A Culture of Learning

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Abstract

I believe that schools are better places when everyone involved is a learner. This design project has been created with the intention of moving my school towards a culture of ongoing and meaningful professional development, and ultimately developing adaptive expertise. Schools in British Columbia are currently adjusting to the latest revised curriculum and developing mechanisms for teachers to shift their teaching practices to match the new requirements is a necessity. Change is constant in schools and this project has been developed to assist my school in tackling this challenge.

The literature on professional development and professional learning communities provided the basis for the design of the project. The literature combined with my current school’s context was used to develop an action plan that provides a map to develop a culture of professional learning. The action plan is designed for a vice-principal or principal to use as a guide to work with staff to shift towards a model of teacher inquiry as professional development. The end goal of the action plan is to develop a culture of professional learning that is supported by leadership, collaboration and inquiry.

Keywords: professional development, professional learning, leadership, collaboration, inquiry, adaptive expertise
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Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose of the Project

Our purpose as teachers and school leaders is to provide our students with the best possible learning experiences we can offer. This requires that we are continually assessing our practices and making the necessary adjustments to move forward. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to this as using both ‘best practice’ and ‘next practice’ at the same time (p. 51). Teacher candidates at any one of British Columbia’s universities are provided with numerous levels of support as they learn to become teachers. Teacher candidates are given countless reflective exercises and are evaluated and mentored by a faculty advisor plus one or more school advisors. These mentors spend time talking and supporting the teacher candidates throughout their practica. The successful teacher candidate is qualified as a teacher and is then left on their own to seek out mentorship and growth opportunities. As a beginning teacher, many districts in British Columbia offer mentorship programs for teachers early in their careers. However, once you reach a certain level of seniority, ongoing professional support becomes more difficult to find.

As schools in British Columbia currently wrestle with new curricular changes, it is imperative that we discover and implement numerous ways to support the ongoing professional learning of our teachers. Teachers deserve to be supported with consistent and meaningful professional development activities where they can engage in critical reflection of their practice throughout their careers. As Zepeda (2013) states, “it is time to recognize the need to acknowledge the importance of job-embedded, ongoing, and career-long professional development for teachers” (p. xxvi). These professional learning opportunities should allow
teachers to build on the experiences they enjoyed as teacher candidates. We are all learners who develop at different rates and we need to create an environment where all teachers are focused on improving their practice for the benefit of our students. This study proposes to build on the established literature on professional learning to develop recommendations for a British Columbia middle school on how we can provide ongoing and meaningful professional learning opportunities to teachers. The ultimate goal is to create a culture where professional development is a daily occurrence.

I am a new vice-principal at a middle school in British Columbia. Prior to this, I taught in several public high schools throughout Vancouver. Finding ways to support all teachers as learners and professionals is a passion of mine. I believe that a teacher who is learning is more engaged and more likely to provide a quality learning experience for their students. As a new teacher, I remember being thrown into a classroom and realizing that there were a lot of skills and strategies that I had yet to develop. As I reflect back on those early years of teaching, I can remember schools where I developed rapidly and others where I developed a little more slowly. Upon reflection, I recognized that my development was directly related to the amount of personal learning that I did at those locations. The schools where I was most motivated and grew in my practice were schools where I had colleagues who shared ideas and challenged me to become a better professional. These environments appeared to happen magically and I missed them when I was working in a school that did not have the same energy. As I became more experienced, I invited principals and vice-principals to visit my classroom and provide feedback. I craved the opportunity to visit my colleagues’ classrooms but struggled to find ways to do this in a meaningful manner. I informally self-assessed my practices but found that there were very
few opportunities to discuss my strengths and weaknesses with others. I found that my
development as a teacher was driven not by the standard professional development days that all
teachers in British Columbia take part in, but rather the intrinsic desire to improve that was
facilitated by the needs that I saw in my school and classroom.

We ask our students to strive for growth and I feel that we should do the same as teachers
and professionals. To do this we need to foster a school culture that is focused on professional
learning that improves our ability to be ‘adaptive experts’ (LeFevre, Timperley, & Ell, 2015).

**Justification of the Project**

Professional development in British Columbia is not a new concept. However, with the
ongoing adoption of a new curriculum in British Columbia, it is more relevant than ever that we
explore and improve our teaching practices. Therefore, it is necessary that we examine how
teachers can learn, both as individuals and as school teams, in an attempt to meet the needs of
our students. According to Leiberman & Pointer Mace (2008), “professional development,
though well intentioned, is often perceived by teachers as fragmented, disconnected, and
irrelevant to the real problems of classroom practice” (p. 1). One strategy is to embed our
professional development into our schools. Professional development cannot happen only a few
times a year. As professionals, we must enter our schools each day with the idea that we may
learn something new or be excited to experiment with a new approach. Teachers want to grow as
professionals and see that the effort they are putting in has positive impacts for the students they
teach (Zepeda, 2013). In schools, we need to create professional development that allows us to
tackle an ever changing educational system. There will always be new challenges and new ideas
that schools and teachers need to navigate, implement, and adapt into their settings. We must
foster professional development practices that promote ‘adaptive expertise’ at both an individual and school level (LeFevre, et al., 2015).

Teachers want to be good teachers and the way that one is able to grow and move towards greater proficiency of the craft is through, “continuous improvement” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 14). Therefore, we must move away from the image of professional development as single events that we select from a catalogue and move towards the pursuit of quality learning experiences that improve our teaching practices. These learning opportunities can be supported and led by those within a school. Gibson and Brooks (2012) explain that teacher learning must be, “supported by modelling and coaching; allow educators to see and share their work reflectively and collaboratively… and foster a supportive and inspiring environment.” (p. 21).

Meaningful professional development can create a culture of confidence that allows a school to find solutions to the problems they have and prepare for the problems they don’t yet see. Gunn and Hollingsworth (2013) point to the fact that professional development is the mechanism by which, “a newly established culture of risk taking and pedagogical change can be sustained” (p. 215). Done properly, professional development can be much more than a one day presentation by an expert, it can become a natural part of a teacher’s day. Drawing from the literature on professional learning and professional development, I am endeavouring to develop a framework for professional development that fits my school setting but may also offer ideas for other middle schools throughout British Columbia.
Research Question

There is a large amount of literature concerning teacher professional development. Much of the literature discusses what good professional development is, but few pieces provide a plan on how to create a culture of professional development within a school. The goal of this project is to better understand the elements of teacher professional learning, and to draw on this understanding to create a framework of how the best elements of professional learning can be implemented into my school context. The question that will guide my research is: what does meaningful and consistent professional development that is focused on promoting adaptive expertise look like in my school?

