

A REFLECTIVE ACCOUNT OF CHARACTER-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript will reflect on the planning and development of professional learning opportunities provided to diverse university stakeholders on character education and virtue formation. While reflecting on the approach to the project, planning logistics and content development are explored explicitly. An evaluation exploring training modalities, attendance, arrangement, and feedback were used to gain insight and guide the authors in their reflective practice. The reflective narrative and evaluation of ideas led to a decision about the factors that aided the project's implementation. In future professional learning opportunities, determining attendees' prior knowledge of the content and additional internal support for communication and development plans is key. While evaluating how to implement professional learning opportunities focused on character, the planning and development processes were explored; in coming to a decision, the reflective criteria of responsibility, open-mindedness, and wholeheartedness were focal points.

Keywords: reflection, readiness attitudes, planning, professional learning opportunities, planning and development

PROBLEM

A character education center housed within a university in the southwest of the United States set out to provide all university faculty and staff professional learning opportunities (PLOs) to enhance their knowledge of character education and personal character formation. The PLOs aligned with the center's grant objectives to provide training within the university community and aligned with the overarching goal of building a national movement around character education that encourages human and societal flourishing through virtue formation and practical wisdom. While the center's team had a goal in mind when developing the PLOs, what was unknown about the project was how to implement PLOs focused on character. When reflecting on this unknown problem, we

focused on aspects within our process for planning, developing, and implementing the PLOs. The character education center not only wanted to meet the objectives of the grant by training faculty and staff, but then we also wanted to ensure we were achieving our overarching goal; however, it was unknown if we followed the appropriate steps or planned and provided the right content in the PLOs to reach these aspirations. As the center plans to contribute additional PLOs to internal university stakeholders, it is imperative to reflect upon the effectiveness of how we prepared for the implementation of the sessions to make future improvements.

READINESS

Reflection can lead to meaningful change (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2015) if reflective individuals challenge their own assumptions, reduce their

judgments (Bassot, 2016), and remove themselves from the self-confirming perspective (Brookfield, 1995). To achieve critical reflection leading to change through such actions, reflective individuals must demonstrate readiness for reflection, including open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility—three attitudes necessary for reflection, according to Dewey (1933/1989). In this paper, we will reflect on the unknown effectiveness of the PLO's project process and the impact of knowledge on making valuable adjustments in future training projects. Through the reflective process, we hope to unearth the strengths of our process for developing and implementing the PLOs, the strengths of the content offered, and the opportunities for growth in both aspects. The reflective process may provide an understanding of how the content impacted attendees' knowledge or how it may be altered, whether the processes of deployment and communication were appropriate, and what other factors may need to be considered in future PLO projects. By unveiling the potential for improvements through reflection on actions, we might build awareness and improve practice moving forward (Schon, 1983), which could further support the center's overarching goal.

Open-mindedness includes active listening, mindfulness of alternate ideas, and acknowledgment of error (Dewey, 1933/1989). In reflecting on the process and implementation of PLOs, we have deployed open-mindedness by considering how our process and content outline may have made sense to us and followed best practices but could have potentially been better informed through participant feedback and other input. To gain additional perspectives, we were open-minded in evaluating feedback from attendees, leadership, and the development team. Moreover, we assessed our perspectives and whether we were seeking advice to be self-confirming or looking through the perspective lenses of others and how to adjust in the future (Brookfield, 1995). We demonstrated and continue to deploy readiness to be open-minded. We reflected on our approaches and solicited input from various internal groups before making decisions regarding the PLOs. We asked the university's College of Education leadership team for feedback about the schedule and types of training planned after an outline was developed for the roll-out of content months before the sessions began.

We asked the university's faculty training leaders for expert input regarding the types of sessions offered (i.e., asynchronous, virtual, in-person) as well as the timing of sessions. Knowing the impact and relevancy of open-mindedness, we also asked the content development team for their advice on the shared objectives and content delivery (Carpenter, 2017; Hare, 2009; Martin & Mulvihill, 2023). Each group met with the center and offered advice, which informed us of our decision to change plans from offering all twenty-four sessions in one month to delivering regularly over four months. The center team acknowledged we were excited to blast content out to attendees in a robust month of offerings; however, we were open to the perspectives and ideas of others that it may be best to accommodate the busy schedules of staff and faculty by spreading out the learning sessions over time. Open-mindedness in reflecting on the PLO project allowed us to acknowledge errors in the process and mindfully consider new approaches for the future. The center team continually exudes whole-heartedness through our commitment and passion for the content. The engagement in reflection about the PLOs represents our readiness to employ a whole-hearted attitude; we aim to learn more about the project and ways to improve practice. The team was enthusiastic about delivering the content to all stakeholders and dove into the PLO project with zest and a love for learning, which Dewey (1933/1989) describes as an immersion into the subject and enthusiasm to follow through to the end—all necessary for reflection. We engulfed ourselves in the PLO project from start to finish through content reviews, continual meetings and check-ins, and support in content development and communications. We not only saw the project to its end but approached reflection on the project with whole-heartedness to help make informed decisions in the future (Birmingham, 2004). The team used research-based materials to inform content based on our personal experience as we pursued master's degrees in character education. The team demonstrated zest for the project as we worked with marketing and other university departments to advertise the sessions with excitement and by looking for ways to promote the PLOs. Through the connections with a growing community from other character education

center projects, we asked the development team to seek perspectives and input and bring in their own research so the center team could also grow in their learning.

