought" (Fillion et al., 2015).

A shared vision is necessary so that teams create a "shared image of the future" (Senge 1994). Creating and maintaining a shared vision allows teams to move away from just approving a vision to true involvement with the vision. (Fillion et al., 2015) True involvement is where this shared image enables everyone to move along the same path under conditions that promote sustained action maximized by the involvement of all stakeholders (Kools and Stoll, 2016). The work done to create a shared vision then drives the development of other critical elements within the learning organization. This vision becomes the foundation for articulating mission statements and core values (Senge 1994).

The fifth discipline, Systems Thinking, ensures that the integration of the others is complete and ongoing because change is contextualized in terms of the whole system.

2.2 Professional learning community

In order to understand professional learning communities, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker conducted extensive research on the topic. Their expertise comes from research mainly focused on kindergarten through 12th grade schools across the United States of America. DuFour and Eaker first introduced the term “professional learning community” in their book *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

The first step in understanding DuFour and Eaker’s professional learning community, is to turn to their definition of each word within the term. A professional is someone that has advanced training or studies in a specific field. A professional holds the responsibility to continue education in order to remain current in their field. The driving force of continuous education is to ensure their knowledge evolves as their profession expands (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Examples of this would be further studies, professional development or coursework.

Learning, in the context of a professional learning community is referring to continuous action and never-ending curiosity within your field of expertise (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). Community suggests that the group is linked by a common interest (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In a community of educators, mutual cooperation, support and personal development is cultivated as each member works together (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). Communities thrive when teamwork is employed to create sustainable and meaningful change that is often more difficult when attempted alone (Riggins and Knowles, 2020).

When all three terms are put together, a professional learning community is defined as a group of educators within one organization who have made a commitment to collaborate in a continuous process of collective inquiry and research. The basis of this collaboration is for students within the organization to meet their potential (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). Professional learning communities are steered by the assumption that improved learning and

opportunities for students stem from ongoing learning for educators (DuFour and Eaker, 2005).

Professional Learning Communities offer learning opportunities and cross-institutional collaboration for multiple stakeholders in a school: teachers, leadership, support-staff and specialty teachers. Professional learning communities offer the ability for members to speak openly about job-related struggles at length with stakeholders. Open communication allows for opportunities for all members to work together to create solutions that will best support the teachers, and as a result positively impact the students (DuFour and Eaker, 2005).

In order for a professional learning community to reach its maximum potential the team within should self-establish standards in which they operate, communicate, and handle conflict. Together, with all stakeholders, the members of a professional learning community should create the goals they hope to accomplish (Lujan and Day, 2010).

Three 'big ideas' drive professional learning communities. A meaningful professional learning community encompasses a **fundamental purpose**, fosters a **collaborative culture** amongst the members, and incorporates **evidence-based success** (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). An educational institution's fundamental purpose can be outline within a mission and vision. The core of a school's fundamental purpose should hold the focus on student learning, and success (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). How students meet the goals outlined in an intuitions' fundamental purpose relies heavily on the effectiveness of all educators within. DuFour and Eaker (2005) see it to be nearly impossible to meet the goals of a fundamental purpose if teachers work in isolation. The leadership team is responsible for building, fostering, and maintaining a community of collaboration within. A collaborative culture ensures that members are interdependent, welcome the ability to learn from and with each other and together feel responsible for student learning. DuFour and Eaker (2005) stress the importance of evidence-based success within teacher practice and learning. Evidence-based success supports stakeholders to understand and determine if students are learning, and if this learning is supporting them in reaching their potential.

In addition to the three overarching ideas that shape a professional learning community, DuFour and Eaker further identified six characteristics within (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). The six characteristics have been outlined below:

- Shared mission, vision, values and goals – all three focus on student learning
- Collaborative culture amongst members
- Collective inquiry into best practice, with a look at the current reality
- Learning by doing
- An everlasting commitment to continuous improvement
- Results-oriented

Each of these characteristics links itself to one of the big ideas (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). The researcher has represented both the big ideas and the six characteristics of a professional learning community in FIGURE 2 below.

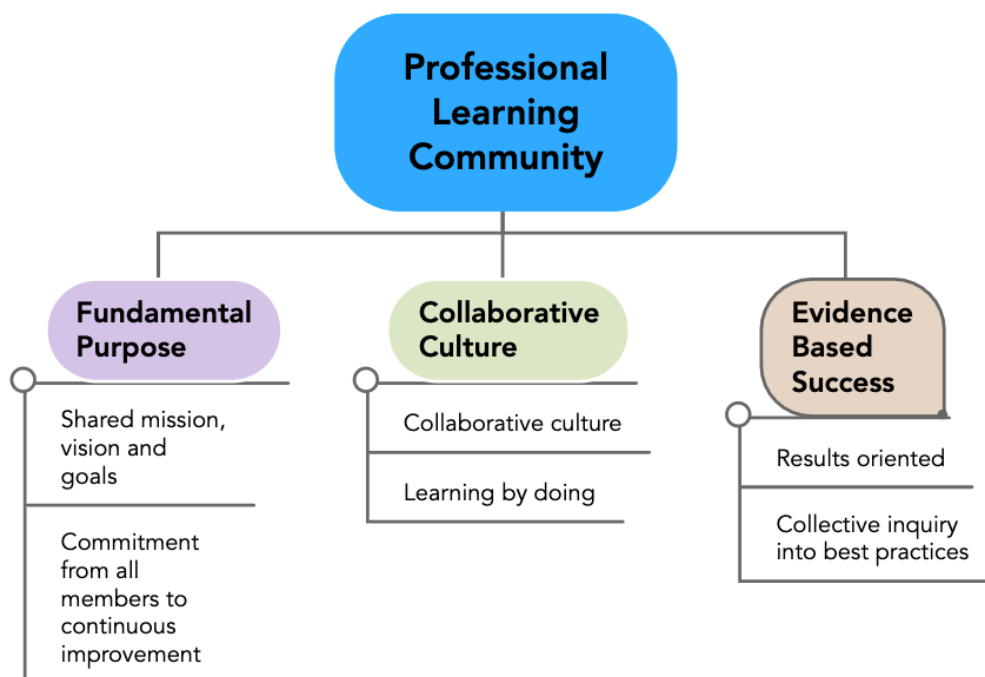


FIGURE 2: An overview of the three big ideas and six characteristics of a professional learning community (DuFour and Eaker, 2005).

Professional learning communities can play the role of a form of ongoing professional development. There are various forms of professional development used in educational institutions. DuFour and Eaker make a clear distinction between faculty meetings and informal conversations with colleagues in a professional learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 2005).

A traditional form of professional development is to have day long trainings that determined days in the academic year (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1998). In the International School setting, it is common to send teachers to conferences and workshops (Thompson et al., 2002). This also rings true in the context of this study. However, due to travel restrictions put in place by the COVID-19 pandemic, online opportunities have become more readily available for teachers.

Although common practice, these day long trainings are not the most effective to encourage continuous learning. This traditional form of professional development can be known as 'sit and get' trainings (Matherson and Windle, 2017). Sit and get trainings refers to trainings where participants attend, are spoken at by the instructor and leave without discussion or ideas of how to implement the strategies into their classroom or school (Matherson and Windle, 2017). Matherson and Windle (2017) stress that professional development needs to move away from its traditional form, as continuous education is multi-dimensional. Professional development should provide educators with the opportunity to create change within an organization and improve the teaching practice of those within (Matherson and Windle, 2017). The urge to move away from 'sit and get' trainings and more towards ongoing open communication and professional learning is the goal of a professional learning community.

2.3 A learning school

In 1990 learning organizational theory came to fruition, followed by DuFour and Eaker's mention of professional learning communities in 1998. Shortly after, Senge published a field book for schools and educators in 2000.

Senge makes the claim that schools cannot deem themselves learning organizations if they choose to send teachers away conferences or off-site workshops. This method does not foster continuous education within an organization and focuses the learning specific to an individual (Senge, 2012).

Despite Senge's definition of a learning organization, schools are unlike corporations which strive to compete for revenue by outperforming competitors for market share and revenue. Instead, schools strive to learn to remain relevant by offering the best possible quality education to students and a supportive work environment for staff. Yet schools are often considered to be institutions that resist change (Senge, 2012).

Senge et al. (2012) states that a school that resembles a learning organization is a learning school. A learning school can be portrayed as an organization that is constantly being re-created and renewed through the learning taking place within (Senge, 2012). All stakeholders within are involved and play a vital role in contributing to the goals and aspirations of the organization. Only through such collaboration with each other can a learning organization develop and meet its full potential. In a learning school, it is vital that leaders, teachers, parents and members of the greater surrounding community see the institution as a vital part of the future. By working together, all parties involved benefit, as the ultimate goal is to learn and this can only be achieved through cooperation (Senge, 2012).

When members of a learning school are able to independently develop and learn together, the organization is able to adapt to new conditions and environments (Kools and Stoll, 2016). It is suggested that practicing the five disciplines of learning organization within the context of a school provides the opportunity to face the challenges and changes within the field of education (Lo, 2004).

A school should act as a stimulating learning environment for students, teachers, leadership and support-staff (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Staff, 2009). The learning environment regards all aspects related to the physical environment, psychological factors within and the relationships held between those within (Pudas, 2009).

Within a learning school, a collaborative culture amongst colleagues is essential for success. This culture includes mutual support, respect and interest in each other. Colleagues within a learning organization should feel comfortable and willing to experiment with new ideas through trustful relationships, as well as give and receive honest feedback to one another. This should go hand in hand with a culture that values teachers work and empowers teachers (Silins et al., 1998).

