Religious Educators' Experiences With Self-Directed Learning in Professional Development: A Qualitative Study

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES WITH SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Brandon D. Porter

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education
(Curriculum and Instruction)

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2014

ABSTRACT

Religious Educators' Experiences with Self-Directed Learning in Professional

Development: A Qualitative Study

by

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Utah State University, 2014

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In 2012, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I), a division of The Church

Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, introduced a self-

directed professional development program that allowed educators to obtain two

certification credentials by completing 12 certification projects per credential. This

qualitative study used phenomenology to examine the following question: "What are S&I

educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects?" Data

were obtained through one-on-one, semistructured interviews with seven professional

S&I educators who described their lived experiences with this phenomenon. Self-directed

learning theory, as influenced by andragogy, provided the theoretical and conceptual

framework for this study and contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data and

findings. Findings indicate that personal and contextual factors influence how self-

directed learning for purposes of professional development is experienced; understanding

program requirements, expectations, and processes, and possessing sufficient motivation and justification, facilitate involvement in this form of self-directed learning; collaborative learning can be used in self-directed learning and can lead to improved learning and practice-related outcomes; and self-directed learning for purposes of professional development can result in meaningful learning experiences, changes in instructional practice, and perceived professional growth, especially when aligned with compelling professional learning needs and interests. This study concluded by offering recommendations for potentially facilitating S&I educators' involvement in self-directed learning in doing certification projects and for increasing the impact of such projects on educators' professional growth.

(316 pages)

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In 2012, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I), a division of The Church

Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, introduced a self-

directed professional development program that allowed educators to obtain two

certification credentials by completing 12 certification projects per credential. The

purpose of this study was to obtain an understanding of the experiences of seven S&I

educators with self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

Personal and contextual factors influenced how self-directed learning for purposes

of professional development was experienced by the participants in this study.

Understanding program requirements, expectations, and processes, and possessing

sufficient motivation and justification, facilitated their involvement in this form of self-

directed learning. Their experiences indicated that collaborative learning can be used in

self-directed learning and can lead to improved learning and practice-related outcomes;

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my major professor, Dr. Michael Freeman, who provided essential direction, guidance, and encouragement throughout this process. I express gratitude to him and the members of my committee for investing time, thought, and counsel in helping me with this research and for providing engaging educational experiences that increased my awareness and understanding of knowledge that has shaped me personally and professionally.

I express gratitude to Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for allowing me to conduct this study, for supporting this academic pursuit, and for providing me with meaningful, fulfilling employment. I gratefully acknowledge the support and assistance of Dustin West, Casey Olson, Dan Skoubye, and other colleagues and friends in S&I. In moments of need, they provided counsel, perspective, encouragement, ready help, and genuine interest in this endeavor. I also express gratitude to Robert Lund and Tom Valletta for valuing this experience and strongly encouraging and supporting my efforts.

I express gratitude to my parents, Dennis and Joyce, for instilling in me a determination to accomplish worthwhile goals and an understanding of the value and importance of education. I express gratitude to my brothers, Trever and Trent, for helping me learn the importance of research and to my sister, Sarah, for her example, guidance, encouragement, and care. I express gratitude to my wife's parents, Stuart and Judi, for their words of encouragement, empathy, and expressed interest throughout this process. I also express gratitude to Martell and LaRue Gee for showing me the benefits of having

an educated mind.

I gratefully acknowledge the support and encouragement of my wonderful and excitement-filled children: Laneah, Adelle, Tessa, and Eliza. Their smiles, stories, and "You can do it" and "I love you" notes provided needed relief and motivation to persist in the inched-paced progress toward completing this experience. Their patience and understanding of my need to take time away to attend class and "do homework" were a great blessing.

I gratefully acknowledge the influence of my wife, Danielle, without whom this experience could not have been completed. Her sacrifice, strength, and support enabled me to invest the time and effort necessary to accomplish this goal, which has belonged to both of us. I express gratitude for her abiding friendship, encouragement, and love. She has shown me the real value of education, which is not gleaned from the social and market value of an institutional-granted credential, but is found in the appreciation, fulfillment, and mastery of God's gift of life.

Finally and ultimately, I gratefully acknowledge the hand of God in initiating and enabling this experience. He provided sustaining support and capacity to enable my family and me to do what we could not have otherwise done on our own. He is loving, good, and always there.

Brandon D. Porter

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Speaking the words "inservice training, workshops, professional conferences, presentations from subject-matter experts" to professional educators may result in a variety of reactions. These words represent conventional professional development activities that constitute a portion of educators' professional lives. Professional development is a mechanism turned to by instructional leaders for fostering the professional growth and expertise of educators (Lohman, 2000; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Professional development is intended to help educators enhance or deepen their content and other job-related knowledge and transform or develop new instructional practices, methods, and skills (Borko, 2004; Ferrara, 2009; Lohman & Woolf, 2001; Roberts, 2009; Tough, 1971).

The types of professional development activities available for educators are many, but the ideal outcomes are the same: meaningful and actual educator development that results in improved student learning (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2011; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Mizell, 2010). Despite these intentions, research indicated that conventional professional development activities rarely lead to the desired improvements in instructional practices and student learning outcomes (Borko, 2004; Freidus et al., 2009; Glickman et al., 2010; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009). Based on a multi-year research initiative to examine the status of professional development in the United States, Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) reported the following among the key findings of the study:

American teachers say that much of the professional development available to them is not useful. Teachers give relatively high marks to content-related learning opportunities, with 6 of 10 teachers (59 percent) saying this training was useful or very useful. But fewer than half found the professional development they received in other areas to be of much value. (p. 5)

Millions of dollars are spent by schools, districts, and the federal government on various forms of professional development that are "fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account what we know about how teachers learn" (Borko, 2004, p. 3). The inadequacy of conventional professional development offerings is recognized as an unresolved problem for both American educational practice and educational research (Borko, 2004).

Authors have spoken of the need for, and effectiveness of, alternative, less traditional forms of professional development for educators (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Dorph & Holtz, 2000; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lee, 2005; Mahmood, 2003; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Marczely (1996) explained that "professional development practice has, for the most part, ignored the need to get beyond blind prescriptive 'training' in large-group settings and to personalize the professional development experience" (p. viii). One method that can personalize the professional development experience and increase its effectiveness is self-directed professional development (Beavers, 2009; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009). This form of professional development incorporates principles of self-directed learning in the design of professional development programs or activities for educators.

Brockett (2009) noted that self-directed learning could have "crucial implications" (p. 47) for continuing professional education, which applies to educators'

professional development. Using self-directed professional development "may reduce the mismatch between continuing professional development (cpd) inputs (teacher learning activities) and the outputs (teacher cognition and classroom practice)" (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009, p. 376).

In 2012, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I), an educational entity within the Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints designed to provide religious instruction for high school and college-age youth and young adults, implemented a professional development program for full-time seminary and institute educators. This program, referred to as the Certification Program, incorporates principles of self-directed learning.

The Certification Program is comprised of four credentials that S&I educators can earn: Certifications 1 and 2, a master's degree, and a doctorate degree. Certifications 1 and 2 are earned by completing 12 certification projects per credential. These projects can consist of self-designed projects, guided projects, and certification classes intended to help educators develop in three professional areas of practice: teaching and learning, content mastery, and administrative and leadership skills. S&I educators have primary responsibility for planning, working on, and evaluating the projects they engage in. Involvement in this program is voluntary, and nearly all of the time spent on projects must take place outside of educators' regular work hours. Completion of these credentials results in an increase in pay if a requirement for years of work experience is also met.

A few months after the Certification Program was implemented, the S&I Office of Research (2012) surveyed 127 S&I educators to obtain preliminary insights into their

initial engagement in certification projects. Respondents reported having a fairly positive experience with certification projects and reported a preference for working on self-directed projects over other types of projects (e.g., classes, guided projects). Respondents also described various frustrations and challenges they had experienced. Some also reported that participation in certification projects was contributing to their professional growth (S&I Office of Research, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The results of the study conducted by the S&I Office of Research (2012) provided useful insight and encouragement regarding the potential of certification projects to meaningfully contribute to S&I educators' professional development. The findings also illustrated some of what educators have experienced in doing certification projects, but research is needed that reveals the meaning behind the numbers and provides further understanding of educators' lived experiences (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

The purpose of this study was fourfold. First, this study sought to provide needed exploration of, and insight into, S&I educators' experiences with doing certification projects. In so doing, this proposed study wanted to accomplish three general goals of research, particularly research that pertained to professional development programs: to know more about a phenomenon, to inform practice, and to improve or refine program components (Borko, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Ponton, Derrick, Confessore, & Rhea, 2005). The understanding of S&I educators' experiences that emerged from this study can reveal strengths, limitations, and possibilities of doing certification projects. This understanding

can inform S&I administrators' decisions regarding the design and management of certification projects, leading to possible improvements that could facilitate educators' involvement in doing certification projects and increase the impact of projects on S&I educators' professional growth (Polkinghorne, 1989).

A second purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature pertaining to the professional development of religious educators. Religious educators represent a unique population within the field of education. These educators provide religious instruction to primary, secondary, or post-secondary students apart from instruction that takes place in traditional worship services. Religious educators may or may not have received academic degrees in subjects related to the content they teach or in teaching methods in general. In contrast to the amount of empirical attention that has been given to the professional development of educators in public education, a review of the literature indicated that very little empirical knowledge exists pertaining to the professional development of full-time religious educators.

A third purpose of this research was to address a need for research that explores the experience of self-directed learning as a form of professional development. Much of the research in self-directed learning has focused on the individualized, self-directed learning experiences outside of formal institutions (Peters & Gray, 2005). One suggested area of further investigation for the field of self-directed learning was its use in education and training programs (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Multiple studies have found benefits for educators in terms of meaningful learning and professional growth, as well as benefits for their students in terms of

improved learning, as a result of their professional development activities that incorporate principles or methods of self-directed learning (Acevedo, 2013; Corabi, 1995; Gibbs, 2002; Husby, 2005; Jailall, 1998; Morgan, Gilman, & Cruzeiro, 2005; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009). However, professional development programs based in self-directed learning have not been widely implemented in schools (Steinke, 2012). Though research pertaining to the self-directed learning of educators for purposes of professional development exists, more is needed (Sparks & Loucks-Horsely, 1989; Wagner, 2011).

A fourth purpose of this research is to fill a gap in the literature in the field of self-directed learning. Brockett (2009) suggested an agenda for future research in self-directed learning and observed that the field would benefit from examining self-directed learning through different lenses or approaches. Brockett specifically identified phenomenology as a promising approach. According to Brockett, "In terms of self-directed learning research, phenomenology could prove valuable in promoting an understanding of how learners experience self-directed learning in their own lifeworlds" (p. 43).

One purpose of research is to accumulate sufficient knowledge to lead to increased understanding of a phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that focuses specifically on seeking an understanding of what an experience with a particular phenomenon is like for individuals who experience it (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2013) explained that a phenomenological approach for examining a specific research problem is appropriate when "it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (p. 81). The intent of this study was to gain understanding of seven S&I

educators' lived experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

The use of phenomenology also aligned with Candy's (1991) suggestion for furthering the field of self-directed learning by employing interpretive research approaches that explore individuals' experiences with self-directed learning from their perspectives. It also fulfills an additional suggested way to advance the study of self-directed learning by "studying how people engage and manage their self-directed learning" (Merriam, 2001, p. 10). Furthermore, using phenomenology satisfies Spear's (1988) position that "the study of self-directed learning projects requires…a naturalistic or qualitative approach based on interviews with learners" (p. 218).

Research Questions

The central research question that guided the efforts to accomplish the intended purposes of this study is "what are S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects?" The use of phenomenology as the methodology for this study influenced the nature of this research question, which focused on the experiences of individuals with a specific phenomenon.

Self-directed learning theory, as influenced by andragogy, serves as the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding this study. Self-directed learning was selected because of the way it can add understanding about S&I educators' experiences in doing certification projects. The experience of self-direction in learning incorporates both personality and process factors (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Brockett and Hiemstra defined the process of self-directed learning as one in which "the learner assumes

primary responsibility for and control over decisions about planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning experience" (p. 12). These components of self-directed learning provided a general framework for gathering data pertaining to the experiences of the participants in this study.

For purposes of this study, the evaluating component of self-directed learning includes both assessing the outcomes of the learning and the value of the learning in terms of professional growth. Thus, in obtaining descriptions of S&I educators' experiences with doing certification projects, a second research question was also addressed: What perceived impacts has S&I educators' engagement in doing certification projects had on their professional growth?

Limitations

The use of a qualitative methodology introduces inherent limitations into a study. In qualitative research the researcher is the main research instrument (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). This means that data is gathered and interpreted through the lens of the researcher and the resultant descriptions represent only one interpretation of the data (Moustakas, 1994).

The contextual nature of qualitative research inhibits generalizing the findings to a broader population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Findings may be transferable, but the primary determination of transferability rests with the reader of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results and findings of this study reflect the experiences of the participants in this study with self-directed learning for purposes of professional

development and their unique contexts. Therefore, these results and findings may not be reflective of experiences of other religious educators within S&I, educators within other religious organizations, or public educators.

Because "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 77), a purposeful sampling strategy was used to identify S&I educators who had experience with doing multiple certification projects. To maintain consistency in data collection procedures, geographic proximity was also taken into consideration, resulting in all of the participants being located in northern Utah. The sampling criteria used for this study therefore excluded S&I educators located in areas outside of northern Utah and also excluded S&I educators who had limited or no experience doing certification projects.

This study was not intended to be evaluative of the Certification Program, but was designed to explore experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects so as to increase understanding of the experience. Quantitative methods were not used to quantify professional growth and improvements in participants' practices; participants' perceptions were relied upon instead. Finally, because the Certification Program is relatively new, longitudinal data pertaining to long-term effects of doing certification projects on participants' profession growth and learning efforts was not able to be obtained.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a description of andragogy and self-directed learning, which are recognized as foundational adult learning theories (Merriam, 2001). Andragogy, as put forth by Knowles (1970) who is considered to be the father of andragogy, is reviewed because of its relationship to self-directed learning, which provides the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. Although andragogical concepts were developed by Knowles over four decades ago, and some have evolved with time, they continue to represent the foundation of study and practice in adult learning.

The second section contains a review of literature pertaining to constructs associated with the research questions of this study: professional development, self-directed learning as it applies to professional development, and the professional development of religious educators. The final section of this literature review provides a thick description of the context of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Andragogy

Learning can be defined in various ways and can refer to a variety of processes, including knowledge and skill acquisition, development of competencies, behavioral change, personal transformation, internal change of consciousness, growth, and fulfillment of potential (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Fenwick, 2008; Knowles, 1973;

Tough, 1971). The systematic study of adult learning began in the 1920s (Merriam, 2001). Early research on adult learning sought to answer the question of whether adults could learn (Merriam, 2001). As researchers established that adults could learn, research questions evolved to differentiating adult learning from learning in childhood (Merriam, 2001).

Knowles (1970) observed that the field of adult education lacked "a coherent theory to justify…treating adults as adults" (p. 38). Adults tend to embody some distinct learning capacities (Tusting & Barton, 2003) and possess more developed faculties than children, faculties that enable deeper understanding, appreciation, discernment, and meaning (Houle, 1961). However, adult educators used the same teaching techniques with adults that were used for teaching children, which hindered educators' effectiveness (Knowles, 1970). Knowles developed a theory of adult learning and labeled it andragogy, a term borrowed from nineteenth century German educational thought. Knowles defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 38), in contrast to pedagogy, or "the art and science of teaching children" (p. 37).

Andragogy is based on the following six assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners (Knowles, 1970, 1973, 1975; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

1. Adults have a need to know why they need to learn something before they seek to learn it.

2. Adults have developed an identity, or self-concept, of being independent and a need for and capacity of being self-directing.

3. Adults have a reservoir of experiences that influence their self-identity and

serve as a resource for learning.

4. Adults become ready to learn as motivated by developmental tasks associated with evolving social roles.

5. Adults engage in learning largely to improve abilities to deal with life problems or tasks and, as such, are interested in the immediate application of most of their learning.

6. Adults are responsive to both internal motivators (e.g., satisfaction, pleasure, self-esteem, quality of life) and external motivators (e.g., improving employment opportunities, earning potential, social capital), with internal motivators being more potent.

These characteristics are steadily developed from infancy through preadolescence and then more rapidly developed in adolescence (Knowles, 1973).

The different assumptions about learners represented in andragogy and pedagogy lead to different instructional practices (Knowles, 1973). Within pedagogy, a primary assumption is that learning generally follows "an external directive" (Tusting & Barton, 2003, p. 20). In practice, the teacher is assigned "full responsibility for all decision making about the learning content, method, timing, and evaluation. Learners play a submissive role in the educational dynamics" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 72). In contrast, andragogy assumes that learning is generally voluntary and pursued to satisfy needs and wants that emerge from individuals' lives. In practice, the teacher invites students to share or take responsibility for their learning and assists them in their learning (Knowles, 1970).

Not all adults seem to fit within the assumptions of the andragogical model (Knowles et al., 2005). The extent to which an adult embodies these assumed characteristics is dependent on the maturity of the individual (Knowles et al., 2005). Some adults may have yet to reach stages of development in which they are motivated and able to independently pursue their own learning (Knowles et al., 2005).

Knowles acknowledged that rather than perceiving a dichotomy between pedagogy and andragogy, they could be considered to exist on a continuum ranging from teacher-directed learning to student-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). The appropriateness of the approach is dependent on the individual learner, the situation, and the goals of the learning, meaning that andragogical practices may be appropriate and used for teaching children in some situations, and vice-versa (Knowles, 1973; Knowles, et al., 2005; Merriam, 2001; Tusting & Barton, 2003). Andragogy has since become defined "more by the learning situation than by the learner" (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). Knowles still considered that even in situations in which pedagogical practices might be most appropriate for adult learners; educators should still assist learners in becoming more responsible for their learning (Tusting & Barton, 2003).

Andragogy is rooted in humanistic philosophy of personal development (Knowles et al., 2005; Tusting & Barton, 2003). Sparling (2001) explained that "humanists believe in the ability of individuals to develop and grow throughout the life span" and that "adult learners are capable of identifying their own learning needs and solving their own problems" (p. 200). These two factors—the unlimited potential of humans for self-improvement and the capacity to assume personal responsibility for learning—"lie at the

heart of adult education as a field of practice and study" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 12).

Self-Directed Learning

As a theoretical field, andragogy gives special attention to the attributes that tend to be characteristic of adult learners and the learning processes they engage in. One of these processes which has taken on a theoretical and empirical life of its own is self-directed learning. Knowles' six assumptions of andragogy have influenced and are present in the theoretical construct of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975; Long, 2007; Steinke, 2012).

As Knowles (1975) noted, "A prime characteristic of adultness is the need and capacity to be self-directing" (p. 130; Tusting & Barton, 2003). Although adults are not the only ones who engage in self-directed learning (Brockett, 2009), as individuals mature, their need and capacity to be self-directing increases (Knowles et al., 2005).

Beginning in the 1960s, practitioners and scholars began an active pursuit of understanding self-directed learning (Long, 2009). Significant foundational contributions to this field of study were made by Houle (1961) and two of his doctoral students: Allen Tough (1971) and Malcolm Knowles (1975) (Brockett, 2009; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella, 1993; Candy, 1991). Self-directed learning was one of the most attended to topics in the field of adult education during the 1970s and 1980s (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). The "peak period" of publications pertaining to self-directed learning was from 1983-1991 (Guglielmino, Long, & Hiemstra, 2004). In 2012, Hiemstra and Brockett noted that "over the past several decades, self-directed learning (SDL) has been

one of the most active areas of inquiry within adult education and learning" (p. 155).

Self-directed learning defined. Self-directed learning is conceptualized in several different ways (Glickman et al., 2010). Since its introduction, "literally hundreds of terms, concepts, and definitions associated in some way with self-direction in learning have been developed" (Hiemstra, 2004, p. 1). Some of these terms include self-education, self-planned learning, independent study, autonomous learning, and adults' learning projects (Guglielmino et al., 2005).

Knowles' (1975) definition of self-directed learning is the best-known and most-cited definition (Guglielmino et al., 2004). According to Knowles:

> In its broadest meaning, "self-directed learning" describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (p. 18)

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) proposed that self-directed learning be referred to as self-direction in learning, which consists of two distinct but related dimensions: one process related (self-directed learning) and one personality related (learner self-direction) that emphasizes the desire for assuming responsibility for one's learning. In this conceptualization of self-direction in learning, Brockett and Hiemstra defined self-directed learning as "a process in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process" (p. 24).

The core elements of Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) definition are reflected in many definitions of self-directed learning put forth by other scholars. Based on a review of these definitions, self-directed learning might be defined in a more detailed way as

follows: purposely chosen and consciously engaged self-initiated learning in which the

learner assumes primary responsibility and control in identifying learning goals; choosing

and planning the learning resources and activities; carrying out and managing the

learning, including determining where and when to learn as well we the pace, sequence,

and depth of the learning; and evaluating the learning experiences (Brockett, 2006;

Brookfield, 1985a, 1993; Caffarella, 1993, 2002; Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991;

Guglielmino, 2008; Long, 1992, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007; Ponton, 2009; Pratt, 1988).

Candy (1991) perceived that self-direction, as it relates to learning, was used in

literature related to self-directed learning to refer to four distinct, but related, concepts.

Two concepts pertain to personal attributes or characteristics, and the other two pertain to

self-directed learning activities. Candy labeled the concepts pertaining to personal

attributes or characteristics as personal autonomy, or self-direction "as a personal quality

or attribute" (p. 411), and self-management in learning, or self-direction "as the

willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education" (p. 23).

Candy (1991) referred to the concepts pertaining to self-directed learning

activities as autodidaxy, or self-direction "as the independent pursuit of learning without

formal institutional structures" (p. 441), and learner-control, or self-direction "as a mode

of organizing instruction in formal settings" (p. 23). As opposed to autodidaxy, in which

the learner has complete ownership and control of the learning, in learner-control

conditions, "the learner's choices or even the criteria he or she uses to make those

choices" (Candy, 1991, p. 409) are influenced in subtle and symbolic ways, and in some

cases overt ways, by the culture of the learning situation.

Caffarella (1993) explained that the concept of self-directed learning includes three distinct ideas.

> A self-initiated process of learning that stresses the ability of individuals to plan and manage their own learning, an attribute or characteristic of learners with personal autonomy as its hallmark, and a way of organizing instruction in formal settings that allows for greater learner control. (pp. 25-26)

Each of these three main ideas is discussed below.

The process of self-directed learning. Much of the initial research on self-directed learning focused on the process (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Many models have been put forth as representations of the self-directed learning process, describing how learners go through their learning activities. Three general types of process models have been addressed in the literature: linear models, less-structured interactive models, and instructional models (e.g., integrating self-directed learning methods in formal educational settings; Merriam et al., 2007).

Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) definition of self-directed learning provides a general framework of the process of self-directed learning. A more detailed description of the process was provided by Danis (1992). Danis described the phases, or stages, of the self-directed learning process as follows: (a) reacting to a triggering event or situation; (b) seeking and selecting knowledge to be acquired and available resources; (c) organizing and structuring the knowledge to be acquired and the strategies to be used; (d) acquiring and integrating the new knowledge; (e) assessing the quality of the learning outcome and learning strategies used (this can be done during or after the learning process, individually or with the help of others); and (f) applying the new knowledge.

The triggering event influences an individual's awareness of a need for learning.

Multiple authors recognize the identification of a personal learning need as a step in the

self-directed learning process (Jossberger, Brand-Gruwel, Boshuizen, & van de Wiel,

2010; Knowles, 1975; Ponton & Carr, 1996; Steinke, 2012). This need can emerge as a

recognized gap between present performance and a higher standard of performance, a

recognized needed competency to successfully manage a particular situation, or a

potential work-related problem that might need to be solved (Knowles, 1970, 1975;

Slotnik, 1999). Awareness of such a gap can come by increasing individuals'

understanding of what is required or possible in a given situation by way of improved

proficiency, knowledge, or skills (Mezirow, 1985). These learning needs can then be

converted into learning goals, which can provide guidelines for learners' selection of

learning content and activities and can be used to evaluate their actual learning

(Caffarella, 2002). When the learning need is self-diagnosed and clearly defined, the

adult learners are likely to experience greater motivation to learn than if the need is

externally diagnosed (Knowles, 1975).

   Self-directed learning activities. Research has shown that most adults have a

preference to self-direct their learning when given the opportunity and appropriate

support (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985, 1991). The types of resources and learning activities

that individuals select are influenced by a variety of factors, such as personal learning

styles, the purposes of the learner, the nature of the subject matter to be learned, and the

learner's previous knowledge of the specific field (Bouchard, 2009; Candy, 1991; Tough,

1971). Adult learners do not only prefer one method of learning, but may engage in

various learning activities based on the activities' perceived potential to accomplish

learners' educational goals (Houle, 1961).

When planning one's self-directed learning, the learner has a number of different activities to choose from. These can include reading (e.g., books, magazines, professional journals, online resources, etc.), writing, attending workshops or conferences, taking courses or classes, action research, viewing multimedia products, observing others, interviewing others, internships, mentoring, and guided study using an established curriculum (e.g., workbooks, e-learning courses, learning modules).

Self-directed learning does not necessarily mean isolated or solitary learning without interacting with others or using external resources (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 1985a; Caffarella, 1993; Candy, 1991; Cavaliere, 1992; Peters & Gray, 2005). Donaghy (2005) conducted interviews with four prominent scholars in the field of self-directed learning. Each scholar acknowledged the importance of collaborative learning in adults' self-directed learning efforts (Donaghy, 2005). Self-directed learning activities can be conducted independently or collaboratively (Guglielmino, 2008). Activities are self-initiated, but they can involve learning with or from others (e.g., family members, mentors, content experts), learning from material resources, or learning in formal educational settings (e.g., courses, workshops, presentations; Caffarella, 1993, 2002; Cavaliere, 1992; Sparling, 2001). Furthermore, individual learners rarely evaluate their learning projects entirely alone (Peters, Taylor, & Doi, 2009). The learners may include others in the validation of the learning (Candy, 1991).

Often, when given autonomy over one's learning, learners will choose to work collaboratively with others (Candy, 1991). Collaborative learning and support groups can

be "a means of capitalizing on synergistic learning efforts" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 177).

As mentioned previously, learning in formal, other-directed settings can be part of an individual's self-directed learning efforts (Caffarella, 1993; Ng & Confessore, 2010; Peters & Gray, 2005). Highly autonomous adults and self-directed learners may still sometimes choose a traditional, teacher-directed instructional setting due to convenience, speed, learning style, or lack of knowledge about a subject (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991; Knowles et al., 2005). In some cases, a highly teacher-directed approach may be the most effective learning approach to take (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

By choosing other-directed learning activities, self-directed learners give up some control of the learning process, but they demonstrate self-directedness by making a cognitive, purposeful choice to enroll in the formal learning activity (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991). To be considered self-directed learning, however, the learner must also continue to demonstrate psychological control and personal responsibility in the learning process (Knowles, 1975; Long, 1992).

The influence of context. Interactive models of self-directed learning take into account the influence of context, the nature of learning, and personal factors that interact to form learning episodes (Merriam et al., 2007). Contextual factors have a bearing on individuals' self-directed learning (Garrison, 1997; Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012). A learner's environment heavily influences every aspect of the self-directed learning process, serving as "the arena in which the activity of self-direction is played out"

(Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 33).

Opportunities and resources within one's learning environment can influence the engagement in and success of learning activities (Caffarella, 1993; Varlejs, 1999). Based on their research, Spear and Mocker (1984) developed the concept of "organizing circumstance" to account for the determining influence of individuals' environments on their learning. The organizing function performed by one's circumstances is seen in the learning resources, methods, opportunities, and constraints that are experienced (Spear & Mocker, 1984; Tough, 1971; Varlejs, 1999). The Internet has altered adults' organizing circumstances by increasing the accessibility of learning resources once limited by one's location and time constraints (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Rager, 2006).

Barriers to self-directed learning. A lack of time, physical energy, and resources can serve as barriers to initiating self-directed learning activities (Brookfield, 1993). Brookfield stated that "exercising self-direction requires that certain conditions be in place regarding access to resources" (p. 233), and explained that self-directed learning is a meaningless idea if a learner is unable to access the needed learning resources. Adults are better equipped to take action to pursue learning when they are knowledgeable about learning tools and resources they can use in different learning contexts and when they have the skills to use such tools (Ponton & Carr, 1996). Research has established that learners often lack sufficient abilities to identify resources and strategies that can be applied to learning projects (Bouchard, 2009).

Guglielmino and colleagues (2005) explored barriers and interrupters to the pursuit of learning projects of a purposeful sample of 14 adults who were perceived to be

highly self-directed learners. Guglielmino and colleagues organized the major barriers identified from participants' reports into seven themes: time, including having competing priorities; lack of accessibility or adequacy of human or material resources, including difficulty in accessing and understanding some resources; interactions with other people, including family responsibilities and other social interactions, events, and obligations; personal limitations in the form of inadequacies in personal skills or abilities; issues related to the use of formal learning offerings as part of a learning project (e.g., cost, times classes were offered); difficulties or malfunctions with technology; and loss of intensity due to factors such as a loss of earlier interest, indecisiveness, or trouble persisting when progress was not clear.

Characteristics of self-directed learners. Scholars assert that every adult possesses the characteristic of self-directedness in learning to a certain degree (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Guglielmino, 1978, 2008; Guglielmino et al., 2004). The degree varies in different learning situations (Candy, 1991), and not all adults have the same level of readiness or aptitude for engaging in self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Guglielmino, 1993; Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010). Scholars consider the readiness and ability to self-direct one's learning as being a factor of personal attributes and specific self-directed learning skills (Merriam et al., 2007; Ricard, 2007). Guglielmino (2008) described the determining influence of learners' personal characteristics on whether self-directed learning takes place.

> Although certain learning situations are more conducive to self-direction in learning than are others, it is the personal characteristics of the learner—including his or her attitudes, values, and abilities—that ultimately determine whether self-directed learning will take place in a given learning situation. (p. 2; Raemdonck,

van der Leeden, Valcke, Segers, & Thijssen, 2012)

Guglielmino (1978) brought attention to the psychological characteristics of self-directed learners with her development of the Self-Directed Learner Readiness Scale (SDLRS; Long, 2009). The SDLRS is a "58-item, Likert-type instrument designed to assess individual attitudes, values, skills, and personality characteristics supportive of self-direction in learning" (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2006, p. 23). Positive correlations have been found between self-directed learning readiness and individuals' educational level and age (Reio, 2009; Reio & Davis, 2005).

The SDLRS is the tool most frequently used to measure the existence of characteristics of self-directed learners (Merriam et al., 2007). Other instruments that have been used to assess characteristics of self-directed learners include the Oddi Continuing Learning Inventory and the Learner Autonomy Profile, which is "a battery of tests designed to measure behavioral intentions linked to self-direction in learning" (Guglielmino et al., 2004, p. 8).

In developing the SDLRS, Guglielmino (1978) formulated "a tentative description of the highly self-directed learner" (p. 72).

> A highly self-directed learner…is one who exhibits initiative, independence, and persistence in learning; one who accepts responsibility for his or her own learning and views problems as challenges, not obstacles; one who is capable of self-discipline and has a high degree of curiosity; one who has a strong desire to learn or change and is self-confident; one who is able to use basic study skills, organize his or her time and set an appropriate pace for learning, and to develop a plan for completing work; one who enjoys learning and has a tendency to be goal-oriented. (p. 73)

Other recognized skills of self-directed learners include skills in self-evaluation, problem solving, critical reflection and thinking, coping with ambiguity, and identifying

and effectively using resources and learning strategies (Bolhuis, 2003; Bouchard, 2009; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Candy, 1991; Cavaliere, 1992; Grow, 1991; Steinke, 2012). If adults lack such independent learning skills, they may resist self-directed learning activities (Sparling, 2001).

Other attributes of self-directed learners that have been emphasized in the literature include personal responsibility, autonomy, self-efficacy, and motivation. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) identified personal responsibility as the "cornerstone" of self-direction in learning, providing the link between the process and personality components of self-direction in learning.

Caffarella (1993) stated that personal autonomy was the hallmark characteristic of self-directed learners. Candy (1991) explained that "the term *autonomy* literally means 'self-rule'" (p. 101). It involves the ability to operate as an independent learner "with minimal supervision or institutional support and affiliation" (Candy, 1991, p. 343). Being an autonomous learner involves characteristics of self-regulation, initiative, resourcefulness, and persistence (Ponton & Carr, 1996).

Self-efficacy is an individual's conviction or perceived capability to perform successfully in a given endeavor in bringing about certain outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Ponton, 2009). Self-efficacy is influenced by various factors, including individuals perceiving their success in previous experiences can be attributed to their personal abilities or when respected others are verbally persuasive in their encouragement of an individual's capability to succeed in a given situation. Self-efficacy can also be developed vicariously when individuals observe the success of others to whom they

consider themselves to be similar (Ponton, 2009; Ponton et al., 2005). Individuals' self-efficacy affects their decision to engage in self-directed learning, as well as their amount of effort and perseverance in the learning activities (Bandura, 1977; Ponton, 2009).

Learners' motivation greatly influences their decision to assume responsibility for and engage in self-directed learning, as well as their effort and persistence in their learning toward the achievement of learning goals (Bouchard, 2009; Garrison, 1997). Self-directed learners tend to be self-motivated (Marczely, 1996).

Motivation to initiate a self-directed learning project is a product of valence and expectancy. Valence refers to the perceived value, or importance and worth, of the potential outcomes from engaging in self-directed learning in terms of satisfying the individual's needs or preferences (Garrison, 1997). These outcomes "must be of sufficient value to pay the cost of the effort" (Long, 2007, p. 9), including the opportunity costs for choosing to engage in learning rather than other activities (Bouchard, 2009). Expectancy refers to the individual's beliefs in his or her abilities to achieve desired outcomes and his or her perceptions of contextual influences that will enable achievement (Garrison, 1997).

Motivation for self-directed learning is influenced by intrinsic (from within the person) and extrinsic (from outside the person) factors (Husby, 2005). Intrinsic factors might include increasing or maintaining one's self-esteem; anticipated increased pleasure, satisfaction, or confidence in performing a task or fulfilling a responsibility well; the need to acquire and apply knowledge or skill; the desire to grow; and satisfying curiosity (Clardy, 2000; Derrick, 2009; Dixon, 1993; Husby, 2005; Knowles, 1973; Morgan et al.,

2005; Reio, 2009; Tough, 1971; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). As stated by Husby (2005),
"learners motivated by intrinsic goals become more deeply and personally engaged in
learning experiences" (p. 8).

Extrinsic factors can include receiving credit for learning (e.g., grades,
certification, continuing education credit), rewards, or promotion (Husby, 2005; Kim,
2005; Tough, 1971). When learning is encouraged or mandated by external sources, "the
challenge is to have students internalize external goals and rewards" (Garrison, 1997, p.
29). External motivators can have a positive influence on learners' motivation to persist
in completing a self-directed learning project. The amount of external pressure must be
kept in balance to preserve the condition of perceived lack of pressure, which condition
can encourage adults to initiate and continue their efforts in a learning project (Kim,
2005).

Research illustrates that self-directed learning competencies can be developed
through receiving instruction on and engaging in self-directed learning (Guglielmino,
1993; Mok & Lung, 2005). In addition, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) explained that
research illustrates that adult learners can quickly adapt to assuming self-direction in
learning. However, "like any other skill, there is a learning curve involved in becoming a
self-directed learner. It takes time for an individual to begin to become efficient in the
process" (Steinke, 2012, p. 56).

Even with the offering of assistance and the potential for developing self-directed
learning competencies, some adults prefer other-direction over self-direction in learning
(Candy, 1991). Self-directed learning activities may not be compatible with some adults'

learning styles nor with their previous learning experiences in which they may have been

passively involved in the learning (Candy, 1991; Sparling, 2001; Steinke, 2012). If

adults' previous learning experiences required them to be principally passive learners,

they may continue to demonstrate passive learning behaviors in their present learning

activities (Gravani, 2012).

  Assisting learners in their self-directed learning activities. Adult learners range

in their readiness and abilities to self-direct their own learning (Brockett & Hiemstra,

1991; Tough, 1971). As such, they may need support or assistance in their self-directed

learning efforts (Dixon, 1993). For example, Dixon reported that a sample of nurses who

participated in a study on self-directed learning projects

> indicated that they needed some help deciding exactly what they should know for
> the skills and knowledge base they wanted to obtain. They also indicated that they
> needed assistance with details, evaluating the effectiveness of their learning, and
> finding and structuring the time necessary for learning. (p. 93)

  Dixon's (1993) findings are echoed by other scholars. Candy (1991) noted that

"orientation, support, and guidance may all be required in the first stages of a learning

project" (p. 309). Some learners may need assistance from others in identifying their

actual learning needs (Knowles et al., 2005), and others may need assistance in

identifying appropriate learning resources and activities or steps to take in a learning

project (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Tough, 1971). Learners can also be

assisted in the evaluation stage of the self-directed learning process by receiving an

outsider's perspective regarding the acceptability of the learning (Bouchard, 2009;

Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1991; Garrison, 1997).

  Adults' situational involvement in self-directed learning activities. Whether a

self-directed adult engages in self-directed learning activities is situational. Self-direction can be considered "a situational attribute, an impermanent state of being dependent on the learner's competence, commitment, and confidence at a given moment in time" (Pratt, 1988, pp. 161-162; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985; Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991). In addition, the desire to be self-directed may fluctuate throughout a person's life (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). An adult's preference for, or success in, self-directed learning behaviors in one situation may not translate to success, or even a desire for self-directed learning, in a different situation (Brookfield, 1985b; Candy, 1991).

Self-directed learning is it not always the best way for some people to learn, nor is it the ideal for all adult learning efforts (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). For example, Brookfield (1985a) asserted that if self-directed learning is the only approach used by educators of adults in formal settings, these adults may never be exposed to alternative perspectives or identify ways to shape their present or future circumstances. Instead, as explained by Brockett and Hiemstra (1985), "Perhaps it is more appropriate to think of self-directed learning as an ideal mode of learning for certain individuals and for certain situations" (p. 33).

Self-directed learning in formal settings. Self-directed learning has caused adult educators to expand their thinking about learning in formal settings (Caffarella, 1993). Self-directed learning as an instructional process has been explored in college courses, graduate programs, community education, and continuing professional education (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 1985a). Health professions and other industries have used principles of self-directed learning in their staff development efforts (Brockett

& Hiemstra, 1991).

As a method in formal learning settings, self-directed learning entails organizing instruction in a way that learners have greater control over their learning (Caffarella, 1993). The instructor is to provide conditions that can facilitate self-directed learning and to ensure that students feel comfortable and competent with the amount of control they are given in the learning process (Garrison, 1997). The instructor acts more as a facilitator, guide, and provider of access to learning resources than a content expert and information provider (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985; Guglielmino, 2008; Knowles, 1975; Sparling, 2001; Steinke, 2012).

Giving students greater control can include giving them the opportunity to select what they learn, helping them identify their needs and competencies associated with the course topic, encouraging self-reflection, giving them choice in how they will demonstrate mastery of the subject matter, and employing methods such as independent projects, student-directed discussions, or discovery learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Bulik, 2009; Candy, 1991; Merriam, 2001; Tough, 1971). Learning contracts can be used as a means for the learner to negotiate with a teacher or supervisor the learning objectives, content, resources, strategies, evaluation, and timeline for the learning (Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986).

Borrowing from a model of situational leadership, Grow (1991) put forth the Staged Self-Directed Learning Model. This model is described in the context of a classroom environment but is applicable to other settings as well. This model "proposes that learners advance through stages of increasing self-direction and that teachers can

help or hinder that development" (Grow, 1991, p. 125). The task for teachers is to match their teaching style with the learner's degree or stage of self-direction, as manifest in his or her readiness to be self-directing, and to help the learner advance toward a greater stage of self-direction in his or her learning. Readiness consists of ability and motivation and "is situational and it may even be task specific" (Grow, 1991, p. 126). If a teacher gives students more responsibility for learning than they are skilled and motivated for, students may experience frustration and feel resentment toward the teacher (Grow, 1991).

The use of self-directed learning methods in formal educational settings can yield many benefits. Research has shown that "methods of instruction that emphasize and encourage self-direction in learning will arouse curiosity, enhance people's self-concept as learners, and increase information-seeking behaviors" (Candy, 1991, p. 57). These outcomes can carry over to individuals' self-directed learning outside of the formal setting (Candy, 1991). By effectively using such methods, instructors can contribute to students' development of self-efficacy and competence for self-directed learning (Ponton, 2009; Tough, 1971).

Benefits of self-directed learning. Although scholars acknowledge that self-directed learning is not a panacea for solving all of the problems of adult learning and education, it does offer many benefits (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991). Guglielmino (2008) explained that "self-directed learning is our most basic, natural response to newness, problems, or challenges in our environment" (p. 2). Self-directed learning enables individuals to renew their competence and to survive and prosper in an environment of continual personal, societal, and technological change (Caffarella, 1993;

Guglielmino, 2008; Long, 1992). According to Guglielmino, self-directed learning is "essential for the continuous, lifelong learning that is required in today's world of pervasive and ever-increasing change" (p. 3), especially given the fact that individuals currently graduate high school knowing less than 2% of what they need to remain successfully employed until retirement.

Summary. Andragogy and self-directed learning represent significant contributions to the understanding of adult learning. Andragogy has provided insight pertaining to characteristics of adult learners, and self-directed learning, as influenced by andragogy, adds further insight into a particular process of adult learning that can take place outside or within formal settings.

Building from its association with andragogy, self-directed learning theory asserts that adults have a need and capacity for self-directing their learning efforts. Process and personality elements must be accounted for in instances of self-directed learning. The willingness and ability to assume responsibility and control over one's learning decisions link these two elements. The process of self-directed learning, which includes planning, implementing, and evaluating one's learning, is influenced by the context in which the learning takes place. Self-directed learning activities can be engaged in independently and collaboratively. Because adults possess varying levels of readiness and abilities to self-direct their learning, they may need assistance in the process. Adult learners who possess characteristics of self-directed learners choose self-directed learning activities on a situational basis.

In regards to self-directed learning, Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) noted that "over

the past several decades, self-directed learning (SDL) has been one of the most active areas of inquiry within adult education and learning" (p. 155). However, the number of research articles on self-directed learning in mainstream periodicals has dropped in recent years (Brockett, 2009). Brockett asserted that many gains could still be realized through expanding the scholarship on self-directed learning. After discussing various areas for investigation within the field, Merriam (2001) said, "Clearly, there are numerous possibilities for how future research on self-directed learning might enrich adult education practice as well as contribute to theory in adult learning" (p. 11).

Professional Development

Having detailed the theoretical framework for this study, focus now shifts to literature pertaining to the professional development of teachers. In this section, an overview of teachers' professional development is provided, followed by a review of literature pertaining to the application of self-directed learning to professional development. This section concludes with a review of research pertaining to the professional development of religious educators.