Responsibility can also be considered a consistent belief, requiring courage to see and accept the consequences and integrity to persevere through challenges and do what is right (Dewey, 1933/1989). To approach the reflective process with responsibility, the center team was responsible for approaching the PLO project reflection to courageously accept perspectives and consequences of decisions made to make informed decisions moving forward. We mirrored the courageous actions of asking for feedback before the project rollout. Additionally, we solicited feedback after the sessions from several stakeholders, including college leadership, the development team, and attendees, incorporating received feedback into their reflection on the unknown effectiveness and plans for the future. The center team consistently showed perseverance and integrity as we continued to offer and attend PLOs even after, in one case, over 50 attendees signed up for a session, but only four attended. By approaching the reflective process regarding the PLO project with responsibility, we accepted the consequences of potential bad scheduling of sessions, as sessions were scheduled before staff and faculty were off work and have taken responsibility by accepting and integrating results and by offering the sessions via video recordings to reach more individuals helped to rectify this situation (Dewey, 1916/1985). The integrity demonstrated through the thoroughness of materials offered in the content, the consideration of faculty and staff learning modalities, the integration of feedback, and the active problem-solving reflect our responsibility within the project.

WORKING IDEAS

Through reflection, we hoped to understand more about effectively developing and deploying PLOs focused on character to influence attendee knowledge and practice. We had some working ideas of what may have contributed to this unknown, whether effective or not. The working ideas that we had about the success of the implementation of PLOs were related to (a) planning the logistics of the sessions and (b) planning and

developing content for the sessions. Logistics and developmental considerations for implementation include the steps we took to plan and provide the PLOs and the content considerations involving the planning and alignment we considered to determine and develop content within the PLOs. This section of the paper will outline the ideas based on our professional intuition and experiences.

Factor 1: Planning Logistics of the Sessions

The character education center was newly developed and only existed for about three months when we began working on the PLOs project. We outlined content and objectives for 24 sessions using personal experiences, prior knowledge, researched-based frameworks, and examples from various character-based initiatives at other universities and organizations. With an outline in place, we gathered vested internal applicants to develop content for the sessions and worked with internal departments to develop a communication plan. We worked with the internal development team to create a rollout plan for the learning sessions. What was unknown about this planning process was whether it was effective for optimal attendance and providing valued content for attendees. The team could have taken additional measures to gather interest levels, determine attendees' prior knowledge of the content, and provide additional internal support for communication and development plans.

SUGGESTIONS ON FORMAT, DURATION, AND TIMEFRAME

Several concepts were considered regarding the logistics for implementation, as seen in Figure 1. By soliciting feedback from multiple leadership teams prior to the rollout of the PLOs and actively listening with open-mindedness to the perspectives and expertise of others, we believed the integration of the feedback would prove to be successful in the format of sessions (asynchronous, virtual, in-person options) and the scheduling of sessions (four months versus one month). However, feedback regarding the timeframe sessions offered (time of day) was not utilized and may have hindered the effectiveness of our implementation of the PLOs. The learning experiences offered through in-person and virtual sessions versus asynchronous sessions would hopefully

increase understanding and enjoyment of the sessions. The feedback from leadership suggested offering different modalities for format but to lean on asynchronous sessions, as faculty prefer to learn in their own time. While we did not initially hold this view, we trusted the feedback from others with more experience. The session modalities ended up being four in-person sessions, 11 virtual sessions, and nine asynchronous sessions.

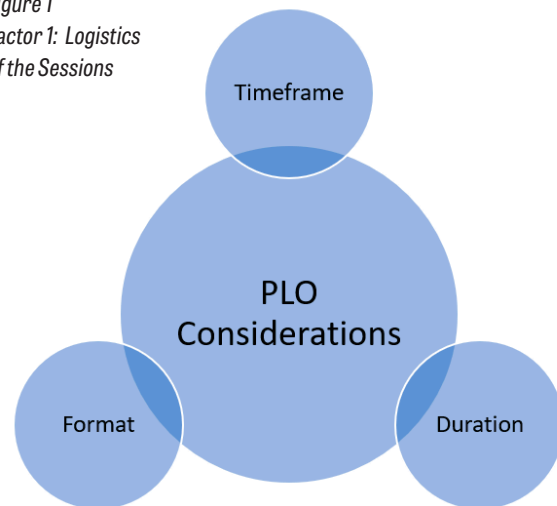
We planned the sessions to be offered throughout one month. However, the leadership teams suggested altering the plan of offering all sessions over one month and instead spreading the content over a more extended period, as many staff and faculty are consistently busy and would likely not be able to attend multiple sessions weekly. With this feedback, we adjusted plans and offered sessions over three months. We believed the process of requesting feedback and suggestions from multiple leadership teams with more experience with faculty and training development and adjusting the plan according to the feedback would be effective in gaining interest and attendance.