By meaningful professional development, I am referring to professional learning that clearly demonstrates benefits for student and teacher learning. Consistent professional development implies professional learning that is ongoing and embedded within the structures and allocation of resources within my school. My initial hypothesis is that the model may look similar to what many refer to as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). I aim to apply principles from professional learning teams, such as PLCs to develop a framework that could be implemented within my school learning community.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this project, the terms professional development and professional learning will be used interchangeably. These terms are increasingly referencing the same thing in the literature and refer to any learning or attempted learning undertaken by a teacher or a group of teachers in order to improve their teaching and their students’ learning. A group of teachers learning together can often be referred to as a Professional Learning Community (PLC),
and in this project, this term will be thought of as a type of professional development and learning. A PLC may also be used as an example of collaboration. Collaboration is a term that refers to any time two or more people work together to overcome a particular challenge or develop a solution to a problem. A key premise of this project is that professional learning needs to be focused on the growth of adaptive expertise amongst the teachers and leaders of a school. LeFevre et al. (2015) discuss the development of adaptive expertise and they define this as the ability to tackle challenges and solve problems in new ways (p. 312). Adaptive expertise, as explained by LeFevre et al. (2015), forms the basis for effective professional learning. They argue, “long-term, sustained improvement can be driven by professional learning that gives teachers agency and responsibility for their own learning… and enables them to be in control of their own learning and improvement through attention to evidence and theory (p. 322). Lefevre et al. (2015) express the need for study into, “the processes and conditions that optimize professional learning driven by a vision of professionalism as adaptive expertise” (p. 322). The idea of adaptive expertise is very much at the root of this project as schools consistently search for solutions to a never ending set of challenges. Another key definition of this paper is inquiry and this is a process through which teachers explore an issue and create solutions. Inquiry is often used in balance with current research to develop knowledge and skills that are most likely to benefit the teachers and students of a specific context. In this project, the context is a British Columbia middle school composed of nearly six hundred students in grades six, seven, and eight with approximately thirty teachers and fifty staff.
Project Overview

In developing this project, I will be creating a framework of professional development that is designed for my current middle school context but hope that many of the elements will be flexible enough to adapt to benefit other middle schools in British Columbia. This model will be influenced by the current literature around professional learning for educators. The model will be heavily focused on teacher inquiry, the role of collaboration and team, and the influence of leadership from both teachers and formal leaders. In British Columbia, schools and districts are evolving to meet the requirements and goals of a new curriculum with various levels of support. In my current school we have no shortage of challenges, whether it is new report card templates, learning to use new math manipulatives, designing a new student inquiry project, or learning to balance the core and curricular competencies. Teachers are struggling to maintain a work life balance that is sustainable, while wanting to do what is best for their students. This project is motivated to create a model that promotes adaptive expertise, allowing teachers to feel more confident, energized, and excited to come to school each day to learn alongside our students.
Ch. 2 Literature Review

Introduction

In the pursuit of professional learning that promotes adaptive expertise, the role of leadership, collaboration, and teacher inquiry all play an integral role. These are the three themes that will be explored throughout this literature review and provide the basis for a school-based framework of professional learning.

Leadership and Professional Learning

School-wide professional learning can be greatly enhanced by the actions and attitudes of formal leaders. In the learning community studied by Clausen, Aquino, and Wideman (2009), they cite the actions of the school principal as being critical in the formation of a learning community. This learning community studied by Clausen et al. (2009) consisted of five participants, which included the principal and four teachers (p. 446). Clausen et al. (2009) individually interviewed the participants twice over the school year and used evidence from two group meetings that occurred over the course of the year (p. 446). Clausen et al. (2009) noted how the principal made participation voluntary and this was appreciated by the staff. This small step of not demanding participation helped to create an environment where the formal leader’s actions were viewed positively by staff. Clausen et al. (2009) also noted that the principal was the clear driving force behind the creation of this group, rather than facilitating the growth through a more grassroots focus. The question Clausen et al. (2009) pose is whether or not this model of creation would be successful in other settings or if different settings simply require different approaches. In Buttram and Farley-Ripple’s (2016) study, of four schools in two districts, they frequently point to the actions taken by one principal as to the reason why that
school was seeing success with their professional learning communities. This principal brought his background in team building to the creation of learning communities and also clearly articulated that he was part of the different teams by attending meetings and actively participating in those meetings (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). According to Buttram and Farley-Ripple’s (2016) report, in the less successful schools the principals were not as actively involved for fear of seeming as if they were too controlling. In Hipp and Huffman’s (2008) work looking at two schools attempting to become learning communities, they were able to elicit teacher feedback as to the role they felt their formal leader provided in supporting their learning communities. They stated that, “our administrator with a vision started the journey and was willing to go ‘outside the box’” (Hipp & Huffman, 2008, p. 181). It is clear that a formal leader’s actions can have a significant impact on their schools. The skill that needs to be learned is in which direction to lead. What all the examples above demonstrate, however, is that there is a need for a school’s formal leaders to be involved and a need for leaders to communicate their actions to the staff of the school.

When attempting to make any changes and build a community of learners, there is a need for the leaders to provide clear and purposeful communication. The ability and efforts of leaders to communicate is an essential piece of any change (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). In addition, Clausen et al. (2009) list open communication as an essential element of a learning community. In Clausen et al.’s (2009) study of one middle school they determined that the principal’s numerous efforts to provide space for communication was a key element in the success of the school as a professional learning community. This is also supported in Hipp and Huffman’s (2008) work where they list open communication as an ingredient that helped to make
a middle school a successful professional learning community. These communication channels do not necessarily need to be from formal leader to teacher. In the middle school studied by Clausen et al. (2009), they found that one of the successful elements that was implemented was the fact that the principal had created a timetable that, “set the stage for communication between and among the staff as a whole” (p. 449). The role of the leadership in communication is to actively pursue various avenues to allow staff members to share and listen to each other’s ideas. It is critical to a school for a leader to provide and create clear communication channels that provide opportunities to learn from each other. By opening up the channels of communication, a school’s formal leader may not only help people feel heard, but create an environment that allows others to grow into a leadership role themselves.

The more leadership that is available to support a model of professional development the better. Hipp and Huffman (2008) studied both an elementary and a middle school’s professional learning communities and discovered that shared leadership was an element that both communities enjoyed. In the elementary school, they found that they had a strong environment of shared leadership and that the, “leadership team is made up of teachers who have been trained in facilitation” (Hipp & Huffman, 2008, p.183). In the middle school’s report, Hipp and Huffman (2008) note that the teachers felt that decisions were made as a group. It is interesting to note that early in the process teachers felt that shared leadership was, “administrators abdicating responsibility [but] now they view facilitation as just part of the collaborative effort” (Hipp & Huffman, 2008, p. 183). In Buttram and Farley-Ripple’s (2016) work with three different Delaware schools, they noted how one successful school principal had placed staff members in positions of leadership and then clearly expressed to these individuals that their job
was to be leaders. In Clausen et al.’s (2009) study of a middle school, they found that leadership was not shared in the early stages of the learning community, but rather leadership and a shared sense of ownership was something that the group adopted later in the process. In Buttram and Farley-Ripple’s (2016) and Hipp and Huffman’s (2008) studies, the examples of shared leadership were provided from already established learning communities, while Clausen et al. (2009) tracked the growth of a professional learning community. The process by which shared leadership of professional learning can be established is something that is worthy of further exploration.

**Collaboration and Professional Learning**

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), working with others makes an individual better. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) are firm believers in the need for collaboration to drive our schools forward. They state that, “students do very well because they have a series of very good teachers - not by chance but by design” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 16). The design they are referring to is one of collaboration and they refer to “teaching like a pro… [as] doing teaching not as an isolated individual but as part of a high performing team (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.22). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) state clearly that teachers who work in schools where collaboration is embedded in how they do things are more successful than those who do not (p. 112). Dever and Lash (2013) observed the attempts to build collaboration among teachers in one middle school. They observed groups of grade eight teachers who belonged to two different types of groups. One group was set up around subject matter, while the other group was set up among cross grade teams. Dever and Lash (2013) found that the group that was organized around subject matter was a higher functioning learning community and they hypothesized that
the focus on subject matter was the reason why these groups were more productive. They noticed that there were a number of roadblocks to allowing these groups to set up productive collaborative teams. Dever and Lash (2013) found that, “the lack of initial training in the nature of the PLC and how it functions resulted in some PLCs with members who had little motivation to work together” (p. 15). In the lowest functioning PLCs, Dever and Lash (2013) found that these groups had the lowest levels of trust and felt that this was a key reason why these groups were not able to share, support, and ultimately work together very well.

