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A grounded theory of professional development preferences of millennial educational professionals

Bobbie M. Downs
Rowan University

A GROUNDED THEORY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCES OF MILLENNIAL EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

By

Bobbie M. Downs

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the group of refugee students in Cairo, Egypt who taught me the value of education. Your passion for learning inspired me to become an educator and continues to push me forward today. Thank you for showing me that I should never take my education for granted and that it truly can change one's life. May we see a world of educational opportunities and equity for everyone one day.

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Abstract

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JoAnn B. Manning, Ed.D.
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The purpose of this grounded research study is to answer the question: How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation? As the workplace, including the field of education, becomes more generationally diverse, it is education leaders must learn the unique needs of their staff members and develop meaningful professional development opportunities that meet these requirements. Both generational cohort theory and transformative learning theory became the underpinnings of the research. The research was conducted primarily through qualitative interviews at an educational services commission in New Jersey. A theory about millennial preferences for professional development was generated: Millennial educational professionals prefer a multimodal style of learning through interactive workshops that focus on relevant material to their current assignment, taught by someone with applicable experience, during the course of their day, and at a reasonable cost. Educational leaders should find this information helpful in planning effective and fiscally responsible professional development opportunities to better support their youngest educational professionals of the millennial generation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Social institutions, government organizations, and other associations are products of the populations of which they are composed. As our society and workforce are becoming younger, we are seeing major shifts of political, ethical, and corporate values, which are indications that changes must be made to mitigate the generational differences (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2013). The United States is witnessing a clash between traditionalists (born before 1943), baby boomers (born 1943 to 1960), Generation Xers (born 1960 to 1980), and millennials (born 1980 to 2004), generations with very different ethics, backgrounds, and beliefs (Zemke et al., 2013). When generational diversity, defined as the "shared perspectives and experiences among individuals born within boundaries of time" (Waljee, Chopra, & Saint, 2018, p. 1547), emerges in the workplace, conflict can arise. The discussion of generational shifts in the workplace is not new, but there are unique, unavoidable issues brought upon by the millennial generation and their stark contrast to the preceding generations. As generational shifts sweep our workplaces, I must become aware of how to mitigate these changes in order to support staff at an educational services unit. Other educational administrators must do the same if they want to successfully support their students and staff members.

Using the components of qualitative research, this dissertation explored this potential conflict through the use of a literature review, data collection and analysis, and the development of theories. The first three chapters will provide the foundation needed to effectively answer the research questions. Chapter 1 outlines the background of the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research question, the

theoretical frameworks, the significance of the study, key terms, and other important information. Chapter 2 will discuss the current literature about millennials and professional development and dive deeper into understanding the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 will outline the methodology of this dissertation, focusing on the key aspects of qualitative research and grounded theory. Chapter 3 will explain the relationship of the research questions, research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, role of the researcher, and ethical assurances. Chapter 4 will explain the data that were collected, the results of the analysis, and how these findings are situated in the literature in Chapter 2. This chapter will also include a discussion of the limitations, biases, assumptions, and insights gained for the field of study. The fifth and final chapter will emphasize the conclusions and implications of the research. Within this chapter, I will explain why the research matters, the implications of the research, and follow-up that is recommended. All of the chapters will help to answer the proposed research questions through a solid methodological framework in order to generate a practical and useful theory.

Background

As a major industry with over eight million dollars spent in state aid throughout 2,516 schools (New Jersey Department of Education, 2018), New Jersey educational settings must become aware of generational shifts and potential clashes if they are to generate a culture and climate conducive for learning and also for business. Administrators in schools face many challenges, including encouraging and training the staff so they can best support students. If millennials are as different from older

generations as the literature proposes, then schools must begin to develop ways to meet the needs of millennial teachers to maximize success in the classroom.

The current literature suggests that millennials, including educators, have unique expectations and partialities in the workplace. In a recent study on workplace communication preferences, millennials expressed that they desire "fair and equal treatment of all employees" and a "good culture in the workplace." Those surveyed also stated that bosses should be "understanding," "easy to work for," "motivational," and "friendly and honest" (Hall, 2016 p. 35). Since this is the case, research suggests that employers need to change how they address millennials in the workplace. For example, contemporary research has found that corrective feedback, though necessary, can cause millennials to become defensive since they are accustomed to receiving praise. Therefore, employers should provide specific, objective examples of what needs to be changed (Hall, 2016). Moreover, millennials expect close, open, supportive relationships with their supervisors and prefer to work in teams (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Consequently, the workplace needs to be much more cooperative than in previous eras. These are just two preliminary examples of the changes needed in the workplace. In the bureaucratic school system that now focuses on test scores and teacher evaluations, educational leaders must be able to find ways to adjust to these preferences within an already complex system if they want millennials to be successful.

With all of the layers of generational shifts, the unique dispositions of millennials, and the need for this age group to be effective educators, more information is necessary to understand how millennials can be better supported in the educational setting. It is difficult to ignore the growing population of millennials in the workplace, so the question

becomes: How can educational leaders best support millennial staff members? To answer that question, one must also ask: (a) what differences exist among millennials and other staff members that influence the type of support needed to be successful in the workplace and (b) what types of clashes do these differences generate and how can they be mitigated in the workplace? There is little research on professional support of millennials specifically in the educational setting; therefore, more research on the types of professional development and peer support best designed for millennials is needed to support the emerging future group of educational leaders.

Research Problem Statement

There is a growing need to research best practices in professional development to better support the increasing generation of millennials in the workplace if educational leaders are to create environments that are supportive of both students and staff. Current researchers in the field contend that our current workplace is full of conflicting voices and views of the most "age- and value-diverse" population (p. 5) that has ever existed (Zemke et al., 2013). This diversity is going to be exacerbated by the growth of millennials in the workplace as that age group will make up 75% of the workforce by 2025 (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2015). Leaders can no longer expect that their traditional approaches to leadership will be successful as they try to meet the demands of this new group while also balancing the glaring differences among other generations.

The research in the past 5 years on millennials has grown exponentially according to my search. However, the current research does not link the unique preferences of millennials to explicit characteristics and preferences of professional development. Studies have sought to determine generational preferences and to provide instruction on

how to best work with millennials, but they have not married the two concepts effectively. Additionally, most of the research has been done in the corporate world or in higher education, neglecting the field of K–12 education. These realities have created an overwhelming gap in the research: There is no direct connection to the preferences and methods of millennials; there are minimal in-depth qualitative studies on the topic from the perspective of millennials, and none of them exist in the field of K–12 education. As millennials continue to increase in numbers, it is important that workplaces adapt to their needs for both retention of employees and professional growth.

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study explored the best practices that educational leaders can use to support millennials in the workplace through professional development. It begins with my assumption that effective professional development is key to creating a supportive work environment for both staff and students. To best enhance the success of the educational services unit, it is imperative that I provide the proper support to all of my staff members, particularly those who are just entering the field of education. As an educational leader, I must, then, determine their strengths while providing a supportive environment for professional and personal growth. This is true for all educational leaders, so the study is relevant to not only my own work, but those of my colleagues across the field. The overall purpose of this dissertation is to develop a substantive theory grounded in data on professional development that links the preferences and needs of millennials with best practices so that educational leaders can effectively fulfill the needs of their staff members.

Significance of Study

My research is unique because it attempts to build a theory of professional development in schools that meets the needs of a significant population of educators. This type of theory does not exist, and leaders are struggling to find what works. By understanding which practices are best, I want to immediately implement professional development plans that match these recommendations. However, the practical applications are not just within my own organization. By completing an in-depth study of millennials' preferences, I will be able to develop a theory about best practices in professional development for an ever-increasing population of educators.

The reality is that teacher burnout is high, and teacher retention in the first few years is low (Perrone, et al., 2019). This research will assist educational leaders in developing professional development opportunities for their staff members that will enhance both the employees' growth and ultimately the growth of the students. Standing on the assumption that professional development is imperative, my research will provide a theory grounded in literature and qualitative data that will mitigate this potential threat not only in my own organization but across other schools. This could lead to changes in policies and legislation regarding the types, levels, and needs of professional development in schools. While there are policies about the professional development topics that must be done, there are no policies on which format and types should be utilized. By understanding what is most effective for this new generation, policy makers could begin to be more specific in their policies to ensure that millennials are being supported. If these types of changes do not occur, it is possible millennial staff members might move to other industries that are making these adjustments, and schools will struggle to fill their places.

Additionally, I believe that this study will provides a framework for understanding other generational preferences in a variety of contexts. By using qualitative research as a model, I will demonstrate the need to go beyond surveys to explore the preferences of millennials in depth; this can be done for topics such as professionalism, communication and other work- and learning-related experiences. This study can be an exemplar of why researchers in generational studies need to use qualitative grounded theory to better understand their topic and make recommendations for practical change. I am filling a gap in research that does not address millennial educators and professional development but also setting the stage for further research to be done.

Research Design

The research design of this dissertation is embedded in the facets of qualitative grounded theory. Developing an improved theory of professional learning that supports millennials is aligned with the purposes of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). With the approval of the university's institutional review board (IRB), I conducted semi-structured interviews with at least 20 millennial educators in the educational services unit to better understand their preferences and experiences with professional development. Consistent with grounded theory, I allowed these interviews to inform my study as I progressed through the process, including the use of theoretical sampling to choose my next round of participants. I also used field notes, observations, and document analysis because they will help to elucidate my topic in a way that quantitative variables alone cannot do (Parthak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013).

Throughout the process, I thoroughly analyzed my data, utilizing a constant-comparative method to determine themes and patterns in order to explain what is

occurring; this is consistent with grounded theory research (Durdella, 2017). I utilized process and pattern coding to begin to develop my theory. Throughout this process, I implemented strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of my study. I triangulated my data, utilized member checking, implemented peer debriefings, clarified bias, and presented negative information. All of these strategies are needed to ensure that both my data analysis and overall research generate information that is both credible and trustworthy. Through this process, I was able to develop a theory of professional development that meets the needs of millennials in the educational environment.

Research Questions

This dissertation was developed to answer the question: How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation? To support this overarching question, I explored the following supporting research questions as well:

1. How do millennial staff members describe how they learn best and their preferences for professional development?
2. What types of professional development do millennials believe have been most helpful to their growth so far?
3. What characteristics of professional development are valued most by millennials (i.e., teamwork, personalization, practical application, etc.)?

Theoretical Frameworks

To shape my research, I utilized generational cohort and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Each of these enduring theories provides a framework for understanding millennials' preferences of professional development. Generational cohort

theory provides the foundation necessary for grouping millennials into a category separate from other groups because it supports the idea that generations within certain timeframes have shared beliefs, values, and expectations (Zemke et al., 2013). Therefore, millennials are not an anomaly but a group of age-specific peers with commonalities that vary from their predecessors. While generational cohort theory supports the first part of the research on millennials, transformative learning theory is linked to the idea of professional development. Developed by Jack Mezirow (1991), this framework helps to understand how millennials' views on their own learning are developed and impact professional development. Both of these frameworks are further explored in Chapter 2 as they become the outline for answering my research questions.

Assumptions and Limitations

With all research, there are assumptions and limitations that need to be addressed. It is important to recognize both of these in the early phases of research, so they do not skew the process or the results. Assumptions are beliefs that I hold to be true and from which I believe I can draw some conclusions. They are based on certain premises that may either hold up or be shown to be unwarranted as I move through my research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To increase the trustworthiness of my study, I need to recognize these beliefs and explicitly address them. Limitations, on the other hand, are those characteristics of design or methodology that impact the interpretation and findings from my research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). By recognizing these, I can place my research into a reasonable context with acceptable expectations.

Assumptions. My research is based on the major assumption that there are significant generational differences that create conflict in the workplace. While this concept is supported in literature, it is also the result of my professional experiences and worldview. This assumption is embedded in the ideas of constructivist theory, which argues that reality is socially constructed through interaction and that there are multiple realities and meanings that are agreed upon in the natural setting (Durdella, 2017). I approach this research with the belief that generational differences and millennials' viewpoints are socially constructed. Another assumption is that because of these generational differences, millennials have a collectively unique perspective on professional development that differs from the traditional approaches that have been implemented in the workplace. The other major assumption is that professional development plays a significant role in the field of education in the growth of both staff and students. I anticipated that these assumptions would be important in my understanding of my research as they are either supported or abandoned throughout the process.

Limitations. In a discussion of trustworthiness of my study, I need to confront the limitations of the research. The setting itself is one limitation. Because this research is conducted within the context of only one educational environment, the transferability can be potentially affected. For example, the existing culture or available resources in another context could potentially mean that the types of professional development that are proposed are not practical in that setting. My research is also limited in scope because it focuses on one generation, particularly millennials. Because of this, further research needs to be done to determine the preferences of the other generations, including those

following the millennials into the workplace. As I continued my research, I was transparent about these limitations.

Key Terms

Finally, as an introduction to this dissertation, it is important to define some key terms. The following meanings are used throughout the dissertation:

a. *Millennial* is a member of a generational cohort born between 1980 and 2000 (Zemke et al., 2013). It should be noted that the limits for millennials may be as early as 1978 and as late as 2002 in other studies (Tolbize, 2008). This generation is also known as Generation Y.

b. *Professional development*: The code of the mid-Atlantic state in which this research takes place states that professional development is defined by five components (New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:9C-3.2):

(a) comprised of professional learning opportunities aligned with student learning and educator development needs, and school, school district, and/or State improvement goals;

(b) have as its primary focus the improvement of teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness in assisting all students to meet state standards;

(c) include the work of established collaborative teams of educational professionals committed to the improvement of evaluating student needs through data and setting clear, rigorous learning goals;

(d) incorporate coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based strategies that improve educator effectiveness and student achievement; and

(e) include support by external expert assistance or additional activities that

address defined student and educator learning goals.

c. *Educational professional* refers to an all-encompassing definition of anyone who is hired to work in the educational setting and has the responsibility for assisting students to succeed in the school setting. Many educational studies focus on teachers, but this study extends beyond classroom teachers. In an educational services unit, the staff is made up of a variety of educational professionals. This includes, but is not limited to, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists, school psychologists, Learning Disability Teacher Consultants, school social workers, job coaches, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) consultants, Educational Interpreters and others. The two main characteristics are that this professional has been hired and has a specialized skillset.

These definitions are beneficial in understanding not only the study but defining the gap in which this study seeks to fill. Because there are various interpretations of each of these words, it is important to keep these definitions in mind as the study unfolds.

Summary

Overall, this dissertation explored the learning preferences of millennial educational professionals to understand how to develop professional development opportunities to meet their needs. It seeks to make recommendations not only for a local educational services unit but also for the broader context in the field of education. This qualitative study is embedded in the concept of transformative learning theory to help understand how adults learn and their views on professional development. The next chapter examines the existing literature to determine the current information on these topics, the gaps that emerge, and how all these studies can support educational leaders'

understanding of millennials and professional development.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

By collecting and analyzing current research, this study builds upon the existing literature but also begins to add to the understanding of the issue as it relates to educators and their views on professional development, filling a much-needed gap in understanding. If educational leaders are to successfully support both their millennial staff members and their students, they must be exposed to potential differences in generations while being offered practical suggestions on how to best support the emergent millennial population. As generations change, workplaces are now forced to decide whether they will try to adjust to their new employees or try to mold a unique wave of interests and desires into a traditional organizational model. Making an informed decision such as this is dependent upon a solid understanding of the issue at hand. This dissertation develops a theory based on literature and data collection about which educational practices are most effective in meeting the professional development needs of millennial educators.

For the purposes of this literature review, I researched current articles in peer-reviewed journals from primarily the last 5 years as there has been an increased focus on this topic recently. Using research terms such as *generational differences* and *generational clash* as well as *millennials* and *workplace preferences*, I was able to ascertain that research does exist in this area but does not exactly capture the preferences for professional development of millennial educators. Because this qualitative study also seeks to make recommendations to administrators on how to best support millennials by understanding their unique needs and desires, I also looked for articles that discussed best

practices in supporting millennial workers. Overall, I was able to find research on generations in the workplace broadly, existing beliefs about millennials, millennials' preferences in the workplace, and some information about millennials and professional learning. To better understand the problem, I also researched the theoretical framework of transformative learning, which shrouds the themes of adult learning. Overall, a foundational understanding is needed in this area to begin to infer how millennial beliefs might impact their professional learning.

Generations in the Workplace

As the workforce naturally becomes younger, there is the need to identify how the emerging generation view their responsibilities, engage in the workplace, and want to learn more professionally. Before delving deeper into an understanding of millennials themselves, it is important to understand why generational designations even exist.

Generational cohort theory. One theoretical framework that needs to be considered is generational cohort theory, a longstanding concept discussed in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and social psychology (Hung, Gu, & Yim, 2007). This theory explores the similarities and differences among various groups of people as defined by a *generation*. It is through this grouping and shared social, historical, and life events that various generations emerge with their own beliefs and expectations (Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014). Zemke et al. (2013) argued that generations are not only developed because of shared beliefs but also influenced by their shared historical experiences. These shared experiences have a profound effect on the values, beliefs, expectations, and attitudes of a group (Becton et al., 2014). Researchers also argue that generations are not just shaped by the culture; rather, they shape the culture themselves (Campbell,

Campbell, Siedor, & Twenge, 2015). It should be noted that there are various definitions and ranges of generations, with no agreed upon start and end dates to a generation in the literature, but there is agreement among the shared experiences and beliefs of the groups. It is clear that millennials have developed characteristics, regardless of their exact birthdates, and have not only been influenced by a unique culture but are creating a well-defined culture of their own (Zemke et al., 2013).