Having school structures that support professional learning is also essential for the success of a learning school. These structures encourage teachers to participate in the decision-making process within the school, promote collaboration and teamwork, and encourages learning to take place through collaboration rather than isolation (Stevenson, 2001). The physical structure should not be underestimated as it has the ability to provide natural interaction between colleagues within the school.

School leaders bear the responsibility of establishing conditions in which professional learning can take place within the learning school. The role of the school is to assure that professional learning becomes a regular practice amongst the professionals within the school.

2.4 Professional learning communities within a learning organization

Peter Senge notes aspects of organizational learning and team learning in education (Senge, 2012). Senge (2012) highlights the importance of avoiding drive-by staff development, previously described as sit and get trainings. Both sit and get trainings and drive by staff development share a commonality in which experts from outside of the organization personally visit and tell teachers what and how to conduct themselves in practice rather than understanding the context these teachers are working in. By the end of these trainings, teachers often feel overwhelmed with the content and are unsure of how to use this in their everyday practice. As a result, old practices are continued and these new techniques quickly fade.

The three aspects of organizational learning are: guiding ideas, innovations and infrastructure, and theories and methods (Senge, 1994). One of the challenges mentioned regarding team learning in the field of education is the fact that teachers are trained to work independently and become an expert in their own field, instead of encouraged to work together (Senge, 2012). As a result, teachers develop individual communities within their classroom and students are often referred to as “their own.” Although classroom community is essential to learning, this fact alone can create limits for teachers and result in a bias from the teacher (Senge, 2012).

As a result, teachers begin seeing their classroom or a certain group of students in which they interact, as their sole responsibility. As a result, natural limitations occur regarding the way things are done in that specific classroom or with that specific group of students (Senge, 2012). This bias can be avoided if all teachers within a learning organization see the collective group of students as the responsibility of the school.

If professional learning takes place in isolation, this bias of an individual teacher will continue to grow. Professional learning communities within the learning organization have the ability create a natural space for professional learning to become collaborative and for all members to see all students as their responsibility. Teacher educational development should focus on both the development of the individual teacher, as well as the school in which the teacher is working (Senge, 2012). When professional development holds the focus on the school rather than the individual, a sense of community is established.

Senge (2012) highlights three principals implemented by the Uniondale school district that guides professional learning for educators. These principals demand that the professional development should: consider real challenges faced by the school, ensure action learning during the session, require a follow up and involve leadership and community engagement (Senge, 2012).

The goal of professional development that abides by the three principals mentioned above is to improve the capability of the school by providing an opportunity for participants (educators) to learn from each other and foster

collaboration within. Traditional practices of professional development (sit and get) hold the focus on the individual participating in the learning, rather than the collaboration between members of a professional development (Matherson and Windle, 2017).

When analyzing the literature on learning schools, learning organizations and professional learning communities, there is a recurring theme that traditional means of professional development of teachers will not provide much change for the teacher. In order for professional development to be meaningful, the support from the community is necessary (Matherson and Windle, 2017).

Senge, Dufour and Eaker share the idea that there needs to be ongoing development in a safe zone within the organization. A safe zone consists of a community within the organization that meets regularly to learn from each other and work together. This safe space, where teachers can communicate and collaborate acts as a practice arena for its members (Senge, 2012).

In FIGURE 3, the researcher has outlined how each of Senge's learning organization disciplines can be adapted by educators for continuous professional development.

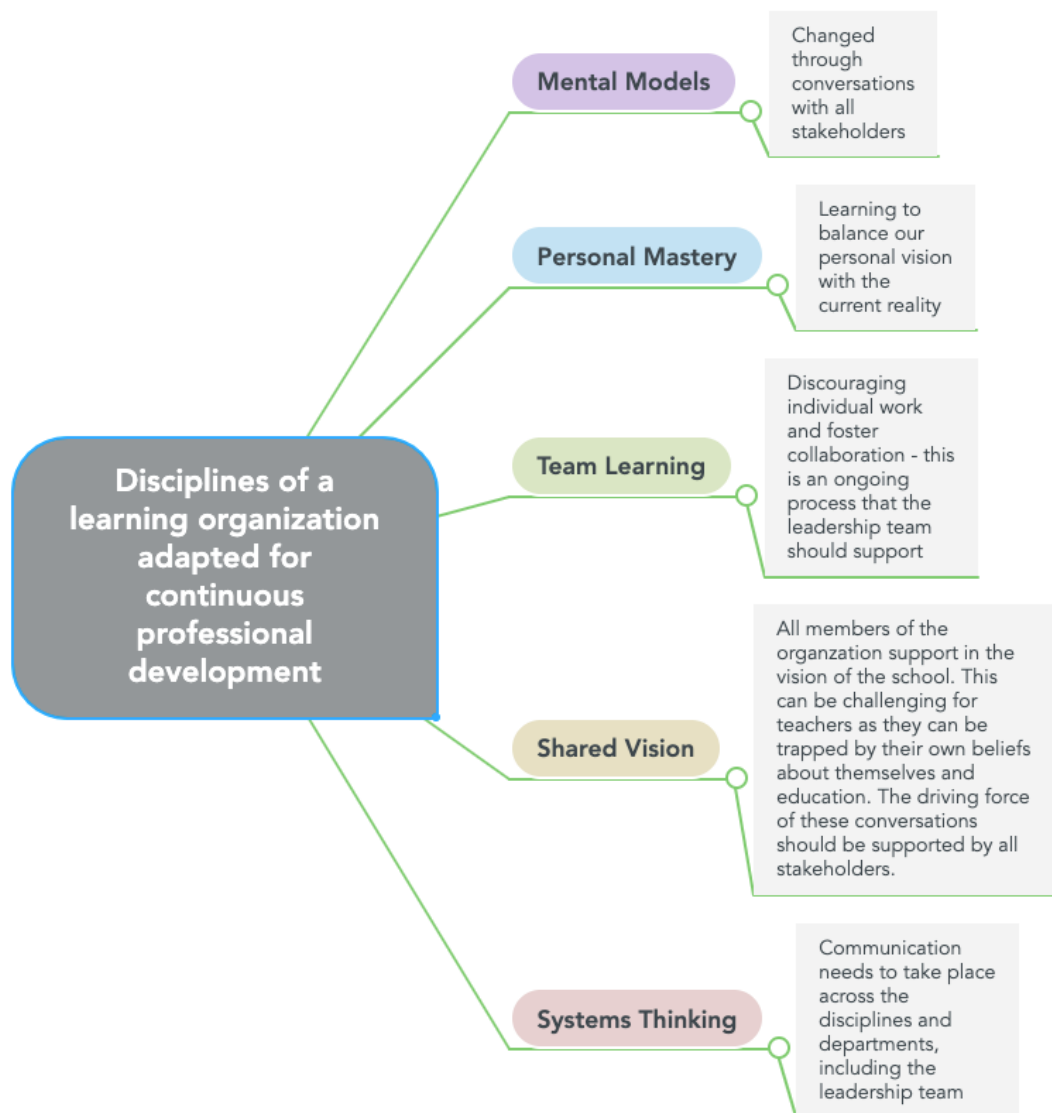


FIGURE 3: The five disciplines adapted for professional learning in a learning school (Senge, 2012).

A professional learning community does not include every stakeholder within the school (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). However, a learning organization does. Examples of those not involved in the professional learning community, but involved in the learning organization would be administrative members such as the IT department, admissions department, and marketing department. In FIGURE 4, the researcher represented the context of a professional learning community within a learning organization.



FIGURE 4: The context of a professional learning community within a learning organization

Professional learning communities stem from Senge's theory of a learning organization. The focus of a professional learning community is on group learning based around student needs and achievement. The group learning fostered in a professional learning community takes place between teachers and in collaboration with leadership (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). A learning organization is a strategy that focuses on the improvement of the overall practice within an entire institution. This improvement within an institution is not limited to sole student achievement or continuous education amongst the teaching staff.

2.5 The context of digital learning

Distance learning, e-learning and online learning are terms that are used frequently in the field of education and are often used interchangeably (Moore et al., 2011). While some of these terms are vague in meaning, there are distinct differences amongst each of them. Distance learning is often used when referring to learning that takes place for those who are distant due to geographical locations (Moore et al., 2011). When researchers use the term e-learning, often

this does not imply that there is live interaction between students and teachers (Moore et al., 2011). E-learning could be delivered with or without access to the internet, while online learning has been recognized as a modern version of distance learning (Moore et al., 2011).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher has chosen to use the terms digital learning and online professional development, as these terms are relevant to the context and are used interchangeably within School X. Digital learning is a general term used to describe a range of instructional practices which incorporate the use of technology and technology-based methods to support learning and instruction (Wheeler, 2012). For this study, the researcher interviewed teachers within School X that took part in various types of online professional development that fit the description of digital learning.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Case school

For this study, the researcher chose to focus on the impact of online professional development on the professional learning community within a learning organization. The learning organization is considered to be School X, and the Professional Learning Community takes place within School X.

For this research, the case school is considered to be a learning organization. Members of the learning organization include all employees of the institution. The five disciplines of a learning organization are modeled throughout the day to day operations of the school. The professional learning community within School X is specific to the teaching staff of the school. As each member of the academic leadership team within School X teaches courses, the leadership team is naturally part of the professional learning community.

