Investigating Contextual Preferences for Professional Development Activity Design

by

Mia Danielle Coleman

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Supervisor
Dr. Scott Priestman, Vancouver Island University
Abstract

School and district based professional development account for a significant amount of professional learning that the teachers of British Columbia engage in each year. It is therefore important that professional development activities are planned for the specific needs of the teachers it is meant to serve, and is designed using effective professional development practices. My research sought to investigate the preferences and perceptions of effectiveness of specific designs for professional learning activities at one specific school on southern Vancouver Island. Teachers were invited to take part in surveys and interviews based upon professional development design characteristics. Eighteen teachers completed the surveys, and five teachers followed up with interviews conducted by the researcher. Results showed that teachers preferred learning opportunities where they were able to collaborate with colleagues, engage in active learning opportunities, gain practical strategies and resources and maintain a sustained focus, yet where there several short opportunities to learn are provided. The researcher made recommendations to the school’s Professional Development Committee; in order to help guide the planning of future school based professional development activities.
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT..................................................................................................................ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..............................................................................................iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS................................................................................................iv

LIST OF TABLES.............................................................................................................v

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION..............................................................................1

  Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................. 1

  Justification of the Study......................................................................................... 2

  Research Question and Hypotheses ....................................................................... 5

  Definition of Terms ................................................................................................. 5

  Brief Overview of Study ......................................................................................... 6

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW................................................................. 8

  Themes.....................................................................................................................8

  Educational Reform............................................................................................... 8

  Effective Professional Development Practices .................................................... 9

  Context .................................................................................................................. 16

CHAPTER THREE: PROCEDURES AND METHODS ............................................ 19

  Research Design................................................................................................... 19
APPENDIX D – Interview Questions ...................................................... 61
APPENDIX E – Call for Participants Script ........................................ 62

List of Tables

Open-ended Survey Response Coding Table ...................................... 27
Interview Response Coding Table ..................................................... 29
Recommendations for Professional Development Committee Table .... 46
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the characteristics of effective professional development as perceived by teachers at one school in a Southern Vancouver Island School District. It is important that professional development be created in a way that most effectively reaches its’ learners, the teachers. Teachers will at times focus their formal and informal learning around effective teaching strategies and learning styles, yet it is not common for a school staff to focus on their own learning styles and needs as they may pertain to professional learning. Professional learning and development are typically touted as the key way to affect reform in teaching and learning and, therefore, education in general (Hofman (2010), Philips, (2002), Timperley (2008). It was important that we were able to identify the needs and values of a particular staff as it pertains to their professional development.

The goal of this study was to shed light on the specific learning preferences and perceived effectiveness of delivery for professional development of the teachers at said school and to compare that to current literature in order to eventually construct effective professional learning opportunities for its’ particular staff and teaching context. It was expected that professional learning tailored specifically for this context would be more effective and engaging and may increase motivation of teachers to become more involved in both the development and participation in professional learning opportunities.

In the specific context of this study, the responsibility of school based professional development committees can often fall on the shoulders of one or two committed individuals. Most of the time given to planning professional development activities comes from the
individual teachers’ personal time and little release time is available. Furthermore, teachers volunteering to be part of school based professional development committees have training as teachers, but not specifically as teacher leaders. Nor do they necessarily have any specialization or training in professional development for teachers. This often led professional development committees in this school district to have very little adult learning expertise or resources to work with. With only two specific school based professional development days, this familiar scenario was a problem that needed to be addressed.

The importance of designing and implementing effective professional development was of great importance at the current time in the realm of education in British Columbia. The BC Ed Plan, introduced in 2012, proposed major changes to curriculum. The new curriculum focusses on specific competencies that many teachers had not yet been required to address in their teaching. Coupled with this was an expectation for more accountability of teachers and a more extensive evaluation process (BC Ed Plan, 2012).

Justification of the Study

There is a tremendous amount of research investigating effective professional development. Lists of effective characteristics ranging from six to twenty-one items, with varying levels of overlap, are published in great numbers. There is a general consensus that specific designs of professional development are more effective than others, but discrepancies in research show that there is also a lot of variance in the agreed upon characteristics (Guskey, 2003). Research, focussing only on effective characteristics of professional development by this researcher would not be new, but certainly supported by general literature.
This study was important to research in professional development within the context it strives to serve. Effective professional development shares themes of effective characteristics across teachers, schools, districts and provinces. Yet effective professional development is personal and must fit the needs and styles of the teacher in order for it to be effective. A study by Guskey (2003), looked at multiple studies of effective professional development and found there to be overlap of twenty-one characteristics of effective professional development practices, yet also several discrepancies within the research (2003). Guskey went on to point out that the context for professional development plays a role in effectiveness, saying that the “contexts introduce a web of factors that influence whether or not a particular characteristics or practice will produce the desired result” (2003, p. 750).

Several studies in recent years had shown that professional development led to deepening content knowledge and the development of teaching practices (Desimone, 2002). Further studies suggested that professional development, that espoused in its design several identified effective characteristics of professional development, could have a “substantial and positive influence on teachers’ practices and student achievement,” (Desimone, 2002, p. 82).

Quality teaching had been shown in research to be the largest indicator of student achievement within the control of the education system (Philips, 2002; Desimone, 2002). In the report, *Teacher Quality in Canada*, Phillips (2002) states that, “the teaching quality of individual teachers has been shown to be a major factor in the variance in student achievement” (p. 22). This sentiment was echoed by Darling-Hammond (1995), as she states that dozens of studies show “the single most important determinant of student achievement is the quality of teachers and the extent of their knowledge” (p. 158).
Student achievement is an expectation of our education system and the public. If professional development is different across contexts, it leads to increased teaching quality, and that quality in turn largely effects student achievement; research must be focused on the effectiveness of professional development for individual teachers and schools.

Because the contexts in which teachers educate are so diverse, (varying SES status of students, district protocol, curricula, and leadership styles just to name a few of the differences), it seems plausible that this affects the effectiveness of specific professional development characteristics. It is therefore important that research into effective professional development practices be done in specific contexts and be used to guide the development within that context.

The context of any school is always changing and this needs to be identified and considered when designing school based professional development (Timperley, 2008). The school studied in this research saw a significant shift in its’ teaching that year, with eight new permanent and temporary teachers joining the staff. In a school with a staffing complement of thirty-four teachers, this is a significant turnover and will change the needs of the staff as whole when considering professional development. Many teachers joining the school will have less than five years’ experience, studies show that this is a stage where professional development needs to be targeted and often takes the form of explicit mentorship, a form of professional development neither needed nor utilized by this staff in recent years (Long, 2009).

The context of the specified school was also changing, in relation to curricula, at the time of this study. New curriculum drafts were available for preview and trial for the 2014/2015 school year (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). A new curriculum was going to require support for optimal implementation, one of these supports being opportunities for professional development around the expectations of the new curriculum.
This research was therefore the most relevant research regarding professional development practices needed for this specific context. The researcher hoped that this research would guide professional development design at this school, as well as provide a process by which other staff were able to research their contexts specifically and identify their needs and characteristics of professional development. This would facilitate the design and implementation of more effective professional development at the school level.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

What characteristics of professional learning do teachers at a particular school prefer and find the most effective in developing their practice; and how can these best be supported at the school level?