Generational clash. Workplaces, including educational settings, are now seeing a clash between the generations they have in the workplace: traditionalists (born before 1943), baby boomers (born 1943 to 1960), Generation Xers (born 1960 to 1980) and millennials (born 1980 to 2004), generations with very different work ethics, backgrounds, and beliefs (Zemke et al., 2013). Each of these generational categories has been labeled with stereotypical generalizations that are common among the group and that seem to differentiate their ethos, work ethic, and perceptions of not only the workplace, but the world more generally. A failure to recognize these differences can lead to negative organizational outcomes such as workplace conflict, miscommunication, poor or nonexistent working relationships, reduced productivity, decreased innovation and ingenuity, and poorer employee well-being (Becton et al., 2014). These potential consequences warrant an understanding of the differences and a need for proactive steps to reduce conflict.

Traditionalists, also known as the silent generation, are members of the oldest generation in the workplace. They were greatly influenced by the Great Depression and World War II, leading to their conservative nature, sense of fiscal restraint, and sense of obligation and responsibility (Zemke et al., 2013). They are viewed as the most

hardworking generation, preferring formality and a top-down chain of command (Tolbize, 2008). Additionally, they appear to be stable, thorough, and loyal, with a dedication to teamwork and communication. While most traditionalists are now retired, they can still be found in the workplace.

Baby boomers, named for the high population of children born between 1945 and 1965, have historically had a strong generational presence because of the high number of them in the workplace. They grew up during the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, Watergate, and other high-profile controversies. Stereotypically, they are known for being achievement oriented and competitive, placing an emphasis on material success. Empirical research has found them to have a higher propensity for self-achievement and self-reliance than other generations (Becton et al., 2014). Like their predecessors, they are loyal to an organization and respect authority, but it is their competitive and materialistic nature that sets them apart.

The Generation Xers were raised in times of economic instability, high divorce rates, inflation, downsizing, and recessions (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Becton et al. (2014) argued that it is also important to note that this generation's parents (baby boomers) were compulsively hard workers, which is believed to have a tremendous impact on Gen Xers' beliefs towards work; these beliefs include a distrust of corporations, individualism, lack of loyalty, and a focus on life–work balance. Research has found that this generation is more likely to leave an employer for advancement or a higher salary, not having the same level of loyalty to an employer as their parents had. Egri and Relson (as cited in Becton et al., 2014) found that this generation is not as focused on self-enhancement and does show more openness to change. They view work as a part of life but not as a defining element.

While traditionalists and baby boomers share many similar characteristics, it is possible that the shift with the Generation Xers has contributed to the start of the contrast of millennials.

In what is now deemed as one of the most generationally diverse work environments to exist due to the need to work longer before retiring, employers are seeing gaps emerging among their workforce, which is becoming increasingly populated with millennials. Older millennials, those in their early thirties, are already becoming established in the workplace, while the young members of the millennial age group are starting to enter the workforce rapidly (Hackel, 2016). It is anticipated that by 2025, millennials will make up 75% of the workforce (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2015), so garnering an understanding of this generation in the next few years will be the key to success. The current generational mix in the workplace makes leadership more complex (Hall, 2016), so understanding the views of various generations is critical to a successful organization.

Impact of generations in the workplace. As the current literature suggests, educational leaders need to be more conscious not only of the potential differences that emerge among generations but how to address these changes as they arise. Gardner (1987) emphasized the role of followers in leadership. In order for a leader to succeed, the leader must understand the followers, including which generational cohort they belong to and how that influences their preferences. Even if a leader is an effective decision maker and strategic planner, he will fail if he does not address the unique needs and motivational level of his followers. Leadership is not possible without the followers, and this literature emphasizes the complex impact of generational diversity in the workplace.

Existing Beliefs about Millennials

The topic of millennials in the workplace is not new, but they are a demographic group that is garnering more interest and discussion (LaCore, 2015). As more millennials enter the workplace, there are concerns that their predispositions and behaviors will affect organizations negatively if not harnessed correctly (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Millennials are known as the "look at me" generation, an implication that they are self-confident and self-absorbed (Pew Research Center as cited in Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 225). Additional stereotypes surrounding millennials include that they are self-centered, lack motivation, demonstrate less respect for authority, and are increasingly disloyal (2010); as previously mentioned, these trends were seen in some degree by the Generation Xers. They are also deemed to be narcissistic and entitled (Thompson & Brodie as cited in Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2016). These typecasts are consistent with those from the often-cited book, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (Howe & Strauss, 2009 who argued that millennials are "special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving" (Much, Wagener, Breitkreutz & Hellenbrand, 2014, p. 37). These preconceived notions certainly generate negative opinions that supervisors might have towards millennials and increase the probability that clashes might occur. More important, if valid, these characteristics have the ability to influence how millennials act in the workplace.

Some research cites technology as partly to blame for the change in culture in this new generations; millennials are being called "digital natives," and their exposure and connections to technology are opposed to some of the traditional methods of their workplace counterparts (Otey, 2013, p. 204). The link, and often dependence, to

technologyrg has contributed to some of perceptions regarding millennials. However, having been the first generation to grow up with computers might actually be considered a "redeeming characteristic" (Baker Rosa & Hastings, 2016, p. 53). It is possible that this connection to technology can be beneficial to workplace efficiency.

In a study focused on college-aged millennials, the researchers used a qualitative methodology similar to the current study to explore the university staff's general perceptions of the millennial generation. It is important to note that this prior study focused on the beliefs toward millennials held by their professors, not the beliefs of millennials themselves (Much et. al., 2014. While the purposeful sampling of 20 individuals brings some concerns of whether this study can have broader implications, it does shed some light on how millennials are viewed by previous generations. Among the two most significant findings were the perceptions of millennials and rules. The study found that interview participants routinely had millennials ask that the rules be changed for them, coming with the expectation that they do not need to abide by the rules (2015). This further perpetuates the ideas that millennials are self-centered. The professors attributed this to a generation of overaccommodating parents and a belief that millennials are "special" as individuals (Much, et. al, 2015), solidifying the label of the look at me generation (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). It is interesting to think how these beliefs then carry over into the workplace after college. Additionally, professors highlighted that millennials tend to blame others and ignore problems so that they go away, summarized by the researchers as millennials' passive approach to problems (2015). Moreover, they did not view millennials as active problem solvers but felt that they are overly reliant on their parents or other authority figures to help them navigate their problems. These

findings help to further preserve the beliefs of previous generations about millennials. Regardless of the potential validity of these beliefs, their mere existence skews the relationships that can occur in the workplace.

The existing research highlights the stereotypes, many of which are negative towards millennials in the workplace. Various authors have labeled millennials as narcissistic, confident, and unmotivated, among many others. While some previous literature blames technology for encouraging these characteristics, the use of technology, as supported in other research, is actually a benefit to millennials' skillsets. So, what does this say about millennials more generally? If one were to read only some of the research, it would perpetuate the negative characteristics like those held by professors in the Much et al. (2015) study. Research has begun to determine that while these stereotypes might be valid, there are ways to harness them in the workplace for success. There are certainly "clashes" (Much et al., 2015, p. 155) that exist in the workplace because of not only the increase in millennials working but also the amount of attention surrounding them. By understanding the generational differences that exist, the preferences of millennials in the workplace, and their needs in professional development, educational leaders can begin to support millennial employees more effectively.

Millennials' Preferences in the Workplace

Studies exploring the preferences of millennials both in the workplace and more generally do exist and are increasing. As the research begins to expand, there is a need to cross reference the findings for both commonality and validity. In addition to exploring the beliefs about millennials, it is also imperative to understand how their own preferences and desires in the workplace are either supported or hindered by these beliefs.

After all, workplace values have been acknowledged as a robust construct that influences factors such as job satisfaction, commitment or loyalty to an organization, and organizational behaviors (Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015).

Personal preferences in the workplace. In the study, "Millennials at Work: Investigating the Specificity of Generation Y versus other Generations" Pinzaru et al., 2016), personality inventories were distributed to a convenience sample of more than 1000 people from the millennial generation (in this study defined as adults age 29 years and younger in the year 2016) and more than 3000 people from other generations (ages above 29 years). Using *t* tests to analyze their data, the researchers concluded that millennials show "a lower level of sustained energy, low resistance to pressure and stress, a more fragile self-esteem, less determination in achieving results (especially when faced with barriers), impatience when dealing with less appealing tasks or tasks requiring a sustained effort, poor attention for details and work quality" (Pinzaru et al., 2016, p. 185). Consistent with other studies, these findings continue the thematic beliefs about millennials in the workplace as being needy, self-centered, and lacking a solid work ethic. Additionally, they found that millennial employees are more likely to have negative outlooks than their older workmates, demonstrate a higher preference for egocentrism and self-promotion, display a tendency of dominating those around them, and become easily aggravated under stress; these studies are aligned with other research that supports such propensities (Pinzaru et al., 2016). Furthermore, the study found that millennials are motivated by recognition, public acknowledgement, instant and frequent feedback, and gratification. They resent having to work after hours and require a flexible schedule (Pinzaru et al., 2016). They do, however, enjoy being a part of various social networks,

are motivated by a nonconformist environment, and enjoy interacting with others from various backgrounds. These preferences not only perpetuate the stereotypes surrounding the generation, but they are beginning to also have greater implications for the workplace. By understanding these tendencies, one will begin to see the connections to professional development in the educational setting.

Career expectations of millennials. These conclusions are aligned with the findings in another study that investigated the career expectations of millennials compared to other generations (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2016). Using a sample of 27,592 post-secondary students, the survey focused on career, advancement, and pay expectations. While millennials agreed that the first job may not be the most desirable, more than two thirds expected to be promoted within 18 months of their first job and that their salary would increase by an average of $26,699 from their starting salary to 5 years post graduation (Ng et al., 2016). Consistent with the idea that millennials are impatient to succeed, they rated career advancement as the most desirable work-related attribute. Second to this desire was the preference for good training and developing new skills so that they could take on higher positions (Ng et al., 2016). A preference for good people in the workplace indicates that the social aspects of work are also important to millennials (Ng et al., 2016). Based on this information, Ng et al. (2016) concluded that there are certain things that employers can do to attract millennials in the workplace. While somewhat controversial, they argued that supervisors should use the same strategies of coddling, support, and praise to which millennials have become accustomed. The researchers also contend that because millennials need this type of consistent, frequent feedback, maybe it is best to pay them a one percent increase three times a year, rather

than giving them a 3.5% raise at the end of the year (Corporate Leadership Council as cited in (Ng et al., 2016). This study emphasized that the millennial preferences are affecting the environment in the workplace and that educational leaders must be sensitive to these changes.

Communication preferences in the workplace. Another study used a survey method to understand the expectations for communication that a group of undergraduate business students of the millennial generation held. Among the major conclusions of the study was that millennials believe that the culture of a workplace is extremely important to them (Hall, 2016). Within that culture, millennials hold the expectation that their opinions be heard and valued at work. Additionally, 76% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I need to understand how my job fits into the bigger picture" (p. 39). While many respondents indicated that they would appreciate constructive criticism, the open-ended responses highlighted a need for respect and consistent positive feedback, consistent with findings across the literature. An intriguing and relevant finding is that while millennials want to learn from veteran colleagues, they do not necessarily want to develop a relationship with that coworker and are not typically comfortable asking for assistance from their peers (Hall, 2016).

Consistency within the generation. In a study of workplace preferences, it is also important to understand if the differences in opinions are based on the life and career stages an employee is in rather than just the generation. Since millennials span the age range of early twenties to the early thirties, it is possible that there could be variations between the older and younger age groups. For example, does a 30-year-old millennial who has been in their position for over 5 years and has a young family at home hold

different views than a millennial entering the workplace straight of out of school? If so, does this negate generational differences? A a study of 906 millennials spanning from pre-career to working was done to answer such questions (Kuron et. al., 2015). Embedded in other literature as a foundation and through the use of multivariate analysis, the researchers were able to determine that millennials' workplace values do not vary significantly. Across the spectrum of work experience, millennials still placed a preference on: "extrinsic work values, followed by intrinsic, social/altruistic and prestige work values, regardless of whether they were students or had started their careers" (Kuron et. al, 2015, p. 1001). Interestingly, this is different than previous generations, including Generation Xers and baby boomers, who, according to various studies, shifted in their beliefs as they transitioned into their working lives. The fact that millennials remain relatively stable in their beliefs makes it even more important that employers begin to understand their unique needs and preferences as they are not expected to change with maturity or experience. It also raises the question whether or not millennials are capable of developing the emotional intelligence skills that are imperative in the workplace, including practicing transformative learning.

Understanding millennial preferences in the workplace. By understanding millennials' preferences in the workplace, researchers and, ultimately, educational leaders can start to develop work cultures that are conducive to this generation. As the literature suggests in the study by Pinzaru (2016), one major takeaway is that millennials are less likely to put in the additional effort to overcome problems and become frustrated more easily than peers in other generations. This information coupled with the findings that millennials are motivated by recognition and feedback can help leaders adjust their

approach to how they may react to their younger employees. Ng et al. (2016) found that millennials are likely to switch careers quickly, especially if they do not seek advancement in the near future (Ng, et. al, 2016). Millennial employees may also seek other employment if they feel that their opinions and values are not heard, and they do not have a relationship with their employer (Hall, 2016). These preferences are not likely to change over time either, as older and younger millennials tend to share the same beliefs regardless of how long they have been in the field (Kuron et. al., 2015). While this current investigation does not focus on the broader workplace environment, these studies support the argument that the success of millennials in the workplace is dependent on understanding and adjustment by employers. The existing literature reviewed seems to suggest that leaders must make a conscious effort to recognize and support millennial preferences in the workplace.

Transformative Learning Theory

Professional growth is a key component of workplace success. However, in order for one to grow, an employee must understand both how they learn and what they need to learn. This qualitative research dissertation is embedded in the theoretical framework of transformative learning theory in addition to generational cohort theory. First introduced by Jack Mezirow, this theory argues that learning is formed by references, structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's point of view (Taylor, 2008). It is more than just implementing new instructional strategies with adult learners; rather, it involves teaching from a particular worldview and educational philosophy. According to literature, millennials are entering the workplace with references that are different from previous generations. This research seeks to understand the frame of reference for

millennials to best develop professional development and support that will ultimately transform their frame of reference to become more "inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective and integrative of experience" (Mezirow as cited in Taylor, 2008, p. 6), as these are qualities of effective educators.

Transformative learning theory is embedded in the belief that "it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance" (Mezirow, 1991, p. xiii). If this holds true, then millennials, who research has shown have a very different lens through which they view the world, are certainly going to interpret and explain both their workplace experiences and professional development very differently than previous generations. It is through understanding adult learning and how "meaning" (1991, p. xiv) is developed that we can begin to fully grasp how millennials truly differ from their predecessors and begin to make sense of how to move forward in an educational workplace.

Shifts in understanding. Transformative learning theory is centered around the concept that adults must wrestle with a shift in their understanding or assumptions in order to cope with new information (King, 2009). It describes experiences that adult learners might have as they examine "previously unquestioned assumptions, try out new strategies, views and approaches, and begin to ultimately transition to a significantly new place in their understanding of values, beliefs, assumptions, themselves and their world" (King, 2009, p. 4). While the theory of transformative learning has evolved into a complex and multifaceted set of theoretical perspectives, the underlying constructionist belief is that meaning exists within ourselves and not in external forms, with our personal

meanings being acquired and validated through human interaction and experience (Mezirow as cited in Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Therefore, millennials have developed their sense of meaning and understanding through their interactions growing up within a generation that has been coddled, self-serving, and individualistic. If this is the case, their sense of meaning could be drastically altered when entering a workforce that has been designed around generations with very different perspectives. It is, therefore, imperative to begin to understand the differences that might exist, how to navigate learning, and how to mitigate the potential negative effects while maximizing the conceivable benefits of such varying mindsets.

Self-reflection and dialogic moments. Self-reflection is an ultimate goal of transformative theory, aligning with the four realms of emotional intelligence in the workplace: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman, 2004). Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2001) argued that emotional intelligence is a critical determinant in workplace success. For millennial educators to succeed in the workplace, they must be able to reflect on their own beliefs and progress. By using a qualitative research design, this research seeks to start providing a container for millennials to reflectively discuss their learning while answering the research question: How do millennial staff members describe their own learning styles and preferences for professional development?

Current literature suggests, however, that these types of discussions and reflective practices need to be purposeful and centered on relationships or groups. "Dialogic moments" (Schapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos, 2012, p. 357) occur when there is a moment of dissonance in the context of a group. Schapiro (as cited in Schapiro et al.,

2012) stated that these contexts could include a class on improvisation, non-formal collaborative learning among peers, participatory action research projects, and mentor-guided student-centered educational programs. When an adult learner is effectively exposed to this type of group setting, it promotes transformative learning. It could be argued, therefore, that millennials should learn in groups if they are to have professional growth and personal development.