The purpose for narrowing this research down to digital trainings is due to the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic and the limitations and drastic adjustments the pandemic has put on professional development within the field of education. A direct consequence of the COVID-19 restrictions within School X was that all professional development were shifted online. Teachers within School X interacted with various providers and platforms for professional development. Platforms and providers included the local Ministry of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education, International Baccalaureate, and inhouse trainings done online through Google Meet. At the time of this research, the professional learning community met weekly online during a full staff meeting, and were not seeing each other in person.

3.2 Methodological approach

This study explores a group of teachers' experiences with digital learning as means for professional development. For this study, the researcher implemented a case study approach. This study is specific to a group of 30 teachers at an

international school in Germany. The goal of this study is to understand the impact that digital learning as a means for professional development has on the professional learning community within the learning organization.

Throughout this study, the researcher collected and analyzed data using qualitative methods with a case study approach. Case study research analyzes people, events, periods of time, or institutions holistically using one or multiple methods (Thomas and Myers, 2015) The researcher is conducting the research within her place of employment. Case studies use multiple approaches, and in this research surveys and interviews were used to reflect the perspectives of each participant. Due to the researcher's employment being at the case institution, this case study is considered a local knowledge case (Thomas and Myers, 2015). For this study, the sample is a group of teachers working at an international school in Germany (School X).

The results of this case study are expected to give indicators as to how digital learning as a means for professional development have or have not impacted the professional learning community within School X. Using a case study approach in education enables the researcher to complete a comprehensive study with a small sample size (Mills et al., 2010).

The case study for this research implemented qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is commonly used in social sciences and educational research in order to understand the reality of a situation or experience (Gillham, 2000). Qualitative methods enable the researcher to view a case from the perspective of those involved, and explore situations where little is known or understood (Gillham, 2000).

3.3 Access to case study population

Access to the research participants was permitted by the leadership team within School X. The thesis topic was discussed with the leadership team before the thesis process began. The researcher presented her thesis topic in a virtual staff meeting and directly sent out a questionnaire to understand how many members

of the professional learning community took part in online professional development. Participation in this research was voluntary and participants did not receive any compensation for participating. In order to participate in the study, participants were asked to give their consent for the interviews to be recorded and analyzed by the researcher. In this consent form, the researchers were informed that all identifying information would be changed so their identity would be protected. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix 1.

3.4 Population of the study

An initial questionnaire was created through Microsoft Forms and sent to members of School X in order to understand how many members of the professional learning community took part in online professional development. The researcher chose to use Microsoft Forms as this platform is familiar to all members within School X and allowed for easy distribution and completion. Due to the restrictions in place at the time of this research, all participants were working from home and were not able to meet as a group on campus. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 2.

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions, six of which were multiple choice and two were open ended. The aim of this questionnaire was to understand the demographics of the participants and identify a sample group. The questionnaire link was e-mailed to all thirty members of School X, thirteen of which completed the form.

This represents 43% of School X's professional learning community population. Possible reasons for a low response rate could be the fact that the researcher is part of the teaching staff or teachers did not feel compelled to complete the survey unless they had taken part in digital learning as a means for professional development. The questionnaire was open for two weeks. Although this was an anonymous questionnaire, participants needed to provide their name if they were willing to be participate in an interview.

An overview of the questionnaire results can be seen in TABLE 1 below. Amongst the teachers that completed the initial questionnaire there were four Germans and nine non-Germans. The majority of the non-Germans originated from countries where English is the primary language, however all participants use English in their workday.

TABLE 1. Demographics of the questionnaire respondents

| Category | Gender | | Nationality | | Department | | |
|------------|--------|------|-------------|------------|----------------|------------------|------------|
| | Female | Male | German | Non-German | Primary School | Secondary School | Leadership |
| Percentage | 62% | 38% | 31% | 69% | 15% | 77% | 8% |

Purposive sampling was used, as this method includes selecting participants who are likely to address the research question efficiently (Blandford, 2016). In order to address the research question efficiently, participants should have had experience with online professional development during the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions in place throughout Germany from March 2020 until the time of the questionnaire, February 2021. As a result, the questionnaire respondents who did not take part in online professional development were excluded from the study.

3.5 Interview participant overview

Of the thirteen respondents to the initial questionnaire, ten were willing to be interviewed. Of the ten willing to be interviewed, only eight had taken part in digital learning as a means for professional development. As the researcher implemented purposive sampling, the two participants who were willing to be interviewed but had not taken part in any online professional development were excluded from the interviews.

Over the course of a two-week time period, the eight participants who took part in digital learning as a means for professional development were able to schedule an appointment with the researcher using an online scheduling tool called Calendly. Calendly is commonly used to schedule meetings in School X. In total,

seven participants scheduled times with the researcher, but only six attended the scheduled interviews. Rescheduling was not possible for one participant as the school was in the midst of a partial reopening and the teacher was part of the reopening plan. TABLE 2 below outlines the demographic distribution of the interview participants.

Out of the six participants, three were male and three were female. Two identified as German, and four identified as non-German. All participants teach in the secondary division of the school. For context, this refers to Grades 5-12.

TABLE 2. Demographics of the interview participants

| Category | Gender | | Nationality | | Department | | |
|------------|--------|------|-------------|------------|----------------|------------------|------------|
| | Female | Male | German | Non-German | Primary School | Secondary School | Leadership |
| Percentage | 50% | 50% | 33% | 67% | 0% | 100% | 0% |

As previously mentioned, part of the school was undergoing a partial reopening. This could be a reason as to why the primary school and leadership team was not represented.

3.6 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out, recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews are best suited for gathering people's perceptions and experiences and bring in the interests of both the researcher and the participant (Blandford, 2016). The participants were asked seven open-ended questions in order to collect qualitative data.

In preparation for the interviews, the researcher prepared a topic guide with example questions (Blandford, 2016). Blandford (2016) suggests researchers prepare a topic guide as they are able to serve as a plan for the researcher, although this was not followed verbatim as some participants brought up topics naturally and prior to when it was outlined in the topic plan (Blandford, 2016).

The early stages of the interview focused on gathering facts and details about the participants' experience with digital learning as a means for professional development, their experience with professional development prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how comfortable they were with digital learning from a student perspective prior to participating in virtual professional development. The last four questions were framed around the characteristics of a professional learning community outline in the theoretical framework of this thesis (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). Themes found in the last four questions that are in line with the theoretical framework are: fundamental purpose, vision, mission, collaborative culture within School X, results-oriented goals, and incorporating collective inquiry into best practices. The topic guide which includes the planned interview questions can be found in Appendix 3.

3.7 Thematic analysis

3.7.1 Become familiar with the data

As the researcher collected the data herself through virtual interviews using Microsoft Teams, time was dedicated to transcribing the interviews. Although Microsoft Teams is able to generate transcriptions when the interviews are conducted in the English language, adequate time was dedicated to cleaning up the transcriptions. During the interview process the researcher noted down some initial thoughts and similarities that were present between the conversations of the research participants.

The transcriptions were triple checked against the recorded video by the researcher in order to ensure accuracy. The researcher edited the transcriptions to protect the identity of the individuals and the institution. Some research participants asked to read over their transcriptions to confirm identity protection. A transcription from one interview is found in Appendix 4. While the researcher was reading and analyzing the transcriptions, she sought out patterns that were present between all interviews. This process acts as the structural framework for the entire analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.7.2 Generate initial codes

Once the researcher became familiar with the data and had a list of ideas about patterns across all transcriptions, the second phase began. Within this phase of the thematic analysis, the researcher began to generate initial codes. The purpose of the codes is to specify features of the data that are interesting or stand out to the researcher. This allows the researcher to group data based on similarities (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As the researcher only had six interviews, she manually coded the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher used various tools for coding which included note taking, highlighting and color-coding. All three techniques were compiled to color-coding on Microsoft Word. An example of a color-coded interview transcript can be found in Appendix 5. The researcher outlined the initial codes in FIGURE 5 below.