It can be hypothesized that teachers at the school being researched will report characteristics of effective professional development similar to those of studies recently conducted throughout North America. Characteristics repeatedly cited in literature as being effective are reform type formats, have specific durations, support opportunities to collaborate, involve active learning, promote coherence and are content focused (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, et al, 2002. p. 83). It is, however, important to remember that each school will be different and must therefore be treated on a case-by-case basis.

**Definition of Terms**

*Professional development* - Professional development is considered to be a process of personal growth through informal or formal opportunities that enable teachers to individually or collectively enhance professional practice

(http://www.bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx, July 12). This term will be used when
referring to any activity that a professional is involved in where the goal is to learn more about their professional practice. It was also be used synonymously with professional learning.

*Professional Development Committee*—Each school has a professional development representative who helps organize professional learning opportunities for the members of school staff (http://www.bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx, July 12). This position is voluntary and there is often more than one teacher on the committee.

*Professional Development Day*—A non-instructional day within the school calendar that is set aside to provide time for teachers to engage in professional learning activities. At the school being research, there is one provincial, one regional, two self-selected school based and two administratively driven professional development days.

*Practice*—A teacher’s practice encompasses their pedagogical approaches, theoretical beliefs and values as teachers, teaching context and tools and strategies employed within their day-to-day teaching.

**Brief Overview of Study**

This study was conducted in one elementary school that is part of a Southern Vancouver Island school district. The study was conducted only in this school, as the outcomes of the study were specific to the context of this school and its’ teaching staff. This study attempted to clarify the specific preferences of the teaching staff in relation to their professional development and perceived effectiveness of characteristics used in the design of professional development.

This study used a combination of surveys, interviews, observations and reviews of literature in an attempt to draw conclusions about the most effective characteristics of
professional development design that would meet needs of the professional learning and development of teachers at the described school.

The researcher was a teacher within the school being investigated. Once characteristics of professional development and the needs of the teachers were identified through analysis of the data collected, a recommendation for creation and implementation of research guided professional development at the school level was made.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Themes

The researcher reviewed literature that was consistent with the themes of this research study, namely: educational reform and professional development's role within it; effective professional development practices; and the role that context plays in the design of professional development activities. Effective professional development practices were the major theme of this literature research. The researcher attempted to use current research completed within the past 10 years, and as much Canadian content as possible, however the literature was heavily weighted with content from the United States.

Educational Reform

Education is changing. The BC Ministry of Education released its BC Ed Plan in 2011 and proposed major changes to the curriculum, graduation requirements, reporting, and core competencies that students should learn while attending BC schools. “The focus for this transformation is the movement to increasingly personalized learning, which is enabled and supported by quality teaching and learning, flexibility and choice, and high standards.” (http://www.bcedplan.ca/assets/pdf/bcs_education_plan_2015.pdf, March 2015). British Columbia is not alone in its push for reforms. Educational reforms are taking place across Canada and throughout other countries and are setting new and lofty goals for student learning (Broad and Evans, 2006).

The success of such reform movements are increasingly being linked to the ability to prepare the teachers who are to carry out these goals within their classroom and to provide them
with the necessary tools and professional development they need in order to do it successfully (Broad and Evans, 2006; Garet et al, 2001).

Villegas-Reimers (2003) points out, in *Teacher Professional development: an International Review of the Literature*, “regardless of scope of the reform, the relations between educations’ reform and teachers’ professional development is a two-way relation, … reforms that do not include teachers and their professional development are not successful” (p. 28). Villegas-Reimers emphasises the significant positive effects that effective professional development can have on student learning during a time of educational reform.

At the time of writing, the BC Ed Plan has not outlined any plan for professional development of teachers that would coincide with the eventual roll out of the BC Ed Plan. Thus far, the Ed Plan only states that they will, “Work with … education partners to make sure that professional development days are used to enhance educators’ knowledge base and professional expertise.” (BC Ministry of Education, March 2015, p. 24). Clearly the BC Ed Plan is not a complete document but rather a work in progress. It will be imperative that the professional development of teachers is a key component of the plan if it is to be successful.

**Effective Professional Development Practices**

The literature surrounding professional development, its effectiveness and design is immense. Several attempts to review the plethora of studies and literature to find the most effective design criteria have produced several reviews that cannot boil down effective professional development design to a simple formula. Such reviews, however, have found several common themes that appear to re-emerge in studies (Broad and Evans, 2006; Garet et al, 2001; In Praxis, 2006; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). A consensus has not yet been made as to which
of these re-emerging themes are most relevant and related to effective professional development, partly due to the difficulty in finding large scale empirically based research and the varied needs and contexts that professional development serves.

One specific large-scale study, entitled, *What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results from a National Sample of Teachers*, was conducted in the United States in the year 2000. The study attempted to identify specific factors of staff development design that made it effective. Over 1,000 participants of the federal government's Eisenhower Professional Development Program participated in the study, making it among the largest empirical studies on the subject of professional development.

The results of their study found that three core features had significant positive effects on self reported increases in knowledge and skills according to their participants: focus on content knowledge; opportunities for active participation; and coherence with other learning opportunities.

The study later found that these core features and their inclusion in the design of professional development activities showed strong correlation to the effectiveness of different structures of professional development activities, with those being form, duration and collaborative opportunities. In the case of form, it was the features and characteristics of the form of the activity that made it successful not the actual form itself. For example, a workshop, typically touted as being a very ineffective form, may be effective in that it has the above mentioned core features, as well as a sustained duration, as a part of its design (Birman et al, 2000). The same study found that professional development activities that were of a longer duration, were “more likely to have more subject area focus, opportunities for active learning, and more coherence with teachers’ other experiences than do shorter activities” (Birman et al,
Finally, professional development activities that had collaboration as a part of their structure were more likely to also include opportunities for active learning and were coherent with teachers’ other experiences (Birman et al, 2000).

Aforementioned, several pieces of literature around the subject of professional development have been done as a review of related literature. Two such reviews have been done on a large scale, and are Canadian. Alberta Education published, *Effective Professional Development. What the Research Says* in 2006 and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education prepared, *A Review of Literature on Professional Content and Delivery Modes for Experienced Teachers* for the Ontario Ministry of Education, also in 2006. Both studies aimed to compile their research and, as best they could, conclude characteristics of effective professional development design.

Both publications supported the claims made by Garet, Porter, Desimone and Yoon, in their 2000 study, where form, duration, collaboration, active learning, coherence of experience and content were all claimed to be effective characteristics of professional development design, yet had more to add to the conversation of effective professional development.

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) notes that in addition to the six characteristics agreed upon as stated above, that professional development activities should be linked to student achievement and guided by such data, be personalized, employ content that is evidence and knowledge based, consider context in planning, and focus on authentic issues as they relate to the day to day responsibilities of a teacher (Broad and Evans, 2006). Broad and Evans (2006) also state in the publication that professional development needs to be evaluable and evaluated.
Effective Professional Development: What the Research Says, also notes the importance of all aforementioned characteristics of professional development design and adds the importance of involving families and other stakeholders in professional development and ensures that “professional development accommodate diversity and promotes equity in schools.” (InPraxis, 2006, p.43)

The researcher sees these characteristics of professional development as fitting into two areas: the ideas that need to be considered before and after planning an effective professional development activity; and the pragmatic planning of exactly how a professional activity will be executed on the particular professional development day or days. Considerations for planning include that it takes context into account and relates student learning and teacher learning, is driven by goals that meet the authentic needs and issues of teachers, gives opportunity for involvement of stakeholders and promotes diversity within its structure and content and be evaluable. Planning of effective professional development activities would include using evidence based knowledge as content, active and job-embedded learning, be sustained over time, driven by data, and involve collaboration as well as personalization, and provide activities coherent with each other and teachers’ experiences.

