

Two Days at Edcamp: What Educators Take Away from the Unconference Model

Annie McMahon Whitlock^{1*}

Received: 21 January 2016; Published online: 14 May 2016

© Annie McMahon Whitlock, 2016. Published with open access at www.uscip.us

Abstract

This project examines a new movement in K-12 educator professional development (PD) called “Edcamps.” Edcamps are free PD opportunities that are organized by the attendees, without a previously determined agenda (Swanson & Leanness, 2012), unlike PD that are one-day workshops or conferences on topics determined by an organization or committee. Although Edcamps are becoming popular among educators, very little is known about why educators are attracted to this type of alternative type of PD and what they learn from attending. This study examines two Edcamps held in Michigan to determine what educators value and learn from the Edcamp model of PD. Educators value having the choice in what they learn through conversation and collaboration with colleagues. Participants like being part of an Edcamp community and are open to learning what that community can provide (regardless of what it specifically is), which may mean that what is learned at Edcamps may not be implemented in classrooms.

Keywords: Professional development; Education; Unconference

1. Introduction

Professional development (PD) opportunities are a convenient way for K-12 in-service educators to learn new instructional practices or initiatives that can help their students. Educators can experience PD in many ways—ranging from on-going staff meetings within their school, to one-day workshops often sponsored by outside providers, to longer, more in-depth professional learning sustained over several years on one topic. PD can be delivered by a variety of different agents both within and outside of a school system, and they can vary in length and methods; but which type of professional development is most likely to change teachers’ classroom practices?

Many research studies have found what appears to be a set of best practices for PD, acknowledging that educators do not learn from just any type of PD. Joyce and Showers (1983) found that PD that

*Corresponding e-mail: annie.whitlock@gmail.com

1 University of Michigan-Flint

is relevant and specific to a teacher's work and is supported within the school site completes the connection between PD and practice. Since then, others have echoed Joyce and Showers, stressing the importance of PD that is active, collaborative, (Desimone et al., 2002; Lumpe et al., 2012), and focused (Reeves, 2010) on specific instructional practices.

However, even if a PD experience is active, collaborative, and focused that doesn't necessarily mean that teachers will be receptive enough to what they learn to change classroom practices. "Seldom do teachers come to a professional development program assuming that their views of knowledge and subject matter or students need to change" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 199). One can't control what educators may want to learn when they embark on a PD experience, and this can have an impact on how effective the experience is in changing practices.

This study describes a new kind of PD that is active and collaborative by nature—the "Edcamp." Edcamps are "unconferences" because they don't have pre-determined agendas—the participants at the start of each day determine the agenda, based on the instructional practices or topics that the participants want to learn more about. Therefore, anyone who attends can be a presenter (Swanson and Leanness, 2012). This study examines why participants at two different Edcamps were attracted to this type of non-traditional PD and offers possibilities on the Edcamp's potential to change teachers' classroom practices.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The unconference derived from "Open Space Technology." Open Space Technology is the conceptual framework that a group of people, gathering for a purpose, can self-organize--no set agenda is always needed for learning. "Whoever comes is the right people, whatever happens in the only thing that could have, when it starts is the right time, when it's over, it's over" (Boule, 2011, p. 20). At unconferences, the learning is socially constructed from the participants and the collective intelligence of the group.

In 1983, Harrison Owens was one of the first in the United States to plan a management conference with the open space, or unconference format. In the early 2000s, those in the computing and technology industry organized un-conferences (calling them "camps") such as FooCamp and BarCamp with a focus on technology and coding (Boule, 2011, Demski, 2012). In 2010, educators organized the first Edcamp in Philadelphia—the first large unconference devoted to discussing educational practice and issues. In the following years, many Edcamps have been organized in many countries, states, cities and school districts; 190 Edcamps were organized in 2013 all over the world (Swanson, 2014). The U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) hosted their first Edcamp in June 2014, inviting educators from Washington, D.C. to the USDOE to attend, and millions of others to attend virtually (Dixon, 2014).