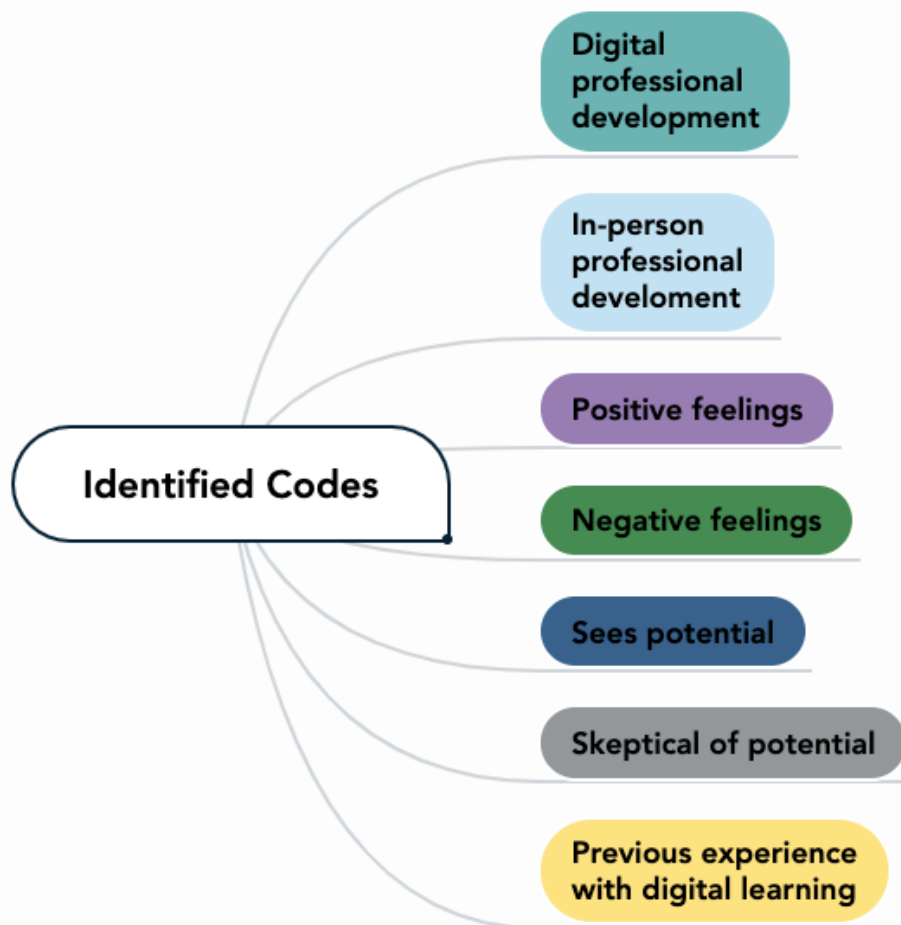


FIGURE 5. Initial codes

3.7.3 Searching for and reviewing themes

When searching for themes within coded text, it is important to look at the codes from the top (Blandford, 2016). By examining the codes from a wider lens, the researcher is able to identify any overarching themes that are present across all six interview transcriptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For this phase, the researcher combined all data within each code to search present for themes. The end result of these two steps of the analysis process does not include identified themes, rather it acts as part of the draft phase of initial themes.

3.7.4 Defining and naming themes

Once the researcher has a preliminary list of themes, a list of final themes will begin to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The final themes in relation to the codes are found in FIGURE 6.

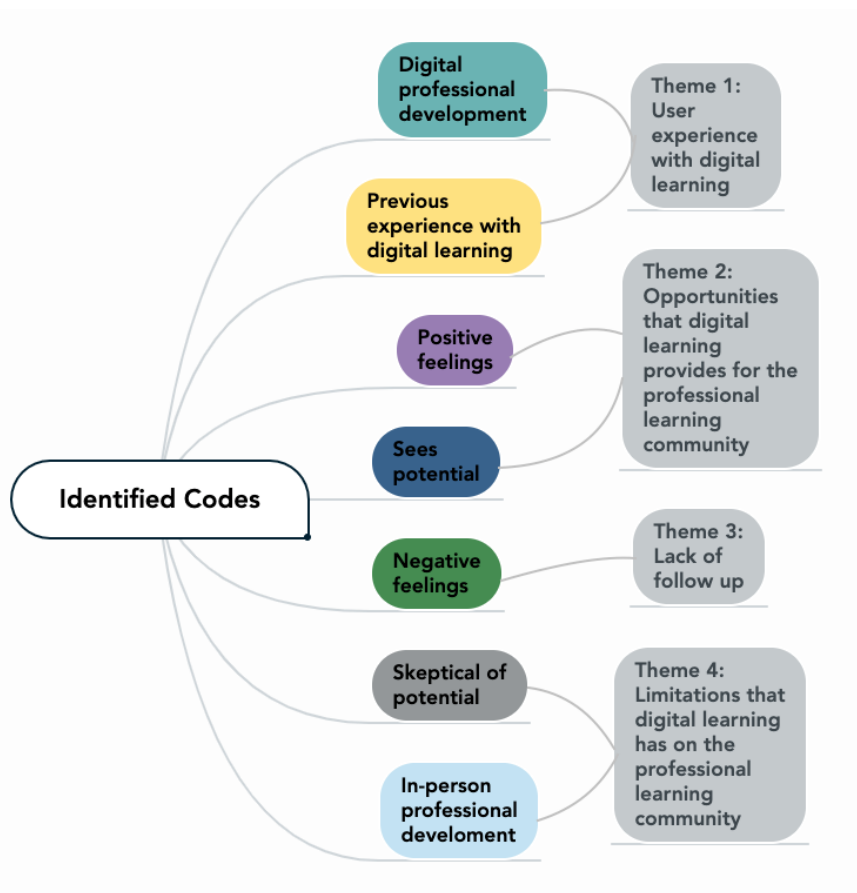


FIGURE 6. Relationship of codes to themes

4 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The data for this study was gathered from six interviews with educators from School X. The research participants have various national backgrounds, teaching experience, and work within diverse departments within the secondary school sector of the case school.

The researcher conducted qualitative research using an inductive thematic analysis. Qualitative research is used to understand the human experience (Braun and Clarke, 2006). More specifically, a thematic analysis is beneficial when the researcher is seeking to understand various perspectives, finding the similarities and differences within, and being able to discover insights that one might not automatically find (Nowell et al., 2017). When considering an inductive thematic analysis, it is essential that the data collected is specifically for the research (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To guide the thematic analysis for this research, the researcher used the six guidelines introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six guidelines include familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As the researcher had a manageable amount of transcriptions, the documents were coded by the researcher herself. Coding was used to find common patterns and themes amongst the six interview transcriptions. In the following section, the researcher will present the data she collected through the lens of the six steps mentioned above.

4.2 Identified themes

In the next section of this chapter, the researcher will present the data within each theme. The themes chosen will be related back to the main research question: how did the use of online professional development impact the professional learning community within a learning organization?

The four themes within the data are:

- User experience with digital learning
- Opportunities that digital learning provides for the professional learning community
- Lack of follow up
- Limitations that digital learning has on the Professional Learning Community

4.3 User experience with digital learning

The research participants were asked to describe their experience with digital learning as a means for professional development through the following statement: Please describe your experience so far with professional development through digital learning. You can give details about which platforms you have interacted with and your experience thus far.

From the responses, all six teachers had experience with digital learning as a means of professional development. There were similarities and differences in the platforms and providers they had interacted with since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The platforms and providers in which the research participants interacted with are outlined in TABLE 3 below:

TABLE 3. Research participant's experience with platforms and programs

| | IB | Harvard Graduate School of Education | Local State Ministry of Education | In-house Professional Development | Publishing Companies |
|---------------|----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Participant 1 | x | x | x | x | |
| Participant 2 | | x | x | | x |
| Participant 3 | x | x | x | | |
| Participant 4 | x | | x | x | |
| Participant 5 | | x | | x | |
| Participant 6 | x | x | x | x | |

In order to understand the research participants previous experience with digital learning from the student perspective prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research participants were asked the question: How comfortable would you say you were using and participating in digital learning (as a student) prior to moving online due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Responses to this question included explicit statements outlining their comfort level as well as specific details as to their experience with digital learning. In TABLE 4, the researcher provides an overview of the research participants previous experience from the perspective of a student with digital learning prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE 4. Research participants previous experience with digital learning, as well as their comfort level with using digital platforms for learning.

| | Participated in Digital Learning as a means for Professional Development | Experienced digital learning through previous degree programs | No previous experience | Generally comfortable | Generally uncomfortable |
|---------------|--|---|------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Participant 1 | | x | | | x |
| Participant 2 | x | x | | X | |
| Participant 3 | | x | | X | |
| Participant 4 | | | x | n/a – did not have previous experience | |
| Participant 5 | x | x | | x | |
| Participant 6 | x | x | | x | |

An in-depth look at direct responses to the question is stated below:

I feel really uncomfortable with the digital, whether that be as student or as teacher. I find it very, very difficult. It seems quite in personable and it doesn't have the same impact that in-person learning has.

I like to think I was pretty comfortable with it just because like even going through grad school, we had a lot of online courses, so there was kind of like a natural thing. So, taking part in professional development online did not seem like a big deal.

I didn't have any experience with learning online prior to having to teach online due to COVID, so that was the first encounter I had with online learning. So at the time I first had to, um, figure out how to teach online. Then I took part in professional development (PD) where I had to learn online.

I have done several of my studies online. They were online even years ago. I did some University studies online. But then it was more watching videos, doing some problems and uploading them, sending them in and watching new videos. No, real live interaction.

I would say I'm fairly comfortable. I think there are lots of different platforms, so sometimes that takes a little bit of figuring out to see how is this set up, Where can I find the resources, how do I overview - so that sometimes takes a little bit to get accustomed to, but as I was completing my student teaching and just University studies prior to that, I had always had online courses, so I was familiar as a student, not necessarily in professional development, but for other work. And so, you just kind of I don't know, start to have an intuition for how to deal with these different platforms.

4.4 Opportunities for the professional learning community

During the interviews, the participants were specifically asked about two of the three pillars of a professional learning community: fundamental purpose and collaborative culture (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The research participants were asked: How do you think digital learning as a means for professional development impacts the fundamental purpose of School X?", and "Do you think digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the collaborative culture within School X?"

When seeking to understand more about the third pillar: evidence-based success, the researcher asked two questions that were more explicit to the sub-pillars of evidence-based success: results orientation and collective inquiry into best practices (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The researcher chose to break the third pillar down into two sub-pillars as she felt the term “evidence-based success” could refer to various topics in the field of education, and the goal of this researcher is specific to the professional learning community within an educational institution.

Specific to the results-oriented goals, the research participants were asked: “To what extent do you believe that digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the results-oriented goals that School X holds for the team?” The second sub-pillar of evidence-based success is specific to collective inquiry into best practices. For this, the researcher asked participants: “To what extent do you think digital learning as a means for professional development incorporates collective inquiry into best practices?”

When research participants answered the four questions mentioned above, a common theme found amongst their answers included opportunities they see in having the option of taking part in digital learning as a means of professional development.