The considerations for planning will not be investigated further in this literature review, as the design of professional development activities is the focus of this study. It is, however, important to note that the considerations for planning have been reflected upon during the process of this research and will continue to be considered in any successive planning that may follow this research.
Personalization, job-embedded learning, coherence and meeting the authentic needs of teachers are all characteristics of effective professional development that are consistent with adult learning theory. It is important to realize that adults learn and are motivated in different ways than their students. Adult learners are typically motivated most in a professional development activity where they are: given choice; find relevance and meanings related to their daily work; and are working in a collaborative environment (Broad and Evans, 2006, p.40). Adults learn well when they have the opportunity to choose their own learning activities and are able to “identify, plan and pursue activities that they believe support their own learning” (Sparks, 1999, p.35). Broad and Evans (2006) further point out that professional development practices need to be personalized because each teacher has a unique sets of needs and experiences and that job-embedded practices “through peer coaching, mentoring, action research, planning teams and critical friendships offer strong opportunities to implement and practice” (p.13) what teachers are aiming to learn. Such job embedded practices are said to be easier to sustain over time as compared to professional learning opportunities that occur outside a school or classroom setting (Garet et al, 2000, p. 921). When learning opportunities are embedded within day-to-day practice of a teacher, they will invariably be meeting the authentic needs and issues of the teacher involved and will employ active learning where teachers are given the opportunity to engage in reflection of previous knowledge and experience and relate it to new knowledge and experience.

Research has not come to any sort of consensus around the best forms that professional development should take. Much of the research labels specific forms of professional development as being traditional or of reform type, with most concluding that the former is far less effective than the latter (Broad and Evans, 2006; Darling and Hammond, 1996; Guskey, 2003; In Praxis, 2006; Timperley, 2008). Broad and Evans (2006) state that “The literature
suggests the limitations of traditional forms of in-service ‘training’ and ‘one shot workshops’ and the need for a richer repertoire of professional development practices and modes of delivery for all teachers,” (p.11) but this sentiment is not shared by all researchers. It can be argued that it is the characteristics of design of any form of professional development that better determines its’ effectiveness. Garet et al (2006) state that, “to improve professional development, it is more important to focus on the durations, collective participation, and the core features (i.e., content, active learning, and coherence), than type” (p. 936).

If teachers are going to spend some of their little professional development time learning something new, the content should be context specific, evidence-based knowledge, (Broad and Evans, 2006; Darling and Hammond, 1996; Guskey, 2003; In Praxis, 2006; Timperley, 2008) and this includes both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Content may be as specific as learning computation skills in math, to as general as classroom management practices. Content specific to particular contexts will be more coherent with the experiences of its’ teachers and provide a better opportunity for teachers to address the specific needs of their class (Timperley, 2008). Content needs to have been subject to research. To what degree the content needs to have been researched in order to be seen as evidence based is debatable. Timperley (2008) has argued that it should be “subject to research and wide debate” (p. 28), while others do not make this distinction, suggesting that the practices that have been shown to be effective in general practice are acceptable.

Much of the current literature in effective professional development practices calls for a sustained focus and duration for activities in order to maximize the depth of teacher change. (Birman, 2000; Broad and Evans, 2006; Darling and Hammond, 1996; Guskey, 2003; InPraxis, 2006; Timperley, 2008). InPraxis (2006) states that, “sufficient time, follow up and support,
must take place over an extended period of time in order for substantial change and learning to occur” (p. 13). Sustained duration allows time for practice and, reflection, follow up, support, in depth discussions and meaningful collaboration; all of which can be related to characteristics of adult learning theory.

Collaboration is also highly recommended in the literature as being a characteristic of effective professional development practices. Timperley (2008) states that, “participation in a professional community with one’s colleagues is an integral part of professional learning that impacts positively on students,” (p.18) yet can only be successful when the group focused upon the students’ learning needs. Opportunities for collaboration give teachers the ability to engage in dialogue, problem solve, debate, extend experiences and knowledge, reflect and support one another and build environments of trust, where teachers are more willing to take on challenges of learning (Garet et al, 2001; InPraxis, 2006 Timperley, 2008). Schmoker (2004) goes even further, to state “carefully constructed learning teams…are probably the most practical, affordable and professional dignifying route to better instructions in our schools. (430)

Coherence is required in many ways. New ideas must have some fit with previous experience or knowledge in order for the adult learner to add to their conceptual construct (Garet et al, 2001). Tasks and learning opportunities should also be coherent among school goals and multiple teachers’ experience within a school (InPraxis, 2006). By meeting such coherence in the above modes a professional development activity is more likely to be effective in improving teachers knowledge and skills (Garet et al, 2001).
In many cases, teachers are involved in professional development in order to attempt to improve their effectiveness as a teacher and, in turn, student achievement. In order for teachers to best direct their professional time and focus they need to know what their students need in terms of skills and content. Part of this sense is well known by experienced teachers in a very general way. Experience allows them to compare the achievement of their current students to those in the past and to the curriculum itself. While this sense may be the impetus for a professional development focus, it is not enough to be the means by which the professional development activity is planned. “If student learning needs, professional learning needs, and worthwhile content are to be aligned, the teacher must be able to discover what students already know and can do and how to build on that knowledge in deep, rather than superficial ways” (Timperley, 2008, p.28). Teachers and professional development organizers should be using student data to determine what teachers should be learning and later used to determine how well they’re learning it (InPraxis, 2006).

**Context**

It has been clearly suggested in literature that context plays a huge role in the effectiveness of professional development programs. What works for one school, in one place, at one time, may not be appropriate for another school in another place or even the same school, but at a different time (Birman, 2000; Broad and Evans, 2006; Garet et al, 2000; Timperley, 2008; Villegas-R, 2003; Zepeda, 2013).

The specific characteristics of context that should be considered within the school being researched in this study are that it is a French Immersion school and its provincial government ministry is in the process of changing the curriculum in order to better fit the proposed personalized learning focus as set out in the BC Ed Plan. The needs of French
Immersion teachers as a construct of the context in this school will be explored in this literature review. The ideas around educational reform, as they also pertain to this context, have been previously reviewed in this chapter.

In an examination of the preparation of teachers for French Immersion programs in Canada, Muhling (2004) found that preparation for French Immersion teachers has only recently developed programs that are specialized. Due to this recent change, the majority of teachers teaching French Immersion in Canada are not currently teaching with such preparation or background. This is certainly the case in British Columbia, where the province expects that, “In addition to regular certification requirements, teachers teaching the French portion of immersion programs should have a high degree of oral and written proficiency in the French language… and should also have completed at least one course in immersion methodology.” (http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=DCBD126F605646F7B16D62E5D09CD289, March 21, 2015). One course in immersion methodology! French immersion teachers are teaching the acquisition of language all day long in primary classrooms.