Transformative learning theory and organizational change. Transformative learning in the workplace has also been studied as a means of organizational change. Linked intrinsically to the ideas of change theory, or more specifically organization transformation theory, transformative learning has the ability to positively impact the work environment. Change in an organization is inevitable, but success is not guaranteed. It is only when an organization effectively plans will it be able to ensure more efficient and sustainable change. Educational organizations in particular are not exempt from these unavoidable changes; rather, they are in desperate need of efficacious innovation and transformation. Peter Senge (as cited in Fullan, 2011) argued that "no institution has a more critical role to play in the historic changes coming than school because no institution has greater potential to impact how a society changes over the long term" (p.xi). Heifetz (as cited in Watkins, Marsick, & Faller, 2012) argued that the type of adaptive challenges people face today are not compatible with past solutions. There needs to be "collective, critical reflection in, on, or through action to build new opportunities or to address troubling challenges, sometimes catalyzed by leaders with a mandate for organizational change" (Watkins et al., 2009, p. 374). In an effort to support double loop learning in organizational change, educational leaders must create an environment that is

conducive to transformative learning and encourage it among all staff members, but particularly the growing employee population of millennials. What is yet to be determined is if this type of learning is both attractive to this group of millennials and if it is effective. The literature suggests that transformative learning is imperative to growth, but this research examined if millennials and professional learning invoke the concepts that Mezirow (1991) and his contemporaries set forth.

Millennials and Professional Learning

While there are limited studies on transformative learning as it specifically relates to millennials, there are studies that have reviewed the unique preferences of millennials in the workplace and professional learning. The concept that professionals need to grow and learn in an organization is neither new nor revolutionary. However, the methods and emphasis placed on professional learning and development have been the evolving factors. Jack Mezirow (1991) argued that adult educators tend to use the approaches that they have experienced in universities or public schools to try to teach other adults but often find these approaches to be dysfunctional. Combine this futile approach with the existing generational differences, and education has found itself in a place where those who encourage learning among the youth do not want to learn themselves.

Millennial preferences for professional learning. However, as we try to better understand the best practices to use with millennials, there is foundational work on their preferences in this area. Among the leading studies was one that investigated the learning preferences of millennials in a for-profit, high-technology U.S. corporation using a qualitative research study of 10 participants and in-depth interviews that explored organizational learning support preferences. Thompson (2016) concluded that existing

research data and his analysis show that there are specific learning support preferences of millennials. Among the preferences listed, millennials stated that they needed to understand the "big picture" (p. 22) about what they were going to learn, how they were going to learn, how this learning will benefit them, and how the organization will benefit from their learning. This information sheds light on the supporting research questions regarding what millennials value most in professional development.

When exploring the question about the types of professional development millennials prefer, millennials also demonstrated a desire for shortened learning-cycles with "just the right amount of information" (p. 20); this is also linked to a preference for independent and small group learning. One of the most salient findings of the study by Thompson (2016) is the desire for millennials to have subject-matter experts or trainers that should demonstrate a genuine interest in the success of the millennial employee. To have this type of interest, the "learning guide" (p. 100) would need to meet with the millennial, follow up on outcomes of learning, and have discussions regularly with the millennial staff member (Thompson, 2016). This type of mentoring also involves having a more senior worker tutor, giving advice, and enhancing the career prospects of the junior mentee (Moberg, 2008). Fortunately, these preferences are inherently linked to the ideas of relationship. This study has practical implications for the types of learning and peer support that should be occurring in the workplace.

Learning preferences of millennials in college. There is also research that exists to help address the question of which learning styles millennials prefer. To better understand the learning preferences of medical students, a convenience sample of 40 second-year nursing students was recruited. During the first few weeks of class, the

professor lectured with PowerPoint slides, showed short video clips, facilitated small group activities, assigned readings, and distributed concept maps (Garwood, 2015). In the middle of the course, students were given a formative assessment in which they were asked several questions about what teaching and learning strategies used in this class helped them learn and better understand the content. The research concluded that millennial students "identified a preference for reflective, interactive, and engaging learning strategies such as group quizzes, concept maps, and interactive group activities" (Garwood, 2015, p. 42). Along with other research that supports the argument that millennials are "digital natives" (Otey, 2013, p. 204), the use of technology was also an effective tool to help collaboratively engage students. The authors of these studies concluded that there has been a paradigm shift from passive to interactive and goal-directed learning with the emergence of the millennials. This dissertation investigates whether or not these characteristics are also applicable to millennials who have entered the educational environment as employees, not college students.

Types of professional development. Research has also focused on the effectiveness of various types of professional development for educators. Much emphasis has been placed on the need for professional learning communities. The term, *professional learning community*, embraces the idea that experts in the field should participate in continuous growth and curiosity in a group that has common interests and supports to achieve an action (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Professional learning communities (PLCs) focus on collective inquiry, consistently challenging the status quo, and seeking and testing new methods (1998) and have been found to be effective means of teacher growth. Other studies have found that extending opportunities to teachers for

experiential learning in the classroom have been effective (Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016). Other research has argued that professional development needs to have a strong focus on content, inquiry-oriented learning approaches, collaborative participation, and alignment with school policies and curriculum maps (Badri, Alnuaimi, Mohaidat, Yang & Al Rashedi, 2016). In the realm of higher education, a quick review finds that much of the emphasis is on strategies of preparing pre-service teachers, but there seems to be a gap in understanding how to continually develop educator learning once they receive a position in a school. In the overall relation to this study, there is very limited information as to how these suggested professional development types support the learning needs and preferences of millennial educators.

Professional development preferences. There is some current literature that seeks to join the types of professional learning with the preferences and values of millennials. Using a quantitative study and previous data from questionnaires, Canadian researchers sought to determine the best model of feedback and professional learning for millennial medical students. The researchers concluded that competency based medical education (CBME) was most compatible with the personality traits of millennials (Desy, Reed, & Wolanskyj, 2017). The survey data revealed that millennials prefer explicit goals and objects, personalized and self-directed teaching methods, deliberate training in professionalism skills, continuous and frequent assessments, explicit feedback, and a need to affect positive change. Using these findings, they, then, matched the characteristics of CBME and found that there were similar emphases on continuous performance evaluation, explicit feedback, high expectations and standards, and public accountability. While this study provides a model of how to match millennial preferences

to various methods, more research is needed: research that explicitly asks millennials about their preferences of both learning style and professional development can better help to marry the two topics rather than merely taking existing information and applying it to a model. However, this current study validates the objectives in another field to also find ways to meet the needs of this unique generation.

Correlation of age and professional development. While much of the research has focused on businesses, there have been some fundamental explorations of the correlation of age and professional development in the field of education. A growing body of research has shown that developmental opportunities at work, often considered a job resource, are strong predictors of work engagement (DeLange et al. as cited in Van der Heijden, Van Vuuren, & Kooji, 2015). This is because opportunities for development and to enhance skills help employees meet their needs for personal growth through continuous learning and self-development (DePater et al. as cited in Van der Heijden et al., 2015). Driven by these two concepts, Van der Heijden and his team (2015) wanted to determine if age and proactive personality played a role in the importance of professional development for teachers. Using a survey design of Dutch teachers ($N = 180$), they discovered that the implementation of age-conscious developmental opportunities is a meaningful tool in encouraging staff to pursue professional development. The researchers found that there is no influence of age on the correlation between developmental opportunities and work engagement. However, they found a significant effect of age and professional development opportunities on self-perceived employability, with a stronger association between older workers than younger ones. This means that older staff members feel that their ability to learn new skills is linked to their ability to be employed.

While this increased older staff member's self-perceived employability, the team also found that older teachers do not think that professional development is valuable in terms of their enjoyment at work. Other research (Koijj et al as cited in Van der Heijden et al., 2015) has found that employees' motivation to actually engage in challenging work from which they would gain new skills decreases with age but that the motivation to engage in interesting work utilizing existing skills increases with age. With this knowledge, Van der Heijden (2015) argued that age-conscious professional development is necessary. Combining his survey study with previous research, he argued that older workers would benefit and prefer learning in informal settings because they prefer to learn new skills and put them to use, while younger workers are more likely to want formal programs at educational institutes and work-related training. Their concluding argument was that professional development should be tailored around age. This validates some of my intentions with my own research.

Understanding millennials and professional development. Much of what we understand about millennials and professional learning is found in other industries, including corporations and the medical field. However, this information provides a foundational understanding of how millennial educational professionals prefer to learn. Among the most prevalent findings in the study by Thompson (2016) was that millennials need to know how what they are going to learn is beneficial to them and the big picture. In the same study, the researcher found that millennials want expert trainers that are genuinely interested in the success of millennials, which is related to the egocentric stereotypes previously discussed. While conducted in the higher education setting, the study by Garwood (2015) is also valuable in understanding that millennials

also prefer interactive and engaging learning strategies. The study by Desy et al. (2017) supported the findings in these other studies, as millennials wanted explicit training with continuous feedback and a recognizable benefit. The existing literature has breached the surface of understanding millennial learning, and this study seeks to expand on what we know by placing it in the context of educational professionals.

While the field of education seems to emphasize professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), there is no agreed-upon approach to professional development, and there is a gap in understanding how to best support educators once they leave the education setting. However, this gap may be the opening that educational leaders need to introduce learning that meets the needs of millennial educators. Because the field of education is not dominated by one type of adult learning, this makes it possible for administrators to understand the learning preferences of their younger employees and employ strategies that meet these needs. Rather than emphasize a particular method of professional development, this research focused on the characteristics of professional development that millennials prefer, giving flexibility for educational leaders to choose types of learning that meet these characteristics.

Conclusion

The existing literature is helpful in understanding the foundational information regarding the topic of millennials and their preferences in professional learning. Research on the generational differences has grown exponentially, highlighting the differences between the emerging workforce and their predecessors. Studies have focused on the leaders' beliefs about millennials and the existing stereotypes. Other research has

switched the focus onto what millennials believe about work. The literature is strong and growing in these areas.

Unfortunately, much of the current research on millennials in the workplace has focused on generational differences in the health care or business fields, but the education field has only looked at millennials as learners in higher education, as some are still in college, without viewing them as employees that need professional development. Millennials are making up the majority of teachers, educational professionals, and even emerging as administrators. If educational leaders ignore these generational shifts while still trying to mandate professional learning, there can be a detrimental disconnect.

With all of the layers of generational shifts, the unique dispositions of millennials, and the need for this age group to be effective educators, more information is necessary to understand how millennials can best be supported in the educational setting. It is impossible to ignore the inevitable growing population of millennials in the workplace, so the question becomes: How can educational leaders best support millennial staff members? To answer that question, one must also ask: (a) what differences exist among millennials and other staff members that influence the type of support needed to be successful in the workplace and (b) what types of clashes do these differences generate and how can they be mitigated in the workplace. Current educational leadership research focuses on professional learning communities, but if we cannot create communities among the staff because of generational differences, then our approach to professional development might need to be reviewed. There is little research on professional support of millennials specifically in the educational setting, Therefore, a qualitative study on the millennial preferences of professional learning in the workplace is needed to determine

how to best support them in a workplace that demands transformative learning and organizational change.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative research methods and grounded theory design are particularly suited to this study. The characteristics of each of these theories allow for the exploration of data to answer the proposed research questions while also placing the information in the context of the existing literature. Throughout this chapter, I explain how this particular methodology is appropriate for my research.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the professional development preferences of millennials in order to develop a theoretical model and recommendations for educational leaders to best support this emerging population. As described in the literature review, this generation has unique predilections and desires in the workplace that translate into not only potential conflict but also certain needs. Because these preferences impact the work ethic and need for growth of millennials, they potentially impact the types and means of professional learning, or professional development in the world of education, in which millennials are willing to invest. By determining millennial preferences in professional development through an exploration of their own learning styles, what has worked best for them in the past, and the characteristics they value the most, I hope to develop a theoretical model and recommendations for educational leaders to maximize their professional development for this growing generational population.

This chapter outlines the methodology used to examine preferences of millennials to develop a theory and recommendations for best practice. The chapter begins by restating the research questions and rationale before launching into a description of the research design, including my worldview, assumptions, and the literature supporting the

choice of the particular method. The population and sample are explained in depth as well. The chapter then moves to the instruments and methods used to collect data. After describing the methods of data collection, I then explain how that data is coded and analyzed. Next, I address the issues of credibility and trustworthiness as they relate to my study. Finally, I include a description of my role as a researcher and ethical assurances that need to be assured. Overall, I provide a strong foundation for the qualitative methodology of my research.

Research Questions

The methodology for this dissertation is designed to answer the research question: How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation? To support this overarching question, I plan to answer the following supporting research questions as well:

1. How do millennial staff members describe how they learn best and their preferences for professional development?
2. What types of professional development do millennials believe have been most helpful to their growth so far?
3. What characteristics of professional development are valued most by millennials (i.e., teamwork, personalization, practical application, etc.)?

While it is important to understand the preferences of millennials generally, as an educational leader, it is imperative to take that information and transform it into best practices that can be implemented. I hope to extrapolate that information received from millennials to determine their learning styles, which types of professional development

are consistent with these styles, and what characteristics of professional learning are most valued to help millennials transition into the work place and succeed once they are there.

Research Design and Rationale

This research study is embedded in qualitative inquiry, a heuristic process of discovering and creating knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). More specifically, it is based in the aspects of grounded theory, one of the types of qualitative research. Although surveys and quantitative methods were considered, it was important for me to interact with millennial staff to question, clarify, and discuss their understanding of professional development in order to draw more precise conclusions that can develop into a theory of practice. The data provided through interviews, field notes, and document analysis will add a new dimension to this issue that cannot be obtained through the quantitative measurement of variables alone (Parthak et al., 2013). Because of this, I have studied the aspects of qualitative research to ensure that my methodology aligns with the foundational components. I aim to provide a methodological congruence in which my purpose, questions, and methods are all interconnected and interrelated (Morse & Richards as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is "an approach for exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4), so in this case, it is the exploration of millennials' views or perspectives of professional learning. Essentially, qualitative research gives the participants a voice and helps to explore the information in a humanistic approach. This study is methodologically aligned with Creswell's (2013) insistence that researchers should study a problem by collecting data in the natural setting with the purpose of determining themes and patterns. In the final

aspects of his definition, Creswell (2013) notes that the overall report must include the voices of the participants, the researcher's reflexivity, and an analytical interpretation of the problem, including how it contributes to the current literature or a call to action. My subsequent chapters highlight all of these aspects.

Qualitative research should be used when there is an issue or problem that needs to be explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In terms of this study, the problem is that millennials demonstrate unique characteristics and preferences in the workplace that call into question the traditional practices of professional development that occur in school environments. Based on the current literature, there are glaring differences between millennials and other generations, especially the baby boomers and traditionalists, and it is these differences that are causing clashes in the workplace. If educational leaders want to best support their staff members, they need a complex, detailed understanding of the differences in order to design meaningful professional development experiences for this growing generation. This type of understanding cannot be generated by surveys and data; rather, it must be established by talking to millennials and allowing them to tell their own perspectives, many of which have been overshadowed by the negative stereotypes of the generation. Qualitative research empowers them to tell their stories while mitigating the power relationship that may exist between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If we give millennials a voice in the process, then they will not only feel that they have input in the organization, but the organization can learn to adapt to their growing needs. It should be noted that this idea of adaptation is often debated as workplaces feel that it is the employee who should adapt to the environment, but through the use of qualitative research, a better understanding of common ground may emerge.

Worldview and Assumptions

Qualitative research is composed of core paradigms that inform the research and identify worldviews that essentially "shape the conceptualization, practice, and nature of research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016 p. 42). These paradigms include postpositivist, constructivist/interpretivist, critical theory, and pragmatism (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The constructivism/interpretivism model is consistent with my worldview and has been chosen for this study. I view the world as socially constructed through interaction and that there are multiple realities and meanings that are agreed upon in the natural setting (Durdella, 2017). Reality is, therefore, constructed through social, cultural, and historical interactions. This paradigm is also based on the assumption that individuals develop subjective meanings of their own experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). I explored the socially constructed views of millennials, starting from the assumption that their beliefs about professional learning have been constructed based on their interactions and experiences. I believe they are coming to the research table with a set of beliefs that are both subjective and constructed over time. It is through understanding these generational views, how they have been developed, and what they truly are, that I develop a better understanding of a larger theory of generational professional learning preferences.

As an educational leader, I have developed my own subjective opinions through my experiences. I personally have witnessed the clashes among the generations; my staff members have used phrases such as "those millennials" and words like "lazy" and "entitled" when referring to their millennial coworkers. I feel that these opinions have become socially constructed over time, and sometimes even I feel like I can fall into those opinions when I am frustrated with the work ethic of a younger generation. My

desire to pursue this research topic has been the result of those experiences but also stems from a professional and personal need to better understand the differences and even similarities in the workplace to create a more productive and welcoming environment. I also want to understand why I as a millennial have climbed the leadership ladder within the short 9 years of my career, but others in my generation seem so content to leave the school doors exactly at 3:00 p.m. I have relentlessly pursued professional development opportunities including graduate school, international experiences, and weekend seminars, yet most in this age group seem so disinterested in growing professionally. I have started to wonder what subjective experiences each of us have had that sets us apart from each other but also collectively from our more experienced coworkers.