In the school studied by Dever and Lash (2013), they found some success by sending the ‘resisters’ to visit other schools and their learning communities. The ‘resisters’ reported back that it shifted their attitudes from ones that viewed collaboration as an extra to something that would complement their already ongoing practice (Dever & Lash, 2013, p. 16). Despite the difficulties, the teachers in Dever and Lash’s (2013) study reported that they saw, “PLCs [as] their primary professional development tool” (p. 16). Over time the teachers in Dever and Lash’s (2013) observations became invested in the work they were doing and this is when Stewart (2014) would say that learning communities are operating at a high level. Stewart (2014) believes that meaningful and consistent professional learning occurs within a, “community of practice” (p. 31).

This leads us to Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) and how they compare good collaboration to good teams. Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) state that strong teams, “thrive on diversity and disagreement, promote good variation of style, strengths... and increases individual as well as collective talent” (p. 18). According to Fullan and Hargreaves (2016), strong collaborative groups infuse individuals with confidence and an ability to make better decisions. It is clear that
there are many benefits to building strong collaborative practices. However, the question remains as to how to create a culture where individuals feel safe and secure in the ability to welcome opposing views but also willing to offer opposing viewpoints. The issue of overcoming resistance to collaborating is also worthy of further investigation.

Gibson and Brooks (2012) studied the professional development offered to teachers with the creation of a new social studies curriculum in Ontario. The professional learning offered occurred over one year and the study by Gibson and Brooks (2012) attempted to understand how the professional development impacted the teachers, their students, and their learning five years later. Although there were a number of less than favourable viewpoints of the professional development offered, one element that was viewed favourably was the ability to participate in the experiences with other teachers from the same school (Gibson & Brooks, 2012, p. 15). Teachers referred to the ability to collaborate with another teacher as a component that made the learning more meaningful and increased the ability to make changes to their practice (Gibson & Brooks, 2012, p. 15). Teachers reported that the idea of working as a team increased motivation and support as they attempted to implement the new curriculum (Gibson & Brooks, 2012, p. 15-16). Clausen et al. (2009) also discovered elements of collaboration in their study as teachers met in partnerships, but also in larger settings to improve their learning. The benefits of collaboration were seen by Timperley (2011) in her study of five elementary principals who had higher than average student improvement. Timperley (2011) found that ‘mutual respect’ was a key element that was evident when relationships between the principals and staff, “were focused on promoting mutual learning” (p. 160). A possible starting point for building a strong collaborative community is a clear vision. Zepeda (2013) states that a common vision is needed for good
professional learning to occur. Parr and TImperley (2010) would agree as they discuss the benefits of developing ‘coherence’ and how having a common understanding among learners aids in developing a ‘community of practice’ (p. 164). Timperley (2011) found that when there was a common understanding the mindset of teachers shifted towards the pursuit of more effective teaching and teachers were more open to doing things differently. Stewart (2014) also believes that professional learning is strengthened when working with others who share the same goals. Although collaboration is something that teachers desire and welcome, it needs a common purpose and goal in order to be as effective as possible. Collaboration needs leadership from those in formal leadership positions.

**Inquiry and Professional Learning**

Zepeda (2013) states that, “professional development is about learning - learning for students, teachers and other professionals who support children” (p. 5). The traditional forms of professional learning which have teachers gather in a room, listen to a presentation and then go back to their classrooms the next day are no longer warranted and are ineffective (Zepeda 2013). Gibson and Brooks (2012) uncovered the desire of teachers to have their professional learning connect to their classrooms. Ermeling (2010) found that one alternative, teacher inquiry, led to improved learning for students. Ermeling (2010) conducted a study with four science teachers who committed to collaboratively taking an inquiry process in an attempt to enhance their teaching and increase their students’ success. Ermeling (2010) acted as a facilitator and guide in this study and used observation and interviews to reach his conclusions. Two of the teachers, “unmistakably attributed changes in their practice to their participation in the inquiry process” (Ermeling, 2010, p. 386). The feedback teachers provided Ermeling (2010) strongly
demonstrated that they believed the inquiry approach they followed was beneficial to professional learning. One teacher stated, “It’s really what professional development is in my mind… It’s what really changes teaching” (Ermeling, 2010, p.385). This supports LeFevre et al. (2015) and their belief that teachers will engage more fully in professional learning when they take responsibility for their learning.

In a study conducted by Butler, Schnellert, and MacNeill (2015), they followed the attempts of a school district working to improve adolescent literacy. Butler et al. (2015) found that the district experienced success in the inquiry process by sharing responsibility for setting district goals while, “also encourag[ing] and support[ing teachers] to set unique goals in their classrooms based on the particular needs of their students” (p. 19). There seemed to be a balance between teacher autonomy and district initiatives. One principal stated, “We’ve got to come up with a plan that’s good for the kids, good for teachers, and the teachers are going to want to implement it” (Butler et al., 2015, p.17). One of the main discoveries from Butler et al.’s (2015) study of inquiry, “was that the vast majority of participants (90% of interviewees), from across roles and levels, made gains in self-perceptions of efficacy” (p. 21).

A large scale study of a professional development project in New Zealand conducted by Timperley, Parr, and Bertanees (2009) found similar results. This project embraced inquiry as a way to improve students' writing and reading and was successful in making gains in these areas (Timperley et al., 2009, p. 236). Using teacher inquiry as the basis for professional learning, this project focused, “professional inquiry on student learning needs from which teaching learning needs [were] identified” (Timperley et al., 2009, p. 240). According to Timperley et al. (2009), this method of professional development provides teachers with a road map to what they must
learn to best serve their students, therefore providing teachers with, “a compelling reason to engage” (p. 240). Timperley et al. (2009) simply points out that the basics of teacher learning are not that much different from student learning in that it should be focussed on the needs of the learners. Todd-Gibson’s (2017) study of how inquiry enabled middle school science teachers to see improvements in student learning agrees, “professional learning needs to be focused on the needs of the teachers to meet the needs of the students” (p. 177).