This lack of extensive and specialized training exposes a need for high quality professional development for French Immersion teachers. For years, teachers have had to develop their own resources and professional development activities in the French Immersion programs, on their own (Muhling, 2004, p.14). We know that without careful planning and understanding of effective professional development practices that pro-d activities are often ineffective, costly and do not benefit the teachers taking part in them. With French Immersion teachers often busy carrying the burden of creating their own resources, they need practical and well planned professional learning opportunities. As such, time spent participating in ineffective professional development activities that are not attuned to their specific needs should be avoided.
French Immersion teachers need specific professional development activities that support their instruction, their knowledge of language acquisition and their students and are grounded in best practices of effective professional development.
Chapter Three – Procedures and Methods

Research Design

This research study was aimed at investigating preferences for professional learning and perceived effectiveness of professional development activities in order to inform design for most effective professional development at the school-based level. The study gathered qualitative data to investigate teachers’ perceptions of effectiveness and preference for specific characteristics of professional development design. Data was collected by use of paper-based surveys and face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher. The entire teaching staff of the researcher’s school was invited to volunteer to share their perspectives through surveys. A smaller group of teachers participated in the interviews (this included all teachers that submitted completed interview consent forms).

Sample

This study was conducted in a school with 29 teaching staff. The teaching staff was predominantly female and was of a wide range of experience. Staff’s experience ranged from less than 5 year to over 25 years’ experience. The population included all teachers currently teaching at the school, as this study was meant to target the needs and design of school based professional development days. The staff includes several specialist teachers, including librarian, music, special education, and reading recovery teachers. The school’s staff also includes several itinerant teachers.

All members of the teaching and specialized staff, excluding the researcher, were given the opportunity to be involved in the study. The sample used for the purpose of this study was 18 staff members, all of whom volunteered to be part of the study (from here on in, this sample will be referred to as the ‘participants’). This is a 64% participation rate. Itinerant teachers were not
included, as they are rarely at the school based professional development days and typically do not work at the school on school based professional development days. This is, in general, a moderately high participation rate. This may have been due to the time that the researcher spent engaging in conversation with colleagues during the recent BCTF strike. Several colleagues asked about the researcher’s studies while walking the picket line and were expecting surveys to be presented as part of her studies. Other possibilities include the possibility of influencing future professional development in the manner that they prefer by completing the survey.

The researcher collected data from surveys of all willing participants. The sample was comprised of a well-represented range of teaching staff at the school. 14/18 participants taught primary grades, 4/18 taught intermediate grades. This is representative of the entire staff, where 18% of eligible participants in this study teach in the intermediate grades and 64% teach primary. 9/18 participants taught in the English program and 8/18 taught in the French Immersion program. Three specialist teachers participated and a variety of teaching experiences were represented, with teachers having 25 or more years’ experience having the highest rates of participation.

Participants completing surveys were able to volunteer to be a part of the interviews by submitting a form confirming their interest. The form was attached to surveys, yet submitted in a separate envelope to ensure anonymity of the surveys. All 5 participants that volunteered to take part in the interviews were interviewed. The 5 staff members that participated provided a generally representative sample of the staff, including 2 French Immersion and 3 English teachers, a specialist teacher, an intermediate teacher and teachers with experience ranging from under 5 years over 25 years. All participants were interviewed within two weeks of each other.
and within 5 weeks of the return of surveys and interview consent forms. Interviews were completed by the researcher herself, thus increasing the internal validity of the study.

**Instrumentation**

The instrument used in the initial phase of the study was a survey provided to participants. The survey was intended to gather information about the perceived effectiveness and preferences for professional development design. Research shows that self-selected professional development is typically more effective than those that are expected as part of a top-down approach. It is therefore conceivable that investigating characteristics of professional development design and content of professional development activities, and using this information to inform design of professional development activities, would increase effectiveness within this context. The survey directly sought data about preferences for professional development formats and design and their perception of its’ effectiveness.

The instrument used in this study was a survey containing semantic differential questions and multiple choice lists where participants were able to choose up to 5 options that applied to their preferences. Questions were crafted around characteristics of professional development design such as duration, format, facilitators, process, group size and end results. The survey was comprised of semantic differential, 8 multi answer questions and 3 open ended question. The survey also included 3 multiple-choice demographic questions.

The semantic differential survey question is appropriately used in this study as it is a rating scale commonly used to measure opinions, values, and attitudes where bipolar choices are given on either end of the scale. Multi answer questions provided an opportunity for participants to give their preferences as related to effectiveness for multiple characteristics and content
allowing for frequencies to be tabulated and giving designers of professional development several options for the course of further professional development. This style of question did not limit participants to choosing just one of many characteristics or content areas that they prefer and / or find most effective. Professional development becomes increasingly more effective with increased positive characteristics of design as part of its development. Multi answer questions provided the researcher with rich information by which she could make recommendations for future development of pro-d.

The surveys, survey consent form and interview consent form were distributed to all teachers on staff through their physical mailbox just prior to a staff meeting. The researcher introduced the study to the staff during the staff meeting and allowed two weeks for teachers choosing to participate to complete the surveys. Return of surveys implied consent, as outlined in the survey consent form. Anonymous surveys and separate identifiable completed interview consent forms were returned to respective envelopes in the researcher’s mailbox during the following two weeks.

The second instrument used was an interview that followed up the survey. Questions asked in the interviews related to initial questions and findings within the survey. These questions were asked in order to give more robust and descriptive answers to similar questions found in the surveys. Teachers were asked to expand on their preferences and perceptions of effective regarding specific characteristics used in the design of professional development activities. Teachers were asked to describe specific positive instances of professional development.

Several considerations were made by the researcher in order to maximize the validity of the interviews. All interviews were conducted by the researcher herself, ensuring that the
execution of the interview was as consistent as possible. All interviews were held in a power-neutral environment, this often being in the interviewee’s classroom and always at the preference of the interviewee.

**Procedures**

1. The research study and opportunity to participate were outlined during a staff meeting. Surveys were placed in teachers’ mailboxes just prior to the staff meeting beginning.

2. A reminder was given 5 days prior to the 2-week deadline of recruitment and time allotted for survey completion.

3. Paper surveys and interview consent forms were returned to respective envelopes in the researcher’s school mailbox. Completion of surveys implied consent.

4. Paper survey information was transferred directly to Excel by the researcher. Paper copies were kept in a locked cabinet. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed into a Word document.

5. Survey and interview results were analysed.

6. All data will be destroyed in June of 2017.

**Validity**

This research study was valid as the investigation of teacher’s preferences regarding their school based professional development design and perception of effectiveness of said design sought out through the instruments could be used to directly answer the initial research questions. The research question, *What are teacher’s preferences for and perceived effectiveness*
of elements of school based professional development design, relates directly to the context where the research was carried out, within the school, thus increasing its’ reliability.

Validity of this study may have been compromised by a common theme affecting validity found in typical research studies. There was no explicit power over relationship in this study, yet some participants were teachers new to the school and profession and may have felt compelled to participate in order to begin to be a part of the school culture. Potential participants were all ensured that participation was voluntary and that all survey participation would be anonymous. As the researcher had only one years’ relationship with the teachers at the school where the study was carried out, it is unlikely that any teacher felt compelled to participate because of current relationships with the researcher. The only possible benefit to participating in the study was the improved nature of future professional development activities.