Professional Development Defined

Professional development can be defined as activities or experiences in which educators acquire job-related knowledge (e.g., information, facts, understanding) and develop skills and other characteristics (e.g., attributes, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives) for purposes of increasing competence, improving job performance, and personal and professional growth (Desimone, 2011; Glickman et al., 2010; Minott, 2010; Organisation

for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011; Roberts, 2009; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). It is equated with individual growth, learning, and change in the context of a professional role (Husby, 2005; Merriam et al., 2007; Zepeda, 2008). Professional development for teachers is also sometimes referred to by other names, such as staff development, inservice, training, professional learning, and continuing education (Mizell, 2010).

The professional development activities teachers might choose to engage in are many. Conventional, formal professional development activities include attending local or national conferences, seminars, or workshops; participating in school- or district-sponsored inservice training; engaging in collaborative learning with a team of coworkers; and enrolling in corporate, online, college, or university courses (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Lee, 2005; Mizell, 2010; Scribner, 1999). Other fairly common professional development activities include mentoring, peer coaching, having one's teaching observed, or observing the teaching of others at one's own or another school (Caffarella, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Kwakman, 2003; Lee, 2005; Mizell, 2010; Roux, 2013).

Some professional development activities teachers engage in are less formal in nature, such as independent study activities (e.g., studying subject matter literature, professional journals, teaching manuals, other text-based resources) and individual inquiry, or action research (Kwakman, 2003; Mizell, 2010; Roux, 2013). Formal or informal collaborative learning activities are also often turned to for professional development. These can include collaboratively reflecting on lessons and lesson

planning; discussing student work, instructional issues, resources, or new instructional

approaches; engaging in study groups; and conducting collaborative action research

(Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, 2005; Caffarella, 2002; Desimone, 2011; Duron, 1994;

Kwakman, 2003; Lawler, 2003; Lee, 2005; Lohman & Woolf, 2001; Mizell, 2010;

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011; Roberts, 2009; Roux,

2013; Wagner, 2011).

The end goal of professional development for teachers is to improve student

learning and achievement (Desimone, 2011; Learning Forward, 2012; Mizell, 2010;

Roux, 2013). While multiple factors influence student achievement, "research shows that

teacher quality is the single most powerful influence" (Wei, Darling-Hammond, &

Adamson, 2010, p. 8; Mizell, 2010). Teachers' effectiveness "can be fostered through

high-quality professional development" (Wei et al., 2010, p. 8). Teachers' participation in

professional development activities can lead to improvements in their content knowledge,

instructional practices and skills, and classroom management, which in turn can lead to

improvements in student learning (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2011; Glickman, 2002;

Glickman et al., 2010).

Teachers have a need for ongoing professional development. As Diaz-Maggioli

(2004) explained, professional development is a "career-long process in which educators

fine-tune their teaching to meet student needs" (p. 5). Demands on teachers to improve

their content knowledge, teach more subjects to an increasingly diverse student body in

terms of learning needs and styles, assume more responsibilities with the management of

schools, and utilize continually evolving technologies and classroom strategies influence

their need for continual professional learning and growth (Beavers, 2009; Lohman & Woolf, 2001).

Teachers are motivated to participate in professional development by both instrinsic and extrinsic factors (Corabi, 1995), though they are generally more motivated by intrinsic factors (Duron, 1994; Knight, Tait, & York, 2006). These intrinsic factors can include a desire to help students, a desire to learn, maintaining or improving practice-related competencies, addressing content knowledge and pedagogical needs, career development, and becoming better educators in general (Guskey, 2002; Knight et al., 2006; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Roux, 2013). Extrinsic factors include certification, contractual agreements, and remuneration (Guskey, 2002; Scribner, 1999).

Effective Professional Development

Multiple authors have discussed the characteristics of effective professional development for teachers. According to research, effective professional development

- Is intensive, sustained, and ongoing—of sufficient duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011; Duron, 1994; Garet et al., 2001; Lee, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Wagner, 2011; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008; Wei et al., 2010).

- Is job-embedded—focused on and connected to teachers' practice and school initiatives, and designed to respond to teachers' needs and interests (Caffarella, 2002; Desimone, 2011; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Duron, 1994; Garet et al., 2001; Jailall, 1998; James, 2008; Lee, 2005; Mizell, 2010; Roberts, 2009; Wayne et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2010).

- Focuses on improving teachers' content knowledge and understanding of how to help students learn the content (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Ferrara, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Roberts, 2009; Wayne et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2010).

- Involves collaboration among teachers in their learning (Beavers, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Ferman, 2002; Ferrara, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Lee, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Wagner, 2011; Wei et al., 2010; Wood & Thompson, 1980; Zepeda, 2008).

- Involves active, hands-on learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2001; Levin, 2012; Roberts, 2009).

- Involves the teachers themselves in planning the professional development (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Glickman et al., 2010; Jailall, 1998; Knowles, 1973; Merriam & Leahy, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Rowe, 2009; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989).

The effectiveness of teachers' experiences with professional development can also be influenced by their work environment. Specific characteristics of environments that foster effective professional development include having norms of collegiality and peer support of learning, schools being crafted as learning communities, encouragement of experimenting, empowerment to influence one's work environment, and administrative priority and support of teachers' efforts toward continuous improvement of their practice (Blase & Blase, 1999; Corabi, 1995; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Duron, 1994; Roberts, 2009; Sparks, 2004; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989).

Research illustrates that organizational, supervisory, and peer support of professional learning influence the likelihood that transfer of learning will take place (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Merriam & Leahy, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Seyler, Elwood, Bates, Burnett, & Carvalho, 1998).

Personal, critical reflection is also recognized as an important element of effective professional development for teachers that can influence their professional effectiveness and enhance student learning (Beavers, 2009; Minott, 2010). Reflection influences teachers' abilities to effectively learn from experience, integrate new learning with existing knowledge, and subsequently apply this learning in a way to benefit practice (Minott, 2010). The use of reflection as a professional development activity is sometimes associated with action research (Husby, 2002). Collaborative reflection on practice with other teachers is also a noted professional development practice (Lohman, 2003).

Despite what is known about effective professional development, these principles are not always applied to the professional development programs and activities that are offered to educators. Teachers are often disappointed with the format of staff development rather than the ideals (Beavers, 2009). The presentation-oriented, information-packed nature of education conferences does not reflect principles of effective instruction, resulting in minimal, if any, effective gains in professional learning (Levin, 2012).

Administrators often turn to "one-size-fits-all" approaches to professional development (Glickman et al., 2010; Marczely, 1996). Top-down planned professional development approaches that seek to disseminate standardized knowledge or skills

generally do not lead to the professional growth that teachers desire (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Marczely explained that both economical and philosophical reasons drive this standardized approach: "Economically, districts want staff development programs to reach large audiences. Philosophically, district administrations want consistency in teaching practice and outcome and believe that the way to attain this goal is to provide uniform training for teachers" (p. 12).

Teachers generally do not find that conventional standardized forms of professional development are relevant to their professional growth needs and learning goals (George & Tracy, 1993; Lohman, 2003; Wood & Thompson, 1980). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) found that "research does not support professional development that is not related to teachers' specific contexts and curriculums" (p. 49). Teachers can experience difficulties with being attentive and receptive to staff development activities that are irrelevant to their classrooms or students (Duron, 1994).

The unique needs of individual teachers limit the ability for one centrally planned and administered professional development program to meet them all (Clark, 1992; Tough, 1971). These unique needs can be due to teachers' differing stages in the teaching life cycle or in adult development (George & Tracy, 1993; Marczely, 1996; Terehoff, 2002). These needs are also influenced by organizational factors, such as the unique contexts, circumstances, and challenges teachers experience in their individual schools and classrooms (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Marczely, 1996; Mizell, 2010).

As illustrated by research, effective professional development is job-embedded and responsive to teachers' needs and interests. Professional development activities

should take into account the diverse characteristics, needs, learning styles, educational background and experiences, professional goals, and unique work contexts (e.g., student characteristics, schools, districts) of the audience they are designed for (Ferrara, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Lawler, 2003). As Glickman and colleagues (2010) observed, "The need to individualize teacher learning, indicated by the literature on adult learning, stands in sharp contrast to the actual treatment of teachers" (p. 59).

In traditional pedagogical environments, "teachers set learning environments for their students, design learning activities for them, and evaluate the outcomes" (Cummings, 2011, p. 19). Most professional development activities for teachers are designed based on these same pedagogical practices and create "a culture of dependence on top-down instructional processes" (Steinke, 2012, p. 54; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009). "Teachers, however, are not children or adolescents. They are adult learners, and professional development programs for teachers should, therefore, address the characteristics of adult learning" (Cummings, 2011, p. 19; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Gravani, 2012; Terehoff, 2002; Wood & Thompson, 1980).

It must be acknowledged that although traditional professional development approaches are not always considered to be effective, they are not necessarily without effect. Such activities have the potential to embody characteristics of effective professional development, though these characteristics are more likely to be found in other types of professional development activities (Garet et al., 2001). Some teachers prefer the structure offered in formal professional development activities (Corabi, 1995). Highly structured or scripted professional development activities may also be appropriate

to assist underprepared and novice teachers (Sparks, 2004).

Some teachers report a preference for and benefiting from participating in workshops and conferences (Ferman, 2002; Ferrara, 2009; Minott, 2010). According to Boyle and colleagues (2005), "international literature indicates that traditional approaches to professional development such as short workshops or conference attendance do foster teachers' awareness or interest in deepening their knowledge and skills" (p. 4). Teachers also report benefiting from the social interactions offered through such professional development activities, which can include reflecting on practice and sharing ideas, as well as intellectually stimulating and context-relevant instruction (Corabi, 1995; Duron, 1994; Lohman, 2003; Scribner, 1999). Despite the unique features of one's context, teachers can still benefit from insights from outside observers and experts and learnings from other schools' professional development experiences (Guskey, 2009).

Improving professional development. One reason that conventional professional development practices may fail in their effectiveness is that they often have little or no acknowledgment of teachers' learning characteristics as adult learners and therefore neglect principles of adult learning in their design (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Steinke, 2012; Wood & Thompson, 1980). Multiple authors assert that viewing teachers as adult learners and incorporating what is known about adult learning in designing professional development activities for teachers can increase the relevance, usefulness, and effectiveness of such activities in resulting in actual professional growth (Beavers, 2009; Blase & Blase, 1999; Jacka, 1997; Lawler, 2003; Merriam, 2008).

As adult learners, teachers engage in learning to improve their abilities to deal

with immediate tasks. They "learn what they think they ought to learn depending on their professional needs" (Terehoff, 2002, p. 74). Research shows that teachers' engagement in professional learning activities is increased when they anticipate such activities are designed to meet their immediate self-identified learning needs (Jacka, 1997; Slavit & McDuffie, 2013). Activities that are designed to meet teachers' needs are more meaningful and relevant to their classroom practice (Duron, 1994).

The experience of professional development activities not meeting teachers' needs is affected by teachers not being involved in planning the professional development (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). This lack of involvement can result in resistance and lack of commitment to the learning activities (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Knowles (1973) explained that the practice of authority figures exclusively planning learning activities

> is so glaringly in conflict with the adult's need to be self-directing that a cardinal principle of andragogy (and, in fact, all humanistic and adult education theory) is that a mechanism must be provided for involving all the parties concerned in the educational enterprise in its planning. (p. 109)

Teachers report desiring more input and autonomy in the selection of their professional development activities (Ferrara, 2009; Gravani, 2012). Participants in Duron's (1994) study of teachers' professional growth experiences reported that having individual choice was essential in their development and that professional development options should be individualized to enable the diverse needs of teachers to be met.

Allowing teachers to have responsibility and choice in planning their professional learning goals, content, and activities is a research-supported element of effective professional development (Jacka, 1997; Marczely, 1996; Roberts, 2009; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Being involved in the planning and selection of professional

development activities allows teachers to individualize their professional development to their needs and motivations (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; George & Tracy, 1993). Such involvement shows respect for teachers' professional expertise and judgment and can increase their ownership of the learning activities, their motivation to learn, and the meaningfulness of the activities (Acevedo, 2013; Castle & Aichele, 1994; Corabi, 1995; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Duron, 1994; Gibbs, 2002; Lawler, 2003; Mahmood, 2003; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009). Engaging adults as collaborative partners in planning their learning "appeals to their self-concept as independent learners" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 183), and "should aid in predisposing participants to the learning and subsequent transfer" (Merriam & Leahy, 2005, p. 15).

Self-Directed Professional Development

Applying principles of self-directed learning to professional development is a way to satisfy the call for individualized forms of professional development that are designed to meet teachers' needs and in which they are given responsibility, choice, and involvement in the planning (Beavers, 2009; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Jacka, 1997; Minott, 2010; Steinke, 2012; Trotter, 2006). As Beavers (2009) explained, "If directors of professional development are to effectively educate their teachers, they must respect their individuality and allow for self-direction" (p. 29).

According to Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009), "self-direction has been identified as a potential key to the success of professional development of teachers" (p. 375). Self-directed professional development (defined in this study as professional development that incorporates principles of self-directed learning) empowers teachers, providing them with

"an internal locus of control that ensures that [they] continue to build new understanding of teaching and learning" (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009, p. 381).

McNamara (n.d.) described some of the benefits of self-directed learning programs. Such programs:

- Are more effective in development because learning accommodates employees' learning styles and objectives

- Save substantial training costs because learners learn to help themselves and each other with practical and timely materials

- Achieve increased employee effectiveness in their jobs as they learn to learn from their own work experiences and actually apply their learning in their places of work. (para. 5)

The nature of the teaching world requires teachers to acquire new learning while assessing what is and is not working in their classrooms (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Applying self-directed learning to professional development allows teachers to explore practice-related questions that they generate and to pursue learning and "mastery of skills that are relevant to their positions" (Duron, 1994; Slavit & McDuffie, 2013; Steinke, 2012, p. 54). Self-directed professional development can be used to meet the needs of teachers at diverse stages of their careers (Corabi, 1995). Self-directed learning also allows teachers the flexibility they need to complete learning activities when they are able (Steinke, 2012).

Hearkening back to the characteristics of effective professional development, self-directed professional development allows the learning to be job-embedded. It also allows teachers to focus on improving their content knowledge and to be actively engaged in the learning. If they choose, it can involve collaboration with other teachers. With certain activities, the teachers can ensure the learning is intensive, sustained, and of sufficient

duration to allow for understanding, retention, and application.

Teachers report a desire and preference for self-directed professional development. Of the 24 educators who participated in an exploratory workshop conducted by Ferrara (2009), 95% strongly agreed that they desired having more input in the planning, implementation, management, and evaluation of their respective professional development programs. Ferrara suggested that an individualized program of professional development, as called for by participants in the study, would be consistent with existing research and "would also assist in allowing teachers to participate in more self-directed professional development that would have immediate benefit to both them and their students" (p. 107).

Roux (2013) studied science teachers' (grades 5-12) involvement in professional development activities. Fifty-two experienced teachers completed an online survey. Roux found that "science teachers as adult learners preferred self-directed, high-quality learning opportunities" (p. 117).

Self-directed professional development programs. Having established that self-directed professional development can align with principles of effective professional development and is desired by many teachers, this review now turns to models and research pertaining to self-directed professional development programs. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) discussed five models of staff development: (a) individually guided-staff development; (b) observation/assessment; (c) involvement in a development/ improvement process; (d) training; and (e) inquiry. Within their study, a staff development model was defined as "a pattern or plan which can be used to guide the

design of a staff development program" (p. 36). The model of most relevance to the current study is the individually guided staff development model, a key characteristic of which is that the learning is designed by the teacher.

The individually-guided staff development model "assumes that individuals can best judge their own learning needs and that they are capable of self-direction and self-initiated learning" (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989, p. 42). Other assumptions of this model include adults learning most efficiently and being most motivated when they self-direct their learning (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). This model is supported by adult learning theory, particularly the assumptions of adult learners stated by Knowles (1970, 1973, 1975; Knowles et al., 2005), and by stage theory which asserts that teachers at different stages of development have different professional needs (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989).

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) described the phases of activity in individually guided staff development as follows: (a) identifying a need or interest using formal (e.g., needs assessment, evaluation from a supervisor) or informal (e.g., reflecting on an instructional problem) processes; (b) designing a plan for the learning by selecting a learning objective and the learning activities (e.g., reading journal articles, workshop attendance, observing others, conducting research) intended to achieve the objective; (c) engaging in the learning activity(ies), and (d) formally (e.g., a written report) or informally (e.g., cognitive awareness of learning) assessing if the initial identified learning need or interest was met. These phrases may occur "informally and almost unconsciously, or they may be part of a formal structured process" (Sparks & Loucks-

Horsley, 1989, p. 42)

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) explained that learning activities may include a single session, such as attendance at a workshop, or may occur over time. Furthermore, "based on the individual's preferred mode of learning, it may be done alone…, with others…, or as a combination of these activities" (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989, p. 42).

More research is needed regarding individually-guided staff development models (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). A review of the literature yielded relatively few results of examples of structured self-directed professional development programs. A sample of examples I found are provided below.

Corabi (1995) used a case study method to explore 23 teachers' experiences with a self-directed professional development program. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers who were generally considered to be confident and willing to take risks were surveyed and interviewed. In this self-directed professional development program, teachers identified their individual learning needs, established learning goals, selected and implemented strategies to accomplish their goals, and evaluated their experience. Teachers selected activities that were of professional interest, and they could choose to work individually or in a group. Learning decisions were made collaboratively between the teachers and their principals.

Corabi (1995) found that "teachers liked to identify individual areas of deficiency and establish their own program to address those needs" (p. 122). Some teachers reported that selecting and pursuing goals that were meaningful and designed to meet their

individual needs influenced their sense of purpose, ownership, investment, empowerment, and their desire to succeed. Teachers reported a need for more thorough preparation for participation in the program, including a better understanding of the expectations of the program. Corabi concluded that this model was effective as evidenced by teachers growing professionally through the acquisition of teaching skills and by perceived improvements in student learning.

Jailall (1998) sought to identify the elements of a successful differentiated supervision model. This type of model enables teachers to receive the type of supervision they desire while accomplishing the dual functions of evaluation and promotion of their professional development. Three common options within this model are intensive development, cooperative professional development, and self-directed professional development.

Of the 28 schools and systems using self-directed professional development that were surveyed for this study, 96% of them reported that such an approach was moderately to highly effective in improving teacher performance (Jailall, 1998). The only program that failed to indicate such reported that it was too early to assess. From interviews conducted at four of these sites, Jailall found that the one overriding factor contributing to the effectiveness of self-directed professional development was teacher input, which allowed activities to be "catered to the individual interests of teachers by providing options that teachers want to pursue" (pp. 76-77). Other factors contributing to its success included district support, the maturity and skills of the teachers, a supportive school culture, effective program design, high motivation of teachers, options to choose

from, and adequate time being provided for preparation and planning. Adequate resources not being provided (e.g., training, preparation, and planning time) and teachers not being mature or skilled inhibited their success with self-directed professional development.

Gibbs (2002) used phenomenology to study four teachers' experiences with the phenomenon of self-directed professional development plans as a form of supervision in a differentiated model of supervision. In using self-directed professional development plans, teachers developed personal goals for their professional development, created action plans detailing their planned learning activities for accomplishing their goals, and described anticipated outcomes. Teachers could choose to engage in collaborative learning activities, which could include peer observation and peer coaching. Being a district-sponsored tool provided legitimization to teachers' self-directed work.

The choice of these teachers to use self-directed professional development plans aligned with their predisposition and preferences to be self-directed in their learning (Gibbs, 2002). Teachers felt validation of their professional judgment by being given the ability to self-direct their development (Gibbs, 2002). The use of self-directed professional development plans increased the teachers' ownership and the meaningfulness of the learning and influenced their development. Participants expressed a desire to have more interactions and meaningful conversations with their colleagues about what they were learning. Gibbs observed that unlocking the potential of self-directed professional development requires the use of reflection to identify purposeful ways in which teachers can improve their practice and to plan activities that can result in

such improvements.

Morgan and colleagues (2005) explored 55 teachers' use of a self-directed professional development model. The intent of the learning activities, which lasted 3 years, was to improve teachers' use of instructional technology for instructional and collaborative professional purposes. Morgan and colleagues found that the self-directed professional development model employed in the study "proved to be an effective means of improving teacher competency in the use of instructional technology" (p. 69). The authors also reported that "teachers felt they benefited the most from being online and doing their own discovery and exploration" (Morgan et al., 2005, p. 69).

Cummings (2011) described a self-directed learning program in which certain teachers receive funding to pursue self-directed learning projects. Cummings noted that these projects embody the true spirit of self-directed learning in that teachers determine their own learning content, design their own learning process, and evaluate their learning without any involvement of certification, exams, promotions, or grades. Based on the case example provided by Cummings, teachers' learning projects in this program led to meaningful learning.

Acevedo (2013) explored the effects of differentiated professional development on secondary world languages teachers' perceptions of professional development, teaching, and morale. Nine teachers volunteered to participate in the program, five of which chose to participate in collaborative lesson study. The remaining four conducted individual activities in the form of book study, researching and implementing a technological tool, and assessment creation.

The differentiated professional development program enabled teachers to engage in self-directed learning that addressed their individual learning needs (Acevedo, 2013). Teachers felt empowered and motivated to learn due to the individualization and say they had in their professional learning. Engaging in such customized self-directed learning led teachers to change their instructional practices. The job satisfaction and morale of the teachers who participated in the program were positively affected, as were their perceptions about professional development.

Self-directed professional development can take the form of action research, which serves as a way to individualize professional development (Jailall, 1998; James; 2008; Marczely, 1996; Thiessen, 1992). Action research is an iterative cycle that begins with reflecting on one's practice and identifying a problem or question that exists, reflecting on the nature of the problem, gathering and analyzing baseline data about the problem, designing a plan or change to address the problem, implementing the planned action, and assessing the effectiveness of the action through observation and reflection on experiences (Hatch, 2002; Husby, 2005; Peters et al., 2009; Watkins & Marsick, 2010).

Hatch (2002) explained that action research "is undertaken for the sake of investigating practice…and improving that practice based on what is discovered" (p. 31; Caffarella, 2002; Peters et al., 2009). Action research is reflected in the practices of "best teachers" who "are continually experimenting with new methods and ideas to create the best learning environment for their students" (Beavers, 2009, p. 28). These teachers question the effectiveness of their practice and experiment with ideas to identify those which "are best-suited to individual classroom conditions" (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 43).

Grootenboer (1999) studied five secondary mathematics teachers' perceptions of a self-directed professional development program employing action research and collaboration. Teachers reported various elements of the program that they valued, including the ability to direct their own development, having the activities related to their own issues, collaboration, and reflection. Participants identified three issues that were crucial to the success of this program: interest from administrators in teachers' learning without being too involved; sufficient time to observe colleagues' classrooms and discuss observed issues; and the support and trust of colleagues. The teachers concluded that this type of self-directed professional development program was their preferred mode for professional development, and Grootenboer concluded that action research can be a beneficial activity for self-directed professional development.

In an effort to "seal a proverbial crack in contemporary professional development of educators" (Husby, 2005, p. xiii), Husby provided a staff development model based on methods of self-directed learning and principles of action research. This model is designed to be delivered to a group of teachers by a facilitator. It consists of group meetings led by a facilitator in which the majority of the time is devoted to individual work on a self-selected learning project and individual reflection. Teachers are not required to work on projects outside of these sessions. Teachers are guided through a detailed planning process in which learning projects are designed. The learning projects teachers select are "based upon a combination of self-identified growth areas, professional responsibilities, school and district goals, and a direct connection to student achievement" (Husby, 2005, p. 2).

Husby (2005) reported that teachers' experiences with this program typically range from frustration to elation, with the end result being large numbers of participants being pleased with the outcomes and acknowledging that their individual needs in terms of content and learning style were met. Participants in this program also report benefiting from being held accountable to complete their learning activities, having time provided to work on the learning activities, and receiving camaraderie and support from the group setting (Husby, 2005). Husby also reported that "learners indicate that content learned is specific to their needs and will transfer to their professional roles better than that of other staff development programs" (p. 107). Furthermore, "in terms of results, all participants have reported either use or intended use of knowledge and skill gained in their professional roles" (Husby, 2005, p. 4).

As illustrated in previous examples, self-directed professional development does not need to take place independent of others. Data from a study from Freidus et al. (2009) demonstrated how self-generated, self-directed professional development study groups "in which teachers actively engage in…reflective processes and look analytically at their own work and the work of their students foster both professional growth and professional pride" (p. 193).

Principles of self-directed learning can be also applied to professional development by providing participants with a variety of learning options to choose from that they can complete at their own pace (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). Online learning programs allow teachers to self-direct their learning in terms of pace, time, and, in some cases, content (Steinke, 2012). Another way principles of self-directed learning can be

　
applied is by giving teachers the choice of conference sessions or workshops to attend (Caffarella, 2002).

In the absence of a structured self-directed professional development program, teachers still report engaging in self-directed learning activities for purposes of professional development and experiencing professional growth as a result (Jacka, 1997). These activities can be individual or collaborative, and can include activities such as searching the Internet for information, reading professional literature, conducting independent research, and experimenting with new instructional strategies (Lohman & Woolf, 2001; Roux, 2013).

Wagner (2011) interviewed nine elementary school teachers to examine the relationship between their self-directed learning activities outside of the school environment and their classroom instruction. All of the teachers "related self-directed learning activities as investigations into ways to improve their teaching in their classroom in order to improve their student learning" (Wagner, 2011, p. 66). Teachers "reflected on the needs of their students, their content knowledge needs, and the needs of their school in choosing areas to pursue" (pp. 85-86). Wagner found that the learning activities teachers engaged in did affect their classroom instruction. Wagner concluded, "The results of this investigation show that self-directed learning can be engaging and powerful professional development" (p. 83).

Personal and organizational characteristics needed for self-directed professional development. Teachers, by nature of their profession, regularly demonstrate characteristics and behaviors of self-directed learning readiness (Rowe,

2009). For example, teachers consistently prepare and design daily instructional activities for their students, demonstrating the attributes of self-initiative and self-starting (Rowe, 2009). However, not all teachers are necessarily ready to participate in a self-directed professional development program (Jailall, 1998; Marczely, 1996). Teachers who are best served by such a program contain characteristics of self-directed learners. They have a willingness to learn, a willingness to identify learning needs, initiative, self-efficacy, self-regulation, persistence, reading and researching abilities, problem-solving skills, intellectual curiosity, and interest in their content area. They are intellectually mature, reflective, perceptive, self-motivated, and organized (Jacka, 1997; Lohman, 2003; Marczely, 1996; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Steinke, 2012).

To enable a self-directed professional development program to work, instructional leaders must be willing to demonstrate confidence in teachers' abilities to direct their professional development by giving teachers this responsibility and the necessary autonomy (Duron, 1994; Mahmood, 2003). Instructional leaders must be willing to promote risk taking, otherwise they may hamper teachers' learning efforts (Gibbs, 2002; Wagner, 2011). Instructional leaders must be willing to adopt a supportive role, providing needed support, guidance, and advice when it is sought (Gibbs, 2002; Grootenboer, 1999). Part of this support includes ensuring needed human and material resources are available (Jacka, 1997). Teachers also need to feel that self-directed learning activities are recognized and valued by their organizations (Caffarella, 2002).

Self-directed professional development requires learners to "take responsibility for their own professional growth" (Brown, Ferrill, Hinton, & Shek, 2001, p. 242). Some

teachers who have been accustomed to professional development activities that are other-directed may require some time to transition to planning their own professional development activities (Guglielmino, 1993). Initially, some teachers may struggle setting quality learning goals or struggle with completing learning projects in general (Guglielmino, 1993). Guglielmino suggested that "when we adopt programs that do require a higher level of self-directed learning, *facilitation of the process and transitional periods can prevent a great deal of frustration and misunderstanding*" (pp. 232-233). Instruction pertaining to the use and purpose of self-directed professional development can help teachers' align their learning choices with their professional practice (Clancy, 2012).

Engaging in self-directed professional development learning activities can have the effect of helping teachers further develop as self-directed learners (Guglielmino, 1993). Husby (2002) found that participating in a guided self-directed professional development program based on action research had a positive impact on teachers' abilities to engage in self-directed learning as measured by the SDLRS. With the development of abilities to self-assess their learning needs and self-plan their learning, and successful experiences in self-directed learning, teachers' confidence and enjoyment for such professional development will increase (Guglielmino, 1993).

Summary. In its design, self-directed professional development can incorporate principles of adult learning and effective professional development for teachers. Teachers' capacities for being self-directing are honored and their professional development activities can be individualized to their immediate, unique needs. When

learning activities are designed to meet their needs, teachers' engagement in the learning

is increased, as is the meaningfulness of the learning. Teachers who have participated in

self-directed professional development report benefits to their professional practice and

student learning. Teachers must be adequately prepared and have the necessary resources,

skills, and support to succeed in self-directed professional development. According to

Guglielmino (1993), "The goal of moving toward teacher-directed professional

development is long overdue, and, if pursued, will lead to positive change in our

educational institutions" (p. 233).

**Professional Development of Full-Time
Religious Educators**

Research on the professional development of full-time religious educators is

sparse. Searches for studies on the professional development of religious educators in

educational research databases and peer-reviewed journals of religious education yielded

very few results. Of those that did contain some reference to professional development,

even fewer had relevance to actual professional development practices used by full-time

religious educators. Many of the relevant studies I located dealt with the professional

development of Jewish educators. The findings contribute to the field of research

regarding the professional development for educators in general and for religious

educators in particular.

Stodolsky, Dorph, and Nemser (2006) surveyed 178 teachers at Jewish schools in

an eastern metropolitan area to gather insight into conditions and opportunities regarding

the professional culture and professional development in their schools. As part of the

survey, teachers were asked to describe up to three professional development activities they experienced in the past year that provided the "most learning" (p. 101). Only 143 of the teachers described at least one activity. Thirty-nine percent of the teachers reported that the activities were mainly self-initiated, while the remainder reported that their involvement was largely initiated by school administration. The most frequently mentioned activity was school-based workshops (31%). Other reported activities included school-based study groups, receiving classroom mentoring, and attending college courses and institutes. Fifty-four percent of the professional development activities involved pedagogical content, while 34% had specific subject-matter content. The majority of the professional development activities lasted 6 hours or less.

Various studies on collaborative models of professional development among Jewish educators have been conducted (Dorph & Holtz; 2000; Goldmeier, 1974; Stodolsky et al., 2006; Stodolsky, Dorph, & Rosov, 2008). One such model, a pilot program of support group meetings, was described by Goldmeier. This support group allowed Jewish educators and others with interest in Jewish education to gather together to voice frustrations and discuss topics of professional interest, ideas, and plans. Goldmeier suggested that this type of model had potential to yield meaningful professional development for the professional educators involved.

Dorph and Holtz (2000) emphasized the need for professional development in Jewish education to transition from the traditional training model of professional development to newer, research-supported models. Such models incorporate practices such as appealing to the learning styles of adults in engaging them as learners in content

areas that are related to their classroom subject matter (Dorph & Holtz, 2000).

A few studies or articles pertaining to the professional development of full-time religious educators were located outside of the field of Jewish education. One study used a phenomenological approach to examine the perceptions and experiences of professional development of six elementary Catholic school principals (Jewitt-Ramirez, 2009). Jewitt-Ramirez found that reflective practices, mentoring, and networking were particularly beneficial for purposes of professional development. For the development of specific professional practices, the principals discussed the importance of hands-on learning experiences in well-connected, inservice learning opportunities that are grounded in theory and are career-staged (indicating that they are directly connected to the principals' practice). The principals suggested that such experiences were more important than "one-shot" workshops.

O'Brien (2004) surveyed classroom teachers and interviewed principals of three Catholic primary schools and professional development staff from the Melbourne Catholic Education Office to obtain their perspectives regarding effective professional development. Teachers indicated that being engaged in a learning program over an extended period of time was a component of effective professional development programs. Such prolonged engagement allowed for the implementation of learning in practice, evaluation, and follow-up. It also provided a sequential, gradual scaffolding of knowledge and skills. Some of the other program components considered to be effective included opportunities to share learning with peers, learning activities that are linked to theory and educational trends that can be used in the classroom to assist in improving

teaching and learning, drawing upon teachers' own experiences, and presenters using a variety of instructional methods.

The Scottish Catholic Education Service has implemented a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program for its teachers. In this program, Catholic teachers are contractually required to complete 35 hours of CPD per year. Teachers are encouraged to create an individual CPD plan annually with their immediate supervisor (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2000). Based on needs that emerge from their professional contexts, teachers are able to select from a variety of accredited courses to complete with the intent of developing their professional expertise (Coll, 2006).

Coll (2006) interviewed one member of the senior management team of six different schools that have responsibility for the school's CPD program. Many of those interviewed indicated that teachers' selection of courses to enroll in was related to their need to develop a portfolio that could be a means for career progression. Participants' responses indicated that the program was possibly too centrally-driven and tied to policy to allow teachers the autonomy and professional learning experiences that they desired, such as personal research and discussion (Coll, 2006).

While courses offer opportunities for professional growth, for Purdon (2003), the strong emphasis on courses in the CPD program over other forms of professional development "raises concerns over the diversity of professional development opportunities currently undertaken by teachers" (p. 946). Purdon also acknowledged that "the focus on measurability of CPD opportunities limits some of the more innovative approaches where neither the input nor the output is as easily quantifiable" (p. 949).

Brooks-Young (2012) acknowledged the need for effective professional development activities and explained that a lack of time and money sometimes impedes the establishment of professional development programs. Brooks-Young described a change in emphasis from formal professional learning experiences that are externally driven to those that support school-wide goals and are principally controlled by teachers. She then described options for technology-based self-directed professional development for Catholic educators, which include online courses, webinars, video clips, and podcasts; online professional learning communities; and online research of specific topics or interests.

I found only two studies pertaining to the professional development of S&I educators that had relevance for this study. Gardner (2011) studied seminary teachers' use of reflective practices as part of their professional development. Gardner found that teachers did engage in a variety of reflective practices and recommended ways that teachers could realize more of the potential benefits in their professional development from engaging in purposeful reflection.

McConkie (1973) studied the differences in the inservice needs of various S&I personnel. Participants reported that the activity with the greatest influence on improving their teaching was working with inspiring colleagues. McConkie found that in efforts to improve gospel scholarship and teaching, teachers had a stronger need and preference for spending more time in personal study than in formal inservice activities. According to McConkie, "Informal in-service experiences...do more to improve teaching than the formal activities, such as the instruction in the monthly division or district meetings" (p.

100). Formal inservice activities needed to be more responsive to the individual needs of the teachers involved.

McConkie's (1973) findings indicated that full-time educators desired greater influence in the selection, planning, and evaluation of inservice programs. McConkie suggested that teacher training should be decentralized to make it more effective, and he recommended "an independent study program in lieu of or as a supplement to the present in-service program" (p. 104).

As discussed previously, a few months after the Certification Program was implemented, the S&I Office of Research (2012) surveyed 127 S&I educators to obtain preliminary insights into their initial engagement in certification projects. Results indicated that the majority of educators plan to work on, are working on, or have completed certification projects (S&I Office of Research, 2012). Respondents reported having a fairly positive experience with certification projects and reported a preference for working on self-directed projects over other types of projects (e.g., classes, guided projects). Educators invested an average of 36.7 hours to complete a project, exceeding the required minimum of 30 hours to be spent on a project. Many respondents "expressed concerns about sacrificing family time" (p. 18) to work on certification projects.

The top two influences on S&I educators' motivation to do certification projects were an increase in pay and professional growth. Some educators reported experiencing frustrations due to a lack of clarity and communication about requirements, expectations, and processes associated with certification projects and with the lack of timeliness in having their projects reviewed. Some also reported that participation in certification

projects was contributing to their professional growth.

In summary, research findings from studies pertaining to the professional development of religious educators are similar in many ways to those pertaining to other educators. Religious educators recognize the need for professional development that is relevant to their needs and that will help them grow in their content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Multiple authors note the need to include less traditional professional development approaches in religious educators' growth efforts.

Context of the Study

As previously mentioned, the S&I program is an educational entity within the Church Educational System (CES) operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the 2012-2013 school year, 397,036 students generally ages 14-18 enrolled in seminary, which is a 4-year religious education program consisting of daily instruction during a school year (S&I, 2014). The curriculum for seminary rotates between four scripture courses: *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*. For the same year, 359,828 college-age students enrolled in institute, which is a program of "weekday religious instruction for young single adults and married postsecondary students (generally ages 18 to 30)" (S&I, 2014, p. 1). Institute courses are based on books of scripture and other religiously related topics. Students were serviced by 45,102 volunteer educators compared to 2,013 full-time administrators and teachers (defined as "educators" in this study; S&I, 2014). Full-time administrators and teachers each have a minimum of a bachelor's degree received from

an accredited institution in various fields of study.

The objective, or mission statement, of S&I is "to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven" (S&I, 2012, p. x). As part of S&I educators' efforts to achieve the Objective of S&I, they are asked to "continually seek to improve [their] performance, knowledge, attitude, and character" (S&I, 2012, p. x; Hawks, 2013). This includes improving their knowledge of content, teaching methodology, and effective administrative practices and improving their performance in teaching and administrative responsibilities (S&I, 2012). This reflects the goal of continuous professional development employed in other professional fields, which is to ensure professionals "possess the required knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities to maintain and enhance competence and improve performance within their professional roles" (Campbell, Silver, Sherbino, Cate, & Holmboe, 2010, p. 657).

S&I administrators have emphasized the need for S&I educators to continually improve in their professional practice, particularly for the sake of their students (Hawks, 2013; Holland, 1992). For example, speaking to religious educators, Jeffrey R. Holland (1992), a former Commissioner of Church Education for CES, said:

> It is…required of us to develop genuine mastery in our profession using the best educational techniques we can employ and honing our skills for as long as we are privileged to enter that classroom. We need to devote the same kind of effort toward improving our teaching abilities that men and women in any other profession would exert. (p. 1)

S&I educators are taught that they are ultimately responsible for their individual

professional improvement and that developing professionally by becoming better teachers and leaders is part of their professional obligation (CES, 2003).

As an outgrowth of the value that S&I places on continually seeking to improve (Hawks, 2013), in January 2012, S&I administrators announced a new professional development program. This program, referred to as the Certification Program, is designed to help S&I educators increase their capacity to fulfill the Objective of S&I and their various professional responsibilities, with particular emphasis placed on educators' primary purpose of helping students learn (Webb, 2012).

Central to the Certification Program is educators' engagement in learning activities. The act of learning "is strongly connected to professional goals which demand teachers to strive for continuous improvement of their teaching practice" (Kwakman, 2003, p. 152).

The Certification Program involves earning two academic credentials (master's and doctorate degrees from accredited institutions) and two certification credentials (Certification 1 and 2). Participation in this program is voluntary, though S&I administrators encourage and invite educators to participate in this "professional development opportunity" (Hawks, 2013, ¶ 30).

Educators cannot begin working on a certification credential until they have successfully completed the apprentice program (the first 2 years of employment) or the new coordinator certification, depending on their work assignment. Educators are not permitted to begin work on Certification 2 until they have completed Certification 1 and a master's degree. Educators are not permitted to work on Certification 1 or 2 while

enrolled in a master's or doctorate program.

The certification credentials are designed to be professional growth and improvement opportunities for S&I educators, as well as to increase the overall learning of the workforce by sharing what is learned in the projects. The long-term goal of completing these certifications is the development of a workforce that can respond to the ever-changing requirements for effective teaching, be self-guiding, and take initiative and assume personal responsibility for independently identifying and resolving work-related issues (K. Shepherd, personal communication, August 9, 2013).

To complete a certification, educators must complete three projects within each of three professional categories that center on the core work of S&I—teaching and learning, content mastery, and administration and leadership—along with three additional elective projects within any of these categories for a total of 12 projects. In addition to being aligned with the core work of S&I, the certification projects that educators select need to be related to their work responsibilities and other professional needs that arise from work-related situations. By addressing the multiple facets of an S&I educator's professional responsibilities, the Certification Program aligns with Mushayikwa and Lubben's (2009) perspective that "the goal of professional development should be to help teachers become effective in all spheres of their work" (p. 381).

Projects in the teaching and learning category are to center in principles and skills of successful teaching. Content mastery projects are intended to help educators improve their mastery and understanding of scriptural texts and LDS Church history. Administration and leadership projects are intended to be used to explore administrative

and leadership principles and skills.

Educators can do a variety of activities in their certification projects. Educators can do an in-depth study of a topic of interest or work on enhancing teaching or leadership skills. They can engage in research in the form of study or in the form of experiential learning by exploring the use of various teaching methodologies or resources (e.g., technology) in the classroom (K. Shepherd, personal communication, August 9, 2013).

Educators can select from three different types of projects to complete: self-designed projects, guided projects, and classes. At least four self-designed projects must be completed as part of a certification credential. Eight guided projects, which detail the learning activities educators must complete for credit, were designed by S&I central office personnel. Six of these guided projects, including content mastery ones, were made available a year and a half after the Certification Program was introduced. Classes can be organized within local areas (equivalent of a district in public education) and consist of 15 one-hour sessions or 10 one-and-a-half hour sessions. Educators cannot earn credit for certifications by taking classes at a local college or community center.

Educators are allowed to submit a maximum of four certification projects during a 1-year period. This limitation is to help educators pace their learning efforts and maintain balance in completing their work responsibilities.

Because completing Certifications 1 and 2 is not a mandated part of S&I educators' employment, their involvement in doing certification projects must be self-initiated. Educators have principal discretion in selecting the projects they complete.

However, they are encouraged to work with their immediate supervisors in identifying and designing projects that are applicable to their daily work and align with their needs and desires for expanding their abilities to succeed in their professional assignments (Shepherd, 2012). In general, S&I educators are counseled to "seek to be aware of their own areas of needed improvement" (CES, 2003, p. 37), and supervisors are instructed to assist educators by "assessing their effectiveness of *teaching* and appropriateness of *administering*" (CES, 2003, p. 31). Supervisors and educators can incorporate certification credentials, as well as formal education pursuits, in the educators' professional growth planning. Doing so would align with the recognition of professional growth plans as a means for individualizing education and training programs for employees (Caffarella, 2002).

Prior to beginning work on a project, the project must be approved by the educator's immediate supervisor. The process of receiving approval is initiated by the educator's submission of a project application using an online management system. On this application, the educator provides a project title and project summary and describes the desired outcomes of the project. The educator also answers the following questions, "What are some ways this project will be valuable to seminaries and institutes? In what ways will this project benefit youth and young adults?" Used in this way the project application serves as a form of a learning contract (Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). If the supervisor perceives the proposed project aligns with the program requirements, approval is given (see Appendix D).

Ricard (2007) described criteria for rating self-directed learning processes of

formal learning programs for adults. Ricard explained Level 5 programs to be those in

which "learners set goals and objectives, determined and carried out activities, identified

and used resources effectively, and then evaluated their learning experience. Facilitators

supported learners in a non-adversary manner, suggested and guided as necessary, and

shared control of the process" (p. 60). In the case of S&I, "facilitators" in this definition

could be considered educators' supervisors on a micro level or S&I administrators on a

macro level. Considering the S&I Certification Program as a formal learning program for

adults, the process S&I administrators seem to be promoting would be considered a Level

5 program using Ricard's criteria.