4.4.1 Opportunities for the fundamental purpose

In regards to the fundamental purpose of School X, all research participants mentioned how digital learning as a means for professional development incorporates 21st century learning, and more impactful it puts the teachers in the shoes of the students as the students were learning from home at the time of the interviews. Another opportunity mentioned is how digital professional development allows for teachers within School X to easily connect with teachers throughout the world. One research participant highlights the benefit of this specific to the institution as it is an international school.

Responses that show the research participants' view seeing opportunities in digital learning as a means for professional development are outlined below:

So as a professional whose continuing education, you remember what it's like to have those deadlines and read that content, but you're not really having someone teach it to you in the same way ... I don't think always happens in professional development courses when they are in person.

I think for that it's great to be able to have this online thing where people in our school can interact with various people and bring backgrounds from many different places and many different experiences that wouldn't happen in this local setting.

When I especially look at the vision of the school, we talk about 21st century learning. I don't know (if) there's a better way of describing the 21st century learning than by the digital learning that we've been doing over the past year now. This is now more from a professional view. We are continuing to learn under the circumstances

4.4.2 Opportunities for the collaborative culture

In regards to the collaborative culture within the professional learning community, some participants expressed where they see the opportunity for digital learning as a means for professional development. Two teachers expressed the need for a time and place to meet in order for the collaboration to take a more active role, as the building was not available as often due to pandemic restrictions.

You know, I think I think there's a potential for it but again, I think there needs to be kind of like the time and place where this can be put out there and discussed

No, I do not think it does, but I can see how it could. Because we are in the situation we are in - I mean at the moment we are so physically separated that we do not collaborate like we would if we were in the building. We do not share experiences. We are not in the same space and no one is facilitating for us to

meet and share experiences. So this collaborative culture is - maybe it's on hold because of the pandemic, but it could change if we are at least together

One research participant expressed that the opportunities for the collaborative culture could be emphasized if digital workshops and trainings were taken with a group of teachers from the school, instead of in isolation. This participant expressed how the follow up conversation would encourage collaboration.

More teachers from our school would have to participate in this same PD or in the same session even. Because otherwise nobody knows really what others are talking about, right? If they haven't attended the same meeting”

4.4.3 Opportunities for results-oriented goals

Research participants mentioned less opportunities when it came to the results-oriented goals, however some were evident. Research participants mentioned that some individuals in the professional learning community have more task-oriented goals such as receiving state approval for teaching allowances so digital learning as a means for professional development could support in these goals.

Yes, to some extent because I think one of the school's focus – and what they care about is fulfilling state requirements and all of this online PD counts towards that makes it more convenient.

One research participant narrowed down that digital learning as a means for professional development seems to always focus on the student to teacher connection, rather than the bigger picture goals that the leadership team holds.

I feel- at least the PD sessions that I have participated in were more focused on student teacher interactions rather than the development of – not administrative skills, but like how to do project plans or how to do lesson plans, or develop curriculum... or things like those. It was always more on the teaching side.

4.4.4 Opportunities for collective inquiry into best practices

When researchers were asked about the impact on the collective inquiry into best practices within School X, their responses centered around how professional development can be more tailored to the needs of each teacher rather than traditional professional development that is presented to larger groups of teachers.

I think what's good about this is that it can be so individualized, right? So that my digital learning experience can be so much different and so much varied and different from yours. So I think then coming back together in the end and having an opportunity to share and to discuss, you know, gives a lot more diversity.

A research participant also mentioned how some professional development sessions give the ability to connect with local teachers, and how this expands the connections to the local community.

PD sessions like the ones that I've been talking about over and over again where I met as a group and continued to meet with the same people over an extended amount of time and kind of discussing similar topics. These ones very much help with collective inquiry into best practices because even if it's if it's not the teachers from your own school in that group they kind of just show the way that you can discuss topics relating your own work and the work of others. Kind of comparing and helping each other to improve who are located and working with the same curriculum.

4.5 Lack of follow up

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was lack of follow up after taking part in digital learning as a means for professional development. This theme emerged amongst the coded responses regarding negative feelings when asked the about their experience with professional development prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, or when describing the various platforms and providers they used to access professional development. Five out of the six participants who had in

person experience with professional development expressed how the follow up aspect was missing when taking part in digital professional development. Research participants responses are outlined below:

The only point of discussion would be something like responding to another colleague post on a message board, but for the most part, especially, the state training is lecture based, so it's quite literally logging on by yourself and listening to someone talk to you, and then you log out after an hour and a half.

Communicating what I've learned or giving it, you know, spreading my wisdom is something that's missing. So, everybody's doing their own PD, and I feel the same thing like I'm doing my own PD, and some of them have great things coming out of them. Through some of these workshops I learn valuable stuff, but I think there's some missing link of like me learning this and then talking about it. Or even bringing it into the community at school.

Yeah, I think a lot of the benefit that people get out of the professional development in person is actually through interactions with others in the same situation. And online professional development doesn't have that same kind of organic feel of bouncing ideas off of each other outside of the content, which is often content that can be found without a professional development. The kinds of more applicable things don't come up in an online setting.

One of the struggles I have being online is that you cannot look at someone's work at the table and see what they're doing. If you are a bit lost, you don't have this - This thing that you get in a classroom where you can get a lot of feedback from other people without them necessarily talking to you, but you can see what they are doing. And now you are much more alone when you take part in online PD.

You're interacting with these other people, but you don't know really who they are from what they look like, how they talk. So, it can be difficult to have organic conversations.

4.6 Limitations for the professional learning community

As previously mentioned, research participants were asked questions specific to the three pillars of a professional learning community (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). In regards to the fundamental purpose, participants were asked: “How do you think digital learning as a means for professional development impacts the fundamental purpose of School X?”

To gain insight on the impact digital learning as a means for professional development has on the collaborative culture of the learning organization, research participants were asked: “Do you think digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the collaborative culture within School X?”

Finally, in regards to the evidence-based practices, the researcher asked questions directed towards the to the sub-pillars of evidence-based success. The two questions were: “To what extent do you believe that digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the results-oriented goals that School X holds for the team?” and “To what extent do you think digital learning as a means for professional development incorporates collective inquiry into best practices?”

Just as opportunities was a recurring theme among participants, the responses also included a recurring theme of limitations. The researcher has broken down the participants’ responses in regards to each of the four questions mentioned in this section.

4.6.1 Limitations on the fundamental purpose

When discussing the impact that digital learning as a means for professional development has on the fundamental purpose with the research participants, aspects of social and emotional learning were mentioned. One research participant expressed how the digital means in which professional development is offered feels contradictory to one of the fundamental pillars of School X’s

mission. Although social emotional learning is not explicitly stated in the mission and vision of the school, this research participant considers it to be part of the fundamental purpose.

I think with the mission it's a bit more difficult. Um, because even though it's not necessarily explicitly stated in our mission statement and one of the core tenants of the approach that we're trying to have here I see is on like a social and emotional approach to teaching and learning and one of the one of the things we've been bumping into during the lockdown is understanding how to do that with the digital medium through which we are teaching and learning and that kind of acts as (a) barrier or distance between teachers and students.

Two participants mentioned how they feel isolated or alone when taking part in professional development, and they feel this is not in line with the School X's mission and vision.

I feel like so far, a lot of the PD I'm doing is kind of like in isolation.

I'm looking also at the vision statement, you know it's saying individual achievement in a caring community is what we're trying to achieve a balance in. Sometimes with online courses especially self-paced ones, you feel like you're alone.

Two participants mentioned the approaches used in professional development are often contradictory to the mission and vision of the school. As a result, teachers are learning the exact opposite way in which the school approaches teaching.

For example, when I did the IB DP development they were trying to teach us all about how to be creative with the methods that we're using and how to really engage every student or pick every student up where they are with their learning while doing the exact opposite with their professional development. We had this forum and there it was really just "read this, and extract X information from Y video text and whatever" while they were teaching us to be more creative with the tools that we are using.

So it has when I look at the mission and vision, I would say that of course a 21st century minded person as one of them... But the PDs I have attended were not necessarily 21st century focused in that sense, so I think it's much more of a technical and experience-based thing.

4.6.2 Limitations on the collaborative culture

When considering the limitations brought into the professional learning community, specifically regarding the collaborative culture, research participants expressed that the small size of the school's departments limits the amount possible collaboration.

I would say that might be because we have very small department's per subject to collaborate with.

This participant also mentioned how the teacher schedules does not allow for collaboration to happen. It should be mentioned that during the time of the interview, Germany was in a lockdown and all members of the professional learning community were working from home.

It's not really something that is built into our schedule at the moment to have department meetings and collaborate with others

A participant mentioned how the nature and setup of some professional development sessions were not designed for participants to collaborate, so this automatically limited how everyone in the session would interact with each other.

I think the workshop experiences that I've had through either Harvard or like the state ministry here have not been very collaborative. For some of them all you do is log in and log out

Lastly, a participant mentioned how the nature of the situation and all that comes with the COVID-19 pandemic acts as a limitation on the collaborative culture. This

participant stated that collaborating with colleagues is not the focus at the moment, as teachers are in survival mode to simply maintain an acceptable standard of education.

I think there is a time pressure right now to just get stuff done and deliver so many classes in such a weird situation where we don't know how it's going to develop is making it difficult to want to try anything new or anything creative.