The instrumentation in the study was consistently administered, with the same instructions given to all participants for the survey. The researcher conducted all interviews. Interviews were held in the interviewee’s classrooms for all but one participant, where the interview was done during a commute.

Analysis

The data collected from surveys was used to draw correlations between different groups of teachers based upon demographic information given on the surveys and characteristics of professional development design as well as between characteristics of design. For example, the needs and preferences of intermediate teachers’ vs. primary teachers or positive correlations in teachers preferring collaborative design and year-long focuses feels like there is something missing from this sentence. The same data was also used to create frequency tables using
descriptive statistics. This information will be used to better inform the planning of the professional development committee.

Data from the interviews was coded using themes. The researcher looked for correlations between positive professional development experiences and specific characteristics of design of such experiences.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Overview

As stated in previous chapters, this study sought to investigate the preferences for, and perceived effectiveness of, elements of professional development activity design. The results of this study were gathered through surveys and interviews conducted by the researcher during the 2014/2015 school year with teaching staff who volunteered to participate.

The participants of this study had a wide range of experience and teaching contract descriptions. This study was completed at a dual track school (meaning that both French Immersion and English programs are taught at the school). The school employs teachers that range from teaching Kindergarten to Grade 5.

The analysis of the data for this study was done using descriptive statistics of survey results and coding of interview responses and open-ended responses from the survey. The researcher also looked for correlations between teacher demographics and rates of preferences as found in the survey results.

Open-Ended Survey Question Analysis

The final three questions in the survey asked respondents to share information about professional development design. Participants were asked to share what they have had experience with or would like to have offered at the school level. The researcher searched for themes within the open-ended responses and found recurring themes both within the individual question as well as between the three questions. Table 4.1 shows the results of the coding.

When asked about formats or themes of professional development that participants had experience with, and would like to continue to see offered, the responses revealed the following
themes of design: demonstration lessons, observation, collaboration, sustained duration, content or program based and teacher driven.

Many of the same themes were found as participants responded to a similar question about themes or formats; in this case, the information given was responding to what teachers would like to have offered, yet have no been. In this case demonstration lessons, observation, collaboration and content or program based pro-d were suggested.

The final question of the survey gave participants an opportunity to share general comments about effective professional development design. Again, many of the same themes emerged, with lesson demonstration, observations, collaboration, being sustained over time and teacher driven all occurring in multiple responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Common Themes (Responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Are there formats or themes of professional development that you have been offered in the past that you would like to continue to have offered? | - Demonstration lessons  
- Observation  
- Collaboration  
- Teacher driven  
- Sustained  
- Content/program based |
| Are there formats or themes of professional development that have not yet been offered that you would like to see offered in the future? | - Demonstration lessons  
- Observation  
- Collaboration  
- Content/program based |
If there are any other comments regarding effective professional development design that you would like to share, please add them below.

- Demonstration lessons
- Observation
- Collaboration
- Teacher driven
- Sustained

Table 4.1

**Interview Analysis**

The researcher analyzed interviews by coding for common themes. Respondents’ responses were coded for positive or negative comments relating to the eight common themes that emerged through the coding process. Most themes were related to the themes that were found within the open and close ended portions of the surveys, as the questions used in the interviews were meant to evoke responses that would add clarity, background and a generally better explanation as to why certain close-ended responses were chosen. The themes that emerged from the coding process of the interviews were demonstration lesson, observation of others teaching, collaboration, active learning, practical tools and resources, direct link to curriculum, inspiration and professional growth. Table 4.2 shows the results of the coding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Common Themes (Responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What professional tools, insights, strategies, do you typically hope</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>to gain from a professional development activity? Do you</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>usually find that you are able to come away from a professional development activity with this?</strong></td>
<td>- Demonstration lessons&lt;br&gt;- Observation&lt;br&gt;- Collaboration&lt;br&gt;- Practical tools and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe the most effective professional development situation you have</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>been a part of?</strong></td>
<td>- Demonstration lessons&lt;br&gt;- Observation&lt;br&gt;- Collaboration&lt;br&gt;- Practical tools and resources&lt;br&gt;- Directly linked to curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What three aspects of the session that you’ve described made it most</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>effective for you?</strong></td>
<td>- Demonstration lessons&lt;br&gt;- Observation&lt;br&gt;- Collaboration&lt;br&gt;- Active learning&lt;br&gt;- Practical tools and resources&lt;br&gt;- Directly linked to curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which do you find more effective for professional development, a one off</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>workshop or a series of sessions? Why?</strong></td>
<td>Series&lt;br&gt;- Collaboration&lt;br&gt;- Follow up and reflection&lt;br&gt;- Active learning&lt;br&gt;Single Workshop&lt;br&gt;- Lose focus over long period of time&lt;br&gt;- Music, P.E., art curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe your experiences with professional development activities that</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>have collaboration as a part of their design and its effectiveness in furthering your practice.</strong></td>
<td>- Sharing of ideas&lt;br&gt;- Multiple opinions&lt;br&gt;- Accountability&lt;br&gt;- Collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Do you value professional development? Why or why not? | - Inspiration  
- Professional growth |
| Do you feel that professional development has a direct effect on your teaching practice? If yes, explain how. If not, explain why you think it doesn’t. | Yes  
- Demonstration lessons  
- Observation  
- Collaboration  
- Practical tools and resources  
- Directly linked to curriculum  
No  
- Lacking quality |
| Is there anything else that you would like to comment about regarding school based professional development? | - Demonstration lessons  
- Observation  
- Collaboration  
- Practical tools and resources  
Directly linked to curriculum  
- French |

Table 4.2

The results of the coded interviews and open ended survey questions will be further explored in this chapter as they relate to individual close ended survey questions.

**Survey Analysis by Question**

The first three questions of the survey gathered demographic information about the respondents. The following nine questions were closed ended questions seeking information about the respondents’ preferences for and perceived effectiveness of pro-d activity design. Each of these questions allowed the respondents to select all that applied, to a maximum of five choices. The final three questions of the survey were open-ended questions. In questions five to
twelve, where participants were able to choose multiple answers, analysis will often show totals of more than one hundred percent.

The researcher collected demographic information to use when looking for correlations between certain groups of staff members and their preferences and perceived effectiveness of professional developments activities. The correlations found will be discussed in Chapter 5 within the summary of findings.

Survey Analysis by Question and Relation to Open-Ended and Interview Questions

The demographics of this study’s sample generally reflect the school teaching population. The majority of the teachers teach in the primary program, where four of the six grade levels are represented and there are smaller class sizes as compared to intermediate programs. Intermediate teachers are slightly over-represented in the sample. The school is split between French Immersion and English programs almost evenly, with 12/25 divisions being in the English program; the English teachers are just slightly over represented in the sample. Teachers with more than 25 years experiences were slightly over-represented in this sample, and teachers with 0-5 years’ experience were slightly under-represented in this sample.
Teachers were questioned about how they valued professional development. The survey results showed that 56% of participants felt that professional development had the potential to be extremely valuable, and an additional 33% felt that it had the potential to be very valuable. This is consistent with the findings of the interviews, where all teachers expressed that they valued well planned professional development activities. Themes of inspirations and values of professional growth were related to the valuing of professional development activities. The first
interviewee expressed that professional development helps a teacher to “grow a lot…and it always enriches what you’re doing.” The fifth interviewee expressed that “getting out of the classroom to see what others are doing to engage their learners is inspiring. Emotionally, we know that when we are inspired, we will inspire our students.”