The unconference format has two "rules," mostly adopted by those that participate in this format, regardless of the industry. The first rule is to talk about Edcamp (Boule, 2011, Demski, 2012) by blogging about the experience and linking the blog to a common site, usually a wiki. Participants are also encouraged to be active on social media during the conference to create a backchannel, or side conversation. Using a Twitter hashtag for the Edcamp (e.g., #edcampusa) allows people who are unable to attend the conference a chance to follow the conversation. It also allows for further

networking. Talking about Edcamp in these ways adds to the fact that un-conferences can respond quickly to learner's needs. By eliminating the time between preparing a conference proposal, waiting for acceptance and delivering the presentation, Edcamps can often be cutting-edge places to discuss current events in the field (Demski, 2012).

Another important "rule" of un-conferences is the "Law of Two Feet." In the spirit of open space technology, there is no overseer of content discussed in un-conference sessions. Participants can decide when a session or discussion is not meeting their needs by walking out of the session. This is a way for the sessions to be quality-controlled without needing a conference committee to review and accept proposals (Demski, 2012).

2.1 PD That Impacts Classroom Practices

Edcamps share many characteristics of what the PD literature has described to be "effective PD," including active, collaborative learning. Effective PD opportunities are learner-centered, which means they attend to the knowledge and skills that the learners bring to the learning environment, addressing the specific learning needs of the participants (Bransford et al., 2000). Edcamps are a true learner-centered experience, as participants bring their own knowledge and skills to creating the agenda for the PD, and to guiding all conversations and work that take place there. Since the learners create the agenda and conversation, they are active participants in their learning, something Edcamp participants value. In their study of Edcamp participants, Swanson and Leanness (2012) found that the active, learner-centered nature of Edcamps "separates [Edcamps] from past learning experiences and also generated positive enthusiasm from the participants" (p. 28).

However, it is a leap to assume that simply engaging teachers in active, hands-on PD will result in classroom changes. Literature does suggest that there are some characteristics of PD opportunities that have led to success in impacting the classroom practices of the teachers that attend. PD that is focused on student learning (specifically on how to address gaps in student learning), content knowledge, and is based on their specific school needs with continuous support from school administrators tends to be the most successful (Garet et al., 2001; Valli & Hawley, 2002), most likely because that type of PD is most relevant to a teacher's specific situation.

Valli and Hawley (2002) also describe successful PD as involving what educators want to learn, with opportunities for them to collaborate with people that are outside of their school as well as their immediate colleagues. If PD is part of a continuous change process, teachers are more likely to embrace new techniques learned in PD as well (Valli & Hawley, 2002).

Edcamps feature some of these characteristics, such as the opportunity for collaboration and being directed by what educators want to learn, however, by nature, Edcamps are not specific to one individual's school situation. Nor can they be part of a continuous change process, as each Edcamp is unique to the individuals that attend on that particular day and location.

2.2 Collaborative PD

"Learning is a sociocultural process, which assumes that interaction leads to learning when

structured appropriately” (Wesely 2013, p. 305). This quote from Wesley from her work on studying PD through online networks illustrates the importance of learning from others for a successful PD experience. Learning experiences are successful when they can take place in collaborative, community-centered environments (Bransford et al., 2000). Edcamps can provide this community aspect for educators, as each session is set up as a conversation among professionals; more similar to a professional learning network (PLN) (Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour, 2002) as opposed to establishing presenters as experts and attendees at a traditional conference as receivers of knowledge. The idea of the “open space technology” framework is the spirit of collaboration. The purpose of having no agenda is to encourage conversation at Edcamps, which could naturally lead to collaboration and networking.