Rationale for Grounded Theory

Within the realm of qualitative research, there are various genres of inquiry. These include case study, ethnography, phenomenology, and others (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to embed my research in the concepts of grounded theory, which was originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a challenge to traditional methodology because it argued that systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory at the same time (Charmaz, 2014). The desire to develop an improved theory of professional learning that supports millennials is aligned with these purposes of grounded theory. Charmaz (2014) defined grounded theory as a "rigorous method of conducting research in which researchers construct conceptual frameworks or theories through building inductive theoretical analysis from data and subsequently checking their theoretical interpretations"

(p. 343). It was through my data collection and analysis that I was able to develop a meaningful theory about millennial preferences of professional learning.

Grounded theory has become one of the most popular qualitative designs, particularly for those in the field of social science (Durdella, 2017). It has evolved as a method to analyze data to uncover patterns of interrelated events and actions. Grounded theory has become a framework of "discovery" (Glaser & Strauss as cited in Durdella, 2017 p. 102) in which data is used systematically but with flexibility to determine a theory. The main focus of this methodology is on the data collection and analysis through the use of various strategies from personal interviews to observations to critical incident reports (Durdella, 2017). There are few rules in grounded theory, but there is a significant emphasis on concurrent data collection and analysis. During this process, the researcher interacts with the data to make further decisions about where the research should go (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sampling, a major concept of this genre, involves jointly collecting and coding data in order to determine which participants, documents, records, and events the research needs next. Throughout the process of grounded theory, it is also important to practice constant comparative data analysis to determine relationships among larger grouping of coding segments (Durdella, 2017). As I begin to code my information, I need to constantly compare it in order to develop a larger theory and to fill in gaps that might exist. My research, which seeks to find patterns and theories among millennial preferences of professional development, was guided by the aspects of grounded theory as it gave me both the flexibility and structure to engage with both my participants and the process in order to make sense of what is happening. In addition, I employed Charmaz's (2006) foundations of guided research evaluation to ensure the

criteria of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness throughout my study. This ensures that the research followed the framework of this methodology while also contributing to the field of research.

Population and Sample

The project specifically focused on a county-level educational services commission in a mid-Atlantic state. An educational services commission provides supplement staff members to school districts to fill personnel needs, provide specialized services to students, and offer professional development. There is a staff of 220 members with approximately 40 millennial staff members; the staff consists of special education teachers, teachers of the deaf, related services therapists, nurses, and other support staff members. An organization that strives to provide the highest supplemental and educational services to over 40 school districts in a local county, the unit operates much like a business rather than a traditional school. School districts contract with the unit to provide services and staff in a variety of areas including, but not limited to, related services (occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech), deaf and hard of hearing services, assistive technology, and child study team evaluations. There are several other competitive third-party companies that can provide these services as well, so it is imperative that the educational services unit provides the highest level of professional staff and the highest quality services. Professional learning is a key to this goal, so it is critical that we understand how to best promote and adapt professional development for all of our staff members.

Sampling Strategy and Participants

It is impossible to gather intensive, in-depth information about all members of this population, so sampling is imperative (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Sampling involves determining the location or site of the research, the participants who will give data and how they will be sampled, the number of participants needed, and the recruitment procedures to gather these participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I selected participants that were going to help answer my research questions about millennial preferences in professional learning. For the interviews, all participants were full-time staff members of the educational services commission who are of the millennial generation. The unit of analysis in this phase is the individual. Using criterion sampling, I created a pool of millennial candidates from the educational services unit staff list of 156 members. The 156 staff members are comprised of 40 millennials, 67 Generation Xers, 48 baby boomers, and 1 traditionalist. Criterion sampling is used to identify participants who meet a specific standard of interest. In this study the criterion was those employees with birthdates that fall within the generation of millennials (Patton, 2002). It was important to select millennials because they are able to shed the best light on their own generational preferences. The participants were then reduced to a list of the 40 identified millennials. Thirty participants were randomly chosen and asked to voluntarily participate in the study with the hope of gaining at least 20 participants. All of the chosen participants received a recruitment email that outlined the purpose of the study, highlights the research question, details the participants confidentiality and voluntary participation, includes the consent form, and attaches the IRB approval form. They were asked to respond to that email with an affirmation or declination of their willingness to participate in the study.

After my first round of interviews, I assessed my data and used theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) to choose my next set of participants among the remaining pool of thirty millennials. The purpose of the first ten interviews was to determine whether or not my interview protocol was effective in answering my research questions. After these interviews, I revised several of my questions specifically around the format of the professional development, online learning, the qualifications of the speaker, and the relevance of the information. Additionally, the responses in the first ten interviews helped me determine that my next set of millennials needed to be from a wide age-range of the generation rather than choosing those only in the younger or older age groups in the span. While these first ten participants had also been from a wide-range of ages of millennials, I had initially thought that maybe my research would eventually hone on a potential subset of millennials; through doing these initial interviews I realized that was the incorrect mindset and I should continue with this wider range. In order to confirm that the data I had collected was consistent across all millennials, it was important for me to choose millennials across the spectrum of the age-range through theoretical sampling. This type of sampling, which is unique to grounded theory, is different from conventional sampling in that it allows the researcher to follow the lead of the research and then develop the data collection to those areas that will help further develop a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In theoretical sampling, all of the data collection does not occur before the analysis; rather, the analysis drives further data collection. To do this, I examined the information I gained from my first round of data collection to determine which participant characteristics and documents I needed to pursue next. Grounded theory typically relies on 20 to 30 personal interviews (Durdella, 2017), so this is the target total

number of participants to gain enough information to reach saturation. However, I needed to be open-minded as theoretical sampling seeks to find statements, events, or cases that highlight the categories I have developed through my initial analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Because grounded theory requires me to interact with the data in order to make decisions, I must be flexible in how I continue to choose my participants.

Data Collection

Meaningful data collection is critical in a study and should be focused on answering the research questions. This study utilized interviews, field notes, and document analysis to ensure that my analysis was reflective and accurate. These instruments are consistent with the quintessentially interactive nature of qualitative inquiry. While I could have chosen to conduct quantitative surveys to gain some of this information, it is important for me to interact with millennial staff to question, clarify, and discuss their understanding of professionalism. Additional field notes and document analysis gave me the ability to determine if consistent themes exist outside of what is stated by the participants.

Interviews. Interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It was necessary for me to use interviews to better understand the perspectives of millennial staff members. As a form of qualitative research, interviews give the participants a voice and helps to explore the information in a humanistic approach. By using in-depth qualitative interviewing, a researcher is able to gather rich and detailed information through open-ended questions in order to understand the "experiences, motives, and opinions of others" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3).

Charmaz (2014) argued that intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory particularly well because it is more open-ended, emergent, and less restricted than its quantitative counterpart. Interviews offer the interactive space and time for insights to emerge. However, when conducting interviews, grounded theorists need to be able to balance hearing the participant's story it its fullness, which is often an intention of an interview, while also searching for analytical properties and themes (Charmaz, 2014). In constructivist grounded theory interviews, the researcher typically focuses on eliciting the participant's definition of terms, situations, and events while trying to uncover their hidden meanings, assumptions, and unspoken rules. Often, what is not said in the interview can be just as meaningful as what is said. Because the constructivist's goal is to get the voice and ideas of the participants, asking a few questions allows the participant to tell his or her story without the interviewer preconceiving the content or the direction the interview will take (2014). In this way, interview conversations can be the site of further exploration, emerging ideas, and confirmation of experiences. (Charmaz, 2014).

For this study, the interviews were semi-structured with an interview protocol of 10 questions to guide the discussion; the protocol included an introductory explanation of the interview and a conclusion explaining the next steps in the process. While the interview questions were scripted, the actual interviews allowed for flexibility in response to participants' answers (Appendix A). Each interview lasted at least 30 minutes in length and was recorded on an application on the iPhone to ensure accuracy; the app only recorded sound, not video. To protect against potential technological difficulties, I also used a second recording device that ran simultaneously in case the iPhone fails. For convenience, the interviews occurred in a private office in the workplace setting. As the

researcher, I took notes during the session as well to identify themes as they emerged (Creswell, 2013). The interview included background about the participants, their previous experiences with professional development, discussion of their learning preferences, and the values they place on professional learning. The interviews were conducted individually rather than in focus groups to ensure that no responses are influenced by others' knowledge or opinions. Each interview was then transcribed so that it can be coded in the analysis process.

Observations and field notes. In addition to the interviews, I took qualitative field notes. In the field notes, I recorded, in an unstructured way, activities that occurred during various professional development sessions. I then used these field notes to write down anecdotal observations of behavior and interactions of millennials during the sessions. I was looking for the engagement of the millennials, their exchanges with others, and any other connections that might indicate their enjoyment in the activity. I observed the professional development as a participant in some cases and as an observer in others. I started as a "participant-outsider" (Creswell, 2013, p. 192) and fluidly move to more of a "participant-insider." My notes were handwritten and then typed so that they can be coded. A protocol, included in the appendix (Appendix C-E), is used for each field note or observation.

Document collection. In addition to interviewing, I also reviewed any extant documents. Extant documents, which are not affected by the researcher in the way that interviews may be, are often used by qualitative researchers to support their observational or interview findings (Charmaz, 2014). Analyzing these documents aligns with the belief that "what people do (or what they produce) tells the researcher as much as what people

say they do" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 258). In order to supplement the interviews that I conducted, I used document collection to determine if the materials that exist align with what the millennials are saying. Sample documents include professional development certificates of the participants, annual professional development plans, and any relevant emails. For each document, there was a protocol (Appendix C) that included recording the document type, location, author, date of creation, context, purpose, and addressed components of professional learning.

Data Analysis

Throughout the process, I continually analyzed my data. The data provided through interviews, field notes, observations, and document analysis added a new dimension to this issue that cannot be obtained through the measurement of variables alone (Parthak et al., 2013). In grounded theory in particular, it is important to collect data in a constant-comparative method to determine themes and patterns in order to explain what is occurring. Durdella (2017) argued that grounded theory structures data analysis as a simultaneous process of coding, grouping categorizing, and thematizing. To analyze the interviews, field notes, observations, and the documents, I utilized process and pattern coding, and simultaneously compared the themes to the data to determine what was happening in the research. Charmaz (2014) argued that coding is the critical link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory. Grounded theory coding involves two main phases: initial coding and a focused, selective phase that uses the initial codes to sort, synthesize, and organize the data.

Initial coding is necessary to begin to break down and understand the data in qualitative research. DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2010) described coding

as a "sense-making" endeavor (p. 137). In grounded theory, the research remains open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities may exist in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Interviews and documents are full of details and intricacies that have the ability to shed light on larger concepts, so coding allows the researcher to make sense of all of the information. This type of initial coding creates a raw data set that is easier to manage than lengthy passages and phrases. For researchers, personal interviews in particular provide usable data immediately available for analysis, usually after transcription (Durdella, 2017). By using process coding, which adds gerunds to connote action, I was able to touch on the ideas that the processes of human action can be "strategic, routine, random, novel, automatic, and/or thoughtful" (Corbin & Strauss as cited in Saldana, 2009, p.77). By adding *ing* to the coding, I am placing value on what the person is doing at that time, not just merely collecting labels as data or coding for types of people; the emphasis is placed on what is happening, an essential aspect of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Creswell (2013) argued that the researcher should keep types of codes in mind as there are three categories: codes on topics readers expect to find, surprising codes that are not anticipated, and codes that are unusual. By using coding, I was able to draw conclusions about professional development preferences of millennials.

However, to draw such conclusions, it is not sufficient to only do process coding. Pattern coding, a second cycle method, helps to connect those initial markings into broader themes that can be indicative of even more thoughtful conclusions. This process involves linking seemingly unrelated facts together in a logical manner (Saldana, 2016) and is inherently embedded in grounded theory. The connections are made not only within individual interviews but also across all of my interviews. It is the second-pattern

coding that takes the material from the first cycle and begins to answer the overarching research question while noting patterns and themes. First (process) and second (pattern) cycle coding provide a systematic process for understanding large amounts of information in order to answer research questions. In addition to this strategy, I utilized analytical memos (Appendices D–F) to make notes about the surprises, interesting thoughts, and themes that emerged in both the interviews and the documents. Corbin and Strauss (2015) argued that writing memos must begin at the beginning of the research process and start as "rudimentary representations of thought and grow in complexity, density, clarity, and accuracy as the research progresses" (p. 117). These memos then drove my theoretical sampling and further rounds of research. All of these steps helped make sense of the data I collected and were utilized throughout the process, not just in a linear method. Consistent with grounded theory, after I conducted a set of interviews and took a few field notes, I then took the information I have found and used it to inform my next steps so that I am filling in the gaps while expanding on the themes that emerge. My memos and coding specifically were used to answer my research questions by highlighting responses about how millennials learn best, the types of professional development that have been successful, and the characteristics they value most about professional development experiences.

Trustworthiness of Study

My findings were validated throughout the steps in the process of research (Creswell, 2013); however, it is important to delineate how I intentionally focused on the trustworthiness related to my data collection. It should be noted that there are several disagreements in the field of qualitative research about the vocabulary used in a

discussion of trustworthiness. Some researchers have opted to use the words "credibility" and "dependability" rather than "validity" and "reliability" (Bloomberg &Volpe, 2016, p. 163) as the latter tend to have more of a quantitative emphasis but qualitative research is much more subjective based on various theoretical foundations (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For this section, I have decided to use the words *credibility* and *dependability* as characteristics of the trustworthiness of my study. Qualitative credibility is defined as checking "for the accuracy of findings by employing certain procedures" (Gibbs as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 201). Dependability parallels reliability but focuses on whether one can track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data (2016).

As with many research studies, there are several qualitative credibility and dependability threats that can occur in my study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Creswell (as cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2015) developed eight different procedures for testing credibility and trustworthiness including "prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, triangulations, using peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, rich thick description and external audits" (p. 343). It is imperative that as I go through my research I am constantly checking for issues of credibility and trustworthiness using these methods.

There are several things that I did in my qualitative interviews that helped to protect against threats. As proposed by Creswell (as cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2015), I triangulated my different data sources to see if the themes are established across the sources. I also utilized member checking, in which I took the final or semi-final report back to the participants to see if they are accurate. If there are discrepancies in my interpretation and that of the interviewee, I held a discussion with the participant. During

the discussion, we clarified any issues. If my interpretation still disagrees with the participant's interpretation, I explicitly cited this is my memos. Moreover, I clarified the bias that I bring to the report through self-reflection, which is included in a section of my writing. I present negative and discrepant information that counters my themes as well, ensuring that my research is not only balanced, but accurate. Additionally, I used peer debriefings with some colleagues in my dissertation cohort to discuss my findings and analyze their credibility and dependability; I utilized outsiders from this research rather than using those within my organization who may have biased opinions. At the end of each month, I sent my work to a peer to review. I then scheduled a call or meeting with the reviewer to discuss their feedback. All of these strategies were beneficial in improving the credibility of my research.

Additionally, I used Charmaz's (2006) framework for evaluating grounded theory research. Charmaz's four criteria of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness were the lenses through which to evaluate my research. A solid combination of these characteristics enhanced the contribution of my study to the field of education. These criteria are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Study Limitations

In a discussion of the trustworthiness of this research, it was important that I also discussed the limitations. Limitations are those characteristics of design or methodology that impact the interpretation and findings from my research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Because this research is conducted within the context of only one educational environment, the application to other environments could be affected. While the transferability of the study is solid, the theory that emerges about which types of

professional development are ideal might not be practical or applicable for all settings due to the culture that exists or resources that are available. It is possible that the perspectives of the staff at the educational services commission might differ from those of a traditional school setting. Moreover, the study is focused on millennials, a specific population in the workplace, so it is somewhat limited in scope. Further research should be conducted to determine the preferences of other generations and will need to be done in the next few decades to address how later generations view professional learning.

Role of Researcher

Embedded in insider research, there are several considerations regarding the "researcher as instrument" or "insider research" that must be clearly addressed. Constructivist researchers must realize that their own background shapes their interpretation as their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences influence their interpretation (Creswell, 2013). In quantitative research, much of the study is independent of the researcher. However, this is not the case for qualitative research as the data are mediated through a "human instrument" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) as it is the responsibility of the researcher to interpret the data that is collected. The researcher's role as the primary data collection instrument requires that I identify biases and assumptions explicitly. I should realize that my perspectives are not necessarily detrimental but can be useful and positive but that they need to be explored and articulated throughout my research.

Because I am both a millennial and an administrator in the organization, I have to be aware of my role. Because insider researchers are so close to the data, they can make assumptions that interfere with the need to dig into information more deeply. Moreover,

it can become more difficult to obtain information because they might be denied access or have more bureaucratic obstacles to overcome. Inside practitioners are prone to both role conflicts and loyalty issues (Coghlan, 2003). It should be noted that I am the director of the organization, so I am in a position of power over the participants; participants might be hesitant to critique the professional development or provide more specific feedback because they could fear retaliation. Furthermore, I need to ensure that my desire and professional responsibility as director to improve what I see as gaps in the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization do not skew how I conduct the interviews or analyze the data. It should also be known that I, too, am of the millennial generation, so this might influence how the participants relate to me or how I reflect on the literature review. To overcome these challenges, a practitioner needs to be reflective and should enlist other people as consultants or mentors (Coghlan, 2003). Insider research can be complicated, but it makes the research much more meaningful.