Clayton, Kilbane, and McCarthy’s (2017) study of high school science teachers using teacher inquiry as a way to integrate student inquiry into their classes discovered that the inquiry process helped to transform how teachers taught and thought about teaching. It drove teachers to take the “necessary risks” to benefit student learning (Clayton et al., 2017, p.16). Butler and Schnellert’s (2012) study of a literacy project that utilized inquiry found that although not everyone participated to the same degree, the vast majority of teachers described that they changed their practices for the better while learning more about their students (p. 1216). In Macdonald and Weller’s (2017) reflection on how personal inquiry had impacted them as teachers, they reported how inquiry allowed them to “examine [their] teaching practice and its relationship to student learning” and how it “allows teachers to become the creators of knowledge” (p. 146). Macdonald and Weller (2017) go as far as referring to themselves as teacher researchers and how this has provided them with a platform with which to become leaders to other teachers within their school and district. Not surprisingly, Butler and Schnellert (2012) point to the fact that it seems that the most invested teachers are those that have a “dedicated [role] in supporting colleagues or the overall initiative” (1213).
Ermeling (2010) points to the importance of having a structure for teachers to follow when conducting inquiry. Todd-Gibson (2017) also indicates that there is a need for ongoing support and mentoring to support teachers in the inquiry process. Additionally, the need for structures and support is also identified by LeFevre et al. (2015) who present Kaser & Halbert’s (2017), “Spiral of Inquiry” as a process for professional learning that promotes the creation of adaptive expertise (p. 317). According to Ermeling (2010), the support a structure provides ensures that teachers, “adhere to the essential features of teacher inquiry” (p. 387). Inquiry elements are generally made up of identifying issues, using evidence and theory, taking action, reflecting, and focusing on improvement (Ermeling, 2010, p. 385). In the “Spiral of Inquiry”, the structure presented for teacher inquiry consists of scanning, focusing, developing a hunch, learning, taking action, and checking to see if improvement has been made (Kaser & Halbert, 2017, p. 5). The “Spiral of Inquiry” uses questions to encourage teachers to keep their focus directed on what is happening for the students in their class (Kaser & Halbert, 2017). LeFevre et al. (2015) list an, “inquiry mindset that poses questions, recognizes and checks hunches and seeks to deeply understand student and teacher learning-related challenges” as one of their six indicators of professional learning that promotes the development of adaptive expertise (p. 315). Lefevre et al. (2015) argue that adaptive expertise and teacher inquiry allow teachers to tackle problems that are complicated and unique to their setting in sustainable ways. Hunzicker (2010) states that professional development needs to be, “job-embedded, instructionally-focused, collaborative, and ongoing” (p. 9). The characteristics put forward by Hunzicker (2010) appear to support the types of inquiry and professional learning that Ermeling (2010), LeFevre et al. (2015), and Kaser and Halbert (2017), among others, are proposing. Inquiry, at its best, provides
teachers with autonomy of their own learning, encourages professional development that is relevant to the context in which it occurs, and improves student learning.

Conclusion

Professional learning is not a new invention, however we must consistently search for ways to improve the opportunities and environments necessary to foster meaningful and ongoing development of our teachers. The pay off to these efforts will be improved student learning. When looking to create a new framework of professional development, the goal must be to improve the learning of our students.

Leadership is integral to creating an environment that is focused on learning, both for students and for staff. The importance of leadership is difficult to ignore in the literature. In both Clausen et al.’s (2009) and Buttram and Farley-Ripple’s (2016) case studies, the formal leadership of the schools was instrumental in building communities of professional learning that were valued and supported by the teachers. Informal leadership, by teachers, in the creation and sustainability of professional learning was also highlighted in the work of Hipp and Huffman (2008) and Macdonald and Weller (2017). Leaders are in a position to motivate and energize others, create time, build communication networks, map out a vision and provide a certain level of accountability.

Additionally, the literature viewed collaboration favourably as a driver of professional development. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) viewed the importance of having a strong team of teachers in order to best support students, while Dever and Lash (2013) stressed the importance of trust in building collaborative teams. Timperley (2011) provided a window into how to build
that trust by focusing on the need for all to be learners and Gibson and Brooks (2012) pointed to the added motivation that teachers gained through working together.

Finally, the literature strongly supports the use of inquiry as a method for teachers to see their professional learning and development as time well spent by focusing their efforts on students and seeing the corresponding success. Every piece of literature pointed to positive outcomes for students and teachers as a result of teachers engaging in an inquiry process. LeFevre et al. (2015) link inquiry to the building of adaptive expertise, while Butler et al. (2014) reported gains in teacher confidence as a result of using inquiry as a means of professional development. Both Ermeling (2010) and Clayton et al. (2017) found that inquiry helped transform the teaching practices of teachers.

In British Columbia, we need to find ways to help teachers adapt to the recently revised curriculum and provide a framework that will allow them to feel confident that they can change their practices in a way that will benefit the learning of their students for today and also for tomorrow. The ability to adapt to new challenges is very much at the root of LeFevre et al.’s (2015) idea of adaptive expertise. The literature is clear in recommending that professional learning requires a heavy dose of teacher inquiry, mixed with collaboration, and supported with leadership in order to meet the demands of current and future students.
Chapter 3: Rationale

Introduction:

The literature shows that it is possible to build cultures of learning in schools. It demonstrates that teachers will embrace professional learning when they view it as valuable and when it includes inquiry that is supported by leadership and collaboration. The literature provides numerous examples of attempts to build professional learning communities while discussing the difficulties as well as successes faced. What the literature does not provide though is a clear map on how a meaningful and ongoing culture of professional learning can be developed within a whole school, let alone create a culture that is focused on the development of adaptive expertise.

My question was: what does meaningful and consistent professional development that is focused on promoting adaptive expertise look like in my school? In an attempt to create a culture of professional learning that is centred around leadership, collaboration, and inquiry, I have created an action plan to support the development of adaptive expertise at my school. The action plan was written to provide myself, a vice-principal, with direction on how to help move my current school towards a culture of professional development that strengthens our adaptive expertise. Successful implementation would hopefully lead to teachers feeling more confident, energized, and excited to come to school each day to learn alongside their students.

The action plan consists of five stages with an additional section included at the end. The stages are placed in order but they may overlap as they are worked through. The design of the project is such that the stages would be worked through in collaboration with teachers. This is not meant to be a framework that is solely implemented by a principal or vice-principal. I decided on an action plan for my project as our school needed a map for how to move from
where we are to where we could be. I wanted to find a way to include the entire staff in the
discussion and provide them with opportunities to add to and adapt the vision as needed.
Without teacher input the chances of shifting our culture would be drastically reduced. An action
plan provided flexibility and the opportunity to provide significant teacher voice to the final
result.

Stage 1: An Invitation

In the literature, the importance of the role of the formal leaders in creating environments
of professional learning was clear. This was especially highlighted in the work of Clausen et al.
(2009) and Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016). This invitation to a vision of professional
learning begins with hope. That hope that is characterized in the book, “The Hero’s Journey” by
teachers engage and work towards improved learning for themselves and their students. This
invitation would also connect back to the school’s own mission statement that, ‘learners are at
the centre’. Teachers should embody this mission statement by serving as role models through
active engagement in their own learning. The aim would be that by adopting and creating a
professional learning culture, we would be providing ourselves with the tools needed to tackle
the ongoing challenges and changes of our complex profession. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012)
strongly speak of a team of teachers being responsible for the success of our students and this as
well has informed the idea of presenting the vision of professional learning as a hopeful
endeavour. This particular school opened four years ago and was built on hope that it could be
different, and as the initial excitement of a new school has worn off, it is important to reconnect
to that excitement of possibility.
In my action plan, the invitation begins with the six team leaders. Each of these team leaders are responsible for a team of teachers. This was a logical starting point as their leadership will be integral to any professional learning that the school accomplishes. Team leaders also tend to fall into the categories of “gourmet omnivores and active consumers” that Joyce and Calhoun (2010) present as the most likely to seek out and participate in professional learning (p. 22). The positive influence that these groups can have on the less eager teachers to participate is vital to the success of the action plan (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010). By inviting this group into the discussion first, I am galvanizing other leaders on staff to support the initiative but also one another through the next stages.