While suggestions were considered for the PLOs duration and modalities, the center team did not receive suggestions based on the time offered for sessions until after the sessions had already been created and offered via registration links. The leadership teams suggested offering learning opportunities in the evening so participants could be off work and able to attend, as many cannot get permission from their managers to attend sessions during the daytime. The center team had already scheduled events between 4 and 5 p.m. and made the registration links live before receiving this feedback. Thus, the times were not adjusted to align with the suggestions from leadership. We believe the feedback may not have been incorporated well enough when considering the time. Perhaps the process should have included attendee survey feedback to determine the best times for offering sessions.

Factor 2: Planning and Developing Content for Sessions

A second aspect we were unsure about was the development of the content—would attendees perceive the PLOs as influential in their roles or lives? The content for each session was predetermined to focus on three main domains of the center's

Figure 1
Factor 1: Logistics
of the Sessions



framework for Purposeful Cultures of Character: *Individual Learning, Leading with Character, and Serving with Character*. We also consulted a framework for character education in higher education, a program for virtuous leaders, Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) standards, and additional research to determine the content and objectives. The development team used research-based materials to create content for each session. However, it is unknown if the process for planning and developing would be effective in enhancing attendees' knowledge about their personal character formation, understanding of character education, or cultivating their practical wisdom to lead to human and societal flourishing.

ALIGNMENT TO THE FRAMEWORK

Several factors were considered regarding the potential influence of the PLOs on attendee knowledge, as seen in Figure 2. By aligning the content to the center's framework domains, we believe the content will positively affect the attendees' knowledge of their own character formation and utilize character education in their roles to help achieve the center's overarching goal. Before offering the PLOs, we developed a framework for cultivating cultures centered on character. In the framework, the organization and its leaders focused on *Individual Learning* of their own character, *Leading a Community with Character*, and *Serving Through Character*. The content for the PLOs was organized in the same fashion. Based on our research and personal experience, we believe learning about an individual's character and determining a path

for self-improvement is the first step in character formation. Then, by understanding how to lead others with their character formation through open-mindedness, building relationships, developing a common language, and making ethical decisions, individuals help others feel empowered on their character journey. Additionally, serving others through modeling and teaching character using specific strategies aids in guiding others toward flourishing. Thus, we outlined the PLO content based on these three areas, aligning with the center's framework. In the PLOs, several sessions were offered, aligning with each framework domain. Since the framework domains are research-based, we believe the structured sessions according to the framework would be effective in imparting knowledge to the attendees.

RESEARCH-BASED MATERIALS

We believed that using research-based materials and professional experience would be effective in providing valuable content to attendees. With the outline of session topics aligned to the framework domains, we also wrote objectives. We provided research-based materials, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and websites, as resources for content development. The team of facilitators who developed and delivered the session content were provided with such materials several months before the PLOs were offered. During that time, they reviewed the research-based materials and developed the session content based on the information. Each PLO session included references and content related to current research and character development resources. We believed this approach would effectively impart knowledge as the materials and content were of high quality in character education (Carpenter, 2017).

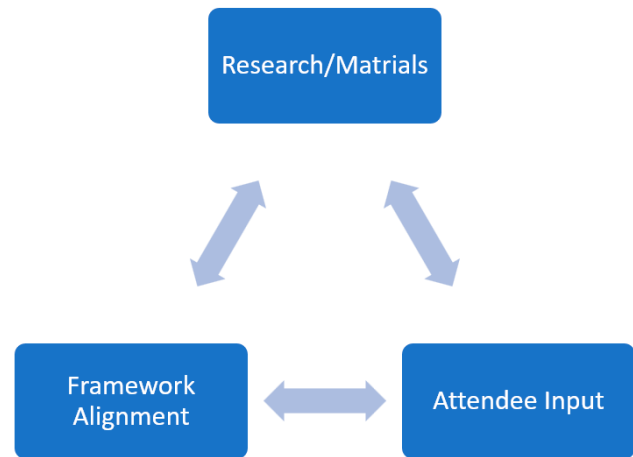
SOLICITING ATTENDEE INPUT

Although we believed the content would be effective in imparting knowledge to attendees based on the research and framework alignment, there was a possibility it would not. If the content was not successful in imparting knowledge to attendees, one working idea is that perhaps canvassing input from attendees or gauging their prior knowledge could have left a stronger impact. Knowing attendees' level of knowledge would have allowed the center team to develop specific topics for sessions that would further develop attendees' character

formation understanding. With this, research-based materials would still have been used, only the content would have been based on the attendees' needs. However, this approach was not utilized as we worried the level of knowledge would be too sporadic, and the better option was to develop content for all levels of knowledge and allow attendees to select their needs.