In writing this research, I have to ensure not to include my own opinions about the validity of stereotypes, as those opinions would also apply to myself. I must also avoid making comments about my own opinions in the interviews. Throughout the process, I need to engage in reflective process to determine how my own biases and position might affect the study and seek to best depict the experiences and opinions of the participants outside of my own beliefs and realities.

Ethical Assurances

There are several ethical assurances I needed to consider in my research, as ethical issues can arise prior to conducting the study, in the beginning of the study, while collecting data, during data analysis, and in sharing data (Creswell, 2013). Among the

most robust ways to ensure that my research addresses potential ethical problems is to gain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). During this process, the board reviewed my proposed study and ensured that it considers all social, psychological, economic, and physical potential risks for my human subjects, often referred to as research participants. I did not interact with any participants before obtaining this approval. A participant consent form was obtained before each interview; all participants were reminded that the interview is completely voluntary. The interviewees received a copy of the consent form in writing before agreeing to the interview and then its contents were discussed before the interview started; this discussion was recorded. The consent form outlined potential risks. All participants also had the option to drop out of the research study at any time and could revoke their consent. If this happened, all of their documentation and interviews would not be included in the final study. No special populations are included in this study as everyone is an adult who can comprehend and consent to participation.

Additionally, I took steps to maintain privacy and confidentiality. No one else had access to the participants' information, and all identifiable information was removed from the dissertation. All of the research was kept in a locked filing cabinet for one year before being destroyed and would not be accessible to anyone else in the work environment. I constantly assessed these potential concerns throughout the dissertation process.

Summary

As I explored the preferences of millennials for professional development, I allowed the methodology to guide my research. I was mindful of the implications of constructivist worldview and grounded theory as my qualitative method, allowing them

to structure and support my data analysis. By developing a methodologically sound study, I ensured that the theory I developed as a result of my research is credible and trustworthy. The subsequent chapters are the product of this methodology.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents an analysis of the qualitative data that were collected in the spring of 2019 for this study. The focus of this study is the exploration of best practices that educational leaders can use to support millennials in the workplace through professional development. Through the use of a qualitative grounded theory framework, data were collected primarily through interviews with millennial staff members in an educational services unit. Additionally, the use of field notes and document analysis was implemented to supplement the data produced from the interviews. Interview questions centered around learning preferences, the ideal structure and logistics of professional development, and the value of professional development in the workplace. Through the use of analytical memos, I was able to keep a detailed account of my insights and reactions to the interviews (Saldana, 2016). This analysis presents a deeper understanding of millennial preferences for professional learning.

The overarching research question of this study was: How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation? To support this overarching question, I proposed three supporting research questions:

1. How do millennial staff members describe how they learn best and their preferences for professional development?
2. What types of professional development do millennials believe have been most helpful to their growth so far?

3. What characteristics of professional development are valued most by millennials (i.e., teamwork, personalization, practical application, etc.)?

These questions assisted in the development of my qualitative interview questions, which were the focal point of the interview protocol.

This chapter outlines the findings of my research as they relate to these questions and the purpose of my study. Additionally, this chapter outlines my participant sample and setting, including any influence on the sample participants that might bear on the findings. This chapter then outlines the data collection and any variations from the plan presented in Chapter 3. I will then report the process used to move from coded units to larger categories and themes that relate to the purpose of this study. Chapter 4 then addresses each research question in depth, providing qualitative information obtained from the interviews. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of this study and a summary of all findings.

Participant Sample and Setting

The participant sample and setting, an educational services commission in a mid-Atlantic state, did not deviate too much from the proposed plan outlined in Chapter 3. There were only minor changes to the original methodology. The first change was to the proposed time frame; while I planned to collect data over a 3-month period from January through March 2019, the interviews occurred over a 6-month period from January through June 2019 because of scheduling issues both on the account of the researcher and the participants. The second change was to the sample size. My goal was to interview at least 20 participants, and I was able to increase my sample size to 25 interviews during this period. Out of 40 potential millennial candidates on staff at the organization, I

emailed 30 randomly. Based on the positive responses, I scheduled with my first 10 interviewees. After my first round, I then used theoretical sampling to select the next 10 candidates and then scheduled my last five candidates. Over this 6-month period, two of the respondents left the educational organization, so I chose new hires who met the criteria and agreed to participate in the study using this same theoretical sampling. In addition to the interviews, I also completed observations, collected documents, and gathered field notes during this 6-month period.

Data Collection

The number of potential participants for this study consisted of full-time millennial staff members at the educational services commission. At the time of this study, the number of potential participants meeting these criteria under the method of criterion sampling was 40. Using random sampling, recruitment emails were sent to 30 staff members. Twenty-eight staff members responded to the email, and two did not respond. Interviews were first scheduled with 10 participants and then theoretical sampling was used to schedule the rest of the interviews. After completing the first set of 10 interviews, I was able to determine that I needed revisions to my interview protocol to further explore several concepts. Additionally, these interviews helped me to determine that I needed my next sample to include millennials across the whole age-range for that generation so that I could determine that the emerging data patterns were consistent across all millennials and not a particular subset. These conclusions led me to select 15 more participants who would answer questions from the revised protocol. The total number of qualitative interviews completed was 25. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the demographic information for the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Interviewee	Age at time of interview	Role	Gender
1	35	Occupational therapist	Female
2	29	Speech language pathologist	Female
3	31	Occupational therapist	Female
4	34	Occupational therapist	Female
5	28	Physical therapist	Female
6	29	Reading Specialist/teacher	Female
7	25	Speech language pathologist	Female
8	24	Speech language pathologist	Female
9	30	Speech language pathologist	Female
10	34	Physical therapist	Female
11	34	Occupational therapist	Female
12	34	Teacher of the deaf	Male
13	31	Speech language pathologist	Female

(continued)

Table 1 (continued).

Interviewee	Age at time of interview	Role	Gender
14	35	Speech language pathologist	Female
15	28	Occupational therapist	Female
16	29	Occupational therapist	Female
17	31	Speech language pathologist	Female
18	32	Occupational therapist	Female
19	27	Reading specialist/teacher	Female
20	26	Teacher	Male
21	25	Speech language pathologist	Female
22	33	Social worker	Female
23	28	Teacher	Female
24	27	Teacher of the deaf	Female
25	28	Occupational therapist	Female

I completed 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews. The interview protocol consisted of 15 questions. After conducting the first round of interviews, I revised my interview protocol to hone in on areas of information I wanted to explore more; this type of revision is consistent with the concepts of grounded theory. Throughout the process, I analyzed

my data using a constant-comparative method to determine themes and patterns in the interviews (Durdella, 2017).

The interviews were conducted in my private office at the educational services commission. Before the interview, participants were asked to review and sign a consent form to both complete the interview as well as one to be audio-recorded. These consent forms were also included in the recruitment interviews for review before participants agreed to participate.

Each participant was interviewed only once, with most interviews lasting between 17 and 25 minutes. Participants were given the opportunity to contact the researcher if they felt that there was additional information that needed to be added to their responses; no participants contacted me to add anything. The entire interview was audio-recorded on a digital voice recorder. The interviews were then transcribed using a digital transcription program. The transcriptions were then sent to the interviewees for review as a process of member checking (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

While I did not previously specify a number of observations that would be completed, I am satisfied that I was able to collect data from three events: one book study, a departmental training, and an in-person workshop. The observations occurred over the course of one hour at each event. The book study was hosted by the educational services commission after school from 3:30–4:30pm and was voluntary. The hour-long departmental meeting was mandatory and held during the workday for all members of the teaching staff. The in-person workshop was held after hours and was co-sponsored with a nonprofit organization. This particular workshop was voluntary and lasted from 4:00 to 5:00pm. The field notes were recorded on the field notes/observations protocol

(Appendix D-E). The protocol includes a summary of the event and descriptive notes (physical setting, participants, individual engagement, and quotes). Any other observations relevant to the study were recorded on the form as well.

My document collection included registration from three professional development workshops during the 2018-2019 school year and five professional development plans of millennial staff members. The professional development registrations are internal documents of the educational services unit that are shared among the entire administrative team. The professional development plans are district-wide documents wherein all staff members must develop three goals—one unit-wide, one departmental, and one personal—that they want to achieve during the school year. The data were recorded on document collection protocol (Appendix C). The protocol recorded the type of document, its location, the creator, date, and the context. The document has space to record notes on quotes and events that are relevant to this research. Throughout the process, I was able to align my actions with the methodology outlined in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

The data analysis used for this research is consistent with the characteristics of qualitative inquiry, specifically grounded theory. Charmaz (2014) explained that coding is the "pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data" (p. 113). In grounded theory, coding involves two phases: initial coding and focused, selective coding that involves synthesizing and integrating the information gathered into larger amounts of data. Both of these processes were used to make sense of the data and develop a theory.

In the initial round of coding, I chose to use process coding, which utilizes gerunds to indicate what is occurring at the time of the interview (Salanda, 2009). The addition of the *ing* helps to give value to what the person is doing at the time rather than just labeling the data; this is an essential component of grounded theory. Through this process, I developed a list of meaningful codes that would begin to shape my data. The most frequently used codes are indicated in Table 2. Approximately 55 to 62 codes were used in the average interview.

Table 2

Frequently Used Codes During Initial Coding

Identifying effective PD	Emphasizing/referencing relevance
Identifying/describing learning style	Choosing a time of day/year
Referencing PD type	Comparing generational differences
Comparing to others' learning	Discussing cost as a factor
Employing what is learned	Working with schedule
Describing format of PD	Evaluating online learning
Highlighting mandatory v. voluntary	
Evaluating experience of speakers	
Emphasizing level of engagement	
Interacting with others	
Highlighting collaboration/collaborating with others	

It should be noted that the code "emphasizing/referencing relevance" increased after a revision in interview protocol questions. Consistent with the continuous analysis of grounded theory, I revised my questions to add the question: *If all aspects of the professional development workshops were the same (cost, location, format, etc.), would you more likely choose a workshop that is relevant to what you do today or one that would be more beneficial to your overall professional growth? Why?* As I progressed

through the interviews, I found that many of the participants kept referencing the importance of relevance, so I wanted to explore that question further.

Additionally, I restructured some other interview questions to further explore some emerging concepts. My original interview protocol asked respondents to describe a hypothetical workshop, including to describe who would teach it. In order to better understand the credentials and personality that they were describing, I revised the question to: *In thinking about this hypothetical workshop, who would teach it? What credentials and characteristics would you prefer that this person hold?* As I discovered that several respondents had a difficult time answering the original question, I determined that it was best to not only separate this question into its own entity but to also explicitly ask about characteristics and credentials to gather more specific data. This led to the additional code of "evaluating experience of speakers."

Another emerging theme that surfaced during my initial coding was that of online learning. While I originally asked participants to merely discuss the types of professional development they have attended as well and the aspects of the PD that they felt helped them learn (i.e., collaboration, technology, etc.), the discussion of online learning played a larger role in the discussion than originally anticipated. As a result, I added the question: *Have you done any online learning or professional development? If so, what were the advantages and disadvantages to the online format? Do you prefer this type of learning?* This added question to the interview protocol not only increased the use of the code "evaluating online learning" but then also helped in the construction of a theory regarding the role of online learning in millennial professional development.

As I progressed through my interviews, I also realized that the timing of professional development was an important characteristic. Yet, my initial protocol discussed only the time of day that the learning took place. I soon learned that I also needed to ask about the time of year as a relevant factor in determining professional development. I, therefore, added the question, *What time of the year do you think is best to have professional development (i.e., beginning of the school year, summer, etc.)?* While this did not significantly impact my coding, I realized through the initial coding process that this was a theme that needed further exploration.

The final revision to my protocol was also a result of the initial coding process as "discussing cost as a factor" was repeating in all of my interviews. When I added the explicit question: *To what extent is cost a factor in choosing professional development?* it not only increased the frequency of this code but helped me further understand the role of cost in determining professional development opportunities. All of the changes to the original interview protocol created a much richer understanding of the data as well as better prepared me to construct emerging themes and theories.

When grounded theorists conduct initial coding, they must remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities can be discerned in the data so that they can move towards later decisions about defining the larger conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014). These larger concepts emerge in the process of pattern coding. It is the second-pattern coding that takes data from the first coding cycle and begins to answer the overarching research question through the notation of patterns and themes. A sample of themes that emerged from my research is highlighted in Table 3. The codes listed in Table 3 are a representative sampling of codes from which themes emerged. I have

included these themes so that the reader is exposed to the progression of coding and themes that emerged during this phase of data analysis.

Each of these themes ultimately have helped me answer my research questions. By grouping the themes with the appropriate question, I was able to develop some answers supported by qualitative data.

Table 3

Pattern Coding Themes From Interviews

Themes	Codes	Code occurrences
Relevance to daily work	explaining job responsibilities, introducing something new and different, having a clear message, maintaining relevance, employing what is learned	58
Learning styles and preferences	describing PD meeting learning style, discussing with others, comparing to others' learning, learning the best way, identifying/ describing learning style, comparing generational differences	29
Format of professional development	breaking into groups to discuss, identifying effective PD, referencing PD type, highlighting mandatory v. voluntary, emphasizing level of engagement, interacting with others, highlighting collaboration/collaborating with others, evaluating online learning	82

Table 3 (continued).

Themes	Codes	Code occurrences
Timing of professional development	choosing a time of day, working with schedule, having time for PD, working after hours, interfering with schedule, highlighting accessibility	27
Characteristics of professional development	attending effective webinars, being engaging, having good delivery and engagement, evaluating experience of speakers, discussing cost as a factor	102

Results

To organize my results, I applied each of these themes to my research questions. These themes and codes support the responses to each sub-question and ultimately my overarching research question. This information culminates in a theory that can be used by educational leaders to support millennial staff members' professional development preferences.

Supporting research question #1. How do millennial staff members describe how they learn best and their preferences for professional development? To answer my first supporting research question: How do millennial staff members describe how they learn best and their preferences for professional development? I have relied on the emerging theme of learning preferences. My purpose for including this question was to determine whether or not millennial educators had similarities in their learning preferences that could then be used to shape professional development.

Learning styles and preferences. When asked about their own learning styles and preferences, interviewees often referenced the learning modalities through which they were taught: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile (VAKT). This is not surprising, as the concepts of learning modalities are common in educational literature, pre-service teacher programs, and many professional development workshops. Therefore, millennials are referencing their preferences within the framework of learning styles through which their generation has been taught (Willingham, 2005). One respondent stated, "I am a well-focused person. So I can do auditory only, just take pages of handwritten notes from a person lecturing at me and can learn that way (Interviewee 7). However, another participant said, "Definitely a hands-on learner. I like to be as tactile as possible" (Interviewee 3).

But even when the participant relied on a modality to describe their learning, it did not always match up with how they said they learned. This implies that while the interviewees often put labels on their learning, they may not have a strong metacognitive understanding of their own learning. For example, one respondent said that she is a visual learner but then also emphasized "doing" as how she learns best in a workshop:

> "if they're talking about a certain type of treatment or game that they do, they actually have the game and we play it. Something like that. I've been to a lot of courses taught by actual OTs that will get you involved and say, "Okay. This is what I'm talking about, and now let's do it," so. That works best for me.

Other respondents also stated that they did not rely just on one modality, citing that they need more than one type of method to understand the information. "I don't like just visual, auditory, just tactile. I like to learn it all." Another millennial participant stated,

"Although I'm pretty visual, I find that I'm also a hands-on learner." One interviewee described a mixture of learning styles, stating that they prefer hands-on, experiential type learning, but mixed with visuals, presentations, and videos.

As I further answer my other research questions regarding the types of professional development that millennials support, it is important to note that often the type of learning that millennials described as being effective did not match their previous response of their preferred learning style. Over half of the respondents gave a description of a workshop that helped them learn that did not match the learning style that they self-identified within the question about learning preferences. For example, one respondent said that she really preferred to write things down from a visual PowerPoint when learning but then stated that the most helpful professional development was the clinics because there was a roundtable discussion. Another respondent said that she learns best with flash cards but then described an interactive small group workshop with role-playing and acting as her example of a workshop that met her learning style (Interviewee 14). Another respondent said, "So I'm more of a visual learner and I'd rather hear things than have to sit and be told to read a book." However, when asked what type of professional development has been helpful, the participant said interactive workshops that included discussion, with no reference to visual learning.

Supporting research question #2. What types of professional development do millennials believe have been most helpful to their growth so far? Similar to the previous question, many respondents had personal preferences when describing the types of professional development, but some interesting commonalities did arise. These emerging themes focused on interaction in live workshops and a dislike of online learning. Using

the theme of "format of professional development" I was able to extrapolate some information to draw conclusions about the types of professional development millennials believe have been helpful to their growth so far in their careers. As previously discussed, these responses did not align necessarily with the learning preferences chosen by the participant. Similar to the learning preferences, there was not one specific type of professional development that emerged as dominant. In this section, I have also included the theme "timing of professional development" as it is interconnected with the format of learning.

Format of professional development. Participants were asked a series of questions that focused on the previous formats of professional development that they had attended as well as what they hypothetically would like professional development to look like if they could design the learning opportunity. The follow are the questions from the interview protocol that focus on the format of professional development.