Learning resources that can be used for certification projects include trustworthy

resources and available resources produced by the LDS Church. Educators are to spend

approximately 30 hours on each project, and nearly all of the time spent working on

projects is to take place outside of the normal work hours.

The final product of a project is either a 15- to 20-page written paper (8-10 page if

completed as part of a class) that meets designated requirements, or a portfolio of work

products (e.g., a journal, tests, interviews, media, resources for classroom or inservice

use). The paper and portfolio are intended to demonstrate the work the educator has

invested toward his or her professional growth and are to be college-level quality.

Samples illustrating acceptable portions of papers and portfolios are provided on the S&I

Educator Website for educators to reference. In some rare cases, with central office

approval educators might demonstrate their learning from a project by completing an

exam or some other task to demonstrate proficiency with acquired knowledge or skills.

Each completed paper or portfolio is reviewed by two peers using evaluation standards provided by the central office. This review process is designed to provide feedback on the paper or portfolio to further improve it. After reviewers complete their reviews, the paper or portfolio is returned to the educator with suggested changes or comments. In the online management system, the reviewers also rate the project as either "Ready to Submit" or "Not Ready to Submit" based on the project meeting the designated standards.

Educators have the option, but are not required, to incorporate reviewers' feedback before the project is submitted for supervisor review and approval. When educators desire to submit the project for supervisor approval, they must complete a project completion application. On this application, educators summarize the results of their projects, describe ways they, their students, and S&I benefited from the project, and complete a self-evaluation. The intent is that educators' efforts are highly self-assessed in terms of determining whether the required standards have been met (Webb, 2012). If the supervisor also determines that the project meets the designated standards, he or she gives approval of successful completion. Some completed projects have been made available for other educators to access on the S&I website, with the intent being to eventually make more available so as to increase the opportunity for other educators to benefit from their colleagues' learning.

When the Certification Program was introduced, S&I administrators also introduced a new compensation plan. To reward educators for their investment of time and effort in their professional development outside of their regular job responsibilities,

upon completion of a credential and if requirements for years of experience are met, educators advance one salary grade level.

Prior to this new professional development system, the compensation structure consisted of three salary lanes and educators advanced to a higher salary lane upon completion of a master's degree and a doctorate degree. Under the new program, obtaining the additional academic credentials still results in advancement in salary grade level when the required years of experience are also met.

Caffarella (2002) noted that factors that influence the decision to develop an education or training program include people, organizational and environmental factors, and cost, which includes time, money, and staff. These factors were taken into consideration in designing the Certification Program. The program needed to be designed so that educators around the world could participate and so that no additional management and staffing costs would be required (K. Shepherd, personal communication, August 9, 2013).

Rather than designing professional development curriculum materials to service the global workforce, S&I administrators sought to situate educators' learning in their own professional practices. The individualized nature of projects allows for educators in any country to address their learning needs while using the learning resources that are available to them in their own language (K. Shepherd, personal communication, August 9, 2013). The Certification Program was also designed to require minimal central oversight and involvement. Only one employee in the central office has responsibility for performing consulting and support functions for educators who seek his help. He also

works on general improvements to the program.

The Certification Program reflects the commitment of S&I administrators to the personal and professional growth of S&I educators and their belief in educators' capacities to learn and grow (Shepherd, 2012; Webb, 2012; see also Caffarella, 2002). A major question asked when developing an education or training program is whether it "can really address the problems, new opportunities, changing conditions, societal issues, and/or images of ideal practice that are presented" (Caffarella, 2002, p. 138). S&I administrators believe the Certification Program can address such elements. At the time the Certification Program was introduced to the workforce, Chad Webb (2012), Administrator of S&I, acknowledged the pressing need for educators to continue to improve so as to increase their effectiveness in helping students learn. He also provided a vision of where S&I would be collectively and individually as a result of educators' involvement in the Certification Program:

> Ten years from now we will teach better than we teach right now. We are going to train called [volunteer] teachers better in the future than we ever have. We are going to write better curriculum than we ever have. We are going to be better administrators and leaders than we have ever been. We are going to be more effective in the future in our classrooms, of teaching by the Holy Ghost in a way that protects and edifies and helps young people to come to the Savior of the World.

The purposes for the Certification Program laid out by S&I administrators align with purposes of education and training programs for adults as described by Caffarella (2002). According to Caffarella, five primary purposes of such programs are

> (1) to encourage continuous growth and development of individuals; (2) to assist people in responding to practical problems and issues of adult life; (3) to prepare people for current and future work opportunities; (4) to assist organizations in achieving desired results and adapting to change; and (5) to provide opportunities

to examine community and societal issues, foster change for the common good, and promote a civil society. (p. 10)

A program may serve more than one purpose. In the case of the Certification Program, the first four purposes listed by Caffarella directly apply.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter provided a description of self-directed learning theory, which provides the theoretical framework that informs this study, and a review of literature pertaining to teachers' professional development. The review of the literature illustrated the need for more research to be conducted that explores the professional development of full-time religious educators.

Chapter 1 contained a description of the purposes of this study. As described, in 2012, S&I implemented a professional development program that incorporates principles of self-directed learning. As a new program, research is needed to provide an understanding of what S&I educators are experiencing with the certification project component of this program and its perceived effects on their professional growth. This study seeks to explore the nature of S&I educators' experiences and to fill a gap in the literature pertaining to self-directed learning for purposes of professional development by answering the following research question: "What are S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects?"

Answering this research question requires the use of qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology is used to explore or provide an in-depth and detailed understanding of a central phenomenon, or "the key concept, idea, or process studied" (Creswell, 2005, p. 45; Patton, 2002). The data obtained using qualitative methods can lead to a descriptive and thorough understanding of the phenomenon. According to Patton, "Qualitative data describe.... They capture and communicate someone else's

experience of the world in his or her own words" (p. 47). Thus, a qualitative approach to research is appropriate when seeking an understanding of individuals' experiences or the meanings they make of their experiences (Patton, 2002).

The research question for this study is designed to be answered by using the qualitative research design of phenomenology. The use of phenomenology provides general guidelines for the strategy of the study and the processes of data collection and analysis. The use of phenomenology also fills a gap in the literature in the field of self-directed learning (Brockett, 2009).

The first section of this chapter provides a description of phenomenology and why it was selected for this study. The second section details the data collection process, and the third section describes the data analysis process. The final section discusses how the trustworthiness of this research was established.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, or the study of phenomena, was developed by philosopher Edmund Husserl (Wertz, 2005). It is the study of consciousness (Wertz, 2005), or the study of phenomena as they appear in one's consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Dukes (1984) explained that phenomenology is "a perspective on what constitutes knowledge in the human sciences" (p. 202). Within the philosophy of phenomenology, what exists as knowledge and reality only exists as it appears in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). In 1990, van Manen explained that "consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world" (p. 9). Thus, phenomenology directs attention to what

exists in one's conscious awareness of a phenomenon rather than how an object exists

outside of one's consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1989).

To perceive a phenomenon in consciousness, a person must devote some degree

of attentiveness to it—consciousness is always directed toward something (Creswell,

2013). This is the concept of intentionality, or "the internal experience of being conscious

of something" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). What appears in consciousness is directly

related to the intentionality devoted to it (Moustakas, 1994). The intentionality of

consciousness therefore consists of what an individual is conscious of (the perception of a

phenomenon) and how the individual is conscious of it (Moustakas, 1994). How a

phenomenon is perceived in consciousness reflects the meaning the phenomenon has for

the individual (Moustakas, 1994).

Obtaining an understanding of what exists in an individual's consciousness

requires an understanding of his or her lived experiences. This is because reality, as it

appears in one's consciousness, exists "at the intersection of consciousness and the

world—the human experience" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 58). In other words, what exists

in consciousness makes its appearance from an individual's lived experience (Moustakas,

1994). As such, the world cannot be directly described without reference to an

individual's lived experience of it (van Manen, 1990).

In light of these philosophical tenets of phenomenology, as a methodology

phenomenology calls for the study of individuals' lived experiences with a phenomenon

to understand how it is known by those who experience it. Phenomenology is "concerned

with providing descriptions of the general characteristics of experience" (Polkinghorne,

1989, p. 43). These descriptions of experience include the textural "what" and structural "how" of a phenomenon as it exists in the consciousness of those who experience it, the end result being a reduction of "individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

van Manen (1990) explained essence as that which constitutes the unique nature of a lived experience with a phenomenon—"that what makes a thing what it is (and without which it would not be what it is)" (p. 177). The essence can also be thought of as "the typical way in which a phenomenon presents itself in experience" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 42), or the way in which the lived experience makes sense to those who experience it (Dukes, 1984).

The essence is sometimes referred to as the essential, invariant structure of a lived experience (Creswell, 2013). These "essentials" of the experiences—the necessary structural invariants—do not vary between the experiences of different individuals with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984). They are "the constituents or common elements that make the experience what it is" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46).

Data Collection

In this study, phenomenology determined the type of data that was collected and how it was collected. Data collection processes in phenomenological research are "designed specifically for developing general descriptions of experiential processes" and can "yield clear and accurate descriptions of the structures of consciousness that constitute what appears in human experience" (Polkinghorne, 1989, pp. 44, 58).

Sample

In 1990, van Manen explained that "phenomenological research is the study of lived experience" (p. 9). Creswell (2013) added that "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 77). To accomplish this end, data is collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological studies therefore employ purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989).

When using a purposeful sampling strategy, the researcher intentionally seeks participants who are sources of rich amounts of information pertaining to the phenomenon of interest—those who have experienced the phenomenon and can thereby contribute to understanding it (Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989). I used the following criteria for identifying such participants who were able to contribute to the purposes of this study:

1. S&I educators who had completed projects in at least two categories (e.g., teaching and learning, content mastery, administration and leadership) and of different types (e.g., self-designed, guided, classes).

2. S&I educators from different S&I areas (the equivalent of districts in public education).

3. S&I educators who were at different stages of their professional lives, which could serve to add to the variety of experiences of doing certification projects (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Participants meeting these criteria were able to provide a rich description of the lived

experience of doing certification projects, resulting in increased understanding of what it is like to experience the phenomenon of self-directed learning in doing certification projects. Having completed multiple projects in different categories and of different types enabled participants to provide richer descriptions of various facets of their experiences. Being located in different areas enabled various situational factors that could influence educators' experiences to emerge from participants' descriptions.

I acknowledge that a sample based on these criteria excluded some S&I educators who might experience self-directed learning in doing certification projects in different ways due to their geographic location. For example, S&I educators in locations in which they are the only full-time educator within hundreds of miles and have limited face-to-face contact with administrators and other employees may have different experiences with certification projects than the purposeful sample in this study. An understanding of their experiences might be pursued in a separate study. The purposeful sample for this study enabled the purposes of this study to be accomplished, and the results of this study can potentially provide a point of comparison for future studies with other samples.

This sampling philosophy reflects the sampling philosophy used by Houle (1961) in his study of adults' engagement in continuing education. Houle asserted that understanding the phenomenon of continuing education must begin with an understanding of the nature and actions of those who participated in continuing education to the highest degree. This sample for my study similarly consisted of those participating in certification projects to the highest degree.

I was unable to locate an empirically validated recommendation for sample size in

phenomenological research. Dukes (1984) and Wertz (2005) acknowledged that one participant can be sufficient to answer a phenomenological research question. Gibbs (2002) employed phenomenology in a study designed to explore the meanings that four teachers derived from their experiences with self-directed professional development plans. Zabloski and Milacci (2012) used a sample of seven students to explore the shared meaning in the experience of dropping out of school. Creswell (2013) stated that in a phenomenological study, data can be collected from as many as 10 individuals. Dukes also suggested that studying three to 10 subjects can lead to strengthened findings in a phenomenological study. Other studies have used up to 25 participants (Creswell, 2013). I decided to use a purposeful sample of seven S&I educators. With seven participants I was able to gather rich data that enabled a deeper understanding of the experience of self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

To aid in the identification of the study participants, the S&I Certification Program coordinator provided me with a list of all of the S&I educators who had completed certification projects. I identified those who had completed multiple projects in at least two categories and of different types, and I identified the S&I areas they were located in. Geographic proximity was also taken into consideration to enable consistency in the method of data collection. As such, I identified potential study participants who lived within an approximately 80-mile radius of my location. Stretching north and south along the Wasatch Front, this distance includes nine different S&I areas. The number of individuals who had completed multiple projects in at least two categories and of different types varied by S&I area. Three areas had 15, 18, and 20 individuals,

respectively, who met the criteria for inclusion in this study, whereas the remaining six

areas had nine individuals or fewer.

I obtained information regarding the years of experience for a list of a narrowed

potential sample, which was based on the aforementioned sampling criteria, from within

these areas. Per the recommendation of the S&I Educational Research Committee, the

program coordinator provided insight regarding these potential participants. From this

list, I selected seven educators ranging from 4-30+ years of experience and representing

six different S&I areas (two teachers were from the same area). Two educators were

assigned at institutes and five were assigned at seminaries. These participants had

completed 4-7 projects each (a total of 44 combined) and were in the process of working

on more. I contacted each participant by telephone and explained the purpose of the

study, what involvement would entail, and invited them to participate.

Interviewing

Whereas quantitative research employs such instruments as surveys and

assessment tools to collect data, in qualitative research the researcher is the main research

instrument (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). As the research instrument,

qualitative researchers often employ one, or a combination of, three primary methods of

obtaining qualitative data: in-depth interviews, direct observations of human experience,

and written documents (Glesne, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). The

quotations from interviews, field notes from observations, and excerpts from documents

generally constitute the data for qualitative studies (Patton, 2002).

Interviewing is recognized as the typical and preferred method for data collection

in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Because phenomenology seeks descriptions of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994), interviews serve as a "means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative materials that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Therefore, I used two one-on-one, semistructured interviews as the method of data collection because they allowed an in-depth exploration of each participant's experience with self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

A semistructured, open format allowed the probing of participants' responses and enabled the conversation to follow a natural path in obtaining participants' descriptions of their experiences (Glesne, 2006). It also enabled attention to be directed to elements of participants' experiences that are of particular interest for purposes of this study.

Interview questions in phenomenological studies are designed to direct participants' attention to their experiences with a phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989). The description an individual is able to provide of a phenomenon is derived from the lived experience the individual has had with the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989). This description must be obtained after the individual has experienced the phenomenon because to reflect on the experience of a phenomenon in the moment it is experienced changes how it exists in consciousness (van Manen, 1990). To obtain a description of an individual's conscious experience of a phenomenon requires reflection *after* the lived experience (van Manen, 1990). By inviting participants to reflect on and describe their past experiences with the phenomenon of interest, often focusing on specific situations

and actions, researchers are able to obtain "descriptions of what is present in a person's consciousness when he or she attends to the particular experience under investigation" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 50; van Manen, 1990).

Creswell (2013) suggested that when using interviewing in a phenomenological approach to data collection, each interview should begin with two general questions:

1. "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?

2. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (p. 81).

These questions are intended to yield data that can be used to capture the textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences with the phenomenon and ultimately lead to an understanding of the essence, or unique nature, of the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Additional open-ended questions may also be asked (Creswell, 2013).

Early in the first round of interviews, I found that it was necessary to alter the second question suggested by Creswell (2013) pertaining to "contexts or situations" that had "typically influenced or affected [their] experiences" (p. 81) with doing certification projects. After multiple participants were unable to understand what was meant by "contexts or situations," I replaced this phrase with "environmental factors, or things happening around you." Though some participants still required clarification, they generally understood this question more easily.

My experience conducting pilot interviews with two S&I educators who had each completed multiple certification projects shaped the questions I used for this study. Per the recommendation of Glesne (2006), I used these pilot interviews to learn about the

research process and to test the interview protocol so as to increase the clarity and effectiveness of the interview questions. After completing each interview, I invited the participants to review the questions and comment on their effectiveness (Glesne, 2006). I also asked what other questions they thought I could ask to gain an understanding of the experience of doing certification projects. Their feedback led to improvements in the questions and adjustments in the planned structure of the interview.

During the pilot interviews, I found that a question that elicited key descriptions of their experiences was too far into the interview and needed to be upfront. This question was similar to the general questions suggested by Creswell (2013), and the adjusted interview protocol began with such questions. I found that the general nature of the question about participants' experiences in doing certification projects allowed them from the outset of the interview to unload a variety of thoughts and feelings pertaining to doing certifications. From these responses, I was able to probe deeper into multiple facets of their experiences and perceptions. This question brought out some of their most pressing thoughts and feelings about the Certification Program.

The interview protocol I used, as developed from the experience of the pilot interviews, is contained in Appendix B. The additional interview questions and the associated probing questions were designed help participants describe their experience and to capture textural and structural elements of the experience of self-directed learning in doing certification projects. Following the example of Houle (1961), participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences, and during the course of the interviews, I was able to ensure that the needed interview questions were addressed. Due

to certain comments and insights participants shared in the first interviews, the following

questions were added to the protocol for the second interviews:

- Do you have any preference for learning on your own or with others?

- Why have you not collaborated more with others on projects?

- To what extent has the time invested in projects been worth it in terms of growth and usefulness?

- What is the role of certification projects in relation to the regular inservice we already receive?

- Why do you think educators are willing to make the sacrifice to earn a master's degree but might be less willing or unwilling to earn a certification?

Following the recommendation of Glesne (2006), I scheduled interviews for 1

hour on days that were most convenient for the participants. For all but one participant,

interviews were conducted in their personal offices, allowing for comfort and privacy

during the interview. This other participant chose to meet in my office and at a seminary

closer to his home. Upon arriving at the site for the first interview, I provided participants

with an informed consent form to sign (see Appendix A). I reviewed the purposes of the

study, the anticipated duration of the interviews, and reminded them of their involvement

in the study after each interview (Creswell, 2013).

During the telephone conversation in which I invited the participants to

participate in the research, I inquired about their consent to have the interviews audio-

recorded and videotaped to ensure accuracy in data collection (Creswell, 2005). Each

participant consented to having the interviews audio-recorded, and five consented to

having the interviews videotaped. One participant expressed discomfort with being videotaped and another said that I could videotape the interview but it would alter the frankness of his responses. I therefore decided to not videotape the interview to allow for his comfort and thoroughness in describing his experiences and perceptions. For the interviews with these two participants, I used two audio-recording devices in case one failed to work.

The purpose of videotaping the interviews was to capture any behaviors or nonverbal communication that could provide additional insight into participants' statements. Videotaping is recognized as a way to enhance observation of participants in a study (Glesne, 2006). For the two participants who did not consent to having the interviews videotaped, I was prepared to record observations of any relevant behaviors or nonverbal communication as field notes during the interview.

During the interviews I provided each participant with a list of the projects he had completed. This proved to be a helpful resource in triggering participants' memories of experiences with certification projects they had done. The visual reminder of their projects assisted them in being more pointed in discussing their experiences.

During the interviews I recorded field notes that helped me preserve impressions and insights from the interviews that may otherwise have been lost in the transcription process or due to memory loss (Bredahl, 2013). These included comparisons to make with other participants' comments, additional questions to ask, and poignant statements that appeared to reveal much about the participants' experiences. Following each interview, I used a research journal to record my own reactions and thoughts regarding

participants' statements and the interviewing experience to raise awareness of any personal biases that might interfere with data analysis. I also included my field notes in research journal entries. The research journal was kept on an electronic document. I added thoughts and insights to the research journal that came about during the transcription process as well. The research journal served as an additional data source (Glesne, 2006).

As soon as possible following the interviews, digital video files were transferred from the recording device, which was password protected, to a password protected computer. The research journal was also stored on this computer. The video files were destroyed upon completion of this study. Other paper documents were stored in a locked drawer. I was the only person with access to these materials.

My experience with the pilot interviews revealed that more could be gained by conducting a follow-up interview. I sensed that one pilot interviewee in particular had reached a point of what he needed to say at that moment, but that a subsequent interview would reveal more about his experience. As such, each participant in the study was interviewed twice. This proved to be extremely beneficial to allow for an in-depth discussion of participants' experiences. Having two interviews allowed me to probe deeper in participants' responses in the moment they expressed them.

I did the transcription of each interview. Transcripts were stored on a password protected computer. After I transcribed the first interview, I sent the interview transcript to each respective participant. I invited them to review the transcript in preparation for the second interview. Each second interview began with an invitation to clarify or

expound on anything from the first interview. I then asked any needed clarifying questions or questions to probe deeper into additional elements of participants' experiences and perceptions. I also asked additional questions that were needed to capture more of participants' experiences. To ensure participants felt their experiences with doing certification projects had been fully captured, I sent them the interview transcripts from their second interviews by e-mail to review and include any additional experiences or insights (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also invited them to respond to a few additional clarifying or probing questions.

Data Analysis

I had initially intended to rewatch all of the videos as part of the data analysis process. However, over the course of the interviews themselves and the initial transcribing in which I used the video files to transcribe from, I realized there was nothing added to my understanding of the data by viewing them. As supported by notes in the research journal, the participants were honest and candid in their responses. One evidence of this was the way multiple participants made mention of relying on the promise of anonymity when making statements that otherwise could have contained veiled references or tempered responses, or they would refer to speaking "honestly" (e.g., "let's be honest," "to be honest with you," etc.). Participants' direct and nonhesitant tones clearly manifested and reflected their attitudes, and their nonverbal communication manifested intentness and sincerity. The identification of such nonverbal communication cues was enabled by previous training in nonverbal communication. I therefore engaged

in data analysis by reviewing only the interview transcripts, which serve as a "description of conscious experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 10), and the research journal. Videos were available for referencing, if needed.

Each transcript was first reviewed in its entirety to obtain a general impression of each participant's experiences. During this process, as well as the transcription process, I wrote memos in the research journal about emerging patterns and recurring elements I noticed in participants' descriptions of their experiences. These memos provided some assistance with identifying codes, meaning units, and potential themes in the next step of the analysis process: horizonalization of data (Moustakas, 1994).

In the process of horizonalization of data, significant statements from each transcript that are relevant to the experience of the phenomenon are to be listed and each regarded as having equal value (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). To accomplish this, I carefully read each transcript and identified and coded significant statements. I then grouped the coded statements together by similarity of code and further analyzed them to identify nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements describing or representing unique components of S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. These nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements are referred to as meaning units in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). I then grouped, or clustered, the meaning units into common categories referred to as themes (Moustakas, 1994).

The themes were created as they naturally emerged from participants' descriptions of their lived experienced. Wertz (2005) suggested that in "an advanced

stage of the analysis, the researcher may deliberately abandon the epoche and interrogate the situation in view of previously posited concepts and theories" (p. 172). Theoretical concepts may highlight elements of participants' experiences that were not previously evident (Wertz, 2005). Concepts associated with self-directed learning and professional development aided in the initial coding of the data. At a later stage of data analysis, I reviewed theoretical concepts associated with self-directed learning theory, namely process and personality-related constructs, as well as literature related to professional development. I compared these concepts to the meaning units and themes that naturally emerged from participants' responses. This helped to solidify the descriptions of the meaning units and themes.

The time and effort spent completing the aforementioned parts of the data analysis process enabled me to be fully immersed in the data. Reading each transcript in its entirety multiple times, and individual segments of transcripts multiple times beyond that, helped me develop a thorough understanding of participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Using the themes, I then developed composite textural and composite structural descriptions of the experience of self-directed learning in doing certification projects (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As previously noted, any phenomenon consciously experienced by an individual has textural and structural components to it (Moustakas, 1994). The textural components of a consciously experienced phenomenon reflect the qualities and general features of the phenomenon. These are "the 'what' of the appearing phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 78).

After composing the composite textural description, I developed a composite structural description. The structures of the experience are the inherent, underlying dynamics of participants' experiences that account for the textural qualities of their experience (Trumbull, 1993). The structures are the "how" of the experience—"the conditions that must exist for something to appear" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The how might include "psychological processes: bodily, perceptual, emotional, imaginative, linguistic, social, behavioral, and so on that are involved in its constitution" (Wertz, 2005, p. 172). These structures that "precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon" could also include "the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99).

Coming to an understanding of the structures involves the process of imaginative variation. This process "involves seeking all possible meanings, looking for divergent perspectives, and varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013). Polkinghorne (1989) described this process as "thought experiments," which involve "varying a thought or perception in one's imagination and observing the outcome" (p. 44). This involves "reading between the lines" to uncover implicit meanings embedded in participants' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990; Wertz, 2005). Based on the results of this process I composed a composite structural description.

The concluding portion of a phenomenological study is "a descriptive passage that discusses the *essence* of the experience for individuals incorporating 'what' they have experienced and 'how' they experienced it. The 'essence' is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). The essence is the essential nature

of the experience of self-directed learning in doing certification projects—how the experience essentially presents itself in consciousness as described by S&I educators who have experienced it (Dukes, 1984). This descriptive passage is a synthesis of the shared textural and structural components of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). It represents the whole of experience as comprised of its textural and structural parts. While not a long passage (Creswell [2013] suggests 1-2 long paragraphs), it was written with the intent of enabling others to capture an understanding of what it is like to experience self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

The textural and structural descriptions and the essence are products of my own reflective-interpretive process (Moustakas, 1994). I therefore recognize that my descriptions are only one interpretation of the data and do not "exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 31).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is comparable to the concept of validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In phenomenological research, trustworthiness of the project's findings "depends on the power of its presentation to convince the reader that its findings are accurate" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57). Trustworthiness was established in this study based on the four criteria of judging the trustworthiness of a qualitative study identified by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Many of the strategies for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research suggested by Creswell (2013) were included in these efforts. Creswell recommended that at least two suggested procedures be used for establishing trustworthiness. As illustrated, my efforts more than satisfied this recommendation.

Credibility

Triangulation and member checking are two ways that the credibility of qualitative research can be established (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple data sources can be used to triangulate the data collected (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the multiple data sources consisted of multiple interviews, which allowed for revisiting and more deeply discussing earlier questions, and a research journal. The research journal consisted of notes, reflections, and insights relative to what occurred during and after the interview for comparison during data analysis. Interpretations of participants' experiences could be compared with insights, reflections, and others observations recorded in the research journal. I also recorded reflections in the research journal during data analysis to provide a means to monitor any potential influence of personal bias.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checking was done by providing participants with the transcript of the first interview prior to the second interview for their review. During the second interview, participants were able to clarify or expound upon their previous responses. I sent participants the transcript of the second interview by e-mail and invited them to determine its accuracy and to add any other aspects of their lived experiences that were not captured during the interviews. I also asked a few additional

questions for which they provided written responses. The multiple interviews and

contacts that transpired through member checking contributed to having prolonged

engagement with participants, an additional strategy for establishing trustworthiness

(Creswell, 2013).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability for findings from one study to be transferred,

or applied, to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The degree of transferability

depends on the degree of similarity between the study context and the new context

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's responsibility to enable transferability is to

provide thick description of the context within which the study is conducted (Creswell,

2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is accomplished by the thorough description of the

nature of certification projects and the S&I program, which serves as the general context

in which certification projects are done, provided at the end of Chapter 2. This is also

accomplished by providing detailed descriptions about emergent themes in the data as

recorded in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

The dependability and confirmability of qualitative research can be

simultaneously established using an external audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An external

audit involves an outside individual (auditor) who examines the acceptability of the

process of inquiry, the potential influence of researcher bias, and determines whether the

inferences and interpretations are logical. The auditor also assesses the appropriateness of

the themes, whether findings are grounded in the data, how credibility measures were used, and the extent to which all evidence, including alternative explanations, was accounted for (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of an external audit is also validated by Creswell (2013).

The external auditor for this study was selected because of his familiarity and experience with phenomenological research. Per the suggestion of Lincoln and Guba (1985), the external audit was conducted near the completion of the study. The auditor reviewed the results of his audit with me and provided a letter of attestation that his findings were satisfactory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This letter is contained in Appendix C.

Positionality

When using phenomenology, prior to data collection the researcher is to engage in the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, this is the process of bringing to conscious awareness my own experiences with and presuppositions regarding self-directed learning in doing certification projects and temporarily suspending them (known as bracketing) so as to approach the interview with a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon and an openness to hearing participants' descriptions of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2009). This serves as a means to clarify the researcher's bias, which clarification is recognized as an additional strategy for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The following description of my interest and involvement in certification projects and my positionality as a researcher are designed to

accomplish this.

I have been employed by S&I for 6 years. More than 4 years of that time was spent as a teacher in a seminary classroom. My current assignment, which I have had for the past 2 years, is as a curriculum writer. Located at S&I's central office, I am involved as a writer and reviewer of seminary curriculum and other learning resources. I have been told that after a few years in this assignment, I will again be given a teaching assignment outside of the central office.

As a classroom teacher, I felt a strong desire to improve my practice for the benefit of my students. I was continually interested in what methods could be used to enhance students' learning, and I actively sought for increased understanding of the subject matter. As a curriculum writer, I am able to continue my pursuit of increased understanding of the subject matter, and I also seek ways to improve my researching, writing, and reviewing skills.

My graduate studies piqued my interest in self-directed learning and the use of purposeful and results-producing professional development. Therefore, when I was first introduced to the Certification Program, I developed a strong interest in the processes associated with certification projects and the effects, if any, of doing certification projects on S&I educators' professional growth. At this point, I have not had the opportunity to work on any certification projects. One rule of the program is that if an employee is working on a graduate degree, he or she is not allowed to work on certification projects. I, therefore, could not bias the collection and analysis of the data with my own personal experience. I was intrigued by the preliminary research that was gathered and by the

responses of colleagues to their experiences with doing certification projects. I was deeply interested in exploring S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning as it is manifested in their assuming responsibility for and control over their learning, planning their learning projects, implementing their plan, and evaluating their learning.

With no personal experience in doing certification projects, the extent of my potentially biasing experience was what I had observed from others' experiences and assumptions I brought to the process based on theory and existing research. These experiences, combined with my beliefs regarding certification projects, needed to be suspended so as to approach each participant's experience with doing certification projects with a fresh perspective, free from imposition of my expectations (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989). While bracketing is never perfectly accomplished, by bringing cognitive attention to the components of my potentially biasing experience and purposefully trying to suspend their influence, I believe I was able to approach data collection with the needed openness (Moustakas, 1994).

As a researcher, I am philosophically positivist. However, I recognize and agree with various tenets of constructivist philosophy, which is one of the paradigms under which qualitative research is conducted. Constructivism does not deny the existence of an outside reality (Candy, 1991). Yet, individual consciousness plays a central role in an individual's understanding of the world, and this understanding is constructed by the individual (Candy, 1991). New knowledge is integrated with existing cognitive schema to create new connections, meanings, and understandings (Candy, 1991; Tusting & Barton, 2003).

Positivistic research is often quantitative, but I consider the contributions qualitative research makes to understanding various phenomena as essential because the resulting data of qualitative research can provide meaning that "describes a lived experience and tells the stories behind statistics" (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012, p. 175). Such "stories" can add insights into unique cases and can increase understanding in general.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The data collection process brought to light many different experiences, perspectives, ideas, and nuances associated with self-directed learning in doing certification projects, as well as with the Certification Program in general. The results reported in this chapter are those which pertain most directly to the research questions for this study, which were:

1. What are S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects?

2. What perceived impacts has S&I educators' engagement in doing certification projects had on their professional growth?

This chapter begins with a brief description of each participant. The intent of these descriptions is to provide readers with a general understanding of each participant and their disposition toward the Certification Program. Following a description of the participants, the meaning units and themes that emerged from the analysis of the data are discussed. These meaning units and themes were developed using participants' descriptions of their experiences, notes in the research journal, and personal observations. Many direct quotations are included to allow the data, or the participants, to speak for themselves. Rare and slight editing of their descriptions was necessary for clarity.

The textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences are then provided. These are followed by the essence. Throughout the process of identifying meaning units and themes and constructing the textural description, structural description,

and the essence, I engaged in an interpretive process (Moustakas, 1994). As a recognized

principle in phenomenological research, these products represent only one interpretation

of the data (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

All seven of the participants in this study were S&I educators located within the

Wasatch Front, a geographic region including nine S&I areas. The participants of this

study represent six of these areas. The names of the participants in this study have been

replaced with pseudonyms to safeguard their anonymity. Because the participants

represented a relatively small population of educators within S&I, descriptions of each

participant have been judiciously selected so as to protect their identities. To accomplish

this same purpose, their years of experience are reported in ranges. Each participant had

earned a bachelor's and a master's degree.

John

John had been employed with S&I for 14-17 years. At the time of the interview,

he was assigned as an institute instructor, a position he had been in for 2 years. His

previous assignments included being a seminary teacher and a principal of a seminary.

John expressed interest in pursuing a doctoral degree in a few years. To John, "Education

is essential regardless of whether it's from a formal university or in-house training."

John had a very favorable attitude toward certification projects. In his words, "I

love them, sincerely.... Really enjoy them." He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to

improve himself by doing certification projects.

Mark

Mark was very similar to John in numerous aspects. He had been employed with S&I for 14-17 years, and was assigned as an institute instructor. His previous assignments included being a seminary teacher and a principal of a seminary. He also expressed interest in pursuing a doctoral degree in a few years.

Similar to John, Mark expressed gratitude for the Certification Program. He said, "From day one I've been a huge proponent of doing certifications and incredibly grateful that they even put something out like it." Mark thought that certification projects were "an incredible idea," and he felt that he could not "say enough good about the program."

Kurt

Kurt had been employed with S&I for 10-13 years. He was assigned as a seminary teacher, served as a mentor for a newly hired teacher, and fulfilled other responsibilities at his seminary. He had been a principal on a previous seminary faculty. Prior to joining S&I, Kurt worked in another professional field for several years, which he believed influenced him to perceive elements of work hours and salary differently than other S&I employees.

When the Certification Program was first introduced to him, Kurt was "fine with it." Though Kurt felt favorably about the learning opportunities and outcomes associated with certification projects, his initial descriptions of his experiences with certification projects had a tone of frustration. His frustrations largely stemmed from concerns with communication about the financial implications of the Certification Program.

Pete

Pete had been employed with S&I for 25-30 years. He was assigned as a seminary principal, so in addition to teaching several classes, he supervised educators at his seminary as well as those assigned to nearby junior highs. He was also a mentor for a new teacher. He had completed coursework toward a doctoral degree, but chose not to complete a dissertation.

None of the aspects of the Certification Program were initially appealing to Pete. He felt that if those who designed the program would have surveyed educators and asked, "What can we do to help you be a better teacher? Would doing this Certification Program do that for you?," educators would have responded, "This Certification Program isn't it." He was frustrated with many aspects of certification projects.

David

David had been employed with S&I for 25-30 years. He was assigned as an assistant principal at a seminary, which meant in addition to teaching three classes he assisted the principal with his responsibilities.

David's initial response when asked to describe his experience with doing certification projects was that he was excited because he considered in-house education as a fitting means for financial increases. In his experiences with doing certification projects, David had sought ways to minimize the amount of effort he needed to invest, and he was frustrated with the formatting requirements for written papers. Of the participants in the study, David was the least driven to initiate and engage in self-directed learning efforts.

Bill

Bill had been employed with S&I for 10-13 years. He was assigned as a seminary instructor.

When the Certification Program was first introduced, Bill thought "it was great." Bill's initial response when asked to describe his experience with doing certification projects introduced a theme he repeated throughout his initial interview: the difficultly of satisfying the requirement to work on certification projects largely outside of work hours.

Jim

Jim had been employed with S&I for 4-6 years. He was assigned as a seminary instructor. Prior to joining S&I, Jim worked in another professional field for several years. Jim had begun doctoral coursework but was unable to continue due to enrollment errors on the part of the university. He expressed interest in continuing his efforts in a few years.

When Jim was introduced to certification projects, he thought "it was just a great idea." He felt the program was "inspired" to help educators be better. Jim was the only participant required to complete 24 certification projects because he was not gifted the first certification credential. He said he was "okay" with needing to do 24. He had a favorable attitude toward certification projects due to the favorable experiences and outcomes he had experienced from doing them. Similar to Bill, he questioned and had difficulty with the time requirement pertaining to when educators are allowed to work on projects.

Meaning Units and Themes

The following 51 meaning units and 9 themes were developed as they naturally

emerged from participants' descriptions of their lived experiences. Theoretical concepts

associated with andragogy and self-directed learning were also consulted in developing

the themes. A comparison of key findings from these themes with theory and existing

research is provided in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.1 provides the nine themes that emerged from the analysis of the data

and the meaning units comprising each theme. The following results of the study are

presented by theme; within each theme detailed descriptions of the meaning units

comprising the theme are provided.

**Theme: The Influence of Personal
Characteristics**

Participants' descriptions of their experiences with certification projects

illustrated how various personal characteristics influenced their decision to engage in, and

how they experienced, this form of self-directed learning. These personal characteristics

include the desire for self-improvement; being self-motivated; initiative; desire for

control; the ability to cope with ambiguity; preference for structured learning

experiences; preference for learning with others; desire for variety; desire for easier ways

to learn; comfort and confidence in research and writing; persistence; honesty and

integrity; and concern for quality.

Desire for self-improvement. Participants spoke of their desire to improve

themselves as educators. Kurt and Pete said that in the absence of certification projects,

The Influence of Personal Characteristics

-Desire for self-improvement

- Being self-motivated

- Initiative

- Desire for control

- The ability to cope with ambiguity

- Preference for structured learning experiences

- Preference for learning with others

- Desire for variety

- Desire for easier ways to learn

- Comfort and confidence in researching and writing

- Persistence

- Honesty and integrity

- Concern for quality

Motivation

- Financial incentive

- Influence of age in career on the valence of the financial incentive

- Obedience

- Desire for self-improvement

Personal Interest and Applicability

- Selecting projects based on personal interest

- Applicability

- Benefit

- Influence of personal interest on learning experiences

- Reflecting on one's learning needs to identify learning interests

The Influence of Others

- Influence of students

- Influence of colleagues

- Influence of supervisors

- Influence of central office personnel

The Influence of Program Requirements and Expectations

- The influence of requirements and expectations on learning efforts and activities

- Positive effects of the requirements and expectations on learning

- The challenge of doing certification projects

- The requirement to not use work time to do certification projects

Lack of Understanding of the Requirements, Expectations, and Financial Implications of Doing Certification Projects

- Lack of understanding of the requirements and expectations regarding how to do certification projects

- Lack of understanding of the financial implications of earning a certification credential

Time

- The number of hours and months spent working on certification projects

- Pacing the number of certification projects completed each year

- Influence of personal responsibilities on working on certification projects

- Influence of work responsibilities on when certification projects are worked on

- Benefits from when certification projects are worked on during the year

- The need to justify investing time and effort

- Time being worth it or wasted

Emotions Experienced in Doing Certification Projects

- Excitement, enjoyment, and fun

- Satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment

- Lack of excitement, enjoyment, and fun

- Frustration, guilt, and anger

Perceived Influence on Learning and Growth and Use in Practice

- An opportunity to have additional professional development needs met

- Increased understanding, growth, and improvement

- Evaluating one's learning based on improvement

- Affects practice

- Creating a resource to reference or use

- Reflection facilitates the application of learning

- Evaluating one's learning based on application to practice

- No large improvements

Figure 4.1. Themes and meaning units that emerged from participants' descriptions of their experiences.

they would still pursue their own self-directed learning efforts for purposes of professional development. Such efforts were part of their "nature." As Kurt said, "I'm just one of those guys that wants to improve."

Pete and David, who had both worked for over 25 years as religious educators, were committed to improving themselves. Pete said, "I would've continued to self-improve anyway, or I would've retired.... My whole drive right now for my last 10 years is just to keep improving. Just get better. Don't get stale. Don't give up. Don't cave in." David described other educators who had been "riding their time until they retire," but he "refused to be that way." He said, "I think any teacher ought to be on the cutting edge, they ought to be learning and growing and developing as part of their professional development."

John felt that continuous improvement as an educator was "just the expectation of being hired." He noted that S&I kept paying him more every year and he felt he "ought to merit that pay" by becoming "a better teacher." On a personal level, John said, "I have a really hard time staying dormant." As such, he sought to become like individuals who exemplified qualities of hard work and an unwillingness to waste time in life. John had adopted the following mindset: "If you're going to have a career, you gotta be the very best you can be at it, whatever that is.... I've got to be the best I can be at this to add value to the company."

Mark attributed part of his excitement for certification projects to his love for learning, which stemmed from a desire to be "informed and knowledgeable." He said, "Wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, I'm trying to learn something." Mark's desire for

learning was "all-encompassing," so whether it was "Harry Potter trivia" or "Jabari Parker's stats," he loved gathering information and learning.

Every participant described how their desire to improve themselves as educators was influenced by their desire to help their students learn and enjoy their experiences in the classroom. For example, John's desire to be the best he can be as an educator was also motivated by his "love" for students and his "desire to be good enough for them." Mark spoke of wanting to "become a better resource to help [his students] in the world they live in." Kurt's desire "to have a better classroom experience for students" was what "motivates [him] to be the best [he] can inside [his] class." Pete felt it was important for S&I educators to "do the very best" they can in teaching students. He added, "I want to keep improving and keep getting better so that those people that I directly affect, I can affect them in a positive way."

Being self-motivated. Jim's engagement in certification projects was due to "self-motivation" and not encouragement from others. John and Bill both described themselves as being "pretty self-motivated." Bill felt that many of the first earners of the certification credential were educators who are "extremely self-motivated and extremely task-oriented."

Initiative. Participants' personal initiative was illustrated in the way they responded after certification projects were introduced to them. Mark described his response: "I was super excited.... I jumped right on it.... And I actually went home after the announcement and I made up a spreadsheet of all the different ideas that I had right then of different things I could do." Mark immediately took part in helping organize a

certification class for other educators in his area. He described his mindset as, "Let's go, let's get this done and going."

When asked to describe his experience with making the decision to move forward with doing certification projects, John replied;

> Oh, there was no decision. I mean, I was that excited about it. It was immediate.... By the time the meeting was over, I was thinking of different projects that I wanted to approve, and that I had written down.... And so there was no pause in, "Are you going to do it?"

John said that he and most of his faculty put a certification project together and "started on it right off the bat as soon as we could."

Bill was similar in the way he "jumped in and started going" on certification projects: "The minute [the program] launched was the minute I started doing one." Bill immediately went "on the website looking for what to do." Kurt demonstrated initiative by asking "enough questions to understand that [he] needed to do [certification projects]," and, like Bill, by searching for information on the website to gain more understanding of how to do them. Pete had the following mindset regarding initiating his efforts to do certification projects: "I've got to get started. I've got to get going.... I've got to get this rolling."

Desire for control. Several participants' descriptions of their experiences reflected a desire for control over decisions regarding their learning. Mark had a unique perspective about his educational preferences, a perspective that revealed his preference for control: "I like to learn. I don't necessarily like to be taught, but I like to learn."

Kurt and John exhibited control over their learning by taking the design for a certification project created by someone else and adapting it to their own individual

preferences. For example, Kurt worked with a colleague to adapt an idea for a certification project done by educators in another area so that, in his words, it "looked like what we wanted it to look like."