4.6.3 Limitations on results-oriented goals

When discussing the limitations caused by digital learning as a means for professional development related to results-oriented goals, a majority of the research participants mentioned that the goals of various professional development sessions were unclear. As a result of unclear goals, participants did not feel the sessions they were taking part in connected to the individual and team goals of the professional learning community.

The professional development experiences digitally done here have become more collaborative, but they actually end up becoming more of the conversations. They become open ended conversation, so there's not necessarily a goal in mind going into the conversations there's less of a direction and therefore it's hard to say whether any of the conclusions are like the results of those conversations or the conclusions or the results that the leadership team wants.

It depends on what kind of digital learning I engage in - is it just to click checkboxes and get my hours in to fulfill a certain requirement? Or is it actually something I'm interested in that connects with the goals set for me? What is the goal of each PD session?

4.6.4 Limitations on the collective inquiry into best practices

In the final sub-pillar of a professional learning community, one participant mentioned how the digital medium in which the professional development takes

place limits the collective inquiry into best practices. This is due to his own personal discomfort with digital learning.

I do think that you will always be missing something through a digital medium. Like I said. I personally don't feel comfortable digitally and that will always stand in the way of the impact on the collective inquiry

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to answer the question: how did the use of online professional development impact the professional learning community within a learning organization? Although the results of the study were inconclusive, the results did highlight opportunities and limitations that should be considered when members of a professional learning community are utilizing online professional development. These limitations and opportunities should be considered by all members of the professional learning community, especially the leadership team, and should serve to highlight the potential impact such limitations and opportunities will have on the learning organization.

The researcher employed qualitative research for this case study. Blandford (2016) states that qualitative research often provides interesting and unexpected findings. The results of this study will be useful, as online professional development continues to be used within the School X due to the restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. If and how online professional development is used after the pandemic is unknown, but it is likely considering how convenient research participants found it to be.

The results of this study highlight both limitations and opportunities that digital learning as a means for professional development has on the professional learning community. From the data analysis, it is evident that each research participant had a unique user experience with digital learning based on their familiarity with digital learning. Participants also had varied experiences with professional development depending on which platforms the research participants interacted with. However, a common theme amongst all platforms is the lack of discussion during the professional development as well as the lack of follow up afterwards. In the next section of this chapter, the researcher uses the data analysis to provide recommendations for School X.

5.1 Recommendations

Each research participant highlighted a unique experience with online digital learning. Their experiences were based on previous experience with digital learning from the student perspective, as well as their experience and outlook on teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. If online professional development is meant to be accessible to all teachers, it should be considered that not all teachers will have the same level of comfort with online platforms. To ensure that all teachers can benefit from online professional development, the comfort levels should be assessed and considered by members of the professional learning community and support should be made available to assist teachers that are not as familiar and comfortable with online learning from the student perspective. Although all teachers within the professional learning community of Company X have become familiar with teaching online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it cannot be assumed that everyone has the same experience with learning online.

When focusing on the first pillar of a professional learning community, the fundamental purpose (1998), participants said their participation in digital learning from the perspective of the students helped them understand what the students were going through during the lockdowns and in turn shaped the way they delivered content. However, contradictory to the fundamental purpose of the school, social and emotional aspects are lacking in digital professional development. Other participants felt isolated and alone, which is contradictory to the fundamental purpose of the institution.

The fundamental purpose of School X holds its focus on high levels of learning and how effective teachers are instructing their students is also a key aspect (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). If participants themselves feel the social and emotional aspect of professional development is lacking, it can be expected that it is lacking in their teaching. By ensuring the members of the professional learning community are connected to each other, their teaching practice will reflect this (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). If School X continues to use online professional development opportunities as a means for professional development, it would be beneficial if the teachers participating were able to feel

connected to other participants in the sessions. This could be achieved by narrowing down professional development providers.

Research participants highlighted the potential to expand the collaborative culture by using online professional development to connect with teachers around the world. While this is an opportunity that comes by implementing digital learning as a means for professional development, the collaborative culture needs to remain strong within the organization to best enhance the professional learning community (Zee and Koomen, 2016). If online professional development is to continue being used in School X, it would be beneficial for teachers to participate as a group, or host follow up sessions to pass the learning onto teachers within a department. This would avoid traditional methods of professional development that tend to take place in schools, otherwise known as sit-and-get development (DuFour and Eaker, 2005). By creating micro-groups that participate in the same professional developments, the likelihood for collaboration to take place amongst participants is increased. This collaboration time will likely not be built into the professional development itself, rather time needs to be allotted for this collaboration to take place. The leadership team must recognize the importance of this collaboration time and hold members of the professional learning community accountable (Riggins and Knowles, 2020).

Online professional development allows for teachers to meet individual goals that they have set for themselves, or are set in collaboration with the leadership team. When understanding the opportunities that online professional development has on the results-oriented goals of the professional learning community, participants highlighted that online professional development seems to focus on smaller, task-oriented goals, rather than larger scale goals. This could be due to the fact that there is little collaboration and community within online professional development. However, if School X is to continue with online professional development it is recommended that the leadership team is aware that larger goals are not being met by online professional development. If School X were to only rely on online professional development, it is possible that big picture goals such as curriculum development would not be fostered, and as a result this will have long term effects on the growth and development of the learning organization.

Regarding the evidence-based practices piece of a professional learning community, participants mentioned that the ability to tailor professional development to the needs of individual teachers became more available through online professional development. In order for professional development needs to be effective, it should be meaningful for educators (Siko and Hess, 2014). However, teachers would benefit from understanding the ultimate goal of the professional development. This could be determined in partnership with the leadership team or with departments within the school. When setting these goals with members of the professional learning community, the leadership team and teachers should be aware that not all teachers are equally comfortable with participating in online learning opportunities. Therefore, additional support might need to be provided based on the individual needs of teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic made online professional development a reality for teachers within School X. It is recommended that School X continues to use online professional development in combination with in person, as it provides teachers with flexibility to attend professional development based on individual interests. When continuing with online professional development, the recommendations listed in this section will enable meaningful professional development and could have a positive impact on the professional learning community within School X.

5.2 Limitations

A number of limitations should be considered when reviewing this research. The researcher employed a case study approach, and it should be reiterated that the sample within the case organization was small. This study represents the lived experiences of 20% of the members within School X. In all case study research, the results are specific to the case company and should not be used to generalize the impact of all online professional development on professional learning communities. When the case company is considering the results of this study, it is important to highlight that only members of the secondary school were research participants.

The research participants interacted with various platforms, and had varied experiences with each platform. Some of the platforms are specific to the state in which the case company operates in. As teaching and learning was taking place online, the research participants were likely to be spending an adequate amount of time online. Their feelings about online professional development, and their experience with these trainings could be influenced by this.

At the time of this research, the research participants were experiencing a shift in their job responsibilities as Germany was moving in and out of lockdown. At the start of the study, the staff was teaching in school where it was possible to physically meet teachers to have informal conversations. During the time of the interviews the teachers had been in lockdown for nearly two months, and were working from home. The shift in their location could impact their experience with digital learning.

The researcher is also a part of the professional learning community. The leadership team encouraged the research to take place, however all communication with potential participants came directly from the researcher. As the researcher is part of the professional learning community, this could impact how open and honest the research participants were with their answers.

5.3 Further research and development

This study employed qualitative research to understand the lived experiences of teachers taking part in online professional development at one international school in Germany. Research participants interacted with various platforms such as HGSE, IB, and one specific to the context of the school. To further develop this study, it could be limited to the teachers experiences with only one platform.

This research was also carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic and Germany was in the midst of transitioning in and out of its second lockdown. The transitions between lockdowns had an impact on school closures and the research participants' place of work. It is likely that the research participants' experiences

would be different if they would had been able to meet in-person and interact in the school. Further research on this topic could be conducted where the learning environment is not changing, and members of the professional learning community have consistency.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Participant Consent Form

To name of research participant,

You are invited to participate in an interview for my thesis study which focuses on professional development through digital platforms, and the impact it has on the professional learning community. This interview is being conducted as part of my thesis research for my M.B.A. in Educational Leadership at Tampere University of Applied Sciences in Finland. This interview is part of the data collection process.

Title of the study: *Using digital learning as a means for professional development: exploring the impact it has on a professional learning community within a learning organization.*

Researcher: Anna Elizabeth Bruns

Background information: As a participant in this qualitative study you will be asked about your experiences with digital learning as a means for professional development since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact these have had on the professional learning community within the case company.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Anna Bruns via e-mail at ...

Research procedures: The interview consists of seven open-ended style questions and is estimated to take no more than 30 minutes to complete. The interview will take place using Microsoft's web-conferencing software: Microsoft Teams. Each interview will be recorded to allow the researcher to analyse the data.

Risks and benefits of participation: There are no known risks by participating in this study.

Compensation: There are no monetary benefits for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: All participant data and identifying information will be kept confidential. The researcher will edit the transcriptions to maintain confidentiality of you and the intuition. The motive for confidentiality ensures that all your information is protected and you are able to openly share your understanding and experiences with the researcher.

Voluntary nature of the study: Participation in this study is voluntary. You are able to decide within the interview that you would no longer like to participate. If you chose to remove yourself from the study before, during or after the interview, there will not be any consequences.

Withdrawal: If you want to withdraw at any time, please email me at ...

Statement of consent: I have read and understand this consent form, and I hereby give my consent to participate in this interview.

The interviewer has the right to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Participant's name: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix 2. Initial survey questions

digital learning as a means for professional development - questionnaire

The following voluntary questionnaire is intended to collect data regarding the impact that digital learning as a means for professional development has had on the professional learning community at

The results will be part of an MBA in Educational Leadership which I am pursuing at Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland, and will be available online upon completion.