- How do you learn best, including how you like to learn and what helps you to learn?
- Please describe an example of a lesson, workshop, or anything else you have experienced that met your learning style and explain why.
- If you could design a professional development opportunity that would be ideal for your learning needs, what would it look like?
- In thinking about this hypothetical workshop, who would teach it? What credentials and characteristics would you prefer that this person hold?
- When you think about the types of professional development you have had so far, which types (webinars, mentoring, workshops, etc.) have been most helpful for your professional growth?

Interactive in-person workshops. One of the most common formats that participants referenced was that of an interactive workshop. Of the 25 respondents, 21 of them referenced this format either directly or indirectly (interacting with others, breaking

into groups to discuss, and other similar codes). While the characteristic of "interactive" is inherently intertwined with my third research question, I noted that it helps to answer my question about the format of an in-person workshop. Within these live in-person workshops, there was a significant number of participants who wanted a lecture with hands-on activities. When describing an ideal professional development experience, one respondent said she prefers an "in-person thing… with a little bit of lecture-type presentation mixed in with exercises where we can work in small groups and talk and practice whatever was just taught, kind of like in chunks. "Another respondent explained that she prefers when someone is speaking with a visual and then gives participants the opportunity to collaborate and discuss what they learn in small groups. Many of the responses referenced these types of activities, including specific examples from conferences and workshops they attended in the past.

It should be noted that while mentoring was offered as a potential option for a format for professional development, only two interviewees discussed mentoring in any format. One participant described a specific mentoring program that she had in graduate school, while another mentioned that it might be helpful. However, because the discussions were not significant and did not emerge as common findings, they were not explored further as I progressed through the interview process.

Online learning. As these discussions surrounding in-person workshops organically developed, interviewees often commented on their dislike for online learning without prompting. While one might assume that the millennial generation, who has grown up in a society rich with technology, would prefer this format, that was not true. Of the sample population, only two respondents said that they preferred online learning,

often due to its accessibility, while four others said that they enjoy it, but it is not their preferred format of professional development. One interviewee stated that while she can do online learning, it's difficult to focus on the presentation with all of the other distractions in the home; this was similar to many of the other respondents who said that this format is often taken less seriously because there is no accountability to pay attention.

While most interviewees do not prefer online learning, 21 of them have had experience with it in some capacity. One respondent who is currently in graduate school explained that she has a "love/hate relationship with it" because she is unable to share her ideas with someone else and get feedback. She opted to do the online course because of its flexibility but has not found it to be as beneficial as other professional development she has attended.

Among the most appealing aspects of the online learning was the level of accessibility and flexibility with the schedule. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, the flexibility and ability to complete them anytime was unanimously cited in the interviews. Depending on the topic, interviewees were willing to choose the online option, with one staff member saying, "I'm not going to discriminate against doing online and not doing it in person all the time because it just depends on what's available and if it's something I want to learn about so." However, the most common disadvantages included not being able to interact with others or ask questions and the inability to focus when at home or when someone is just lecturing.

With emerging technology, some interviewees recognize that the level of interaction on webinars could start to increase. One interviewee started to argue against online learning, but then started to change her mind while discussing:

> I think advantages is it's convenient, and it's accessible, and it's easy. And I think, I guess, disadvantage would be, as I was kind of saying, it's not as interactive because you're not face-to-face. But I also kind of want to take that back because I know a lot of webinars now, you can actually-- it's the chat feature, so you can ask those questions. So I feel like in that sense maybe it's a little more interactive than I'm actually thinking.

Overall, the respondents prefer in-person workshops to their online counterparts. While there were differences among the specifics of the workshops, which will be explored further in the next research question, the favored format was one that included a mixture of lectures supported with visuals and hands-on relevant activities.

Timing of professional development. With the desire for staff members to want to do live professional development workshops, it was important to understand when they would want these workshops to occur. Because in-person workshops do not have the same flexibility and accessibility of online learning, the scheduling of the workshop was also a factor that needed to be considered. In completing the interviews, all but one participant stated that they would prefer to have the workshops during working hours, with the majority of the participants choosing the morning specifically as they feel that this is when they are the most productive, and it is the least disruptive to the school day. The quantified results from the interviews are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Preferred Time of Day for Professional Development

Time of day	*n*
Morning	15
Afternoon	3
Evening	1
During work hours (unspecified)	6

This information is consistent with the field notes and observations that I conducted. Of the staff members who attended the professional development sessions after hours, there were only five millennial staff members out of the 40 possible attendees. Additionally, there were over 30 staff members of other generations who attended the professional development, an indication that millennials are less likely to attend professional development after hours.

While I also asked participants if they had a preference for what time of year the professional development should be conducted, including the beginning, middle, end of year, or summer, there was not a significant result, and several applicants said that this did not matter to them when considering their preferences. From these results, it can be determined that millennials prefer that professional development occurs during work hours and specifically in the morning.

Supporting research question #3. What characteristics of professional development are valued most by millennials (i.e., teamwork, personalization, practical application, etc.)? To answer this question, I focused on two of the emergent themes "relevance to daily work" and "characteristics of professional development." While I did not originally expect to discuss the relevance to staff members' daily work as part of my

interviews, it quickly surfaced as its own theme, equally important as the other characteristics of professional development. Of the other characteristics of professional development, the most important were the background of the speaker, level of engagement and interaction of the workshop, and the cost.

Relevance to daily work. One of the most consistent themes that emerged during the interview was the relevance to daily work. With the exception of four respondents, all of the other participants indicated that they would choose a workshop that is relevant to their own work before choosing something that would improve their overall professional growth, with the idea of relevance organically appearing in interview responses to other questions as well. One staff member stated, “I think relevance would be the most important. I think having that foundational piece, whether it's a recap-- and I know a lot of the SLPs [Speech Language Pathologists] that are probably there wouldn't need it” (Interviewee 2). This same candidate also later explained that she feels overburdened with the other aspects of her job including the paperwork. Like many other millennials, she said that she often worries whether her workload is getting in the way of doing what is best for kids and she wants the resources to do what is best for her students tomorrow. As new members of the field, millennials are in what one might describe as “survival mode,” trying to determine what to do each day, so they want as much as support as possible to help their students immediately. This pressure may contribute to their desire for immediate relevance rather than long-term growth. Another respondent, who recognized the importance of professional growth later in the field, stated that she couldn’t focus on that growth because "I'm trying to survive the next five years, and I need something here and now." (Interviewee 5). Other respondents, like Interviewee 6,

also wanted relevant, practical resources like activities that could be implemented immediately and therapy strategies.

This response was consistent throughout the interviews, with the word *relevance* and other related phrases being used to respond to multiple questions. In my field notes, I commented that the speakers who presented spoke on broad topics of "mental health" and "student behavior" without specificity to the millennial staff members' workload and questioned whether this may have contributed to the lack of that generation's attendance. If educational leaders want to attract millennials to professional development opportunities, they must be cognizant of the level of relevance that it has for the staff members.

Characteristics of the workshop. Throughout the coding process, the "characteristics of the workshop" codes appeared the most. While there were several codes that I used in the initial coding, the ones most relevant to my findings focus on the credentials and background of the speaker and whether the workshop is engaging. The other characteristic that was important to the staff members was the cost of the workshop. Each of these characteristics were among the most prominent when the interviewees were asked to explicitly summarize the most important qualities of professional development.

Credentials of the speaker. In discussing the format of the professional development, I also explored the credentials and personality traits the speaker would need to possess, which is connected to the theme of relevance. When participants were asked about what background they would like the speaker to have, 22 respondents wanted the speaker to have experience in the field. Ultimately, they wanted the speaker to have experience relevant to what the interviewees do, as they felt that was important

in understanding the topic. One participant noted that she does not like when the speaker does not apply what they learn. Her response highlighted the need for someone who had actual experience working with people, not just theory and research. Like other respondents, another interviewee stated that he would like the speaker to be able to share stories that are relatable and relevant because she did not respect a presenter who was not able to bring in their own background and stories to support what they're teaching.

While not directly discussing the experience in the field, one interviewee commented on the speaker's need to be "realistic," which many related to having had experience in the field and not just in academia. She stated that she wants someone who is "down-to-earth" and "who's real, who's going to give you helpful hints, but also is a realist. In a perfect world-- we can't be perfect in our classrooms, so this might not necessarily apply perfectly, or things like that. But finding ways that we kind of incorporate things in more realistic manner."

The overarching concern was whether the presenter of the workshop was able to relate to them as summarized by an interviewee who stated that the presenter's education is not important because the amount of experience one has is much more important than the amount of schooling they have. Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that the millennial interviewees were not concerned about the number of certifications or degrees that the speaker attained or whether they were endorsed by other organizations.

Level of interaction/engagement of the workshop. Aligned with the desire to have a professional development format that was a live, interactive workshop, the level of engagement of the workshop was a primary concern among the characteristics of the interviewees. Even when discussing the presenter characteristics, one interviewee

commented that they wanted the presenter to be, he said, **"**animated. Not a podium stander and just reading word-for-word off the slides. I want them to interact with the audience. I want them to bring us in, rather than just lecture." Another interviewee said she wants the speaker to be fun and outgoing, maintaining a level of enthusiasm and interactions so that the participations are not just sitting there.

When asked about how the workshop should be structured, the respondents also commented that they wanted it to be engaging and interactive, often working on realistic applications and discussions with others. When summarizing the most important characteristics, an interviewee highlighted, "I think the knowledge of the speaker, obviously. Interaction, whether it be hands-on or just something interactive to keep me engaged." Another interviewee summarized many of the other millennials' answers when she said this about what she desires in professional development:

> Definitely, interactive. That means not just with the person who is presenting but that's with everybody. I like when they give us time to actually talk about things. I would say interactive. I always like when they give handouts or I can take away something and I can use it within an hour. I think that that's very, very helpful rather than trying to get all of this information and then come up with something on my own. I also like when they give us time to actually work on what we just learned, because most of the time

When analyzing my memos regarding the professional development, I did note that the millennials who were in attendance tended to become more engaged and upbeat when the speaker interacted with them and when they were given the opportunity to participate in groups. Because the groups were of mixed ages, I also noted that the millennials were

more willing to interact than their mixed-generation peers. The level of interaction and engagement both with the presenter and the format of the professional development were common characteristics among the majority of the interviewees.

Cost of professional development. When asked about how important cost was in choosing professional development, one interviewee said, "A big cost. I mean a big factor [laughter]. That's probably the first thing I look at." Throughout the interviews, I asked directly what role cost played in choosing professional development. While some participants did not mention cost until this explicit question, all of the respondents said that it was a significant factor in selecting professional learning opportunities. Many millennials responded to the question similarly by stating that money is a huge factor in their lives, not having a budget set aside for professional development.

No respondents denied that cost was a factor in choosing professional development. After being asked this question and then being asked to summarize the most important characteristics of professional development, the majority of respondents answered that cost was one of the top three factors. Because all of the workshops in my field notes were free to staff members, I was unable to gage cost as a factor in this data analysis.

Through the initial and pattern coding question, I was able to analyze the data to answer my overarching research question. The discussion of my analysis and the implications of this research are furthered discussed in Chapter 5. Ultimately, I was able to determine that professional development should be designed intentionally to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and dependability as aspects of trustworthiness in my study, I employed several methods. Among the qualities of credibility is that participants' stories are genuine and valid (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). To do this, I ensured that I used clear protocols and procedures for my qualitative data collection. I also ensured that my participants understood the purpose of the study by providing them the information in writing and verbally before the interview as well as clarifying if they had any questions or concerns before proceeding with the interview.

I ensured that I triangulated the data between my interviews, document collection, and the field notes. There were no significant discrepancies that emerged. The only concern that did arise was that during my field notes, I noted that millennials were less likely to participate in the discussion during the professional development that I observed, but I had no other supporting details to support that claim. Therefore, it has not been included in this study's summaries. Table 6 shows which data collection instrument was used to derive the themes for each supporting research question.

Table 5

Key Findings by Theme and Data Collection Instrument for Triangulation

Supporting Research Question	Theme	Instrument
1	Learning styles and preferences	Interview, field notes
2	Format of professional development	Interview, document collection, field notes

Table 5 (continued).

Supporting Research Question	Theme	Instrument
2	Timing of professional development	Interview
3	Relevance to daily work	Interview, field notes
3	Characteristics of the workshop	Interview, document collection, field notes
3	Cost of professional development	Interview

Note. When only one instrument was used, data were compared across responses and other themes.

I also utilized member-checking to increase the credibility and dependability of the study. After each interview was transcribed, I provided the participants with a copy of the transcription and asked them to review. The participants then had to confirm that the information was accurate, both in the verbatim transcription, but also in the message that they were trying to convey. With the exception of one participant who noted a spelling error, there were no other concerns, and all participants confirmed that their information was accurate. However, despite these precautions, several threats do exist with this study.

One internal threat to the validity of this study is maturation. The maturation of the participants (millennials born between 1980 and 2000) prompts several concerns. Ihantola and Kihn (2011) argued that responses can vary based on varying maturity levels rather than the factors being studied. Among the most pressing concerns is their ability to interpret their professional learning experiences as they have not been in the field for a substantial amount of time. In many cases, the interviewees compared their learning to

things that they have done in college. Because this study focuses on professional learning as it relates to their career, this comparison is not particularly helpful; the goals and organizational structure of learning differ in secondary education to that of the workplace. Additionally, for the purposes of my study, I chose a wide range of ages that can be considered millennial. The youngest respondent was 24 years old, while the oldest was 35 years old. While both defined as millennials, their experience in the workforce, time in the field, and even experience with technology and learning all vary. The maturation of someone who has been in the field for over 10 years certainly varies from that of someone practicing for only one to two years. Because this study lasted for a period of 6 months, the maturity levels of the participants in the study themselves did not alter significantly. Additionally, because the responses varied (in terms of learning preferences) and were consistent (in terms of characteristics of professional development) among participants in similar age ranges and across the sample, it seems that maturation was not a significant threat.

An external threat to the trustworthiness of this experiment was the small sample size of the population studied ($N = 25$). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) argued that often qualitative research does not cover enough of an expanse of subjects to provide a "reasonable degree of reliability" (p. 177). Even if I had studied all 40 millennials at the educational organization, this sample size does not allow for findings to be generalized to other populations. As a result, readers are cautioned about generalizing the information. The coding process created an audit trail that documented and justified the choices made during the research process and analysis.

Additionally, time was an external threat. The results of this study were time-bound in that the research cannot necessarily be generalized to past or future groups (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). As a means of addressing this threat, I recommend replicating the study at a later time. This allows researchers to determine if the same results occurred and if the findings can be more generalized.

Throughout the process, I also ensured that I was aware of my own bias. By member-checking and recording the interviews, I was able to reflect upon whether I inserted any bias into my interactions with staff members. Additionally, I consistently referred to the research and qualitative process to mitigate such threats.

Summary

Throughout this process, I was able to draw conclusions about the professional development preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation. When exploring learning preferences, I discovered that participants often referred to the learning style labels they have learned but often misidentified their learning style when describing practical and helpful professional development styles. Moreover, I learned that while one might assume that tech-savvy millennials would want to learn online, they overwhelmingly preferred in-person, interactive workshops that aligned with their work schedules. When describing these workshops, they wanted the workshops to be relevant, engaging, taught by a presenter with practical experience, and cost-effective.

All of these findings will be are discussed in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I will further interpret these findings before determining how these results impact educational leaders in their pursuits of providing meaningful professional development for the growing population of millennial staff members. I also constructed a theory grounded in

my research so that it can be applied to other organizations. The next chapter will also provide recommendations for research, practice, policy, leadership, and future study that are grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study as well as the literature reviewed in previous chapters. Finally, I will conclusively summarize this research into a theory that can be used to improve professional development for millennial educators.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This research explored the best practices that educational leaders can use to support millennials in the workplace through professional development. As an educational administrator, I recognize the generational shift in my own educational services commission, and I want to ensure that I am meeting the needs of my new staff members and giving them the training they need and desire so that they will be successful at our organization. The overarching purpose of this dissertation is to develop a substantive theory grounded in data on professional development that links the preferences and needs of millennials with best practices. Through the data collection and analysis, I was able develop a meaningful theory that answered the question: How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation?

Using the tenets of grounded theory and qualitative research, I determined that professional development should be designed strategically to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation. The key preferences of millennials determined from the study can be summarized as follows:

- Multimodal: The presentation should use multiple methods to effectively reach various types of learners.
- Interactive: The professional development opportunity should allow opportunities for the participants to interact with both their peers and the presenter.

- Relevant: The professional development topics must be applicable to what the participants are doing currently in their job and taught by someone with similar experience.
- Appropriately timed: The professional development should be taught during the workday as not to interfere with personal time.
- Cost-effective: The learning should be in a format that is cost-effective for participants.

My culminating theory is that millennial educational professionals prefer a multimodal style of learning. This includes interactive workshops with material that is relevant to their current assignment. Instructionally, they prefer that workshops are taught by someone with applicable experience. With respect to time, they prefer to incorporate it into the course of their day. Finally, with respect to cost, value is important to them. It should be noted that this emergent theory does not negate the possibility that these could just be overall best practices for educational professionals, not just those in this generation; further research should be done to determine whether these characteristics are universal or generationally-bound. However, it can be concluded that these specific criteria are what millennials desire in the professional learning that they receive.