The PD format of a PLN has shown to help teachers try more student-centered instruction (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993) and may even improve student learning (Newmann & Whelage, 1995). One aspect of successful PD is to broaden one’s circle to include both “outsiders” to one’s school as well as colleagues, digital PLNs such as social media networks are easy ways to do this that many educators have embraced (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014; Collier, 2012). Online communities allow educators to self-select how and with whom they collaborate, which can enhance engagement (Lieberman & Miller, 2002). Collaborating with people one doesn’t know may also mean there are fewer personality conflicts to overcome before the learning can take place (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001), and could lead to knowledge which is fast and immediate for teachers, something teachers have valued in PD experiences for many years (Smylie, 1989).

Edcamp participants value the chance to share with others. The participants in the Swanson and Leanness (2012) study wrote, “that the expertise in the room exceeded their expectations” (p. 28), suggesting that learning from other participants was an unexpected benefit of the Edcamp model. The fact that Edcamps make heavy use of social media such as Twitter to advertise for the event and connect participants also adds to the community aspect, as participants use social media to interact during and after the Edcamp event to continue conversations that can often become long-lasting professional relationships (Demski, 2012).

So much has yet to be known about Edcamps and whether they are truly active and collaborative and how so. Although the research so far has reported positive feelings, and many educators are attracted to this new PD model (Swanson & Leanness, 2012), it is important to continue to explore the educator perspective and look at the Edcamp format more closely. This study examines Edcamp PD opportunities to determine why educators attend Edcamps and gathers the educator perspective on how their learning at these events can impact their practice.

3. Research Questions and Methods

This study examined the Edcamp model during two Edcamp events in the United States in the state of Michigan. At these events, I studied the following questions: 1) What attracts educators to Edcamps? and 2) What do participants of Edcamps learn and how do they learn it?

The two Edcamps I attended were very different from each other. Edcamp Literacy was intended to have more of a focus on children’s literature and reading instruction, and many participants did develop sessions related to this theme. Edcamp Literacy was held in a rural community at a local

high school, but attracted nearly 300 participants. Edcamp Tech had no general theme to begin with, but participants developed sessions that were heavily focused on instructional technology and tech devices. Edcamp Tech took place in an elementary school in a large urban city, but had only 25 participants.

I attended both Edcamps as a participant-observer. At each event, I went to as many sessions as possible and took detailed observation notes about the process of selecting sessions, the overall organization of the conferences and the details of the individual sessions. Being a participant in the Edcamps allowed me to use my field notes to add to previously developed interview questions for the conference participants and gave me the appropriate context in which to understand the experiences the participants spoke about in interviews.

I interviewed eight conference participants for this study, all of whom responded to a call for participants that I posted to that particular Edcamp hashtag on Twitter. All of the participants attended at least one of the two Edcamp events voluntarily during the summer of 2014. One of the eight participants attended both Edcamp Literacy and Edcamp Tech. There were seven females and one male in this group, representing educators of many different grades, subject areas, and positions ranging from third grade to eighth grade teachers, including one district instructional technology consultant. I interviewed most of the participants in the afternoon of the Edcamp events, and one after the events via videoconference. The interviews were 20-40 minutes and audio recorded for analysis.

Common themes emerged from the interview responses regarding what these educators valued about Edcamps and what they learned, and I initially coded responses into these broad themes, including "Community," "Conversation," and "Choice," among others. A research assistant also coded the interview responses, and we discussed our codes to come to an agreement. Through this process, we created sub-categories and codes from these broader themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, "Community" was broken into smaller categories of "Online Community" and "Groups with Similar Interests." My observation notes from each event helped to provide context by which to create codes and analyze responses.

4. Findings

The following sections describe why these eight participants chose to attend an Edcamp and what the participants learned from these events. During the interviews, the participants revealed that many of them had been to many Edcamps in different locations over the course of a school year, indicating that they are attracted to this particular type of PD enough to participate outside of the school day and year and are committed to bringing what they learned back to their classrooms. In addition to the attraction of learning specific ideas to take back to their classrooms, these participants were attracted to the opportunity to learn in a certain way that traditional PD doesn't always offer them.