Figure 2

Factor 2: Planning and Developing Content



REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE

Having the readiness attitudes to reflect and the working ideas to hypothesize the potential effectiveness of the PLOs, a reflective recount of the events leading to the PLOs and our personal insights can provide additional context to lead to systematic inquiry for practical improvements (Greenberger et al., 2021; Greenberger & Or, 2022). Our university received a grant from a foundation in 2022 and developed the character education center in July 2022. Our work within the center included several main objectives within the three-year grant, and part of one initiative included training faculty and staff within the university in the realm of character education content. Our center team is comprised of two members, who are both also obtaining additional master's degrees in character education while working within the center. We were working diligently to get the center off the ground while also enhancing our own knowledge in the field. The timeline of events for our center's development, including offering the PLOs described, can be

seen in Figure 3. Part of the center's launch meant developing processes, connecting with internal departments for various needs, creating a mission, vision, and framework for the center, and much more while working toward grant objectives. Therefore, the work needed to be divided, and one member took on all training initiatives for internal and external partnerships. That team member started by outlining the content and writing objectives. Consulting research from the aforementioned master's program and networking partnerships within the character education field were also considered. Additionally, we considered alignment with the center's framework domains and what was learned in the master's program. With that, we slimmed content into digestible basics of what character education is and includes, how to lead and teach with character, and how to form your character. This had to fit into the required twenty-four sessions based on grant obligations.

We started our "Center Community" through connections during an in-person retreat and training, mission and vision committee meetings, and other internal networking. Through this community, five contracted positions were offered for PLO development and facilitation. Solid choices for the team were made and included faculty, curriculum, and faculty training departments. The diverse group had an array of wonderful expertise and experience. The five individuals were knowledgeable about the university's inner workings and processes. One member had experience in faculty and training, while the other four had experience leading faculty training and professional learning through conference presentations and departmental sessions they facilitated. The development team felt confident in their abilities to create content outlined by us and facilitate the PLOs.

With a development team in place and content outlined, we started the journey of content development and advertising. We met with the development team regularly, and in those meetings, research-based materials to reference for each session were provided. We engaged in peer reviews and team development in some cases. The development team of five continued to connect and review references. They expressed concerns about time management on top of their regular positions; however, they were satisfied with the resources

provided and confident in the content they were creating and the support they were provided.

Concurrently, we worked with the marketing department to develop flyers and communications to promote the PLOs. We planned to offer all sessions in a "Character Kickoff Month," with aspirations for the month to cultivate interest and hype around the content. We initially planned to offer a variety of session modalities, but primarily an in-person format, as the connections built through learning together and seeing each other face-to-face offer significant benefits. We wanted to help build community across the university and felt the in-person sessions would provide that opportunity. We planned to offer more sessions virtually than asynchronously for the same reason, hoping the discussions and dialogue would build community and increase understanding. The development team mapped out the month and when we could host virtual sessions, which might be best served in an asynchronous format and which would be most valuable as an in-person session. While mapping out the schedule, it began to seem overwhelming for the development team as they also held full-time positions and availability for some was difficult considering all the sessions to be offered. The schedule began to get scattered, and at varying times of the day, the content was no longer following sequence, as we had to accommodate the presenters' schedules as well. Concerned about the devaluing of content, the center team gathered expert advice from various leadership teams.

We asked to meet first with the university's College of Education's leadership team and present the PLO plan to them. We solicited feedback on the sequence, times offered, "kickoff month" plan, and general feedback. We gleaned from the discussion that most faculty would only realistically be able to engage in one or fewer sessions a week, and the times offered were during teaching hours, making it difficult to attend as well. The leadership team suggested making sessions available after 4:00 p.m. with a maximum of two weekly sessions. Thus, we actively listened to this feedback and adjusted to make the sessions last over four months, twice weekly, and made all virtual or in-person sessions from 4:00-5:00 p.m. This adjustment to the session delivery put the development team at ease as the workload seemed to lessen; they felt they could breathe a bit more, knowing they had addi-

Figure 3

Timeline of Center's Development

tional time to develop higher-quality materials for attendees. We also felt less of a burden of trying to squeeze everything into a whirlwind of tasks.

As part of the process for advertising, we worked closely with the faculty training team to create a communication plan that would inform potential attendees of available sessions to sign up for. Within the meetings regarding email communications, we learned that sessions were more likely to attract attendees if offered after working hours, after 5:00 p.m. However, at that point in planning, all marketing materials were developed, some people had already signed up to attend sessions, and sessions were added to the calendar at earlier times. Due to these issues, the team could not adjust the planned session times. We were worried this might affect attendance, but since we had never done anything like this before, we figured we might as well try it out and see how it went. With hopeful minds, we dove right in and accepted the risks.

The university's employee learning leadership team offers training and supports other departments in offering training for faculty and staff. They possess a wealth of knowledge and experience in the realm of PLOs. The leadership team felt our character education center offered quality content but with lofty goals and timelines. They supported the PLOs, but their feedback was that additional input from departments within the college before the development stage may have been valuable, such as working with their department to educate managers on the PLOs so they could advertise to personnel and support session attendance. Again, we were wary of our approach but were left at mid-field. We had already taken steps to implement the PLOs and could not reverse them. We accepted the risks and continued pushing forward, sharing widely within the university.

The sessions began rolling out as planned, and the registration numbers continued to soar. We, along with the development team, were optimistic

about the PLOs. We had over 400 people signing up for sessions. Some development team members were worried it might be too much to facilitate quality conversations in such large groups. However, as the first few sessions were held, the attendance did not match the registration numbers. One in-person session had four attendees, while over twenty individuals had registered to attend. Even with a small attendance, the discussions were rich, and the attendees expressed great interest and gratitude for the content. We were, however, a bit saddened by the low attendance.