John felt control over his written papers. In discussing whether he implemented feedback from a reviewer, he said, "Ultimately it's my paper. And I'm going to make the decisions of whether to implement their comments based on what I'm trying to accomplish."

Jim had the most to say about desiring to have control over his learning. Jim loved that S&I administrators had allowed educators "independent choice" in determining what certification projects they would do. He said, "I think having that choice—that liberty of really choosing something that I have a desire in—has made it worthwhile." He used the word "genius" to describe this feature, and added, "If I'm an administrator, I'm thinking, 'If people really buy into this, it's worth this money that we'll pay out because they're bettering themselves through their own choice.' That's amazing, right?"

Jim's reason for enjoying writing papers reflects his preference for control over his learning:

> I feel like I'm in control. I feel like I have freedom to voice my opinion. It's not black-and-white maybe like a math test would be where it's either right or wrong, but I have more wiggle room.… I think there's freedom in it.

Jim also liked the "freedom" of being able to plan his learning activities. Kurt experienced a sense of freedom as well: "I like freedom to be able to choose projects that I want to learn about myself or that will improve my teaching in the way I think I need help." He and Pete noted that one feature of learning independently was that they could

have freedom or control over the learning topic, resources, and activities.

Jim said he "would really resist and have a lot of friction if [he] was told what to write on." He added, "I would be doing it as a check-off and as an assignment instead of doing it to seek more knowledge and even make myself better." Even guided projects led him to "feel infiltrated." He contrasted this with a certification project he completed that he had "ownership" of. Because he "owned" the project, he still remembered what he had learned. In general, Jim emphasized, "I want to own it, completely from start to [end]."

Mark, Pete, and Kurt also spoke of the possibility of S&I making some certification projects required. Mark speculated that "most of the first certification" would eventually be composed of required projects that other S&I educators have found to be meaningful. As a new educator Mark said he would have appreciated being required to do certain projects for the following reason: "Because then I didn't know what I wanted to know."

In certification classes or collaborative settings, participants exercised control over their learning. They discussed making the choice to attend certification classes or collaborative learning activities that were offered, and discussed how in classes they were given the choice of what topic they would write their papers on. Despite liking his experiences with a certification class he took, Mark addressed what he termed "the negative of a class":

> It limits how broad you can go or specific you can go because it depends on what the teacher's teaching to what you're going to learn.... In the class it's much more directed by the teacher.... I don't get to really kind of decide where I want to go with the information.

He contrasted this with self-designed projects in which he could direct what he wanted to learn.

Mark's description of his experiences with attending a certification class reflected his sense of control in the learning situation. He said, "I chose to go to the class. And so that automatically makes me think I'm the agent in my learning and so I'm going to love being taught." He added, "If I choose to go then I am accountable for the fact that I'd better learn something because I chose to go." He recognized that he was also "accountable to learn something" in situations in which he had not chosen what he would be taught, but that the learning "doesn't feel as urgent in those situations."

The ability to cope with ambiguity. The ability to cope with ambiguity was evidenced in several participants' descriptions of their efforts to plan and move forward with their certification projects. John described the importance of the planning stage of a certification project for him: "I think that's one of the most crucial stages because that sets the tone of your whole project." One element of the planning stage was the establishment of learning objectives. Jim felt the online proposal helped him clarify his learning objective by "molding down" what he was "really trying to do" and giving him "this clear path" of what he wanted to accomplish.

Having a learning objective enabled participants to move forward with their learning despite not having complete certainty about the learning resources and activities they would use in their learning. John and Bill generally knew what resources they would use and activities they would engage in, but other participants differed in the extent to which they were certain of all they would use and do. For Kurt, despite not knowing

exactly what a final product would look like from the outset for some certification

projects and all of the resources he would use in his learning, he did know what he

wanted "to get out of it." He felt he did not "have a good enough vision" to plan all of his

learning "in advance."

David was similar. After coming up with an idea for a certification project, he

asked himself, "If this is going to be a project, what is it that I'm going to specifically

do?" Rather than planning out all of his specific learning activities, he explained, "It just

kind of it went as it went. I knew the end result was going to be a document, so what's

going to be in the document?"

Pete also described the role of his learning objectives in moving forward with his

learning efforts and his inability to plan out all of his learning activities when he said:

> I knew the end results of what I wanted to accomplish. And I planned these were
> some of the things I wanted to look at. But you can't just sit down and say,
> "Okay, this is all good. I know exactly what I'm doing." Because over the course
> of that there's things that you're going to be, I think, inspired with. I don't know
> whether it's spiritually inspired or you just logically say, "This isn't what I want.
> I'm going to change it." And so you just kind of build it as you go along.

Kurt and John also acknowledged that their learning objectives could change as they

advanced through their learning because of the way new information could alter or add to

what they wanted to accomplish.

Multiple participants also coped with ambiguity in the requirements, expectations,

process, and financial implications of doing certification projects. (More about the

specific ambiguity they experienced is detailed in a separate theme.) The "ambiguity" of

the requirements of doing certification projects "was an obstacle" Bill experienced. Kurt

explained that "probably the biggest challenge—the biggest hurdle—to overcome in the

first couple of projects" was the "ambiguity" about the "process and what it's supposed to look like." For these participants, coping with ambiguity involved moving forward with their learning efforts without a complete understanding of these factors. Referring to certification projects he completed early in the program's existence, Mark said, "I just did whatever I wanted and hoped it fit. And they didn't even really know, and so it fit."

Coping with ambiguity did not necessarily involve a passive acceptance of what was unknown. This was evidenced by Bill and Kurt's efforts to understand program requirements and expectations and Kurt and Pete's efforts to understand the financial implications, which Pete explained as being "ambiguous" and "vague." These participants actively sought to obtain clarity regarding what was initially ambiguous.

For example, Bill described how after the program was introduced he was "on the website looking for what to do and there was nothing there." However, he moved forward with "just the basics" he remembered "hearing about." Even in the continued presence of ambiguity about requirements, Bill planned to continue "bulling forward" in doing "what's asked on the website—the minimum requirements, the maximum requirements, whatever you want to call it."

In the absence of clarity about learning resources, Kurt judged what he perceived would be sufficient based on his understanding of available information about requirements. To obtain understanding of expectations, he searched on the S&I website for information, called the program coordinator "several times trying to understand," called his area leaders, and spoke with colleagues. He printed a sample of a written paper provided on the S&I website and patterned his paper after it. He said, "I figured if I could

make it look like that and it's the same length at least, and I have at least the number of resources, then it's got to count." Because he had invested the number of hours that were required, did his best to make it look the way "they wanted it to look," and believed that those approving his work were "good enough men that they're going to see that [he] put in real effort," he believed his work would be accepted.

Preference for structured learning experiences. Pete expressed a very strong preference for structured learning experiences—what he referred to as "the class mentality." Such experiences involved an external entity providing learning resources and direction regarding learning activities, or having a structured learning plan while learning with colleagues. Pete considered structured learning experiences to be "far better" than projects he did by himself. He intended to have his remaining four projects be formal classes or projects with others, rather than doing them on his own.

In speaking of his learning preferences, David said, "I appreciate having some structure and some direction." That was one reason he appreciated guided projects, which provided him with the learning resources, learning activities, and a clear expectation of what the final product would "look like." David also preferred taking certification classes over doing self-designed projects because of the structure classes provided. He explained,

> If all my certifications could be done going to these classes and writing up a paper, that's the way I'd do it because it's prepared for you. It's outlined for you, and you show up at 10:00 and you learn.…And then you write the paper on it.... I like that because I know I have to be to this class at 10:00 and I'm going listen for 2 hours and I'm going to take notes and be inspired by a good teacher, and it motivates me. Whereas if I've got to sit down for 2 hours on my own and write that, that's why I have more projects approved than I have done. So it's more of a personality thing. But the structure is helpful for me.

Mark believed that the clearly known structure of a master's degree made

working on one more desirable to S&I educators than doing certification projects, which

he felt educators still had uncertainty about what they needed to do. Because a master's

degree is structured by a college ("they'll tell me what I have to do"), Mark thought that

educators would be more willing to earn a master's over a certification credential.

Preference for learning with others. All of the participants enjoyed and

benefited from learning with others, and some would seek it out on a situational basis.

For example, Kurt would rather do research by himself, but he preferred learning with

others when studying teaching skills and methods. Jim preferred learning on his own, but

would "never choose either-or."

Pete and David had a strong preference for learning with others over learning on

their own. Pete felt that he learned better by working with others. He explained,

> I think it's just the way I learn. I learn a lot better in a group than I do just sitting
> down. Even in my lesson planning I read the stuff and then I have to go in [to a
> colleague] and say, "What do you think? What's your feeling of…?" Because I
> just learn better that way. I can put things together better that way. It might just be
> my own personal learning structure, but it's better for me that way.

David felt that being "with your colleagues" was "a motivation" to engage in a

certification project. He added, "It's not an independence, hours on end in your office.

I'm more of a people-person and a social-person anyways, so I'm motivated by that." He

felt that needing to do projects on his own "becomes less of a motivation."

Desire for variety. Five participants spoke of having interest in, a desire for, and

benefiting from variety in their learning. As a general reflection of a preference for

variety, John spoke of having "loved the variety" in the certification projects he had been

able to do. One reason Jim enjoyed working on a certification project for maybe "an hour

every day" during summer work hours was because doing so was "kind of breaking the mold."

Jim's desire for "variety" in his learning experiences influenced him to choose to complete an area-wide project and to enroll in a certification class. It was also a reason for his interest in doing a portfolio. Jim considered the certification class to be "a good alternative to just doing hardcore research." He said he also liked "having the variety of it doesn't just have to be a 15-page paper." He added, "Even though I do enjoy that, it was nice to have another option."

One value Bill saw in learning with others was "there's variety to it." Bill felt that at the stage he was at in his certification projects, a guided project "might be really good" for him to be able "to try something a little bit different…for variety-sake alone. New horizons. A different challenge. An opportunity to break the mold a little bit by doing something different."

Pete's method for working on projects reflected his desire for variety. He described his method, which involved having the project "broke out into different aspects of what [he's] doing with it." He would "spend so much time with" one aspect and then "spend so much time" with another "part of it." By having "three or four different parts…going on at the same time," he was able to say, "Oh, I did that one last time. I'm tired of that one. I'm going to go do this one."

David appreciated having the option of working on different certification projects at one time. He described how he would design a lesson outline for one project "and then put it aside and do the other one next time."

A lack of variety also influenced participants' experiences. While working on one certification project, because it "didn't have enough variety," Jim said his mindset "eventually…kind of turned into, 'Well, let's just get it done.'" For Bill, a lack of variety had a different nuance. The lack of variety between the substance of his work and church service responsibilities, which involved a significant amount of teaching, and the topics of certification projects made it challenging for him to want to work on projects.

Desire for easier ways to learn. Comments from Mark and David reflected a desire to find what they considered to be easier ways of doing certification projects. Mark described how he looked for "loopholes" in the requirements of tasks he was given that would make it so he was "still meeting the qualifications, but that'd make it easier to do those things." He did not elaborate on what loopholes he had found with certification projects, but he said that S&I administrators had "closed" some of them.

David said he "was very, very excited" about the fact that the required length of a written paper was shorter for taking a certification class, and this served as a motivation for him to do the class as a certification project. David described part of his reasoning for his learning preferences: "I'm a little less effort, the better." As additional evidence, he admitted that his preference for being able to turn work assignments he was already doing into certification projects was "a personality thing and a laziness thing."

Comfort and confidence in researching and writing. Participants varied in their comfort and confidence in self-directed learning activities related to researching and writing. John and Mark were especially comfortable with researching. John described one of the most appealing aspects of certification projects to him: "Very honestly, one, it gave

me additional reason to research, which I love.... I love the research of a paper.... The personal satisfaction of being able to do stuff that I love to do anyways was a huge part of that." John considered "the research and everything like that" as a "hobby." He felt that "research should just be part of who we are in our employment."

For Mark, being able to work on certification projects was "doing what [he] really wanted to do anyways." When certification projects were introduced, he said, "I was thinking, well, I do this stuff anyways. Because even before the certifications came out, every once in a while I'd get a bee under my bonnet and I'd go, 'Ooh, I want to learn more about that.'"

Pete felt that identifying resources to use in his learning—to take a topic and "really research it out"— was "probably a little bit more difficult" for him than some others because he was "not a real research guy." He explained,

> I don't like that process, so it's something that's a little bit more difficult for me. I think it's because I'm hyperactive. I have a hard time just sitting and doing that kind of stuff—just going through stuff and finding stuff. That's just not my personality.… Research just isn't my thing. I'm more active—get up and go. So that's been a challenge to just make myself sit down and do something that I really don't like the process.

Every participant expressed confidence in his ability to access the required five resources that needed to be referenced in a certification project. Participants reported that their knowledge of and ability to access resources had no influence on limiting the projects they would select. Mark recognized the need to contemplate what resources he would obtain prior to submitting a proposal. David acknowledged that accessing resources related to some topics would be "easier" than finding resources for other topics, but he felt that "there's got to be five resources somewhere." Even Pete felt that five

resources was "a reasonable amount of things to look at" and that it was "fairly easy to find that many." John questioned whether an individual would be really doing research if he or she was unable to access a minimum of five resources.

Pete described the way the Internet had made identifying resources "a lot easier." Bill and Kurt felt confident in being able to access needed resources because the Internet had created, in Kurt's words, a "pretty accessible world." A world that, according to Bill, enabled a person to "find whatever you want whenever you want without having to go to a library and find the book and find the page." As such, to access resources related to religious education, participants talked about using Google, the S&I Educator Website, and other websites. They also used the LDS edition of the scriptures, S&I training handbooks, S&I curriculum manuals, a digital resource library, and other books. To access resources related to public education, participants talked about using Google, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and other websites. Some participants also reported talking with colleagues to identify and access religious and public education resources to use in their learning. Works cited in resources participants initially studied also led them to additional resources to explore.

Six of the participants mentioned the way that their previous work-related experiences influenced them in identifying and accessing resources, and the other participant acknowledged the way that a previous experience in a church service responsibility would influence him in the same regard. For John, Pete, and Kurt, identifying resources to use in their learning involved remembering articles, talks, or portions of books they had previously read that related to the topic of interest. David and

Bill discussed using learning resources they had obtained earlier in their experiences as educators. For David, some resources were "old, old resources from years ago" that other educators "don't even have anymore."

Bill and Jim's awareness of resources in the field of public education and knowledge of how to access them were influenced by their experiences with researching and writing papers for their undergraduate and graduate degrees. Bill realized that one of the benefits of earning a master's degree was "you're open to more resources and you have more knowledge." Bill and Jim's previous experiences helped them become familiar with using search engines such as Google Scholar and EBSCOhost to identify and access articles to use in their learning.

Jim's thought to use students as a resource to learn from by surveying them was also influenced by his previous educational experiences. In describing how he decided what activities to do for certification projects, he said,

> For some reason—I think maybe from my master's degree—I always think surveys and evaluations—qualitative research and hopefully put in some quantitative research. But I always think surveys because it's anonymous, kids respond to that well. They like fill-in-the-bubbles, and then I can put it on an easy scale to measure.

Participants varied in their comfort and confidence with writing papers. John didn't mind writing papers. After spending over 100 hours on a certification project that involved writing a paper, Pete had been cautious about doing additional certification projects that required written papers. He said, "I like learning, but I am not a fan of writing."

In terms of writing, Kurt, Mark, and David were similar in that none of them considered themselves to be "great" writers. Because he did not consider himself to be "a

writer," Kurt said, "I hate that part when I've got to put it on paper, but I do like the finished [product] idea."

Mark did not "feel comfortable writing" and did not like writing. He reasoned that this was likely the case because he had not "done it a ton." Because Mark did not like writing papers, he said, "I choose portfolios whenever I can." Mark did feel confident in his abilities to "write short extemporaneous stuff." He appreciated that the writing activities and final products for some guided projects were designed that way, something he initially did not know was allowed.

One reason guided projects were appealing to David was because of the way his learning could be "broken down into segments." He appreciated being able to complete a project by reading some materials and writing a little paper on what was read and repeating this process rather than simply reading a large quantity of materials and writing a large paper. This made the writing process more "manageable" for him and helped him feel like he was "making progress towards the end result in segments." He felt the ability to do smaller writing assignments helped him overcome the challenge of having his thought patterns interrupted while in the process of working on a large paper and needing to figure out where to start up again. Because of "so many distractions" existing around him, he appreciated "that you can get a chunk out of the way." Otherwise, he did not feel able to work on projects until he had a long enough block of time to read a large portion of materials and write about them.

Jim and Bill were different from the other participants in their attitudes toward writing papers. Jim said, "I enjoy writing papers." He appreciated how writing gave him

"plenty of time" to arrange his words in a way "to sound more intelligent or sound more persuasive." Speaking of his abilities to write papers, Bill said, "I can type a paper. I'm not saying it's great, but I can type.... I can get ideas down. It's just something that's always been there." Bill's confidence in his abilities to write papers contributed to his willingness to do certification projects.

Jim attributed his comfort with writing papers to "practice" and his previous educational experiences. He said, "I'm a lot more comfortable writing a research paper because of all the research papers I did in school." Bill's experiences in his master's program influenced his confidence in writing papers as well. He noted that when he started working on projects he was "kind of fresh off of [his] master's degree" in which he "did a lot of research papers." He said that his process for writing papers was "the way that [he] was taught." He added,

> So my master's degree was extremely helpful in [writing a paper]. I could've never done any of these without that.... The minute I started typing up my first paper…, I was relating back to my master's degree and all that I've learned there.

Mark acknowledged that he was "much better" at writing papers because of going through his master's and doing other things, but "even now [he's] not super comfortable sitting down and writing a 20-page paper." David pointed to the potential influence of individuals' past formal educational experiences on their comfort with writing when he acknowledged the challenge for him to format a paper in the way S&I required because, as he said, "Man, I've been done with school for 25 years."

Persistence. Every participant embodied the characteristic of persistence to a varying degree. This characteristic revealed itself in the way they worked on individual

certification projects and in their efforts to earn the certification credential in general.

Bill related what he experienced after the initial excitement of a certification project wore off to running. He said that in "week 1, hour 1, 2, or 3" he felt "driven because ideas are flowing, you're writing them down." Then, in "hour 5, 6, 7, 8" the question of "how am I going to finish this?" emerged, similar to how after the third mile of a race "you want to die." The next few miles can be "great" with a "second wind," and then "you hit walls."

Mark similarly likened his experience after the initial excitement of a certification project wore off to "running a marathon. You hit walls and you bust through the wall and then you're motivated again and you're moving through." The "walls" could take the form of a lack of time or the difficulty of the learning activity. When such challenges were encountered, Mark said he would "take a break and then you push through."

Kurt demonstrated persistence by continuing to work on his certification projects at the end of a work day despite being exhausted. In such a condition, he stated, "I find the motivation to continue with my project because I am trying to accomplish the goals I have set."

Pete's persistence was reflected in the following comment about how he overcame challenges he experienced as he worked on certification projects: "You just do it.… If you're not self-mastered by the time you're my age, then you're probably not going to be in a lot of things.... You just figure out a way to do it."

Despite being unsure where he would "find the time to do" his remaining projects, Bill was confident he would finish all 12 because he was "this close" to finishing. In

describing himself, Bill said, "Once I start something I have a tough time not finishing it." John described himself in a similar way: "When I get something in my mind, I can't let it sit. I'm one of those guys that you got to finish it, you got to keep working on it until you wrap it up or whatever."

Similarly, Jim said that once he was into a learning experience, he felt "the responsibility of finishing it." His investment in a certification project was influenced by his sense of "I need to get this finished." He said, "Twelve projects is a big deal.... I can see this easily getting pushed behind and never getting done.... I want to get it done." The desire to complete a certification project enabled Jim to overcome the desire to go home after work, and to attend a certification class instead. He reported that "most times" when he would work on certification projects his mindset was, "Put your nose down and get to work."

David did not consider himself to be "driven" like some other educators around him. In addition to the financial incentive, finding projects that he considered to be easier to do, particularly those in which he could incorporate work he was already required to do for his job, helped David "keep going" toward earning the certification credential. David's persistence was also influenced by his mindset of "now that I've started, why would I give up on it?" He felt that he was "close enough" to finishing, and added, "So it's like, really? I'm not going to finish now?"

Honesty and integrity. Satisfying the requirements and expectations of certification projects was a conscious thought and desire of the participants. Five participants' descriptions about the importance of satisfying requirements and

expectations reflected their desire to be honest and have integrity.

Bill talked about the way that some S&I educators might be okay with ambiguity in the program requirements because "you can find a way to do it your way." He said that such ambiguity was "difficult for others" because "they want to be honest with their employer. And they want to know that what they're doing is the right way."

For example, Bill wanted to feel like he had done what was asked, but he was torn about not using summer work hours to work on certification projects. He felt that if S&I administrators never intended or wanted educators to use summer work hours, "then you don't feel good about what you've done for your employer." Despite using summer work hours, he said he "never once felt like [he] was cheating [his] employer" because he felt he was benefiting himself and S&I. He resisted receiving clarification regarding the perceived ambiguity about whether educators had to wait until 3:30 p.m. or later to begin working on certification projects during the summer because he worried the clarification would alter his feelings about doing so. He felt that such a specific rule would result in certification projects not being "done honestly."

John wanted to be sure that he was "meeting standards." His desire to satisfy expectations was reflected in his explanation for choosing to do some guided projects. He said, "I knew that you'd be meeting expectations and putting in, you know, the type of research." When asked about why it was important for him to meet expectations, he explained, "I just always want to make sure that you're never trying to shortchange anything."

Pete said that if educators were "going to have integrity," they would invest the

required number of hours in a project. In terms of meeting the time requirements, Kurt said, "I want to make sure I'm being honest, so I at least do my 30 hours and then sometimes it ends up bigger." He also acknowledged, "There's probably people who do more than I do, but for just my own heart—my own self—I have to have integrity. And so I at least make sure that I put in what their minimum standard is." His efforts had shown him that "it's a healthy program if you do it right—if you're honest in your hours and you're writing, you put in plenty of time."

Kurt and Mark's attentiveness to being honest in their work on certification projects was reflected in their descriptions of collaborating with others on projects. For example, Kurt described that when working with colleagues, "We always make sure that we're doing our own work because we don't want to cheat and not do the guidelines— what they want us to do." He noted that they would never spend less time than what was required.

Concern for quality. Every participant made a statement regarding their concern for the quality of their certification projects. John said, "I don't want to do a project that is just getting by." Mark felt, "Unless it was worthwhile, I wouldn't turn it in." Part of Bill's reasons for not wanting to work on certification projects at the end of a full work day was that it would be hard for him to do a quality job.

Pete spoke of the difficulty and effort of "trying…to do a good job" at writing a paper and "making it a college-quality paper." Jim spoke of seeking to produce a "well-rounded paper" and using multiple resources to avoid an "off-balanced paper" that "wouldn't be beneficial" for him. He wanted to make sure his papers "sounded good,"

and he would go over them "again and "again" to be make sure they "ran smoothly."

Kurt included knowledge gained from researching a topic in his written papers to make

them "more complete." He spoke of not wanting to "leave a project halfway or two-thirds

done," and how that led to spending more time than the required minimum in completing

a certification project.

Kurt and David's interest in having quality written papers was evidenced by their

descriptions of how reviewers contributed to having "a better paper." Kurt appreciated

reviewers' suggestions for grammatical changes. He said, "I improve on everything I can

because I want it to look good—I want the product to look good. I want to look half-way

intelligent when it becomes a finished project." Kurt and David valued feedback

regarding ways to clarify or better explain their thoughts so as to help a reader better

understand what they had written.

Theme: Motivation

Participants' descriptions of their experiences with self-directed learning in doing

certification projects brought to light the factors that motivated their efforts to engage in

this form of self-directed learning. The extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors that

influenced their engagement included the financial incentive, obedience, and the desire

for self-improvement. The valence of the financial incentive was influenced by the age of

participants in their careers.

Financial incentive. Five participants cited the financial incentive as influencing

their motivation to do certification projects. For example, John explained, "This is my

career, and I've got to provide for my family, and if it encourages me to be able to have a

little bit more income to help out my family, that's a huge motivating factor." John

acknowledged that his passion for researching also influenced his motivation to do

certification projects, then added, "And, if I'm speaking honestly, I don't know which

one weighs more heavily, but the personal satisfaction of being able to do stuff that I love

to do anyways was a huge part of that."

Kurt said, "If you're going to ask me why I'm doing what I'm doing—jumping

through those hoops—it's all about income." Speaking of the decision to move forward

with doing certification projects, Kurt said,

> It wasn't really a decision I had to make. It was already made for me because I
> need to increase my income. For me, the carrot of income is a big deal because I
> left a job and I came here making less than half what I was making. And so I
> needed to continue, and I was counting on the increases from the pay scale they
> had given to us before. And so when they said if you just jump on board you can
> still make some more income, I don't really have a choice. I have to do it because
> I'm not made out of money and the money tree does not live at my house. So it
> wasn't an option for me. It was just a matter of let me figure out how this works
> and then do it.

Kurt appreciated that if he was going to "have to jump through a hoop to get a raise, at

least it's a useful hoop" that would "benefit" his life and "help [him] in the classroom."

Kurt believed that the influence of the financial incentive on one's motivation to

do certification projects was not unique to him. He said, "Everyone that I know is doing

this for income, and a side benefit is that we're improving our teaching and we're getting

knowledge." Kurt did acknowledge, though, that "sometimes people are just not

motivated with money."

Mark explained that the most appealing aspect of certification projects for him

was "compensation for learning that [he] already wanted to do." He described how he

perceived certification projects when they were first introduced: "This was an

opportunity for me to continue my education and things, get credit for it, and make more

money." He felt that getting "compensated for something you were going to do anyways"

was "one of the fairest things Seminaries and Institutes have ever done."

"The number one thing" that excited David about certification projects was "just

the pay raise—it's financial gain." He had "always kind of thought that if education is the

only route for pay increases then we ought to maybe do an in-house educational

program." He felt that "the incentives of growth financially help motivate" using

certification projects to benefit his practice. He added,

> I mean, I guess that sounds horrible, but it's all about [laughs] getting paid. But I
> think that talks.... I just do not believe that teachers would do it without that
> financial benefit.... The financial gain is what causes you to do it.

For David, having a learning effort credited as a certification project, which would lead

one step closer to receiving the financial increase, was "an outcome not just knowledge-

based at the end" that he felt motivated him to engage in such a learning effort.

Jim cited the "financial incentive" as a "big" factor that influenced his experience

with doing certification projects. He thought it was a "great incentive." The excitement

Jim experienced when the Certification Program was first introduced to him was a result

of "this possibility of making more money based on [his] work," rather than having his

pay increases based on a supervisor's evaluation of merit. When asked about the aspect

of the program that was most appealing to him, Jim said, "I feel so bad if I say money,

but it's always there, right? Most appealing was [pause]…for sure it was the money."

Jim also described how a portion of his motivation to begin working on

certification projects was influenced by a sense of "competition" with colleagues: "I've got to stay up. If he's doing it, then I want to start doing it." Talking with colleagues about certification projects also influenced Jim's motivation to do them. He added, "Even that peer pressure really helps at least get into it." He felt that if he were an S&I coordinator, who does not have full-time religious educators in his immediate vicinity, his motivation to do certification projects "would go down."

Influence of age in career on the valence of the financial incentive. Some participants believed that whether the financial incentive was a motivating factor for S&I educators depended on their age in their careers. For example, four participants spoke of other educators they were acquainted with who would not invest the time and effort (the "rigmarole" as one of David's older colleagues referred to it) to do certification projects. These educators felt that doing so was "not worth [their] time" because they were "too late in their career" to experience meaningful financial gains. For a certification project John participated in with other faculty members, he noted that some of the educators who were later in their careers still chose to come and participate, but they chose not to "spend the time formalizing it" because the effort would not be worth the compensation.

David had a colleague who reasoned, "So what's it really going to do for me? I mean, I can get a part-time job for the financial gain." David felt that if his colleague "had only taught for 10 years or 15 years, it might be a different story." For example, Jim, who had been employed for 4-6 years, felt that he was "young enough to where it's worth trying." By way of contrast with his colleague, David viewed certification projects as "an opportunity to increase livelihood," despite the fact that "the pay grade is not

going to be anything significant because" he planned to retire in 5 years. He added,

"We're not going to retire rich because of certifications, but why not?"

Bill said that "a lot of sentiment" when certification projects were introduced was

"that's not worth it.... Where I'm at in my career, to bump up that much for that much

effort, I can grow in spirituality in other ways and that's not going to be one of them."

Kurt felt that for a colleague who would retire in 2 years, doing certification projects

"doesn't make sense for him."

Pete felt it would be better, more motivating, and that more educators would do

certification projects if every educator, no matter their age in their career, were to receive

a $5,000 raise for doing 12 certification projects. He reasoned that the "20 hours"

invested by younger educators was not any more valuable than the hours invested by

older educators, and so the percentage increases should not be different.

Obedience. For Bill, the most appealing aspect of certification projects when they

were first introduced was the "financial aspect" because he felt that "with a family of

[several] kids," they needed a little more income. He added, "I'd like to say that the first

thing on my mind was that I'm going to grow spiritually, but we already have a lot of

opportunities to do that, and so that wasn't at the forefront of my mind, but it was pay."

However, Bill was unique in acknowledging that "about a week or so after it got

launched the financial aspect was not that appealing." He explained what influenced his

motivation once the financial incentive dwindled:

> And so maybe right up front it was about money, like for a day. But, and I sound
> like a brownnoser here, the ultimate from that day on was I'll do it because I'm
> being asked to and I'll grow.... So I guess when it all comes down to it, the
> intrinsic part of, "I did it. That's cool. I was asked to do it and I did it."

Bill did not perceive that doing certification projects was a requirement, but he felt it was something he had been asked to do.

Bill was unsure of the specific final implications of doing certification projects. He provided the following reason for not calling human resources to obtain understanding of the financial incentive as two other participants had: "Because I don't care.... I just don't. I'm not that extrinsically motivated by money. If I were, maybe I'd care more. If I were I probably wouldn't be doing this." He did acknowledge that he would call if he received no increase in pay when he finished his twelfth project because he would want to know, "Now what did I just do with 360 hours of my life?"

Despite having his salary at retirement at the "forefront" of his thoughts, Pete initially had no intentions of doing certification projects because he perceived that he would receive no financial benefit for doing them. His motivation for doing certification projects came from his desire to be obedient—"a good soldier"—to his supervisor. He explained that the "only reason" he did certification projects was because his supervisor came to him and said, "I know that you know that the financial benefit for this isn't going to be very much for you. But as one of my principals, I'm asking you to do the certifications." Pete then began doing certification projects "just to be obedient." Pete said he will be "glad" when he finishes all 12 projects for the following reason: "That will be a good day for me because then I can look at my administrator and say, 'I did what you asked me to do.'"

Desire for self-improvement. As discussed previously, participants possessed the desire for self-improvement in their professional practice as a personal characteristic.

Some participants described this same desire as a specific motivating influence on their experiences with doing certification projects, and every participant referenced desiring to improve themselves as a factor they considered in determining the topics they selected for certification projects.

Jim acknowledged that his motivation was "not just solely about the financial incentive." Instead, "The other factors of how this was going to benefit me as an employee still pushed me to get it done." Bill's motivation to do certification projects was also influenced by his perception that he "would grow."

David described his experience with making the decision to do certification projects as follows:

> For me it was this moment where I said these projects are all centered towards what I do in my career, and that's going to help me as a teacher anyway. So forcing myself to do a certification betters me rather than just doing nothing.

David felt that doing certification projects would help him avoid the tendency "to just kind of cruise through" the remainder of his career.

Theme: Personal Interest and Applicability

Participants repeatedly emphasized their desire for their self-directed learning experiences in doing certification projects to be connected to personal interests and applicable and beneficial to their practice. Participants described how their personal interest in a topic influenced their learning experiences. Participants identified some of their personal interests for topics for certification projects by reflecting on their professional practice to identify learning needs.

Selecting projects based on personal interest. Every participant stated that the topics for certification projects they had chosen were in some way connected to a personal interest—something they were "interested in knowing," "somewhat interested in," had "curiosity" about, that "spoke to" them, that they had a "love" for, or they would "want" or "like to do." Otherwise, they would not do the project.

Participants would choose to enroll in a certification class if they were interested in the topic. Participants emphasized that they would only do a guided project if it aligned with a personal interest, or, using Pete's words, one that "kind of flips [their] switch." Mark selected guided projects that were "already on" a list of topics for certification projects he had made. David and Kurt selected the same guided project because the topic and the learning activities, which involved reading messages from LDS Church leaders and writing short papers about the messages' application to life, were of interest to them.

Applicability. A primary reason that topics for certification projects were of personal interest to participants was because they were applicable to participants' practice. Mark explained his reasons for selecting the topics he did:

> That's what I'm interested in. And I think they are incredibly applicable.... I think the reason I'm interested is because they're applicable.... I would say that relevance is by far the biggest determining factor on most projects because it helps you.... If it's relevant and what I like, it's even better.

Mark provided an example of how relevance affected some S&I educators' choices to do a certification project. He described how a class on teaching skills was offered, and 30 seminary teachers attended. Later, a content-based class about a specific part of the Bible was offered, and only six institute teachers and one seminary teacher attended. He attributed the reason for the difference to the teaching skills class being

"much more relevant…, especially to seminary teachers." Mark felt that a content-based class related to the seminary curriculum for the given school year would draw more seminary teachers to attend.

Kurt's topics for certification projects stemmed from things he found "interesting" and "applicable" to his work. He felt that "if it's not relevant, then you're not going to be motivated." Kurt wanted his projects to be "useful" to his practice, adding, "I don't want to waste time anywhere else." Pete had a similar mindset: "If I'm not going to use it then I'm not going to do it" because otherwise it would be "a total waste of [his] time."

Bill spoke of trying to do certification projects that "directly impact the classroom." He said that he did not see a "point" in doing certification projects that would not "have a direct impact in the classroom." Jim reported that he had learned the following about choosing topics for certification projects: "It needs to be applicable to what I'm doing every day—what I got hired to do, which is to teach." He described a realization he had "early on" in working on certification projects: "I was gaining more when it was more applicable to what I did every day in my job, which is teaching— teaching skills mainly, and content."

Jim considered administrative projects as things that are "nice to do," but was unsure if they would make him "as good of an employee as the teaching skills" projects. He explained that he knew they were still important "because it makes [him] well-rounded," and that "one day" he might be in a leadership position where "maybe that will be helpful." However, he stated, "As of now I don't see it as relevant."

David described how his motivation and engagement in a teaching skills project

were higher than in an administrative project "because of the application in the classroom." David said he was "passionate" about topics for certification projects for which he could "see application in the classroom." He felt a certification project involving an in-depth study of S&I's teaching handbook was "valuable" because it helped him focus on a priority S&I administrators had emphasized of implementing teaching methods from the handbook. Being able to do certification projects that had "application to what [he did] in the classroom" influenced him to persist toward earning the certification credential.

Four participants described how ideas for certification projects never came to fruition because their relevance dwindled over time. John described how he had submitted a project but did not receive approval for months due to the online tracking system not notifying his supervisor of his need to approve the project. John eventually resolved to not do the project because "the need for that project has changed now in what [he] wanted to do." Mark talked about how he would write down some ideas "and then things just move on and go." He described how he had not worked on a certification project for which he had been approved for over a year, but during that time he had completed others projects that were started afterward because they were "more urgent." He explained, "Those were more into my brain and what we were doing."

For five participants, their reason for selecting some certification projects was because they were connected with the curriculum for the present or upcoming school year. One reason John took a certification class on the *New Testament* during the summer was because he thought it "would be good preparation for teaching the following year" in

which the New Testament was the curriculum. Kurt was "excited" to do several certification projects in the upcoming summer that would "tie in" with the curriculum for the upcoming school year while still being "interesting for [him]." Bill described a certification project involving a review of multimedia materials that could have been "like watching paint dry," but because it was related to the curriculum for the upcoming school year, doing the project "was awesome!"

Because participants sought to do certification projects that would be applicable to their practice, their work-related assignments influenced the topics for projects they chose. John stated that "assignments in S&I will motivate" his selection of topics for certification projects. For example, John described doing a project with colleagues that was designed to help them improve their use of technological tools in their practice. For John, he was especially interested in learning Microsoft Excel. He said that as a teacher, he "never had a need for Excel, and yet in administration, all of the sudden as a principal, there was a whole bunch of need for using Excel." John also explained how a certification project he did on a new curriculum he was assigned to teach "was driven out of a desire to be better prepared to fulfill [his] assignment."

Mark explained, "The current assignment is a very big determiner of what certifications I'm going to do." He spoke of writing a list of certification projects that he initially thought to do, and said that this list had "changed considerably" because he was no longer a principal. Initially, his thoughts for projects dealt with helping his faculty, but being reassigned as a classroom teacher caused him to think about improving his teaching to be better for his students.

Some participants selected to do certification projects that incorporated learning activities that they would be doing anyway in conjunction with work-related assignments. Putting forth "a little extra effort" by completing additional activities, such as studying additional topics, writing a paper, compiling evidence of their learning activities, or documenting the implementation of their learning, enabled participants to "kill two birds with one stone." Some of these work-related assignments were given by S&I administrators, area directors, or the S&I training division. For some participants, their mindset was one of "I might as well" when considering making learning activities they would be putting time and effort into anyway into certification projects.

David strongly preferred the types of projects that simply required adding learning efforts to what he was doing anyway. David sought out such projects "that have application for what [he's] going to do anyway." He reasoned, "Maybe that's because that creates an excitement for me because I'm going to do it anyway." For one project, David was required to invest 10 hours in fulfilling an assigned responsibility, so he "threw" a leadership element into his efforts to "get another 20 hours" and turn his required learning efforts into a certification project. Pete had also done several projects that consisted of adding learning efforts to what he was doing anyway. Both he and David felt that these projects, which "naturally" aligned with work-related assignments, were "easier" to do.

Kurt, John, and David described their interest in, and appreciation for, certification projects that did not only apply to their professional practice, but to their personal lives as well. Kurt described criteria he used for selecting projects: "Something

that I would be interested in that would mull well with me and my family and work…that

I could use in all aspects of my life." John said that one thing he had "loved about the

projects is, yes they're based on occupational needs and development, but it's not limited

there." John felt that a lot of projects were "based off what's happening in [his] personal

life as well, not just occupation. But that new responsibilities in personal life will often

lead to the desire to develop that occupationally as well." David intended to create a

curriculum he could use in his church service responsibilities and in helping his students.

He said, "I'm kind of excited about that because I'm doing that anyway and I think it can

benefit…me, my calling, and my classroom."

      Benefit. Related to the concept of applicability was participants' desire to

"benefit" from their experiences with doing certification projects. This desire to benefit

influenced the topics and learning methods they selected. David described the nature of

the certification projects he had selected: "I'm trying to do projects that are helping me be

a better teacher and to be more successful at what I do." Jim explained why he selected to

study a teaching methods book for one of his projects: "Because I knew this book would

give me practical things to work on in the classroom to make me a better teacher."

      "Whatever it is that helps me best or teaches what I want to know" was Mark's

criteria for deciding whether he would do a self-designed project, guided project, or a

certification class. John's desire to benefit from his certification projects led him to adjust

the writing requirements for a guided project in a way that he felt would better enable

him to accomplish his desired learning outcomes. Rather than writing longer papers about

a given topic, he felt he would gain more and be challenged more by writing a series of

shorter papers.

Participants' desires to benefit from their experiences also influenced their decisions regarding the final product they would create. As John said, "Sometimes I might specifically do a portfolio where I think it'd be more beneficial to compile the information that way rather than to write a paper about it." John, David, and Kurt, even with a self-proclaimed dislike or weakness in writing, would not shy away from certification projects that required that a written paper be produced. For Kurt, the final product he selected depended on what "makes sense" in terms of what aligned best with the purpose of the certification project. He explained,

> It's the subject matter that means everything to me. But I'll write a paper or do a portfolio, whatever. It's the experience. I want to make the best experience possible. If I'm going to do it I want to make it as beneficial as possible and I don't care whether the outcome is a portfolio or written paper or PowerPoint or whatever.

Jim and Pete described how not seeking to benefit or "improve as an employee," but having "passing off a project" or "just trying to get them done" as one's "primary purpose" would be "a waste of time." Pete talked about educators he was acquainted with whose mindset was one of "I'm just going to get them out of my way." He said that their certification projects, which had "nothing to do with being a better teacher," had resulted in "zero" benefit for them.

Influence of personal interest on learning experiences. Participants' responses illustrated how their personal interest influenced the way they, and others, experienced self-directed learning in doing certification projects and the outcomes they experienced. John acknowledged the way personal interest influenced his learning experiences when

he said the following about planning projects:

> To plan, for me, it includes not just what will get it done but what am I really excited about. What's going to keep my attention for that long? I want to make sure that it's a topic that I don't get part way through and say, "Oh, can we just get this over with?" You know, that it's something that I'm going to enjoy researching, not just until the project's done, but I'll continue.

John reported that he "did more" than the minimum requirements "because the projects were things that [he] enjoyed."

Bill wanted his certification projects to be "things that [he was] interested in" for the following reason: "So I'm not spending 30 hours on something that's boring or something that I have nothing to add to." He described how he and some colleagues all began working on a similar project, but only he had completed it "because it wasn't interesting to them." At the time of the interviews, Bill said he had "hit a wall" in "trying to find something that's interesting enough to spend 30 hours on it about leadership." Similarly, Jim acknowledged that one challenge he had experienced with doing certification projects was "figuring out 12 things to do that are worthwhile and beneficial."

Jim recognized the influence of one's personal interest on their learning experience. He said, "You have to choose things that you'll like doing or else it just won't get done, or it will be painful." In speaking of certification projects he had selected, Jim said, "It's what I know I'll finish because I have interest in it." Jim thought that if he was "really invested in the project," the time of day (e.g., having more energy in the morning versus the afternoon) did not have a bearing on his willingness to work on it. His level of investment was influenced by the content of the project: "Have I chosen

something that I really, really want to learn more about?"

Kurt felt that "if you pick the right project then you'll be interested enough to try and make it good enough.... When you pick something for yourself that you're interested in, you have a passion for it." He acknowledged that "you probably would go get more out of [a project] if it was something that you were interested in," compared to an assigned project, which he "wouldn't take beyond their minimum requirement because [he doesn't] really care."

Reflecting on one's learning needs to identify learning interests. Some of Mark and Bill's ideas for certification projects came without any deliberate planning: "all of the sudden they'll come in," as Mark described. However, they, along with every other participant, described identifying learning interests that would be applicable to their practice by reflecting on their practice to identify professional learning needs. Some of their certification projects emerged from these self-assessed needs. For example, David identified a topic for one of his certification projects by reflecting on an area of teaching that he felt he had "failed" in. He asked himself, "What could I do to be better there?" and then designed a project that would satisfy his needs.

John said, "Something that maybe I feel I need to do better" had led him to some of the topics for certification projects he completed. When Kurt was asked what sparks his learning interests, he responded, "When I find a need." Kurt described how he would identify such needs:

> If I need a teaching skills project then I think, "Okay, what can I do in teaching that I want to do that will help me?…This is where I feel I'm weak at. How can I use a project that will help me in my teaching?"