4.1 Why Edcamps?

Since Edcamps have increased in popularity, it is important to examine why educators are drawn to this type of PD. In interviews, educators frequently mentioned that Edcamps provided them with

choice in their learning. Edcamps traditionally begin with the creation of the agenda at the start of each event. This is a gathering of all the participants with the purpose of filling a whiteboard (a literal one or a digital one or both) of ideas for sessions. A participant may volunteer to lead a discussion on a particular topic (using Google applications in the classroom, for example) and write this idea on the large board under a certain time and location. Since these sessions are supposed to be more conversational in nature, participants can volunteer topics that they are very knowledgeable about (with the purpose of sharing their ideas) or they may volunteer a topic they know nothing about but wish to learn more about (with the hope that others will be willing to share).

Since the people there create the Edcamp agenda, the learning is specifically tailored to those that attend, as opposed to being set by a conference committee or school administrator. This is a strong contrast to traditional school in-services, where teachers all learn the same thing at the same time and are required to attend whether the learning is connected to them or not. Many participants were drawn to the open space technology aspect of Edcamps--the allure of a blank slate and the opportunity to create their own learning experience. Several educators made connections to how they attempt to individualize learning in their classroom for students. One teacher, Wendy, characterized Edcamps as “differentiated PD. We talk about how [differentiated instruction] is good for our students, why not us?” Since participants have the freedom to choose the sessions, choose which ones to attend and to move in between sessions, they are tailoring their own PD experience. Allison compared this to the often “one size fits all approach” of school in-services:

They put an entire K-12 teaching staff in the auditorium and say we’re all gonna learn about this today. It’s like where is the differentiation? Cause what impacts high school teachers is going to impact elementary teachers very differently... you’re wasting a large group of people’s time when you do things like that.

Edcamps allow participants to avoid the “entire staff in the auditorium” type of learning and take an active role in their PD.

The “Law of Two Feet” was frequently brought up as a way to ensure that everyone’s time is valued, since they aren’t wasting time in a session that isn’t relevant for them. The opportunity to literally move from one session to another make Edcamps truly active, as participants are constantly fluid throughout the event—there were rarely quiet spaces, as participants at times made their own impromptu “sessions” by gathering in the hallways or common spaces of these events to have conversations outside of the sessions that had been created on the whiteboard.

What Wendy and other participants echoed was that the freedom to choose their sessions motivated them to learn more. As Sharon commented, “It’s the PD that you choose, which means you’re probably going to take it back to your classroom and implement it.”

Participants were attracted to choice, but also to the way Edcamps value the knowledge of all participants. The teachers frequently mentioned feeling excited to learn from other practicing teachers and that everyone was treated as experts. Again, this is a contrast to traditional school in-services, where perhaps the administrator or another consultant delivering the PD is set up as the expert and teachers often sit and receive learning from the experts. Edcamp sessions traditionally

have no designated expert, as even the person who suggested the session might not necessarily know anything about the topic.

For the participants, the absence of a designated “expert,” empowered *them* to be the experts, and to see that the “expert” is really the collective experiences of a group within the sessions. Many described this experience as validating for them as professionals, and implied that many traditional school PD services don’t validate the expertise of their staff in this same way. Ed, a middle school music teacher, elaborated on this idea:

There’s also people in your building who are experts. If you never validated that, that’s kind of oppressive to a teacher. It’s always somebody else who’s an expert. It’s always somebody else who’s better. I think we need to tap into the strengths of the teachers we have. And that’s why that empty board is so liberating.

This feeling of being “oppressed” by traditional PD is echoed by other participants who felt their voices and the voices of their colleagues were not heard. They were happy to have the opportunity at an Edcamp to learn from the expertise of others.