Please answer the questions as they relate to you, as a professional at

If you would be willing to be interviewed as part of this research, please include your name and contact e-mail address at the end.

All data collected will be handled anonymously for academic research purposes only.

The estimated completion time is about 5 minutes.

Section 1

...

1. Please select your gender *

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary

2. Please state your nationality *

3. Please select your age range *

- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60

4. What best describes your role at ISC *

- Primary School Teacher (1-4)
- Secondary School Teacher (5-12)
- Leadership team member
- Support Staff Member

Section 2

Please respond to the following statements in terms of how they apply to your experience of participating in digital learning as a means for professional development since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please consider all options of professional development that you have taken part in online - this could be through the IB, Harvard Graduate School of Education, or the state-approved platform. If you took part in others, please describe them below.

*Digital learning as a means for professional development is referring to courses, workshops or seminars that have taken place virtually

5. I have taken part in digital learning as a means for professional development since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *

- Yes
- No

6. Please select the platforms you have interacted with *

- Harvard Graduate School of Education
- programs offered through ministry of education
- I.B.
- Other
- n/a - I did not take part in professional development

7. Are you willing to be interviewed about your experience with digital learning as a means for professional development? *

- Yes
- No

8. If yes, please provide your name. I will be in touch with you by the end of this week.

Enter your answer

Appendix 3. Topic guide for interviews

1. Please describe your experience so far with digital learning as a means for professional development. You can give details about which platforms you have interacted with and your experience thus far.
2. What was your experience with professional development prior to the COVID-19 pandemic? (Virtual or in-person)
3. How comfortable would you say you were using and participating in digital learning as a student prior to moving online due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. When considering the fundamental purpose of School X, (our vision & mission) – describe how digital learning as a means for professional development has impacted them.
5. How do you think digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the collaborative culture within School X's professional learning community?
6. To what extent do you believe that digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the results-oriented goals that School X holds for the team?
7. To what extent do you think digital learning as a means for professional development incorporates collective inquiry into best practices?

Appendix 4. Example transcription of an interview

Interviewer: *Please describe your experience so far with professional development through digital learning you can get details about which platforms you have interacted with and your experience with those platforms.*

Interviewee 6: I've had several experiences with digital learning for professional development specifically

I believe the first one was for the International Baccalaureate program. They, I believe use their own platform. I don't even know what it's called anymore. On their it tends to be like a monthlong program, in which the instructor uploads content per week. It's not something that has live lessons that you need to stream at a certain time. So you can work self-paced through the content.

The most interaction that you have with other participants is through discussion boards. And I believe to think about this, they break up the cohorts for you, so you have smaller groups to discuss with, so you're not in a group with maybe different participants all trying to respond to each other, but a smaller group with, I think about eight people, and that can change every week, so you have some contact with different learners in the platform or in the course. So that was one.

I have some experience with the Harvard Graduate School of Education and they use canvas. That was the first time that I worked with that. There was a similar setup (to the IB) where it was a two-week course. You had content listed per week that you had to read through or watch a video for. Some of it was recorded content from the instructor and some of it was, you know, other resources, videos or. Clips that were found from other resources online and then you also had to respond individually to some questions that were submitted to the instructor and others that were more of like an online discussion board.

With that I have no idea how many students were in the entire course, but you were broken up into cohorts of about - I want to say something like 12 to 15 people and you remain with them for the whole duration of the course.

And the last one that I had experience with is offered through the local state authorities. They use. Adobe Connect and those are about 90-minute seminars that you can sign up for. They offer different ones every month I've attended, oh, must be 6 or so of them and they do happen as a live stream at a specific time.

And it is for English language, which is my course that I teach. However, they are all given in German, so you have to know the language to be able to participate in them. And those do not have like a video recording but they have an instructor who is speaking. And then you're following a presentation that they're presenting and they deal with all sorts of different concepts, for example: how to introduce vocabulary to second language learners, using technology and other specific learning apps or websites in the classroom, ways to get kids talking in the lower levels when they don't have as much content knowledge... What else have I had with them? Reading strategies for comprehension also with the lower level learners who don't have as much vocabulary to deal with, so that has been my experience in the past 3-4 years.

I don't know if I have a specific favorite for it's like live or work at your own pace. But I like trying out a range of different ones.

Interviewer: *Ok, so you mentioned that this has been your experience during the last 3-4 years. Have you had an increase of online PD during the pandemic and have you had experience with in person PD prior to the COVID- pandemic?*

Interviewee: Yes, to both questions so I did have experience online prior at the time before covid. However, I wasn't working as a full-time teacher, so that was also part of the reason why I probably didn't have as much contact in person, but I did have some and it was partially in person.

Some of it was also online, but since the pandemic started and I have been logging hours for professional development, it's definitely increase as far as how much of that is online and with this local authority state courses I think normally those are offered in person is my understanding, but they have kind of shifted everything to be on line, which I find very convenient cause you have people from all over the state and you have to physically travel anywhere to get there. So yes, it has 100% it has increased and it's definitely there are definitely more digital options.

Interviewer: *How comfortable would you say you were using and participating in digital learning from the student perspective prior to moving online due to the COVID- pandemic?*

Interviewee: I would say I'm fairly comfortable. I think there are lots of different platforms, so sometimes that takes a little bit of figuring out to see How is this set up, Where can I find the resources, How do I overview - so that sometimes takes a little bit to get accustomed to, but as I was completing my student teaching and just University studies prior to that, I had always had online courses, so I was familiar as a student, not necessarily in professional development, but for other work. And so, you just kind of I don't know, start to have an intuition for how to deal with these different platforms.

Interviewer: *When you consider the fundamental purpose of the case school, describe how digital learning as a means for professional development has impacted them or could potentially impact them.*

Interviewee: At the moment I think it's hard to see the impact because we are still online and not back to working and interacting in person. But I think it would definitely have an impact, and it doesn't mean that all professional development needs to be online, but I think you remember what it's like to be in the kids position, because I think I see like in their in their vision. They talk about, you know, being a 21st century international education, well, you're definitely going to be in integrating technology in the classroom and then specifically with the pandemic.

That's more or less what you're relying on. So as a professional who's continuing education, you. Yeah, you remember what it's like to have those deadlines and read that content, but you're not really having someone teach it to you in the same way.

It was self-paced learning and I think a mix of having like live instruction and then the resources that you can always refer back to is the best way to do it.

I don't know if that always happens in professional development courses themselves, but I think that's something as a teacher that you should try to keep in mind that you're going to need those kids who need you know to see your face and to see the way that you explain it. And an and have that sort of connection and not just always say "Here's the text, read it and you could submit it online."

So that's one aspect that comes to mind right away. And I think if I'm looking also at the vision statement, you know it's saying individual achievement in a caring community is what we're trying to achieve a balance in. Sometimes with online courses especially self-paced ones, you feel like you're alone. You're interacting with these other people, but you don't know really who they are from what they look like, how they talk. So it can be difficult to have organic conversations. And I I think that's something that our school has been doing OK with when we have our own PD, given the situation.

With having the online lessons that everybody has to be there that you turn your cameras on an you realize that there are other people that you've already built relationships with. Who are in this with you as well.

Interviewer: *Do you think digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the collaborative culture within School X's professional learning community?*

Interviewee: That is very difficult question, I think. So if I break it down a little bit with the IB division, yes, because there is a very clear cut curriculum and as a foreign language teacher I have contact with other foreign language teachers in our building, so that is helpful because you can use tips that you might have had from one workshop and discuss them with your colleagues and they have something else and you just adapt it for your language. So, in that sense, yes, and you can always- always find people to collaborate with across the world for IB on like Facebook groups and other platforms, or with them within the professional development courses online as well. So in that sense, yes.

Within the school itself I would say it sometimes feels a little bit like you're trying to log hours for your individual, whatever you want to call it score sheet like "I have done this and now I get my teaching allowance from the state" and it's not really something that is ever discussed about what sort of content we've had.

I would say that might be because we have very small department's per subject to collaborate with but on the other hand, it's not really something that is built into our schedule at at the moment to have department meetings and collaborate with others.

So if I choose to do that, it's more out of my own volition rather than something that's expected or integrated into how we collaborate in the school. Perhaps the conversation piece is lacking because we aren't physically in the building to have more off the record conversations.

Interviewer: *Ok, so you said in the IB there's definitely there is some sense of collaboration. What would need to happen in order for the collaboration for PD did happen online and the collaboration to take place on campus through all departments of the school?*

Interviewee: I think a lot of that has to do with having common input, so for example, if you have a PD day that the whole staff school participates in, then you're dealing with the same content and you have something to reflect on and collaborate as a group on.

Whereas if it's something that's more subject specific it maybe it also has to be required. This like OK, all the English teachers are going to end this professional development course and then you have a chance to talk about it.

I can see where there might be push back on that because people say oh, it doesn't fit in my schedule or that's not something that interests me, so I get that professional development also should be a bit of an individual interest you pursue because a lot of times when there are these organized events for the whole staff to partake in there, like I didn't feel I really needed that where I didn't find that super helpful or whatever

And I think especially because we're still, still building our curriculum. For English language as a second language in in Germany with English It's very flexible and what you can cover as far as content is concerned, and if you had like for example with this Harvard Course that I took where it was about culturally responsive literature, which sounds perfect for an International School, but you never had a chance to talk about like what sort of texts are we going to pick and say this is the curriculum. These are the books or the authors that we're going to read and of course there's room for flexibility, but right now it kind of feels like every teacher just picks with they like.