Pete described how his process for identifying topics for certification projects began by thinking "about all of [his] needs." In this process, he would ask himself some of the following questions:

> What are some of the things that will help me be a better teacher and a better administrator? What are some things I could do that over the course of that certification is going to actually help me be better or facilitate what I do? What are some of the problems I have? What are some of the things that I need help with? What are some of the things I need?

One project Pete completed originated as he reflected and "wondered why" he had used games as a teaching method. He explained, "I was just curious whether or not all the games really made a difference."

The topic for one certification project Jim completed originated with the following question: "What's something that I had been wondering about with students?" That led him to a teaching method about which he wanted to know: "Are there things I need to change?" Some other projects originated from an awareness that he "wasn't doing a good job" of using a teaching method, from reading a teaching methods book and recognizing "something [he] could work on," and from having a realization that he "wasn't doing that well" at one of his administrative duties.

Mark described how a self-identified learning need creates "an urgency" to learn. Mark asked himself the following questions to identify what his learning needs were: "How am I going to be a better teacher for these students? How can I help my faculty in different things—whether content or whatever?...What do I want to learn about how to teach better?"

Theme: The Influence of Others

Participants' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects were strongly influenced by others. These "others" include students, colleagues, supervisors, and S&I central office personnel.

Influence of students. Five participants described making decisions regarding topics for certification projects in consideration of how students would be influenced or helped by what the participants learned. For example, Mark felt that "really the goal of all of" his certification projects was, "How am I going to help my students?" As such, when determining topics for certification projects he would ask himself, "How's it going to affect my students or the people I'm in charge of?" He would also think of "what the students need the most" based on what challenges they were experiencing, or might experience, in their lives.

When planning ideas for certification projects, Jim liked to think about how his students would react to what he considered learning. For one certification project, Jim explored the use of a teaching method because he wanted to know if he needed to change his practice to build "good enough rapport with a wider audience." To accomplish this, Jim planned from the outset to survey his students because he "wanted to hear what they had to say." He said, "I knew their perceptions were most important and it would give me different paths to consider that would benefit my project."

Kurt described wanting to do a certification project to "help" the youth in his classroom and in his local congregation understand LDS church history. He did a project that involved a review of multimedia resources because he recognized that "media's a

great use—the youth really speak to that."

Bill said that the way he had chosen topics for certification projects had changed in that he used "the needs of students" and "what's going on in the classroom" as criteria for projects he would choose. He gave his reason as follows: "Because I've seen the fruits of it. I've learned something, taken it to the classroom [snaps], and seen things happen."

Students influenced Mark and Bill's experiences with actually working on their certification projects, like when students would stop by after school hours to visit. As Mark said, "I'm doing less now that I'm getting more into [working] with the students. I have students in my office more." Such interaction "takes away some of that extra time after hours that [he] can do things" for his certification projects.

Influence of colleagues. Participants' colleagues influenced multiple facets of their experiences in doing certification projects. For example, Mark did not know how to do an annotated bibliography until a colleague taught him. After obtaining understanding for himself, Mark began teaching others as well. Jim felt that he and his faculty members had helped each other with doing certification projects and that "being on a faculty has been such godsend to help [him] get this done." Jim felt "bad for those who are alone, who don't have" the opportunity to learn with others."

The influence of colleagues was seen in some participants' experiences with selecting certification projects. To identify some topics, Kurt asked his coworkers questions or discussed ideas with a colleague with whom he intended to collaborate on a project. One project Bill selected came from an idea about a teaching method that a former faculty member had discussed with Bill.

Jim, David, and Kurt felt that their colleagues were helpful in directing them, or providing access, to resources. Kurt felt confident that if he needed help in identifying resources, he could go to his faculty, name his topic, and "five men or women would come up to [him] and hand [him] a book." Between their assistance and his own efforts, he said, "In one minute I could have the resources I need." John acknowledged that he "probably should do a better job at asking other people what their resources would be." Mark felt that doing so "couldn't hurt," but "you would have to find the right people."

David reported actually using his colleagues as resources for one project he did. To seek a better understanding of how he could improve in an area of his teaching, he asked his colleagues questions like, "What have you done? How do you get this down?"

Participants' learning experiences with their colleagues took three different forms: certification classes, certification projects done as a faculty, and certification projects done with one other colleague. Every participant spoke positively of, and reported benefiting from, their learning experiences in each collaborative form. Bill described, "It just feels like they go faster because you're not on your own—you're not just in an office at a computer. There's variety to it. There's talking, there's interaction."

Every participant spoke highly of certification classes they had attended, using phrases like "applicable and very effective" and "phenomenal" to describe their experiences. David questioned the emphasis placed on doing certification projects individually instead of with others. He felt that working with others on certification projects "makes it a lot more meaningful." He added, "That's why I think the class one was so meaningful—you're together, you're with your colleagues, you're sharing, you're

helping one another back and forth." Bill felt that one of the written papers he completed "couldn't be what it is" without having attended a certification class.

In comparing his certification class experiences with certification projects he did on his own in terms of developmental outcomes as an educator, apart from one certification project that involved an in-depth study of S&I educators' teaching handbook, Pete said the classes were "ten times more effective at making [him] a better teacher." He described leaving class experiences with more that he could "take back" and apply. He felt that in general, "You can get better with a group more than you can by yourself." Pete thought if S&I were to only do certification classes and encourage educators to attend two during the summer, it "would've blessed [him] more as a teacher than anything that [he] could've done."

John said that he and his faculty "had a great experience with" a certification project they completed together. He explained some of the ways they benefited:

> It brought unity to the faculty. It really did do something like that. It brought together the faculty. It got us sharing some ideas and talking and working together.... I think, in a lot of ways, that maybe it was better because I learned from other people, whereas a self-directed one is my own thoughts. A faculty one like that we were gathering ideas and, "How did you do that?", and we learned a lot from each other that way.

One consistently reported benefit of working with others on certification projects was being able to hear others' viewpoints, which would increase or deepen participants' knowledge and understanding of what was being studied. The following statements from various participants illustrate this: "we think completely different and so you get ideas from someone else;" "if I can add his thought to [what I see], it just opens my whole view;" "because my perspective is one part of the prism…you get things that you

wouldn't have seen;" "working together…adds a wider variety of things you haven't considered before;" "you have more insight into things; "you get more viewpoints;" "you can have people share things that you never thought about before;" and "it just opens my mind to things I didn't consider." John acknowledged, though, that learning on his own had benefit. He said that processing a topic alone "really allows you to see what you know and what you believe.... Without being influenced by somebody else, you can formulate your feelings or philosophies on a teaching method or whatever it is."

Kurt had worked on three certification projects with one other colleague and felt that he got "so much more out of" the certification projects by doing so. He said that by having "a new set of eyes" and putting "two minds together," their final products were better and "the actual application in the classroom helps [his] students better." Kurt admitted that completing a certification project could take "a lot longer" when learning with a colleague, but he did not regret spending the increased amount of time because of the improved learning outcomes he experienced.

Kurt also explained that "one disadvantage of working with another teacher" on certification projects was "you're at their pace." If his colleague was unable to work together on a scheduled day, Kurt was able to still use the time he had allocated for working on projects to move forward with working on a different certification project.

Participants reported benefiting from the external accountability and structure of doing certification projects with others. For example, regarding taking a certification class, Jim said, "You're more on a schedule, so you're going to finish on time. When it's left on your own, it can be pushed aside for a few months."

Mark described why he liked learning in a class:

> It was something that I was committed to that I didn't have to make the time for. So I knew I had this class, so I knew I was going.... With a class I have to go because otherwise I don't get credit for the class.... I have that time scheduled. Everybody knows about it. My wife knows about it—I'm not taking time away. So I go to the class and I get it done and it makes it a lot better.

He contrasted this experience with his experience working on a self-designed certification project: "I know it's there but I don't have a time commitment to it. And so it's going much slower, and it's easy to not do something."

David compared the "self-guided, on your own, when you can get to it" structure of certification projects with how the deadlines of a master's class "forces you through." When asked if he could self-impose a deadline that had the same force as a deadline imposed by a professor, David responded,

> Not for me because I know if it's my self-imposed deadline I can just change the deadline, but I can't change a professor's deadline. And if I have to pay for the class myself, I'm going to get that deadline met.

The external accountability of doing certification projects with faculty members or individual colleagues also helped educators progress with their learning. Kurt described how if he felt a lack of willingness to work on a project on a given day due to fatigue, collaborating with someone else

> will help motivate you to keep going because you're accountable to someone else. So one day you're like, "I just don't feel like doing it." But if you know he's coming in your office, you're just going to do it and you're glad you got it done.

Pete had completed multiple certification projects with his faculty. He said that doing certification projects together was "easier because then you have a lot of support and a lot of return and report." As an example, he described how for one project he had

done with his faculty members:

> You know that we're going to do this on Wednesday so you'd better have your stuff done by Wednesday. And so when there's a lot of people doing it together there's that little bit of peer pressure that says, "I've got to get my stuff done so that I'm not holding somebody back."

Pete felt that being able to do a certification project with others "motivates everybody to keep going."

In light of the many benefits from learning with others, participants were asked why they had not done more certification projects with others. One reason was the perception that they were not allowed to. Kurt had not collaborated with others on more projects "because no one else is doing projects." If more educators were doing projects, he said he would collaborate with them. One reason Jim had not collaborated with others on more certification projects was because of the need for "someone taking the bull by the horns and saying, 'This is what we're going to do.'" Pete felt that collaborative certification projects were "a little more difficult to come up with," and coming up with 12 would require someone to be "pretty creative." Pete recognized that some certification projects were better suited to being done individually.

Because of the review process, participants' experiences with this form of self-directed learning were inherently influenced by their colleagues. Being a reviewer for projects, something Mark really enjoyed, had allowed others' learning efforts to influence his knowledge. In speaking of the projects he had reviewed, Mark said, "They're almost always new thoughts that I haven't thought that then add to my level of scholarship."

John appreciated reviewers' feedback because he wanted "to see what people are thinking." He felt that all of their comments were "valuable," and would assess them

based on the following questions, "Will it make it better?... Is it in line with what I feel I need to do?" He felt that reviews with "tons of notes" were "the most beneficial." He said, "When a reviewer takes the time to really consider how to help out, then it makes a difference." Mark also felt it was "beneficial" when reviewers "really read it," compared to those who just "glanced through it." Pete found that reviewers "don't say much." He had "never had a reviewer come back and ask [him] to change anything.... It's mostly, 'Good job. That was interesting.'" He tried, though, to be thorough as a reviewer.

Kurt benefited most from grammatical changes, something Jim appreciated as well. Kurt and Mark thought it was "interesting to see [a reviewer's] opinion," but it was not something they felt obligated to accept. Jim said that if a reviewer's feedback would "require a lot more work," he would "let it slide." He also felt that "positive feedback… helps too."

David did not appreciate reviewers who critiqued his formatting approach. Most of the feedback he received consisted of such critiques. Similarly, Jim acknowledged that one challenge he had experienced with certification projects was when reviewers marked up his papers because they were written in MLA or APA, but his reviewers were trained in a different formatting and citation style.

Jim felt that having someone from his faculty as his reviewer made the review process "really beneficial" because it could turn into "a discussion." He felt he could "argue [his] point." He did wonder, though, if the reviewers who were closer to him had "a harder time putting down errors," not wanting to "ruffle feathers."

Bill expressed something similar. He felt that his personal relationship with

reviewers could have a negative effect on the quality of the review they would give. He described how he had reviewers who gave him "a few things here or there" but largely "just checked it off." He felt that reviewers were caught in a difficult situation between "the person hoping that they just pass it off for you" and feeling like, "Man, I can't really say what I'm feeling here because it's not worth it" in terms of breaking "the harmony" and "the unity of the faculty." Bill felt that a "blind" review process would result in better feedback and final products.

All of the participants spoke of "others" or "somebody" who could possibly benefit from using final products they created, or of benefiting themselves from projects others had completed. Some also spoke of developing products that would help S&I. For example, for one certification project, John sought to create a resource that "would be beneficial" for him and for colleagues in his same position who might have reason to use it.

John considered that his papers were written "for somebody else." Pete spoke of a desire to do a "good job" on his written papers "so that it's actually something that would be valuable to somebody if they wanted to read it." David expressed comments similar to Kurt, who said he appreciated feedback that helped him understand how to clarify his thoughts in a way that "would help someone who's reading" his papers. Jim wondered if one of his written papers would benefit a "new teacher" who might have a similar question to that which he researched.

Jim, Bill, and Mark were aware of the possibility that the final products from certification projects would be placed in an accessible, searchable database. Regarding

S&I administrators' commitment to developing a searchable database, Mark said, "I don't know how dedicated they are to that, but I hope they do it because once this really gets going and they have figured out what they really want, these projects are going to be an incredible resource." Mark felt that inservice leaders could use these resources for training their faculties. He and Bill both expressed the possibility of personally benefiting by being able access resources created by their colleagues. As Mark said, "I don't have to go to Google, I can go to our database and find stuff that's been done." However, Pete observed that "most of these certifications have gone somewhere and nobody's ever going to use them" because "they don't know how to get to them." As a result, "nobody really benefits" from projects their colleagues have done.

Mark and Jim felt that the results of certification projects should be shared in inservices. They both reported being present when a colleague shared his findings from a project, something Jim found to be "edifying" and something he wished he could have the opportunity to do as well. Mark posed the following question:

> If a project does what it's supposed to do where it benefits the person, benefits Seminaries and Institutes, and benefits the student, why in the world when someone got done with a project wouldn't you have them present that to their faculty? It doesn't make any sense that it doesn't happen, but it doesn't that I know of.

Mark wondered about the possibility of making the sharing of one's learnings with his or her faculty a required part of the process of doing certification projects. David wondered about having such a presentation be considered another option for a final product, rather than only doing a portfolio or a written paper.

Influence of supervisors. A principal or area director had affected five

participants' experiences with certification projects, beyond these supervisors' inherent influence from being involved in approving participants' project proposals and final submissions. Supervisors influenced participants' project selection in multiple ways. One way was by providing certification classes participants could choose to enroll in. Two participants completed certification projects by accepting a supervisor's invitation to teach a class or be an inservice trainer for an assigned topic.

Multiple participants completed certification projects that built upon an assignment given by their area directors. For example, their area director required educators in the area to complete online teacher training modules, but he also gave instructions regarding how educators could augment their efforts for purposes of doing a certification project.

As acknowledged elsewhere, Pete's supervisor had a direct influence on his motivation to do certification projects. Because of Pete's "respect" and "trust" in his supervisor, when he asked Pete to earn the certification credential, Pete resolved to do so "just to be obedient." Pete had likewise tried to encourage his faculty members to "be good soldiers" and "do what we've been asked to do with these certifications." Pete and John, acting as principals, designed certification projects for the purpose of helping their faculty members develop professionally. Pete also did it to help his faculty members begin and continue their work on certification projects.

As a principal, Mark helped faculty members understand how to do certification projects. Such instruction helped them become "a little bit more" excited about certification projects. He also discussed their work on projects "all the time" because he

"was working on things, and so it was in the forefront." Mark felt that if supervisors were telling their employees about guided projects, it would "especially" help "those that aren't motivated right now."

John's supervisors had "been very good to work with." He described the way they had influenced his experience with certification projects as follows: "They encouraged us to do projects. They wanted us to get involved and to move forward on it. But all of my supervisors have been very supportive and very helpful."

David was especially helped in obtaining an understanding of certification projects by his supervisor, who was actively involved in doing certification projects himself. David said, "He deserves a lot of the credit for keeping me educated.... I know he's a resource that's available right here." Without his supervisor's assistance, David said, "I would have probably not been as far along as I am right now. I think it can get kind of out of sight, out of mind." David spoke of how his supervisor helped him with organizing a plan for projects to do, made him aware of guided projects, and encouraged faculty members to do certification projects. David said that such support "has been very helpful and motivating to me."

Bill's supervisor influenced his experience by "leading the charge on it." Bill felt that if he had a supervisor "that didn't care about" doing certification projects, Bill would "probably still do them." He added, "But that definitely helps to say, 'Hey, he's moving right along where I am, and above where I am.'" Bill wanted to keep up with his supervisor. Bill said his supervisor was a "good example" of waiting until 3:00 or 3:30 p.m. before "starting on certification projects" and working until 5:30 or 6:00 p.m.

Supervisors could also influence participants' feelings about using work time to work on certification projects. For three participants, if their supervisors "felt comfortable" or said it would be acceptable for them to work on a project during summer work hours if they had met their work responsibilities for the day, they felt okay with or better about doing so. Bill said he would feel "1000%" okay after receiving such approval. Kurt said that if such were the case, "I don't worry about it." David said that such permission "helps kind of subside my guilt."

Beyond the aforementioned influence, Kurt's supervisors had not had much influence on his experiences with doing certification projects. He described how he was the one to train his current supervisor on how to approve projects "because he hadn't done one before." Regarding the influence of his supervisor, Mark said, "I haven't had a supervisor that's pushed doing them, but that could be because I was already pushing doing them." His supervisors had contacted him to gain understanding about doing certification projects.

Jim acknowledged that his supervisors "don't motivate me either way." Jim felt that a supervisor could help "get [him] thinking about" working on certification projects by asking, "How are you doing with your projects?"

Influence of S&I central office personnel. "Central office personnel" refers to S&I administrators, the S&I Certification Program coordinator, human resources representatives, and others located at S&I's central office who were involved in facilitating the Certification Program. Central office personnel influenced participants' experiences with doing certification projects in multiple ways. For example, hearing a

presentation from S&I administrators helped two participants develop ideas for topics for certification projects. For Mark, the administrator's presentation "opened up a new thing that [Mark] hadn't thought of before." Some participants completed certification projects offered by employees in the central office.

Human resource representatives contributed to three participants' understanding of the financial implications of doing certification projects, though Kurt and Pete remarked that it was somewhat difficult to obtain the understanding they desired. Jim was part of a presentation from a human resource representative in which figures for earning a certification credential were shown. David's principal had visited with human resource representatives and received clarity and information about the incentive, which he then passed on to David and others.

S&I administrators and the program coordinator helped participants obtain a better understanding of how to do certification projects. David had one central office employee come to a faculty inservice to discuss certification projects, "which helped answer a lot of questions." One participant described how the program coordinator helped ensure certification projects met the requirements of certification projects in terms of rigor, minimum resources, and effort. The program coordinator had rejected some of this participant's project proposals and helped him develop plans for learning activities that would satisfy the requirements and expectations.

The information placed on the S&I website by central office personnel influenced Bill and Kurt's understanding of how to do certification projects. Kurt found "some good information online" to help overcome his lack of understanding of what S&I

administrator's "expected" or "meant" about what final products were supposed to be. He printed off information and sample documents so he could "quickly, readily refer to it." He felt that the sample papers were "really helpful" because he did not know "how else you explain what they want us to do." He added, "When I'm not sure what they want, I make it look like [the sample paper]."

Mark felt that improving educators' understanding of doing certification projects came largely through personal communication. He explained,

> What happens is people call me, or they call somebody else that's doing them.... They don't want to go and read a whole bunch of text on a website. I don't even want to go read a bunch of text on the website because when I read it I have questions about what they're saying so I'm going to call [the program coordinator].

Mark said that if he gets an email with information about projects, "but it's four pages long," it gets waved aside.

The guided projects provided by central office personnel had a significant influence on participants' understanding of the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects, as well as on their actual experiences. John, Kurt, David, and Mark described the way guided projects influenced their understanding. Seeing guided projects enabled them to see "an expectation" and "examples" of what S&I administrators wanted certification projects to be, and helped John ensure he was "in line with the expectation." John felt it was "great to have a concrete example" and "a little bit more concrete ideas." For him, as well as Kurt and Mark, it "clarified the types of things that should go into a project." These "things" included the expected depth of study, indicated by the amount of reading and resources that should be used, and the writing activities that could be used.

Mark felt that "there's a lot of people out there that…would do projects if they were guided because it gives them an idea of what they're supposed to do."

Kurt thought that seeing a guided project when he began doing certification projects would have helped him. As a result of having seen the examples provided by guided projects, David said he would "absolutely" feel more comfortable designing his own project from scratch. For Mark, having seen guided projects would "absolutely" influence how he would design his own certification projects because "it's given [him] a framework—a rubric, maybe—of what a project should look like." He added, "Whereas all of my other projects, I just did whatever I wanted and hoped it fit." Mark felt that seeing guided projects would enable educators to "pattern something after that based on what they want to learn."

Multiple participants discussed the potential influence of guided projects on their project selection. David said that seeing guided projects made coming up with an idea for a project "a little easier" rather than trying to determine, "What am I going to do this on?" and which of the required categories the project would fall under. Mark and John discussed how reviewing the list of guided projects could help educators recognize personal interests that they had not previously thought of. Despite his lack of preference for guided projects, Jim felt that if he were "struggling with an idea," he could benefit from consulting the list. At the time of the interview, Bill was unaware of the existence of guided projects. He thought that looking at guided projects on leadership could help him find a certification project to do.

One reason John chose to do guided projects was "because they were already

formatted." He appreciated that it was "already outlined saying, 'This is a great way for you to pursue this.'" Jim, Kurt, Mark, and David described the way that guided projects made, or could make, the learning experience "easier" by providing structure—what Jim referred to as "boundaries" on his learning. For example, Kurt selected one guided project because he really liked the content and learning activities and also because it would be "easy": "Easy because I don't have to think about how I'm going to do this.... It was an easy format." He expounded, "When I say easy I don't mean less time or less work, I mean it wasn't a lot to wrap my arms around it because it was so straightforward."

Mark explained one reason guided projects were so appealing to him: "I don't have to come up with everything." This made it "easier on [him]" because it was "here's the work, here's the resources for the work." As a result, "I don't have to go find the books. I don't have to go find the talks.... The more I can learn and not have to do stuff to learn, the better."

Mark contrasted this with his experience with one of his certification projects in which he searched for resources he "might be able to use," and read three books only to realize, "I don't need this book. This is a waste of time. This isn't what I'm thinking." He recognized that being "on your own" on a "new project," unsure of "what resources you need," would result in the learner finding some resources "that won't work and some that will. And so somebody's got to spend the time." However, he felt that a lot of his time and effort in the aforementioned project "could've been curtailed with something that would've been guided." He appreciated that the central office personnel who compiled

the guided project had already completed this process for him so that he would not "have

to waste [his] time on stuff that doesn't matter."

One reason David appreciated guided projects was because he appreciated

"having some structure and some direction." He explained,

> I like the idea of, "Here's what you can do to get a project." …It's a checklist, almost. And that helps me. I think it makes it feel easier rather than, "What do I got to come up with on my own? And how do I got to put this together? And all this research." And it's all kind of provided for me.

Theme: The Influence of Program
Requirements and Expectations

Participants' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects

were influenced by the requirements and expectations of certification projects. These

requirements and expectations influenced participants' learning efforts and activities, had

positive effects on their learning, and contributed to the challenging nature of doing

certification projects. The requirement to not use work time to do certification projects

also strongly influenced some participants' experiences.

The influence of requirements and expectations on learning efforts and

activities. The requirement to complete at least three projects in each category (content

mastery, teaching skills, administration and leadership) influenced participants' project

selection. When considering projects to do, participants made decisions based on

categories in which they had a "need" for projects. This requirement caused participants

to forgo learning in categories in which they were more naturally inclined and interested

(content mastery and teaching skills) to pursue learning related to a topic they otherwise

might not have of their own choice (administration and leadership).

For example, without certification projects, Pete said, "I probably wouldn't have looked at as many things because I would've been more focused just on some of the teaching things and not so much administration. I don't like administration, particularly." John made a similar observation:

> I love that it's encouraged me to look at some of the areas that I, I don't know that I don't enjoy them, but I wouldn't research them as much—administration. I probably wouldn't spend as much time in those categories as I would on content and teaching. And yet, those have been some very enjoyable projects to go through and learn some of those things.

For several participants, the nature of the learning activities associated with certification projects (e.g., studying a topic of interest, learning about a teaching method, taking a class) were learning activities they would engage in anyway. However, the requirements and expectations for certification projects led participants to engage in a form of self-directed learning that was different from what they would normally do for purposes of professional development. The requirements and expectations influenced participants' investment of extra time and effort in learning activities and in the formalization of their learning in a way they would not do otherwise.

For example, when John, Pete, and Kurt would consider ideas for certification projects, they would assess whether the ideas they thought of would allow them to meet the required number of hours. Kurt said that typically, despite his love for studying the gospel, he "wouldn't write a paper about it…jump through the hoops, [or] do the hours." Instead,

> I would just go study what I want to study and then move on to whatever I'm interested in next.... So it's going to take me a lot longer to fulfill what I want to do anyway because of the hoop of the certification.... If I would just find what I want to know, I could do it in a third of the time.

Kurt also explained how "in some ways," the need to earn the certification credential had affected his self-improvement learning efforts:

> It's slowed me down a little bit because I have to study the things that I can make a project out of. In my free time I go towards [certification projects] because they have the carrot of a raise in front of me.... So I don't always get to study what I want to study.

For four participants, one way their self-directed learning efforts for purposes of professional development were altered was by writing a paper. For example, David's primary intent for one certification project was to create a learning resource for his students. He described his efforts to find quotes related to the topic of his project, create a bibliography, and insert endnotes as being "just for the certification…just because it's a requirement."

John remarked that the "major addition" of certification projects to his regular self-directed learning efforts was "formalizing" his learning by writing a paper. He explained, "To go out and research topics or learn things that will help me be more productive is things that I'd like to think I would do anyways without writing a paper about it." He did acknowledge, though, that he might "spend more time in giving [himself] a finished product that [he] could refer to more frequently" in his future self-directed learning efforts.

Five participants' experiences illustrated how the creation of a written paper or a portfolio, the required final products for certification projects that they would not have otherwise created, was a central learning activity for them. For example, for some self-designed certification projects, after Jim received approval he first searched through scholarly articles, printed off seven or eight, and then "whittled it down to five that [he]

knew that [he] could report on with [his] literature review."

When Bill described his process for doing a certification project, the construction of the final product was the central activity. Everything revolved around a Microsoft Word document on which he would first type bullet points related to the topic of study. As he researched, he placed quotes under these bullet points and developed a "very rudimentary" reference sheet at the end of the document. He said, "Once I felt like I had all the content down, then I would take it and organize it into a paper that hopefully flowed."

John followed a similar pattern. While researching, he would read, take notes, copy and paste statements, and organize these by themes he wanted to use in his paper as he went along. He said he would "just kind of gather data for a long time" and "read a lot of books as part of projects because it's enjoyable." After gathering data, he would compile the information and ask, "Okay, what have I learned?" He would then create an outline of his paper, note sections where he wanted to be sure to include certain quotes and examples, and then write the paper.

Though writing their papers was a primary learning activity for their certification projects, Jim and Bill did not consider writing about what they experienced from implementing the teaching methods they learned about in their projects. Jim did not record his reflections about what he was learning because he did not "feel like it's appropriate." He added,

> I wish I could write more of my reflections now that I'm thinking about it.
> Sometimes I wish I could just really write what I'm feeling, but I know that's not
> scholarly. That's not research-appropriate, I guess. I feel like these certificates are
> more research—more black-and-white and less color, if that makes sense. Which

is fine, and it's still productive. But that's been a challenge where sometimes I wish I could get more informal and just write, "Here's what I'm thinking."

Multiple participants reported writing papers that far exceeded the length requirements. One participant wrote an approximately 30-page paper and said, "It was bigger than I ever thought it would be." Other participants submitted papers ranging from 50-70 pages in length.

Positive effects of the requirements and expectations on learning. Program requirements and expectations could affect participants' learning efforts in positive ways. For certification classes that participants took that they would have taken "anyway," the increased investment of effort required for purposes of doing a certification project took the form of more purposeful note-taking and planning of how to use the learning in their practice, in addition to writing a paper. Pete said that these efforts made "the class a very beneficial class."

The length requirement of written papers and the required number of resources influenced Jim's experience of writing papers. In speaking of the length requirement, he said, "I appreciate that boundary because it just gives you that limit. I know where I need to stand.... I think it makes me be more concise." These requirements also gave him "benchmarks" for determining how far along he was in his learning efforts and how much further he needed to go: "I've got three [resources], I need two more. Okay, I've got nine pages, I just need six more."

Several participants mentioned the way that the requirements of certification projects influenced the depth of their learning. The requirements led these participants to "probably go even more in depth" in their learning than in other self-directed-learning

efforts and led them to "learn more." David said that he still would have engaged in self-directed learning efforts to satisfy his professional learning needs and interests, but he "wouldn't have taken it to the depth that [he] did because of a project." Mark felt that the difficulty of the requirements was good because "then you work harder and you learn more."

Kurt provided an example of how the requirements for papers influenced the depth of his learning. He explained that "to write a paper that fulfills the requirements, you have to go beyond what you normally would've gone." The requirements he specifically mentioned included the length, the number of references, and the need for a conclusive point. He concluded that as a result of satisfying these requirements, "I probably get a little bit more knowledge than I would've had anyway."

John, David, and Jim also acknowledged that writing affected their learning. John described the effects of writing on his learning as follows: "I love the process of writing a paper that allows me to think through a topic, to analyze what I'm thinking about something, to put it into words, and to discover things in the process." Jim stated, "Writing it out helps me visualize. Writing it out helps me reflect. Writing it out allows me to cater or create paragraphs or sentences that I feel will be more persuasive towards readers." Creating the paper" was "the most beneficial" part of the process of doing certification projects for Jim's professional growth. He explained, "Because I'm doing the work, and it's me connecting the dots." Though writing sometimes felt "more like a hoop" than a beneficial outcome for David, he recognized that some positive effects of writing came because "you have to internalize and force yourself to think about it…and

put it down."

The challenge of doing certification projects. Participants cited the required time and effort to meet program requirements and expectations as reasons for certification projects being hard. Having completed multiple projects, Pete said he had learned that "if you're going to go through the process right and you're going to do the things the way they've asked you to do them, they're difficult to do."

Bill had learned "that the design of it is to be challenging, but not impossible.... Like anything else that's worthwhile, it's challenging. It's a lot." David explained that the effort to do certification projects "has maybe been a little harder than people felt." In David's estimation, the fact that "it's hard" had been a contributing factor to some people deciding to not do certification projects.

Everyone except John reported that they would sometimes work on two projects at a time. Mark felt that the rigor inherent in satisfying the requirements of certification projects would limit the number of projects educators could work on at the same time. He also acknowledged that some certification projects he had done earlier in the process would no longer be approved because they would not be considered "scholarly" enough in terms of the use of outside resources. In light of clarifications on requirements, Mark said, "I have to think a lot more about how I'm going to make them scholarly and what I'm going to use as references."

The independent nature of some certification projects could also be challenging. Mark described how planning the learning activities for one certification project "was really hard" because the idea for the project "was completely brand new" and he "had to

come up with everything."

Jim felt that doing 12 certification projects was "about as much work as a master's degree." John and Mark thought the degree of difficulty was equivalent to doing a master's degree, and Kurt concluded "it's more time than a master's degree. A lot more effort." Pete said he had not written any papers in college that were more difficult than the ones he had done for certification projects, and Jim felt that the expectations for a written paper were comparable to "a senior undergraduate paper."

Pete and Kurt discussed how they learned ways to satisfy the requirements in more "manageable" or "efficient" ways. After investing 120 hours on a project, Pete learned how to make projects "a little bit more manageable, not quite as in-depth as far as the amount of work that [he] had to put into them." Kurt described investing extra time and effort to complete the first paper he wrote, which he did not start writing until after he had done most of his research. He said, "To write 20 pages after you've done 30/35 hours of research is impossible for me." This experience helped him learn a way to make his process of working on projects more "efficient" by typing his papers throughout his researching efforts.

The requirement to not use work time to do certification projects. The requirement to not use work time to do certification projects had an impact on Bill, David, and Jim's experiences with doing certification projects. When the Certification Program was first introduced, participants did not perceive a strict stipulation against doing certification projects during work time. John said that he understood the time requirement to be "as long as it was not taking away from teaching time, as long as you

were doing everything else, then it would be completely acceptable to spend time working on that at work." Many educators completed projects during summer work hours, but in October 2013, an update to the requirements of certification projects was released. One point of emphasis in this update was that certification projects should be worked on predominantly outside of regular work hours.

Bill believed that a rule against using work hours during the summer "hurts… growth from happening." Jim and David questioned this requirement because they felt their certification projects were related to their work and were helping them become better. Pete believed using work hours during the summer made "summer more beneficial," and Jim believed that working on certification projects during summer work hours helped educators be more productive with their work time. For this reason, Jim was "still kind of confused" about the requirement to not use summer work hours because he "thought it was a great idea for what we do in the summer."

For Jim, "the hardest thing" about working on certification projects had been the issue of using "free time versus work time." He understood why S&I administrators would make a requirement to not use work hours, but he felt like "there can be a little bit more leniency." Because of the clarified requirement, Jim thought it would take longer for educators do to 12 projects and worried about when he would find the time to work on his. He said that he would need to do some "test trials" to find what "works best" for him, but thought he would "get a little bit more lazy" and have "a little bit more negative attitude" if he were to only work on certification projects after a work day. Similarly, Bill said that complying with a requirement to wait until 3:30 p.m. to begin working on

certification projects would make him and his family "disgruntled."

Theme: Lack of Understanding of the
Requirements, Expectations, and
Financial Implications of Doing
Certification Projects

Participants' experiences with doing certification projects were influenced by

their understanding, or the lack thereof, of the requirements and expectations regarding

how to do certification projects. Several participants' experiences were also influenced by

their lack of understanding of the financial implications of doing certification projects.

Lack of understanding of the requirements and expectations regarding how

to do certification projects. Several participants experienced challenges in doing

certification projects due to their lack of understanding of the requirements and

expectations of how to do them. One reason for these challenges stemmed from the way

they perceived certification projects were introduced. David thought the program "rolled

out without some clear direction of where we were headed and what we were doing."

Mark stated, "They sent it out in such a general way." John described that when

certification projects were first introduced

> it was so kind of out there. It was, "Do a project and do something and here's
> some ideas," and not a concrete example of, "Here's the type of work that would
> be expected."…It was just kind of left out there.

Kurt believed that because "most people just didn't understand" certification projects,

"they just don't worry about it. They just still don't."

Mark and Bill believed that part of the reason for the confusion educators

experienced was because the program for certification projects was introduced on the

same day that the pay scale was changed. Mark felt that as a result, "There was a lot more concern on, 'Well, what am I getting paid? How does this work?' Rather than on, 'Here's this new program where you can make more money.'" Bill felt it was "a lot to handle on day one" and he was left with a feeling of "what is going on?"

Participants' descriptions of their experiences revealed specific requirements and expectations of doing certification projects that they did not understand. David described educators having questions about what could be considered a certification project and whether a reviewer's feedback had to be implemented. Kurt said that "because there were no guided projects" when he planned his first certification project, he felt he "had to make up something that [he] thought was applicable" to what was expected. When Kurt wrote his first paper, he said he "didn't know what they expected" or "meant" in terms of "what a finished project was," and that "no one really explains this to you." He wanted to ensure his written papers aligned with "what they want" so he could "make sure [he] got credit."

From his experiences with reviewing certification projects, Mark had been "amazed" at the differences in educators' interpretations of the writing requirements. Regarding the required annotated bibliography, Mark felt many educators "just don't have a concept of what they're asking for." Initially, he was also unsure of what one was.

For Bill, the "ambiguity" or lack of "a clear-stated principle" of why educators needed to align their written papers with a standard style guide was an "obstacle" he experienced in his experiences. He described how after he had completed several certification projects, someone from the central office called and asked why he had

written his papers in APA format, which Bill was accustomed to from his master's

program. Bill responded, "I didn't know they were supposed to be in Chicago or MLA or

whatever style it is." He was instructed that the remainder of his papers needed to comply

with the required style guide.

David was unsure why papers needed to be formatted in accordance with a style

guide, though he thought it might be because "it's got to be published." He added, "And

maybe [S&I] is publishing them. I don't know."

Pete and Bill's explanations for why they had not done more certification projects

with their colleagues indicated that either their supervisors misunderstood a requirement,

or that they misunderstood what their supervisors had told them. Pete explained that he

had not collaborated with others on more certification projects because his area director

had "kind of counseled us against that…because that's not the mentality that [S&I

administrators] have about that.... They don't want it to be done as a faculty." Bill had not

collaborated with others on more certification projects because "the direction that [he]

had received was that the group work was done.... And so it's not that there wasn't an

interest in them, it's that the direction was that 'we're not doing those.'" He said it was

"ambiguous," though, whether S&I administrators "didn't want groups, or that they

didn't want during the summertime hours." Bill also said that "it came down" from S&I

administrators that doing certification classes "wasn't acceptable anymore."

Jim wondered if the reason he had not collaborated with colleagues on more

certification projects because "we think we can't do that many." He wondered if

educators felt that projects had to be done "on your own," but he said he "would love to

do a few more" collaborative projects.

Bill felt that "there's still so much confusion as to the actual rules." He felt that the existing requirements for certification projects were "pretty good," and that "a lot of it's there," but that "there's a lot of the unwritten stuff that's not there yet." One rule that both he and Kurt mentioned not being understood pertained to educators not using work time, particularly in the summers, to work on certification projects. Bill felt that the interpretation of a "hard start time" for when educators could begin working on certification projects at the end of a work day was "ambiguous." Kurt felt that "every area director has a different interpretation" of this rule.

Participants revealed an inconsistent understanding of the amount of time required to be spent on a project. Three participants understood the requirement to be at least 20 hours, one participant said it was 20-30 hours, and three participants said it was a minimum of 30 hours.

John and Kurt acknowledged that they obtained some understanding of the program requirements and expectations through their learning experiences over time. Kurt felt that some things he had learned about effectively writing a paper were things that "no one can really help you with.... Some of those just have to come by experience."

Understanding the requirements and expectations regarding how to do certification projects had implications for how participants worked on their certification projects. One participant explained that he had multiple project proposals rejected because they did not satisfy the requirements, but from his rejections and from seeing guided projects he had "no doubt" he could "write a proposal now that will get accepted

because [he] saw what they want."

John said he had obtained "more clarity" in how to present "the finished project…, putting it into a more professional format." Based on his understanding of "how it should be carried out," John said that he might "have directed [his projects] a little bit differently."

When asked how having a clear understanding of what's expected in doing a certification project would influence the way he would work on one, Kurt gave the following response:

> You would probably be more efficient when you're working on it in the beginning because when you have an outcome that you understand needs to happen, as you work through it, you would be able to organize things from the beginning with the end in mind.

Kurt felt that his efficiency was lower on his first certification project, but his experience helped him understand ways to make his efforts more efficient. In describing why he felt he could be more efficient, he said, "Because I know what I'm looking for and I know what it needs to look like." Bill expressed something similar when he said, "When you've got a clear mission of what you're doing, you can reach that easier."

Mark believed that "once [educators] get a concept of what [S&I administrators] are asking for, they do it, gladly, but they just haven't been really taught.... But once they get taught how to do it, they're good." As an example, he said that S&I administrators had provided clarity regarding "here's what an annotated bibliography's supposed to be." As a result, in the projects he had since reviewed he was getting annotated bibliographies that met the requirements.

Mark and Kurt had become resources within their areas for helping other

educators obtain understanding of how to do certification projects. Kurt said, "I have people come to me all the time in the area asking me how these things work." Kurt had taught other educators what certification projects were and had "modeled" and shown "examples" of what a written paper "looked like."

Participants accepted that mistakes would probably be made in administering the Certification Program because it was a brand new program and S&I administrators would be learning as they went along. Mark believed that most of the changes and clarifications to the requirements had been made because "people started doing projects, and then [S&I administrators] went, 'Oh, wait a minute, those aren't the kinds of things we want. So we're going to tweak this and…tweak, tweak, tweak.'" Participants reasoned that "someone's got to be first" in doing certification projects, and one participant considered himself, along with the other first finishers of 12 certification projects, to be the "guinea pigs."

Mark, Kurt, and Bill believed that due to various influences, such as feedback and mentoring from those who complete 12 certification projects, guided projects, and feedback from this study, other educators will begin working on certification projects with improved understanding of the requirements and expectations. Mark believed that "Seminaries and Institutes will clarify what certifications really are, what they really want." Bill thought that the certification project program "will get fine-tuned so the person knows exactly what they're getting into—maybe not exactly, but they know what they're getting into. They know what's expected. They know the benefits."

Lack of understanding of the financial implications of earning a certification

credential. Every participant mentioned or confirmed that many educators do not understand the financial implications of doing certification projects. As indicated previously, part of the challenge originated from the lack of understanding of the pay structure that was implemented when the Certification Program was introduced. Three participants said that most educators did not understand the pay structure. Bill said that for "your lay guy who's not a financial guru," they "didn't have a clue what [S&I administrators] were talking about." David said it was "a foreign language" to him.

Mark felt that most S&I educators "are unclear as to how the pay scale works and how much of a difference these projects can make in their immediate and long term compensation." Pete, Jim, and Bill believed that "no one" knows how earning a certification credential will actually affect their pay. Pete said that having the financial incentive be "a guess-game" was a challenge for him, and not receiving a straightforward answer regarding what the financial reward would be for him "kind of grates at [him] all the time." He said, "It'd be really nice if I knew that I did all this and this is what I was going to get…, more than just it might give you some income somewhere."

Bill had "zero idea as to how much of a pay raise" he would get, "if any at all." Bill felt that the financial incentive had lost its appeal to him "because it was painted the picture of it's not that attractive…and the numbers that they are aren't that high." Bill believed that for the amount he understood the pay raise to be, he could complete a side job in one day that would earn him the same amount of money as he would receive for doing certification projects over the course of several years.

Kurt explained that "the only negative side" of his experience with certification

projects was "that the communication" about "how certification will affect your income hasn't been very forthcoming." He felt that because most educators did not understand "how it works," they do not realize the financial implications of choosing not to earn the certification credential.

Jim, John, and Pete believed that not understanding the financial implications of doing certification projects affected S&I educators' decisions of whether to do them. John and Pete felt that the lack of understanding had a demotivating influence on people. Pete felt that the lack of understanding also resulted in educators picking "the easiest thing [they] can come up with that fulfills the requirements…because [they] have no idea what it's going to give [them]."

Kurt believed that "if you can teach someone why they should do something, they can find a way." Kurt's perspective, which reflected David and Pete's perspectives as well, was that

> if we don't understand how this affects us—the money side—then it's difficult to see a reason to do a certification because people are still trying to improve, they just don't see a reason for it.... If people don't know how it affects their pay, then why would they do it? It's extra work.

He provided an example of a personal self-directed learning effort of interest that might only require a few hours to complete. He explained, "But if I don't understand how that affects my bottom line, then I wouldn't be motivated to make it into a certification project" in terms of investing 30 hours and writing a paper.