When questioned about effective formats for professional development design, over 50% of respondents selected workshops, observation of other teachers and collaborative self-directed professional development. Hands on experiences, collaboration and individual self-directed professional development were selected by 39%-44% of respondents. This shows a wide range of perceived effectiveness of formats for professional development. The open-ended questions and interview analysis showed more preference and agreement for perceived effectiveness of activities that involved collaboration, demonstration lessons, observation of others teaching and self directed collaborative activities.
Participants of the survey overwhelmingly preferred to collaborate with colleagues rather than work alone during pro-d activities. The majority of the study participants preferred to work in small groups, with 67% choosing this option. Only 17% of participants chose working alone as a preference for their professional development activities. Interviews and open-ended survey response echoed this sentiment, as many mentioned that activities where collaboration was a part of the design, were the most effective. One teacher explained that, “collaboration with same grade partners with writing strategies, assessment and evaluation has been my most powerful pro-d experience at the researched school. Having a school-wide interest in one subject area gives colleagues a level of accountability to make sure topics, strategies and models are provided for all students. The collaboration helps to standardize evaluation and that is a confidence builder for teachers. We all need confirmation that what we are doing is on target and effective.” Other teachers noted that we have so many experts in our school that we can learn from and collaborate with, and that working with others allows for sharing of ideas, confirmations of what teachers are doing and that inspiration and support are often results of collaborative processes.
When questioned about facilitators for pro-d events, the responses were rather evenly split between the three options of colleague, district specialist or expert in the field. Of total responses, 41% chose an expert, 31% a district specialist and 28% a colleague. This differs from the results of the interviews as well as the open-ended questions. Most teachers that were a part of the interviews described experience with colleagues both within their school and at other schools as being the facilitators of professional development that they found most effective. In many cases teachers noted that professional development that was led by a fellow teacher allowed them to observe a lesson, often came with accompanying resources and provided a colleague who they could easily contact for support if needed.
In question #8, participants were asked what topic or theme they prefer their professional development to address. Writing was overwhelmingly preferred as a topic for professional development, with 72% of participants choosing this as one of their options. Numeracy, reading and special education topics were all highly preferred, with 44%-50% of participants choosing them. Technology, assessment and the new curriculum were all chosen by 39% of respondents. Most interviews and open-ended responses did not focus on specific topics for professional development, but the specific needs for French based professional development activities that were accompanied with resources were noted multiple times. Teachers, in general, suggested that topics that were in any way directly related to curriculum expectations were the most practical and valued.
Teachers were asked what they would like to come away with from a professional development activity. Most participants declared that they would either like a strategy or physical resources to be the outcome of their professional development activity, with 67% and 44% respectively choosing these options. This is consistent with what teachers suggested in the open-ended portions for this study, with the mention of a professional network or resource person also being noted as something valued as an outcome of professional development. One interviewee expressed her preferences for a strategy as an outcome. (S)he said, “I like a strategy that I can use in different contexts, like in literacy, and relates to a bigger picture…One that and I can practically put into place almost immediately.” (S)he, and others, also suggested that the practical tools and strategies that they are looking for are best when they’re presented in tandem with new pedagogical knowledge.

![Professional Development Outcomes](image.png)

Teachers were asked what length they preferred a session to be, as well as the number of sessions they preferred a professional development focus to have. Teachers that responded to the survey expressed a preference for half-day professional development sessions, with 61% of
respondents choosing this as an option for length of sessions. Full day sessions, yearlong focuses and ongoing mentorship were each chosen by 17% of respondents.

Most participants preferred a single session for a professional development activity, with 39% of respondents choosing this option. A series of three sessions was chosen by 28% of respondents, 22% preferred a sustained focus and 17% preferred a two-session focus. Several interviewees and survey participants shared their preference and perceived effectiveness for programs offered by the school districts Learning Initiatives program. This program offers teachers an opportunity to collaborate over short sessions during a school year. Most included a short demonstration lesson or mini workshop with follow up on learning rounds based on an inquiry question developed by the participants at each school. This structure allows for both the shorter session lengths, as well as the longer focus many teachers showed preferences for.
Responses to the final multi-choice question showed a pragmatic theme, where the preferences for activities that are part of the design of a pro-d activity were time for application of new learning, lesson demonstrations, hands on activities and time to explore new learning. These findings are consistent with those from the open-ended responses of the interviews and surveys. Themes of lesson demonstration, active learning and collaboration were recurring in several questions and responses. The second interviewee expressed his/her preference for professional development where, “the basic format is instruction and then practice…feedback and then practice again. It’s also really fun to collaborate with everyone and get new ideas and its always interesting to see what people are doing in their classrooms.”

One interviewee summed up many of the overall preferences for, and perceived effectiveness of, professional development design characteristics and especially noted the potential effectiveness of school based professional development. (S)he says, “the colleagues on staff have been instrumental in providing informal and formal mentorship. This mentorship has facilitated pro-d that goes on between pro-d days. There are the quick chats in the hall about a new experience or trial. There’s the one off glitch in the Smart Board that prompts a quick ‘fix’ and in that, a window into a colleagues application to the software. There are the work samples that one colleague shows another to demonstrate exploration of something new. Colleagues can work in isolation but school based sharing of expertise opens doors and provides a safe context to validate teachers for being learners. Teachers need a sense of belonging, and school based pro-d with lunch provided, makes for a welcomed day of exploration and connectedness. These days also show administrators the strengths and needs of their staff members.” She notes
collaboration, ongoing professional development, active learning, demonstrations, discussion, and powerful collegiality that is built on school based professional development days.
Chapter 5 - Summary and Conclusions

This final chapter summarizes the research done, and reports conclusions made through the process of the research. This is followed by recommendations made for the individual school, as well as the school district where the research was completed and for areas of possible further research.

Summary and Overview of Research

This research study sought to uncover the preferences for, and perceived effectiveness of, professional development design characteristics at an individual school on lower Vancouver Island. The findings may later be used to help shape and plan future professional development opportunities at said school.

This research was important to conduct in this context, as personalization of professional development has been correlated with the increased effectiveness of professional development activities. The specific context of the time and place of this study was one where professional development policies were in the process of being shifted within the province of British Columbia. More emphasis was being placed on accountability and maintaining certification, rather than professional learning. It was hoped that the outcome of the study would lead to insight into personalized professional activities that would increase the engagement of the professional teaching staff working within the researched school.

In January of 2015, the researcher invited all teaching staff to take part in surveys and follow up interviews as part of this research project. Eighteen of twenty-nine eligible staff members completed and returned surveys; this is a 62% participation rate. Five staff members, 18% of eligible staff, completed follow-up interviews with the researcher.
Surveys data was collected and organized on an Excel spreadsheet by question and participant. The data was analyzed to provide frequency of response by question in order to find trends between specific demographics in the school and their specific preferences.

Open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts were coded for emerging themes. Themes that emerged were active learning formats such as demonstration lessons, observation of others teaching, collaboration, sustained activities and focus’, teacher driven focus’, acquisition of practical tools and resources and program and direct curricular content based activities.

Data collected by the researcher was compared to published research with the same themes of effective professional development design and was outlined in the literature review of this thesis report.