This chapter provides a detailed interpretation and discussion of the findings that led to the development of this theory. This chapter will contextualize the research in a framework for evaluating grounded research before discussing the limitations of the study. The recommendations and implications of this research are then explained as they relate to future research, policy making, educational leadership, and personal practice. The chapter concludes with a concise summary

Interpretation and Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature regarding millennials' broader preferences in the workplace. These preferences include a desire for positive social aspects in work culture, including the ability to interact with the supervisor (Ng et al., 2016); understanding where one's role fits into the "bigger picture" (Hall, 2016); and a need for extrinsic work values (Kuron et al., 2015). These preferences differ from those of previous generations and have confounded employers who are unsure how to meet these changing demands. (Sinek, 2017). This study explores millennials' workplace preferences in the field of education, an area is currently underrepresented in research, but it may also offer recommendations for professional learning in the workplace more generally. As an educational leader, I empathize with the struggle to adapt to changing ideals in the workplace, especially as they relate to professional development. As a result of this study, I have a better understanding of my millennial employees' preferences.

To best interpret the findings, I want to focus on the following components: multimodal learning, interactive nature of workshops, relevance to current workload, timing of professional development, and the cost of the training as these are the most prominent themes that emerged in my research and are relevant to the existing literature. Each of these themes can be placed in the context of the current research and the conceptual frameworks while also casting some new light on millennial preferences for learning. These findings were previously organized by supporting research questions but are now outlined here as individual characteristics that support the grounded theory of how professional development should be structured for millennials. The conceptual

framework of generational cohort theory helps elucidate these overarching themes because major similarities emerged both in beliefs and expectations within this generation (Becton et al., 2014). The findings solidify the idea that millennials have specific thoughts and perceptions towards professional development, consistent across the specified age-range for this generation. The millennials' responses were similar regardless of the respondents' age and time in the field. This consistency makes it even more important that employers begin to understand millennials' needs and preferences, as they are not expected to waiver with maturity or experience.

Multimodal learning. When asked about their own learning styles and preferences, respondents often referenced the learning modalities in which they were taught: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile (VAKT). Their description of their learning, therefore, is embedded in these different modalities, without much depth of understanding. There was not one modality that emerged as the most common among the participants, as each cited their own personal and unique preferences. The answers varied according to perceptions of personal needs and their own understanding of their learning. The qualitative data support the argument that there is not one consistent learning preference of the millennial respondents.

This is consistent with the theory of Zemke et al. (2013) that generations develop shared beliefs based on a shared history. Because their educational experiences have emphasized these modalities, that is the lens through which the participants responded, a testament to generational cohort theory. This is also consistent with transformative learning theory, which argues that millennials are entering the workforce with references about the world, structures of assumptions, and expectations that frame their point of

view (Taylor, 2008). One of the major commonalities is not only that they identified their learning using these labels but that they felt that this was the best way to structure professional learning. In other words, no millennials accounted for the need to have professional learning consider multiple learning styles to assist their peers. Their ideal workshop was structured on their needs only, focused on their learning style and interests, not what they thought might benefit their peers in the field or what might be an area of need in education more generally; this supports the existing literature's arguments that millennials are egocentric.

Additionally, it was discovered that the modality that a millennial participant identified as their preference often did not match the workshop type they said had been helpful to their growth. For example, one person stated that they were a visual learner but then emphasized how they needed interactive workshops to learn. Millennials, therefore, frame their learning within the constructs of what they have been taught, even when they might not fully understand these concepts. These consistent tendencies to providing a learning preference that does not match another answer might suggest that millennials have not achieved the ultimate goal of Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory: self-reflection. Self-reflection aligns with the four realms of emotional intelligence in the workplace: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman, 2004). Much of the literature review focused on the egocentric aspects of the millennial generation, so it is possible that their inability to self-reflect and properly identify their own learning preferences could be embedded in their overall lack of emotional intelligence as supported in the larger context of the literature review. However, this would need to be explored further as my question specifically asked the participants to

reflect on their own learning. Millennials, therefore, are able to put a label, even if inaccurate, on their learning but are unable to currently reflect on how that preference should be translated into practical application in the context of professional development.

I have summarized the research to conclude that millennial staff members often describe their learning using the modalities that they have been taught, but these descriptions do not always consistently match their practical description of how they like to learn and that there are no consistent responses among the group. They lack accurate self-awareness, one of the four components of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004) in terms of their own learning, and this must be considered when establishing appropriate professional development, not only in terms of format but also when discussing the content.

Interactive nature of workshops. Regardless of the learning modality that millennial respondents chose, there was an overarching desire that professional development have an interactive nature to the learning. This concept of interaction encompasses the characteristics/structure of the workshop, the engagement of the speaker, and the ability to converse with peers about relevant topics. Ultimately, millennials want professional development that gives them a chance to interact with others in person.

This finding is consistent with the existing research about millennials who are often described as "team oriented" staff members (Much et al., 2014, p. 37), who enjoy being a part of various social networks, are motivated by a nonconformist environment, and enjoy interacting with others from various backgrounds (Pinzaru et al., 2016). Moreover, millennials expect close, open, supportive relationships with their supervisors

and have a desire to work in teams (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). These existing studies substantiate the findings in this current study as those qualities were apparent throughout the responses about how professional development should be structured.

This study is also consistent with studies about learning preferences of millennials in college. Garwood (2015) found that millennials demonstrated a preference for reflective, engaging, and interactive learning, which is aligned with the findings in this study. The overarching theme of interaction, extending even into the overall culture and climate of the workplace more generally, was prominent in the literature review and supported by this research. Millennials, in college and in the workplace, want to be engaged in their learning through interactions with professors and supervisors and with fellow students and co-workers.

However, one contradiction that emerged in this area was the level of interaction through technology. Based on the ideas that millennials are "digital natives" (Otey, 2013, p. 204) and that technology has created a new medium of interaction, I assumed that millennials would prefer webinars and online learning as opposed to in-person workshops. Current literature emphasizes the changing preferences of millennials and the inherent connection to technology but does not discuss how this impacts professional learning explicitly. Rather, the connection to learning and technology is implied in the existing research. This study highlights how, regardless of their familiarity with technology, millennials still prefer face-to-face interactions and discussions when learning. The participants highlighted the need to be able to ask questions, share experiences, and learn from each other as significant aspects of effective learning. The participants commented that they felt that they were unable to sustain attention and get

the feedback that they need when listening to a webinar. This could be intrinsically tied to the millennial need for consistent feedback, but more research is needed to determine why millennials have an aversion to online learning and a preference for in-person workshops.

Relevance to current workload. In addition to the professional development opportunity being interactive, millennials also emphasize the need for it to be relevant to their current workload. Among all of the themes that emerged from the coding, this was one of the most dominant. Interestingly, the majority of study participants stated that they would prefer professional development opportunities that are relevant to what they do today rather than those that would benefit their overall professional growth. Ultimately, millennials only want to attend professional development if they can immediately relate and apply it to the work that they are currently doing.

While one could argue that millennial educators are still new to the field and are in "survival mode" as they try to figure out demands of their job, there is also an inherent link to the existing literature regarding an overall generational preference. The current literature is saturated with arguments that millennials are self-centered and egocentric (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). This desire to have learning be related to them could certainly be embedded in these characteristics and their desire to see their own worth in the larger scope of the organization. In the study done by Hall (2016), millennials stated that they need to understand the "bigger picture" about what they were going to learn, how they were going to learn, how this learning will benefit them, and how the organization will benefit from their learning (p. 22). There was an overwhelming desire that millennials receive professional development that not only applies to what they are

doing immediately but also that explicitly outlines why they need to learn the information. If educational leaders want to engage millennials in professional development, then they must choose topics that millennials see as relevant to what they are doing and related to the bigger scope of their jobs.

This need for relevance in learning aligns with other existing studies. Additional existing literature that focuses on professional learning preferences found that millennials prefer personalized and self-directed teaching methods as well as deliberate training in professional skills (Desy et al., 2017). Professional learning, as a result of this study and previous research, must, therefore, be deliberately related to the skills that millennials need to succeed. Millennials do not want to leave the professional development workshop questioning how what they learned relates to what they need to accomplish. Professional development must answer "why am I learning this" and "what can I do with what I just learned" in order to satisfy the needs of millennials.

The professional credentials of the presenter are also intertwined with this concept of relevance. Thompson (2016) found that millennials want to have subject-matter experts or trainers that take a genuine interest in the success of the employee. While I originally thought that this meant that the trainers should be highly credentialed in the field, my research found that millennials do not care about the official credentials but that the expertise should be found in relevant experience. For example, an occupational therapist that was interviewed did not want someone with a doctoral-level education and research-based knowledge in the field but rather wanted someone who has been in the field practicing in the same manner and location as that employee (i.e., school-based not medical experience). Throughout the interviews, millennials emphasized the need for the

presenter to be able to relate to their experience, not only on an emotional level through empathy but also in that the strategies they were providing were ones that they had personally used successfully. As educational leaders seek to provide meaningful professional development opportunities, they should invest their time in ensuring that the training is relevant to the current workload and taught by someone with similar experience.

Timing of professional development. In addition to the delivery and actual content of the professional development, this study found that millennial educators also have preferences regarding the timing of the professional development. Consistent with the research that states that millennials resent having to work after hours and require a flexible schedule (Pinzaru et al., 2016), this study found that millennials want professional development to occur during work hours. While some recognized the need to have learning occur in the evening in order to meet required hours, they would prefer that all learning occur during work so as not to interfere with their personal schedules; it should be noted that I did not explore their personal schedules further so there may be a variety of reasons millennials want learning to occur during work (i.e. they work another job to supplement their income, they have family responsibilities, etc.) Interview participants also preferred that the learning opportunities occur during morning hours because that is when they feel they are most productive, and it is least disruptive to the school day. While previous generations may have been willing to stretch their work hours to accomplish what was needed millennials hold to the values of a work-life balance with strict boundaries (Zemke et al., 2013). Educational leaders cannot rely on educators to

seek out learning opportunities if they are outside of working hours and, thus, must create opportunities for this learning to occur during the day without impacting student success.

Cost of the training. The final theme that emerged from this study is that cost is a valuable factor in determining professional development choices. If millennial staff members are going to choose professional development, they are going to look at the cost and determine whether the training fulfills all other criteria: meets their learning needs, is interactive and relevant, and takes place during the school day. If staff do not see professional development meeting these criteria, they are not going to spend money on it. This is also aligned with current research. Because millennials have a " lower level of sustained energy, low resistance to pressure and stress, a more fragile self-esteem, less determination in achieving results (especially when faced with barriers), impatience when dealing with less appealing tasks or tasks requiring a sustained effort, poor attention for details and work quality" (Pinzaru et al., 2016, p. 185), they are not going to actively problem solve if cost is a factor. There is the possibility, though unexplored in this particular study, that the economic struggles of millennials may be different than previous generations, so that this age-group cannot afford to spend money on learning when they have other pressing fiscal obligations. Educational leaders need to determine how they can provide cost-effective professional development that meets the other criteria to attract millennial staff members.

Preferences for professional development. Overall, millennials who participated in this study indicated preferences for professional development that focused on several characteristics. Preferences should be taken into consideration as educational leaders seek to meet the learning needs of their youngest employees. Companies,

including schools, must adjust their strategies and philosophies to keep up with not only the larger societal demands but also the changing needs and preferences of their workforce (Sinek, 2017). As a result of this study, a theory emerged that recommends that educational leaders develop professional development for millennial educational professionals that employs a multimodal style of learning through interactive workshops that focus on material relevant to their current workload taught by someone with applicable experience during the course of the workday and at a reasonable cost.

Evaluating Grounded Theory Research

Throughout the evolution of the development of grounded theory as a methodology, researchers have established criteria to evaluate the emergent theory. Glaser (as cited in Berthelsen, Grimshaw-Aagaard, & Hansen, 2018) first established criteria to which grounded theory research must meet. These criteria center around the concepts of fit, work, relevance, and modifiability. Using this as a basis for evaluation, Charmaz (2006) modified the criteria to determine if the grounded theory research presents and explains credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Charmaz (2006) argued that an effective combination of originality and credibility substantially increase resonance, usefulness and the overall value of the contribution of the study. Using these four criteria to evaluate my research regarding the preferences of millennials for professional learning, I found that I have developed grounded research that can make a valuable contribution. It should be noted that I chose Charmaz's (2006) model because her work emphasizes a constructivist view, which is consistent with my assumptions about how millennials developed their views toward professional development.

Credibility. Charmaz's (2006) outline of credibility is aligned with the general aspects of credibility in qualitative research. She wants to ensure that the research has achieved "intimate familiarly with the setting or topic" (p. 182) while creating logical links between the gathered data and the arguments and analysis. In her book *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006), she asked whether the research provides enough evidence to not only support the emergent theory, but whether the audience would also come to the same conclusions after reading the study. Using this question as a guide, I do believe that my emergent theory is both ideologically and methodologically sound. Having followed the methodological tenets of grounded theory research, including consistent comparison and analysis through initial and pattern coding, I was able to uncover thematic preferences of millennial educators for professional learning. The limitations of this study, which could impede the credibility of the research are previously discussed, and I have been transparent about my role as the researcher throughout my writing. While there is room for further research as outlined, this study provides a solid foundation for understanding the preferences of a generation as determined though existing literature and qualitative research.

Originality. The second criterion in Charmaz's (2006) evaluative framework is originality, which is inherently aligned with the research problem statement. Existing research supports the argument that educational leaders, and employers more generally, need to modify their traditional approaches to leadership if they are going to meet the demands of this growing generation of employees. While research in this area is growing, it is often done in the corporate field or in institute of higher learning, not in the field of K–12 education as this research has done. Moreover, much of the current research does

not discuss the preferences of millennials explicitly as they relate to professional development; research focuses on preferences in the workplace more generally or learning as it relates to their experiences in colleges and universities. The originality of this work lies in both the specific setting and central focus, both of which supplement the current research.

Resonance. Charmaz (2006) asked if the grounded theory makes sense to the participants and others with similar circumstances, and if the research contributes to the participants' understanding of their own lives. While this needs to be further explored, this research does provide further insight into the lives of millennials. It generates a collective set of preferences for professional learning that validates how a millennial answered because their responses were consistent with others, while helping them better understand professional development more generally. The emergent theory helps millennials recognize that they should pursue and request learning that is multimodal, interactive, and relevant as this emerged as the preference of this generational cohort. Additionally, aligned with transformative learning theory, this research helps these younger adults understand their own learning and views on professional development.

However, the goal was not to have this research resonate only with millennials but also with the leaders responsible for supporting them in the educational setting. While further outlined in the section on implications, this research further supports the argument in the existing literature for educational leaders to adapt their expectations to meet a growing generational cohort in the workplace. This research clearly outlines the preferences of millennials for professional development, and leaders can take this emergent theory to develop meaningful learning opportunities for them.

Usefulness. In the final criterion for evaluation of grounded theory research, Charmaz (2006) challenges the researcher to question whether the analysis offers interpretations that people can use in their everyday lives. Rather than ask about the knowledge gained through the resonance criteria, this tenet focuses on the practicality of the research. While further developed in the Implications section of this chapter, the research in this grounded theory study is definitely relevant and useful as both millennials and educational leaders navigate the realm of professional development. The emergent theory and data help millennial educational professionals apply their preferences when choosing effective professional development. In the same way, educational administrators can design professional development using the characteristics outlined in this study in order to best support their millennial employees.

Moreover, the criterion of usefulness asks if the analysis sparks further research in other areas (Charmaz, 2006). As previously discussed, further research can be done both in the breadth of the research as well as the application of the research. Educational leaders are encouraged to conduct similar interviews or additional surveys among their own staff to determine their preferences for professional development. However, they could also use the framework of this study to do comparative generational studies on professional development and other areas of the workplace. This study is positioned between the current research and the future research that needs to be done.

Overall evaluation. When using the criteria set forth by Charmaz (2006) this study and its emergent theory meet the tenets of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. When combined with the sections on the limitations of this study as well as

the recommendations for further research, this evaluation is thorough and recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

Limitations of the Study

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) described limitations as those characteristics of design or methodology that impact the interpretation and findings from the research. The major limitations of this study are grounded in the setting and sample size. Because this research was conducted within the context of only one educational services commission, the transferability of the findings is limited. Moreover, my sample size was only 25, a threat to the trustworthiness of the study. This limited sample size is often one of the biggest criticisms of qualitative research when compared to quantitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), but in this study the sample size provides a meaningful foundation for understanding the preferences of millennial educational professionals. Additionally, it is possible that educational professionals who choose to work for an educational services commission might have different preferences than those educators working in a traditional school setting. Finally, this research is limited in scope because it only focuses on one generation. All of these limitations have been addressed throughout my research and should be considered as further research is conducted.

Recommendations

This study has produced several recommendations for multiple stakeholders. This includes recommendations for further research, both in depth and breadth of the study. It suggests that policymakers use this study to improve policies regarding mandatory professional development for educators.