Several participants discussed their belief that understanding the financial implications for earning a certification credential, if sufficiently meaningful, would motivate many S&I educators to do certification projects. Kurt believed this was the case

because he felt many educators were "very financially motivated." Kurt found that after

educating his coworkers on the financial implications of earning, or not earning, a

certification credential, most of them started "to work on it." He explained the reason he

moved forward with doing certification projects: "I did enough research to understand

that I have to do it for pay."

Bill felt that if S&I administrators were to clarify the financial implications of

doing certification projects it would be more motivating for him. He expounded,

> Even if the dollar amount was less than I thought, I would at least know.... It's the
> whole idea of the carrot for the donkey. The donkey knows what he's going for. If
> it's a little carrot he's going for it. If it's a big carrot he's going for it.... To look at
> a guy and say, "Okay, on average, where you're at in your career, if you do it,
> you're going to get this amount of dollars." I think that it would be good and
> probably more fair to say it upfront. Just to let a guy know what he's doing.

Pete agreed that S&I administrators should clarify the amount educators would

receive for earning a certification credential. He felt that an educator could then "have a

good idea of what it is" and could then "make a decision" whether the time investment

would financially be "worth it." If it was worth it, Pete felt educators would likely do

certification projects.

After a human resource representative showed actual financial numbers for

earning a certification credential to Jim's area, Jim said it had "a lot" of effect on his

motivation and "caused a stir" for other educators who were present. Jim believed that

seeing such a presentation would "absolutely" help motivate other educators to do

certification projects.

Theme: Time

Participants' descriptions revealed how time influenced their experiences with this form of self-directed learning. Participants described the number of hours and months they spent working on certification projects and pacing themselves to complete a set number of certification projects each year. The amount of available time to work on certification projects was influenced by personal responsibilities, which, along with work responsibilities, influenced when participants worked on certification projects. Whether certification projects were worked on during the school year or the summer resulted in certain benefits. Participants had to justify investing the required amount of time to work on certification projects, as well as the time spent away from other responsibilities. Participants also described whether their time spent working on certification projects was worth it.

The number of hours and months spent working on certification projects. Six of the participants' estimates regarding the average number of hours they spent on each certification project fell within a range of 30-40 hours. One participant had spent an average of 20 hours on his projects. Two participants had spent close to 50 hours on a project, one had spent over 60 hours, and Pete estimated that he spent approximately 120 hours on a project. Bill said that once he got to 30 hours he "stopped counting," and he thought the 30-hour required minimum was "about right."

Two participants described how the increased amount of time spent studying a subject in a certification project allowed for more in-depth study than what educators obtain through inservices. Pete compared the "once a week for an hour" spent in an

inservice with the "three times a week for an hour" spent in a certification class and felt

that the increased amount of time contributed to greater learning outcomes.

Participants reported that certification projects required between one to nine

months to complete. The number of months was influenced by factors such as the number

of projects they were working on at one time and the number of hours they could dedicate

to working on projects. John stated that if he was working on a certification project he

was "really excited about," he "could do it in a couple months." He felt that "to put in the

time in a month or two is very reasonable." Working three or four times a week on a

certification project enabled Mark to complete a project in one month and Kurt to

complete one in a couple of months, if he would "stay focused."

Pacing the number of certification projects completed each year. Jim had

learned "that you have to pace yourself" in working on certification projects. He was

cognizant of the amount of time required to complete 12 certification projects:

> I remember once saying, "Ooo, 3 years. I'll be doing this for 3 years." And then
> just planning it out: "Okay, so how am I going to practically do this? There's 12
> that I need to do, so about four a year."

Pete described feeling "pressure" to do a certain number of projects each year to

be able to "get done in the shortest amount of time so that it doesn't drag on and get to

the point where you just kind of give up and say, 'I'm just never going to get there.'"

David described his pacing when he said, "I've kind of set a goal to say I'm going to

wipe these things out in 4 years. I'll do three a year and it will give me three more years

before I retire, and they'll be done."

Influence of personal responsibilities on working on certification projects.

One of the factors that influenced the number of months it took participants to complete a certification project was their personal responsibilities. Kurt acknowledged that the number of months required for him to complete a certification project "depends on interruptions of life," which arose from family and church service responsibilities. He described how he had set a goal to complete a project by the end of the month in which he was interviewed for this study, but "it's not going to happen. It's going to be another month because life is busy."

Four participants said that the biggest challenges they experienced in doing certification projects were related to time. For John and Jim it was finding the time to fit it in. For John, overcoming this obstacle involved, "just realizing when my time is." For David the challenge was "putting in the time." When asked how he had overcome that challenge, he answered, "You don't, you just got to do it. You just have to grind it out and set aside the time—it's all personal choices—and just get it done."

Participants experienced time in limited quantities due to personal responsibilities. John acknowledged, "How busy I am determines how much time I can put into" working on a certification project. The busyness of John's life was influenced by his family and church service responsibilities. For Bill, some of his certification projects had been "extremely difficult to try to do the 30 hours," not just because they were difficult "in nature," but because of family, church, and work responsibilities. In speaking of an educator who had already completed 12 certification projects by using only time outside of work hours, Bill wondered, "Is he a father? Where would you fit those hours in?"

When certification projects were first introduced to Pete, he described the

following decision he had to make: "Whether or not I can fit it in to all the other things I'm trying to do." Pete acknowledged that one reason working on certification projects outside of work time was "stressful" for him was because of his church service responsibilities that demanded a lot of time and also because he had "children still at home."

David spoke of colleagues who wanted to do certification projects but had not yet started. He described their reason for not doing them yet: "It's always about there's not enough time—just too busy. And they just put it off."

Participants' personal responsibilities also influenced when they actually worked on certification projects. When Mark taught in a seminary, he would "almost always" work on certification projects in his office after he had "completed [his] workday." Due to the unusual teaching schedule associated with being an institute teacher, he no longer had "a set time." Instead, he would spend different times throughout the day working on projects. Mark's reasons for working on certification projects when and where he did, and Bill felt similarly, was that he felt it would be difficult to work on certification projects at home because his children would want to be with him. He reported having fewer interruptions at his office.

Kurt stated, "My outside life affects a lot when I do my certification projects." Kurt chose to work on certification projects in his office because he had access to resources there and "quiet time." He explained his reason for refraining from working on projects at home as follows: "Because I'm 100% dad when I get home." This involved supporting his wife, helping his children with homework, and doing housework, among

other things. He expounded,

> I don't have a life where I can just tuck myself away for an hour or two every
> night—that's not what I want to do. So I can be twice as efficient here, and my
> wife knows that. So after my hours are done, I'll stay until 4:00 or 4:30—an extra
> hour—and I just do my certification project.…When I come home, I can't tell my
> child "no" when I'm reading a book when they need something or want to do
> something, so I just do it here. And I come in early sometimes and do it before
> work.

Kurt's wife supported his approach. He explained, "My wife just expects me to be
home at 4:30 p.m. because she knows I'm working on certification.... She's just a great
wife and very supportive and she understands the program and she knows our finances."
He described how in his previous employment he would not get home until 10:30 p.m.
three nights of the week. He said, "And so now if I'm home before 5:00 p.m. my wife's
just giddy."

John's decision for when he chose to work on certification projects—"at my home
and in just my spare time"—was influenced by his family. He said that he had mostly
worked on certification projects from 10:00 p.m. to midnight because by 10:00 p.m. his
kids and wife were asleep. He said, "I feel guilty taking that time away when I have
limited time with my children as it is." John also spent time working on certification
projects on some Saturday mornings. He explained, "Before the kids are up I'll just get
up and work for a couple hours."

Pete estimated that 90% of the time he had spent working on certification projects
had been outside of work hours. Pete established 9:00-10:00 p.m. as his time to do
projects, though sometimes he worked until midnight because he did not want to quit. He
said that "nothing else steals" this time so that he "can get it done." He added, "It was

important for me to make sure I knew that every day at this time for this hour I have to work on it." At the end of each day, Pete would "plan what [he] was going to do the next day."

Pete was "99.9% sure" nothing would interrupt him between 9:00-10:00 p.m. because his kids were in bed and his church responsibilities were generally done by that time. He said his wife was supportive of him using that time "because she's a teacher and she understands that mentality of sometimes having to do a lot outside of class." He recognized that the time needed for doing certification projects had to "come from somewhere," so he had given up some activities he enjoyed to rearrange his schedule so that he could still spend time with his children and wife and take care of his church service responsibilities before working on certification projects.

David, Jim, and Bill mainly used summer work hours or days during the school year when students were not in attendance to work on certification projects. Bill was reluctant to use time outside of work hours on certification projects. He felt that doing so "takes away from a lot of things that are really important," what he described as time with family and time for church service responsibilities. He noted that earning his master's degree "was very, very difficult and there was a lot of sacrifice." Bill supposed that if a certification credential was "being compared as the same thing" as a master's degree, "Then that's what they should ask for, I guess. I hate to say that."

Bill felt that because of his personal responsibilities, "there's just no way" he would have as many projects done without using summer work hours. He said that if by 1:00 p.m. he had finished his work responsibilities, he began working on his certification

projects. Occasionally, Bill would stay until 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. in the summer working on certification projects, "not by pressure but by choice." He felt that on such occasions he was "going" and couldn't stop. He was conscious of his wife and would text or call her saying, "Hey, just give me a little bit longer." Bill felt that if he were to stay until 6:00 p.m. some nights during the school year, his wife would be supportive because she would know "that there's an end."

Jim said that 60% of his time spent working on certification projects had been during the summer, 35% had been on school breaks, and the remaining 5% had been on Saturdays or after-work hours. He stated, "Which is not what they want. I know that. That pie chart's way off." He said his wife was supportive of him using some Saturday mornings because she knew that earning the certification credential was "important for [their] financial future."

Jim described how at the end of his work day, his mind would start "wandering" to his personal responsibilities and it was "hard to be focused." Jim felt that if he were to stay at work until 4:00 or 4:30 p.m. working on certification projects, his wife's response would be, "It better not be happening a lot. That can't happen a lot." He added, "I wouldn't expect me to do that more. I just [pause]…nothing's worth that for me, unfortunately."

Kurt, John, Mark, and Bill described how the season of individuals' lives had bearing on their abilities to engage in educational opportunities like certification projects or doctoral programs. John spoke of "life right now" not allowing him "to do a lot of extracurricular things with [his] time." Mark and John described how factors like the age

of their children and church service responsibilities inhibited them from being able to invest the time needed to accommodate the "rigid" class times and assignment due dates of a doctoral program. However, they viewed certification projects as an opportunity to continue their education in the meantime. As John said, "I can do this on my spare time in ways that I can't do a doctorate degree."

Bill felt that he "wouldn't participate" in a certification class held in the evenings because of "where [he is] in [his] life right now." He cited his church service responsibilities, the number of children he has and their ages, and his children's involvement in extracurricular activities as reasons why. He said that "part of the reason that [he] jumped in quick early on in the career" to work on his master's degree was because his children "were so young." Bill felt "really good" about being "almost done with the certification" credential because his oldest son was just beginning to be more involved in extracurricular activities.

Influence of work responsibilities on when certification projects are worked on. David felt that to sit down on his own for a "big chunk of time after school" to work on certification projects was harder for him because he was "already tired" and "it's just busy." He added:

> If I had a choice to do my project or prepare a lesson, I always go to my lesson.... The pressure of day-to-day being ready for students and having an effective lesson is real. And that consumes everything else. And so to switch that and say, "I'm going to work on my project," when my project doesn't help me face 30 kids the next day, it just doesn't work.... It seems like the project is the thing that gets chucked on a busy day rather than becoming a priority.

For this reason David generally focused on certification projects during the summer and teacher preparation days. He said these times lacked "the day-to-day pressure and stress

of a lesson and administrative things." As a result, "You tend to be able to have a little more time and just thinking and processing, and you can stay later on one of those days."

Bill felt that for most educators, when they get done "teaching six classes in a row,…the last thing that you would want to do is sit down for an hour and do more." He questioned the quality of a project—"what's it going to look like?"—that is completed "after a day teaching and you're worn out and you're burned out." He acknowledged the possibility that someone could "get a second wind—by 4:00 and 4:30 you'd be back into it," but he had never tried it to find out. Despite being a "pretty energetic person," as of the time of the interviews Bill had not "touched a certification for a while." He explained why:

> Because the end of the day comes and I can't. I can't. Mentally, emotionally…students stopping by, parents calling, taking roll, doing make-up work. And there comes a time that you say, "I've got to go home." And so I can't…. It's not like we have a hard labor job—it's not physical exhaustion. It is lesson plan, lesson plan, teach, teach, teach, lesson plan, lesson plan. I don't— maybe I'm less of a man—I don't have the mental capacity to go and do something that was going to be quality.

Bill, like David, considered the summer to be "fertile grounds" for working on certification projects because there was "less direct pressure—students aren't coming in 5 minutes." As a result, "My mind was a lot more able to engage." For one certification project he had completed during the summer, Bill said "there was time and mental energy to really focus on that."

Jim acknowledged the way his work responsibilities made finding time to work on certification projects difficult for him: "So much time is spent getting the next lesson ready, calling parents, and it's really hard to want to stay after work and work on a

certificate." Jim explained why doing so was hard for him: "You have already put a lot of work in searching through information and resources to prepare an effective lesson. It's hard to put that much effort after a whole day into a project." Not needing to "prepare for tomorrow" or "call any parents" were reasons Jim felt that summertime was "a great time" to work on his certification projects. He had "struggled lately…finding that time and motivation" to work on certification projects, but felt that during the summer the "motivation was there."

Benefits from when certification projects are worked on during the year. Four participants discussed how working on certification projects during the school year enabled them to immediately use what they were learning in their teaching. For example, Jim described that after studying about the effective use of questions, he "would automatically go into the classroom and try to practice what [he] just researched or what [he] just read." After studying the importance of being attentive to the "body language of students," he said, "That was something I could do the very next day in the classroom."

Kurt explained why he preferred doing a certification project on teaching methods during the school year: "I prefer just to go through the school year and apply it when I do it because then we can apply things that we learn right now in the class." He believed that he experienced more development by being able to immediately apply what he was learning to his teaching than he would by doing similar certification projects during the summer.

Completing certification projects during the school year enabled Jim and Pete to learn from their students. Jim was able to survey his students, and Pete was able to

experiment with two different teaching methods with them.

Doing certification projects during the summer was beneficial as well. Pete explained why taking a scripture-based certification class before the school year was advantageous: "You already have all these insights that you've now developed so that now when you go to put your lessons together, you have lots of things to do and that you've thought about."

The need to justify investing time and effort. Participants described experiencing a need to justify investing the amount of time and the type of effort needed to do certification projects. One participant also experienced a need to justify taking time away from personal responsibilities. In both instances, the financial incentive provided the needed justification.

John spoke of the financial incentive as giving educators "a reason" to engage in certification projects. Mark and Bill felt that the financial incentive was meant to be compensation for doing "a little bit more," "going to the next level," and investing learning efforts "above and beyond" their regular professional development efforts or job requirements. Bill noted that if the expectation for S&I educators to take their professional learning efforts beyond what they typically do "had no benefit and no pay, it would be kind of hard to expect anybody to do anything about it."

As a reviewer, Mark had been impressed with the diversity of the projects he had reviewed, and he believed educators "would not have put the time into writing a 20-page paper about this thing and solidifying those thoughts if it wasn't for the certification." Kurt discussed how S&I educators regularly pursue professional development

opportunities and "try to get better," but without a financial incentive connected to doing certification projects, "it's difficult to see a reason to do a certification."

For a certification project David was working on at the time of the interview, he said that he probably would not have done it on his own otherwise, but "the certification becomes a motivation to invest the time." David indicated that without the financial incentive, he would still seek to improve, but he would not do it in the way required for certification projects.

Jim felt similarly about a certification project he had done in which he invested a large amount of time and effort to understand the perspectives of students regarding a teaching method. He said that having it credited as a certification project was an "incentive" and gave him "a reason" to do the learning activities he chose, otherwise he "never would have done it." He explained,

> I think I would just come to my own conclusion and go from there. But having a certification kind of influenced me to find out—I don't know if we use the word "scientifically" or just more conclusively—a result.

Pete had initially ruled out doing certification projects because he felt it was "not worth the time and the effort" because he would not receive a meaningful salary increase. Pete did feel, though, that an adequate increase would justify spending the extra time outside of work. He also described how being able to have a learning activity he "thought about doing for years" be credited as a certification project gave him "a reason to actually take the time to sit down and do it." He said he would not have invested the time otherwise because of the possibility that the resource he would develop would not be used by the intended audience, but now at the least his efforts would be credited as a

certification project.

Mark spoke of justification in terms of being justified to take time away from other responsibilities because of the financial incentive. Mark spoke of an idea for a self-directed learning project "that germinated long before certifications came up." However, he said, "I never could put the time I wanted to into it because I couldn't justify that time because it didn't do anything other than just learn about that." He described how if he would have tried to invest that time, his wife would have said, "Well, you don't really need to know that.... Why aren't you home helping me with the kids because you didn't have to do this? You didn't have to spend an extra 2 hours at work going over hundreds of talks."

Mark believed that the financial incentive allowed him to respond in the following way: "Well, I'm doing this project that's going to then help our family and I'll be able to support better and provide better." He added, "And so, [certification projects are] awesome because it justifies me going over here and spending time away from other things, putting time into something that I really want to learn and to do." He said that in his situation, his wife had a favorable reaction for the following reason: "Because I'm a good husband because I'm looking to better myself so I can provide better for the family. But if I'm just doing it on my own I'm selfish."

Time being worth it or wasted. Mark, John, and Jim were confident they had not wasted their time in doing certification projects. For example, John felt that the time he had invested in his projects had been "worth every bit and more" in terms of his growth and usefulness. He added, "If I feel like I'm a better teacher or a better employee, then I

never feel that it was wasted time."

Jim was confident he was not "wasting [his] time" in doing certification projects because, as he said, "I'm learning, and I just feel that sense of learning and improving." Jim described how his interest level in doing certification projects grew as a result of the outcomes he experienced from studying a teaching methods textbook as part of a project:

> Each chapter in that book was something I could work on. So that's when I kind of bought into the idea that these certificates were worthwhile—were worth my time. And not just for the financial incentive, but it was helping me become a better employee.

Bill felt that the time he had invested was "extremely" worth it in terms of growth and usefulness. Kurt felt that the time spent researching had been "very worth it," whereas the "jumping through the hoops process of evaluations and submitting to supervisors [was] meaningless to [him] except for to pass it off." He added, "That doesn't take a lot of time, so it's not that big of a deal."

David and Pete were not certain that the time they spent working on certification projects was worth it in terms of growth and usefulness. David said, "I don't know that the time investment is worth it except for the financial gain." Pete said the "jury's still out" as to whether the benefits were worth the time he had invested. At the time of the interviews, Pete estimated that 20% of his time invested in certification projects had been worth it in terms of growth and usefulness because, as he said, "About 20% of what I've done in these I use." He did not consider that he had wasted the remaining 80% of his time, but thought that perhaps he had not gotten around to using 80% of what he had learned. He remained open to the possibility that over time he might use more of what he had learned.

Theme: Emotions Experienced in Doing Certification Projects

John and Pete reported experiencing "a gamut of emotions" in the process of working on certification projects, which Pete thought anyone would experience "if you're normal." This gamut of emotions for participants included excitement, enjoyment, and fun; satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment; lack of excitement, enjoyment, and fun; and frustration, guilt, and anger.

Excitement, enjoyment, and fun. Multiple participants reported experiencing excitement, enjoyment, and fun at various points in their experiences with doing certification projects. Some participants experienced excitement when certification projects were first introduced. Mark and John also experienced excitement while working on certification projects and both remarked that they "love them." John said he was "always excited to start a new project." Mark said that the "excitement of a new project is fun. A new idea—that is fun."

John experienced "excitement in understanding" whatever concepts he was studying. David experienced "joy in the process of what you learn along the way" and "excitement" in finishing a paper he worked hard on. Mark experienced "the enjoyment of learning" in working on certification projects. He said that reviewing projects was "a joy, not a burden at all. I just love reading the information." Kurt said, "I've enjoyed a lot of these. Not necessarily the making of the end product, but the actual research I've really enjoyed." The anticipated joy of learning influenced Jim's willingness to attend a certification class when he desired to simply go home after his work day. Pete stated, "Every once in a while there's excitement when you actually do something that you

implement from one of them and it works. And you say, 'Hey, that's awesome.'"

For John, "the fun" of a certification project "happened during the research." Kurt felt that "when you learn it's—you're having fun." Jim reported having "fun" while reading students' responses to a survey he gave them. John, Pete, and Jim described having "fun" while working on certification projects with their faculties.

Jim said that planning topics and learning activating for projects was "fun" because he could focus on what he wanted to do his projects on as opposed to someone else telling him what to do. Jim also sometimes experienced a feeling of "fun" while actually working on projects: "When things are really clicking, it's fun, it's good—I could do hours of that." Moments when things were "really clicking" were moments when "the research seems to flow. Like an article flows with maybe something a student said. All of the sudden the paragraph is just making sense. The counterargument fits in well. It just flows." During such moments he had thoughts of, "Don't stop. Don't stop." Similarly, on occasion Bill would have an experience when working on certification projects that he described as, "I'm going and I can't stop." He said that "on those days it didn't feel like a burden because you were going."

Satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. Six participants also experienced satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in engaging in this form of self-directed learning. Mark gained "satisfaction" from "doing the project and learning the stuff" and experienced "the satisfaction of completing something." Despite having projects lose their excitement and becoming more of something to get done, Mark said that by the end of the experience the feeling "turns into a satisfaction and a feeling of accomplishment."

Kurt also described "a sense of accomplishment when you finish one and you look online and you see that you're improving, you're getting something done." John experienced "a sense of accomplishment" in connection with his feelings of "developing professionally" as a result of doing certification projects and in "feeling like you understand your craft."

Bill reflected on his feelings when he finishes certification projects:

> When you're done—when you hit "enter"—you feel successful.... [You feel] excitement and sense of accomplishment when you're done and you've got that green checkmark. Like, "Hey, I did it." Another guy might read it and think, "What the heck is this?" But I read it and I say, "I'm proud of that. I'm happy with that."

Jim said that working on certification projects "always feels productive." Jim experienced gratification in the way doing research "kind of gets your hands dirty." He expounded,

> I picture research as you're doing this hunt.... In our profession we don't get to get our hands dirty, right? It's not a physical labor, but it feels like research is the way I get my hands going. I'm doing hard work.

The experience of doing hard work was "rewarding" for him.

Pete did not "take the time to think about, 'Wow, I'm done,'" after finishing a certification project. When he finished one project, he said he was "already involved" in another or would start "another one immediately." He did, though, occasionally pause and reflect on what he had done. He explained,

> I have more emotion when I finish four of them because I know a year's done. I know I got it done. I did it. I got the four done in the year's time.... When I got the first four done, that was awesome. And I thought, "I got it!" But then it was right back into the next four.... So emotions from one to the next—not much. End of four—that feels good.

Lack of excitement, enjoyment, and fun. Not every part of the experience of doing certification projects was exciting, enjoyable, or fun. While actually working on a project, David expressed that "the grind of getting in there and getting it done is probably more of a prevalent feeling." At one point in working on certification projects, Mark said that "the excitement ends, then it's, 'Okay, I've got to get this done.'" He had not "had a project yet that's stayed exciting the entire time." He expounded, "Excitement is like, 'Here we go! Yeah!' But then it's like, 'Alright.'" After the excitement waned, sometimes the "interest in the subject matter" was what was left to push him as he continued his learning efforts.

For some certification projects, Bill felt that he had to "get it done because you're going to lose your mind" otherwise. Sometimes when he would work on certification projects he would "feel the same way" he felt while working on his master's. He described this feeling as, "What am I doing? This is just busywork."

Jim described some emotions he experienced:

When things get a little dull, like in a paper, it seems like I need a break. And I know that and so I'll go out and talk to someone. I'll walk around. I'll give it a little bit of a break. Sometimes it feels monotonous. Other times it feels like you're checking off just to show S&I that you're a good soldier and you're willing to do it and you do want that extra money.

Pete said that "not one" educator had told him that they were "excited" about doing certification projects. In describing the emotions he experienced when working on projects, Pete said, "Sometimes it's boredom. You get into some things that you're doing and they're just not exciting to do, but they're necessary and so you do them." Researching and writing were parts of the learning process that resulted in boredom for

him. Pete acknowledged that he was not "an avid reader anyway," and that the nature of research itself just "leads you to some things that are boring to read." Pete acknowledged that "in some cases the experience was stressful," but he had found a way to do certification projects "and not get too stressed out about it."

Kurt said that he "can get tired by the end" of a certification project. He specified that the only times he got tired or "fatigued" was "doing the spacing and doing the reviewing and writing and all that type of stuff" which was "not interesting or fun." He explained, "And so that's where I wouldn't enjoy it as much." He described this, along with the evaluation process, as "the non-fun time which is the jumping through the hoops." Because of his lack of enjoyment in formatting his written papers, he would try to format his papers as he wrote them, "so it's not as painful."

For John, the concluding stage of a certification project, which included formatting his papers and working with reviewers, was "kind of a letdown." Formatting to align with the style guide was the part of the learning process that "bogs [him] down," "where the project loses its joy," and was when he would sometimes think, "I just want to get this project over with." He enjoyed doing portfolios because he did not have to do as much formatting for the final product.

John described an experience he had the night before the second interview. He spent 3 hours "going back and reformatting all the quotes" he had included in his paper "just to get it in the right format." Regarding this time invested in formatting his papers he said, "I'd rather spend those hours reading, researching, not formatting." Because he liked researching so much, he felt that he was "paid the extras" for earning a certification

credential because of "the parts that [he didn't] like—the formatting."

Frustration, guilt, and anger. Participants also reported experiencing frustration, guilt, and anger during parts of their experiences with doing certification projects. Bill reported feeling "joy, inspiration, but also frustration and overwhelmed." Kurt felt "a little bit of frustration" when certification projects were first introduced because "there were very few people who understood the program and because of that we couldn't go to very many people to ask." Kurt also experienced frustration with the lack of understanding about the financial implications of doing certification projects.

For Mark, changes made to the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects had been "a little bit frustrating," but he considered such to be "just a minor annoyance that happens with the growth of a new system." Jim said that "there's been too many glitches" with the online certification tracking system "that have been frustrating." He added, "It gives you anxiety when you work on something and it's not smooth."

David reported experiencing "more frustration than joy" in doing certification projects. He experienced frustration with "finding time to do [certification projects] that's not part of your workday." He said that working on certification projects during the workday "creates some guilt for [him]." This guilt came from "knowing that they're supposed to do it at a time not part of work." He rationalized that because what he was doing was for his students, he could spend some time during work hours working on a project.

David explained his experience with formatting his papers as being "kind of a

drudgery, frankly.... That's when the projects become kind of almost a little frustrating."

David was disappointed that S&I had to "drag in" philosophies of public education for

formatting requirements, what he called "'across the street' type of formatting." David

believed papers could be written without needing "to be all technical," and he questioned

whether they needed to be "so much publishable." He did not consider the formatting

requirements to be "critical" to his learning, and viewed the time spent formatting his

papers and developing the required components as "a hoop that really has done nothing

for the outcome that [he'd] already gained." He explained that the benefit of one paper he

wrote "did not come because [he] wrote endnotes. It came because of what [he] studied

and what [he] learned."

One source of frustration for five participants was waiting for reviewers to

complete their reviews. This was the "biggest challenge" that Mark had experienced,

something that "drives [him] crazy." John said that "sometimes the reviewing process has

taken longer than writing or doing the project." Mark had waited upwards of a month-

and-a-half for a review to be returned, David had waited months, and Kurt had waited

three months for some. Kurt said it was "difficult to move on to another project" while

waiting for a reviewer. Jim described why waiting was frustrating for him: "When I

submit it I want it done—I want it out of my way."

Bill and Pete, who did not report waiting for reviewers as a frustration, did join

with John, Jim, and David in describing that they did have to follow up with reviewers

about completing their reviews. John felt it was "a little bit difficult" and "uncomfortable

…if you don't know the person to reach out and say, 'Hey, why have you not reviewed

my project?'" For purposes of ease in follow up, Pete selected reviewers who were on his faculty because he was on a "timeline" and wanted to get his projects submitted for final approval. David also tried to get reviewers who were "in proximity" to him so he could "hound them" to review his projects.

Jim experienced "anger" when going through some reviewers' feedback, and he would "immediately call them." Jim said that some reviews were "frustrating because you feel like you gave a fairly polished paper and to come back and say it looks like a sixth-grader's paper." He added, "That's how I feel, but then again that's also pride."

Pete reported experiencing "anger sometimes" when working on certification projects because he wondered "whether all of this was worth the time that you put into it." His feelings stemmed from considering the possibility of doing different learning activities that would have had the same results but would have been more enjoyable to do.

Theme: Perceived Influence on Learning and Growth and Use in Practice

Participants perceived certification projects as an opportunity to have additional professional development needs met. They also perceived that they experienced increased understanding, growth, and improvement as a result of doing certification projects. Some participants did not feel these improvements were large. Participants described how their practice was affected by doing certification projects, which effects were influenced by the creation of learning resources and by reflection on their learning. Participants evaluated their learning based on their perceived improvements and the application of their learning

to their practice.

An opportunity to have additional professional development needs met. Each of the participants perceived the purpose of certification projects to be the professional growth of S&I educators. Participants used phrases such as "professional development," "progress," "improve," "bettering ourselves," "make me a more effective employee," and "to get better administrators and teachers" in describing the purpose of certification projects. Bill considered certification projects as "12 or 24 opportunities to grow and to expand and to be better."

Six participants acknowledged that they could experience some degree of improvement by participating in weekly and summer inservices that were part of their regular work responsibilities. However, four participants expressed that not all of their professional learning needs were met by regular inservices. Some participants felt that greater growth could be obtained by doing certification projects because, as Kurt said, inservice "can't address every individual need." Mark said, and Kurt expressed something similar, that "certifications allow [him] to self-direct what [his] needs are and meet those beyond what inservice is doing."

Bill thought that certification projects were intended to fill a gap, or room for growth, in helping educators reach their ultimate potential beyond what can be accomplished in regular inservices. Certification projects allowed participants to study topics that would not be covered in inservices and to go more in-depth in their study of topics of interest.

Increased understanding, growth, and improvement. Every participant

reported that their understanding of various topics that they studied changed or increased—ranging from "a little bit" to "a lot"—as a result of doing certification projects. Kurt said that a certification project he did in which he conducted an in-depth study of fundamental doctrines of the gospel was "really beneficial" in that it "clarified some things and just added to [his] understanding." Pete's understanding of the importance of involving church leaders in the enrollment of the seminary-eligible youth in their congregations had changed because of "going through that process of learning why [leaders are] important and what benefits they can have."

Five participants believed and hoped they experienced meaningful growth as a result of doing certification projects. John and Mark spoke in terms of not stagnating. In doing certification projects, John felt, "That I'm not stagnant. That hopefully I'm getting better than I was." John felt that doing "research" and "studying" were "the best part" of his learning experiences with doing certification projects and the part that contributed most to his growth. He appreciated that some learning "bleeds over into [his] personal life," so in addition to his learning helping him become "a better teacher," it was hopefully helping him "be a better person" and "a better father." He also thought that his future self-directed learning efforts to stay current with the expectations of his employment "will be strengthened by doing certification projects."

Speaking of the effects of his experiences with doing certification projects, Mark said, "It's already changed me a great deal." Mark felt that the certification credential "stops you from stagnating because you're still stirring up the water—you're adding new, more water. You're becoming better, and so you don't stagnate." Mark felt that in doing

certification projects he was becoming a "better teacher" and "employee," and that his

certification projects had "mainly" helped him as a teacher in "helping [his] students."

Jim described approaching two of his certification projects with confidence that

his learning experiences would result in him becoming "better." After doing a

certification project, Jim described experiencing the following realization: "Wow, this

feels good. It feels enlightening. It feels empowering.… I feel better. I feel like I'm out of

neutrality and I'm increasing. I'm improving instead of just coasting." He felt he was

improving "in just being a well-rounded teacher and more knowledgeable human being,

which is a plus." He felt that if he stopped "the flow of knowledge," he would be "kind of

stuck in a rut. That rut might not necessarily be bad, but it could always get better." As a

result of doing certification projects, Jim hoped that he had "taken to heart" that he "can

always figure out something to work on."

Bill felt like he had been "better in the classroom" as a result of doing

certification projects, and that all of the projects he had done—"some more than

others"—had "benefited [his] career." He felt that certification projects help an educator

> to be what he otherwise wouldn't be in the job for himself, for his students, and
> for S&I. And I think that that's what they're wanting. And, you know, with the
> seven or eight projects I've done, that's how I feel. I feel like that's happening.

Bill felt that the extent to which student growth and change happened was

"absolutely" influenced by the teacher's own growth and development. He added,

"Teacher improves, students improve. You could probably do a chart on it.… I think

there's a direct correlation between doing these the right way and enjoying your job

because you're growing but you're watching your students grow." Bill felt that if student

growth and change was happening "at any degree" due to certification projects, "then it's well worth whatever remuneration S&I would give. Low or high. I wish it were high, but it's worth it."

Kurt explained how his experiences with certification projects had affected him: "It's been beneficial to my teaching, it's been beneficial to the understanding of doctrine that I've attained, that I would teach with." Kurt felt that "if your heart's in the right place, you're going to benefit a lot" from certification projects, "no matter what it is." He described the "right place" as being "willing to learn and grow and improve."

Evaluating one's learning based on improvement. John, Kurt, and Mark evaluated their learning based on whether they had accomplished the learning objectives they established during the planning stage of their certification projects. They explained that their learning objectives generally took the form of something they wanted to become more effective at doing in their teaching or administering, or improving their understanding of content and concepts. John said that for him, this evaluation "really happens in the process of the project." He reported enjoying being able to look back on his objective and see what he had "gained in the process." Mark would evaluate whether he had arrived at "the level" that he wanted to learn based on the criterion of "it feels right."

Affects practice. Outside of general acknowledgments regarding the way they had improved or grown as a result of doing certification projects, every participant described changes in their practice as a result of certification projects they had done. They reported using content knowledge they had gained and administrative and teaching

skills they had developed. For example, Pete had restructured the way he began his classes, rethought his use of PowerPoint resources and questioning techniques, and increased his sympathy for students who struggle.

Five participants described examples of how what they learned from different certification projects affected their students' learning experiences in positive ways. Learnings from one certification project led John to try to "adjust" his practice in areas that would help him "be better at helping" his students. Bill felt he could teach what a commonly misunderstood doctrine "actually meant" as a result of one certification project and that his students could therefore "have a better understanding" of the doctrine as well. Kurt's study of new teaching methods led him to incorporate them in his preparation and practice, which in turn helped students better understand and apply gospel teachings in their lives.

Bill felt that doing certification projects had been "extremely impactful" on his practice, and that "every one" of his certification projects, some more directly than others, had "blessed [his] students' lives." He reflected,

> In retrospect, I look at the body of work that's been there, and almost on a daily basis it comes out somewhere in the lesson, somewhere in the way I speak, somewhere in the way that I ask questions, somewhere in the way that I use technology. So it's a positive thing.... I think they're all specifically being used.

Jim's in-depth study of a part of the New Testament affected his understanding of the text. He described what he called "a pretty cool ripple effect" that would come from what he learned having an effect on his lesson preparation, "which will affect [his] teaching, which will then affect the students that [he's] teaching."

Jim surveyed his students to obtain their perceptions about certain teaching

methods. The results of the survey "helped [him] understand" that he needed to make some changes to his practice to align with students' preferences. Jim said, "It completely affected very, very quickly how I taught. And I could see the results quickly. So this made me a believer into the certification. It really did.... That was my hook that got me hooked." Additional responses from students at the end of the semester led Jim to know that this certification project "actually benefited [his] employment and [him] personally." Jim felt that what he learned had changed his practice and would affect it throughout his career.

Creating a resource to reference or use. Six participants discussed creating a final product they could reference or use in their practice. As a result of one certification project, David developed a resource that he and his faculty members were using to help their students improve their understanding of the scriptures. Bill, Kurt, and Jim increased their exposure to multimedia resources and created spreadsheets of such resources that they could reference to help them save time in their lesson preparation.

John described seeking certification projects "that, although the project's finished, [he's] continuing to build on it…adding material, revising things." Mark and Kurt reported creating final products that they could continue to add to as well. As Kurt explained, "So I've got a living document on my computer that I can refer to if I have a question with a bunch of really good quotes and scriptures."

Kurt said that he preferred the type of certification projects that involved producing documents that he could go back and reference. Kurt would spend more than 30 hours on a certification project because he wanted the final product to be something he

could benefit from. For one certification project, he far exceeded the page requirements because, as he said, "I made it a document for me and not just for them to see that I did what they wanted me to do." He wanted the document to be for his "own personal use," which, he explained, "is what the whole purpose of this is—to make it useful for you."

David, Bill, and Pete described how they had revisited some of the final products they had created. Bill said, "I revisit them from time to time and re-read some of the research I have done to use in the classroom." He felt that "a body of 12 of those could have some good shelf value for years and years." Pete did something similar to Bill. He explained, "I go back and read them all the time and see if there's something that I've put in there that maybe I missed, I haven't thought about." This led him to additional study in which he would "maybe get something [he] didn't get the first time through."

Reflection facilitates the application of learning. Reflecting on their learning influenced Pete, John, and Kurt's efforts to apply what they learned from their certification projects. For a project in which Pete studied the S&I teaching handbook, his reflection involved "reading stuff in there" and then thinking about, "Okay, this is what I've learned, now how do I implement that in the classroom?" John thought that reflection was "where all of [his] learning comes from.... Reflection comes as you're thinking about the project and trying to implement it." Kurt said, "I think any time you're trying to improve in any way, reflection is the key because you take what you learn and you reflect and figure out how to apply it into your life."

Evaluating one's learning based on application to practice. One way Pete, Kurt, David, Jim, and Bill evaluated their learning was based on the application of their

learning in their practice. Using his learning in his teaching was one way Kurt knew he

had "done something good." David said, "If what I've learned just seems to be a natural

part of what I do now, I think that that's of value." Jim evaluated his learning while he

worked on a certification project and used the following criteria for his evaluation: "I

think the greatest way to measure mine is am I doing it in the classroom? Will this affect

me as a teacher? Has it affected me even as just a normal, every-day person?"

Bill was the only participant who used the online self-evaluation for purposes of

evaluating his learning, whereas several others considered it a "formality" or something

to "click, click, click." Bill said that "two questions [he'd] always be looking at" in terms

of evaluating his certification projects were two questions included in the online self-

evaluation: "How did it benefit you professionally? How did it benefit your students?"

No large improvements. Pete and David did not perceive that they experienced

large improvements professionally as a result of doing certification projects. Because

Pete believed there was no financial benefit for doing certification projects for him, "the

only benefit" he thought he could get was "something that maybe along the way [he'd]

pick up that might change one thing [he did] in the classroom that will make it better." He

believed that the purpose of certification projects was to "improve your teaching," and

said the following regarding this outcome:

> I've formed my own opinion of that—which I don't think it does. I think that it
> increases your knowledge in some things that you're interested in, but when it
> gets right down to being a better teacher in the classroom, I don't think…at least,
> that's for me. Maybe I've just done the wrong certifications, but for me, it
> hasn't.... It's given me some new insights, it's made me think about some things,
> but I don't know whether it's really made me a better teacher.

He added,

I think there's small increments of improvement in all of the things that you do if you're doing it with the right mentality. Large things—I don't see any mind-blowing professional improvement things. I wish there were some things like that.

Pete said that there had "been some good things that have come out of" doing certification projects. His understanding of how to teach a portion of the scriptures was "a little bit clearer;" he received confirmation of what he "already knew" about leadership and that he was "doing the right thing;" he implemented certain practices that "[he'd] keep for the rest of [his] career that will have an effect on [his] career;" and he was "better" at researching because he had "done more of it more often." He anticipated that the remaining certification projects he planned to complete would "be good" for his "professional growth," and that one in particular dealing with an in-depth study of a book of scripture would "make [him] teach it better." He questioned, though, whether the long-term effect of doing certification projects "will be any greater than" what he would have obtained from his "own desire to improve." Despite not perceiving any large improvements, Pete said that "all in all, the experience for [him] has been good" and he was "glad" he had worked on certification projects.

David experienced a "process of learning and growing" by doing certification projects. He thought that there was something good "about being put in a situation to do more and a little better and to stretch yourself," and that "certifications help with that." However, he was unsure whether doing certification projects had resulted in substantial improvements for him. He said,

> I do not know that the projects have made me a better teacher or given me skills that I needed. I think that projects have helped maybe make some tweaks, but in the day-to-day, run-of-the-mill observation of it all, I don't know that projects have done anything to help me really feel like I've improved and grown and—

that's not true, I've grown because of the effort—but, I don't think the projects has made me better. If I hadn't done any projects, I think I'd hopefully still be in a good place, still striving to hang on and be effective and learn.... But overall, I don't think the [certification] is a monumental thing that says, "Well, look what you've become because of these projects."

David did describe certain ways doing certification projects had affected him. He said that the teaching skills certification projects he had done had "helped [him] as a teacher." He felt that one in particular involving a study of new teaching methods was "making [him] a better teacher." He added, "It's really benefiting us with what we're doing in the classroom.... I'm grateful for that project. I'm glad I did it." He also mentioned experiencing some "self-improvement" and developing some "self-discipline" as a result of doing certification projects.

Textural Description

The textural components of a consciously experienced phenomenon reflect the qualities and general features of the phenomenon—the "what" that individuals experience (Creswell, 2013). What follows is a composite textural description of the experiences of the participants in this study with self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

The experience of self-directed learning in doing certification projects began with exposure to the Certification Program. Participants perceived certification projects as a means for professional improvement and as a means to increase their income. The absence of mandated involvement in doing certification projects required participants to inherently assume some degree of responsibility for and control over their learning efforts. For some participants, the decision to do so required minimal thought due to

excitement for learning and motivation for financial increase, despite the financial incentive's ambiguity. This incentive allowed several participants to justify investing the increased time and effort necessary to engage in this form of self-directed learning. For others, assuming responsibility for and control over their learning efforts was influenced by a desire to comply with a request of a supervisor, to appear compliant with S&I administrators' expectations, or to keep up with colleagues who were doing certification projects. Some participants experienced freedom and ownership by having control over their learning decisions.

Participants' initiative influenced them to move forward with planning and implementing their learning. In the initial planning of their involvement in doing certification projects, several participants thought through when they desired to complete their twelfth project and the number of projects they would therefore need to complete each year. As participants moved forward with planning their learning efforts, they encountered the requirements and expectations of how to do certification projects, some of which were not characteristic of participants' regular self-directed learning efforts for purposes of professional development. These included the amount of time spent studying one subject, the need to work on certification projects outside of work time, finding a minimum number of resources, and the need to formalize one's learning by writing a paper that included S&I's required components or by constructing a portfolio.