Three different participants specifically used the word “grassroots” to describe the appeal of Edcamps. Edcamps have begun somewhat from the ground up, as the events themselves are typically organized by teachers and usually only attended by teachers. As Allison commented, “It’s really quite phenomenal what happens when you put professional educators in charge of their professional education.” Part of the appeal of Edcamps is that it feels like PD that is developed “for teachers by teachers.” As Sharon said, “When [teachers] decide to make that power and do it on their own, I think there’s something great about that.”

4.2 What Do Teachers Learn from Edcamps?

Both of the Edcamp events in this study had different foci. Edcamp Literacy was focused on children’s literature and reading instruction. Edcamp Literacy was two days long, where the first day was organized like a traditional conference with scheduled speakers, and the second day was the unconference model. Edcamp Tech had no specific focus, but the sessions created by participants were mostly focused on instructional technology. This wasn’t a surprise to Ed and Allison, who attended Edcamp Tech, as each of them facilitated technology-focused sessions there and both mentioned about how previous Edcamps they have attended have featured more sessions demonstrating instructional technology than other instructional strategies. This could be due to the roots of the unconference model in the technology industry and its history as a gathering for coders and hackers. Even Edcamp Literacy featured many sessions on instructional technology, including sessions hosted by Wendy, Macy, and Sharon.

Perhaps because sessions on instructional technology tended to focus on specific tools teachers can use, many of the participants referenced these specific tools as things they learned and will take back to their classrooms. Allison described at length what she learned about the world-building game Minecraft from a session at Edcamp Tech and how she plans to use it to teach social studies by having her fourth grade students create countries within the game and set up government and economies for these virtual worlds. At Edcamp Literacy, Cora attended a session on using Google

Forms in the classroom and began to see ways this could be a time saver for collecting student work in her fourth grade classroom.

Since Edcamp Literacy did have a more targeted focus, participants there also learned more specific literacy strategies. Olivia and Gillian described how valuable they found the sessions on teaching with graphic novels and the “close reading” instructional strategy, respectively. However, the close reading session that Gillian enjoyed was featured on the first day of Edcamp Literacy, where the sessions were facilitated by scheduled speakers invited by the Edcamp organizers. Olivia’s session on graphic novels that she enjoyed was suggested by a conference participant during the second day of the unconference model, however, in this session, the person who offered to host the session on graphic novels had a pre-prepared presentation that she lectured to those that attended. The presentation on graphic novels was well attended, despite some “voting with their feet” to leave (for example, Macy said she attended this session in the beginning, then left for one that was more of a conversation), and Olivia found it valuable. Even though the sessions that Olivia and Gillian learned the most from more closely resembled traditional PD-type sessions, these were at least chosen by participants and the teachers that organized Edcamp Literacy, suggesting that choice is a very important part of active learning for participants.

At both Edcamps, notes from every session were shared on a Google Drive document for anyone to access, and many of the participants shared their learning on social media during the conferences, especially Twitter. Perhaps because of this easy access to the information that was shared in sessions, many participants didn’t say much in interviews about the specific things they learned, instead, they described how the sessions were facilitated as the valuable part of the Edcamp experience.

4.3 How Do Teachers Learn from Edcamps?

Although the Edcamp participants in this study did describe some specific instructional strategies or tools that they learned from attending Edcamps, they spoke more generally about the value of how they learned. To the participants in this study, *what* you learn from Edcamp is less important than *how* you learn. Gillian described this as “trusting the system” of Edcamp:

When you come to Edcamp you know you’re gonna learn something...but you really don’t come thinking I want to learn about X, Y, or Z.... You’re open to learning what’s there. And having faith in the system that... somebody’s gonna have a session or you’re gonna facilitate a session on something that you are really interested in. And so I came into this knowing to trust the system.

“The system” includes participants being able to have time to talk to their peers in an informal setting of Edcamp sessions as part of a community of like-minded people.

