The Business of Professional Development

Wendy Thompson

New Jersey City

Professional Development continues to be a rising enterprise in education (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Defining Professional Development is dependent upon the educator's desired outcome (Hirsh, 2009). Hirsh (2009) promotes the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) definition for Professional Development as "a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement." (p. 12). Utilizing this improved definition in the face of teacher shortages, accountability measures, and educating 21st Century learners, highly qualified educators need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and the ability to assess their own capabilities to prepare for meeting students' needs. Hawley and Valli (1999) assert that the role of professional development is an essential factor to improving student learning.

Professional Development has many different models of delivery from face-to-face to online synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid professional learning models (Bates, Phalen, & Moran, 2016). Face-to-Face models, those that happen in a brick and mortar setting, have had limited substantive or rigorous research to prove claims of effectiveness (Shaha, Glassett, Copas, & Huddleston, 2016). Workshops that are often only held once, as those school districts mandated fail to impact a teacher's practice (McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, & Lundeberg, 2013). Online Professional Development offers teachers the options of freedom of time, place of engagement, and topic selections that are based on a meaningful personal choice (Vu, Cao, Vu, & Cepero, 2014).   With districts attempting to wisely manage their Professional Development budgets, many have turned to Online Professional Development as a cost effective measure (Moon, Passmore, Reiser, & Michaels, 2014). Professional Learning Networks or Communities encourage the sharing of career related issues with a network of associates through different digital communications platforms. Technologies like those developed in social

networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google+ have aided in the development of global awareness to Professional Learning Communities (Perez, 2012). Professional Learning Networks/Learning Communities strive to improve job performance for educators and have emerged as an Online Professional Development alternative that numerous educators find beneficial (Perez, 2012).

The increase in Professional Learning Communities, as a means of meeting Professional Development (McConnell et al., 2013) has been supported by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Based upon a concept derived from the business community that identifies the ability of a connected group to acquire knowledge, educational settings have adapted the concepts to form Professional Learning Communities (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The authors recognizing that knowledge is part of teachers daily experiences understand that reflective assessment with others in similar situations is essential to defining Professional Learning Communities (Vescio et al., 2008). The merging of a need for quality Professional Development and the delivery options that are now available through the "disruptive" power of technology (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2011) has turned Online Professional Development into an expanding business that has found its place in the educational community (p. 44).

The growing number of options available to educators attempting to negotiate the Online Professional Development market requires a means for clarity of what is considered best among the offerings. The Software Information and Industry Association (SIIA), a leading trade organization backing the software and digital information industry, presents an annual peer reviewed selection of leaders in the area of Online Professional Development. Since 1986, SIIA-CODiE award winners have been representative of the quality in product, development and services available in the Online Professional Development market. Placing as a finalist within a

specific category affords acclaim while providing recognition for a company's product. SIIA-CODiE 2016 Best Professional Learning Solution for K-20 Faculty and Administrative Staff finalists are set to provide professional development services to educators that will affect the implementation of curriculum content in classrooms across the country. Viewing these providers in more detailed will offer insight into how they might affect the field of education.

Originating as a startup, Edthena has steadily gained notoriety since its beginnings in 2012. The founders, Adam Geller and David Wheldon (Edthena, 2016.), use video conferencing to support online professional development with learning communities. This award winning company has for the second year in a row been selected as a CODiE finalist. Forming partnerships with the Gates Foundation and California State Board of Education, Edthena is on its way to helping define a new version of educational professional development. Despite its success a call for caution in the use of products such as Edthena has been advocated by the research on Professional Learning Communities advising a need to support the development of community between participants in order to be effective (McConnell et al., 2013).

Open Court Reading Professional Development, a product of McGraw-Hill, has also been chosen as a CODiE finalist in the Professional Learning Category. McGraw-Hill a leading provider in the elementary and secondary educational market since the 1950's was established in 1899 (McGraw-Hill, 2016.). With its long standing and diverse connections to financial and political groups, Open Court has built far reaching relationships in educational professional development. When teachers and administrators purchase the Open Court Reading Series they are provided access to "Professional Learning Environments" that are designed to promote a three tiered system of professional development options, formal learning courses, on-demand

content, and an online community of support. The multi-level aspects of Open Court Reading

Professional Development places it in the hybrid model for professional development options.

Pearson, another prominent player in the education market, made the coveted list with its

entry Professional Learning Model. Relying on the "flipped classroom" approach, teachers are

offered leaning options through Connections Education. A leader in the virtual and blended

education market, Connection Education (Pearson, 2016.) was brought under the Pearson

umbrella of companies' in 2011. A synchronous online learning setting extends applied practice

of information gained through previously provided material. As Pearson continues to gain

ground with the accountability community, segmenting into online, virtual, and blended learning

will cement its current spot on top of the influence leader board (Pearson, 2016).

A new entry to CODiE's Professional Learning category is Global PD by Solution

Tree. Starting as a publishing company, Solution Tree has been providing professional

development for the K-12 education community since 1998 (Solution Tree, 2016.). In 2014,

Global PD was launched in partnership with Professional Learning Communities at Work. Global

PD following a Professional Learning Community platform, Global PD presents to its subscribers

with professional development on demand. They accomplish this through personalized virtual

coaching from leaders in the professional learning community field. Global PD offers courses,

books, and online learning communities that are designed to support districts, schools and

teachers. Their goal is to help users determine essential standards, build common assessments,

and identify at risk students.

Infosource Incorporate, the parent company of Simple K-12 started its education

department in 1983. Partnering with well-known players in education such as Microsoft, ISTE,

CompTIA, and Certiport, Infosource has grown into a powerhouse in the Online Professional

Development community. Simple K-12, though not a SIIA-CODiE 2016 finalist, boasts having well over 400,000 members around the world. Simple K-12 makes online learning available for teachers and school districts through paid subscriptions. on demand learning for teachers and school districts (Infosource, 2016). The staff of EdSurge an online technology newsletter, reviewed multiple on-line PD companies, and presented their findings in an online product review report (Edsurge, 2016). In their report Simple K-12 was reported to have contracts with more than 450 school districts in several states including Missouri, Louisiana and West Virginia. Districts may purchase district wide accounts which Simple K-12 customizes content to meet the district's specific professional development needs.

Education of the 21st century learner requires instructors who are highly qualified and constantly reassessing their professional and content specific knowledge (Hirsh, 2009). The business of Professional Development has grown over the past twenty-years as districts and teachers have searched for ways to gain the mandated hours of content specific or professional level training most states now require (Shaha et al., 2016). Technology has allowed for the integration and development of online learning options for Professional Development. As more teachers and school districts gravitate towards Online Professional Development to answer the concerns of time, money, and personnel (involved in the business of professional development) the potential is there for success by providing easily accessible, cost effective and socially supportive learning (Vu et al., 2014). The need for transparency of the relationships between educational publishing companies, curricular developers, professional development providers and the donor organizations supporting professional training of teachers to ensure unbiased influence over school districts' missions and individual learner goals.

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