We felt passionate about the quality and importance of what we offered within the PLOs, and we wanted more people to benefit from them. Despite the low attendance, we continued to move ahead and stick to the plan. Each week, the sessions continued with someone from the development team facilitating and someone from the center team attending for support. While the attendance numbers never matched the registered number of attendees, we always reflected virtually as a team. We agreed the discussions were rich, and the take-aways seemed bountiful for attendees. Facilitators were pleased with their session content and delivery, and some attendees verbally shared their value in the sessions. We felt pleased with the feedback throughout the implementation of the PLOs.

As sessions commenced, more and more attendees joined. It was never quite the amount that signed up, but the numbers were still enough to hold conversations and break out into groups for activities and collaboration in virtual sessions. Asynchronous sessions were utilized more, perhaps due to flexibility for participants. In-person sessions received the least attendance, but the connections were stronger, according to the facilitators. Virtual sessions saw increased attendance as time passed, and discussions were deep. The development and center teams were pleased with their progress and the session delivery. Each session ended with a brief survey for feedback. The

survey asked if they completed the training, which gathered attendance data for us. It also asked for feedback and at least two takeaways.

After the sessions ended, we met with the development and facilitator teams to discuss our thoughts. As we reflected on the attendance, discussions, content, and process, we had mostly positive feelings. As each of us is also in faculty and teaching roles in some capacity, we could identify with the attendees. We understood that timing was always an issue. It was also an issue for facilitators as they were trying to develop content, teach courses, facilitate PLOs, and other obligations. They admitted to getting behind on some session development and not being as productive as when we thought we would offer all sessions in one month, and there was more urgency to create materials for sessions. As we could identify with attendees, we realized they may have wanted to join sessions but could not fit them in, which would explain why asynchronous sessions were utilized more. We reflected on the content and discussions, even asynchronous collaboration from attendees, and agreed that the attendees seemed to have benefited from the material and topics. We felt an impact was made but wanted to scale it in the future. The literature shows that professional development activities increase job satisfaction and cultivate positive relationships (Ilgan & Basaran, 2023). We still felt passionately about the PLOs focused on character and wanted to make a more significant impact. Thus, we began this reflective process to determine how to implement PLOs focused on character more effectively in the future.

EVALUATION OF IDEAS

In this reflective process, we hoped to evaluate our working ideas regarding what might have contributed to effectively implementing PLOs focused on character. With this knowledge, we planned to make informed decisions about future PLOs and work within the university. To determine the effective components of implementing PLOs, we explored survey responses from participants after each PLO session, and we reviewed literature on professional development, character education, continuing professional development, adult learning theory, and university initiatives. The surveys deployed asked participants to provide feedback, explain what they found most helpful in their pro-

fessional roles, and their main takeaways in an open-ended format. To analyze the results, we calculated the number of responses for each session and compared them to the Zoom attendee record for virtual sessions. This provided attendance data. We also reviewed open-ended responses and recorded themes found. Although the analysis was initially an informal piece intended for our knowledge, we considered the context and feedback provided to evaluate the working ideas outlined in this paper. The analysis is discussed in the following section.

FACTOR 1: PLANNING LOGISTICS OF THE SESSIONS

Suggestions on Format and Duration

We wanted to learn if planning logistics and developing content for deploying the PLOs would be effective. The working idea was that soliciting feedback from internal university stakeholders with more experience would yield more success. To assess this theory, we reviewed the attendance of PLO sessions and feedback about the modality and times offered (asynchronous, virtual, in-person options). There was no feedback regarding the time the PLOs were offered (one month versus three months). From our experience, it was difficult to know if spreading the PLOs out over three months affected attendance as we are unsure what attendance would be in any other duration. More evidence regarding format was present for us to evaluate this working idea.

The survey responses revealed the highest attendance was in virtual sessions, averaging about 18 attendees, followed by asynchronous sessions, averaging 10 participants, except for the first two asynchronous sessions offered as outliers with 20 participants, and lastly, the in-person sessions with under five attendees. Advice from university stakeholders indicated this audience would prefer asynchronous sessions they could manage on their own time and not during the working day. Digital andragogy is a concept of adult learning via digital technologies (Fahimah et al., 2023). However, it can be assumed that digital andragogy is the approach to adult learning that integrates technology or uses digital platforms to deliver professional learning and allows accessible and flexible options for peer interaction (Fahimah et al., 2023). Existing literature suggests no difference in impact between online professional learning and face-to-face

opportunities, but rather that the topic is complex (Killon, 2014; Tynan et al., 2023). Moreover, Talakoub (2020) and Nanjundaswamy et al. (2021) suggest that digital professional learning offers many opportunities for educators to collaborate, create, participate in, and expand their professional networks while enhancing their pedagogical and content expertise. Therefore, offering learning opportunities via all modalities was appropriate, considering the impact that could be made. Despite this consideration, we found that the most utilized sessions were the virtual sessions, which aligned with the suggestion from Talakoub (2020). This modality also supported collaboration and connection, leading to richer conversations and imparting knowledge. The feedback comments revealed that a few attendees agreed with the stakeholder feedback and literature. They shared that they appreciated the flexibility in watching recordings later and learning outside working hours (Lambert & Yanson, 2017). However, the attendance data strongly indicated that attendees favored collaboration in a virtual space. Jacob et al. (2019) and MacPhail et al. (2019) found in their research on professional learning in higher education that collaboration and discussion with cross-disciplinary colleagues were more effective. We also experienced this as we observed PLOs, and the development team shared the same. Attendees were more vocal regarding the value they found in virtual sessions, and the facilitators were more engaged in virtual sessions. Thus, this modality seems to hold the most benefit for attendees.