**Stage 2: Our Context and Our Values**

An element that came out of the literature around collaboration spoke to the importance of a common vision in order for collaboration and learning to occur (Stewart 2014; Timperley 2011; Timperley and Parr 2010; Zepeda, 2013). This laid the foundation for stage two. The purpose of stage two is to begin to figure out what is important to us as a staff and what we want to work towards. Simply put, the purpose of stage two is to bring about an alignment of our vision and goals. When the school opened four years ago, teachers came to this school from many different places, bringing their individual traditions with them. A discussion of our personal and school identity, connected to what we aim to accomplish, would be beneficial.

The Teacher Perspective Inventory (TPI) is an online survey that provides takers with an overview of what they most value. This is a good starting point for individuals to better understand why they are teaching and also show the group how varied and different our reasons
for teaching may be. This conversation would then be applied to the school as a whole and lead into a discussion of our strengths and weaknesses.

I incorporated the work of Barrett and Fry (2008) on appreciative inquiry into stage two as a mechanism to move the conversation forward. There is a danger that as we look at our context we become weighed down in the negative. Barrett and Fry’s (2008) ideas around how to frame these discussions in a positive way through the use of the “4-Ds of discovery, dream, design, and destiny,” appear to be a much more positive route to take (p. 54). To maintain interest and encourage participation through these discussions, I also included practical activities from Lipton and Wellman (2011) that teachers could complete on their own and then bring to staff meetings to move our discussions forward.

**Stage 3: Team Leaders = Lead Learners**

For Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), the importance of a strong team of teachers is paramount to student success. In the case studies of Clausen et al. (2009), Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016), and Hipp and Huffman (2008), it was clear that shared leadership is a vital component to any culture of professional learning. Stage three is focused on building a sense of team and creating shared leadership.

Joyce and Calhoun (2010) have found that when professional learning is supported by coaching or mentorship the effects of that learning are stronger and longer lasting. In fact, they found that with peer coaching upwards of ninety percent of participants experienced a change in practice (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010, p. 79). Shifting the focus of team leaders away from the historical administrative tasks of a team leader and towards those of a facilitator and mentor are paramount to the successful implementation of this professional learning model.
Stage three revolves around supporting team leaders with this change in their roles. Team leader meetings will now be focused on developing the necessary skills to lead professional learning amongst the staff. Creating a learning community that consists of the administrative team and the team leaders that centres around participation in an inquiry, on topics that will benefit the whole, is a logical step to accomplishing this. In the action plan, facilitation has been highlighted as a potential topic for the first year of this plan in an effort to build the confidence of team leaders in their role as lead learners. Practical exercises have been highlighted from Lipton and Wellman (2011) in order to give us a tangible starting point for discussion and inquiry.

**Stage 4: Finding Time**

An element that was clearly highlighted in Clausen et al. (2009) and referenced in other literature such as Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) was the value of creating time in the schedule for collaboration, communication, and learning to happen. It was also clear that teachers respected and valued formal leaders who worked to find time so that learning could be pursued. In my context, the creation or finding of time was critical. If there is no time in the schedule for professional learning to occur, it is highly likely that no amount of positive discussion, thought, or good intent will matter. If there is no time, then there is a built-in excuse to not participate. I began looking for time anywhere I could find it.

I first sought to find time that was already scheduled that could be re-appropriated for professional development. I purposely left this stage later in the plan as it will require teachers to prioritize their learning. Once we know what we are working towards, the belief is that teachers will be willing to place an increased importance on their pursuit of learning and value the time set aside for this purpose. I found time in teachers’ non-teaching blocks, where I discovered that
one, forty-five minute block a week could be used for professional learning. I also highlighted the forty-five minute block of collaboration time that is already scheduled, but currently used as an extra preparatory period, as time that could be revitalized to fit its original intention. Knowing that confronting the beliefs of how this time should be used may prove challenging, I chose activities from Lipton and Wellman (2011) to use with staff in an effort to rediscover the value of this collaborative time.

I next explored alternative ways to create time and opportunities for learning. Depending on staffing levels, it may be possible to create positions in the school that allow for teachers to meet with one another. An example of creating a physical education position in order to free up classroom teachers for a period, where they could serve as mentors or visit classrooms, is offered in the plan. Implementing structures such as ‘Pineapple Charts’ where teachers can write down what is happening in their classrooms as an invitation to others to visit is also suggested (Gonzalez, 2016). Although this does not create time, it does make the use of that time more effective and acts as an entry point to collaboration for teachers. Finally I suggest that it is paramount that the administrative team demonstrate that they value the learning of the teachers by making themselves available to teachers to pursue ongoing learning through the coverage of classes for collaboration, observation, or mentorship. By setting professional learning as a priority in stage four, we will be well positioned to further develop a culture of professional learning.

**Stage 5: The Process, The Learning**

LeFevre et al. (2015) were very clear that they felt teacher inquiry as professional development was the way to develop adaptive expertise. Ermeling (2010) was also clear that for
inquiry to succeed teachers require structure and knowledge in how to conduct inquiry. Among others in the literature, Clayton et al. (2017) felt that inquiry provides the type of environment that leads to increased student success. It was clear to me that the implementation of a model of teacher inquiry was the end goal of this action plan.

Stage five provides a calendar for a year of inquiry that is based on “Spirals of Inquiry” by Halbert and Kaiser (2017). There is a recognition that the first year of implementation may require additional support and learning about inquiry and thus extending an invitation for outside help was included in this stage. Again, exercises from Lipton and Wellman (2011) provide some practical support in helping teachers to narrow their focus area and reflect on their progress.

The creation of the lead learners in stage three is important in this stage. This is where team leaders will play a vital role in supporting their colleagues through the process. They will keep their peers on course through ongoing discussions and mentorship. It was decided to put the team leaders in the role of support due to the impact that peer coaching can play as outlined by Joyce and Calhoun (2010). In addition, small groups, supported by colleagues creates a safe environment for teachers to openly discuss the challenges they are working through. Staff meetings and Friday collaborative mornings are additional times that support the inquiry calendar. These larger sessions provide the opportunity to share and celebrate what has been learned.

**Learning Together for Adaptive Expertise**

I included this final section in my action plan as a place to summarize what it is that I am trying to accomplish with this plan. This action plan was designed to be flexible to the needs of the teachers and the school while working towards a model of teacher inquiry in a professional
learning community. It is not meant to be a model that can be simply put into place. This section is intended to answer questions people may have about accountability and the purpose of this plan. It is meant to display the intentions of the plan, which is to support all teachers in their development. The belief behind this plan is that by embracing professional learning for adaptive expertise we will provide our students with a richer and more valuable learning experience.
Chapter 4: The Design

Introduction:

The following pages contain the action plan for adaptive expertise that I have created. This plan is designed as a process for myself, the vice-principal, and the principal to use as a guide to work with our staff to develop a culture of professional development that is ongoing, meaningful, and focused on developing adaptive expertise. This plan is about moving from where we are to where we want to be. The stages may overlap at certain times along the journey, but the sincere hope is that by working together we can become a more confident and engaged staff that are providing a consistently great learning environment for our students regardless of the challenges we face.
Learners At The Centre : An Action Plan

*Professional Learning for Teachers*

An action plan for ongoing and meaningful professional development in a British Columbia middle school built on leadership, collaboration and inquiry in pursuit of adaptive expertise.

“When all teachers embrace the idea that they can improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better, this creates a natural collegiality that supports all teachers in embracing the need for continuous improvement.”

D. Wiliam

**Figure 1:** Learning for Adaptive Expertise: A representation of the elements that are included in this action plan in pursuit of adaptive expertise.
1: An Invitation

This action plan starts with an invitation. An invitation to all staff members to a journey to develop a culture of learning, not only for the students but for the educators who call this school home. Teachers will be invited to join in a future where professional learning is as much a part of their day as student learning is. The hope is that this vision will soon become a shared vision.

