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Will defend their dissertation on

Date: May 20, 2026

Time: 2:00 P.M.

Zoom: Link by request ceshs.gradstudies@wsu.edu

Title:

EXPLORING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL

Chair: Sharon Kruze

Abstract:

Professional learning is widely recognized as a critical mechanism for strengthening school leadership and advancing equity; however, school administrators frequently experience professional development as fragmented, compliance-oriented, and misaligned with the realities of leadership practice. This qualitative, interpretivist study explores how school-based administrators perceive and experience professional learning and examines the conditions under which professional development supports meaningful leadership growth and implementation. Centering the perspectives of elementary school principals in Western Washington, the study investigates three guiding questions: how administrators perceive the alignment between professional development and their daily responsibilities, what characteristics define impactful professional learning, and what conditions influence the translation of learning into practice.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with practicing principals and analyzed using an inductive thematic approach. Findings reveal six interrelated themes that position professional development as a relational, affective, and system-mediated process rather than a series of discrete training events. Administrators described emotional resonance and psychological safety as foundational to learning, identified agency as self-directed learners when district offerings were insufficient, and reconceptualized professional development as embedded learning infrastructure within school routines. Participants also highlighted persistent breakdowns in district-level professional development, including time constraints, fragmentation, and compliance-driven accountability, and raised critical concerns about power, equity, and differential enforcement.

This study contributes to leadership development and adult learning scholarship by foregrounding affect and relational trust as mechanisms of professional learning. Implications underscore the need for districts and policymakers to design coherent, equity-centered professional development systems that support administrators as learners, designers of learning, and leaders navigating complex educational environments.