A phenomenological study of the professional development needs of millennial principals in leading a mulitigenerational staff in the northeast region of the United States

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MILLENNIAL PRINCIPALS IN LEADING A MULITIGENERATIONAL STAFF IN THE NORTHEAST REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

A Doctoral Research Project

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MILLENNIAL PRINCIPALS IN LEADING A MULITIGENERATIONAL STAFF IN THE NORTHEAST REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract:

This study examines the professional development needs of (14) Millennial principals, in the Northeast Region of the United States, leading a multigenerational staff. With the increase of Millennials becoming leaders within the workforce, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the perspectives of Millennial principals as it relates to professional development and its role in building their instructional leadership capacity when leading a generationally diverse staff. Millennialism and the phenomenon of generational cohorts, their attributes, work style and leadership preferences were studied through a review of literature. Additionally, literature revealed the context in which professional development is utilized and how adult learning tenets and principles can support engagement. Further, authors explored the interconnectedness and the employing of the two leadership styles, instructional and transformational leadership, as a guide for effective practices that can yield school and student success. Utilizing the ZOOM virtual conferring platform and an interview protocol which included thirteen semi- structured questions, Millennial principals discussed their experiences in leading a multigenerational staff. Enlisting the perspectives of Millennial principals, the problem studied was whether professional development

can be used as a resource of support in the building their instructional leadership, and if so, what modes, features, and attributes can be leveraged when engaging in professional development. Results revealed that Millennial principals perceived professional development to be a source of support for their professional growth, helping to develop their leadership skills and their ability to support the pedagogical practices of their teachers. Millennial principals detailed the varied professional development opportunities they engaged in, highlighting that they were provided opportunities to engage in learning through webinar sessions, collaborative groups, and district provided training and sought professional learning within personal networks, in reading professional material and resources, and engaging on social media outlets. Millennial principals offered considerations for professional development they deemed beneficial, noting engagement as the most important variable, and associating attributes such as interactive, applicable, and personalized learning as critical components. Contrastingly, Millennial principals described professional development that caused disengagement due to lack of connection to their learning needs as irrelevant, generic, lacking depth and poor in presentation. Further, Millennial principals detailed the need for tailored professional development for their multigenerational staff, proposing their varied capacities, characteristics, and responsibilities associated to meeting student needs as reasons. Millennial principals shared their experiences leading a multigenerational staff to contextualize their professional development needs, describing difficulties such as prejudice associated with their age, race, and turbulence navigating established beliefs and staff professionalism. However, the illumination of positive experiences in leading a generationally diverse staff were detailed, emphasizing the benefits of having the knowledge and varied capacities of staff intermingle and its role in strengthening school culture. Thus, Millennial principals expressed the desire for professional development that would support their responsive leadership,

and described the need for relevant learning opportunities that engaged staff in difficult conversations, developing instructional practices, and building cultural consciousness and awareness of the diversity that exist within their respective school communities. Finally, this study provided recommendations connected to policies and programs focused on leadership training and development of the multigenerational workforce, originating data-informed and tailored professional learning, creating options for autonomous inquiry, and optimizing opportunities for multigenerational collaboration.

Keywords: Millennial principals, multigenerational workforce, professional development, instructional leadership, adult learning

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Millennials are individuals born in the late 1970s through approximately 2004 (Murray, 2011). As Millennials begin to make up most of the workforce, a fraction will choose to secure positions as principals within school systems. Considering the evolution of leaders accepting principal roles, specifically the occupancy of Millennial leaders who follow this trajectory, it is imperative to research the characteristics and values of principals within this generational cohort. To ensure that schools demonstrate significant levels of academic achievement, exploring Millennial principal beliefs, experiences, and needs as it pertains to professional development is necessary to secure school success.

Contemplating the complexities of being a Millennial principal, one must consider the parameters that create staff diversity and its implications. Within variables for deliberation, the progression of the multigenerational workforce ascends, requiring the Millennial leader to study the experiences, values, and the impact of these effects on professional collegiality; thus, illuminating the necessity of focusing on the professional learning needs of the leader to ensure the success of the varied team (Balda &Mora, 2011; Lewis &Wescott, 2017, Whitacre, 2007).

Bearing in mind the convolution of sensitivities when leading a multigenerational workforce, securing appropriate developmental support for Millennial leaders is critical (Emeagwali, 2011; Sweeney, 2019). To personalize requirements, an exploration of Millennial understandings and experiences, with support such as professional development, is essential when designing action plans tailored in approach and seeking to influence school advancement.

As education systems seek to develop Millennial principals and increase school achievement, the views of Millennial leaders could support the design of the professional development provided. While designing engaging opportunities to enhance the skillset of Millennial principals, research-based leadership models may serve as a foundation and resource in the development and support of the Millennial expertise. Considering the educational level and the skills needed by leaders to inspire a generationally diverse staff around a shared vision and mission, empirical research explores the intersection of instructional and transformational leadership as leadership styles that help to propel schools toward achieving success (Buil, 2009; Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003).