The creation of a shared vision starts with the invitation to an imaging of a school that is focused on ongoing and meaningful professional learning for the benefit of teachers and ultimately the students. In this four year old middle school, this discussion logically can begin with connecting back to the values the school was opened with.

The school’s mission statement states that ‘learners are at the centre’. It also states that learners are connected by ‘community, inquiry, and innovation, while being focused on deep student learning’. This is the starting point for discussion on how we are currently working to meet our mission statement. If teachers embrace these goals and act as role models, it is much more likely that our students will embrace learning. If we are to develop a school culture that values and actively pursues professional learning and the best learning for our students, we need to develop and enhance our sense of purpose and hope that is characterized in the book, “The Hero’s Journey” by Brown and Moffett (1999).

All schools are faced with challenges that are beyond their control, but if a school can create a structure and a framework that provides support and learning for, to, and by teachers, we will have provided ourselves with the confidence and ability to overcome all manner of challenges while thriving in an ever changing and complex profession. As we develop our
A CULTURE OF LEARNING

collective adaptive expertise we will be increasing our individual and collective confidence in our ability to handle difficult situations through problem solving. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) discuss in “Professional Capital”, the success of students does not rest in the fact that our students have a single great teacher, but rather in the strength of a team of teachers so that students go from one great teacher to another. By building a culture of professional learning, we will be building a stronger team. One that will provide a map to more ably support teachers in their learning journeys for mutual collegial success.

In our context, the initial invitation would occur with team leaders as this is the main leadership group of the school. Following this discussion, the invitation would be extended to the staff as a whole. Joyce and Calhoun (2010), explain that a staff is constructed of four different groups, including “gourmet omnivores, active consumers, passive consumers, and reticent customers” (p. 22-23). Our team leaders would predominantly fit into the gourmet omnivore and active consumer groups, meaning they are more likely to seek out and participate in new learning. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) refer to the passive consumers as the largest single group on any staff, “making up more than half of our populations”(p.22). According to Joyce and Calhoun (2010), this group benefits greatly from the support of the gourmet omnivores and active consumers. Therefore, team leaders are likely to accept the invitation and later act as support to other teachers, making them a logical group to begin the conversation with.

From this point onwards, staff will be encouraged to provide insight into the action plan. The following steps and processes are meant to be a baseline from which the various stakeholders can build upon. This plan is a living document that must adapt as the situation
A CULTURE OF LEARNING

dictates. We must make sure that we allow flexibility in how we learn and develop our adaptive
dictates. We must make sure that we allow flexibility in how we learn and develop our adaptive
expertise.

**What:** An invitation to a common vision for all staff members.
**When:** Ideally at the beginning or end of the school year. Team Leader meeting first, followed by Staff Meeting.

**Reading:**

**Activity:**
*Groups at Work* (2011) Lipton and Wellman
- P+M-I* p. 30
- Futures Wheel p. 24

**2: Our Context and Our Values**

Once we have created our vision, we must begin our journey. Although we may all
readily agree to a vision of ongoing professional learning, we must take some time to reflect on
who we are as individual teachers and who we are as a school. What are the beliefs and values
that we all bring and what are the unique elements to our community that make our school what
it is? What are the strengths that we individually bring to the school and how do we recognize
these as a way to move forward?

To begin to look at our individual values and beliefs of education we would be wise to
begin with taking an online survey, such as the Teacher Perspectives Inventory (TPI), as a staff.
This will provide us with a starting point for discussion about our beliefs and purpose as
individuals and as a school. This survey provides teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their
practice and why they may take the actions that they do. This is particularly important for a new
school that is still attempting to form its identity and decide where the collective energy of the staff should be placed.

The discussions that arise out of the TPI will help us to clarify our values and what is important to us as a school. Pairing this survey with the *Group Resume* activity provided in Lipton and Wellman’s (2011) “Groups at Work” would provide the whole staff with a deeper understanding of their own values and skills as well as those of the whole staff (p.11). A discussion of the TPI and a follow up activity could logically take place during a staff meeting.

Our perspectives as a staff would then need to be connected to our community’s context as a middle school. What do our students bring with them to school, what are their strengths and what are their weaknesses? What are our strengths and weaknesses as a school? Throughout this discussion, it will be important to frame the discussions in a positive manner. The “4-Ds” described in Barrett and Fry’s (2008) “Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Building Cooperative Capacity” provide a guide as to how to do this (p. 54). Barrett and Fry’s (2008) “4-Ds” of discovery, dream, design, and destiny” help to present a way of looking at the things we do well, where we want to go, and how we want to get there (p.54). Conducting an activity such as *Artifact Hunt* from Lipton and Wellman (2011, p. 40) would be an effective way of reflecting on the culture that the school currently has. It will also support us in focusing on any areas of strength and areas that need improvement in order to become a school that focuses our attention on professional learning that leads to adaptive expertise.

A process that we already have in place that supports our need to reflect on the needs of our students is the class review process. During this process, teachers take time to think about and share the strengths and needs of the students in their classes. This provides another piece
that will guide us in understanding our culture and ultimately where to focus our learning.

Incorporating the ideas of Barrett and Fry (2008) into the class reviews may also help us to move forward.

**What:** An appreciative approach to better understanding our school, our strengths, and our needs.

**When:** Ideally at the beginning of the school year (September/October). During collaborative time or a Staff Meeting.

**Activity:**
- *Groups at Work* (2011) Lipton and Wellman
  - Group Resume p. 11
  - Artifact Hunt p. 40

### 3: Team Leaders = Lead Learners

Team leader positions are year long positions that put teachers into formal leadership roles.

Teachers volunteer for these positions and are monetarily compensated, much like a department head in a secondary school. At this school, we typically have six team leaders as we have five teaching teams plus a student services or resource team.

After the invitation and exploration of our school culture takes place, the role of our team leaders in supporting our vision of professional learning is pushed to the forefront. To that end, the role of the team leader must shift toward that of a lead learner. The role of a lead learner and their priorities are:

- To participate in monthly Team Leader meetings where the team leaders, principal, and vice-principal engage in a learning process that is designed to support each other and our colleagues in their professional learning. This may result in the group
collectively exploring a problem or embarking on individual inquiries. For example, we may together explore the best ways to promote collaboration or we may each have individual inquiries related to collaboration that we discuss, share, and support one another with.

- To support their team members in team or individual inquiry. Develop a collaborative environment.
- Help to establish and maintain a culture of learning within the school through role modelling and coaching.

This signals a shift away from a focus on administrative tasks for team leaders. Team leader meetings will now focus on supporting each other to learn how to be better facilitators and coaches. It is imperative that the principal and vice-principal support and learn alongside the lead learners by developing and modelling the necessary collaborative skills to be successful. This group, and the monthly meetings, will be critical in how successful the school is in adopting an attitude that professional development happens everyday.

In the first year of this plan, it may be beneficial for the group to focus on the skill of facilitation. An early meeting may make use of Lipton and Wellman’s (2011) *Know/Think I Know/Want to Know* exercise to focus the group’s learning on the area of facilitation. As we work through the year, we can continue our learning through readings on facilitation and choosing appropriate discussion strategies from Lipton and Wellman (2011). Lead Learners would then be able to try out different skills amongst their teams and share back what they have learned during monthly meetings. This process of choosing a topic, learning, and experimenting will form a continuous cycle mirroring the ongoing inquiries that all teachers are engaged in.
What: A refocusing of the roles of Team Leaders to Lead Learners. A group of learners focused on supporting the professional learning of all staff.