Suggestions on Timeframe

While suggestions were considered for the PLOs duration and modalities, we did not receive suggestions based on the time offered for sessions until after the sessions had already been created and offered via registration links. The leadership teams suggested offering learning opportunities in the evening so participants could be off work and able to attend, as many cannot get permission from their managers to attend sessions during the daytime. At that point, we had already scheduled events between 4 and 5 p.m. and made the registration links live before receiving this feedback. Thus, the times were not adjusted to align with the suggestions from leadership. We believe the feedback may not have been incorporated well enough when

considering the time. Furthermore, we believe that not incorporating this feedback may have been an ineffective approach to planning. Literature suggests frequent and flexible professional development enables team learning (Bowers & Yilin, 2023). Perhaps the process should have included attendee survey feedback to determine the best times for offering sessions.

With the survey data from participants, no feedback was explicitly given to the time PLOs were held. However, the low attendance versus the number of faculty that signed up to attend had a significant disparity and may point to unavailable time for professional development (Hill et al., 2002). For example, over 100 people signed up for nearly every session, and the attendance varied from one attendee to over 30 but never reached the total that signed up. This might suggest the time was not plausible for some to attend, but they signed up in case they could make it or receive the recording for later viewing. We found fewer people attending in-person sessions than those in attendance virtually at the time offered. This may suggest that committing to this timeframe is more challenging for attendees. Thus, the research and attendance data indicate a greater desire for virtual and collaborative learning sessions, perhaps with options to review asynchronously for some. As the literature suggests, providing flexible delivery methods with varying days and times helps to increase stakeholder participation (Bowers & Yilin, 2023).

FACTOR 2: PLANNING AND DEVELOPING CONTENT OF THE SESSIONS

We believed that using research-based materials and professional experience, as well as aligning the content to the center's framework domains during planning and development, would effectively impact the attendees' knowledge of their character and character education. This presumption was based on our experience and hope. From our viewpoint, the material was high quality, and the framework was aligned with our mission. However, there was no underpinning literature or research to support this assumption. While our findings support the notion that the PLOs imparted knowledge, it may be due to other factors.

Research-based Materials

During the PLOs, attendees were engaged in feedback, participating in rich discussions, and

sharing their perspectives. Many attendees shared how important they thought the content was to them and their roles. Adult learning theory suggests that adults bring much knowledge and experiences to their learning; when they can connect that prior knowledge to new learning or practice, the PLOs are more successful (Knowles, 1980). Survey responses from attendees about their takeaways and what they found most beneficial from the sessions yielded patterns of positive content influence. Many responses were categorized as helpful strategies to integrate into work (with university-level students) and helpful in understanding and cultivating their own character and specific virtues. Other feedback found that the content was meaningful and inspiring, the real-life examples and connections were helpful, and the importance of character education was illuminated. As the literature suggests, related research-based materials deemed meaningful to adult learners should be identified by adult learners to ensure an authentic learning experience (Givens, 2007; Lawler, 1993). Survey data, our experience in the PLOs, and existing literature denote the significance of using research-based content in character development. Thus, we can conclude that the content we developed and planned to offer was of value to attendees. If the attendees said the content was helpful, meaningful, inspiring, and will be integrated into their roles, we can determine they felt it was valuable overall.

Alignment to the Framework

We believed the content would positively affect the attendees' knowledge of their own character formation, and they could utilize character education in their work roles. The attendee's responses reflected gratitude for the strategies and tools in several sessions, which attendees stated they could and would use in their professional roles. After several sessions, the responses were categorized into themes. Participants shared that they collaborated, were interactive, enjoyed discussions, and felt they could increase understanding, find their purpose, and cultivate their own virtues. These results indicate that the participants found a positive effect on their character formation and how to use character education in their roles. This suggests that aligning to our framework of personal development before

developing others is important and was successful during our planning for implementation.

The survey responses reflect the imparting of knowledge from the PLOs; however, there is no support for the cause being research-based materials or alignment to the center's framework domains. The survey responses yielded patterns of appreciation and feelings of benefit from the facilitator's knowledge, strategies, and presenting style, as well as the collaboration, interaction, and discussions with other attendees. Constructivist learning theory includes adult learners actively constructing knowledge and developing personal meaning through engaging in activities, experiential learning, and reflections instead of just hearing content from a presenter (Garmston & Wellman, 1994, as cited in Chuang, 2021). The constructivist theory emphasizes collaboration (Chuang, 2021) and is supported by research on PLOs in higher education (Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019). According to Jacob et al. (2019), higher education institutions' professional development with interdisciplinary-focused content led by faculty and involving learning and discussion platforms are some of the most effective PLOs. We planned for our PLOs to be faculty-led, include discussions and interaction, and allow attendees across disciplines and roles to learn and share strategies about content. We found this format engaging, leading the attendees into deep conversations and sharing ideas. As noted in survey responses and research, this may have proved to be a successful planning and development action that led to imparting knowledge.

