Professional Development that Considers Teachers’ Attitudes Toward an Innovation

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Abstract. This study investigated the extent to which teachers’ motivation and attitudes for professional development training facilitated their willingness to implement reform strategies. Teachers completed surveys prior to training and after receiving training. Analysis compared the responses of beginning teachers (new to the process) and advanced teachers (receiving advanced training). Advanced teachers showed that their instructional strategies and goals corresponded to the innovations at the start. At the end of the training, beginning teachers gave positive ratings for the training and their emotions toward implementing the training.

Introduction
Researchers have suggested that potential adopters’ attitudes toward an innovation should be considered for its diffusion (e.g., Ellsworth, 2000). However, few studies have examined how to address this (Ertmer, Conklín, Lewandowski, Osika, Selo, & Wignall, 2003). This study investigated the extent to which a professional development training, one that regards teachers’ attitudes and beliefs as being important elements to consider when designing professional development, may facilitate teachers’ willingness to adopt instructional ideals and strategies of the innovation.

The professional development training in this study was Great Expectations (GE) in Oklahoma. As a whole-school reform model, primary objectives of the training is to instruct teachers on ways to increase students’ knowledge, self-esteem, and social competencies while also focusing on instructional strategies that align with constructivist principles. For example, similar to research on exemplary teachers (e.g., Allington & Johnston, 2002), model GE teachers are exceptional classroom managers because they establish and explain routines/procedures and they emphasize student self-regulation. In a high-implementation GE classroom, disciplinary actions are rarely observed. Additionally, GE teachers use instructional strategies that emphasize cross-curricular, meaningful lessons in which cooperation and effort are emphasized. Also similar to exemplary teachers, GE teachers express high expectations for their students’ learning and carefully monitor their students’ understanding (Turner & Shapley, 2000). Perhaps most importantly, teachers’ implementation of GE practices has been shown to positively and significantly affect students’ achievement (Biscoe & Harris, 2005).

To accomplish these overall objectives, GE focuses on the transformation of teachers through. Evaluation results have shown that teachers who fully implement GE (Turner & Shapley, 2000) exhibit instructional and relational behaviors that have been described as “exemplary” in excellent teachers. By examining differences between teachers with and without experience of the GE training, this study investigated possible effects of the GE training, for example, addressing the question, “To what extent might model professional development training impact teachers’ attitudes, motivation, and willingness to implement the training?”

Methodology
Participants were 158 teachers enrolled in a week-long GE summer institute. Of the participants, 97 were taking basic GE Methodology courses (beginning teachers), and 61 were taking advanced GE courses (advanced teachers). Prior to the beginning of the training, participants were asked to complete the following surveys: Incentives for Training (i.e., Self-Improvement, External Approval, Mandatory Pressure); Instructional Strategies (Mastery Approaches, Performance Approaches; from PALS, Midgely et al., 2000), and emotions for attending training (e.g., positive emotions and negative emotions). Following the training, participants completed an evaluation survey. The current analysis is part of a larger study that focuses on changes in teachers’ attitudes and behaviors over time.

Results
First, there were significant differences between beginning teachers and advanced teachers with respect to their incentives for attending the training. Advanced teachers gave themselves higher ratings with respect to being motivated to attend the training by self-improvement ($t=2.389, p<.05$), while beginning teachers gave themselves higher ratings for attending the training because of mandatory pressure ($t=-2.389$, $p<.05$).
Second, with regard to feelings about attending the GE training, advanced teachers rated themselves as feeling significantly more excited ($t=-3.391, p<.01$), enthusiastic ($t=-3.155, p<.01$), content ($t=-3.492, p<.01$), determined ($t=-2.102, p<.05$) and optimistic ($t=-2.670, p<.01$). Third, with regard to instructional strategies, advanced teachers gave themselves higher ratings with respect to using “mastery” instructional strategies ($t=-2.252, p<.05$). Lastly, with regard to planning instructional goals for their students, beginning teachers gave themselves higher ratings with respect to being motivated by mandatory, external curricular goals ($t=5.518, p<.01$), beginning teachers were more focused on covering the required curriculum, than on students’ learning.

Once the training had been delivered, we were interested in understanding if the training had effected beginning teachers’ emotions, such that they would be more likely and willing to implement the strategies taught in the training. Our results indicated that following the training, both groups of teachers increased positive emotions such as feeling excited ($p<.001$) and enthusiastic ($p<.001$). Interestingly, although the beginning teachers rated themselves significantly lower in these emotions at the beginning of the training, they had reached levels of these positive emotions almost at the same intensity levels as the advanced participants. For example, beginning teachers, on average, rated 3.99 for excitement at the beginning of the training; while advanced teachers had an average excitement rating of 4.37. At the end of the training, the beginning teachers increased their excitement to 4.50; while advanced teachers rated their excitement as 4.75.

In addition to teachers’ emotions following the training, we investigated possible differences with respect to teachers’ perceptions of the quality of the training. There were no significant differences between beginning teachers’ and advanced teachers’ ratings on items that assessed the extent to which (1) training objectives were clear, (2) instructors adequately addressed the objectives, (3) instructors were knowledgeable and Great Expectations, (4) participants had opportunities to obtain valuable feedback, and (5) participants had opportunities to learn from other participants. It is anticipated that beginning teachers’ increase in positive emotions and perceptions of the training is—at the very least—a precursor for their willingness to implement the training. Further data collection and analysis is needed to understand the extent to which these feelings were translated into behavior changes in the classroom.

**Discussion**

The findings from this study indicated that the GE trainings, which acknowledged teachers’ attitudes, experiences, and perceptions toward training, provided useful supports for teachers’ willingness to implement this program. Although the findings do not necessarily explain reasons for the differences between beginning teachers and advanced teachers without in-depth research, they suggest that advanced teachers’ previous exposure to GE trainings might have resulted in positive experiences on several aspects. Our data suggested that, prior to the training, advanced teachers valued the GE trainings and they were excited and optimistic about what they would learn. They had already understood and implemented the basic principles of GE, which were grounded in the beliefs that all students can learn and teachers need to learn methods that prepare them to be flexible and responsible for students’ learning. Additionally, the data suggested that, although beginning teachers tended to indicate that (1) they were participating in the training for mostly external and mandatory reasons, and that they (2) entered the training with lower levels of positive emotions than advanced teachers, they were predominately supportive and feeling positive emotions after the training had concluded. It is anticipated that, with these positive emotions, teachers may be more willing to implement the strategies learned at the training. Future research will investigate the specific strategies of trainings to address teachers’ attitudes.

**References**