When: Begins at the start of the year. Ongoing and cyclical.

Reading:
- *What Good Coaches Do* (2011) Knight

Activity:
- *Groups at Work* (2011) Lipton and Wellman
  - Know/Think I Know/Want to Know p. 14
  - First Turn/Last Turn p. 46
  - Three A’s Plus One p. 86

4: Finding Time

Most will agree that professional learning is important, but few will believe that we can create the time necessary to do this well. The role of the vice-principal and principal is integral in planning and structuring time within the school day for learning. It is imperative that the formal leaders of the school find and create time for professional learning to occur. There must be usable time in the school day for teacher’s professional learning, otherwise it becomes too easy an excuse for teachers to not engage in the pursuit of their own learning.

The first question to ask is, where is there already time in the school’s schedule for professional learning? Teachers are scheduled with five non-teaching blocks per week. According to local contract language, two and a half of these are set aside for teacher preparatory work. If we recognize the many demands on teachers and round preparatory time up to three periods, this leaves two, forty-five minute periods for other efforts. Teams typically meet for at least one period to discuss administrative tasks such as field trips, special events, or other organizational issues. This leaves us with one period per week that can be focused on
professional learning. Team members have their non-teaching blocks at the same time so they could engage in a team inquiry or individual inquiry with the support of their team and team leader. One non-teaching block a week would be dedicated to professional learning and Lead Learners would be responsible for serving as mentors through the process.

In addition, the school has a forty-five minute time period that is scheduled as collaborative time every Friday morning. Lunch is also five minutes longer on Fridays, so by shortening lunch to match the rest of the week Friday’s collaborative time can be increased to fifty minutes. On the surface this is not a big deal, but if we remember that teachers usually need a few minutes to prepare for the day, adding five minutes makes it more likely that teachers will have a true forty-five minutes of learning on Fridays. This time has not been effectively used in recent years and it is expected that this time will once again be valued as it was intended to be used. This time allows teachers from different teams with similar learning goals to come together and discuss their findings. Addressing this use of time through an activity such as Traffic Lights or What’s the Problem? What’s Not the Problem? by Lipton and Wellman (2011) would help staff move forward and rediscover the value of this time.

By creating an expectation that teachers use at least one of their non-teaching periods per week and taking advantage of the existing collaborative time, teachers will have up to ninety minutes of professional learning time built into their weekly schedule. Barring changes from the district or provincial level, it is unlikely we can create much more scheduled time. Although, it is necessary to consistently review how we may be able to create time for learning. For example, if our staffing is at a level where we can staff a physical education specialist to free team leaders to spend more time mentoring, this would be something that would need to be explored.
In addition to time for learning, we also need to create the opportunity to learn. Simple structures such as “Pineapple Charts” where teachers can write down what is happening in their classrooms and invite others into their classes are an easy and effective way to provide teachers opportunities for observation and modelling (Gonzalez, 2016). This is typically written down on a whiteboard in a visible area so that other teachers can see the opportunities to observe their colleague’s classrooms.

The principal and vice-principal are also key pieces in providing opportunities to learn and can contribute in relatively simple ways such as:

- Providing certain periods of time when they can join a teacher to team teach
- Providing certain periods of time when they can take a class to allow teachers to collaborate or observe. For example, a teacher wants to observe a colleague's new discussion technique but is scheduled to teach.

Time is valuable. Learning is valuable. Combining both of them effectively will help us to reach our goals.

**What:** Creation of time for learning to be pursued.

**When:** Outline the time available at the beginning of each teaching year and review opportunities for learning time annually.

**Reading:**
- *How Pineapple Charts Revolutionize Professional Development* (2016) Gonzalez
  - [https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/pineapple-charts/](https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/pineapple-charts/)

**Activity:**
- *Groups at Work* (2011) Lipton and Wellman
  - Traffic Light p. 36
  - What’s the Problem? What’s Not the Problem? p. 53
5: The Process, The Learning

The development of team leaders as lead learners, the prioritizing of time for professional learning, the support of mentoring, and opportunities for modelling are designed to support a year long teacher inquiry and ultimately the development of adaptive expertise. Inquiry is a process that allows teachers to seek answers to questions they pose thus building their capacity both individually and collectively to continually improve and find new solutions to unique problems.

Individual teachers will be supported by the Lead Learners to develop questions that are focused on the needs of their students. This supports Dylan Wiliam’s (2016) claim that we must not waste our time on activities or learning that does not support student learning.

Opportunities to share will be provided throughout the year as the year-long calendar below follows a cycle of inquiry. “Spirals of Inquiry” by Halbert and Kaser (2017) was the model used for this calendar, however there are many similar models available.

**Figure 2: A Calendar of Inquiry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Stage of Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Year 1: In Depth overview of Inquiry process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 2: Review of Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September/October</td>
<td>Teachers observe students and begin to narrow possible areas of focus. Opportunities to share and find colleagues with similar focuses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October/November</td>
<td>Teachers declare a focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December/January</td>
<td>Teachers research and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February - May</td>
<td>Teachers take action and make changes in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/June</td>
<td>Teachers evaluate whether they have made a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/June</td>
<td>Teachers share their findings with staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the first year, there will need to be a greater focus on what the inquiry process is and this may require outside support from inquiry experts such as Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert. Certainly the purchase of staff copies of an inquiry guide such as “The Spiral Playbook” (Halbert and Kaser, 2017) would be strongly recommended.

In addition, providing support for choosing focus areas is paramount. When working through the earlier stages of our school’s context and individual perspectives teachers may have a general idea of what they would like to focus on, but taking time to narrow their focus may be beneficial. Running through an exercise such as Spend-a-Buck from Lipton and Wellman (2011) may be helpful to teachers. This could be done late in October after teachers have had time to get to know their students and their needs. After teachers have narrowed their personal focus they could then share ideas and create collaborative groups around common areas. Teams may also decide to join together to pursue a common area of inquiry.

At the end of the year, it will be important for the group to reflect on the process and make adjustments for the next year. An exercise such as Mapping Highs and Lows by Lipton and Wellman (2011) would be especially effective at supporting the reflective process. Support throughout the year for the inquiry process will be paramount. Lead Learners will offer mentoring and support throughout their teams, while time provided to discuss and share at staff meetings will also provide motivation and accountability for the work that is being done. Collaborative time on Fridays will also provide teachers with opportunities to connect with teachers on other teams with similar focuses.
What: A school-based inquiry cycle that promotes the development of adaptive expertise.
When: Throughout the school year. Some inquiries may span multiple years.

Reading:
• *Leadership for Teacher Learning* (2016) Wiliam
• *The Spiral Playbook* (2017) Kaser and Halbert

Activity:
• *Groups at Work* (2011) Lipton and Wellman
  • Spend-a-Buck p. 33
  • Mapping Highs and Lows p. 50

*Learning Together for Adaptive Expertise*

The purpose of this framework is to create an environment and culture where learning happens everywhere, all the time, including the hallways, staff room, classrooms, and on the field. If this is to be the case, the school must provide opportunities to celebrate our learning but also to share our struggles throughout the process. These opportunities will be weaved throughout the school day and year. Examples may include providing teachers a place to share their learning through our website or social media feed, presenting at various district meetings, or sharing with colleagues.