As some participants sought to plan their learning efforts, they experienced a lack of understanding of requirements and expectations of doing certification projects. As participants progressed in their experiences, they gained greater understanding of how to

plan certification projects that would satisfy program requirements, which increased their confidence with planning future projects. This understanding was influenced by researching on the S&I website, consulting with colleagues and supervisors, consulting with the program coordinator, and by seeing guided projects. Despite not initially having a complete understanding, participants moved forward with their learning, hoping their efforts would satisfy the requirements and expectations. One participant relied on the understanding of his supervisor to assist him in understanding the program and to guide his involvement.

Some participants experienced excitement when initiating a new project. Participants' efforts to plan their learning began with identifying a topic for study. A topic was considered in its relationship to one of the three required categories for certification projects. Participants assessed the potential of a topic to satisfy the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects and to keep their interest throughout the time they would spend working on the projects. Topics were selected due to their connection to participants' personal interests. Many topics were of interest because they were perceived to be applicable and beneficial to participants' practice and would satisfy a personal desire for self-improvement. Participants also often considered a topic's potential for having a beneficial influence on students' learning. Most participants frequently reflected on their professional practice to identify their learning needs and interests.

Some ideas for topics for certification projects came from interactions and conversations with colleagues. Some participants made decisions for topics based on a

consideration of their personal preference for structured learning experiences and learning experiences with others, though the degree to which some participants pursued learning experiences with others was limited by these participants' understanding of whether collaborative learning was allowed. Some participants would seek topics and learning experiences that afforded variety. Some participants also sought certification projects that could be done by augmenting learning efforts they were already going to do, such as those required by area directors. In some instances, the presence of a certification class, a guided project, or an invitation from an area director or central office personnel served as a means of identifying a certification project to complete.

Once a topic was selected, participants established a learning objective, which was based in improving their teaching knowledge or skills, content knowledge, administrative knowledge or skills, or developing resources they could use in their practice. Participants planned learning activities that would accomplish their learning objectives, which plans included at least a preliminary consideration of learning resources to use.

Participants felt confident in their abilities to identify and access the required number of resources to use in their learning. To identify and obtain what was needed for their learning, participants used personal knowledge, files, colleagues, the Internet, and references in books. Participants' previous work and educational experiences influenced their familiarity with and ability to identify and access resources. Participants evaluated the resources they encountered as to their ability to contribute to the purposes of the participants' certification projects.

Participants varied in the degree to which they knew all of the learning resources they would use and all of the learning activities they would engage in as they emerged from the planning stage. Knowing the direction they were moving because of their learning objective enabled participants to cope with ambiguity in this regard and move forward with their learning efforts. While engaged in their learning activities, participants could discover new learning resources to consult and would occasionally even adjust their learning objectives.

Participants submitted a proposal using the online tracking software and awaited their supervisor's approval. Upon receiving approval, they implemented their learning plan. Working on certification projects involved a variety of activities, including developing instructional or curriculum resources for themselves or others; completing training modules or training on Microsoft applications; watching or listening to leadership training presentations; reviewing multimedia resources; studying messages from LDS Church leaders and S&I administrators; studying a teaching methodology handbook or textbook; experimenting with teaching methods; attending classes; instructing others; observing and interviewing colleagues; studying scriptural texts, religious books, and scholarly articles from the field of public education; surveying students; and reviewing other S&I educators' final products. Some participants immediately applied what they were learning to their lesson preparation or teaching.

Some learning activities were engaged in with others, which would result in increased knowledge and understanding of what participants were studying because they were exposed to additional perspectives and insights. Learning with others could also

provide structure and accountability that would help participants maintain consistent effort and progression in their learning.

A central learning activity in all of these activities was the construction of a portfolio or written paper, which was an activity participants would not normally do in their self-directed learning efforts for purposes of professional development. When writing, some participants encountered weaknesses with their abilities and others enjoyed the process. Some participants rejoiced in guided projects that allowed their reading and writing efforts to be broken into smaller segments. Some participants also encountered questions and confusion regarding what their final products needed to look like. Throughout their writing efforts or at the end, participants formatted their papers to align with a style guide so as to comply with perceived program requirements. For several participants, formatting their papers was a frustrating, undesirable, purposeless experience.

Participants experienced satisfying the requirements and expectations of certification projects as something that could be hard but that could also lead to an increased depth in learning than what might have been obtained otherwise. From engaging in the learning process, some participants experienced increased understanding of ways to make their learning efforts more manageable and efficient. Some participants would work on more than one certification project at a time.

Participants' persistence enabled them to push through challenges they experienced in working on certification projects. One common challenge pertained to when and how much time participants were able to spend working on certification

projects due to personal responsibilities, work responsibilities, and conflicted feelings regarding using work time to work on their projects. Decisions to work on certification projects during work hours, outside of work hours in one's office, or late in the evening or early in the morning at one's home were made in consideration of these factors. Due to work responsibilities, some participants experienced exhaustion at the end of their work day, making it difficult to work on certification projects at that time. In the summer some participants felt an increased capacity to work on certification projects due to the decreased pressure caused by the teaching and administrative pressures of the school year. If participants encountered an internal dilemma with using work time to do certification projects, rationalization or approval of an immediate supervisor helped them feel better about doing so.

When participants considered their final products to be at a personally acceptable level, as well as at a level that would satisfy the program requirements and expectations, they submitted their final products for review. Many participants experienced frustrations due to the amount of time they waited for reviews to be completed. Participants valued feedback that they perceived helped further accomplish the purposes of their projects and improved their final products. Participants were invested in ensuring their final products were quality.

After reviewing the reviewers' feedback, participants made decisions regarding what to implement. They then submitted their certification projects for final approval by their supervisors. As part of the submission, participants completed a self-evaluation of their learning, which the majority of the participants considered to be a formality and

nothing of substance to their learning experience.

In the experience of working on certification projects, participants experienced increased or new understanding of topics they studied, growth, and improvement to varying degrees. They often applied what they were learning to their practice. The application could be enhanced by learning with colleagues and facilitated by participants reflecting on what they had learned and considering how they could implement it. Every participant changed something in his practice as a result of doing certification projects. Participants often created resources they could reference and use to improve their practice in some way. Several participants observed benefits to students' learning and classroom experiences as a result of what the participants learned and implemented from their projects.

Some participants evaluated their learning as they were working on certification projects, but the majority evaluated their learning at the conclusion of their projects. Participants used whether they accomplished their learning objectives and whether they applied their learning to their practice as criteria for evaluating their learning. The extent to which participants perceived they benefited from their learning efforts influenced their evaluation of whether the time they invested in doing certification projects had been worth it.

Structural Description

The structural components of individuals' experiences with a phenomenon are the inherent, underlying dynamics of the experiences that account for the textural qualities of

their experience (Trumbull, 1993). The structures represent the "how" of the experience as it exists in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). What follows is a composite structural description of the experiences of the participants in this study with self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

The appearance of certification projects in participants' consciousness as a means for professional growth was influenced by participants' acceptance of, and belief in, the stated purpose of certification projects; their desire to improve themselves as educators, be effective in their practice, and help their students learn; and, for several participants, by their disposition for learning. Participants considered their self-improvement to be a means for satisfying their deeper desire for assisting their students' learning and wellbeing. Some participants also saw certification projects as additional means for obtaining satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment from engaging in learning activities and obtaining knowledge. Underlying the motivation of the participants who engaged in certification projects to be obedient was a desire to be perceived by supervisors and administrators as dutiful or loyal employees. In such cases, certification projects could exist in participants' consciousness as an activity that needed to be checked off their professional "to-do" lists.

The way many participants viewed the financial incentive stemmed from their desire to increase their ability to support their families and improve their financial security. For several participants, the financial incentive was also perceived as a needed means to justify the increased time and effort they would invest in this form of self-directed learning beyond what they would normally do for purposes of professional

growth. Without this incentive, engaging in this form of self-directed learning was not a logical fit for accomplishing their learning needs. Underlying some frustrations with not understanding the financial incentive were desires to be informed about, and have a sense of control over, one's earning potential.

The requirements and expectations of doing certification projects represented an alteration or deviation from participants' regular self-directed learning efforts. Participants perceived the requirements and expectations as a means, or as "hoops" as some participants referred to them, to a desired end: earning the certification credential and increasing their income. Some participants perceived some of the requirements and expectations as being ambiguous. The lack of understanding of the requirements and expectations existed in participants' consciousness as a source of frustration due to participants' desires to initiate their learning efforts with confidence that their actions would result in approval and credit. Underlying several participants' frustrations, as well as their desires to obtain understanding of the requirements and expectations, were their desires to be honest in their learning efforts and have integrity.

For some certification projects, participants' frustrations were caused by the way they perceived certain requirements and expectations as meaningless to their personal learning purposes. This was especially true of how the formatting requirements of written papers existed in the minds of several participants, which requirements could also be perceived as being unpleasant or drudgery.

Some participants' state of confusion and desires to satisfy the requirements and expectations of certification projects led them to perceive guided projects not only as

means to assist and make their learning efforts easier and more efficient, but also as a means to obtain clarity and understanding of what was required and expected. Seeing external examples of acceptable learning resources, activities, and products influenced several participants' internal confidence in their abilities to comply with the requirements and expectations. These examples were perceived as being authoritative because they were created by S&I central office personnel. One participant viewed his supervisor as resource for obtaining needed clarity, understanding, and confidence as well.

The control some participants preferred having over their learning was an outgrowth of their sense of personal ability to direct their own learning efforts or their desire to accomplish their own purposes. In some cases, to experience control was to experience joy and liberation from external constraints, or to experience an opportunity to exercise one's capacity to direct one's learning.

While planning topics for certification projects, thoughts of self and students were on participants' minds. Participants could experience planning (e.g., identifying topics and learning objectives, resources, and activities) as a strategic endeavor for satisfying personal needs and interests that were identified through reflection on self and practice or by exposure to learning opportunities. Participants also experienced planning as a strategic endeavor for identifying means for benefiting students' learning; satisfying program requirements and expectations; aligning learning efforts with their preferred learning styles for a topic; considering options for variety so as to maintain interest and energy in their learning; and, in some cases, making the learning process easier by minimizing the effort they would need to invest in planning and managing their learning.

Certification classes, guided projects, or projects offered by area directors or central office personnel presented themselves as opportunities to bypass many of the efforts involved in the planning stage of participants' self-directed learning efforts because the learning resources and activities were already provided. For some participants, with experience planning became a tool for increasing the efficiency of their learning efforts.

In their efforts to identify and access learning resources, participants experienced the Internet as a gateway to a more accessible world. In addition to viewing students as benefactors of their learning efforts, some participants viewed students as learning resources as well.

Implementing one's learning plan, and the learning activities themselves, represented a necessary step and means toward accomplishing one's desired learning objectives, accomplishing the desired end of earning the certification credential, and obtaining personal satisfaction. Some participants viewed certification projects done individually as learning experiences that could be set aside due to the absence of external accountability, whereas certification projects done with others were viewed as a containing external structure and accountability that would propel participants forward in their learning efforts. Participants also perceived learning with others as a means to have their learning enriched, enjoyed, increased, validated, and their abilities improved.

In the process of learning, participants' excitement and enjoyment could be diminished and monotony and boredom could be experienced. Underlying participants' persistence in their learning efforts was a sense of responsibility for, and satisfaction

from, finishing what they had started, as well as a basic desire to be done with a particular learning activity.

Underlying the way participants viewed writing, which was a primary learning activity for many certification projects, was confidence or a sense of weakness in their writing abilities. Researching and writing were experienced as enjoyable and a means of obtaining satisfaction for participants who preferred such activities, which preference could stem from their self-efficacy about their abilities to perform these activities well. For those who lacked such preference and self-efficacy, researching and writing were experienced as difficult, unpleasant, or uncomfortable activities.

Time was present in participants' consciousness throughout their experiences with doing certification projects. For several participants, the decision to begin working on certification projects was made with the thought of when the experience of doing certification projects would end. Despite having an interest in doing certification projects, this form of self-directed learning was not considered a long-term alteration of one's self-directed learning efforts. The decision of when to work on certification projects could be met with stress or uncertainty. The requirement to not use work time to do certification projects created an internal conflict for some participants due to their desires to be honest and have integrity.

Participants experienced time as a commodity that existed in limited supply, needed to be found, could have worth, could be wasted or stolen, and the use of which needed to be justified. Participants' relationships with their wives and children influenced how their perceived time, as did participants' desires to fulfill their church service

responsibilities. Certification projects existed in participants' consciousness as competitors with these other responsibilities for participants' limited time. A desire to be a capable, supportive, and involved husband and father caused participants to avoid working on certification projects at times they felt would interfere with family processes.

Some participants viewed reviewers as resources for potentially improving their learning and final products. Most participants also viewed reviewers as sources of frustration due to the need to wait excessive amounts of time for reviews to be returned or because of reviews that participants did not perceive contributed to their learning or efforts.

Although reviewers provided feedback and suggestions for improving participants' final products, participants did not perceive reviewers as a contributing force in the evaluation of their learning. Evaluating learning was perceived as a process of shared authority amongst the participants, their supervisors, and central office personnel. Participants felt principle authority for evaluating the extent to which their personal learning objectives were met, whereas supervisors and central office personnel, by virtue of their authority to ultimately approve a project, had principle authority for evaluating the extent to which the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects were met for purposes of credit.

Evaluating learning existed in participants' consciousness as a means for assessing the quality and usefulness of their final products, whether participants accomplished their learning objectives, the extent to which their learning was being applied in practice, and whether they satisfied program requirements and expectations.

Underlying several participants' desire for quality was a desire to obtain gratification and use from their efforts, to be perceived as competent by others, and to provide a beneficial resource for colleagues. Participants perceived new knowledge, skills, and resources as contributors to personal growth and means to improvements in their practice and students' learning. Many participants viewed completed certification projects as sources of satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and evidence of progression.

The Essence

The concluding portion of a phenomenological study is a descriptive passage or synthesis of the shared textural and structural parts of individuals' experiences with a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This is referred to as the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). The essence consists of the essential, invariant, underlying structures of the experience with a phenomenon as it exists in the consciousness of those who experienced it (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984). What follows is a description of the essence of participants' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

Self-directed learning in doing certification projects represented a form of self-directed learning that differed from participants' regular self-directed learning efforts for purposes of professional development. Participants perceived that this form of self-directed learning existed for purposes of professional growth. It represented an opportunity for participants to satisfy their desire for self-improvement, which was rooted in their concern for students' learning, and to satisfy personal, practice-applicable needs

and interests. The initiation and justification of the experience was influenced by the presence of a financial incentive. Participants experienced this form of self-directed learning in cognizance of personal and work responsibilities and within a condition of limited time due to these responsibilities. How participants experienced this form of self-directed learning depended on their personal characteristics. Participants' previous learning experiences influenced their comfort and confidence in researching and writing, two of the basic learning activities in doing certification projects.

This form of self-directed learning was situated within an organizational context. In this regard, self-directed learning in doing certification projects was an experience of sharing control over one's learning with S&I administrators and supervisors. Participants best utilized this form of self-directed learning when the requirements and expectations established by S&I were well understood. The experience of self-directed learning in doing certification projects was also influenced by students, colleagues, and central office personnel. Participants experienced enjoyable and enhanced learning experiences and outcomes when they engaged in learning activities with colleagues. Participants expressed concern for the quality of their certification projects and thought of colleagues who could benefit from the results of their projects. To engage in self-directed learning in doing certification projects was to experience, to varying degrees, outcomes of learning, growth, and improved or changed practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects?

2. What perceived impacts has S&I educators' engagement in doing certification projects had on their professional growth?

To answer these questions, data were gathered from seven S&I educators in northern Utah. Phenomenology guided the data collection and analysis processes. The previous chapter provided answers to the research questions this study sought to answer. In this chapter, key findings that emerged from these educators' experiences and outcomes are discussed and compared with self-directed learning theory, as influenced by andragogy, as well as other related research findings. This comparison is followed by a discussion of recommendations for practice and recommendations for further research.

Comparison of Findings with Theory and Research

**Personal Characteristics Influence Engagement
in Self-Directed Learning**

Participants' personal characteristics influenced their engagement with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. This finding supports theorists who assert that self-directed learning must account for process and personality elements in its use (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991). This finding is also consistent with self-

directed learning theory, which states that whether self-directed learning takes place in a given situation is ultimately determined by the personal characteristics of the learner (Guglielmino, 2008; Raemdonck et al., 2012).

Consistent with another tenet of self-directed learning theory, the personal characteristics of participants in this study demonstrate how adult learners range in their readiness and abilities to self-direct their own learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Guglielmino, 1993; Kasworm et al., 2010; Tough, 1971). The research-based characteristics of self-directed learners that most clearly emerged from participants' descriptions of themselves are shown in Figure 5.1 and are described below. The extent to which participants possessed these characteristics influenced how they experienced this form of self-directed learning, including their disposition to engage in it.

Assuming responsibility and control over learning decisions. Connected to its roots in andragogy, self-directed learning theory asserts that adults have a "need and capacity to be self-directing" (Knowles, 1975, p. 130; Tusting & Barton, 2003), and should therefore be given control over their learning decisions (Pratt, 1988). This need and capacity to self-direct their learning is reflected in learners' desire and ability to assume or accept responsibility and control over learning decisions, which is recognized as a central characteristic of self-directed learners (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Grow, 1991; Guglielmino, 1978). Learners' willingness to take control over their learning contributes to their potential for self-direction in a given situation (Pratt, 1988).

Most participants in this study demonstrated a willingness and ability to assume responsibility and control over the learning decisions associated with their certification
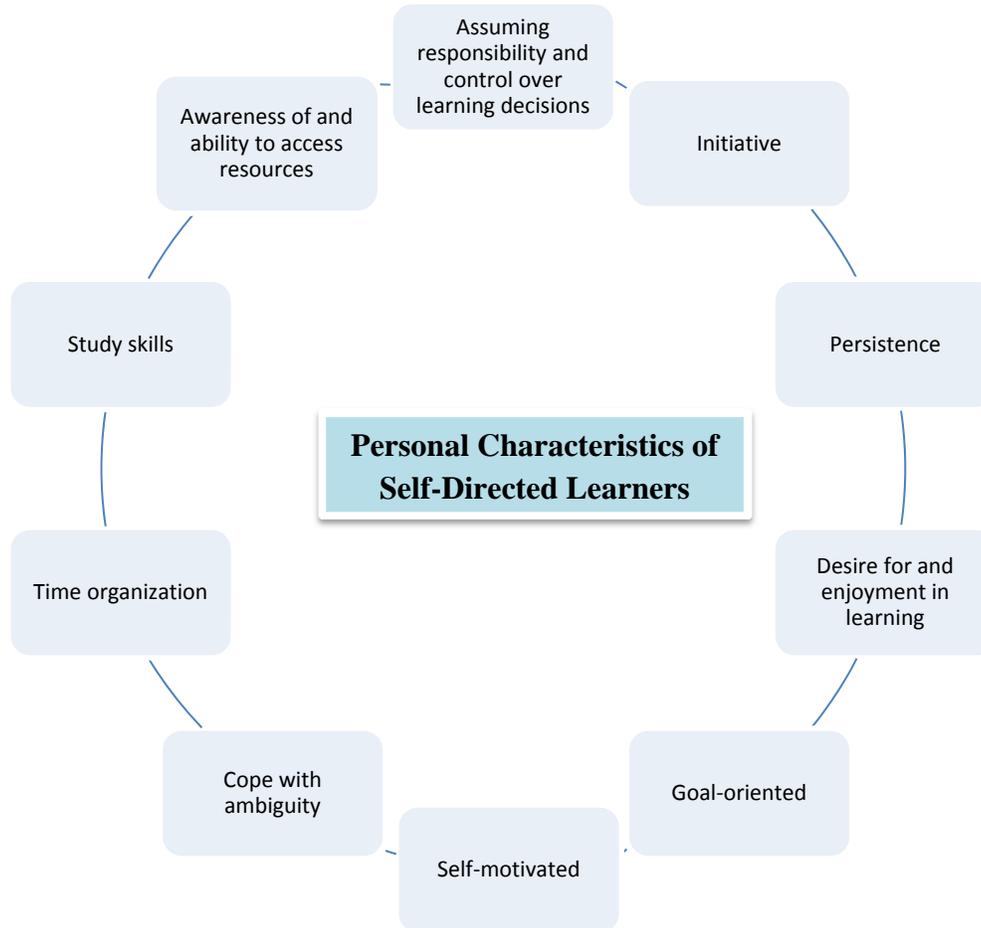
Assuming responsibility and control over learning decisions

Awareness of and ability to access resources

Initiative

Study skills

Persistence

Personal Characteristics of Self-Directed Learners

Time organization

Desire for and enjoyment in learning

Cope with ambiguity

Goal-oriented

Self-motivated

Figure 5.1. Personal characteristics of self-directed learners possessed by participants.

projects. This was especially true for Jim, who wanted to "own" his learning experiences

from start to finish. His, along with other participants', experiences confirm other

research findings that indicate that having control over professional development goals

and activities can increase educators' sense of ownership over, and motivation and

investment in, their learning (Acevedo, 2013; Corabi, 1995; Gibbs, 2002; Mahmood,

2003; Roberts, 2009).

David's experiences, as well as Pete's experiences to a certain extent, support the

assertion that adults vary in their willingness, readiness, and capacity to assume

responsibility and control over their learning decisions (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Pratt,

1988). Pete and David had less desire than other participants to assume responsibility and

control over their learning decisions in this form of self-directed learning. As noted

previously, David preferred certification projects in which many of the learning decisions

were made for him, indicating that he did not always value having control over his

learning (Pratt, 1988). Both participants reported that they would have preferred having

all of their certification projects be done through certification classes. They both

preferred and benefited from structured learning experiences.

David and Pete's desire for using certification classes as their primary learning

method should not be considered as proof of a complete absence of the need and capacity

to be self-directing as adult learners in general. A desire for structured classroom learning

experiences can stem from a general preferred learning style or it can be a situational

preference (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991; Knowles et al., 2005;

Sparling, 2001). If a significant number of their previous professional and educational

learning experiences have involved them in a passive role as learners, they may be

conditioned to having their learning structured by others (Candy, 1991; Gravani, 2012;

Sparling, 2001). Certification classes provided a form of learning deadlines that helped

them progress in their learning, a preference for which is not uncommon among teachers

(Jacka, 1997).

David's experiences illustrate how in the absence of a high level of willingness

and capacity to assume responsibility and control over learning decisions, supportive

structures in the form of structured learning experiences and a supportive supervisor can provide needed guidance and assistance (Grow, 1991). As evidenced, these supportive structures can enable a learner to successfully engage in this form of learning. David's supervisor was especially important in helping him progress in his completion of certification projects. As David acknowledged, he would not have been as far along in his progress in doing certification projects without his supervisor's assistance.

Guglielmino and colleagues (2005) cited "selecting and pursuing a variety of approaches to learning" (p. 89) as evidence that the highly self-directed learners in their study accepted responsibility for their own learning. Five participants in this study spoke of having interest in, a desire for, and benefiting from variety in their learning. A desire for variety led some participants to select different learning methods and others to plan their learning activities in a way that added variety to their learning efforts by working on different parts of a project or different projects from day to day. Having variety seemed to help participants maintain energy and engagement in their learning.

Initiative. Self-directed learning is recognized as a process that is self-initiated (Caffarella, 1993; Knowles, 1975). It is therefore not surprising that a key characteristic of self-directed learners is initiative (Guglielmino, 1978; Jacka, 1997; Lohman, 2003; Ponton & Carr, 1996; Tough, 1971). Initiative "is the driving force that actually sets in motion the learning process" (Bouchard, 2009, p. 16).

The initiative possessed by six of the participants in this study was demonstrated in their planning and managing of their learning for most of their certification projects. The high level of initiative possessed by John, Mark, and Bill was demonstrated by the

way they immediately began planning certification projects after the program was first introduced to them. Others' initiative to move forward with doing certification projects was operationalized after consideration of the financial reward or a request from a supervisor. Bill and Kurt's initiative was also seen in their efforts to seek understanding of how to do certification projects.

David possessed the least amount of initiative, as evidenced by his reliance on his supervisors and central office personnel to help him plan and manage much of his learning. This included his dependence on offerings of certification classes, guided projects, or projects that built upon work he was already responsible to do. Due to self-proclaimed laziness, he sought for experiences that required less effort.

Persistence. Self-directed learners have persistence (Bolhuis, 2003; Candy, 1991; Jacka, 1997; Ponton & Carr, 1996). Persistence is continuing one's learning efforts to the point of attaining one's learning goals (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2010). Every participant in this study embodied the characteristic of persistence to a varying degree. Four participants' persistence was influenced by their inclination to finish activities that they start. David's persistence toward earning the certification credential was influenced by finding projects that he considered to be easier to do.

Persistence also includes "the continuation of action in spite of the presence of obstacles" (Ponton & Carr, 1996, p. 277). Multiple participants described how they persisted through challenges stemming from a lack of clarity of requirements and expectations, a lack of understanding of the financial implications of doing certification projects, a lack of excitement, a lack of energy, a lack of desire, a lack of time, or the

difficulty of the learning itself.

Desire for and enjoyment in learning. Self-directed learners have a strong

desire to learn or change and enjoy learning (Guglielmino, 1978; Jacka, 1997; Lohman,

2003; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Steinke, 2012; Tough, 1971). Based on their

descriptions of themselves, John and Mark were the participants who received the most

satisfaction and enjoyment from learning. They possessed a natural disposition to engage

in certification projects because of their desire and enjoyment for learning. Multiple

participants also experienced enjoyment in their learning while doing certification

projects.

Goal-oriented. Self-directed learners tend to be goal-oriented (Guglielmino,

1978). Every participant desired to improve themselves as educators and be effective in

their practice. Each described how their desire to improve themselves as educators was

influenced by their desire to help their students learn and enjoy their experiences in the

classroom. Kurt's goal-oriented nature helped him persist in his learning efforts despite

experiencing exhaustion at the end of a workday.

Self-motivated. Self-directed learners tend to be self-motivated (Marczely, 1996).

John, Bill, and Jim considered themselves to be fairly self-motivated. Bill believed that

many of the first earners of the certification credential were educators who are

"extremely self-motivated and extremely task-oriented."

Cope with ambiguity. The ability to cope with or tolerate ambiguity has been

recognized as a characteristic of self-directed learners (Bolhuis, 2003; Liddell, 2008).

Individuals who have a higher tolerance of uncertainty profit more from self-directed

learning situations than those with a lower tolerance (Bolhuis, 2003). Tough (1971) said that adult learners would pursue few learning efforts if they do not "react positively to ambiguity" (p. 175).

As evidenced from participants' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects, the self-directed learning situation can have various unknowns (Bolhuis, 2003). Participants experienced ambiguity in two different forms: one with the learning resources and activities they would use in their projects and one with the requirements, expectations, and financial implications of doing certification projects.

Participants' experiences demonstrate how planning one's learning resources, which is recognized as a step in linear stage models of self-directed learning (Danis, 1992; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989), can overlap with the subsequent stage of implementing one's learning plan. In some self-designed certification projects, participants felt unable to fully plan all of their learning resources and activities prior to engaging in their learning efforts. Their ability to cope with the ambiguities about the learning resources and activities they would use in their learning was influenced by having a learning objective, which provided a direction for their learning efforts. As they engaged in learning, new ideas for resources would emerge and their learning objectives could evolve.

Multiple participants also described coping with ambiguities in the requirements, expectations, and financial implications of doing certification projects. The ability to cope with ambiguity enabled these participants to move forward with their learning efforts despite the unknowns. However, possessing this ability did not mean these

participants were comfortable with ambiguity. Rather, reflective of their initiative, multiple participants proactively sought understanding of what was unknown or not well understood.

Time organization. Self-directed learners have the ability to organize their time and to pace their learning (Grow, 1991; Guglielmino, 1978). The four participants who succeeded at completing certification projects outside of work time were able to do so because they structured their schedules and set aside time to work on their projects. They also possessed self-discipline to stick to their established plans. It should not be assumed, however, that those who had not done certification projects outside of work time lacked this characteristic. Exhaustion and a lack of willingness to sacrifice time spent fulfilling personal responsibilities may have been more influential factors.

Study skills. Self-directed learners possess basic study skills, which include reading and researching skills (Candy, 1991; Guglielmino, 1978; Jacka, 1997). John, Mark, Bill, and Jim demonstrated strong researching abilities, and Kurt and David revealed sufficient researching abilities. Pete described experiencing difficulty with researching, though he acknowledged that his abilities to research had improved as a result of doing certification projects.

Because written papers constitute one of the two primary options for demonstrating one's learning in a certification project, participants' writing abilities were an influential characteristic on their abilities to engage in this form of self-directed learning. Four participants were not comfortable with writing, one did not mind it, and two participants, Jim and Bill, were confident in their abilities. Jim and Bill's writing

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experiences in their undergraduate and graduate programs influenced their self-efficacy for writing papers. Some participants were more comfortable and confident with writing a series of smaller papers rather than one large paper.

Awareness of and ability to access resources. The ability to identify and obtain learning resources is recognized as a needed competency for self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Grow, 1991; Ponton & Carr, 1996). Every participant expressed confidence in his ability to access the required five resources that needed to be referenced in a certification project. Each participant's abilities were influenced by previous work and educational experiences (Bouchard, 2009; Knowles, 1970, 1973, 1975). This was especially true for Bill and Jim, who discussed how their experiences with researching in their undergraduate and graduate programs influenced their awareness of, and abilities to identify and access, learning resources for their certification projects.

Other characteristics unique to these participants. Participants in this study possessed three additional characteristics that were not described in existing literature pertaining to characteristics of self-directed learners: honesty, integrity, and a concern for quality. Each of these characteristics emerged due to the organizational context in which this form of self-directed learning was situated.

Five participants' descriptions about the importance of satisfying the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects reflected their desire to be honest and have integrity. They did not want to shortchange or not comply with what was required and expected. This desire influenced their need to understand the requirements and

expectations. This desire also created internal conflict for some participants who desired to use work hours during the summer to do certification projects.

Every participant also remarked about their concern for the quality of their certification projects, principally focusing on the quality of their final products. This concern influenced the effort they invested in ensuring their final products were complete and done well. For Bill, this concern influenced his desire to not work on certification projects at the end of a work day because he felt the quality of his efforts would be less. Participants' concern for quality was connected to a desire for others to be able to benefit from participants' final products and by a desire to make the final products personally beneficial.

**The Influence of Context on
Self-Directed Learning**

Candy's (1991) delineations of types of self-directed learning can be used to place the form of self-directed learning participants experienced in doing certification projects within the theoretical field of self-directed learning. Certification projects are not considered a form of autodidaxy in which learners have complete control over their learning experience. Instead, certification projects are considered a form of learner-control in which learners' decisions regarding their learning are influenced by the culture of the learning situation (Candy, 1991). More specifically, certification projects would be considered a type of independent study, a concept Candy explained as being associated with learner control. Independent study takes places within an institutional setting but allows the learner a higher degree of control over instructional elements such as setting

objectives, choosing learning content and methods, and assessing learning outcomes.

Brookfield (1993) explained that "at the intellectual heart of self-direction is the issue of control, particularly control over what are conceived as acceptable and appropriate learning activities and processes" (p. 232-233; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). This includes control over decisions regarding learning goals, resources, and evaluation criteria (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 1993). According to some scholars, true self-directed learning—autodidaxy in Candy's (1991) terminology—is not possible when it is part of a program that is governed by an organization (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). This is generally because the structure of acceptable learning experiences or the evaluation criteria are established by someone other than the learner (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985). Supportive of these assertions, by being situated in an organizational context, participants were required to relinquish ultimate control over their learning decisions due to the presence of an external entity (S&I administrators) that ultimately determined whether participants' learning efforts were acceptable and worthy of credit.

For example, participants in this study were required to share control over decisions regarding certain elements of their planning and learning efforts with S&I. These elements included the types of topics to study, the number of resources and learning activities to use, the time of day to engage in learning activities, the number of hours to spend, and the final products to create. Writing a paper became a central learning activity in many of the participants' projects, but typically they would not have written a paper in their own self-directed professional learning efforts. Participants were also required to share evaluative authority in the initial approval of a proposed project and in

the final approval of their learning with their supervisors and central office personnel.

Candy (1991) asserted that ownership of one's self-directed learning efforts most clearly exists when such efforts take place outside of organizational contexts. Participants' experiences validate this assertion and also indicate that ownership of one's learning can still be experienced within an organizational context as well. Despite giving up some of their control in their learning, some participants described the control they still felt that they had over learning decisions, including choosing topics to study and the ability to adapt existing learning options to satisfy their personal learning needs.

Participants' experiences validate theoretical constructs that posit that personal factors, process factors, and contextual factors have bearing on individuals' self-directed learning (Garrison, 1997; Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012). Regarding the influence of contextual factors on one's self-directed learning efforts, the results of this study provide support to Spear and Mocker's (1984) concept of "organizing circumstance," which represents the influence of one's circumstances on the learning resources, methods, opportunities, and constraints that are experienced. S&I admininstrators provided constraints on participants' learning in the form of requirements and expectations. Personal and work responsibilities also had a constraining influence on when participants worked on certification projects. Central office personnel provided learning resources, methods, and opportunities in the form of guided and other projects, as did supervisors. Participants' colleagues served as means for identifying and accessing resources. They also offered learning methods and opportunities in the form of collaborative certification projects. Colleagues and students also served as learning resources for some participants.

Consistent with observations and findings from others (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Rager, 2006; Steinke, 2012; Wagner, 2011), participants' descriptions of their experiences illustrated the way the Internet altered their organizing circumstance by increasing their abilities to identify and access learning resources. In Kurt's words, the Internet had created a "pretty accessible world."

The online certification tracking system was a contextual influence that caused some challenges for two participants. Due to John's supervisor not being notified of the need to approve a certification project, in the months that transpired in waiting, John lost the need for the project. The "glitches" Jim had experienced with the online system, including his completed projects and a reviewer's submission not being properly accounted for, had caused him "anxiety."

Supervisors, as part of the context in which this self-directed learning took place, also played a role in some participants' experiences by providing support and encouragement for doing certification projects. In Pete's case, his supervisor provided the motivation to do certification projects. Supervisors helped some participants feel comfortable with using work time to do certification projects by giving their consent.

The contextual influence of colleagues on participants' learning was also witnessed in the way every participant spoke of "others" or "somebody" who could possibly benefit from using the certification projects they completed. Some participants described how the consideration that others could use their final products influenced their efforts to produce quality products.

Two participants spoke of being able to use the final products of their colleagues

as resources for their own future learning needs. However, in the absence of a searchable database, which S&I has expressed plans to create, such expectations and benefits had not been fully realized outside of potentially sharing their products and learnings with colleagues in their immediate surroundings. Even this, though, was minimal because it was not typically included in participants' faculty inservices. Participants may have experienced additional purpose to their learning efforts if such sharing mechanisms were operational.

According to Hiemstra and Brockett (2012), "relatively little work" (p. 159) has been done to explore the interaction between personal and contextual factors in self-directed learning experiences. This study adds to the body of work that has been done by illustrating the way that some personal factors, such as initiative and persistence, enabled participants to progress in their learning efforts in the presence of insufficient understanding of organizational requirements and expectations. In addition, the presence of colleagues in participants' learning contexts enabled those who had a personal preference for collaborating with others in their learning to do so. As discussed previously, participants' honesty, integrity, and concern for quality emerged as influential characteristics on their learning experiences due to the organizational context in which this form of self-directed learning took place.

The findings of this study confirm that a learner's "environment *does* play a role in self-direction" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 129). Furthermore, these findings provide an example of the way a learner's environment can literally influence every stage of the self-directed learning process, thereby serving as "the arena in which the activity of

self-direction is played out" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 33; Candy, 1991; Tusting & Barton, 2003).

**The Need for Understanding and Clarification
of Requirements, Expectations, and Processes**

As noted, for purposes of receiving credit, ultimate approval and validation of participants' self-directed learning efforts in doing certification projects rested with participants' supervisors and central office personnel. Their criteria were based on the requirements and expectations established by S&I administrators. The requirements and expectations represented the target that participants needed to hit to receive credit for their learning. Because participants' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects were situated in and shaped by the organization (S&I), participants' understanding of the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects influenced their experiences.

Like some of the respondents in the S&I Office of Research's (2012) preliminary survey of S&I educators' initial experiences with certification projects, several participants in the present study "indicated challenges with understanding how to complete a project, as well as directions regarding the expectations of a project" (p. 22). Several participants' descriptions of their experiences indicated that their lack of understanding of the requirements and expectations had a negative effect on their initial abilities to engage in doing certification projects and their confidence that their learning efforts satisfied what was required and expected. These participants desired instruction and direction regarding what was expected in terms of requirements, learning resources

and methods, and final products for submission.

Several participants' experiences provided further meaning to the S&I Office of Research's (2012) finding that some S&I educators had experienced frustrations with doing certification projects due to "the lack of clarity and communication" (p. 28) regarding the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects. The experiences of participants in this study further illuminate requirements and expectations that lacked, or lack, clarity. These include what was expected for learning resources and activities that could be used for certification projects, the need for the required components (e.g., abstract, annotated bibliography) of written papers, the need for formatting written papers in compliance with a standard style guide, the de-emphasis on learning with others, the need to work on certification projects predominantly outside of work time, and whether educators need to wait for a certain time in the afternoon before beginning work on their certification projects.

Guided projects were instrumental in helping several participants gain greater understanding of the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects, thereby increasing their confidence in planning and engaging in their subsequent learning efforts. Guided projects provided an authoritative "concrete example" or a "rubric" of learning resources and activities that would satisfy the requirements and expectations. Guided projects helped fulfill Garrison's (1997) assertion that an organized process for self-directed learning should include options for learners to choose from for carrying out the learning process and suggested approaches for conducting the learning. Sample written papers also helped increase participants' understanding of, and confidence in,

meeting what was required and expected in terms of this final product.

Once participants obtained greater understanding of program requirements and expectations, they were able to move forward with greater confidence and efficiency in their learning efforts. The results of this study indicate that participants' dispositions and capacities for self-directed learning were most effectively operationalized when they possessed a sufficient understanding of the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects.

Most of the guided projects were introduced a year and a half after certification projects were first introduced. The effects of guided projects on participants' learning experiences, combined with participants' descriptions of the general way certification projects were introduced and the confusion some experienced regarding program requirements and expectations, indicate the need for sufficient orientation to the requirements and expectations of this form of self-directed learning prior to initiating one's learning experiences. This finding affirms Corabi's (1995) findings pertaining to the use of self-directed learning in professional development. In a study of public school teachers' experiences with a self-directed professional development program, Corabi found that teachers reported a need for more thorough preparation for participation in the program, including a better understanding of the expectations of the program.

These findings also confirm assertions of scholars regarding the potential need for some adult learners to receive orientation to, and assistance with, self-directed learning in general (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991). Sufficient orientation can be a means of facilitating the process of self-directed learning, which is one factor that "can prevent a

great deal of frustration and misunderstanding" (Guglielmino, 1993, pp. 232-233) when implementing programs that require a higher level of self-directed learning. As illustrated from multiple participants' experiences, the need for such orientation is more pronounced when the determination of what are considered valid or acceptable learning efforts is made by an external entity.

Providing initial orientation and instruction regarding why educators are not to use large quantities of their work time to do certification projects and how to manage one's time and learning efforts could potentially help those participants who struggled with working on certification projects outside of work hours. By only working on certification projects during the summer, these participants missed out on learning opportunities and outcomes that other participants experienced by being able to use their students as resources for their learning and to experiment with and immediately apply what they learned in their classroom practice.

Other research indicates that adult learners can need assistance with structuring the time they need for their learning (Dixon, 1993). Seeing examples of colleagues who have successfully managed to work on certification projects outside of work hours could potentially help these participants increase their self-efficacy beliefs regarding their capabilities to do so as well, so long as the participants consider themselves to be similar to such models (Ponton, 2009; Ponton et al., 2005). Having such vicarious experiences by means of comparison with models may not result in as powerful of self-efficacy beliefs as could be developed from experiencing success in one's own experiences, but they could still contribute to these participants' beliefs in their personal capabilities (Bandura, 1977).

Bill felt that if the first finishers of 12 certification projects thought that it was difficult to do, S&I administrators may want to "rethink" whether 24 projects was an appropriate amount for those who need to earn both certification credentials. However, he thought that perhaps the program "will be so understood and so well laid out" at a future point, "that 24 [projects] will be very possible" for even those educators who are "not as motivated" or "as educationally inclined." He felt that with sufficient instruction and understanding, it might be doable for them. Bill's comments indicate that the need for orientation may be more pronounced for educators who are unfamiliar with processes involved in self-directed learning and who embody the characteristics of self-directed learners to a lower degree.

Helping to raise learners' competence and providing resources are two ways that individuals who seek to improve learners' self-directed learning can do so (Candy, 1991). Research illustrates that self-directed learning competencies can be developed through receiving instruction on and engaging in self-directed learning (Guglielmino, 1993; Mok & Lung, 2005). However, even with proper orientation and instruction, one cannot assume that an educator would be perfectly efficient in his or her self-directed learning efforts. As Steinke (2012) noted, "It takes time for an individual to begin to become efficient in the process" (p. 56). This was witnessed, to an extent, in the way Kurt and Pete identified ways to increase the efficiency of their learning efforts and to make them more manageable as they advanced through completing certification projects.

The findings of this study also support the S&I Office of Research's (2012) finding regarding the need for S&I administrators to clarify certain requirements and

expectations of doing certification projects. This is especially true for the requirements

regarding working on certification projects predominantly outside of work time and the

need to format written papers in compliance with a standard style guide. The lack of

understanding of each requirement caused frustration for some participants.

The discrepancy in participants' understandings of the number of hours required

for each certification project indicate that S&I administrators may need to reiterate the

required minimum of 30 hours per project. Otherwise, educators in some S&I areas might

experience dissatisfaction when they learn they spent a significantly longer time

completing their 12 certification projects than educators in other areas.

**Motivation and the Need for Justification
to Do Certification Projects**

One of andragogy's assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners is that

adults are responsive to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, with intrinsic factors

being more potent (Knowles et al., 2005). Relatedly, self-directed learning "assumes

learners are motivated by internal incentives," such as "the urge to grow, the satisfaction

of accomplishment, [and] the need to know something specific" (Knowles, 1973, p. 21).

Consistent with these assumptions and other findings regarding teachers' motivation to

engage in self-directed learning and professional development (Corabi, 1995; Husby,

2005; Knight et al., 2006; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009; Roux, 2013; Scribner, 1999),

intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influenced participants' efforts to engage in

this form of self-directed learning.

Most participants described more than one motivational factor that influenced

their experience. Extrinsic motivational factors described by participants included the financial incentive (five participants), obeying a direct request or perceived expectation (two participants), and competing to keep up with colleagues (one participant). Intrinsic factors included a desire for self-improvement (three participants) and a desire for learning (two participants). This finding is consistent with the S&I Office of Research's (2012) finding that the top two influences on survey respondents' motivation to do certification projects were an increase in pay and professional growth.