4.3.1 Learning From Conversation

Each session at an Edcamp is designed to be a facilitated discussion rather than a planned lecture or presentation. This appealed to the teachers not only as a value to everyone’s expertise, but for the chance to have conversations with colleagues. Wendy likened the sessions to talking to other teachers at lunch—informal but collaborative. “If [teachers] had longer lunches, I really think that every school would be better.” Wendy also described how even the spaces outside of sessions at

Edcamps, like lunches end up being conversations around instructional practice, tools and issues in education. Because the learning usually takes place in informal settings there, the conversations continue in the more traditional informal spaces like the lunch break or snack break.

For people who learn best through conversation with others, Edcamps can be an ideal space for thinking through ideas. Macy described herself as someone who learns best from others and described her frustration with finding specific strategies to take away from traditional PD:

When you go to a conference, I get, I mean maybe if I'm lucky if it's a whole day conference, I have four or five [takeaways]. And then I'm trying to process, because you don't talk during presentations. And so I have this whole big list...cause I've had time to process. I have time to digest it while I'm in. Because it's not frowned upon to talk. It's encouraged to communicate.

The fact that Edcamps become these spaces where teachers can talk to each other is important for the attendees who perhaps rarely get a chance to do so, even during designated PD days.

Both Wendy and Sharon mentioned that talking about classroom practices with others holds them more accountable to try their new learning in their classroom; perhaps their colleague will follow up on their progress, and they'll need to have something to report. Every participant in this study has a professional Twitter account that they use to network with other teachers and engage in conversations on social media. All of the participants in the study posted a status (or several) to Twitter during the Edcamp they attended, and many mentioned that this is the way they keep in touch with the people they meet at Edcamps. Being connected with people on Twitter adds to the accountability piece because it is easy for a colleague to send a quick message asking how they have incorporated their new learning. Wendy specifically described how Twitter motivates her, as she often shares results of what she tries in her classroom on Twitter for her network. "Cause if I'm telling you, I'm gonna do this in my classroom and then I don't do it...I mean I have accountability there."

Many participants commented on learning from conversations, without specifically describing what they learned, suggesting that allowing the time for talk was just as important as the topic of discussion. Being able to engage in conversations with their professional peers is an example of how Edcamps are learner-centered and community centered (Bransford et al., 2000). Edcampers appear to be attracted to learning this way.

4.3.2 Learning as a Part of a Community

Six out of the eight participants had attended many other Edcamps before coming to Edcamp Literacy or Edcamp Tech. Among these six, there was a definite theme of coming to Edcamps to see each other and to talk to people "like them." The participants referenced a community of Edcampers that are bound not just because they attend many events in the region, but also because they like to learn the same way. Being a part of this community keeps them coming back, so they can be around others that learn like them. Ed used the word "subculture" to describe this community, saying:

People who choose to attend Edcamps are the forward thinkers, the innovators, the people who want to come and learn new things in new ways. And I like to surround myself with those people to continue my development in that area.

Subcultures are smaller communities that deviate in some way from the larger culture. All participants recognized that Edcamps are very different from the traditional PD that they are used to and they recognize that they are part of a group that is choosing to attend this different type of PD on their own time. Subcultures also identify with certain styles and practices, and in this case, the Edcamp community has taken to social media (specifically Twitter) to develop their community of learners. Often conversations at Edcamp lead to collaborations that can also be facilitated and continued through Twitter.

The two participants who had never attended an Edcamp before decided to make Edcamp Literacy their first one because they were looking to join up with their previously established community on Twitter. Edcamp Literacy was organized on Twitter first, among people who had connected at previous conferences. This group of like-minded individuals interested in children's literature and reading instruction was looking to find a more informal space to talk and collaborate. Many attendees of Edcamp Literacy were already collaborators in some way via Twitter, but were meeting for the first time to talk at the event.

Others found that attending Edcamp just gave them the space and time to connect with people they see everyday—colleagues in their own school districts. Olivia found the time to connect with her school librarian to plan a reading event at their school. And even though Allison and Ed taught in the same district, they met for the first time at an Edcamp and spent time at Edcamp Tech discussing a possible collaboration of a song-writing unit between Allison's fourth graders and Ed's middle school music students.