Recommendations for future research. For those who seek to explore this topic further, there are several recommendations for research, practice, policy and leadership, and future study. This research answers the question: How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of educational professionals of the millennial generation? Yet, it also leads to more questions. Some of the remaining questions are inherently tied to the limitations of the study. In many ways, the future research could maintain the foundations of grounded theory as a methodology but should consider additional data as an extension of a broader sampling and the constant-comparative method. This could include interviewing more millennials within the same setting or broadening the setting using the same interview questions and processes to enlarge the sample size. If future researchers would like to extend beyond qualitative research, a mixed-methods study using surveys could also add insight into millennial preferences. It is recommended that the survey questions focus on the themes that emerged from the pattern coding of this study.

Among the most significant recommendations is that further research should include a comparative study of generational preferences of professional development. While preferences of millennials did emerge, it is undetermined if these preferences are limited to millennials only or if they are generally preferred characteristics of all educators regardless of one's generation. It is quite possible that these findings are overall best practices for professional learning, not just unique to millennials. However, tf generational differences do emerge from an additional study, then more theories about how to support multigenerational learning through professional development would need to occur.

Another recommendation is to replicate this study in the future. At this time in their career, millennials are still new to the field of education. In subsequent decades, their preferences for professional development could change based on the time in the field and their needs might change based on experience. It would be interesting to further implore whether there are nuanced differences among younger and older millennials as this generation spans two decades- do millennials in their twenties have different views than those in their thirties. While this study sought to determine those differences no differences significantly emerged. This research is a snapshot of millennials during this era, but it is possible that these respondents may have differing responses, both individually and as a generational cohort, as time progresses. By conducting the research in future decades, one would be able to compare their generation's preferences as they gain more experience. It will also be important to conduct this research later because the literature would be more expansive. What we know about millennials in the workplace is embedded in the current research that can only focus on less than a decade of information as millennials are just now entering the workforce.

This study could also be embedded in a bigger sociological exploration of the unique factors that may contribute to millennial viewpoints. For example, there may be obstacles that millennials experience that previous generations did not have in terms of family planning, securing jobs, paying student loans, and more that may alter their abilities to seek out or value professional learning compared to their other needs. Further study of the broader socioeconomic environment as it relates to millennials may cast more understanding as to the motivations and reasons behind the findings in this study.

Finally, the findings support further research on the interactive nature of online learning. While I did not explore this question further, as webinars and online courses become more interactive due to emerging technology, it is possible that the views towards this type of professional development might shift. One question to further explore would be: Do millennials not prefer online learning in and by itself, or do they merely not prefer the lack of interaction? It is possible that this cohort of millennials have just not experienced fully-interactive online learning, and this may skew their preferences. A study further exploring the types of online learning and the possibilities for interaction could shed more light on millennials and their beliefs about this format.

Recommendations for policymakers. The results of this study can inform policy on several levels. First, the research shows that policymakers need to consider generational differences as potential factors in determining policies. They must understand that the growing population of millennials in the educational workplace do not have the same expectations and preferences as their predecessors, so policies may not be as effective. In forming policy, they should pay special attention to the resources that school leaders will need in order to offer meaningful professional development, including the need to offer the learning opportunities during the workday. If policymakers want to provide more specificity to their professional development guidelines, they should consider including the components of this emergent theory to their guidance. This includes, but is not limited to, providing recommendations of the format of professional development, the credentials of the speakers, and the cost of training. Ultimately, these policies as well as the preferences of millennials will have implication for educational leadership.

Implications for Educational Leaders

This study uncovers significant findings for educational leaders regarding the professional preferences of millennial educational professionals. The existing literature emphasizes that as our society and workforce are becoming younger, we are seeing major shifts of political, ethical, and corporate values, which are an indication that changes must be made to mitigate the generational differences (Zemke et al., 2013). As millennials continue to diversify the workplace demographically (Zemke et al., 2013), they will challenge how educational leaders traditionally structured not only the workplace generally but more specifically how they offered professional learning. If educational leaders ignore the changing generational shifts, they can also face millennials leaving the field (Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2016). Educational leaders must quickly start to understand the needs of this age group if they want them to be successful in their positions.

While some may argue that employers should not make concessions for one particular group in the workplace, situational leadership theory creates the opportunity for leaders to react to various situations based on needs. Hersey and Blanchard (1985) argued that there are four leadership styles: telling, selling, participating, and delegating. Previous generations may be able to operate at the level of delegating or would prefer telling, millennials' preferences lend themselves to selling and participating. Existing research and this study show that they want a high level of supportiveness in the workplace with consistent feedback or directedness. Leaders need to be reflective in how their leadership style may or may not meet the needs of millennials.

Educational leaders should not only be reflective on their leadership generally but should also strategically plan professional development based on the findings of this study. While the findings of this study do not specifically support a type of professional development, they do emphasize particular characteristics of professional development. These characteristics include developing professional development that is multimodal, interactive, relevant, during the school day, and cost-effective.

By using this emergent theory, educational leaders can design professional development learning opportunities that are meaningful in both content and relevance to millennials. The sessions should allow the employees to interact with each other using a variety of methods. Professional development that is merely lecture based or one-directional is not sufficient in meeting the needs of millennials. Before bringing in an outside speaker, leaders should ensure that the speaker is engaging and interactive but, more important, that they have relevant experience in the field. Educational leaders should, therefore, consider having peer-led professional development opportunities.

While it might seem advantageous to an organization to invest in professional development that is forward thinking and focused on long-term planning, this is not going to appeal to the millennial staff members. It is suggested that educational leaders who want to pursue professional development in those areas give options to staff members to attend varying professional development opportunities. This would allow those generations that may be intrigued by long-term planning to attend but would give millennials that option to attend training that is more relevant. It would be beneficial for leaders to ask for feedback and suggestions via surveys before providing training, as this gives millennials the voice that they desire while also ensuring that they feel that the

training is relevant to their current workload. When promoting professional development, educational leaders should also clearly define the objectives of the training and how it relates to either the millennial educational professionals directly or the "bigger picture" of the organization.

This is especially true of onboarding in the field of education. As millennial educational professionals take on jobs, they are going to need to be fully supported in ways that meet their needs. The comprehensive, strategic process of onboarding, which differs from the short-term orientation process, requires educational leaders to convey information about the organization and its culture while giving new employees the tools and information they need to be successful. Emerging research states that it is imperative to value the unique contributions of new employees (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). Therefore, applying these millennial preferences to the onboarding process will increase the effectiveness of the process while increasing the millennials overall satisfaction with the learning. Giving millennials ongoing and relevant training may increase their motivation to stay with the organization.

It is recommended that educational leaders take these findings and determine how best to allocate their professional development resources. It would be less effective for them to invest in online learning programs or to expect staff to complete training on their own after hours or with their own money. While previous generations may have been willing to invest in training with their own expenses and on their own time, this will not occur among millennials. Rather, leaders should invest in models that allow millennials to interact with each other during the workday. Because school budgets are limited and

resources can be scarce, educational leaders need to make responsible decisions regarding professional development.

Overall, educational leaders need to make conscious decisions in determining professional development for all staff members, including millennials. While there is certainly room for more research in this area, the findings of this study are a starting point for understanding the preferences for professional development of millennials in educational settings.

Personal and professional implications for leadership. This study also has personal and professional implications for my own leadership. As a millennial, it has challenged me to be more reflective on my own learning preferences, but more important, as a leader, it has challenged me to be more reflective in how I approach professional learning. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) stated that the goal of reflective practice is not just the acquisition of knowledge but the changes in behavior because of it. While I have learned a great deal about my millennial staff members, this learning is only valuable if I put it into action. As I continue to plan professional development opportunities for my staff members, I have applied the characteristics that have emerged from this research. This has improved not only my strategic planning but also made me much more fiscally responsible as I now allocate resources on more meaningful professional development opportunities. Through reflection, I have now developed a more practical plan.

This research also reinforced principals of leadership more generally. George and Sims (2007) argued that empowering people to achieve within an organization, especially a school, is much more valuable than creating loyal followers. As I empower my staff, including millennial educational professionals, I better understand their needs by

becoming an active learner to help the organization improve. Fullan (2011) highlighted this type of learning in his steps for organizational change. His writings include how important it is to motivate the masses, collaborate, and learn confidently; all of these steps are achieved as I am more attuned to what millennial staff members want and need to succeed. This is also consistent with the tenets of moral leadership that emphasize "mutual needs, aspirations, and values between leaders and followers" (Burns, 1978, p. 483). Ultimately, helping my staff members excel professionally and changing my organization requires continuous learning about what motivates and engages millennials to grow.

Conclusion

This grounded theory research was selected for the purpose of constructing a theory of the preferences for professional development held by millennial educators as they exhibit unique characteristics as supported by current research on the generational clash that exists. The goal of this study was to construct this theory so that educational leaders could better support the millennial staff members through meaningful professional development. Through this qualitative research, several themes emerged that highlighted the professional development preferences of millennials. As a result, the following theory emerged: Millennial educational professionals prefer multimodal learning opportunities through interactive workshops that focus on relevant material to their current assignment taught by someone with applicable experience during the course of their day and at a reasonable cost. With this insight, educational leaders, including myself, can make informed decisions about how to allocate their professional development resources to support their millennial staff members.

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Appendix A

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE OF STUDY: Professional Development Preferences of Millennial Educators: A Qualitative Study
Principal Investigator: Dr. JoAnn Manning (manning@rowan.edu)
Student Researcher: Bobbie Downs (downsb65@students.rowan.edu)

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

Dr. JoAnn Manning or Bobbie Downs will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

A. Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the best practices that educational leaders can use to support millennials in the workplace through professional development. It is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

B. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

As an educator and member of the millennial generation (born between 1980- 2004) you are being asked to participate in this study. Every member of the study is also an employee of an educational services unit. Your opinions are important for not only this research, but also the betterment of the educational services unit.

C. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?

Every participant in this student must be an educational professional employed by an educational services unit. The participant must be born between 1980-2004. Employees who are born outside of that timeframe may not participate in this study.

D. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview of at least 30 minutes in length. During this interview, you will be asked approximately ten open-ended questions about your learning preferences and experiences with professional development. The interview will be recorded (audio only), but no identifying information will be included on the recording. The interview may take place at either your district placement or in the main office depending on your preference and/or availability. The interview will occur at a time that is convenient and mutually agreed upon during the work day.

E. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

Possible risks associated with this study are minimal and rare. Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. There is minimal risk that you may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics being discussed. If you are uncomfortable, you are free not to answer or to skip to the next question. Additionally, none of your responses will be used to evaluate your performance or will have an impact on your job standing.

F. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

It is possible that you might receive no immediate, direct personal benefits if you choose to take part in this research study. However, your participation may help us understand professional development practices which can benefit you directly and may help other educational leaders to support millennial staff members.

G. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?

There are no alternative treatments available. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

H. How many subjects will participate in the study?

The research is designed for at least 30, but no more than 40 subjects, to be enrolled in the study.

I. How long will my participation in this study take?

While the study will be conducted over several months from January to April 2019, you are only being asked to participate in one interview of at least 30 minutes during this time period. You may be asked to submit any documents relevant to the study with a time commitment not to exceed an additional 30 minutes.

J. Where will the study take place?

The interview may take place at either your district placement or in the main office of the educational services unit depending on your preference and/or availability. The interview will occur at a time that is convenient and mutually agreed upon during the work day.

K. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

L. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you.

M. Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

N. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. No personal information will be recorded during the interview and all interview protocols and transcripts will be coded. No one else will have access to your information and all identifiable information will be removed from the dissertation. All of the research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and will not be accessible to anyone else in the work environment.

O. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Bobbie Downs at downsb65@students.rowan.edu

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

P. What will happen if you are injured during this study?

If you are injured in this study and need treatment, contact Counseling Services and seek treatment. We will offer the care needed to treat injuries directly resulting from taking part in this study. Rowan University may bill your insurance company or other third parties, if appropriate, for the costs of the care you get for the injury. However, you may be responsible for some of those costs. Rowan University does not plan to pay you or provide compensation for the injury. You do not give up your legal rights by signing this form. If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to the research staff present at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information is on this consent form.

Q. Who can you call if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can contact the Principal Investigator: JoAnn Manning (manning@rowan.edu) or Co- Investigator: Bobbie Downs (downsb65@students.rowan.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:_____
Signature:_____ Date: _____

Appendix B

AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. JoAnn Manning and student researcher, Bobbie Downs. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape (sound only) your interview as part of that research study.

The recording(s) will be used for

- *analysis by the research team*
- *developing a theory of professional development preferences of millennials*

The recording(s) will include no identifying information. The interviewer's name and position will not be recorded. There will be no video recording.

The recording(s) will be stored on an application on the iPhone. The interview will then be transcribed and stored electronically. Any printed copies of the transcripts will be kept in a locked fie cabinet. All documents and interviews will be linked with a code to the subjects' identity. All documents will be destroyed upon the successful completion of the dissertation process.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Check one:

_____ I GRANT permission for my interview to be audio recorded.

_____ I DENY permission for my interview to be audio recorded.

Subject Signature: Date:

Appendix C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee:	Position:	Interviewer:
Date:	Start Time:	End Time:

Introduction: Good morning. I want to thank you for being willing to participate in this interview. As discussed, the purpose of this interview is to gather some information about how we can best support our staff of the millennial generation, particularly in the area of professional development. Ultimately, I want to answer the question, "How should professional development be designed to best meet the preferences of millennial teachers and support staff?" While this is part of an assignment for my doctoral course, it is also part of a bigger project that we are developing to support our staff here at our organization.

Before we get started, I need you to sign this informed consent. It explains that you understand that this interview is voluntary, that your personal information is not going to be shared with anyone else, and that your comments are also kept confidential. Also, as discussed in the email I sent you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. This will help ensure that I can get all the details while still being able to have an interactive conversation with you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Background Information

1. Please tell me about your experience in your position such as how long you have been in your field, what you do on a day to day basis, and any other information you would like to share.

Learning Style

2. How do you learn best, including how you like to learn and what helps you to learn?

3. Please describe an example of a lesson, workshop, or anything else you have experienced that met your learning style and explain why.

4. If you could design a professional development opportunity that would be ideal for your learning needs, what would it look like? Who would teach it? When would it be held?

Types of Professional Development

5. When reflecting upon your career so far, which types of professional development do you believe have been most helpful to your growth? Some types might include workshops, webinars, and mentoring.

6. Were there any aspects (collaboration, technology, etc.) of the type of professional development that really helped you learn?

7. Based on your personal and professional schedule as well as your response to the previous question, when during the day do you feel is the best time to have professional development?

Value of Professional Development

8. Do you think professional development is or should be important to educators?

9. When attending or choosing professional development, what characteristics impact your decision?

10. When thinking of professional development, which characteristics are most important? *Examples include how relevant it is, the level of interaction or teamwork provided, the ability to be personalized, etc.*

Conclusion: That concludes all of my questions for you today. Is there anything else you would like to add that we might not have discussed?

I appreciate all of your feedback and what you shared. If you have any documents that might support what we discussed such as trainings you attended, emails that were shared, or anything else, please send them to me. Should I have to clarify any information or have any follow-up questions I will contact you. I will also send you back my notes on your interview for your review. Thank you for your time.

Appendix D

FIELD NOTES/OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

The following are relevant observations or opportunities for field notes: professional development sessions, supervisor meetings, general discussions, etc.

Type of Event: **Location:**

Date: **Start Time:** **End Time:**

Role of Researcher (instructor, participant, etc):

Summary of the Event (including specific facts, numbers, details of what happened)

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Physical setting/ visual layout (as applicable):	
Description of participants	
Description of individuals engaged in activity	
Participant quotes	
Other observations	
Other observations	
Other observations	
Other observations	

Appendix E

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL

The following are relevant documents for collection: professional development offerings, emails, emails from millennial staff, emails from supervisors regarding professional development, staff requests to attend professional development, staff observations, staff professional development records, existing surveys, etc.

Document # **Name of Document:**

Type of Document: (*email, training, other)* **Location of Document** (*Online, print, other)*

Who created the document? *If staff or educational professional, include. If student, reject.*

Date of Creation: *If before 2013, reject. If after 2013, include.* **Date Retrieved:** (MM/DD/YY)

Length of Document: (# of pages, # of paragraphs)

I**n what historical and organizational context was the document produced?** *Etc.*

What was the purpose of the document? *If related to professional development, include. If designed for other purposes, exclude.*

Does the document speak to participant experiences or preferences? *If yes, include. If no, exclude.*

References to "professional development" in the document: *If indirect or direct references, include. If no indirect or direct references, exclude.*

Components of professional development addressed in the document: *(personalization, format, satisfaction, etc..)*

Key phrases/quotes in the document: *etc.*

Summary of the document: *etc***.**

Appendix F

SAMPLE ANALYTICAL MEMO FOR INTERVIEWS

Participant: **Position**: **Interviewer**: Bobbie Downs
Date: **Start Time**: **End Time**:

Surprises	Interesting Thoughts	Themes to Pursue	Key Themes

Appendix G

SAMPLE ANALYTICAL MEMO FOR FIELD NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

Type of Event: **Location:**

Date: **Start Time:** **End Time:**

Surprises	Interesting Thoughts	Themes to Pursue	Key Themes

Appendix H

SAMPLE ANALYTICAL MEMO FOR DOCUMENT COLLECTION

Document # **Name of Document:**

Type of Document: (*email, training, other)* **Location of Document** (*Online, print, other)*

Surprises	Interesting Thoughts	Themes to Pursue	Key Themes