And then if that teacher chooses to leave the school, or for whatever reason is no longer there, then the next year it's completely different set of texts and so it's not really building on, you know, as a group. Was this culturally responsive literature? Or was it just Teacher X's is favorite author?.... So we read that when she's teaching sort of thing.

Or with like strategies like there are lots of strategies with foreign language learning that are old-fashioned and aren't really academically or scientifically proven to work but they are sometimes used because that's how we were taught a second language, and so like we said, OK, this is how we're going to teach listening comprehension as a school.

That would be really helpful, but it's kind of like you just don't know teach your own teacher strategies how you want, and then when they get a new teacher, maybe it's done differently. I think there needs to be a follow up in the departments after any digital professional development takes place. It feels like it happens more naturally when pd happens in person.

Interviewer: *Alright, do you feel that digital learning as a means for professional development contributes to the results-oriented goals that School X holds for its team?*

Interviewee: Yes, I would generally agree with that. I think it's helpful as an International School to connect with others digitally because there simply aren't that other that many other opportunities around us. If we were at a typical German school, maybe I would find in person workshops more helpful because I know local schools that I could connect with. I know local teachers everybody follows the similar curriculum, but because we're International I think being able to talk to people from all over the world is very helpful.

And as I already mentioned about, you know, putting yourself in the place of your students - What is it like to to learn online?

I just think it's helpful to maybe bring in some different ideas. People have a lot of different backgrounds, maybe in the UK they learn this strategy. In Australia they learn this strategy and they're quite likely different to what is taught in Germany.

But even as an American just to have different strategies about how things are approached, how students are divided based on ability or age or whatever that's helpful to think about.

Interviewer: *To what extent do you think digital professional development incorporates collective inquiry into best practices?*

Interviewee: I think in general one pro for digital professional development is that you can kind of schedule it more easily than if you have to drive somewhere or get a hotel for something so that just makes it more likely that people are going to participate in PD more often.

And as far as it being a collective inquiry, this is I mean part of it happens a bit organically when you have, you know, let's sit down as a group and talk about this and then people have their different backgrounds that they're bringing into it. So yes, in that sense.

If it was to be measured like as a correlation very specifically, then I think it would have to be something that the staff takes part in as a whole group to say that it shared as far as this best practice but I don't want to suggest that every single PD has to be like a full staff because I think it can happen a bit organically when you have a chance to collaborate.

I think that's the intention with the second half of the staff meetings that we have I think sometimes it's like what do they mean by collaboration? Is it like getting a task done or is it like checking in about anything that you have on your own to-do list? Or is it more planning in terms of like curriculum or just discussing best practices, and I think maybe having that like your breakdown collaboration into these specific focuses that people know very much what they're supposed to accomplish, and then that might make it more realistic that best practices are actually put into practice and not just talk about and agreed upon. And then you still separate into your own thing.

Because I think we can say we have collaboration time, and we probably do discuss best practices at the beginning of every school year that that seems what to be what comes up and we all agree on different things or building relationships and social emotional learning.

And then it kind of, I don't want to say it filters out because it doesn't stop, but it seems that it's maybe not as unified or clear of a focus because we our focus' are shifted to assessment or curriculum building.

Appendix 5. Example of codes in use

| Interview #5 | Date & Duration |
|---|---|
| Color & Code | Research Participant Response |
| <p>Digital Professional Development</p> | <p>So this from this group that I had the first PD session with a few of those people came together as a group to develop together under the lead of someone from the local authorities and it was organized through the state department. It was kind of different methods that you could use during online learning that make the classroom more interactive even though we cannot really interact directly with each other the way we know how to.</p> <p>We were trying to find ways to still interact over online platforms like Google Meet - like we've been using GC I think it's called in that group or other people have been using Adobe or whatnot. Different platforms and how you can use them to make learning more interactive.</p> <p>Then online I had the IB DP one. Is it called category one? I think it's called Category One training where we learned about what the DP program in the IB is.</p> <p>over some kind of a forum where there where different threads that you could type your answers into, or where you could comment on what other people had written and where you would get tasks that you were to provide answers to and discuss every week for four or five weeks.</p> <p>And then I've been participating in different online seminars I guess is what you would call those - provided by an external company that makes Managebac or Atlas.</p> <p>And that was more for a bigger audience where teachers and administration of schools provided information on methods that they have been using to teach physics digitally, for example, or how to do social emotional learning? Maybe that's the direction that was that was going in... like how do you build student relationships over Google Classroom and google meet things like those.</p> <p>So more an introduction of tools were then there was a platform provided with the teachers participating in could share the tools that they've been using.</p> <p>Yeah, and then we had the in house PD session where there was a bigger discussion about what every teacher has been doing in terms of SEL content during the whole online.</p> |

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| In-Person Professional Development | <p>one bigger PD session where it was a meeting of the whole day, we were developing kind of methods to use in the science classroom. We would develop a whole project about plastics how we encounter them in our every day will life, and what impact they have on the environment and then kind of how to counteract that and how to make students aware of the problem. And as I said, we spent a whole day I'm working on that.</p> <p>After Corona had calmed down a little bit, I had another in person meeting also through the state authorities where we talked about different ways of assessing student work other than tests - writing tests where we met and kind of there was no discussion really. It was like somebody teaching us how to design that kind of, um, I would call it an essay.</p> <p>Maybe a longer essay in Germany, would call it a homework.... like a home essay that you take home and that is maybe 20 pages long or something so it could be done as a group work or not and how all of that works with distancing and everything but the PD was in person.</p> <p>Yeah, prior as I said I only had this one bigger PD seminar I guess where we met for a whole day to develop kind of this project that you could do in science</p> |
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**Positive
Feelings**

I feel like if we were to continue doing online teaching, taking the role of an online student really helps to gain perspective on the experience that our students have.

So also, negative examples are examples in that case showing me how not to do online teaching.

But that's something that I often think is a good idea is if there's a group of people providing a PD session because then you have different opinions or insights from different people.

And in this case, it was two people and three regulars, including me that attend all of these sessions.

And then there are a few people that are there sometimes and sometimes not so much.

So yes, doing things with the same group over and over again helps.

Um, so the the Faria one I have attended online with our other science teacher, so there was some exchange there afterwards. What we thought about the things that they taught us and how they provided all of that knowledge.

The others I think there was one where afterwards – actually there was two where afterwards I wanted to share this with the science Department and the other one was I want to share this with the whole school and I shared this.

PD sessions like the ones that I've been talking about over and over again.

Where will you meet as a group and you meet with the same people over amount of time and kind of discussing similar topics.

These ones very much help you doing that because they, even if it's if it's not the teachers

from your own school in that group they kind of just show the way that you can discuss topics relating your own work and the work of others and kind of comparing and helping each other to improve.

Yes, and another tool which I liked, and in that sense was at the end of two of the PD sessions have been attending.

And I know that we and not as as part of a PD but I know that we've been doing this at school as well where we have shared maybe a spreadsheet or maybe a link of tools that other teachers could use as well for online learning.

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| Negative Feelings | <p>learning while doing the exact opposite with their professional development.</p> <p>We had this forum and there it was really “read this and extract X information from why video text and whatever” while they were teaching us to be more creative with the tools that we are using.</p> <p>I didn't get feedback or anything so I don't know if anybody was really interested in that.</p> <p>But in general, short answer, no it doesn't contribute to collaboration.</p> <p>Then I don't think at least the PD sessions that I have been attending have anything to do with that. Most of them were like, really, the student teacher surface if you want and not the teacher admin surface.</p> <p>Others not so much because I again see the same problem with them. The PD sessions that you are attending by yourself are kind of are hard to communicate to others if they have either not attended the same or have not had like a more in depth conversation about it,</p> <p>So if they just come up in your everyday teacher to teacher conversation then it's hard to relate to. Like the whole background of what is going on in.</p> |
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| Sees potential | <p>using online professional development for learning in the classroom could be viable</p> <p>If done well, it could totally go well.</p> <p>A good PD session is where you can experience whatever you're learning right now, so if that is a method that you're learning and science, for example, conducting an experiment or doing an activity.</p> <p>If you can actually practice that from both sides as a teacher and as a student, that's a very good PD session in my mind where you can actually experience what they are trying to teach you or what you're trying to learn.</p> <p>If it's possible to do this online somehow: to come to experience the things you're trying to learn then it's a good PD session</p> <p>More teachers from our school would have to participate in this same PD or in the same session even.</p> <p>Because otherwise nobody knows really what others are talking about, right? If they haven't attended the same meeting,</p> <p>Or what could also work is that people kind of present to the rest of the teachers what they have taken away from certain PD sessions, which is difficult if it is subject related?</p> <p>So what I could see myself kind of trying to pass on to other teachers would be the on the connecting two students oe that was kind of SEL based because that's something that could carry over to other subjects.</p> <p>Or maybe the non-test related assessment strategies thing because that could also cover carry over to other subjects, but apart from that I think it's difficult.</p> <p>It could. But again, very much dependent on the PD sessions that we as teachers are participating in. But it's difficult.</p> |
| Skeptical of potential | <p>If it's just a presentation that they moved from the classroom online I mean, yes, the effect is the same, but in the 1st place, that wouldn't be a good PD session for me.</p> |
| Previous Experience with Digital Learning | <p>I didn't have any experience with learning online prior to having to teach online due to COVID, so that was the first encounter I had with online learning.</p> |