Finally, the researcher made a recommendation to the professional development committee of the research school. The recommendation was a sustained, year long, professional development structure, meeting the needs of both the specific school as well as backed by general literature and studies in the area of effective professional development activity design. The recommendation is outlined later in this chapter.

Conclusions

In comparing data that was provided by participating staff and the published literature on the subject of effective professional development design, the researcher made two conclusions. First, that active learning formats are preferred and perceived as effective within the design of professional development activities, and second, that not all data provided by staff mirrored the conclusions of current published research.
Active learning formats such as hands on activities, collaboration and exploration time, that are made part of professional development activities are widely seen as effective, as reported by both participating teachers and general published research. Opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, observation of others’ teaching and self-direction are also positively reported by teachers and general research.

There were areas where the research conducted by the researcher and the published literature were inconsistent with each other. The researcher found that many of survey participants preferred workshops and learning of short duration. According to the literature, however, one -off workshops have been criticized as being one of the most ineffective formats used for professional learning.

Perhaps this inconsistency exists because of the specific needs of the teachers in this context. Not all times, places, stages of reform, stages of career have been researched, nor can we expect to be able to generalize specific research to all contexts. It may also be conceivable that not all teachers that participated in the survey have been a part of other formats of professional development, and therefore possibly unaware of the greater effectiveness of other forms of professional development.

**Recommendations for Researched School**

The researcher suggests the following format for professional development activities at the school that was researched. The recommendations were made through careful consideration of the specific preferences of the current staff, as provided by data collected during the research, and the literature that supports specific characteristics of professional development activity design, as outlined in the literature review of this thesis report.
The researcher recommends that the professional development committee consider planning activities, where both a year-long focus, and shorter alternate foci, are provided.

A year-long focus will provide more opportunities for active learning, reflection and refining of teaching in the area that has been chosen as a focus. Staff currently rate numeracy, writing or special education strategies and content as areas of interest and preference.

Short sessions should be planned to align with the year-long focus, for each of the professional development days, excluding the fall Provincial Professional Development Day and the Tri-District Professional Development day, where several high quality-learning opportunities are planned. The short sessions may range anywhere from one hour to half a day. Additional sessions to fill the day should address technology, assessment and the requirements of the new curriculum. Self-directed collaborative professional development times may also be provided.

Sessions should be facilitated by a variety of people. In-school colleagues, district colleagues, district specialists and experts in the field should be employed to lead professional development sessions.

Several considerations should be taken when planning the year’s professional development activities. The focus or content should be teacher driven and guided by student data. Teachers need to be given the opportunity, at the beginning of the year, to come to some consensus on a focus for the year’s professional development focus, as well as other minor foci for professional development. Student data should drive the planning of professional development activities and may range from writing samples, to math journals, observation’s etc. Teachers need to be intimately aware of what their students know and where they need improvements before they embark on planning lengthy professional development processes. Student data should be
continually used throughout the year to plan follow-up professional development activities. It should be noted that student data may come from FSA results as it has in the past, but this is only one small source of data and should not be the only data used.

The committee should attempt to meet the preferences of the staff by planning activities that will provide new pedagogy and practical resources in tandem. Too often activities will be focused on one or the other. Teachers voiced their need for practical resources, but without the pedagogy and philosophy behind it, a resource would lack the substance needed for true learning to take place.

Several participants noted the effectiveness of professional development activities where they were able to observe another teacher teach. Professional development funds are limited with the school and district, and therefore release time is at a minimum, thus making such observations difficult to carry out. The researcher recommends that the professional development committee reach out to other schools in the school district and attempt to organize an exchange of observations within each school on their different school-chosen professional development days. This will provide opportunities for several teachers to observe others’ teaching, without the need for release time, as well as new opportunities for collaboration.

Finally, the researcher recommends that time for reflection of new learning be given both between professional development resources, as well as at the beginning of each professional development day. This will provide opportunities for teachers to share their experiences, consider and solidify their recent experiences and learning, and to help guide future professional development planning.
**Major Focuses** | Numeracy, Writing or Special Education  
---|---  
**Minor Focuses** | Technology, New Curriculum, Assessment  
---|---  
**Duration** | Year-long focus, comprised of short sessions (1 hour – ½ day)  
---|---  
**Facilitators** | In school colleagues, in district colleagues, experts  
---|---  
**Planning Considerations**  
Teacher Driven  
Student Data Driven  
Pedagogy and Practical Resources Provided in Tandem  
Planning Observation of Colleagues Teaching with Another School within the School District  
Opportunities for discussion and reflection between and at beginning of each professional development day  
---|---

Table 4.3

**Recommendations for School District**

The researcher recommends that the school district provide some training to leaders of school based professional development committees. School based professional development activities plan most of the professional development, on a per person and hours provided basis, than any other group within the school district. Yet, with this abundant potential, professional development committee leaders have no specific training in providing learning opportunities appropriate to adult learners and teachers specifically. The school district should therefore provide some consistent training for professional development committee leaders in the areas of
adult learning theory, effective professional development practices and strategies for teacher as a 
leader.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The researcher recommends that professional development committees conduct research 
each year to provide information on what their staff prefers for professional development 
opportunities. As staff and educational contexts are constantly changing, short surveys, like the 
one used in this research, should be used at the beginning of each year to drive professional 
development planning.

Staff committees should also be assessing the effectiveness of the activities they have 
planned. It is recommended that at the conclusion of each year, that staff committees gather 
information from their staff about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the opportunities that 
were provided that year. This information should be used to guide future planning.

It is recommended, in a general way, that teachers perform their own research within their 
particular schools. Every province, school district, school, and classroom are different. As we 
try to find consensus in the ways that our students and teachers best learn, it is important that we 
also always consider the individual when planning all learning activities.
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Appendix A – Professional Development Design Survey

The purpose of the survey is to better understand what professional learning opportunities you find useful and effective. For the purpose of this study, an effective activity could be one that has led you to have had increased thought about your practice, may have led you to question your practice, developed your practice in a positive way, led to growth in your practice or allowed you to implement a resource or strategy better than you have in the past. This list is not exhaustive, but rather an indication of the ways that effective professional development may have played out in your teaching practice.

1. Which student population do you teach? Select all that apply.
   - Primary
   - Intermediate
   - Non-enrolling

2. Which program do you teach in?
   - English
   - French Immersion
   - Both English and French Immersion

3. How many years’ experience teaching do you have?
   - 0-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16-20
   - 20-25
   - 25+

4. On a scale of 1-5, how valuable do you consider the potential of professional development is in playing a role in advancing your practice?
   - 5 Extremely Valuable
   - 4 Very Valuable
   - 3 Somewhat valuable
   - 2 Slightly valuable
   - 1 Not Valuable
5. Which professional development formats do you find most effective in
developing your practice? Choose up to five that apply.
- Workshop
- Program based workshop
- Classroom inquiry/action research
- In school learning rounds
- Hands-on experiences
- Opportunity to observe others teach
- Mentorship
- Collaboration
- Professional book club
- Self-directed (individual)
- Self-directed (collaborative)
- Demo-lesson/co-teaching
- Other: Please specify ____________

6. Which group size do you consider to be most effective in developing your
practice?
- Individual
- Partnerships
- Small groups (3-5)
- Large groups
- Whole staff