The blending of a physical (Edcamp) and virtual (Twitter) learning space was important to many Edcamp participants based on the fact that many engage with both. For Gillian and Olivia, the first-time attendees of Edcamp Literacy, the entire point of attending the event was to connect with their online community—this is why the event was organized in the first place. For those that attended Edcamp Tech, reconnecting on Twitter during and after the conference helped with accountability and collaboration. Being a part of a community on Twitter ensures that the learning continues long after the Edcamp event, perhaps making the learning that happens there more impactful than if it were a "one-off" PD experience with no follow-up among participants.

5. Discussion

Edcamps are PD opportunities that are more learner-centered than most traditional school in-services. They honor the "knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that learners bring to the educational setting" (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 133). Teachers were attracted to the learner-centered aspects, as they felt empowered to direct their own learning. These teachers felt everyone's work was valued at Edcamps, and looked forward to talking with other like-minded people about their practice.

This empowerment may have potential to increase buy-in for teachers to adopt practices they learned in Edcamps to their classrooms. In a climate where teachers may be consistently feeling like their expertise isn't valued as much as those of administrators and politicians, the fact that Edcamps give teachers the space to share ideas is very attractive. Since the community of Edcamp also blends into the virtual space of Twitter, teachers may be more likely to hold themselves

accountable to try new classroom practices so they can share ideas with their social network after the events.

Edcamps have the ability to give teachers the opportunity to learn what they desire in a way that is collaborative with people outside of their school environment (and possibly within as well) and has the potential to be immediately implemented in a classroom if they so choose. The strong role that Twitter plays in the collaborative aspect of Edcamps also means that teachers can get continuous support from their social network if and when they choose to implement what they learned in a classroom. These are all elements that others have shown to be present in successful PD experiences (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2002; Smylie, 1989; Valli & Hawley, 2002).

Many researchers also agree that effective PD should be focused on gaps in student learning and based within the specific school sites of attendees, presumably to make the PD the most engaging and relevant to those who attend (Garet et al., 2001; Reeves, 2010; Valli & Hawley, 2002). However, Edcamps by nature are not specific to one's school. Like Gillian mentioned, attendees must "trust the system" that they will learn something relevant when they arrive at an Edcamp. There is no guarantee the agenda will be relevant to each person, and the onus of making those connections is squarely on the participant. They are responsible for creating the agenda and voting with their feet. With so much choice and freedom for attendees, there is a risk that what they learn may not be supported by their administration and may not be appropriate for their own students. This could have an impact on how effective Edcamps are in helping teachers change their instruction.

Although many participants mentioned the fact that Edcamps allow them to learn with "like-minded" people (those that are interested in classroom technology, collaborative learning, and are open to new ideas) as a strength of the Edcamp process, this actually could be prohibitive for learning new ideas. If one is continuously and exclusively learning from others that have similar ways of thinking as they do, this could mean one's ideas and beliefs are not being pushed or challenged (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013; Smylie, 1989). This could actually lead to stagnancy, especially as Edcamps are becoming more "themed," attracting a certain "crowd" (those that are interested in literacy or technology) even as Edcamps preach inclusivity. Many participants referenced "seeing the same people" at the events; if the same people continue to attend, there is a risk of recycling ideas over and over. Ed and Allison both frequently share the same ideas about classroom technology at different Edcamps, and two participants at Edcamp Literacy described learning the most from sessions that were chosen by organizers or specifically planned ahead of time for the event, suggesting that maybe the "open space technology" format is great for conversation and engagement, but may not be ideal for transferring learning to implementation.