Soliciting Attendee Input

Findings from Jacob et al. (2019) also emphasize the importance of customized, outcome-oriented content and using a rewards-structure. The effectiveness of providing customized workshops with interdisciplinary connections to an outcome-driven focus is that the attendees benefit from the same goal (improved student and staff learning outcomes), the PLOs meet the needs of diverse participants, and the attendees gain broader insights from discussions across disciplines. Similarly, MacPhail et al. (2019) assert the importance of institutions providing PLOs that engage participants in collaboration with peers and allow self-initiation of PLOs. Integrating self-directed learning theory, wherein adults are active

participants in their own learning, allowed the participants to engage and retain knowledge at their own pace (Knowles, 1980). Self-initiation of PLOs supports faculty's motivation to learn, wherein they have more stake in the content. Furthermore, MacPhail et al. (2019) found that educators in higher education are genuinely interested in improving their skills in practice. Studies show that when strategies and structures for collaboration increase, there is potential to transform cultures into more collaborative ones (Bendtsen et al., 2022). We had a working idea that the PLOs may have been more effective in imparting knowledge if they gauged the current levels of knowledge in the attendees' content or solicited their input on topics of interest. However, we did not assess that prior to deploying PLOs. We did notice the varying levels of knowledge in the sessions but found the content to meet each attendee's needs overall. They were engaging in the content. If they had some knowledge, they could share ideas and build off others' ideas. If they had no experience, they could listen and brainstorm ideas. The survey results from the center's PLOs revealed that attendees appreciated the strategies and tools provided for use in their professional roles and teaching of students. While the levels of knowledge were not predetermined to outline content, the variety of content and connection to all needs of attendees was effective based on survey feedback.

The PLOs included attendees from across university disciplines and engaged them in strategizing personal formation and teaching character to students in their professional roles. The workshops were open enrollment, based on interest, rather than a general requirement. The overarching goal was to enhance character formation and professional practice of integrating character education. Jacob et al. (2019) found that providing rewards—such as the certificates and professional development units provided by the center for each PLO—significantly

incentivizes faculty to attend. We provided professional development units and certificates for attendance. We did not experience a drive to attend based on this, but some attendees followed up to ensure they could get their certificate, which would suggest their desire to attain it. Thus, according to Jacob et al. (2019) and MacPhail et al. (2019), the most effective professional development structures in higher education align with the structure of the center's PLOs. This may have supported the positive results of imparting knowledge and practice to attendees.

DECISION

Making informed decisions about the results of the PLOs occurred over time and through a reflective process, as seen in Figure 4. After summarizing the data from survey responses, our experiences throughout the PLOs, and reviewing the literature to evaluate our working ideas, we determined that the PLOs did impart knowledge in alignment with the center's overarching goal, leaving a lasting influence on the attendees. Therefore, the planning of logistics and content in the ways we did was effective. Overall, we believe the structure of the PLOs was favorable. However, the modality and timeliness may need to be revisited in the future. The decisions about PLOs offered in the future will consider these findings.

In alignment with research in the field and constructivist theory, the PLO format offered attendees the opportunity to collaborate, learn strategies from colleagues, engage in the learning experience, reflect, and enhance personal and professional practice. This proved to be appreciated and meaningful to attendees, as indicated in the patterns of their survey responses, which was also found effective in other research studies (Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019) and in alignment with adult learning theories (Knowles, 1980). Moving forward, we plan to continue utilizing internal faculty

Figure 4
PLOs Reflective Timeline



to facilitate the sessions and plan for and develop discussion-based collaborative learning experiences where attendees reflect, build knowledge, and gain practical strategies to implement in their roles. In development, the constructivist approach will remain the structure of the sessions. Additionally, we will ensure PLOs provide customized, outcome-oriented content using a rewards structure (Jacob et al., 2019) that allows attendees to seek opportunities based on self-interest and provides content and opportunities for them to improve their skills in practice (MacPhail et al., 2019).

Based on the attendance and survey responses, we will continue to plan and offer PLOs in various modalities but will ensure attendees can view and work asynchronously if desired. The concern with offering more asynchronous content rather than virtual sessions is the loss of collaboration and discussion, a proven effective format (Chuang, 2021; Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019). However, we can work to focus asynchronous content on individual reflection and providing strategies and tools for use in attendees' roles, which are also proven effective methods of PLOs (Chuang, 2021; Knowles, 1980; MacPhail et al., 2019). Additionally, we can continue to offer certificates for completion, another effective strategy (Jacob et al., 2019). In the end, providing meaningful content about personal character formation and practical strategies for incorporating character education into professional roles was proven valuable and inspiring for attendees regardless of format or timing (process or deployment), so that will remain the focus of the center's PLOs.

