Chapter 18
Micro–Credentialing Teacher Leadership:
Coaching Digital Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors explore the influence of a synchronous teacher leadership coaching design on supporting an educator's micro-credential experience within an established system. The authors include several experienced leadership coaches who had the opportunity to support teachers in this work. The coaching model created by this partnership was particularly interesting because it integrated established best practices of micro-credentials (e.g., tied to financial incentives), while also addressing some of the key challenges (e.g., communication). Findings include that coaching teacher leaders was especially useful to those teachers hesitant to start or complete a micro-credential on their own, thus making coaching a valuable tool for districts looking to implement micro-credentials districtwide.

INTRODUCTION

States spend approximately $18 billion annually on education-focused professional development, resulting in the average teacher spending 68 hours a year engaged in some form of workplace training (Boston Consulting Group, 2014). With the 2021 passage of the American Rescue Plan, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding will provide even more resources for school systems looking to improve the practice of their workforce. Despite these investments, current professional development opportunities in the United States are not effectively equipping teachers to make change in their classrooms (Acree, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). In general, professional development largely remains a passive learning experience without catering to teachers' individual needs or allowing educators to take ownership of their professional learning (Darling Hammond et al., 2009). A recent solution has come in the form of micro-credentials, previously known as educator *badges,* "credentials for the 21st Century digital age, which can be used to represent a more complete and verified picture of what people know and can do" (Catalano & Doucet, 2013; Gish-Lieberman, 2021). These credentials are often offered online (Staker et al., 2020), cover specific skills that aggregate to a broader amount of relevant knowledge (Demonte, 2017), and are used for both secondary and adult learners (Demonte, 2017; Gish-Lieberman, 2021).

In terms of adult learning, micro-credentials have been piloted in several districts and states as a form of professional development for educators. States are interested in micro-credentials because they can be focused on supporting specific priorities as needed (e.g., inclusion practices, second-language development) and are easily made available online statewide (Demonte, 2017). Educators also see micro-credentials as accessible and easily fitting into existing systems, such as by supplementing established professional development routines with a formal micro-credential track. Though still relatively new, there is growing evidence that micro-credentials are regarded positively by educators (McKnight, 2021; for a notable exception see Demonte, 2013) and offer teachers a chance to explore complex issues via manageable parts (Demonte, 2017). Educators also value micro-credentials because they can be competency-based, personalized, on-demand, and shareable, allowing educators to be the keepers of their own professional development documentation digitally (Staker et al., 2020). Micro-credentials encourage teachers to apply skills to classroom practice, increasing the rigor of teaching (Acree, 2016). The actual effectiveness of micro-credentials on the improvement of teacher practice varies, and overall the research on micro-credentials is lacking. The studies that do exist often focus solely on teacher feedback (Demonte, 2017). Despite the lack of clarity about their effectiveness, both state leaders and educators continue to have a growing interest in using micro-credentials as a form of professional development. Thus, the field as a whole would benefit from exploring what implementation methods best support educators increasing their knowledge and improving their practices via micro-credential-based professional development (Demonte, 2017).

IMPLEMENTATION IN EDUCATION

The design and implementation of micro-credentials might explain some of the variance in their effectiveness as professional development in education. Researchers have found that the usefulness of a micro-credential depends on several factors. Boud and colleagues (2021) found that the content of micro-credentials and how ingrained they are into the larger professional development system influenced

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