The overall positive attitude about Edcamps that the participants of this study described should indicate to school administrators about a possible role they can play in empowering their staff perhaps through using the unconference model to structure PD for the educators in their district or school as opposed to a traditional in-service. Running school in-services in the un-conference format can allow opportunity for conversation and collaboration while perhaps addressing the issue that Edcamps are not necessarily supported by administration or specific to one's school. Many participants suggested this as something they wished their school district would implement:

“Wouldn’t that be awesome if the Edcamp model was part of school improvement? There are definitely people in my building that I would love to learn from.”

Although there have been many studies that examine PD and the types of PD that are most effective for student achievement, teacher learning, or buy-in (Desimone et al., 2002; Lumpe et al., 2012; Penuel et al., 2007; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 2005) very little research has been done on Edcamps. This is mainly due to the fact that Edcamps are a relatively recent PD phenomenon, accelerated by word-of-mouth advertising that developed on social media. There is more research that can be done about what teachers actually take back to the classroom from Edcamps. The participants in this study had many ideas of what they reported they would implement, but future studies could examine how the teachers took their learning back to their classrooms, and if they did. This study sheds some light on the potential of Edcamps for teacher learning, but there are many more opportunities to explore this type of PD.

References

- Boule, M. (2011). *Mob rule learning: Camp, un-conferences, and trashing the talking head*. Medford, N. J.: Information Today.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, D. C.: National Academy Press.
- Carpenter, J. P., & Krutka, D. G. (2014). How and why educators use Twitter: A survey of the field. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 46(4), 414-434.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2014.925701>
- Collier, L. (March 2012). Capitalizing on social media to find professional community. *Council Chronicle: National Council for Teachers of English*.
- Demski, J. (2012). Create your own un-conference. *THE Journal*, 39(5), 42-46.
- Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction results from a three year longitudinal study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(2), 81-112.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/01623737024002081>
- Dixon, M. (2014). 5 takeaways from #EdCampUSA.
- Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Restructuring schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Ferriter, W. M., & Provenzano, N. (2013). Today's lesson: Self-directed learning for teachers. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(3), 16-21.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/003172171309500305>
- Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004915>
- Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001). Toward a theory of teacher community. *The Teachers College Record*, 103, 942-1012.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0161-4681.00140>
- Joyce, B. R., & Showers, B. (1983). *Power in staff development through research on training*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2002). *Transforming professional development: Understanding and organizing*

- learning communities. In W. D. Hawley & D. L. Rollie (Eds.). *The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement* (pp. 74-85). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lumpe, A., Czerniak, C., Haney, J., & Beltyukova, S. (2012). Beliefs about teaching science: The relationship between elementary teachers' participation in professional development and student achievement. *International Journal of Science Education*, 34(2), 153-166.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2010.551222>
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. (1993). *Contexts that matter for teaching and learning*. Stanford, CA: Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching, Stanford University.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M., 1994. *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Newmann, F., & Whelage, G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators*. Madison: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin.
- Penuel, W. R., Fishman, B. J., Yamaguchi, R., & Gallager, L. P. (2007). What makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster curriculum implementation. *American Education Research Journal*, 44(4), p. 921-958.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831207308221>
- Reeves, D. B. (2010). *Transforming professional development into student results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Smylie, M. A. (1989). Teachers' views of the effectiveness of sources of learning to teach. *The Elementary School Journal*, 89(5), 543-558.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/461591>
- Snow, C. E., Griffin, P., & Burns, M. S. (2005). *Knowledge to support the teaching of reading: Preparing teachers for a changing world*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Swanson, K. (2014). Edcamp: Teachers take back professional development. *Educational Leadership*, 71(8), 36-40.
- Swanson, K. N. & Leanness, A. (2012). *Edcamp: A qualitative exploration*. Edcamp Foundation.
- Valli, L., & Hawley, W. D. (2002). Designing and implementing school-based professional development. In W. D. Hawley & D. L. Rollie (Eds.). *The Keys to Effective Schools: Educational Reform as Continuous Improvement* (pp. 86-96). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Wesley, P. M. (2013). Investigating the community of practice of world language educators on Twitter. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(4), 305-318.