Team leaders as lead learners will offer opportunities for their teams during team meetings to ask questions in a smaller and potentially safer environment. Lead learners will serve as mentors who support the learning of their teams, and most importantly, act as role models of an environment that promotes risk taking in the pursuit of growth and better teaching. This plan understands and expects that, just like students, teachers are at different stages of their learning and is not interested in evaluating teachers but rather seeks to support all teachers in their development and growth of adaptive expertise.
There will be layers of accountability implemented in a non-threatening way. These include check-ins with team leaders and sharing sessions at staff meetings. There will be a sign up process for Friday collaboration mornings, where teachers will indicate where they will be. Although it will be flexible, teachers will be asked to indicate which of their non-teaching periods they will be designating as their learning period.

Staff meetings will have a dedicated time period for teams and individuals to share their progress and ask for support. Running alongside the inquiry cycle, team leader/lead learner meetings will be a place of learning for the leadership of the school while constantly evaluating the needs of teachers and students so that our professional learning continues to be meaningful. Collaborative time on Fridays will be opportunities for staff members to meet across the school on areas of focus that are of common interest.

It is sincerely hoped that, over time, all teachers will see the benefits of a school culture focused on learning through a mix of student achievement, peer support, and innovative leadership. Once the benefits of ongoing school based professional development are recognized, it will become an innocuous element of a successful school.

**What:** A state of mind that pursues constant learning.

**When:** Ongoing and developing.

**Reading:**
- *What Good Coaches Do* (2011) Knight
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary Discussion

Teaching is an incredibly difficult and challenging profession. Teachers deserve to be supported in their attempts to provide the best education possible for their students. The literature on professional development and professional learning is perfectly clear in expressing that if the teachers see a benefit to their students’ learning then they will actively and enthusiastically engage. When choosing how to deliver professional development Joyce and Calhoun (2011) express that all methods of delivery work but that it is important to choose the method that will produce the results that you wish to have.

The result that I wish to see is a staff that is constantly building their adaptive expertise as defined by Lefevre et al. (2015). Therefore, the mode of professional development that I chose to work towards in my project was that of teacher inquiry. The stories of growing confidence in their teaching abilities presented by Macdonald and Weller (2017) strengthened my belief that a culture where teachers could find the answers to the questions they wondered and worried about was the route to adaptive expertise. As a result of teacher inquiry, dramatic shifts in teaching were noted by Ermeling and Clayton (2017) as well as by Clayton et al. (2017), and Ermeling (2010) that further strengthened my belief that for a meaningful culture of professional learning to exist, teacher inquiry had a central role to play. This matches with my personal history of professional learning and development. The times I was most connected and engaged in being a teacher were when I was and am actively engaged in exploring challenges and working towards a more positive outcome. I was always excited to head into class with something new to try out and to see the results in the students. If an activity was not successful the first time I tried it I
was not dissuaded because I knew that I had the ability to go back and revise and try again.

Additionally, Butler et al. (2015) found that teacher inquiry helped to develop confidence among teachers. The literature on the subject made it impossible to not include teacher inquiry as the main mode of professional development within a framework that was attempting to grow adaptive expertise.

The literature also strongly discussed the importance of leadership, of principals, and of teachers in building functioning cultures of professional development. In case studies by Hipp and Huffman (2008), Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016), and Clausen et al. (2009), the principals were given lots of credit for the role that they played in starting and maintaining professional learning. The teachers in Clausen et al.’s (2009) case study gave the principal full credit for the vision and implementation of the their professional learning. Over time, the teachers in these case studies became more involved and began to take more ownership. The importance of the formal leadership of the school supporting and creating opportunities for teachers to not only learn but support each other in the pursuit of learning is vital to the success of any school based professional development.

I’ve always believed that two heads are better than one and the literature on collaboration supports this. Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that we need to be developing strong teams of teachers to improve student learning. While Gibson and Brooks (2012) spoke to the motivation that could be gained through the collaborative process. Dever and Lash (2013) talked about the importance of trust and many, including Timperley (2011), spoke about how developing a common vision was the way to build trust. I personally love being part of a team and I enjoy being part of a high functioning team even more. On the
best teams I have been a part of, whether inside or outside of a school environment, they have certain qualities in common. The leaders consistently played a key role in facilitating the process but success is a result of a group of people supporting one another to achieve a common goal. In education, I believe it’s easy to come up with big common goals that revolve around success for students. It is the process of figuring out how to reach them where there is room for improvement. We need the support of our colleagues in order to be successful. Taking the time to understand what each of us brings with us into a school and what we want to achieve and how we want to achieve it is central to beginning the process of developing a common vision.

My question when I began this project was: what does meaningful and consistent professional development that is focused on promoting adaptive expertise look like in my school? The answer is that it looks like ongoing teacher inquiry done in a collaborative setting. It looks like confident, positive teachers who take ownership over their own learning. It looks like teachers who focus their learning in areas that will best serve students. It is a place filled with positivity because everyone knows that whatever the challenge presented, we have the skillset and mindset to thrive.

**Suggestions for Further Development**

This action plan is meant to provide a map to me, the vice-principal, and the principal while we attempt to create a culture of ongoing and meaningful professional development for the development of adaptive expertise in our school. As our school works through the stages and teacher inquiry becomes commonly used, it will be important to assess the impact that this has had on students as well as teachers.
Developing ways to accurately assess the progress of the school will be a logical, interesting, and valuable next area to explore. This is probably best left to after a revitalized culture of learning is established in order to gain a better idea of what measures may be best. It will also be important to avoid giving the perception that individual teachers are being evaluated. Rather, the assessment tool or tools must be focused on how best the school can continue to move forward. In many ways, I feel the assessment of the model may naturally arise through the continuous cycle of inquiry that the school will take part in. It will be interesting to see how the process unfolds.

**Next Steps and Final Thoughts**

I am excited for the next steps and look forward to putting my action plan fully into motion. I was able to dip my toes into the plan this spring when the principal and I introduced team leaders to the idea of refocusing their roles around that of being a lead learner and pursuing an inquiry question over the course of the next school year. The early returns were positive. Team leaders were receptive and in many cases invigorated by the idea. Moving forward in a practical manner will now be our next steps.

To continue my further learning on this topic, and to be able to continue to bring new ideas forward, I have enrolled and will be participating in the British Columbia Principal and Vice-Principal Association's *Leading a Culture of Learning* program. I feel this is a natural progression of what I have created thus far and will provide me with more resources to draw upon as I move forward. It will also allow me to demonstrate to teachers on staff that I am continuing my own learning, as I am asking them to do.
I want to work in a good school. I’ve worked in five schools in two different districts over the course of a thirteen year career. I was a classroom teacher for twelve of those years and have only just recently begun my career as a vice-principal. Prior to this project, I could list which of the schools I thought were good schools, but my rationale was very general. I would talk about the people who worked there and the environment in general terms. To me, the positive environments I found myself in were created by magic or sheer luck.

This project has led me to believe that there is a way to intentionally create motivated, energized, and positive school environments that are focused on overcoming challenges and improving learning for students. The action plan that I have created is a practical way to work with teachers to create a school that is a professional learning community. This is not a model that can simply be implemented in a school, but rather a plan of action that aims to create a meaningful culture of professional development focused on adaptive expertise. Both the process and end result will require a mixture of leadership, collaboration, and inquiry. With time and an open mind, I propose that this plan provides a map to move my school towards this possibility.
Reference List


