



PORTRAIT OF A NEVADA LEARNER

Piloting the Portrait Case Study

How do teachers' perceptions of their professional agency influence their teaching and learning decision making?

Regional Professional Development Program, Statewide

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Introduction

The Portrait of a Nevada Learner depicts the “attributes a learner must possess to succeed both academically and in life, now, and into a rapidly evolving future” (Nevada Department of Education in partnership with ed.Xtraordinary, 2023). Many of the attributes included in the Portrait are achieved through learner-centered pedagogy (LCP) ([Bremner, Sakata & Cameron, 2022](#)). Within learner-centered pedagogy, autonomy, or agency, is key!

The RPDPs innovation project was therefore designed to capture a snapshot of Nevada educators' perceptions of teacher agency through a statewide survey, specifically seeking feedback about how educators viewed their capacity for agency in curriculum and instructional decision making, and choice within professional learning with the intention of using the information gathered to develop specific professional learning opportunities that support increased agency for teachers and in turn, students.

Intended Impact

One key aspect of the Portrait of a Nevada Learner relates to increased student agency through students' contributions, response to challenges, sense of identity and purpose, and connection and belonging within school and the broader community (NV DOE & ed.Xtraordinary, 2023). In order to positively impact student agency, teachers' agency must also be considered, as the teaching and learning decisions they make on a daily basis shape the learning experiences that directly impact students' agency. However, if teachers do not feel they have agency in the classroom through instructional and curricular decision making, nor access to professional learning that assists them in designing learner-centered experiences, the likelihood of teachers providing opportunities for students to enact and increase their agency through learner-centered pedagogy (LCP) is less likely ([Hawthorne-Kocak, K. 2021](#)).

The Nevada Regional Professional Development Program (RPDP) provides high-quality professional learning for teachers and administrators based on best practices and current educational research, including how to develop and integrate learner-centered pedagogy (LCP) that empowers students as agents of their learning. Based on the teachers' perceptions of their agency across instructional,

curricular, and professional learning spheres, the RPDPs will develop and facilitate professional learning aligned with the findings from the teacher survey.

Project Work

The RPDP team developed a K-12 Teacher Agency and Decision Making Survey (Artifacts) that was distributed to Nevada teachers who have participated in training with the RPDP. Although 531 teachers responded, which exceeded initial expectations, it was challenging to obtain a representative sample of Nevada educators' perceptions, including representation of diverse teaching contexts, multiple districts, a variety of grade levels, and different levels of teaching experience. The RPDP team analyzed teacher's responses to determine key themes related to teachers' agency in decision making and professional learning needs that will be used to design and facilitate future professional learning opportunities.

Lessons Learned

Analysis of the survey responses yielded the following insights that can inform the design and facilitation of professional learning in the upcoming school year included:

- The majority of teachers who expressed a positive sense of agency attributed it to school administrators' actions that empowered them to make instructional and curricular decisions in the classroom
- Many teachers did not feel they had a sense of agency in relation to district- or state-level decisions
- Of teachers who reported a positive sense of agency, their locus of control was more likely to occur within a smaller context, such as school site or classroom
- There did not seem to be a distinction between instructional and curricular decisions based on teachers' responses

Next Steps

Potential next steps based on the findings from the statewide teacher survey could include the following:

- Survey administrators to get a sense of to what degree they feel that they contribute to teacher agency at their school sites. In what ways do these administrators promote teacher agency over instructional, curricular and professional learning opportunities for their staff? This next step directly relates to an outcome of our educator needs assessment in which educators who felt they had a high sense of teacher agency attributed much of that to their site administrator. ([Ingersoll, Sirinides & Dougherty, 2018](#))
- Create sample surveys for educators to use with students and families to inform teaching and learning practices that promote student agency
- Provide professional learning for both administrators and teachers based on their input ([gatesfoundation.org, 2018](#))
- Assist teachers in identifying and utilizing the agency already established within their locus of control
- Foster teacher mindsets and dispositions regarding the power of student agency
- Co-create learning intentions and success criteria as a means of increased agency ([Hattie, 2017](#); [Learning Forward, 2016](#); [Nevada Academic Content Standards](#), various dates)
- Make connections between the NEPF ([Nevada Educator Performance Framework, 2019](#)) and the principles of learner-centered pedagogy clear and actionable for instructional practice

Project Artifacts: Case Study Information

[RPDP Teacher Agency and Decision Making Infographic](#)
[K-12 Educators: Teacher Agency & Decision Making Survey](#)
[Survey Purpose Video](#)
[Data Story: Teacher Agency & Decision Making in Nevada](#)