7. Whom do you find to be the most effective in facilitating a professional
development activity? Choose all that apply.
- In school colleagues
- Local/District specialists
- Experts in the field
- Other, please describe __________________________

8. What topic or theme do you prefer to have your professional development
address? Choose up to five that apply.
- Social Responsibility
- Numeracy
- Reading
- Writing
- Technology
- Assessment
9. What would you like to gain from a professional development activity?
- A resource person to contact
- A physical resource
- Strategies
- A network of colleagues to collaborate with
- A new understanding of current pedagogy
- Other: Please Specify ____________________

10. Which duration for a focus of your professional development do you find effective?
- 1 hour
- Half day
- Full day
- Multi-day
- A year-long focus
- Ongoing mentorship

11. How many sessions for one focus or area of professional development do you find to be effective?
- 1
- 2
- 3
- Sustained over more than 3 sessions

12. During a professional development activity which do you prefer to be part of the design?
- Collaboration
- Time for Exploration
- Professional Readings
- Lecture
- Interactive hands on activities
- Question and answer period
- Lesson demonstration
- Discussion
13. Are there formats/themes of professional development that you have been offered in the past that you would like to continue to have offered?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

14. Are there formats or themes of professional development that have not yet been offered that you would like to see offered in the future? Please describe.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

15. If there are any other comments regarding effective professional development design that you would like to share, please add them below.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

The return of your completed survey indicates your consent to participate in this research and for the information you provide to be included in study results.

If you are willing to consider being involved in a follow up interview for this project, please review and complete the attached interview consent form and return it to me.

Please return to survey and consent form to their respective envelopes in my mail drawer within the staffroom. The envelopes are labelled “Completed Surveys” and “Interview Consent Forms.”
Appendix B – Interview Consent Form

Research Consent Form - Interview

“Investigating Contextual Preferences for School Based Professional Development Design”

October 2014

Mia Danielle Coleman, Principal Researcher
Masters of Education Student

Scott Priestman, Ph. D., Supervisor
Department of Education

Participants interested in continuing with the study after completing the survey will have the opportunity to do one, 30-minute follow-up interview with the principal researcher at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. There are also no known benefits associated with your participation in this study.

All records of your participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within my classroom and on a personal password protected laptop. With your permission, I would like to record our interview. The audio recording will be stored on a password-protected cellphone and will be deleted immediately following transcription of the interview. All data will be destroyed within two years of the project being completed, approximately June of 2017. Both electronic and physical files will be deleted at this time. The results of this study will be written in a thesis report. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants. However, because I may use quotes from our interview, your anonymity cannot be guaranteed even though I will not use your name, given the small size of the study population.
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. As a participant you have the right to refuse participation at any time during this study, and your decision to participate is not binding. As a participant you are able to withdraw from this study for any reason, without negative consequences. You may withdraw from this study up until the point of when data analysis begins, at which time your interview information will be removed and not used in the study. After data analysis has begun, however, your information will remain in the study as it will not be possible to distinguish with any certainty what elements of the analysis were solely attributable to the information you provided.

If you, as a participant, have any concerns about your treatment as a part of your research study please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext. 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

The study results will be reported within a thesis paper being submitted to Vancouver Island University. Participants will not be identified or identifiable in this thesis paper. A brief paper with the results of this research project will be available to staff at the participating school upon request.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address below:

Mia Danielle Coleman

Masters of Education Student

Vancouver Island University

dcoleman@sd61.bc.ca
I have read the interview consent form, understand the information read, and understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I consent to participate in the interview portion of this research study.

Participant’s name: ________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

☐ Please check to indicate your consent to the audio recording of your interview.
Appendix C - Survey Cover Letter and Consent Form

Research Consent Form and Cover Letter for Survey

“Investigating Contextual Preferences for School Based Professional Development Design”

October 2014

Mia Danielle Coleman, Principal Researcher
Masters of Education Student

Scott Priestman, Ph. D., Supervisor
Department of Education

I am a student in a Master’s of Education program requiring a research project as part of the completion of my Master’s of Education in Educational Leadership. As such, I have designed a research project to study the contextual preferences and perceived effectiveness of different characteristics of professional development activity design.

During this study, you will be asked to complete a short survey comprised of questions concerning the different forms that professional development activities take and perceived effectiveness and preference for them. You will have two weeks to voluntarily complete the survey and will be asked to return the survey to the researcher’s school mailbox. Once collected the surveys will be kept in an envelope in a locked file cabinet. Your participation will require approximately 10 minutes of your time. If you’re interested in continuing with the study will have the opportunity to do one, 30-minute follow-up interview with the principal researcher at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. There are also no known benefits associated with your participation in this study.

All records of your participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within my classroom and on a personal password protected laptop. Data will be
destroyed within two years of the project being completed, approximately June of 2017. Electronic files will be deleted at this time and all paper-based data will be shredded. The results of this study will be written in a thesis report. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies you. However, while I will not use your name in my report on research results, I may use quotes from your survey responses. As a result, given the small size of the study population, your anonymity cannot be guaranteed, as you may be identifiable based on the information you provide.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation at any time during this study, and your decision to participate is not binding, yet once you submit your completed survey, your information cannot be withdrawn because it will not be possible to distinguish your survey from others that have been submitted. You are able to withdraw from this study for any reason, without negative consequences.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a part of your research study please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext., 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

The study results will be reported within a thesis paper being submitted to Vancouver Island University. You will not be identified or identifiable in this thesis paper. A brief paper with the results of this research project will be available to staff at the participating school upon request.

Submitting your completed survey indicates your consent to participate in this study and for the information you provide to be included in study results.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address below:

Mia Danielle Coleman
Masters of Education Student
Vancouver Island University
dcoleman@sd61.bc.ca
Appendix D – Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What professional tools, insights, strategies, do you typically hope to gain from a professional development activity? Do you usually find that you are able to come away from a professional development activity with this?

2. Describe the most effective professional development situation you have been a part of?

3. What three aspects of the session that you’ve described made it most effective for you?

4. Which do you find more effective for professional development, a one off workshop or a series of sessions? Why?

5. Describe your experiences with professional development activities that have collaboration as a part of their design and its effectiveness in furthering your practice.

6. Do you value professional development? Why or why not?

7. Do you feel that professional development has a direct effect on your teaching practice? If yes, explain how. If not, explain why you think it doesn’t.

8. What question should I have asked you today? What would your response to this question be?
Appendix E – Call for Participants Script

Call for Participants Script

I am currently engaged in the final year of a master's program at Vancouver Island University and am investigating the preferences and perceived effectiveness of professional development activities offered at the school level. I am seeking participants to take part in a survey that takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. I will be asking some of the participants to consider also participating in a follow-up interview, expected to take about half an hour. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your surveys will be anonymous and your participation will be confidential. I will be asking participants to complete the surveys within two weeks and to return the completed surveys to an envelope to be kept in my school mailbox. Along with the surveys, I will also distribute consent forms for those of you that may wish to participate in the follow up interviews. Follow-up interviews will take place within a month of the return of your consent form, which will also be returned to my mailbox. I will distribute a survey and consent form package to all of you. I hope that you will consider completing this survey; I know that you are all busy, but your time would be much appreciated. If you have any questions about your participation or my research please feel free to contact me.