The valence, or importance and worth, of the financial incentive was a factor in its influence on participants' motivation in different ways (Garrison, 1997). Kurt's understanding of the financial implications compelled him to begin and persist in working on certification projects. When Jim obtained a clear understanding of the potential financial increase associated with completing 12 certification projects, it had a large effect on his motivation. Mark and his wife perceived the financial incentive was of sufficient value to justify him taking time away from family responsibilities to work on his projects. Bill acknowledged that he was not "that extrinsically motivated by money," and he described how the financial incentive lost its appeal because he was given the impression that the actual increase was not very high. Pete's perception that he would receive minimal financial benefit as a result of doing certification projects led him to initially choose to not do them. Participants described colleagues who were at later ages in their careers who also cited receiving only a minimal financial benefit, which was not of sufficient worth, as a reason for not doing certification projects.

Every participant mentioned or confirmed that many educators do not understand

the financial implications of doing certification projects. Several participants believed that not understanding the financial implications of doing certification projects affected S&I educators' decisions of whether to do them, to the point of having a demotivating influence for some. According to several participants, understanding the financial implications for earning a certification credential, if sufficiently meaningful, would motivate many S&I educators to do certification projects. Bill even mentioned that such understanding—knowing the size of the "carrot," whether big or little—would be more motivating for him because he would "at least know." Pete felt that such understanding would enable educators to make an informed decision regarding whether to do certification projects.

Kurt felt understanding the financial implications of doing certification projects would also help educators "see a reason," or justification, for doing certification projects. Related to Kurt's reasoning, Roux (2013) explained that teachers conduct a cost-benefit assessment when deciding whether to participate in nonmandated professional development. Teachers determine whether involvement will be worth the time and effort, in addition to considering opportunity costs in terms of how that time could be spent engaging in other learning or personal activities (Bouchard, 2009). Relatedly, Long (2007) argued that the outcomes of a self-directed learning effort "must be of sufficient value to pay the cost of the effort" (p. 9). These assertions were validated by participants' descriptions of the way the financial incentive, one "outcome" of their self-directed learning efforts, provided needed justification to invest the requisite time and effort to engage in this form of self-directed learning. Such justification was needed to

compensate for the opportunity cost of not spending that time in activities connected with their personal responsibilities.

Certain requirements of certification projects represented efforts that were not typical of participants' regular self-directed learning efforts. These included the amount of time spent studying one subject, the need to work on certification projects outside of work time, finding a minimum number of resources, and the need to formalize one's learning by writing a paper that included S&I's required components or by constructing a portfolio. As Kurt described, he typically would not invest the required time and or write a paper in a professional self-directed learning effort because his purposes could be accomplished without doing so. Participants considered the financial incentive as a reason for altering their regular self-directed learning efforts for purposes of professional development to satisfy these requirements.

Use and Benefits of Collaborative Learning

Self-directed learning theory revolves around the concepts of self-initiation and control of one's learning, whatever form the learning activities take. Despite its seemingly independent nature, participants' experiences confirm scholars' assertions that self-directed learning does not mean isolated or solitary learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Caffarella, 1993; Cavaliere, 1992; Peters & Gray, 2005). Other individuals often influenced participants' planning of topics for certification projects and their identification of, and access to, learning resources. Colleagues could also provide encouragement for persisting in one's learning efforts.

Participants' experiences also illustrate that individuals who possess

characteristics of self-directed learners do not only use independently conducted self-directed learning projects to accomplish their learning needs. Rather, these participants, as adult learners, often chose to work collaboratively with others (Candy, 1991). Collaboratively conducting learning projects is recognized as a means by which self-directed learning can be engaged in (Guglielmino, 2008). Learning experiences engaged in with others included certification classes, certification projects conducted as faculties, and certification projects conducted with one other colleague.

Participants' experiences indicate a need to carefully interpret the finding of the S&I Office of Research (2012) that S&I educators prefer working on independent self-directed projects over other forms of certification projects. Projects done with faculty members or colleagues was not an option for survey respondents to rate their preference for. Though it is possible that survey respondents would have still indicated that they more strongly preferred independent self-directed projects, the experiences of the participants in this study who possessed higher levels of the characteristics of self-directed learners show a situational preference for independent self-directed projects. Two participants, Pete and David, preferred learning with others over learning on their own. For them, the self-perceived benefits of learning with others outweighed the benefits of learning on their own.

Mark and Jim's descriptions of their enjoyable and favorable experiences with certification classes further strengthen the finding that highly self-directed learners may still choose a teacher-directed instructional setting (Knowles et al., 2005). A self-directed learner gives up some control of the learning process by choosing to participate in an

other-directed learning activity like a class but demonstrates self-directedness by making a conscious, purposeful choice to participate in the class and by demonstrating psychological control and personal responsibility in the learning process (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Grow, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Long, 1992). Mark's description of his experience with choosing to attend a certification class illustrates these theoretical tenets: "I chose to go to the class. And so that automatically makes me think I'm the agent in my learning.... I am accountable for the fact that I'd better learn something because I chose to go."

Every participant spoke positively of their learning experiences with others. Learning with others enhanced or benefited participants' learning experiences in multiple ways, such as by providing some participants with enjoyment and needed variety in their learning efforts. Five participants reported that the structure and accountability provided by learning with others benefited them by helping them ensure commitment, consistency, and progression in their learning efforts. This finding is consistent with Husby's (2005) findings that teachers engaging in self-directed learning for professional development benefit from being held accountable to complete their learning activities, having time provided to work on the learning activities, and receiving camaraderie and support.

One meaningful way participants' learning outcomes were affected by learning with others was in the growth of their perspectives, understanding, knowledge, and ideas related to topics of study by hearing alternative points of view, insights, and ideas. This finding illustrates the way that self-directed learning groups can be "a means of capitalizing on synergistic learning efforts" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 177).

Diaz-Maggioli (2004) reported that teachers gathering in professional teams to collectively reflect on and discuss teaching methods and styles can lead to improvements in teachers' practices and students' learning. Kurt's experiences showed how these outcomes could be experienced on a team of two. Kurt reported that his application of teaching methods in the classroom was better and helped his students more because he had learned with a colleague who could provide experience-based insights and suggestions. Kurt constructed meaning from his individual learning efforts, and his colleague was able to confirm the knowledge that could be worthwhile in terms of usefulness in the classroom (Garrison, 1997).

These findings regarding learning with others being an effective and enjoyable learning experience that resulted in increased knowledge and understanding of topics studied, as well as other practice-related outcomes, for the participants in this study further substantiate the repeated finding in other research that effective professional development involves collaboration among teachers in their learning (Beavers, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Duron, 1994; Ferman, 2002; Ferrara, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Lee, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Wagner, 2011; Wei et al., 2010; Wood & Thompson, 1980; Zepeda, 2008). In light of these findings and several participants' confusion regarding whether working with colleagues on certification projects was allowed, a need may exist within S&I for clarifying any misunderstanding about working with colleagues and for promoting collaboration in doing certification projects.

Aligning Learning with Professional
Learning Needs and Interests

Every participant reported that their topics for certification projects were

connected to a personal interest. Some topics were of interest due to personal preference,

and many were of interest because of their applicability and perceived potential benefit to

participants' practice. Six participants specifically spoke of their desire for doing

certification projects that were applicable to their practice. Three of these participants

spoke of their interest in the applicability of their certification projects to their personal

lives as well. Two participants felt that their time would be wasted if it was spent learning

something that would not be useful to their practice. Four participants illustrated how the

need for doing a certification project could diminish over time due to its loss of

immediate relevance. Multiple participants also described how their desire to benefit

from a certification project led them to select the learning methods that would most likely

bring about their desired ends. These experiences confirm the theoretical assumption that

adult learners are interested in the immediate application of most of their learning

(Knowles 1970, 1973, 1975).

Two participants' experiences also validate the theoretical assumption that adults

become ready to learn as motivated by developmental tasks associated with evolving

social roles (Knowles, 1970, 1973, 1975). Switching from administrative to teaching

roles led these participants to select certification projects that were applicable to, and

would help them succeed in, their new roles.

Although six participants acknowledged experiencing some degree of

improvement as a result of regular inservices, four participants specifically described how

not all of their professional learning needs were met by these inservices. This supports

the finding that the unique needs of individual educators limit the ability for one centrally

planned and administered professional development program to meet them all (Clark,

1992; Tough, 1971). Certification projects allowed participants to personalize their

professional development to meet their professional learning needs beyond what

inservices were able to do (Beavers, 2009; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009).

Knowles (1980) explained that "individuals are motivated to engage in learning to

the extent that they feel a need to learn and perceive a personal goal that learning will

help to achieve" (p. 56). Knowles (1975) also explained that "self-directed learning starts

with learners becoming aware of some need for learning" (p. 81). These needs can range

from a perceived gap in performance to satisfying a curiosity (Knowles, 1975). One

common "need for learning" that every participant had was the need to earn the

certification credential. The extent to which participants identified a personal learning

need or interest that went beyond this more general need influenced their engagement in,

and outcomes from, their certification projects.

Five participants' personal experiences and descriptions of colleagues'

experiences indicated that the extent to which a topic aligned with a learning need or

interest influenced their engagement and experiences while learning. Supportive of other

research findings and scholars' assertions, participants had greater motivation, purpose,

investment, and engagement in their learning, and their learning activities were more

meaningful, when their certification projects were designed to meet immediate personal

learning needs (Corabi, 1995; Duron, 1994; Garrison, 1997; Husby, 2005; Jacka, 1997;

Slavit & McDuffie, 2013).

Based on participants' descriptions of their reasons for selecting the certification projects they completed and the outcomes they experienced, in 22 of 24 instances, certification projects that were purposefully chosen to satisfy a compelling professional learning need or interest resulted in beneficial and meaningful outcomes in terms of growth and use. Such professional learning needs included acquiring or improving one's content knowledge and understanding; addressing a gap in performance; developing or improving teaching and administrative knowledge and skills; improving one's use of technology; developing resources to improve one's practice; and informing one's practice.

Participants selected some certification projects that were offered, such as certification classes and guided projects. Within an offered learning experience, participants were still able to identify a learning need that could be satisfied or a way the learning could be applicable to their practice. Participants described experiencing beneficial and meaningful learning outcomes from such certification projects, but they provided descriptions of such outcomes less frequently (12 of 18 instances).

Some of the offered certification projects included projects that required augmenting work tasks participants were already expected to complete. Pete and David gravitated toward such projects for reasons of consolidating their learning efforts and for ease in identifying projects to do. In some cases (2 of 5 instances), participants described that these projects still resulted in meaningful outcomes because the learning was directly related to improving their understanding and use of new teaching methods.

Participants' behaviors validated the theoretical assumption and research findings that adults are "capable of identifying their own learning needs and solving their own problems" (Sparling, 2001, p. 200; Corabi, 1995). However, as discussed, participants did not always select certification projects because they would satisfy compelling learning needs or interests. Based on participants' descriptions, it appeared that they varied in the consistency and degree of deliberateness and thoughtfulness in assessing their learning needs and interests and planning certification projects that aligned with these needs and interests.

Gibbs (2002) found that unlocking the potential of self-directed professional development requires the use of reflection to identify purposeful ways in which teachers can improve their practice and to plan activities that can result in such improvements (see also Jacka, 1997). Participants' experiences support this finding. Every participant had completed at least one certification project that they selected because it would satisfy a professional learning need that was identified through reflection on their professional selves or practice. These projects were more likely to result in meaningful learning outcomes. When reflecting, participants often asked themselves questions that would help them assess their learning needs. Like the teachers in Wagner's (2011) study, this occasionally included reflecting on their content knowledge needs and on students' learning needs.

One of Jim's experiences with a certification project illustrated the way reflection can result in a meaningful and beneficial professional development experience. By reflecting on his practice, Jim identified a need to improve in his use of a certain teaching

method. Jim studied about the method, surveyed students regarding their perceptions, designed a plan to implement in his practice, implemented his plan, and assessed its effects. This was one of the first certification projects Jim completed, and the experience "made [him] a believer" in certification projects and was the "hook that got [him] hooked." Jim's experience reflects a form of action research, which is recognized as an effective and meaningful professional development activity (Acevedo, 2013; Boyle et al., 2005; Gibbs, 2002; Grootenboer, 1999; Husby, 2005).

The ability to realistically diagnose one's learning needs is recognized as a needed competency for self-directed learning (Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986). Adults' abilities to identify their learning needs are influenced by their understanding of possible ways of improving their knowledge and skills (Mezirow, 1985). As evidenced by some participants' reactions to seeing topics for guided projects, some adult learners do not know what they want until they know what they can want (Mezirow, 1985).

Some adults are also not aware of their learning needs or best interests (Mezirow, 1985). Some adult learners might "lack competence or thoughtfulness in diagnosing their own…learning needs" (Tough, 1971, p. 70), and could therefore benefit from assistance with identifying actual learning needs and interests (Knowles et al., 2005; see also Jacka, 1997). Some participants' descriptions of their experiences indicate a frequent or occasional need for assistance in identifying meaningful topics for certification projects. Even Jim, who was highly self-directed, reported difficulty in identifying 12 topics that would be "worthwhile and beneficial."

Personal, critical reflection is recognized as an important element of effective

professional development for teachers that can influence their professional effectiveness and enhance student learning (Beavers, 2009; Minott, 2010). Multiple models of self-directed professional development programs include a preliminary self-assessment step in which teachers identify areas for professional improvement (e.g. gaps in knowledge, content and pedagogical topics and strategies they need to increase their understanding of, skills to develop) or interests (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Husby, 2005; Morgan et al., 2005; Morris & Huffman, 1994). The program for certification projects does not. The findings from this study indicate that a need may exist for instruction and encouragement for S&I educators to reflectively assess their professional selves and practice to identify compelling learning needs and interests around which their certification projects can be planned.

Instruction and encouragement to reflectively assess their professional learning needs could help improve the use of reflection in S&I educators' professional development efforts, something that Gardner (2011) advocated for. Educators could also be instructed to enlist the assistance of trusted supervisors or colleagues in their reflective assessments of their practice through observations of teaching and feedback (Gardner, 2011). Such assistance could aid educators in identifying needs they may not notice themselves.

Challenges Experienced

A lack of physical energy is recognized as a barrier to initiating self-directed learning activities (Brookfield, 1993). For three participants in this study, exhaustion at the end of the work day contributed to their lack of desire to initiate their work on

certification projects. For these participants, the lack of exhaustion experienced during

the summertime due to the absence of day-to-day teaching and administrative demands

contributed to their willingness to work on certification projects at that time. Due to their

exhaustion and the exertion required to make "reflectively informed decisions"

(Brookfield, 1993, p. 237) regarding their independently conducted certification projects,

some participants might have been more drawn to structured learning experiences

because many of the learning decisions had already been made for them. Kurt was able to

overcome the effects of exhaustion at the end of a work day by collaborating with a

colleague on certification projects.

A lack of time and having competing priorities, including family responsibilities

and other obligations, are also recognized as barriers or inhibiting factors to self-directed

learning activities or professional development activities in general (Brookfield, 1993;

Guglielmino et al., 2005; Jacka, 1997; Roux, 2013). Family, church, and work

responsibilities could disrupt participants' opportunities to work on their certification

projects or contributed to participants' stress. Participants were especially cognizant of

how their time invested in working on their certification projects affected their families

and sought to work on certification projects at times that would minimize the interference

with family processes. Many respondents in the S&I Office of Research's (2012) study

expressed similar concerns about taking time away from their families.

Four participants described how the season of individuals' lives, referring to the

amount of personal responsibilities at a given time, influences their abilities to engage in

optional educational opportunities. The perceptions of Mark and John validate the finding

that self-directed learning as a form of professional development allows educators flexibility in completing learning activities when they are able (Steinke, 2012). Despite the busyness of their seasons of life, Mark and John felt they were able to continue their pursuit of educational credentials by doing certification projects on their own time, whereas they did not feel able to continue their education by doing a doctoral program because of the rigidness of its structure.

Five participants described how waiting on reviewers to complete their reviews was a source of frustration. For Mark, this was the biggest challenge he experienced in doing certification projects. This finding echoes some of the respondents in the S&I Office Research's (2012) study who "expressed frustration with the lack of timeliness by reviewers" (p. 30). This wait delayed the closure some participants desired to have on their certification projects.

**Outcomes of Self-Directed Learning in
Doing Certification Projects**

Participants' descriptions of their experiences with evaluating their learning illustrate that in self-directed learning, learners can evaluate their learning during or after the learning process (Danis, 1992). Participants had to evaluate whether their learning efforts satisfied the requirements and expectations of doing certification projects, but the more important evaluation was whether their learning efforts accomplished their learning objectives or whether they had applied their learning to their practice. The latter form of evaluation, used by four participants in the study, supports Bouchard's (2009) assertion that in the evaluation stage of the self-directed learning process, "learning must be

evaluated in terms of its actual usefulness" (p. 15).

The certification credentials are designed to be professional growth and improvement opportunities for S&I educators, and every participant experienced these outcomes to some extent. Participants also experienced some of the intended outcomes of professional development described in related literature, which include enhancing or deepening educators' content and other job-related knowledge and transforming or developing new instructional practices, methods, and skills (Borko, 2004; Ferrara, 2009; Lohman & Woolf, 2001; Roberts, 2009; Tough, 1971). Every participant reported that his understanding of teaching methods, content, or administrative topics changed or increased, to varying degrees, as a result of doing certification projects. Five participants perceived they experienced growth as a result of doing certification projects, specifically noting that they had become better teachers. For example, Bill felt he was becoming what he "otherwise wouldn't be in the job" as a result of the certification projects he had done.

Three participants described how doing certification projects helped them avoid stagnating or coasting. John considered that self-directed professional development, even that which took place outside of doing certification projects, was needed because of the perpetual need to change and improve his practice to keep pace with the changing needs of students. John's perception regarding the need for continuous learning and development aligns with those of self-directed learning scholars (Caffarella, 1993; Guglielmino, 2008; Long, 1992).

Every participant also described changes in his practice through the use of teaching, content, and administrative knowledge they had gained or administrative and

teaching skills they had developed. For three participants, the application of their learning was facilitated by reflecting on what they learned and how they could apply it to their practice. Six participants discussed creating a final product they could reference or use in their practice. Three participants desired to create products that they could continue to add to throughout their careers as they obtained additional knowledge related to the topic they had studied.

The extent to which growth and improvement were realized was contingent on participants' conscious and purposeful engagement in the learning. As discussed, previously, this was influenced by the degree of relevance and significance of the learning to participants' practice and professional learning needs or interests. Though Pete and David described ways they had learned and grown and ways their practice was affected or benefited as a result of some of their certification projects, they did not believe they had experienced substantial growth—nothing more than "small increments of improvement" or "tweaks" to their practice. David felt he had grown because of the effort he invested, but he and Pete questioned whether they had become better teachers.

Pete reasoned that one reason he had not experienced large improvements may have been because he had done the "wrong" certification projects. Compared to participants who reported becoming better educators, a lower percentage of the certification projects he and David had completed were purposefully selected to satisfy a compelling professional learning need or interest identified through reflective self-assessment. This further illustrates the need for providing help to identify compelling professional learning needs and interests and to plan certification projects aligned with

these needs and interests.

The ultimate end of professional development activities is improved learning for educators and for students (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2011; Glickman et al., 2010; Mizell, 2010). Assessing the effects of participants' learning from their certification projects on their students' learning went beyond the purposes of this study. However, five participants described how their learning outcomes in the form of improved content knowledge or teaching skills had what they perceived to be a favorable influence on their students' learning. As a result of their learning and growth, these participants perceived their students were able to better understand certain subjects, improve their mastery of certain content, be more engaged in their learning, or were more likely to apply their learning in their personal lives.

The requirements and expectations of doing certification projects caused participants to engage in learning efforts and explore topics, namely those related to administration and leadership, that they would not have otherwise. Though the researching and writing requirements presented some challenges for different participants, these requirements had positive effects on some participants' learning outcomes. These participants reported gaining more knowledge, including greater breadth and depth to their learning, as a result of needing to satisfy these requirements. Writing itself helped one participant to discover new insights, another participant to connect ideas he was learning, and a third participant to internalize and process what he was learning.

These findings pertaining to participants' professional growth as a result of doing certification projects are consistent with those reported by the S&I Office of Research

(2012), in which many respondents indicated that doing certification projects had contributed to their professional growth and had helped them improve their teaching. These findings also contribute to the body of research that has found benefits for educators in terms of meaningful learning, changes in instructional practice, and professional growth as a result of engaging in professional development activities that incorporate principles of self-directed learning (Acevedo, 2013; Corabi, 1995; Cummings, 2011; Freidus et al., 2009; Gibbs, 2002; Husby, 2005; Jailall, 1998; Morgan et al., 2005).

It could be anticipated that engaging in certification projects would result in professional growth because of the characteristics of effective professional development that are present in the structure of certification projects. Certification projects are intended to be job-embedded and therefore designed to respond to teachers' needs and interests (Garet et al., 2001; Mizell, 2010; Wayne et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2010). A minimum of three certification projects must focus on improving educators' content knowledge, though specific emphasis is not always given to improving understanding of how to help students learn the content (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Roberts, 2009; Wayne et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2010). Certification projects could involve collaboration (as previously discussed); include active, hands-on learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2001); and involve the teachers themselves in planning the professional development (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Glickman et al., 2010; Jailall, 1998; Knowles, 1973; Merriam & Leahy, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Rowe, 2009; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989).

As an additional characteristic of effective professional development, the time requirement (minimum of 30 hours on a project) allows learning that can be intensive, sustained, ongoing, and of sufficient duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011). Empirical studies illustrate that durations of 20 hours or more of contact time on a specific topic spread out over a semester, or 49 hours throughout a year, produce meaningful results in teacher growth and improved student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011). Participants in this study spent between one to nine months on a given certification project and generally from 20 to 40 hours. Two participants described how the increased amount of time spent studying a subject in a certification project allowed for more in-depth study than what they obtain through inservices.

It should not be assumed, however, that participants experienced more meaningful learning outcomes simply because their learning experiences generally lasted several months. Apart from certification classes, participants did not necessarily deliberately plan their learning to stretch across more than 2 or 3 months. External factors such as personal and work responsibilities and participants' exhaustion could cause the duration to extend over longer periods of time. Furthermore, simply spending a large number of hours did not automatically correlate with more significant learning outcomes. The type of activity being engaged in influenced whether the hours spent resulted in meaningful learning outcomes. For example, multiple participants felt the hours spent formatting their written papers did not contribute to their learning outcomes.

These findings confirm other research findings that indicate that the type of

activities being engaged is relevant when considering the effect of the duration of professional development activities on teacher and student learning outcomes. These activities can include an in-depth discussion of content and teaching strategies, the internalization of new ideas, and application of new practices to one's practice with the reception of feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Duron, 1994; Garet et al., 2001). Participants reported engaging in some of these activities in some of their certification projects, and doing so contributed to improvements in their knowledge and skills.

Summary of Key Findings

By way of summary, this study has resulted in the following key findings:

1. Participants' personal characteristics influenced how they experienced self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

2. Contextual factors influenced participants' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects, especially by requiring participants to share control over their learning decisions with S&I.

3. Participants' understanding of the requirements, expectations, and processes of self-directed learning in doing certification projects influenced how they experienced this form of self-directed learning. Increased understanding of these elements, which could be obtained by seeing models like guided projects, influenced participants' confidence and efficiency in their learning efforts.

4. A need exists to clarify requirements pertaining to working on certification projects predominantly outside of work time, the need to format written papers in compliance with a standard style guide, and the minimum number of hours required for

each certification project.

 5. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influenced participants' efforts to engage in this form of self-directed learning, with the financial incentive being cited as the most common motivational factor.

 6. The financial incentive provided needed justification for most participants to invest the requisite time and effort to engage in this form of self-directed learning, and a need exists to clarify the financial implications of doing certification projects.

 7. Collaborative learning can be used in self-directed learning for purposes of professional development and can lead to enjoyable learning experiences and improved learning and practice-related outcomes.

 8. The extent to which a topic for a certification project aligned with a professional learning need or interest influenced participants' engagement in the learning and the meaningfulness of the learning activities. It also influenced the likelihood of participants experiencing meaningful and beneficial learning outcomes.

 9. Exhaustion, a lack of time due to competing priorities, and waiting on reviewers were common challenges many participants experienced.

 10. Participants perceived that they experienced professional growth and reported changes in their professional knowledge, skills, and instructional practice as a result of self-directed learning in doing certification projects.

Recommendations for Practice

 Gibbs (2002) explained that "the purpose of phenomenology is to make

recommendations in order to make things better for those most affected by the insights brought forth about the phenomenon" (p. 162; Polkinghorne, 1989). What follows are recommendations based in the findings of this study and their relationship to self-directed learning theory and other research. These recommendations are intended for S&I administrators to consider for potentially facilitating S&I educators' involvement in self-directed learning in doing certification projects and increasing the impact of such projects on educators' professional growth.

A colleague recently remarked, "I need to do a certification project just to learn how to do certification projects." In this vein, S&I administrators should consider developing a guided project that provides orientation to the purposes, requirements, expectations, and processes of self-directed learning in doing certification projects. By making it a guiding project, educators' time and effort to orient themselves about doing certification projects would be incentivized. This orientation-guided project should include the following:

1. Instruction about the purposes and requirements of doing certification projects, including how the requirements (e.g., time, writing) can contribute to learning outcomes.

2. Instruction about the financial implications of doing certification projects.

3. Instruction about the components of written papers and portfolios, including reviewing samples of exemplary written papers and portfolios.

4. Instruction about how to plan meaningful and beneficial certification projects.

5. Examples of learning resources to use and instruction about how to access

such resources.

6. Examples of various learning methods that can be part of certification projects, such as action research and collaborative study groups.

7. Examples of what learning experiences (e.g., planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning) in doing certification projects that align with S&I's requirements and expectations look like, including a review of guided projects.

8. Examples of how educators who have completed certification projects have structured their time to be able to work on projects outside of work hours, including some details about their personal and work responsibilities.

9. Instruction about the review process and its purposes.

10. Instruction about practice and growth-related benefits of engaging in this form of learning, including testimonials of those who have completed certification projects.

11. Instruction about using the online certification tracking system.

S&I administrators should provide educators with sufficient information regarding the financial implications of earning certification credentials. Such an understanding can influence educators' motivation and justification to invest the requisite amount of time and effort needed to engage in this form of self-directed learning for purposes of professional development. With sufficient understanding, educators would be enabled to make an informed decision regarding whether to do certification projects. As noted, this could be part of the instruction in the orientation guided project. Educators

could also be encouraged to obtain information regarding the specific financial

implications for their individual situations by contacting human resources in the central

office.

S&I administrators should assist educators in selecting more meaningful and

professionally purposeful topics for certification projects that are based in educators'

compelling professional learning needs and interests. This can be done by instructing

educators about reflectively assessing their professional practice, student learning needs,

content knowledge, and administrative and leadership knowledge and skills. Such

instruction could be included in the orientation guided project as part of helping

educators understand how to plan meaningful and beneficial certification projects. After

being instructed about reflection and self-assessment, educators could be led through a

reflective self-assessment process to identify compelling needs and interests related to the

three categories of certification projects. Educators could potentially emerge from the

orientation guided project with compelling topics for their remaining certification

projects, as well as a general understanding of the importance of regular reflective self-

assessment on their professional selves and practice.

To increase the possibility of experiencing greater learning and growth, and to

provide educators with additional structural support for progressing with their learning,

S&I educators should be encouraged to engage in effective collaborative forms of

learning for some of their certification projects. These can include study groups,

collaborative action research, and certification classes. Information on the S&I website

pertaining to certification projects should be adjusted to promote and instruct on

collaborative learning, thereby clarifying any misunderstanding regarding the allowance for using this learning method.

S&I administrators should provide clarity regarding the requirements of the minimum number of hours educators are to spend working on certification projects, when educators are allowed to work on certification projects, and whether a standard style guide needs to be followed. If educators are allowed to use work time to do certification projects, administrators should consider specifying exactly how much time can be used. Otherwise, as one participant reported, area directors may interpret this allowance differently, resulting in perceived inequities between educators in different areas. S&I administrators might consider specifying that educators may use work time to complete one certification project each year so long as it does not interfere with their other work responsibilities. As part of this clarification, educators should be instructed as to why work time is not to be used and possibly be provided with additional ideas of activities they can engage in during their summer work hours to add variety and benefit to their workdays.

The experiences of multiple participants in this study indicate a need for clarity regarding the required use of a standard style guide. Some participants and reviewers seem to be under the impression that written papers must comply with the style guide provided on the S&I website. Currently, educators are provided with a style guide on the S&I website as example of the general standards of professionalism that need to be met. Perhaps directly acknowledging that other style guides (e.g., APA, MLA) can be appropriate would help clarify this misunderstanding while retaining the emphasis that

the paper must reflect professional formatting and proper and consistent citations of sources that are used.

The clarification of the requirement, or lack thereof, to comply with a standard style guide would have implications for the review process, a process that S&I administrators should seek ways to improve. Additional improvements could include the institution of a blind review, which could improve the amount and directness of the feedback that is provided, and clarification about the role of reviewers and the type of feedback they should provide. A mechanism should also be built into the process to guard against excessive wait times for reviews to be returned.

S&I administrators should enable the sharing of learning from completed certification projects by providing a searchable database of certification projects that would benefit other S&I educators. If certification projects are being shared, educators might experience additional purpose to writing papers, particularly the required components of an abstract and an annotated bibliography. S&I administrators should also promote the sharing of learning from completed certification projects by encouraging inservice leaders to incorporate sharing of relevant projects in their inservices. The sharing of learning could also be promoted by issuing a monthly email notifying educators of certification projects that have been completed within the previous month. Being made aware of completed certification projects would allow those educators who might have interest in such projects to be able to further their learning and development. These emails could also serve to remind and encourage educators to continue their efforts to complete their certification projects and elevate the cultural significance of

certification projects within S&I.

Finally, if the desire to help their students learn and enjoy their classroom experiences is central to more S&I educators' desires for improving themselves professionally, S&I administrators should ensure that certification projects are positioned as means to do so. Educators should understand that certification projects are a professional development tool designed to help improve student learning outcomes and experiences as a result of educators improving their teaching skills, resources, and understanding of teaching methods and student learning; content mastery; and administrative and leadership knowledge and skills.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several implications for further research emerged from this study. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to accomplish the purposes of this study. The sampling criteria that was used excluded S&I educators located in areas outside of northern Utah. A similar study could be conducted to gain an understanding of the experiences of S&I educators located in other geographic locations with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. The findings of such a study could yield additional insights into the influence of one's context on this form of self-directed learning, as well as any ways their learning experiences can be better facilitated or improved.

S&I educators who have not persisted in doing certification projects and those who have not done certification projects at all were also excluded by the sampling criteria used for this study. Studies could be conducted to explore the personal characteristics of

these educators and reasons why they have not persisted in or initiated working on certification projects. In the current study, the participants' self-directed learning readiness was assumed due to their active engagement in doing certification projects. It was later assessed based on participants' descriptions of themselves and their lived experiences. Studies with these different samples could include administering the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (Guglielmino, 1978) to measure educators' readiness to self-direct their learning.

Because the Certification Program had only been in existence for 2 years at the time of this study, participants were not able to describe long-term outcomes from having completed 12 certification projects. In several years, a longitudinal study could be conducted to explore the prolonged effects, if any, that educators have experienced in terms of professional growth and professional learning efforts as a result of doing certification projects.

By using a qualitative methodology, this study focused on participants' perceptions of outcomes they experienced as a result of doing certification projects. An assessment tool could be developed to attempt to quantify changes in S&I educators' professional knowledge and practice. This assessment could also include metrics to measure outcomes in student learning. A study could be conducted using such an assessment tool to seek correlations between S&I educators' involvement in self-directed learning in doing certification projects and changes in their professional growth and their students' learning. This research could also include an analysis of learning resources and activities that contribute most to these outcomes.

The experiences of S&I supervisors in working with educators in doing certification projects could also be studied. David's experiences with his supervisor and Pete, John, and Mark's experiences as supervisors provide preliminary insights into what the experiences of supervisors can be like in working with different educators they supervise. Grow's (1991) Staged Self-Directed Learning Model could be used to explore the extent to which supervisors base the support they provide to the educators they supervise on the educators' stage of self-direction. Such research could also bring to light any help supervisors need in balancing their efforts to facilitate educators' involvement in doing certification projects with their other administrative duties.

Studies similar to the present study could be conducted within other religious educational institutions that implement self-directed professional development. Such comparative research could provide additional insights into the experiences of religious educators with self-directed learning as a form of professional development. Such research could further assess the effectiveness of self-directed professional development on religious educators' professional growth and identify additional ways to enhance the use of this form of professional development so as to improve the religious education that is provided to students.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of seven S&I educators with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. Self-directed learning theory, as influenced by andragogy, provided the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. The use of

phenomenology brought forth meaningful, informative insights into this phenomenon and filled a gap in the literature on self-directed learning (Brockett, 2009). Phenomenology proved "valuable in promoting an understanding of how learners experience self-directed learning" in this part of their "lifeworlds" (Brockett, 2009, p. 43). This study also resulted in more knowledge about this particular phenomenon (self-directed learning in doing certification projects), informs practice, and has potential to improve components of this professional development program. These constitute three general goals of research, particularly research that pertains to professional development programs (Borko, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Ponton et al., 2005).

This study makes meaningful contributions to fields of study associated with the professional development of religious educators and with self-directed learning as a form of professional development, helping to fulfill a need for more empirical research in both fields. The findings from this study expound and validate theoretical concepts and research findings pertaining to self-directed learning and professional development. Findings of this study show that self-directed learning can be used as a means to individualize educators' professional development experiences to satisfy their professional learning needs and interests. Findings have also confirmed other research findings regarding the potential effectiveness of self-directed professional development in providing meaningful learning experiences that result in educators' professional growth and improvements in their practice. These findings supply valuable knowledge that can also help professionals in others fields who seek to provide meaningful and effective professional development opportunities for their employees.

Perhaps, with time and increased implementation of self-directed professional development, when professional educators think of professional development activities, they will not think of unengaging learning experiences that are often unrelated to their individual learning needs and interests and that might not result in beneficial outcomes for their practice. Rather, perhaps, if implemented correctly, more educators will think of individualized, engaging, meaningful, worthwhile learning experiences that have a higher probability of leading to improvements in their professional practice, content knowledge, and student learning outcomes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter of Information

UtahState University

Department of Teacher Education and Leadership
2805 Old Main Hill
Logan UT 84322-2805
Telephone: (435) 797-1474

INFORMED CONSENT
Religious Educators' Experiences with Self-Directed Learning in Professional Development: A Qualitative Study

Introduction/ Purpose Professor Michael Freeman and graduate student Brandon Porter in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. You have been asked to take part because of your experience with certification projects. There will be approximately seven total participants in this research.

Procedures If you agree to be in this research study, you will be asked to participate in two in-depth, face-to-face interviews, lasting about an hour each, with the student researcher at a time and location of your convenience. The interviews will be audio-recorded and, with your consent, video-recorded. Should you decline to have the interviews video-recorded, they will only be audio-recorded. Following each interview, you will be asked to review the written transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy and that your experience has been accounted for. You might also be contacted by telephone or e-mail to provide additional clarification on responses from the interviews.

Risks Participation in this research study involves minimal risk. You may feel uncomfortable answering questions about your experiences with doing certification projects. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. There is a small risk of loss of confidentiality but we will take steps to reduce that risk as described below.

Benefits There may or may not be any direct benefit to you from these procedures. The investigator, however, may learn more about S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. This information may help religious educators or administrators understand ways to facilitate S&I educators' involvement in doing certification projects and increase the impact of certification projects on S&I educators' professional growth.

Explanation & offer to answer questions Brandon Porter has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Professor Michael Freeman at (435) 797-1474 or via email at michael.freeman@usu.edu

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. You may be withdrawn from this study without your consent by the investigator.

Confidentiality Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator and student researcher will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked room. To protect your privacy, personal, identifiable information will be removed from study documents and digital files and replaced

UtahState University

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2805 Old Main Hill
Logan UT 84322-2805
Telephone: (435) 797-1474

Full AAHRPP Accreditation

INFORMED CONSENT
Religious Educators' Experiences with Self-Directed Learning in Professional Development: A Qualitative Study

with a study identifier. Identifying information will be stored separately from data and will be kept only until the project is completed by October 2014. Audio and video recordings will be destroyed when the project is completed by October 2014.

IRB Approval Statement The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at Utah State University has approved this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury and would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu to obtain information or to offer input.

Copy of consent You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and keep one copy for your files.

Investigator Statement "I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

Signature of Researcher(s)

Michael Freeman, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
(435) 797-1474 (office)
michael.freeman@usu.edu
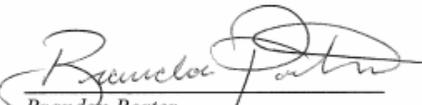
Brandon Porter
Student Researcher
(801) 651-0971
brandondporter@gmail.com

V7 06/15/2011

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

The following interview protocol was used to help capture S&I educators' experiences with self-directed learning in doing certification projects. The interviews were semi-structured, so the order in which the questions are listed was considered tentative. Each of the questions listed was not necessarily directly asked during the interviews if they were answered in participants' responses to other questions. Furthermore, due to the intent of the study, which was to understand educators' experiences and the meaning of their experiences, other questions naturally and appropriately emerged during the course of the interviews.

Interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants to allow for comfort and privacy, except for one participant who selected other private locations for his interviews due to convenience. With the consent of the participants, most interviews were videotaped and all were audio-recorded. For the two participants who did not give consent for videotaping, relevant nonverbal communication cues were captured as field notes and recorded in the research journal.

Background:

- How long have you been employed as a full-time religious educator in S&I?

- What is your highest level of educational attainment?

- What is the nature of your current assignment?

Interview Questions:

1. Take a moment and reflect on your experience with doing certification projects. Please describe what you have experienced in terms of doing certification projects.

2. What environmental factors, or things going on around you, have typically influenced your experiences with doing certification projects?

3. Think back to when the certification program was first introduced to you. What do you remember experiencing when it was introduced to you?

   a. What aspect, if any, was most appealing to you? Why?

   b. What do you remember about others' responses?

4. Describe your experience in making the decision to do certification projects.

   a. What do you perceive the purpose of certification projects is?

5. Why did you select the certification projects you have worked on or are considering?

    a. What situations or circumstances influenced their selection?

    b. Why did you choose the types of projects (e.g., self-designed, guided, classes) you have chosen?

    c. Why did you choose to do a paper versus a portfolio?

    d. How have your ideas for projects changed since beginning the process?

6. You've come up with a topic for a self-designed certification project. Can you describe your process for turning it into an actual project?

    a. What is it like for you to plan the learning activities you will engage in for a certification project?

    b. What is it like for you to identify the learning resources?

    c. How has your knowledge of and access to resources influenced the certification projects you have selected? Has the need to find five trustworthy resources had any bearing on your projects?

7. Describe, in as much detail as possible, an example of your experience of working on certification projects.

    a. What has been your process of working on certification projects?

    b. Where and when do you typically work on them? Why?

    c. How many hours, on average, have you spent on your projects? How many weeks or months were required to complete each project?

    d. What role did reflection play in your learning?

    e. What challenges, if any, have you experienced in doing certification projects (including when working on them)? How have you overcome those challenges?

    f. What emotions have you experienced while in the process of working on certification projects?

    g. Do you have any preference for learning on your own or with others?

    h. Why have you not collaborated more with others on projects?

    i. What have you learned about the nature of what it is to do a certification project?

8. Describe your experience of completing certification projects.

   a. Describe your experience when going through reviewers' feedback.

   b. To what extent has your relationship with the reviewers influenced your experience with their feedback?

   c. What do you think and feel as you complete the self-evaluation on the project application?

9. How do you evaluate your learning from a certification project?

   a. What experiences illustrate how doing certification projects has influenced your development as an educator?

   b. To what extent has the time invested in projects been worth it in terms of growth and usefulness?

10. What do you think the long-term results of doing certification projects will be for you professionally? What effects, if any, will your experience have on your professional growth or learning efforts?

11. How has your supervisor influenced your experience with doing certification projects?

12. What is the role of certification projects in relation to the regular in-service we already receive?

13. Why do you think educators are willing to make the sacrifice to earn a master's degree but might be less willing or unwilling to earn a certification?

14. Can you talk about any additional thoughts and feelings regarding your experience with doing certification projects?

Appendix C

External Audit Letter

I hereby attest that this study meets the trustworthiness requirements for qualitative research. I have performed an external audit in which I have examined the raw data, the analyzed data, and records of study processes. According to my assessment, qualitative methods have been properly followed and the results and findings of this study are grounded in the data.
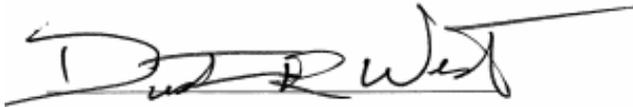
Dustin R. West, Ph.D.
Seminaries & Institutes of Religion Instructional Designer

Appendix D

S&I Education Research Committee Research Approval

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SEMINARIES AND INSTITUTES OF RELIGION

March 6, 2014

Brandon D. Porter
Curriculum Services
50 E. North Temple Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84150

Dear Brother Porter:

The S&I Education Research Committee approved your research project with the following guidelines:

1. Data is to be collected as outlined in your proposal. You will need to submit any changes in the instrumentation or procedures to the Committee for approval.
2. If you are planning to publish or present any of your research findings, please submit a request to the Committee for approval.
3. Prior to submitting your findings, please forward your report to Dan Winder and Dan Skoubye for review. Their input may aid you in meeting your goals with this project.
4. S&I would like an electronic copy of your research report upon completion of your degree. The copy should be in .pdf format and include signatures. Please send to: SI_Research@ldschurch.org.

We look forward to reviewing your findings with a view to the S&I Objective.

Sincerely,
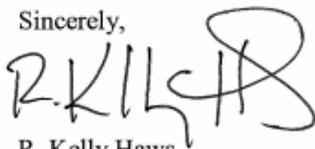
R. Kelly Haws
Associate Administrator

CURRICULUM VITAE

BRANDON D. PORTER

Education:

2014	Ph.D.	Curriculum and Instruction; Utah State University Expected date of completion: Fall 2014 Dissertation: Religious Educators' Experiences with Self-Directed Learning in Professional Development: A Qualitative Study.
2010	M.F.H.D.	Family and Human Development; Utah State University
2006	B.S.	Business Management, Marketing Emphasis; Brigham Young University

Professional Experience:

2012-Present	Curriculum Writer, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
2007-2012	Instructor, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion
2006-2007	Manager of Leadership Development, SkyWest Airlines

Related Experience:

2010-2011	Advisor to Seminary Student Leadership Council, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion
2006-2007	Instructor, Especially for Youth, Church Educational System, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
2003-2006	Instructor and Training Supervisor, Missionary Training Center, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Professional Presentations:

Porter, B., Tulane, S., & Vaterlaus, J. M. (2014). The Perceived Influence of Entertainment Media and Interactive Technology on Adolescent Romantic Relationships, Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, Salt Lake City, UT.

Porter, B. D. (2014). S&I Certifications—Insights from Scholarly Literature Pertaining to Self-Directed Learning for Professional Development, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Central Office Research Forum, Salt Lake City, UT.

Professional Organizations:

Rocky Mountain Psychological Association