I think a lot about professional development, both as somebody who takes a lot of professional development and as somebody who delivers it.

As an educator, I think about learning all the time and how people learn- what works and what doesn't, and how to incorporate this into professional growth and learning opportunities to make the best use of people's time, energy, and frankly money.

Lately I've been thinking about the things I've been learning outside of my professional life and how I've gone about doing it.

The first is a card game that my father plays every year on the 4th of July with his friends called wist. I think it's a regional game, but it's in that family of spades, euchre, hearts, sort of that four-person trump card kind of family of card games.

As a little kid it, I would watch them play and it was so exciting because they were the dads. As I got older, became a card player myself, and learned lots and lots of card games, I'd never actually learned how to play this game. So last time I was home, I asked my father to teach me, and we sat down. We found two other people, and he taught me how to play wist. Lots of fun. He took a little money from me. That's how it goes.

The second thing that I've been learning lately is I've been trying to learn the Greek language. My background in heritage is Greek. My mother speaks it fluently. We took some lessons growing up, none of which stuck very well, so I decided I wanted to start learning Greek. I went about it by downloading some apps and eventually I found a class that I could take to learn and speak Greek.

The third thing, I was walking one day, and I came across a mural of Billie Holiday, and I thought, okay, I know a little about Billie Holiday, but I don't know a ton about Billie Holiday, so I wanted to learn a little bit more. I found a documentary about her, which I then watched. Finally, this is related to professional growth. I thought about this, about facilitating workshops and learning opportunities, and I was feeling a little bit stuck.

I wanted some new activities to do in my sessions. I reached out for recommendations, and I got a recommendation for this book, so I purchased it and am in the process of reading it to help me in my growth.

Four very different topics that I went about in four different ways.

I thought about this and the connection to how we go about professional development. Because very often we don't explore different ways.

In so many organizations, the default when it comes to professional development is trainings and conferences, trainings and conferences.

There's value to be had there, don't get me wrong. But there's also value in lots of other types of ways that we can learn too.

I just demonstrated four of those that can be included in professional development.

Thinking about not necessarily getting rid of trainings and conferences, but how can you start to expand a little bit what you think about when you think about professional development.

How can you add reading to the mix- books, book groups, things like articles and blogs? How to incorporate coaching, giving and receiving lots of feedback.

Evaluations, which might be traditional evaluations, person to person, but also things like instruments and assessments that you might use. Mastermind groups that can be so powerful. Just giving people a chance to get together and talk through what's going on with them professionally. It's a little less structured than maybe some of these other methods but can be so valuable because very often we don't get that opportunity.

Classes and courses, both being observed and having people observe you, depending on the type of work that you do, can be invaluable to see people in action and really be able to give them that real time feedback.

Listening to podcasts, watching documentaries, there's more and more and more. I didn't put this on here, but when I ask people how they go about learning things, and if you think about the last thing you learned, how many people say, oh, I just go to YouTube. I just jump on YouTube, right?

There are so many ways that we can go about learning and growing and there's ways that we don't necessarily think of to incorporate into our professional lives, even though they're really effective in our personal lives.

So, I want to challenge you, encourage you, invite you for yourself and for your staff to really think about how you can start incorporating lots of different ways to access professional learning, growth and development.

Because the method is almost inconsequential. If it's a training versus a book, versus a documentary versus a course. The method by which you go about it depends on your preferences. Some people really thrive learning around others. Some people really prefer to do it independently. Some people love to read. Other people would rather listen to a podcast, for example. There's a lot of personal preference in there, but what matters most of all is not the method, but really making sure that this whole cycle is happening.

Because what happens more often than not is professional development happens in isolation.

You take the workshop, you go to the conference, you read the blog, you listen to the podcast, and you have the moment during or maybe immediately after of like, wow, this is great. This is gonna really help me. And by the time you get back to the office, it's like the moment's gone, you've lost it.

So, what's really important to remember is less focus on the training itself or are you doing it through reading or listening or watching or courses or what the method is that your staff happens to prefer or you yourself prefer.

But making sure that you're allowing this cycle to happen, that you're taking whatever method you used and whatever content that you got, and you are making sure it's being put into practice. That's the only way that it sticks.

Then after it gets put into practice there's opportunity for both internal and external. So, some self-reflection, and then also some feedback and coaching about how it went, what went well, where were there challenges, where do you need a little bit more training? The cycle goes and goes and goes.

That's the key- really making sure that you're completing the cycle of professional growth regardless of how it was initially delivered, so that that learning can really stick.

So, my question for you is, how can you start exploring alternative forms of professional development for yourself and for your staff?