Fry (2018) affirms that as of 2017, 35% of the American workforce were made up of Millennials, consequently making the Millennial cohort the largest within the American workforce. Deloitte (2014) states:

Millennials, who are already emerging as leaders in technology and other industries and will comprise 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025, want to work for organizations that foster innovative thinking, develop their skills, and make a positive contribution to society. (para 2).

Murray (2011) agrees, noting that as Millennials begin to occupy positions, they actively take on leadership roles. Sweeney et al. (2019) assert the need for the development of the Millennial, stating, "to remain a competitive organization and recruit the best and brightest of today's workforce, companies and leaders must consider what is important to Millennials and how to engage them best" (p. 2).

As Millennials begin to populate the workforce and obtain leadership positions, an investment in their professional development is pivotal. Leadership persistence is emboldened by

the enhancement of pedagogy and performance (Elmore, 2000). Elmore (2002) declares, "effective professional development is focused on the improvement of the skill and knowledge of educators" (pp.6-7). When effectively created and implemented, professional development needs to strengthen educators' ability and respond to the needs of the learners it aims to support (Elmore 2002).

Schullery (2013) urges those in the workforce to understand Millennial values and how they differ from previous generations. Schullery (2013) provides context for generational cohorts, stating "the four generations currently in the workplace include the Silent Generation, also known as Traditionalist (1925-1945); Baby Boomers (1946-1964); Generation X or Gen X (1965-1981); and Millennials (1982-1999)" (p. 253). Gordon (2006) proposes that generations are influenced by shared experiences and moments that define cohort. Gordon (2006) states:

> there is also general agreement on the age ranges, and on the fact that much of what comprises a "generation" is its members shared experience of defining events and formative experiences--for example, the Veterans by World War II; the Boomers by Woodstock, the Cold War, and the moon landing; GenX by divorce, AIDS, and MTV; and Gen Y by the internet and 9/11. (para. 11).

Murray (2011) contributes, providing the experiential attributes of Millennials, stating, "Millennials are described as being more comfortable with technology and prone to multitasking, collaborative work, and as having a more integrated view of organizational hierarchy than previous generational cohorts" (p.54).

Recent data recognizes that as Millennials dominate workplaces, they co-inhabit a workforce representative of multiple generations (Fry, 2018). Literature reveals the characteristics of the diverse ages and how they impact professional settings (Schullery, 2013).

Professional development is used as a tool for the enhancement of leadership capacity and skill to promote the success of the workforce (Elmore, 2002). The gap found in research literature is the investigation of Millennial principals lived experiences in leading a multigenerational staff and how their perspectives of professional development and their encounters associated assist in contextualizing the learning needs of this generational cohort. This study intends to address this deficit.

Statement of the Problem

As Millennials secure positions as school principals, they require the skills necessary to lead those with varied generational values and characteristics specific to their generations. It is critical to explore the interrelationship with Millennial principal experiences in supervising a multigenerational staff, their level of professional development engagement, and their beliefs and perception related to professional development as a supportive tool to build instructional leadership capacity.

Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of Millennial principals in receiving professional development to support the growth of their instructional leadership capacity to lead their multigenerational staff in the Northeast Region of the United States. Buysse and Winton (2009) define professional development, stating that it "…encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, those that occur largely through formal coursework, and those that are more informal and situated in practice" (p. 238). Professional development in educational organizations is the approach schools and school districts use to continually develop the expertise of educators in a fashion that is ongoing (Mizell, 2010).

Research Questions

This study's investigation is grounded in the following research questions:

1. How is professional development defined and characterized by Millennial principals?

2. What are Millennial principals' beliefs about the necessity of professional development in building their instructional capacity?

3. What would be appropriate professional development opportunities for Millennial principals in leading a multigenerational staff?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will add to the body of educational leadership research, acknowledging and using the findings connected to the experiences of Millennial principals. Further, it will inform how adequate professional development supports can be initiated when engaging the Millennial generational cohort. Literature explored revealed concepts associated with generational attributes and interactions amongst the workforce, professional development and adult learning significance, and effective instructional and transformational leadership strategies. This study explored the lived experiences of Millennial principals to which these concepts intertwine. Examining the experiences of Millennial principals in leading a multigenerational staff, insight will render the best levers and strategies to design, implement and utilize when delivering professional development that builds Millennial principals' instructional leadership capacity.