Regarding logistics, the feedback from university stakeholders and leadership was not proven accurate or inaccurate. Thus, the effectiveness of planning logistics by soliciting ideas from others was not concluded due to a lack of research and data. We will consider this and continue the PLOs in multiple modalities, as mentioned. The time of day is something to continue seeking input on, and perhaps we will survey past participants to determine the best time for offering PLOs in that manner. The duration of time the sessions were offered was also not determined based on analysis. Thus, we will continue to consider this when seeking future input from university stakeholders and PLO attendees.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Throughout the reflective process of this project, we learned that what we assumed to be best practice may not have been. For example, the process we used to determine key factors of the project was lacking and not effective. We believed gathering leadership feedback would be sufficient to gain insight. However, not all leadership advice was in alignment with attendees' needs. The leadership feedback was to provide mostly asynchronous sessions; however, the virtual sessions were most attended and, according to research, most valuable when collaboration is included (Chuang, 2021; Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019). The limitation of our process was not gathering feedback from attendees on their interests, availability, or preferences. Having participants involved in planning content or self-selection may have resulted in a larger attendance (Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019). Our open-minded attitude and readiness to reflect have allowed us to see the importance of stakeholder input from various groups, such as leaders, potential attendees, and facilitators. In the future, we will extend the process timeline to include gathering substantial feedback and input. We could perhaps engage more attendees in focus groups about their specific needs and target their interests (Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019). Implications for other practitioners based on the experience of the center team would be to value the input from multiple stakeholders and to consider the importance of input from those who will attend the learning opportunity sessions (Jacob et al., 2019; MacPhail et al., 2019).

The center team thought the approaches we took regarding content and the basis of our decisions were rooted in research and evidence. However, through the process, we found that we did not reflect enough at the beginning of the project, nor did we consult research on professional learning. By taking time to consult research on adult learning theory and other theoretically-based research about faculty development in higher education, we may have offered more customized, outcome-oriented content (Jacob et al., 2019) based on participants' self-interest and improvement of their skills in practice (MacPhail et al., 2019). Thankfully, our readiness to reflect allowed us to see that there are alternate reasons for positive results and plausible reasons for negative results. The PLOs

were impactful because the content was meaningful, and the format was favorable. Through a readiness attitude of responsibility, we were able to look at the research in the field with open-mindedness, and we could see that many factors contribute to the effectiveness of ongoing professional learning. While we did not consult research on learning theory prior to developing content, the experiences of the center team in education and attendance of other professional learning opportunities informed the decision on the content and structure of the sessions. This led to a positive impact on participant knowledge, as they favored collaboration and practice-specific strategies for use in their professional roles. Implications for other practitioners based on the outcome of the center team, both in data collection and reflection, include consideration of participant needs, collaboration and discussion, and providing content-specific strategies for participants in training sessions.

The reflective process allowed the center team to take responsibility for our actions and decisions. We considered the alternate reasons for effectiveness through open-mindedness. The decisions made at the start of the project were based on limited feedback from leadership teams and the center team's experiences and education. Through reflection, the center team realized the significance of consulting participants and literature for varying perspectives. As the center team has limited experience in providing PLOs in higher education, upon first reaction to the PLOs, the center team was satisfied. We thought the small attendance in many sessions, particularly the in-person sessions, might be due to attendees having other obligations, the university having a large faculty audience out of state, or the timing of the sessions. Through reflection, the center team has built on these ideas and realized the need to consult, survey, or gather participant feedback about these plausible reasons. While the structure and content of the PLOs were proven impactful, the reflective process has also shown us that input from others could make it more meaningful and valuable to participants. As we approach the reflective process with whole-heartedness and a desire to make improved and informed decisions in the future, we continue to be open-minded to alternative processes and content development. We take responsibility as we realize our fast actions in the first round of PLOs had positive and negative results. As the center team

approaches the next round of PLOs to university faculty and staff, we are considering the results found in the reflective process. We will take time to gather participant feedback on the modality, times offered, durations, and content (Carpenter, 2017; Martin & Mulivill, 2023). We will continue to offer collaborative discussion and constructivist learning approaches while also building on the levels of knowledge already present. Additionally, we will ensure that strategies are helpful to participants. What the center team has found through the reflection described in this paper, and what we suggest to other practitioners offering PLOs in higher education, is to take the time to consult with various stakeholders and literature; know the audience and their needs; align PLO content to the knowledge stakeholders seek; and provide a reward structure and collaborative space.

With whole-heartedness, the center team intends to reflect on our projects continually. This includes reflection before implementation to review various perspectives and alternate ideas responsibly. This will inform our approaches and processes moving forward. We propose future projects include initial reflection and review. For example, we will continue to reach out to several colleagues, university faculty and staff, and leadership teams to gain differing perspectives and feedback on when future PLOs should be offered, what content should be addressed, what additional data may be needed to continuously better our practices, and what modalities the PLOs should be offered. Additionally, the center team can expand upon our approach by gaining insights into relevant and new literature surrounding character education and virtue formation and consistently revisiting the data we have already received from PLO surveys to inform our practices. We found that we did not have sufficient data about the process and deployment we sought. By approaching future PLO offerings with a clear, collaborative vision, we will continue to move forward with wholeheartedness, knowing that the content we are offering to the university community is meaningful, both personally and professionally.

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