This research is significant to educators, specifically school leaders, district and executive leadership teams, mentors, coaches, educational professional developers, consultants, and any professional or professional organization that provides leadership training, feedback, and collaborative support for principals. District leaders, school administrators, and executive

leadership teams can benefit from engaging in research analysis that helps to contextualize the variances of their generationally diverse followers and subordinates in order to support the development of their school communities and student performance. This study reveals the experiences of Millennial principals leading a multigenerational staff and provides research-based recommendations grounded in instructional and transformational leadership and adult learning tenets. Thus, this study could enhance how leaders support multigenerational collaboration, learning and development. Educational professional developers, consultants, and professionals and professional organizations providing leadership training may use this studies' literature review and findings connected to professional learning for adults in order to better design engagement opportunities informed by research and best practices. When providing individualized support and guidance, specifically to Millennial principals, professionals providing mentoring and coaching may examine the researchers' findings about the popular and un-popular forms and modalities of learning and tailor supports to reflect research-based preferences.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical frameworks of this study are based on Bass' (1998) transformational leadership theory, Hallinger and Murphy's (1986) instructional leadership framework, and Drago-Severson's (2008) pillars for adult learning. The conceptual theories focus on leadership actions and outputs associated with supports for development.

In a review of literature, Stewart (2006) explores the evolution of transformational leadership. Stewart (2006) traces the origins of transformational leadership to Burns (1978), highlighting research that explored the difference between transactional leadership, leadership grounded in the exchange of actions, and transformational leadership, leadership grounded in

motivation and constituent capacity building. Stewart (2006) notes the deepening of transformational leadership attributes with the development of Bass' (1998) theory of transformational leadership and its focus on leadership influence on followers. Transformational leadership, also known as Full Range of Leadership (FRL), explores the implementation of the theory's critical attributes and its impact (Bass, 1998). As cited by Stewart (2006), Bass (1998) four components of transformational leadership, noting them as 1. *charismatic leadership, or idealized influence* in which leaders are revered and serve as role models driven by a coherent vision and mission; 2. *inspirational motivation* in which leaders emboldens motivation, excitement, and rigor; 3. *intellectual stimulation* in which leaders utilizes feedback to innovate and create an environment of creativity; and 4. *individualized consideration* in which leaders assess the developmental needs of followers, advocates for inquiry, and address the concerns of followers. Stewart (2006) states, "Bass' model of leadership also includes three dimensions of transactional leadership: contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire, or non-leadership behavior" (p.12).

Hallinger and Murphy (1986) emphasize the instructional leadership theoretical framework as the leadership modalities and processes in school leadership. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) detail leadership processes as:

1. framing and communicating school goals; 2. supervising and evaluating instruction; 3. coordinating curriculum; 4. developing high academic standards and expectations; 5. monitoring student progress; 6. promoting the professional development of teachers; 7. protecting instructional time; and 8. developing incentives for students and teachers. (pp. 2-3).

Hallinger and Murphy (1986) add "leadership processes include communication, decision making, conflict management, group process, change process, and environmental interaction (p. 3).

Drawing on Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental theory, Drago-Severson (2008) provides theoretical practices for consideration when engaging adults in learning. Drago-Severson (2008) notes that adults have three structures of knowing that connect to how they participate in education and describes them as the instrumental, the socializing, and the self-authorizing way of knowing. Drago-Severson (2008) stresses the importance of utilizing four pillars when promoting the growth and learning of adults with varied forms of knowledge and names them teaming, leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring.

Definitions of Terms

Millennials: Millennials are individuals born in the late 1970s through approximately 2004
>   (Murray, 2011)

Generation: Generation signifies to a group of individuals born within a comparable span of
>   time who share a similar age and lifespan and who were influenced by events, culture,
>   and occurrences during that time (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010)

Multigenerational Staff: The four generations currently eligible to work in schools which
>   includes the Silent Generation, also known as Traditionalists (1925-1945); Baby Boomers
>   (1946-1964); Generation X or GenX (1965-1981); and the Millennials (1982-1999)
>   (Schullery, 2013).

Professional Development: Development encompasses all types of facilitated learning
>   opportunities, those that occur predominantly through formal coursework and those that
>   are more informal and situated (Buysse and Winton, 2009).

Delimitation/ Scope of the Study

This study was conducted to explore the professional development demands of Millennial principals to build their instructional leadership capacity when supporting a multigenerational workforce. This study is delimited to the lived experience of Millennials, particularly on the exploration of their professional development needs, and specifically, how their needs can be addressed. Since the participants of this study are Millennial principals from the Northeast Region of the United States, the findings of this study are transferable to similar groups, but their experience may not be universally generalized.

Limitations

This study had one limitation. The limitation involved the constraints created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the global health crisis, professionals in the field were required to work from home, and interviews needed to be conducted virtually. The pandemic created reduced opportunities to recruit participants and restricted flexibility in interviewing modes. Moreover, some cities in the Northeast Region of the United States, such as New York City, have an individualized IRB process and gave priority to COVID-19 related studies; thus, limiting the pool of participants to engage in recruitment within a timely manner.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction that details the background of the study, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the theoretical frameworks that ground the researcher's analysis. Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature that contextualizes the study. Chapter 3 presents the research design and the overall methodology of the research process. Chapter 4 is the analysis of data where the findings of the study are

presented. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, discussion, conclusion, and

recommendations.